Wild Onions 2014

Wanderlust: Unplanned Journeys
The title of our journal has raised a good deal of speculation. The wild onion is a common garden-variety weed, a hardy plant that grows almost anywhere and tends to spring up in unexpected places throughout the woods and fields and roadsides in this part of the country. It blossoms into an unusual purple flower and its underground bulb, if tasted, yields a pungent, spicy flavor. The wild onion is a symbol of the commonplace yet surprising beauty that is living and growing around us all the time, the spice that though uncultivated, unexpectedly thrives and – if we only take time to notice – enhances life.

Submissions are due by February 1 of each calendar year and can be sent via email to: wildonions@hmc.psu.edu. Visit our website to download a copy of Wild Onions at http://www2.med.psu.edu/humanities/
Wild Onions is an annual publication funded by The Doctors Kienle Center for Humanistic Medicine, Pennsylvania State University College of Medicine. It is a journal of poetry, prose, photography, and visual art created by members of the entire Hershey Medical Center community.

Entries are selected on the basis of artistic merit, representation of the broad diversity of the medical community, and recognition of the interplay between science and creativity that is essential to medicine as a human endeavor.

Faculty and staff – both clinical and non-clinical – patients, families, students, and volunteers are invited to submit original (not previously published) literary or artistic work on all topics. Photography or drawings may be submitted in either black and white or color format. All entries may be submitted to the Department of Humanities or electronically via wildonions@hmc.psu.edu. For an unbiased selection process, we ask that identifying information (author’s name, relationship to Milton S. Hershey Medical Center, mailing address, and telephone number) be listed on a separate sheet of paper and sent along with the entry. If you wish to have your entry returned, please include a self-addressed envelope.

No portion of the journal may be reproduced by any process or technique without consent of the author. All submissions, inquiries, and requests for authors and current or past issues of Wild Onions can be directed to Managing Editor, Department of Humanities, H134, Penn State University College of Medicine, 500 University Drive, Hershey, PA 17033.

The aim of The Kienle Center is to advance the appreciation, knowledge, and practice of humane and humanistic medicine, defined as health care that is sympathetic, compassionate, and effective. Wild Onions serves this goal by encouraging literary and artistic work that seeks to describe and understand, with empathy, the experiences of giving and receiving health care.

Activities of The Doctors Kienle Center for Humanistic Medicine include:

- The Kienle Service Grant, co-sponsored with the International Health Interest Group, for medical students engaged in volunteer work with underserved patients.
- The Doctors Kienle Lectureship, which brings national leaders in humane medicine to Hershey Medical Center.
- The Experience of Care Project, which teaches medical students through participant-observation studies.
- The Doctors Kienle Prizes in literature, art, and photography featured in Wild Onions.
- The Doctors Kienle Collection of materials concerning humanistic medical practice (located in the Harrell Library).
- The Medical Student Humanitarian Award, co-sponsored with The Association of Faculty and Friends.
- The Mary Louise Witmer Jones Humanitarian Award, given annually to an outstanding resident.
- The Nurse’s Humanitarian Award, in honor of Lawrence F. Kienle, M.D.
- Humanism in Medicine Awards, co-sponsored with The Arnold P. Gold Foundation, for a graduating medical student and for a faculty member.
- The Kienle Cultural Series, a series of presentations in the arts and humanities.
- Patient Portraits, a photography exhibit by Joseph Gascho, M.D.
Welcome to Wild Onions and to this year's focus of “Wanderlust: Unplanned Journeys.” Wanderlust is the driving word. It implies desire, the desire to experience the new and the different. We need it in our personal lives, and we need it in our patient care. We normally think of wanderlust as the desire to travel to new places, but let us not be limited. We can journey physically, but we can also journey intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. We can find the new and the different in people, emotions, knowledge and meaning every day, wherever we are. In the healthcare professions we are regularly privileged to be a part of new stories; we have the daily opportunity for unplanned journeys. And all we need is the desire and the willingness to accept the invitations from our patients and one another to look carefully and to listen openly. We hope that the images and reflections in this journal will challenge you to do so.

And what do we need to bring to today's journey through the beautiful and thoughtful works in Wild Onions? Bring Curiosity about what might be behind the words or the images because it opens our ears and our eyes. Bring Openness and the capacity to absorb, change and learn because in so doing, we improve ourselves. Bring Empathy because it establishes the connection that allows understanding and healing to occur. Bring Hope because without it there is no healing. Bring Compassion and Comfort because suffering is a common theme for all of us and sometimes they are all that we can offer. Bring Humility because each of us is only one voice, and humility allows us to hear all other voices. Bring a sense of Humor, because laughter is often relief. And bring a sense of Wonder because it facilitates humility and it spawns inspiration. And when we become inspired, we can inspire.

Now please enjoy the journal and the unplanned journey that it provides. And please join me in thanking our many contributors; our editor-in-chief, Dr. Kimberly Myers; our senior student editors, Sarah Tisel and Yehoshua N. Laker; our managing editor, Deborah Tomazin and all others who cultivate Wild Onions. We hope that you enjoy the beauty and energy and meaning that it contains. There is much to learn here from one another, especially from our patients who have shared their experiences with all of us in this journal and in our visits. They are, after all, the reason that we are here.
Wanderlust: Unplanned Journeys

Wanderlust is a romantic yearning for exploration, change, and adventure. It is a curiosity and a willingness to take chances. At the same time, life often throws us a curveball: it places us in novel situations that can be frightening—or delightful. These unplanned journeys are often the catalysts that force us to redefine what we want from life. They can alter our sense of being, and provoke us to dream and yearn toward ever-loftier aspirations.

You will find the journal’s layout slightly different this year. Despite no requirement that submissions match the theme, we discovered that all art takes us on a journey. With this in mind, we decided to conduct you on an unplanned journey of your own conception. Pieces suggestive of beginnings, naivety, and planning launch this creative journey, and pieces reflecting on the end of life, feelings of nostalgia, and wisdom gained will wrap up your travels.

Thank you for making this an incredible year by measures of both number and quality of submissions. Studying your submissions led us to ponder why humans create and share art. The artistic process is used to contemplate, express, and understand our most intense experiences; composition is itself a journey through reflection and revision of life’s unplanned journeys. Similarly, enjoying art generates in each of us an organic wanderlust, a curiosity and yearning to explore and share in the artist’s adventure. Each of us creates our own meaning when we explore art, which makes this year’s journal a different journey for every reader.

We hope this year’s edition will take you to yet unexplored lands and awaken your curiosity regarding the experiences of others. We hope that our talented literary and visual artists will impart to you, as they have to us, some of the wisdom that we all gain when we embark on an unplanned journey.

Bon Voyage!

