

COUNTDOWN TO BOSTON

37 DAYS



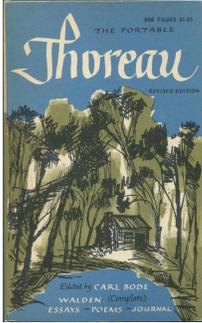
"L" is for La Crosse

I have always shaken my head in wonder at the matchless chutzpah Dean Acheson displayed calling his 1969 memoir about the making of the post-WWII world, *Present at the Creation*. It's a title I'd love to steal for today's look back at the Child Neurology Society's creation myth. But I wasn't actually present when the CNS began, so part of me feels I shouldn't. And yet, I was so close, so innocently and unwittingly close, that another part of me thinks I could: that part of me that would put a memoir by a stuffed shirt former diplomat back on the shelf to pull down a celebrated novel published the same year. The opening line, of Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five, or, The Children's Crusade* fits my overall approach to this 50-Day Countdown quite nicely, in fact: "All of this happened, more or less."

Maybe *Slaughterhouse Five* is a little too toney for my take on the CNS creation myth. Maybe Disney's 1953 animated masterpiece, *Ben and Me*, about a fictional church mouse's faux-forgotten role in making Ben Franklin a Founding Father is a little more like it. Even that may be claiming too much for what follows. Maybe my claim to being present at the creation is more like your pet Golden Retriever claiming credit for you being a child neurologist, having curled up at your feet while you studied for the MCATs. With that in mind, I suggest you read this and all past and future entries warily: they are interpretive takes on CNS history, not authoritative by any stretch of the imagination, mine or yours.

I have written before about starting my 9th grade year at Central Junior High in Rochester, MN a few weeks after and three blocks away from where the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology (ABPN) issued the first six certificates in Neurology with Special Competence in Child Neurology in the summer of 1968. Turning in a science project the previous spring that could charitably called "Our Friend the Chipmunk: a dioramic case study in plagiarism and pastiche" pretty much closed the door on any future in medicine I might have shared with my classmates, the sons and daughters of Mayo Clinic physicians. And it closed off, or seemed to anyway, any conceivable reason I might have for working with the ABPN in the future. But History follows its own crooked path.....more or less.

There simply is no straight line from the 15-year-old me to the 67-year-old me preparing to celebrate the 50th Anniversary Meeting in Boston of ABPN-certified child neurologists. And yet, in walking past the ABPN offices to buy *The Portable Thoreau* at the Lucy Wilder Bookstore, I did, unwittingly, take that crucial first step in the general direction of Boston (or nearby Walden Pond, anyway). And who's to say that what Thoreau had and has to offer isn't part of the mental make-up of many (most?) of the child neurologists who would also end up in Boston in September 2021: "If a man (*sic*) does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away."



In February 1971, Ken Swaiman discussed forming a national organization of child neurologists with J.T. Jabbour in Memphis, then engaged Richard Allen in the same conversation in Ann Arbor in May. Both colleagues were enthusiastic and encouraging. In August, Manuel Gomez invited Ken to drive down to Rochester to meet him at the Mayo Foundation House (originally William Mayo's house, on 4th Street SW). Meanwhile, my senior year at Mayo High School had just begun. Bill Dobyns had just graduated from Mayo the previous spring, thereby dropping the average IQ of the 1500 students filing in for the new school year by at least a dozen points. No matter, we would press on, albeit in a more literary than scientific direction, resigned as most of us were to the futility of following in Bill's footsteps. In that vein, my favorite book read over the summer was *The Great Gatsby*; I spent many moonlit nights in the late summer and early fall wandering through the back gardens of the Mayo Foundation House that Drs. Swaiman and Gomez met at, trying to imagine myself as Nick Carraway sizing up Jay Gatsby's mansion next door. Twenty-five years later, in September 1996, while the CNS was meeting in Minneapolis to celebrate its 25th anniversary, St. Paul celebrated F. Scott Fitzgerald's 100th birthday. I missed much of that CNS meeting to attend the unveiling of the Fitzgerald sculpture in Rice Park created by my good friend (and Godfather to my two kids), the late artist, Michael Price. Many CNS attendees may remember staying through Saturday night to attend the special live Prairie Home Companion show with Garrison Keillor, and the Gala at the Ordway that followed, bringing the Fitzgerald centenary celebration to a close.

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ROCHESTER, MINNESOTA
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August 10, 1971

Kenneth F. Swaiman, M.D.
Box 486, Mayo Memorial Building
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455

Dear Ken:

We will do as you suggested in your letter of August 2, that is, meet, you and I, at 2:00 p.m. in the Library of the Foundation House.

If you are taking the entire day for this meeting you could be here at noon and come to the Mayo Building which is the big gray colored structure in the middle of the town. Parking around here is not easy and you may have to leave your car at the Damon Parkade. After you come to the lobby of the Mayo Building, please take the elevator to the Ninth Floor and ask for me at the East Nine-B Desk. I will be here waiting for you whether you come at noon or at 2:00 p.m.

