

MOMENTS

IN MEDICINE AT MICHIGAN

Shelley Batts, a native of central Florida and a neuroscience Ph.D. candidate, authors the blog Retrospectacle. In April, she wrote about a paper on fruit antioxidants that had appeared earlier that month in the Journal of the Science of Food and Agriculture. She included a table and a graph from the article, and, within two hours, received a strongly worded cease-and-desist e-mail from the Society of Chemical Industry, publisher of the journal. Batts removed the data, but the incident spread wildly through the science and blog communities. Support for Batts poured in from scientists and writers around the world. Two days later, a representative from the society apologized to Batts, calling the incident a “misunderstanding.”

“**T**he e-mail from the journal was very curt. It said I was infringing on their copyright and had to take down the material immediately or they’d contact lawyers and sue me. I didn’t want any legal kerfuffle, so I took it down.

“The next day I posted my e-mail conversation with the journal. People in the blog community were outraged that they were trying to bully me with lawyers and being heavy-handed with a student who was really only trying to bring attention to their journal. I wasn’t slamming them; if anything, I was excited about the research.

“I was so surprised that anyone would think I was doing science a disservice. Science blogs bring pedantic ‘ivory tower’ knowledge to a completely new audience that would probably never hear about it otherwise. But in the end, I’m glad it happened — and that the entire blogosphere howled.” 

—Shelley Batts

*Interview by Whitley Hill
Photograph by J. Adrian Wylie*