Senior Co-Editors

YEHOSHUA N. LAKER, MSIV

Yehoshua N. Laker (that’s yih-hoe-SHOO-uh, Hebrew for Joshua), a native New Yorker who graduated from Queens College CUNY, is also a committed member of the Harrisburg Orthodox Jewish community. He is planning a journey to Case Western to embark on a career in emergency medicine. He is also a literature enthusiast, having double-majored in English and biology and worked for his college newspaper as a copy editor. He has continued to read voluminously throughout medical school, and for a time considered pursuing an advanced degree in English or journalism. Besides his literary aspirations, he is his class’s information technology chair, and there have been innumerable times when he has saved the IT day. As he continues forward in his career, he aspires to be a physician writer.

SARAH TISEL, MSIV

Sarah Tisel is planning a career in general neurology, and has been drawn to Penn State’s humanities curriculum since interviewing here for medical school. She may appear on the surface to be your average American, but her life has been full of wanderlust and unplanned journeys. Born in Minnesota, until five years old she lived in Berlin, where she attended a bilingual kindergarten and helped knock down the Berlin Wall. She then moved to the Netherlands, where she lived until moving back to Minnesota at eighteen. She attended college and majored in neuroscience at Macalester, a liberal arts school in Minnesota. She studied abroad in Australia during college, and spent two months outside Mumbai on a public health project during medical school. As you can see, Sarah is passionate about travel, and says she uses creative writing as a way to understand cultures and experiences.
Student Editors

Literature Editors:
Back:
Yehoshua N. Laker, Ashley Mo, Jimmy Huang,
Jesse Blank, Sarah Tisel
Middle:
Nika Vizcarra, Jessica Frey, Holly Boyle, Seemal
Awan, Sara Carlini
Front:
Allison Weinstock, Kristin Berger, Christine Clark
Not pictured:
Natalie Dogal, Chevon Alderson, Elise Mercier,
Annie Huylor, Hannah Ross-Suits.

Art Editors:
Back:
Neil Manering, Jimmy Huang,
Allison Weinstock, Kristin Berger, Alex Rossi
Front:
Jesse Blank, Ashley Mo, Colin DeLong

Other Contributing Editors:
Seth Gerard, Sara Abu-Tabikh

Stepping Stones
© Chloe Wang  MSIV
ART

**Jonathan Frazier**

Jonathan Frazier is a regional artist, known locally for his pen-and-ink architectural renderings, and more broadly for his vibrantly colored oil paintings.

Much of his art work is influenced by his mindset as a performing musician, and much of his music is in turn influenced by his experience as a visual artist. He studied at the Maryland Institute, College of Art, then transferred to Kutztown University where he received his BFA with a studio concentration in painting. His work has been featured in *Art of the State* and in various juried shows including Lebanon Valley College, The Pennsylvania State Museum, the Washington County Museum of Fine Arts, and Philadelphia Sketch Club. He has had solo shows at the Delaplaine Visual Arts Center in Frederick MD, the Montpelier Center near Richmond VA, and the many commercial galleries that represent his work, including Gallery at Second in Harrisburg, the 2nd Floor Gallery in Mechanicsburg, and Gallery 30 in Gettysburg.

PHOTOGRAPHY

**Wendy Palmer**

A resident of the Harrisburg area for the past 25 years, professional photographer Wendy Palmer is a native of Cape Town, South Africa. Here she earned a Bachelor of Science degree in physiotherapy, and a Medical Honors degree in sport science from the University of Cape Town.

In the United States, after the birth of their second son, Wendy completed an Associate Degree in photography at the Harrisburg Area Community College while continuing to work as a physical therapist. Today she continues to enhance her photography skills and vision though workshops with Visionary Wild and Maine Media.

Her work was included in an exhibition for regional photographers at the Susquehanna Art Museum, Harrisburg, and she also participated in the 31st Annual Art of the State exhibition at the State Museum, Harrisburg. As a student, her work was accepted by Photographer’s Forum for publication in the *Best of College Photography Annual* for the years 1993, 1994, 1996 and 1997.

Every facet of photography holds a fascination worth exploring. Life is a journey and so is her freelance photography, which continually evolves.

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LITERATURE

**Maura Spiegel, Ph.D.**

Maura Spiegel has a joint appointment at Columbia University and Barnard College where she teaches literature, film and American Studies. Associate Director of the Program for Narrative Medicine at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, she teaches film to second-year medical students, and serves on the core faculty of the Master of Science Program in Narrative Medicine. The co-author of *The Grim Reader: Writings on Death, Dying and Living on* (Anchor/Doubleday), she has edited new editions of Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* and Edgar Rice Burroughs’ *Tarzan of the Apes* for the Barnes & Noble Classics Series. With Rita Charon, MD, PhD, she co-edited the journal *Literature and Medicine* for seven years, has written for *The New York Times*, and has published essays on many topics. She is currently writing a biography of the director Sidney Lumet (St. Martin’s Press).
Floating Lessons

© Kim King  Spouse of Steven H. King  
Department of Health Physics

The swathing waves, in humid August air, enwrap my body, the ocean lapping skin and shore. I’m weightless, wingless, floating—chin upraised, my ears are underwater, hair translucent strands that swirl around my bare shoulders—medusa jelly fish spinning filaments beneath the sea. My fins propel me back to when my Dad first shared his floating secrets. “Arch your back,” he said, but when he moved his hands away, I flopped and sputtered slurs of salty spit, “Just try again.” I did and sank, until my head was tipped, and arms and legs were splayed. We rocked in twin silk cradles—tandem grins to the sky.

Cardinal

© Tatiana Teslova  MSIV
**HAPPY BIRTHDAY**
© Jessica Frey  MSII

I string up balloons like paper lamps
Wrapped around the latticework of a terrace
And they glow like jack-o-lanterns
With their wide grins on their wide faces
And I wait for them all to pop
And rain down glitter
I try to catch the glitter on my tongue
Like snowflakes
And it all stays stuck there
Blue and purple sparkles latching on like beetles
With their shiny bodies and their prickly legs
And their big big eyes
I pull each insect off,
Their bodies swollen from my blood,
And I smash each one
On canvas
Look at all those Rorschach inkblots
So red and so beautiful
Like ribbons and licorice and ink suspended in water
Revealing all those wishes
I recite over candles on top of cakes
Words that my own tongue
Doesn’t know how to say.

**REFLECTIONS OF LIGHT**
© Mary Cenia Kohut  Patient

Oh child, you were born to be
Your life is woven, your love is free
Upon the wall, you cast your eyes
The scribbled words to tame your demise
Oh child, the good and ill
Traversing fragile extremities till fate unleashes your will
Here and now you’ve come for your dreams just beginning
Your soul is the star
Oh child, we’re all children you know
Clinging to our hope and appraising the show
Polar perception, black and white
Only to find reflections of light
Oh child, you were born to be
Fear is the lock; your love is the key

© William Fritz  Volunteer
Daybreak

© Daniel Wolpaw, M.D.
Departments of Internal Medicine
and Humanities

Waiting for sun in the wild coast
in the space after the diner girl
went home without me.
It was an end of the day I had not seen,
the rocks and spray not waiting
but knowing,
me not knowing, but waiting

Waiting through all the night-ends, the
day-beginnings to come,
watching the light flow,
time changing and unchanging,
noticed and unnoticed.