With best regards,

Sincerely yours,


M. R. Gomez, M.D.

MRG:jh





University Hospitals
Department of Pediatrics
Area 319: 356-2396
If no answer, 356-1618

September 21, 1971

M. E. Gomez, M.D.
Department of Neurology
Mayo Clinic
Rochester, Minnesota 55901

Dear Manny:

Thank you for your letter dated 20 September 1971. Your memory is indeed astonishing. You are certainly correct that several years ago we did discuss the consideration of establishing a small group of pediatric neurologists in the mid-west for a once a year conference of some sort.

I think your proposal for starting out on a small scale and developing some sort of organization of people working in this area in the mid-west or upper mid-west is advisable. I would think that a nationwide organization would be very difficult to establish and would be almost an insurmountable job for one or two people. There are many different things that a relatively small group could do at a periodic or annual meeting and the best way to decide on a desirable program would be to meet together with a few people involved including the ones you have mentioned.

The date of 27 November would be fine with me and anyplace in the area as a meeting place would be entirely acceptable. You mentioned consideration of a place along the river and the following is a suggestion given to me by one of the staff people here who is familiar with the upper Iowa-western Wisconsin region. Apparently, there is a motel called the Pink Elephant at Marquett, Iowa which is along the river in the northern side of the state just across from Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. This is a new motel with 16 units and right next door is another motel with 22 units. The operators of this motel are Mr. and Mrs. Reese. As you probably know, this is a rather scenic area and might be a desirable spot as it is probably about mid-way between Rochester, Madison, and Iowa City. It is a little far removed from Minneapolis or Ann Arbor. I certainly don't feel strongly about the location decided upon and whatever you and Ken Swaiman decide in that regard is entirely acceptable. Thanks again for your letter and please let me know how further plans develop or if I can contribute anything further to the development of a meeting.

Sincerely yours,


William E. Bell, M.D.
Associate Professor
Departments of Pediatrics
and Neurology

MEB:pn

In October 1971, Dr. Swaiman followed up on his Rochester meeting, inviting Dr. Gomez to join seven other midwestern child neurologists at the Holiday Inn in La Crosse WI on November 26 and 27. Everything was now lined up for the fateful meeting of the infamous La Crosse 8: Richard Allen, Ann Arbor; William Bell; Iowa City; Raymond Chun, Madison; Paul Dyken, Milwaukee; Manuel Gomez, Rochester; Kenneth Swaiman, Minneapolis; George Wolcott, Madison; Francis Wright, Minneapolis. In thinking about History and Memory, it's worth noting that in his 1996 review article, "The Organization of the Child Neurology Society: A Personal View," published in *Pediatric Neurology*, Ken got the dates of the crucial La Crosse meeting wrong, (assuming, that is, the multiple letters involving multiple authors, all referencing November 26 and 27 both before and after, got it right in real time, while Ken mis-remembered the meeting a quarter-century later as taking place November 18, 1971).

Dr. Swaiman writes the following in that 1996 mini-*Present at the Creation* memoir: "The evening session began and ended in the Holiday Inn's bar. We struggled to name pediatric neurologists in the Midwest, writing the names on a cocktail napkin." Out of which came the one and only sacred relic from the Society's founding: "la Serviette de La Crosse." A younger generation, when told this story, would likely look up from the smartphone nestled in their hand, thumbs poised above the keys, to ask in utter perplexity, "Why would someone *write on a napkin*?"



“We had even greater difficulty naming pediatric neurologists in other sections of the country,” Ken continued, “a problem that was to consume time and energy in the coming months. Our later discussions centered on whether or not we should attempt to form a midwestern group with such broad geographic coverage. Would the organization have enough attendance and enough scientific papers to make it worthwhile? The next morning we resolved this issue and agreed to hold a spring meeting in Madison, Wisconsin. The debate became very heated over the feasibility of forming a national organization. No one wished to be a member of an organizing committee of a society which would not succeed, but many felt that there was a need for such a group. We decided to poll pediatric neurologists around the country to ascertain their interest in forming such a society.”

“The previous evening,” Ken noted, Paul Dyken had begun to search for a name for the society. After several outrageous suggestions were vetoed as inappropriate, he suggested ‘CNS,’ the ‘Child Neurology Society.’ In a most unusual sequence of events, the name of the society was chosen before the concept of organization was accepted.”

I don’t know that I’ve ever been in the Holiday Inn in La Crosse, or whether it even still exists. If I were making a movie now, however, I would absolutely have the 17-year-old me sidle in and take a table next to those eight venerable gents, maybe even have him ask if this new organization they were talking about forming might be interested in looking over his resume (he had none), or reviews of his 8th grade science project (there were none). I love the irony of the 17-year-old me fraternizing that fall with the sons and daughters of Mayo Clinic physicians busily forging fake IDs to get into Wisconsin bars 70 miles away (the drinking age in Wisconsin was 18) at the very same time the La Crosse 8 were trying to forge a genuine identity for child neurology. It would make for nice dramatic counterpoint and narrative tension: My misspent youth vs their missional drive and focus.

