

# On Research...

Blogging about research issues at Ohio State University



[Home](#) [About us](#) [Research Communications Staff](#)

## Stubbornness and obstinance . . .

Posted on January 6th, 2010 by earleholland

My friend obviously was enjoying his salmon sushi. Apparently, he was a regular at the Japanese restaurant we'd chosen. The wait staff and even one of the cooks had greeted him warmly as we walked to the table, nodding and smiling in that way that says "I remember you from before."

Ironically, we'd landed at Ohio State the same year, more than three decades ago, both of us poised to begin careers that neither could have predicted. Him, the scientist, and me, the writer. And yet, in all those years, we'd dined together less than a half-dozen times, twice in the last year or so.



Salmon sushi

I don't "do" lunches well. It's a shortcoming, I admit, for a writer, but it's hard for me to focus on the conversation when I worry about spinach lodging in my teeth. I fear that my enthusiastic discussion will end with spilled drinks or splayed food, halting the dialogue.

For me, food has always been a necessity rather than a pleasure, something to keep the migraines at bay. Still, the tempura was excellent . . .

My friend, on the other hand, was world-traveled, educated and sophisticated in that comfortable, non-stuffy way and he reveled in the dining experience. My admiration for him had grown much over the years. And while we were relatively close in age, his demeanor was always more fatherly, more that of an advisor than a peer. And he did like his sushi.

"Ultimately," I had offered, "our success is measured internally. Do we believe we truly have done a good job? Accolades and awards from others are nice, of course, but we have to meet our own expectations, first and foremost.

"Lying in bed at the end of the day and in the darkness, are we more content than not with what we've done?"

It was an argument I'd often made before, one I truly believed and that explained, to me at least, why it was that self-motivated people usually succeed where others fail. But it was also meant to limit some of the disappointment he felt. He'd been passed over a third time for a prestigious honor that he – and I – knew he deserved. He was, he said, too old to be chosen, the victim of some arcane rule that governed the award.

### NAVIGATION

- \* [Home](#)
- \* [About us](#)
- \* [Research Communications Staff](#)

### RECENT POSTS

- \* [A graphic misrepresentation . . .](#)
- \* [Of ghoulies and ghosties and long-leggedy beasties . . .](#)
- \* [A cascade of lemmings . . .](#)
- \* [Not what Ben meant . . .](#)
- \* [Of science, baseball, and cricket . . .](#)

### SOCIAL MEDIA

- \* [OSU Research News on the Web](#)
- \* [Research News on Facebook](#)
- \* [Research News on YouTube](#)
- \* [StumbleUpon](#)

### WHAT WE READ

- \* [Dot Earth — Andrew Revkin/New York Times](#)
- \* [Framing Science](#)
- \* [Health News Review](#)
- \* [Knight Science Journalism Tracker](#)
- \* [Real Climate](#)
- \* [Science News](#)
- \* [Speaking of Research](#)
- \* [The Great Beyond](#)
- \* [The Panda's Thumb](#)
- \* [The Plainspoken Scientist](#)
- \* [TierneyLab](#)
- \* [WiredScience](#)



### CATEGORIES

- \* [Climate change](#)
- \* [Environment](#)
- \* [Physics](#)
- \* [Researchers](#)
- \* [Science Communication](#)
- \* [Science policy](#)
- \* [Space](#)
- \* [Uncategorized](#)

### ARCHIVES

- \* [February 2012](#)
- \* [January 2012](#)
- \* [October 2011](#)
- \* [September 2011](#)
- \* [August 2011](#)
- \* [July 2011](#)
- \* [May 2011](#)
- \* [April 2011](#)
- \* [March 2011](#)
- \* [December 2010](#)
- \* [October 2010](#)
- \* [September 2010](#)
- \* [August 2010](#)
- \* [July 2010](#)
- \* [June 2010](#)
- \* [May 2010](#)
- \* [April 2010](#)
- \* [March 2010](#)
- \* [February 2010](#)
- \* [January 2010](#)
- \* [December 2009](#)
- \* [November 2009](#)
- \* [October 2009](#)
- \* [September 2009](#)
- \* [August 2009](#)
- \* [July 2009](#)
- \* [June 2009](#)
- \* [May 2009](#)

“Ah, well,” he had said, “that’s the way it goes.”

“But we’ve done good,” I offered. “Both of us are leaders in our fields, and we’re proud of that. It was a long road to get here but we’ve earned it.” He agreed, slightly begrudgingly. Ultimately, we had arrived at a good place.

It was, we said, the way good science and good works are actually done. There is no “eureka” moment, no grand discovery. It’s a long slog up a steep hill and most who attempt it fall short or tire early. Research isn’t easy. It isn’t fast. It takes a good, new idea and incredible work. And research advances don’t arise from new, grandiose programs or facilities – they grow inside the scientist’s mind. The programs and facilities are actually rewards, after the fact.

“Stubbornness,” I suggested. “Stubbornness and obstinance and refusing to be defeated, that’s what leads to good research. I’ve seen that proved too many times.”

It was, we agreed after all, one of the key lessons scientist-mentors should pass on to those who follow: That science is a journey and a path, rather than a destination or a goal. And the rewards best received along the way are those we allow ourselves.

Science and research are now often seen as a means to an end, tools which we use to better our lives and society. And that they are, now more than ever. But the goal for most scholars is the question, not the answer, and if something good comes of it for all of us, so much the better.

There was a pleasant melancholy in that conversation, a reminder between two old friends of shared, simple truths and values and why we had come this way in the first place. It was a gift we gave each other, recharging batteries and validating beliefs.

And the food was good. \_\_Earle Holland



Powered by [Bookmarkify™](#)

Tags: [Researchers](#) //

[2 Comments](#) »

## 2 Responses to “Stubbornness and obstinance . . .”

[Nigel @ Solicitors In](#) // Jan 15, 2010 at 11:10 am

I’m with you on this – I don’t do lunches out ... It needs to be an evening meal, and I need to prepare for going out

[Melissa Weber](#) // Jan 26, 2010 at 3:52 pm

Lovely, article Earle. Thanks. (Although – since I DO lunches – often – does that have negative consequences for my future success? Or does it just mean I like to talk and eat out?)

- \* [April 2009](#)
- \* [March 2009](#)
- \* [February 2009](#)
- \* [January 2009](#)
- \* [December 2008](#)
- \* [November 2008](#)
- \* [October 2008](#)
- \* [September 2008](#)
- \* [August 2008](#)
- \* [July 2008](#)
- \* [June 2008](#)
- \* [May 2008](#)

### META

- \* [Log in](#)
- \* [Entries RSS](#)
- \* [Comments RSS](#)
- \* [WordPress.org](#)

### RESEARCH NEWS WEBSITE



## Discussion Area - Leave a Comment

Name (required)

Mail (will not be published) (required)

Website

« [Criticality . . . The smoking gun . . .](#) »

**THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY** ■ [WWW.OSU.EDU](http://WWW.OSU.EDU)

© 2006, The Ohio State University | Enarson Hall 154 W 12th Avenue | Columbus, Ohio 43210 | 614-292-OHIO

This page is maintained by: [University Relations](#). [About this site](#).

[Contact](#)

If you have trouble accessing this page and need to request an alternate format, contact [webmaster@osu.edu](mailto:webmaster@osu.edu).