This morning I noticed.
Sharing a room with the child of my son
she woke crying and we shared a smaller space,
the weight of her head sinking into my neck,
hand on my chest, sleep bordering my skin.
Waiting for her eyes to open,
wanting the dawn to stop,
wanting the moment to notice me, and nod
just a small nod,
the diner girl never offered,
nor the coast, nor
the hard morning.
She raised her head, looked,
and then came back to me.
That is nod enough.

Unconditional Love by Taylor Sanger

© Amanda L. Musser  Patient
An intimate composition of shapes in a warm palette of orangish reds and yellows against the natural wood background of the underlying support. The wood is exploited for its tactile potential in the largest background shape, where it has been burned and incised in a way that vaguely suggests a flowing, feathery quality. Interestingly, elements of this same background shape appear to run down over the closer foreground shape of the shoulder. Further playful manipulation of the pictorial space is evident in the colored shapes which have the hard-edged appearance of stenciled application, as well as the nuanced blending of soft brush work.
Satisfaction is just a horizon
We see it and believe that if we get there
- By train or plane or bus or foot or even falling from space
That we will be happy and done.
Lies.
We are no better than the trees.
Every morning when the solar balloon finally floats up
The trees, those towering sentries of Gaia, feel it
And decide that this altitude isn’t good enough, his canopy horizon
Isn’t satisfactory
Give ten people each a bag of M&Ms;
- they’ll just count and compare.
Stand a man on the edge of a skyscraper’s roof;
- He’ll wonder what it’s like with one foot over the edge
Sit down with a piece of pure white paper
First impulse?
Use a pen to make a mark. Even a single dot gives us focus,
While destroying the limitless possibilities of the page
Which came from the trees that knew no limits just like us.
A patient sits in a waiting room, aging and worrying.
Eventually she sees her doctor for an instant.
Nothing is wrong. But something must be wrong.
Is the horizon on the roof or falling to the ground?
He who sees a wall of art is doomed to question what’s behind it.
The horizon is not our satisfaction,
It is the line from which we draw another.
Go ahead and draw on the paper,
- Draw a map from here to the next horizon.
  If we didn’t keep going there would be no point.
  Face the reality you already drew on the page.
  Then pin it up and get a new sheet to do it again.
**These Roots Are All I Am**
© Jessica Frey  MSII

The architecture is like the branches
Of a maple tree without the leaves
They are all scattered across the
Air like potato chips
Crinkled and ridged and golden copper
Orange yellow I want to
Float
Like that, get caught on the
Tendrils of the wind before
Somersaulting down again.
I will skin off the bark and hollow out the inside
Like a canoe, make it smooth and slender and so much like
Skin
Tender wood that dimples in and dimples in.
And I will whittle those branches down until they are like
Candles
And I’ll light each one
Make a wish make a wish
And they’ll burn down till they’re nothing more than wicks
Just the charred burnt ends that used to hold potato chips
Crunch crunch I wade through the leaves
That now are strewn about the ground and they crackle
Crackle and disintegrate beneath my feet.
I pick one up.
I hold it in the air.
It flutters a little
And then it hovers there.

**Angel Oak**
© Brian Piazza  MSIV

**Antipodes**
© Shaun Levi  Wife of Benjamin H. Levi, M.D., Ph.D.
Departments of Pediatrics and Humanities

I admire a signal Sunset
saluting my cherished horizon,
and rest through the Night
to behold
prevailing Dawn.

**Ants Marching**
© Mackenzie Fell
Daughter of Brenda Hershey-Fell, RN CRC
Nursing Administration
Sunday morning church clothes were always my best costume.
Button-downs were my lies, and ties my deceit.
I knew I already had you all fooled.
Problem was – I even started to believe me.

I dressed the part. I went to church.
I didn’t drink, I didn’t curse.
I didn’t smoke, I didn’t have sex or worse,
I didn’t cheat, lie, or hurt.

Sunday morning church clothes were always my best costume,
until I realized they never really fit me.
The sleeves were too tight, and the pants were too short,
Because I fast outgrew that so-called “Christian” list of chores.

Sunday morning church clothes were never my best costume.
But Jesus never wore them either.
He preferred a crown of thorns and nails through his palms to show his love to his Believers.
But if Jesus is Love and his followers are supposed to be Christ-like
Why do we still focus on the differences between black and white?
Or gay and straight?
When Jesus himself couldn’t give a damn about where you’re from or who you date
Newsflash: racism and classism are just as sinful
as your body’s last fill of cheap thrills and quick orgasms.
The only difference is the light in which you paint them –
so don’t color me surprised at the number of His followers that are blind to their hatred.

I don’t wear my Sunday morning church clothes anymore. And I know Jesus couldn’t care any less.
His ultimate sacrifice says it best: It’s what you do, not what you say, that’s written on the nametag across your chest.
Reflections on Omniscience: Motherhood

© Jean Henry Patient

I sit here at the edge of the woods thinking of children, adolescents, young adulthood and motherhood, the essence of our being.

I never wanted to be omnipresent or omnipotent or even omniscient, the latter, however, being infinitely more desirable.

At one time I wanted to be a deer, a sweet and gentle deer, fawn colored and with dappled spots, a fleeting thing in the woods, like a scented breeze, leaving a remembered gift to anyone or anything lucky enough to feel or smell or hear it. This is what I wanted more than anything else in the world.

I wanted to blend into the woods, to smell the spring flowers and reflect at the wondrous by the side of a brook.

The world beyond the woods did not let me do this, but for a respite of a few months after the birth of each child, when the sensuousness of being shuts out the extraneous world, when mother and child and sometimes father are their own omnipotent world.

I had a gift, a baby, to share with the woods. And then I wanted another and then more...

Motherhood is very strange. There you are having the freedom to dream and suddenly, you are an omniperson to a small creature.

Then you must start that person out of the woods and into a world which is not very nice a lot of the time.

It is difficult, because the woods are so beautiful.

Road Trip

© Joan Yatonsky, RN, ASN, BSN, CNOR, CRNFA, CSN Operating Room
It is a hot day. I mean the kind of hot that makes you feel as if you are literally roasting in an oven. And not only is it scorching hot, but it is humid. So humid that I can barely stand under the weight of all this moisture, let alone take a deep breath. Sticky. I am so sticky from beads of sweat on my forehead that eventually give way to rivers of sweat running down my face, my back, and my legs. I'm not only sticky, but grungy, filthy from riding in the overcrowded public bus on my way here. Seriously overcrowded—"standing room only" wouldn't suffice to explain how overcrowded that bus is. I mean, there isn't even any standing room left. People are stacked on top of each other, hanging out of the windows, even the door. As I go to exit, I realize that my arms are glued to those of passengers standing next to me (sweat can do that). But I'm here now, my destination; I should find relief inside the hospital.

