

Chapter 36

Six-Word Stories

In August 2009, I was alerted to the concept of the six-word story, which may have originated with Ernest Hemingway’s classic creation: “For Sale Baby Booties Never Used.” Following are my first attempts at this genre.

- (1) **Mill Town** **Married Jeannie** **Research Career**
Most research investigators have a support person without whom the career would not have been possible. The support person is not the indispensable mentor(s), but rather one who smoothes the emotional path.
- (2) **Writer Eighty-six** **Still in First Draft**
Most research careers change dramatically every decade. The story is still in the first draft until the last change has occurred.
- (3) **Writer’s Block** **Love Writing** **Can’t Stop**
I took “forever” to complete my first manuscripts. Some people may be born with a flair for writing – for me, it has been an acquired skill.
- (4) **Unimpressive Start** **National Academy** **American Philosophical**
My freshman and sophomore years in undergraduate school could most charitably be described as mediocre, but I was eventually elected during my professional career to membership in both the National Academy of Sciences and the American Philosophical Society. Yogi Berra has stated: “It ain’t over till it’s over.”
- (5) **Manuscript Unsuitable** **Manuscript Suitable** **Manuscript Invited**
My memory is not always accurate, but I think a world-class scholar asked me at one time how many of my manuscripts had been rejected last year. “Four,” I replied. “You’re not aiming high enough,” he said.
- (6) **Tried Research** **Enjoyed Research** **Research Addiction**
Some people believe the driving factor for research is the recognition that successful research brings, which is almost certainly true for some people. However, one of my favorite research areas was protozoan colonization dynamics, which I carried out for about four decades with great pleasure.
- (7) **Science/Politics** **Two Cultures** **No Agreement**
- (8) **First Date** **Talked Books** **Roommates Horrified**
- (9) **Wonderful Life** **Alzheimer’s Struck** **Love Remained**
- (10) **Lone Wolf** **Team Member** **Lone Wolf**
Before joining the field team at the Academy of Natural Sciences, I did individual research for a brief period. When I joined the river survey team, I became an ardent advocate of well planned, group research. I continued team work until Jeannie was afflicted with Alzheimer’s. When she died, I no longer had the stamina/energy to return to team work. Around 2000, I became a permanent lone wolf research investigator again.
- (11) **Reluctant Speaker** **Shy Speaker** **Keynote Speaker**
In high school, I was an extremely shy student. College was no better. When I began a research career, I had no choice but to become a public speaker, however painful it might be. I gave talks everywhere and to any group that invited me. Later, I began getting a satisfactory number of invitations, not because I was a good speaker but because my research was cutting edge. Gradually my speaking ability caught up to my research. Finally, I was invited to give keynote addresses.

Writing these six-word stories is fun, and I might add a few more to this chapter later on. Everyone should try it!