

The final word with a little help from Whitman



Walt Whitman a renowned American poet, essayist, and journalist, wrote the remarkable poem 'O Me! O Life!' in which he talks about the purpose of life. This famous poem was first published in 1867 during a time of quite dramatic technological change in the world. The poem speaks about the struggle of humanity and spotlights our struggle to understand the purpose of life. One could easily feel hopeless if you stop reading after the first verse. Whitman chooses a powerful metaphor in the concluding lines that follow the enigmatic second stanza, that merely reads: 'Answer.' Without hesitation Whitman chose not to leave the reader without hope. He chooses to tell us that we all matter. We all matter because we are here.

*'That you are here—that life exists and identity,
That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse.'*

Whitman equates life and existence to a 'powerful play,' and that each person may contribute to this play. The 1989 movie *Dead Poets Society* features Robin Williams in the role of an enigmatic and passionate teacher. In one of the most memorable scenes, the character played by Williams, delivers the same Whitman poem to his students. And he concludes, in a near whisper: 'What will your verse be? What will your verse be?'

Powerful stuff! Set against the Whitman poem this scene really impacted me back in 1989 when I saw this movie for the first time. Whitman's poem and the eloquent presentation thereof stayed with me throughout my life. I've always visualized my life as a verse in the 'powerful play' as evinced by the Whitman poem. When I researched the scene for this article, I found the movie clip on YouTube, and as I watched the scene start, I experienced a profound and incontrovertible truth - words and ideas still matter. As a young adult/teenager the question posed at the end of the scene, impacted my thinking and life profoundly. Yet, this time around the powerful opening words to the scene made me pause: 'No matter what anybody tells you, words and ideas can change the world.'

It is coming full circle. As the President, I've shared many thoughts and ideas over the past year. It has been a privilege to write this article every month, despite the pressures of a monthly deadline amid a hectic schedule. The process was incredibly rewarding, allowing me to share ideas and words with readers. But more importantly, many, many people shared their ideas and words with me. I experienced the power of words and ideas first-hand and was frequently left in awe of the amazing volunteers that creates life within the Institute. The SAIMM has travelled a tough and challenging road over the past two years. But I see the green shoots emanating from the hard work of the SAIMM team, the volunteers, and the committees starting to appear. In-person events are back on the calendar, and it is with excitement that I look forward to going to a conference again. I think we all look forward to appreciating the things we took for granted before the pandemic.

Members continue to support the Institute with their time and talent, their words and ideas, and it is through these efforts that the Institute stands as a beacon of knowledge and professionalism. Through the power of words and ideas we change the world. I conclude this year with a deep appreciation and gratitude to all who contributed and continue to contribute to the SAIMM's verse. Thank you for the support and feedback from all corners of the world, helping, guiding, and sometimes just supporting. It was an amazing privilege to serve the Membership over the past year and I know I can pass the torch to Zelmia with confidence and excitement as we celebrate the transition.

From me, my final words in this role: Thank you!

I.J. Geldenhuys
President, SAIMM