I am walking through the doors of Premananda Hospital in Kolkata, India with the thirteen other Americans whom I met a few days ago and with whom I journeyed to India. This is a Leprosy Mission Canada hospital. Will this resemble the hospitals I've seen in America?

Overcrowded, understaffed. And I was wrong; it isn't any cooler in here than outside. Even if they did have air conditioning, there is no guarantee that it would work. I learned shortly after arriving in Kolkata that power outages strike frequently and without warning. I walk up the six flights of stairs to the top floor where I am to spend some time talking with the patients. I'm really excited and nervous at the same time. Will they speak English? How badly will their disease have progressed? What is leprosy in the first place? Will there be a fan? I hope there will be a fan.

I walk into the room and I am greeted by the stench of filthy unwashed bodies and dirty bedding. I make eye contact with an older man. His eyes are soft and inviting; I feel drawn to him. I walk to his cot and introduce myself: "Hi I'm Addie. I'm from Delaware" (we were told not to tell anyone we were from America because Americans aren't always cordially welcomed here). "How are you?"

A sweet nurse places her hand on my shoulder and explains, "He can't understand you. He speaks only a tribal language. Nobody at the hospital can communicate with him because he doesn't speak or understand any of our major languages." With that, she walks away to attend another patient. I can't imagine how lonely and isolated I would feel, being unable to communicate with anyone around me. This loneliness in addition to the social stigma and segregation that come with having leprosy is incomprehensible. I am overwhelmed with tenderness and feeling for this man that strangely resembles my grandfather. I gesture in a way as if to ask, "May I sit on the cot next to you?" He nods with a genuine smile and pats the damp, wrinkly blanket. As I sit down, I take the man's deformed hand in my own and look at his face with feeling. His eyes well with tears as we sit in silence. I don't know what is running through his head in this instant, but for me, all the discomfort of the heat and humidity, the buzzing of the rusted fan, the conversation between those around us, the nurses attending to their many tasks... they all disappear. It is truly a surreal and transforming moment. I realize that this man has not felt the touch of a human hand in a long time (perhaps barring the daily tasks of the busy nurses). When was the last time somebody made an effort to care for this man, a man who is surely somebody's son, brother, father, maybe even grandfather? This man has a story but can't share it with anyone here. I feel that by his willingness to hold my hand it is I who have been blessed and touched by his compassion for me. Could he sense that I too need love? I am eighteen years old and have never left the United States or been away from my family for this long, and I miss them. Almost as a paternal figure, he looks at me with warmth and understanding. This powerful moment will change me forever.

That man whose name I don't even know taught me the value of human touch. He taught me that words aren't always necessary and that empathy goes both ways. I was able to empathize with this man and I felt compassion toward him, but he was also empathetic toward me. He recognized a need in me that I had not realized existed until that moment. From the outside it probably looked like I was the compassionate one; by society's standards this man was untouchable, unlovable, perhaps even subhuman, and I reached out and took his hand. But I know the truth: he made a profound impact on me. I will always remember this unique and life-changing experience, and hope that it will forever shape the way that I view human beings and practice medicine.
The element of surprise, mystery and composition is what intrigues me about this image. First, the overall image is captivating. One is drawn into the image by the couple in the rearview mirror of a vintage car, the mirror being the brightest part of the image. One immediately feels a connection between the subjects, even though they are very small. The converging lines (dashboard and visor) further draw one's eye in and around the image to the chauffeur—clean-cut, immaculate and refined in his dress and demeanor as he averts his gaze from the couple while grasping the slim steering wheel with his gloved hands. The right hand corner of the image is darkened and pushes one's eye back onto the image, where one notices the burst of color of the yellow label on the key ring. This then draws one's eye back onto the image, whereupon one notices the EZ Pass, which dates the photograph. One cannot leave the image without noting the size of the subjects…the couple being very small in the rearview mirror and the chauffeur taking up the right hand third of the image. Perhaps it is this antithesis that once again draws one to the couple in the mirror from the dark shape of the chauffeur along the line of the fork of the steering wheel and back to the mirror.

Very well executed!
I'm standing here, paralyzed. My hair is matted with sweat and little beads of it have formed on my forehead. I hate Egypt in the summertime. Scratch that, I just hate Egypt. All the time. I look like a mess. I feel like a mess, and I just want to go home. I never should have come. I know I said I could handle this, but I was wrong, and I can't.

I just left Qatar two weeks ago, left the country that was my home for the last year. My life was a symphony then—all thrill and love and salt-water-sunshine that coursed through me like a set of staccato sixteenth notes. I left a life I loved so much that I had stopped sleeping the last two weeks I was there, because time was that precious. Now I do nothing but sleep and try to pass the day away. This is love, too, I know, but it is silent and twists in my soul like a worm, feeding. It sits on my heart like a rock.

And I'm still standing here, in front of my grandmother's closet, taking in the sweet-stale scent of the old perfume coming off her clothes. I let it wash over me, and with it the memories of the childhood I had spent in that house. The tears start flowing and I feel stupid, because I'm better than standing in front of a closet crying. It's just that…I remember. I remember the woman that wore those clothes, the laugh and smile that went with that perfume. I remember the hand that used to wear those rings, so big and warm against my chubby hands as I was learning to walk. I remember, and every part of me wishes I didn't. Because everything I remember makes it that much harder to deal with the present. No, she isn't dead. But, God, I think to myself with shame and a feeling of emptiness I cannot put words to, I wish she were.

I wish she had died then, in those rings and that perfume and that smile. I wish she had died with laughter in her eyes. I wish she had died long before she had taken that fall, the fall that took her away from me in a way much, much worse than Death could have.

I wish I didn't have to sleep next to her every night, listening to her heart beat and wondering if this would be the last time I would do so. I wish I didn't feel the dryness in her hands because she had stopped drinking water to keep from having to get up to go to the bathroom. I wish I didn't see how the light was dead in her eyes, how her cheeks were sinking with each passing day.

Every night when I was a child, my grandmother would walk me to the picture of Jesus and Mary in the foyer, and we would stand there and pray. I can still hear her voice now, My Lord Jesus, lord of lords, kings of kings, we thank you for every condition. Things were simpler then. Concerning every condition. She could stand, then, and pray. And in every condition.