A few months later, the stars began lining up even more closely, such that I seemed destined to find myself in Boston 50 years later. In December 1971 I escorted a young beauty named Betsy to the Mayo HS Christmas Dance, learning later in the evening, among other things, that her father,

head of cardiac surgery at Mayo, was about to take a job offer at Harvard Medical School (he ultimately passed on it). Like any smitten teenage boy, certain I had found "the One," I immediately fast-forwarded 50 years to family gatherings in Boston, perhaps even including walks around Walden Pond. Alas, it was not to be. In February, Betsy dumped me. My heart and faith in the future sank at roughly the same time and rate Ken Swaiman's, in Minneapolis, rose as he shared with the La Crosse 8 the results of the 189 questionnaires *he* sent out in December.

Or, should I say, "Mary Currey, his secretary, sent out?" Mary typed and photocopied all 189 questionnaires, folded and inserted them in the 189 envelopes she had previously manually typed addresses on, then sealed, stamped and dropped those 189 envelopes in a mailbox. As amazing as that seems now, what's even more amazing (staggering, actually) is the fact that fully 146 of them came back with responses. We're talking hand-written/checked, re-folded responses that someone inserted, sealed, addressed and dropped in the mailbox). That 77 per cent response rate, requiring 5x the time and effort of today's on-line surveys, is roughly 3x the rate of return any survey has seen in years.



UNIVERSITY OF Minnesota

PEDIATRIC NEUROLOGY
BOX 486 MATO MEMORIAL BUILDING • MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA 55455

December 28, 1971

Dear Dr.

At the end of November a group of pediatric neurologists met to discuss common needs and interests including development of an extensive forum for presentation and discussion of investigation in the area of pediatric neurology. During those talks it became obvious that the number of pediatric neurologists is limited, and that the problems are so universal that the formation of a national organization is logical and desirable. Accordingly, we wish to propose establishment of a national group, the Child Neurology Society (CNS), for the purpose of providing pertinent and substantial exchange of scientific information and for fostering the advancement of all aspects of pediatric neurology. It is not the intent of this organization to supplant child neurology sections in other societies such as the American Academy of Neurology and the Society for Pediatric Research. Continued participation in these groups by pediatric neurologists is essential.

Enclosed is a form which will allow us to evaluate your interest in such an organization. Please check the response list and make any comments you wish before returning the information.

Sincerely yours,

Kenneth Swaiman, M.D.
for:
Richard Allen, Ann Arbor
William Bell, Iowa City
Raymond Chun, Madison
Paul Dyken, Milwaukee
Manuel Gomez, Rochester
Kenneth Swaiman, Minneapolis
George Wolcott, Madison
Francis Wright, Minneapolis

Child Neurology Society Questionnaire

Number of questionnaires sent:	189
Number of returns 3-15-72:	146

- | | | |
|---|--|-----|
| 1. I believe there is a need for a national organization to provide a more detailed forum for interchange of scientific papers on Child Neurology and for promulgation of all aspects of Child Neurology. | | |
| Yes | | 124 |
| No | | 16 |
| Ambivalent | | 6 |
- | | | |
|--|--|-----|
| 2. I am interested in joining and participating in such an organization. | | |
| Yes | | 117 |
| No | | 16 |
| Ambivalent | | 6 |
- | | | |
|---|--|----|
| 3. I am willing to submit a paper for presentation and/or attend a meeting of this group in Ann Arbor, Michigan in October of 1972. | | |
| Yes | | 81 |
| No | | 36 |
| Ambivalent | | 19 |



HEALTH SCIENCES
MEDICAL SCHOOL

The results were amply encouraging. Fully 85 percent of those responding thought there was a need for a national organization of child neurologists, and 77 percent expressed interest in joining it. The road to Boston 50 years hence, seemed set.

The rest, as they say, is History: "All of this happened, more or less." Following a promising spring meeting in Madison, plans moved forward quickly toward a 1st CNS Meeting in Ann Arbor, a founding event touched on briefly with "A" at the outset of this Countdown, and one we will no doubt revisit when the Countdown journey ends on September 29 with the opening of the 50th Meeting in Boston.

I will be there in Boston on the 29th. Betsy won't.

"L" is also for Logo

In that same 1996 review article on the Founding of the CNS, Ken Swaiman noted the following: "A solid organizational base was needed to provide a sense of stability and substance at the first meeting. For example, we wanted a logo to place on the membership certificates. Denae Kasbi, an illustrator in the Department of Biomedical Graphics at the University of Minnesota and I, after some trial attempts, developed the logo that adorns the certificates and virtually all CNS materials to this day."

The certificates have gone the way of most paper documents, but the logo lives on.



Until tomorrow ("M" is for Minnesota Twins")

Roger

Roger Larson, CAE
Executive Director

On-line Registration is Open!

Registration is now open for the long awaited 50th Golden Anniversary Meeting of the Child Neurology Society in Boston. Registrants attending this milestone meeting live and in-person in Boston will want to register early (some sessions are limited and reservation-only). You will also want to book hotel rooms ASAP. A link and access code to the Sheraton Boston Hotel will be included in your registration confirmation email.

[Click to Register](#)

2021 CNS 50th Annual Meeting

For more information, click button below.

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