

# Three Things Your Mother Would Have Told You If She Was a Plant Pathologist

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I am told by people who study these sorts of things that the quality of parenting is quite variable. My mother is now 90 years old and is still providing excellent advice on making good choices. When I left the nest and landed in grad school, my academic parent (**Bill MacHardy**) took over. He was a gifted mentor, and I often wish I could be more like him. With the foregoing in mind, I wanted to pass along a few bits of career advice that may not be self-evident. Because you are reading this in *Phytopathology News*, I may be preaching to the choir, but perhaps not. It might nonetheless provide a ready answer to questions raised in the course of mentoring early career scientists or in speaking to peers who are less engaged in APS. So, here are the three things I think your mother would have told you if she was a plant pathologist. In case you're wondering, I've run all of this past Mom and she agrees.

1. You should be a member APS.
2. You should go to the annual meeting.
3. You should publish in APS journals.

Let's take these in the order given.

**Why should someone in this profession be a member of APS?** Is there a moral or even a transactional obligation to be a member of any scientific society? Mom says yes. You need to be a part of something bigger than yourself. APS is the most significant organizing and advocacy force for our profession worldwide. APS—through its three research journals (*Phytopathology*, *Plant Disease*, and *MPMI*), online journals and reports (*Plant Health Progress*, *PDMR*), and APS PRESS—is by far the largest producer and distributor of scholarly and practical information in our discipline. Our professional world would be a pale shadow of the present without the collective contributions of our peers in APS. We are beneficiaries of the sacrifices of generations of peers before us and among us with respect to APS. Others have freely donated their time for our benefit and continue to do so every day. But, the system only works when there is a steady influx of committed volunteers. Mom would tell you that it's an obligation to help others, because they have created the professional world that now benefits you. You may wish for a better professional world than the present, but you must admit that you would experience a far poorer existence but for efforts of the many APS members who surround you. That's a message that needs to be passed along to our colleagues who might not be members. It also needs to be communicated effectively to our students and early-career professionals. My major professor dropped a membership application on my desk in October of my first



Mom might be 90 years old, but she still knows how to have fun with plants (left). Not one to sit on the sidelines, she's out for a spin on our neighbor's new trike (above).

semester and offered to wait while I filled it out. That seems to have worked out well.

**Why should someone in this profession go to the annual meeting of APS?** Assuming that one has accepted the first proposition and is a member of APS, perhaps the question to ask is why would you *not* attend the annual meeting of APS? We are a society of nearly 5,000 members, about one third of whom reside outside the United States. About one-third of that membership shows up at the APS Annual Meeting every year, and they come from all over the world to get there. These are not exactly un-busy people with a lot of leisure time to spend. They are among the busiest and most productive people in our discipline and they *make* time to attend year after year. If you are an early career professional, attending and participating in the annual meeting and operation of the parent society of your discipline is the fastest way to jump-start an effective professional network. It is where you will meet the people who will be interviewing you for positions, where you can get your work out in front of an audience, and where you can get connected. It is where you will meet and interact with the people who write what you are reading every day. If you are a mid- or late-career professional, being involved in APS keeps you connected to the breadth of work in the profession and to your peers in a way that no other venue can match. Mom puts this more succinctly: Get outside and play.

**Why should you publish in APS journals?** Anyone publishing today has a number of options when it comes to submitting their work for publication in a peer-reviewed journal. If you're still reading this, I'll assume you've accepted the first two propositions; you agree that you should be a member of APS and you agree that you should attend the annual meet-

ing. Now, why should you preferentially publish in an APS journal? There are less expensive options. Indeed, some are without cost to the authors. There are options with higher impact factors. The impact factors of APS journals are higher than other plant pathology journals, but all journals within our discipline carry impact factors that are relatively low compared to journals with a wider scope in plant biology. But note well: it is the plant biology *journal* that has the impact factor, not the plant pathology paper that you bury within its pages and professional and editorial structure. A journal that does not collect page charges from authors may appear to cost you nothing, but the costs to your profession can be considerable. Some disciplinary journals are owned by for-profit entities that have largely co-opted the volunteer editorship and peer-review model of scientific societies. These are businesses, not scientific societies. They do not provide member services, nor engage in advocacy on your behalf, or provide career development opportunities.

I would maintain, and Mom agrees, that family has a tangible value that cannot be purchased and that members of a family benefit from preserving that value. That's not to say that family members will not occasionally disappoint you. Some, like my brother Allan, can be a real pain in the butt (in his defense, Allan insists that his brother is even worse). But, occasional annoyances or even profound disappointments do not diminish a family's overall value. As a member of APS, the decision I face each time I complete a manuscript is *not whether* I should submit the paper to an APS journal. I have planned for some time to send it to APS and have already figured out how to do so. I have made that decision about 100 times now. Again, it seems to be working out for me. ■