Now she sits on the edge of her bed every night, and cries, unable to make it out to the foyer. Sometimes I bury my head in the pillow and pretend I don't hear her trying to gulp out the familiar words, My Lord Jesus, king of kings…but tonight, I sit next to her and put my hand on hers. I finish her prayer, We thank you for every condition, concerning every condition, and in every condition. She looks at me and speaks a single word, “Why.” It’s flat, more a statement than a question, but it stabs at me, prickly like a nettle, a tiny splinter I can’t get out. A thousand Bible verses flutter through my mind, taking off like a murder of crows, all black wings and shadows, the words I had been taught through the years by the very woman who sat here questioning them, about reason, and love, and trials. About some meaning in the chaos and madness of it all. Except I don’t know if I believe those words now, if I believe in anything at all. So I bite my lip until it bleeds to keep in the words, but I find them spilling out of me anyway. I don’t know…
I Took a Walk

© John Messmer, M.D.
Department of Family & Community Medicine

I took a walk out on the highway
And met a man along the way.
I asked how far he planned to travel.
He said he seeks a destiny,
The place mankind must surely go.

How far is that, I wondered him.
And which direction do you roam?
How will you know when you’ve arrived?
“The journey’s end will be made clear
From signs along the way.

“The first sign is equality.
Same yardstick for everyone.
No matter your position,
Your beliefs, nor whom you love
Nor even for the color of your skin.

“The next sign I encounter
Will be empathy and compassion.
No disdain for downtrodden,
But care for all, for everyone,
Including you and me.

“And when I see the sign of love,
Complete and without judgment,
Freely given, augmenting giver and receiver
And forgiving without condition,
Then will I have reached my goal.

“It won’t be soon that I arrive there.
The road is long and fraught with disappointments.
Yet forward I must travel
Undaunted by impediments along my way,
Though comfort is wanting and succor, rare.
For the day will come when people care
As much about their neighbors as themselves.”

And so each day, I walk that highway
Following the path of that singular man.
There are some days the route’s uncertain
So that I fear I’ll lose my way.
But when recalled that destination
My heart becomes my compass' true direction
To guide my path to mankind's destiny.
It was going to be a wickedly hot June day, so Toots Nelson was trying to get her old mud-spattered John Deere tractor to start before sunrise. It turned and sputtered but that was all. Toots said, “Goddamn!” hopped off the seat, released the springs on the distributor cap, and used the nail file blade of her pocket knife to clean the points. She got back on the seat, hit the starter button, and as soon as the twenty-year-old tractor roared to life she set to work. Toots’ place was one street over from ours and had once been a farmstead with an old house, a small barn and some chicken coops on about a half-acre. By breakfast she had scraped away all of the blackberry briars from a piece of ground the size of a basketball court on the west side of her lot.

Toots Nelson was a big, raw-boned woman with a weathered face and a Prince Valiant haircut that came from chance encounters with her kitchen scissors. She claimed to be a veterinarian and did indeed doctor horses, cattle and sheep for farmers in Wayne County. But Toots always dressed like a man, walked like a man, cussed like a man, and chewed tobacco like a man. And no one in our little town was about to ask to see her vet school diploma or proof of her gender. The outside of her tired two-story farm house was sheathed in dusty tan asbestos shingles, just like our place, but hers also had a couple broken windows on the second floor, needed a new roof, and was surrounded by weeds, except where she parked her beat-up pickup. None of this mattered to Toots as she had other things on her mind. Since the local farmers had shifted away from having large farm animals, her vet skills weren’t in as much demand as they used to be. So Toots had come up with a plan to cash in on the oil boom that was seeping into Wayne County.

Toots had the largest piece of ground in the neighborhood and her money-making scheme was to build some cabins and rent them to the oil workers who were trickling in from Oklahoma and Texas. Ninth street was just hard packed gravel, but it had the most road frontage of Toots’ property. So she got a load of recycled lumber from Oat Gammon, hired a man who had been laid off at the fuel pump factory, and the two of them set to work building three cabins on the ground she had just cleared. Each of the simple one-story cabins was square, about 20 x 20 feet, had four windows, a front and back door and was covered on the outside with a tar paper that had a yellow brick pattern. They were eyesores as soon as they were finished.

But Toots had misestimated how much building material she needed for the three cabins. When she found that she had a surplus, she decided to build a fourth cabin behind the others, along the alleyway that divided her property from ours. But she only had enough building stuff for a much smaller cabin, and it ended up being about 12 x 12 feet. Like the other three, it had four windows and two doors, with the front screen door facing the alley. By the time it was finished it looked more like a slightly oversized doll house than a place where humans would actually live. Yet this little cabin had a tiny bit of charm, as it was set off from the others and had a scrap of a porch that was about three feet square with an equally miniscule porch roof.

The three cabins on 9th street were finished before Labor Day and were quickly rented to married oil workers who were streaming into town from other oil fields, all carrying cardboard suitcases filled with promises and dreams. The couple in the place at the Center Street corner had a german shepherd that was tied up inside because anytime someone walked by on 9th street it wanted to go straight through the flimsy screen door and after them. The couple in the middle cabin were always playing country music from scratchy 45 RPM records, and the couple in the third cabin were always yelling at one another. So my buddies and I steered clear of 9th street.

Soon after it was finished, the little cabin on the alley was rented to a single oil field roughneck. He put a beat-up bench seat from a worn-out school bus outside next to his cabin's tiny porch. I was just learning to ride a second-hand bike that I had bought with money my Mom had paid me for pulling weeds when the roughneck moved in. Mom told me that until she said otherwise, I could only ride in the alley behind our house between 9th street and the train tracks. So I rode up and back, up and back past the little cabin. On every warm summer evening after
the roughneck got home he cleaned up, put on a clean white T-shirt and Levis, sat on his school bus seat, played with his three-legged rat terrier, drank sodas and smoked Lucky Strikes. Each time I rode by I was mesmerized by his physical presence. Other than seeing Johnny Weissmuller as Tarzan at the Saturday afternoon movies, I had never seen anyone like him. He sat quietly by our shared alleyway, with his gaze both present and far away. On each pass, I could not take my eyes off the web of veins and muscles that spiraled down his arms. At about 5'9" and 140 pounds, he was one half James Dean and one half Bruce Lee.

For a few days we just nodded at one another, with me riding and him watching his black-and-white rat terrier sniff among the volunteer marigolds that grew by the garden fence behind Toots’ place. One warm summer evening when thousands of fireflies were doing whatever fireflies do on warm evenings he said to me as I passed, “Hey Kid, do you know how to make a firefly ring?” I stood on the bike’s Bendix brake, hopped off, said not a word, but looked at him as if he was Jesus Christ, incarnate. He said, “Hi, I’m Archie, and this is my dog, Fritz”. What’s your name?” I had to think for a moment and then I blurted out, “I live over there!” pointing across the alley, not realizing that I had forgotten to mention my name.

Archie went inside his cabin and came out with an empty and clean Peter Pan peanut butter jar and its lid. He handed it to me and said, “Here kid, go git half a dozen of those fireflies.” In a minute or two I had a dozen, with their yellow tails blinking away like miniature suns in the jar. Archie took one out with his left hand and carefully placed it upside down on the denim on his left leg. With his right hand he reached into his back right pants pocket and pulled out a gleaming black and silver object the size of a large cigar. In one continuous motion, the object came forward and leapt to life as its steel blade sprang out. I had just seen my first switchblade knife, drawn and opened by an American samurai. The knife was an artistic extension of Archie. Just like a piece of blackboard chalk was an extension of Mr. Langford, my third-grade teacher. But every school had loads of Mr. Langfords. Unless you lived with a trapeze artist or met an oil derrick roughneck you just weren’t going to meet a 20th century American Samurai.

Archie said, “Now watch what I do.” He waited until the firefly’s light glowed brightly and, with a surgeon’s precision, he deftly cut off the very tip of its light with his knife. Then he released the firefly and the firefly flew straight up, away and joined its kin. Then he said, “Show me your pinkie.” I did and he pasted the still glowing yellow light on my pinkie. He repeated this five times, and all of a sudden I had a magic glowing ring on my pinkie. Archie said, “Pretty cool, ain’t it?” It was getting dark and I heard Toots cussing at one of her dogs and then I heard my Mom call for me from our kitchen door. I still hadn’t said more than one sentence. Archie said, “Come back over some time in the daylight and I’ll teach you to throw a knife.” As I was walking my bike through our gate I saw Archie take the lid off the peanut butter jar, and the rest of the fireflies burst out and headed to the stars.

JUDGE’S COMMENT

The narrator of this splendid story introduces us to Toots Nelson, busy before dawn with her tractor, on a mission whose purpose remains unexplained until we get to know her a bit. Only slowly are we taken to the story’s sweet spot: as Toots builds the cabins, the story seems to construct the narrator’s memory before our eyes. “The roughneck” moves in with his three-legged dog, and takes up residence in the child’s imagination, embodying for him, all the mysteries of manhood, from Tarzan to James Dean. The boy’s evening bike rides bring us into the summer world of a 1950s childhood with tender grace.
A MALAWIAN MORNING
© Diana Dinh  MSIV

In the dark, before the heat
we pack our boxes
wee blue cups
for wee small hands
green plastic spoons
for impatient, little mouths
satchets of supplement
to fill esurient bellies
pens, scales, height boards, enrollment cards- whew!
duct tape and a wrench -- just in case.
Over the mountain tops
the sun climbs tall
traces our route
with its long, slender fingers.
We trundle over dusty roads
and waken to another bright day.
The dry grass tickles our arms
hides our path
scooped smooth by bare feet, broken shoes.
We spy our favorite tree
flowering blue.
Mothers nestle underneath its sun-warmed arms
resting their dusty toes
in the folds of bright chitenjes
sleeping bundles swaddled plump to their backs.
I step into the shade
scattering a cluck of chickens.
A defiant billy goat eyes me warily.
The mothers kneeling,
look up with expectant faces.

UNTITLED
© Joslyn Kirby, M.D.
Department of Dermatology

I lace my sneakers, thoughts swirling,
unfocused, obscuring the solution.
Heart heavy,
thinking about my patient.
My feet pound the pavement.
The air is heavy with wet green smells.
Trees tower above me,
geese migrate in lopsided Vs over fields.
My feet generate a rhythmic pace,
heart rate crescendos then plateaus.
Morbidly obese, but his psoriatic arthritis keeps him from exercising.
Everything I’ve tried stops working,
injections, creams, infusions.
I need him to lose weight so I can treat him.
I need to treat him so he can lose weight,
So he can live.
I will myself to stop thinking.
I feel the breeze that’s come so far to find me,
will keep on traveling after me.
Thump thump thump
Sweat pours from me
takes with it uncertainty.
I know what to do.

SUNSET OVER HERSHEY
© Chloe Wang  MSIV
SEA-WALK
© Lynelle Patient

‘Cross the black rocks,
Smooth & old outcroppings
From the curve of solid, sloping land...

Juts a pier --
Ramrod straight & strong
With narrow weathered planks
Precision spaced, like cross-ties,
Guided, guarded, flanked by rails of iron
Marching out to sea.

And out beyond,
the Water, grey & navy
Topped with fledgling waves
That ride the deeper, darker swells below --

Carried on,
Beyond,
To where the harbor, sea & sky,
Soft, diffuse,
Indistinguishable,

Merge....

Miraged, they grow and surge
Beyond all sight.

Like emissaries,
Visionaries,
Seeking, reaching other lands,
Other times
Other lives
Across the vast unknown.

While left behind
beneath a night sky
Stands a soul, unmoving,
Held entranced & still

By sight beyond his vision,
Light beyond his dark,
Life beyond his death.

A KAYAK AND KAILUA
© Mohammad Bader MSIV

FLIGHT
© Robert Ganse
Connected IT Project Manager
The Gully
© Sigmund David  Patient

Each year it grows deeper.
Fisherman can no longer
Launch their boats
From this point.
Now I seldom see anyone
When I walk here.
At night,
By flashlight,
I navigate
Its jagged rim.
On a clear night
I can view
All the constellations.
I have the shore
Of the River
All to myself.
My mind runs free.

OCD
© Darren Hill  MSIII

Sailor’s warning sunrise peers through the cracks of broken skin.
Fingers dance on arid knuckles, washed and rewashed - still stained.
The guilt of an answered prayer for the pain to go away.
Her son suddenly still in her arms, never to return.
Like zeal without respite and forever-flowing tears,
Soap and water cannot wash away the words she uttered.
But she will try again.

Reproduction of
Claude Monet’s The Seine Near Giverny
© Holly Boyle  MSII
Where Everyone Wears Dust

© Emily Funk  MSI

Sunrise. I awake in my new home
a new routine, I step out the door,
Good Morning blast from the oven
a proclamation from a summer tyrant.

I start the walk, stray dog afoot, squeals of giddy school kids nearby
ahead the highway, formidable, a gushing blur, fast and angry,
To cross you go slow, move predictable, or so I’m told
ignoring my screaming nerves I step into traffic and I Move. Slowly.

Crisscrossing lanes of buses, motorcycles, cars, rickshaws
oil in water, I take a little and they give a little
Never slowing, each changing course a few degrees, just enough

Now makeshift tents line the road, homes on dry, crumbled earth
an old man stirs as lethargic flames wrap around a weary pot
the women, scattered, don’t look up from their sweeping
while clusters of men stare, my presence a puzzle in each brow.

I keep walking, my white backpack, sneakers, skin
people watch me and I them. All I see is dust,
the dust is on them, the dust is in them,
it is a part of them and try as they might…

I start a foreigner but then it’s day after day
it’s Heat that blurs the memory,
haze that clouds the senses
mornings fade together and soon I fade in.

I see it in their looks, less forlorn
some even seem to nod—You’re back. Good morning again.
No longer a stranger, but not yet a friend
just a part of a shared morning ritual.

Still sweat permeates my long-sleeve kurta
and it hides my white skin. But in such heat,
my face approaches vermilion
a sindoor dot would simply blend.

Yes, it’s true. I am not them
but India, she has given me a new skin
and in the end, I, like everyone else,
wear dust.
The strong smell of plastic and cleaning agents made the sterile habitat all the more lonesome. The stark white corridors stretched into the distance, darkening towards the end, as if they could suck you in. The occasional flicker of florescent lighting caused my eye to twitch. I wandered down the ill-lit hallway. The black and white clock on the wall read 4:23, and I was daydreaming through the mind of an eight-year-old into a world where everything turned out all right.

I chased my reflection in the slick floor tiles down the hall. I entered a room where other boys and girls laughed and pushed plastic objects around on the carpeted floor. The hum of laughter and mumbling of speech is all I heard. I didn't know what the children were saying, and I didn't care. I heard a rumbling at the door. As I went to meet the noise, I saw a grey cart filled to the brim with pressed white linens. The cart was followed by a bleak figure, with no expression. It seemed she was wearing one of the linens, the long white skirt pressed tight to her body, jet black hair protruding from a similarly stiff white cap. The clicking of her heels and the buzzing of the cart's wheels played a lonesome rhythm as she continued on her way. The children played in the background as the melody to this sad song.

I stood leaning against the door frame. My head poked out of the doorway as I watched the lady in white disappear around a corner. I left the room of children and plastic objects and continued wandering down the cold corridor. I pushed through a set of doors; the cold metal stung my hand as I pressed the door open. I found ahead of me another similar hallway, still cold, still bleak and white with the darkened distances. But at the end of this hallway, was an elevator. I hopped down the hallway, careful to stay on the little green islands in the sea of white tiles. A crying girl in a chair with wheels passed by. I stopped on an island and turned to watch as her mom pushed her down the hall and as they disappeared behind the metal doors I had just come through. I made it safely across the archipelago and stood now in front of the elevator.

I pressed the plastic button and smiled as the light inside the button turned my fingertip red. As I waited, I noticed the plastic plant to the left of the doors and thought how silly it was for someone to make a plastic plant when real plants that lived and grew for real were just outside this silent building. The elevator doors spread apart and let me enter its cubicle. The doors closed close behind me. I pressed the number four beside the door and leaned against the wall as I felt the room begin to move upwards. A few moments later the doors again opened and I was met by a tired couple who pushed by me into the cubicle from which I had just come; and I turned and watched as the doors sealed these sad faces from my sight. I walked along the outside of the hallway, for there were many more tall, expressionless figures that moved up and down this hall. They passed by me, and most of them didn't even notice me. But when they did notice my little presence in the big hall, they stared and smiled empty smiles at me. I walked on faster. I walked on into the darkened end of the hall to a room that was farther away from the others. I walked into this cold room. The hums and beeps of medical equipment led me to the bed in the middle of the room.

I crawled up into the bed beside the one whom I had played Cowboys and Indians with a month and a half ago, before he got sick. I hadn't seen him in a while, since he had gone to Texas to get better. They said they could fix him there. I looked into his eyes and spoke to him, but he couldn't say anything back. I knew he wanted to; his eyes told me he understood what I was saying. I hugged his neck and lay there a few moments more. Then the nurses came in and I had to move so they could check the machines. I slid off the plastic sheets onto the cold floor. I tiptoed over to the window seat and pressed my head against the cool glass and stared out into the overcast outside. I watched the cars passing slowly with the monotonous beep in the background. I turned back to the room and watched the green line move up and down as it responded to the beeps. The nurses had left, and my brother was asleep now. His frail body lay small in the plastic bed, and he breathed slowly. I stood by his side and watched him sleep and wondered why he was so sick. How could a little tumor make him so skinny? He was fine just a few months before. My stomach screwed itself up into knots and I wanted to cry, but there were no tears. I put my hand on his and said goodbye to the closed eyes of my dear brother. I left that room and walked back down the cold hallway.
Here we have a collaged mixture of materials, including coffee fluidly brushed on in a watercolor style. The deep, earthy umber tones of the coffee stand out against the muted colors of its surroundings. The background is more about brush marks and rich texture, as it is a collage of torn newspaper. It is interesting to note the difference between the flat opaque quality of the white paint that covers some of this background and the warm, luminous white of the exposed paper that shines up from beneath the translucent rendering of the coffee cup.
Cave In To A New World

© Claire Flaherty, Ph.D.  Department of Neurology

Thunderous billowing shrouded them in coal dust
As men around him shouted and then grew silent.
In the fetid darkness he heard the lisping of his children,
Felt the embrace of his wife and daughters above.

Sounds encircled him in a synesthetic rhythm
of color and caress. The massive hull of a ship breached white.
His daughters’ cerulean eyes sparkled before the precessing foam,
his darlin’ Sarah’s bidding farewell to the receding landscape.

The hands reaching toward him in the dim light through
The man-dug rescue shaft were filthy and bloodied.
Steady as they lifted him, he felt only the firm hand of his eldest
Sensing other hands beyond hers; life and spirit coursing through time.

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The Lantern Flickered

© Ruchi Desai  MSIV

The lantern flickered and her mother screamed. She cried, pink, flecked with white. The year was 1922.
The fire crackled, the flames dancing to the rhythm of her feet. Her fair figure was draped in crimson and
a single red dot, the third eye, adorned her forehead. The year was 1942.
The pyre burned and the prayers floated. Her hands, chapped from the sun and heat, folded over her
smooth white sari and silvery strands swept across her bare, red forehead. The year was 1992.

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Study of Birch in Acrylic

© Corinne Gibilterra
Pulmonary, Allergy, & Critical Care Medicine

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The Lantern Flickered

© Ruchi Desai  MSIV

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The pyre burned and the prayers floated. Her hands, chapped from the sun and heat, folded over her
smooth white sari and silvery strands swept across her bare, red forehead. The year was 1992.
Green, black, blue, gray. I didn't know a bruise could be so colorful. I didn't realize it could fill a face like that. I choose not to think of how painful it must be, but instead focus on how frightening it makes those sunken eyes look – those eyes that glare at me with disdain. This is going to be a long shift. I hope she goes to bed early.

She doesn't go to bed early. She doesn't go to sleep before I leave. Her restless soul briskly walks up and down the hallway. Back and forth, back and forth at speeds my long legs can't keep up with. No wonder she's been falling, probably out of pure exhaustion. Surely an eighty-two-year-old needs a break? Yes, but only for a moment. Now back and forth, back and forth.

Every member of the staff says she's their favorite, but I don't buy it. How can they feel so close to a person that can't speak, won't sit to eat, and kicks, flails, and screams when they help her use the toilet? I'm just happy to get a break when her granddaughter arrives. Now I can sit and eat my sandwich.

Vacation from work takes me to my hometown. My grandparents live closer now. Grandma is declining, but at least she can speak. She asks the same questions over and over. “Where's my husband? Where are we? Do I live here?” She doesn't cook her homemade bread anymore, not even my favorite toast with butter and sugar. But I love her and I'm patient with her. She's my grandma, after all.

Back to work so soon. Food is everywhere – table, floor, fingernails, face. I chuckle when she spills the drink just as I turn my back. At least we're sitting down. That doesn't last long and soon we're up walking – back and forth, back and forth.

Her face is losing color and gaining life – less green and blue, more pink and light. I think she may be mistaking me for her grandson. I don't try to persuade her otherwise (I need all the help I can get). She wants to hold my hand while we walk, which beats chasing her through the halls.

She's actually sitting! Bill Cosby is keeping her attention and she can't stop laughing. She says something incoherent, but I know exactly what she means. She nudes me with her elbow, just like my grandma.

Urine is everywhere and she is miserable. Changing clothes isn't happening because she wants to walk back and forth, back and forth. Those eyes seem sad as she asks for her husband. This one question is always clear and coherent. But all I know to do is help her into dry clothes. We start to try, but I need backup. I don't have enough limbs to keep hers from flailing. She's dry, but now those eyes are mad. Maybe some more walking will help us both calm down – back and forth, back and forth.

I arrive and those eyes light up. She recognizes me more often, while at the same time she's forgetting how to use a fork. We walk arm in arm. She tries to help the other residents, just like my grandma would. It must be her registered nurse instincts. I try to help her eat. It's my job, but is it more than that? We speak our secret language of winks, nudges, and smiles. I read her eyes and she agrees to use the toilet. No screaming, no flailing. Now she's peacefully in bed. I hold her hand until she falls asleep. She's definitely my favorite, bad days and all.

She doesn't walk back and forth anymore. Her face is no longer black and green, but pale and tired. Her eyes are more lost than usual, but I think they may still recognize me. Her family is there. They hold her hand and stroke her hair. I sit on the bed and feed her a spoonful at a time. It's more than she's had in days.

Vacation from work, but this time I think of her. I hope she's relieved of pain, but hope she's there when I get back. I get a phone call confirming the less selfish of those desires. I'm relieved for her and only hope her eyes will still recognize me and we can speak our secret language again someday. Maybe we can even walk together – back and forth, back and forth.
He emerged that morning wearing the suit with vest she had bought him one Christmas shortly after they were married.

She was making coffee and turned. Her eyes were puzzled. “You’re . . . not going to work?”

He stopped, not too close, at the edge of the kitchen. “No,” he said, low. “I have an appointment.”

She held the percolator filter, staring unblinkingly at her husband. Church clothes? Overdressed for a doctor or dentist visit – and he would have told her. Female and spousal intuitions conjoined, and afterward she would remember how correctly they had surmised his secret.

Filling the pot, she offered coffee in a minute or breakfast but he shook his head. No. Thanks. He had to leave.

It was 7:21, she noted. Awfully early for a formal engagement.

In their bedrooms the kids were making noises. Time to get up for school.

He came home two and a half hours later, tie loosened. She was vacuuming toward the door. Behind him tiny snowflakes – blizzard dots from a dirty white sky – connoted an eventual depth. She straightened with the Eureka Upright. Dying, it sucked in a leaden ingot of silence, yet he heard a radio somewhere faintly playing Lou Christie’s “Lightnin’ Strikes.”

Addressing her squarely he said, “I’ve been to an attorney. I’m filing for divorce. This can be amicable.”

Her face was blank. She asked as levelly, “Is there someone else?”

He inhaled and released in almost a sigh. “There will be.”

Beyond the closed door snow dropped in larger, heavier, slower flakes.

“We’ll talk some night you choose,” he said. She nodded. The record ended. He left to change clothes, and the Eureka resumed its monotone plaintive singing.

For two days they acted unaffectedly: time to prepare their thoughts. Her husband went to work, their kids went to school, his wife went grocery shopping or other errands, chores, sorted the mail, at eleven went to her part-time job at the candle store, returned, then to the bus stop. The older son protested. For the evenings there were suppers, homework, television, tucking in and kissing the boys good-night. The bigger child squirmed.

The second night when their offspring slept, mom and dad pulled chairs across the glazed floor to the kitchen table, warm site of meals, schoolwork assistance, shared adult opinions and familial decisions.

This, too, would be mutual and brief, disassembling the marriage. A cool officialism when discussing, compromising, agreeing on custody, child support, furniture, financial assets and visitation. That had to be unlimited, he said. No alternate weekends deprivation, particularly in the summer. They needed their father in their lives and she would need the best babysitter on occasion – dates, vacations, cruises. His wife was nodding.

A mild surprise, she surrendered the house. He’d buy out her half, but would he help them find an apartment? Of course, and proximate.

They further agreed to remain a family until June, when their older son passed elementary school. Pointless, tough, changing schools twice in the same year. Until then, they would pretend normalcy. No one must know, especially the boys. Who knew what fears their young minds would imagine.

By midnight it was done. No fault. The house soon fell dark and asleep.

He had laughed once when the attorney used that term. No fault? Certainly there was a fault or faults. The word meant a fissure; they were separating, splitting up, a permanent crevasse after fifteen years of matrimony. What was this, a basketball game? No harm, no foul, no fault.

Across a large desk pillared with folders and legal pads, the counselor was inured. Was she a bad mother? No. As loving as he was a father. Then a lousy wife – slovenly, addicted, absent, indifferent?
No. As sharing and caring as her husband. Selfless. They’d become... accustomed to each other, maybe the word’s disinterested, she first, or him, one reacting to the other, the chicken or the egg thing. Not really dull but routined. No true culprits. Perfunctory. Fine, said the lawyer, leaning back, fingers laced behind his coifed hair. No grounds. Incompatibility. No fault. She signs her spouse’s copy, he signs hers, and after a ninety-day waiting period – a lot of couples reconcile during that time – the divorce was finalized. They were single people again.

Ninety days, thought his client. The boys’ summer vacations. A decade and a half of marriage distilled and funneled down to three months.

There was one fault.

The day after Christmas he walked in and halted. All the Yule decorations, the tree and window ornaments, the big evergreen itself, the electric train, lights, presents, the parade of hanging, snowy, glittery greeting cards were missing, stored or thrown away already. Unprecedented. They always left everything out until New Year’s. Furniture positioned again, the living room spread larger, empty and joyless.

Mom had given the kids a plausible reason. Back to normal.

He moved to the center, rotating slowly, the house shocked silent. The snowball he had created and she had co-signed was beginning to roll, closing and accumulating.

Then one June afternoon so swiftly, so scalpel sharply, he pulled in and their bicycles were gone from the carport. A vacuum descended. The sweaty breeze calmed and chilled. No birds in the yard, trees or sky. No traffic, no neighbors mowing or gossiping. Not any sound or movement. He looked up. Cumulus petrified to a painting. From his house vacant windows watched.
Here, a bulldozer stumbles through the cold November afternoon between the nearby neighborhood and the local school. The township’s 10-year sewer replacement project is well under-way.

Catherine Street is only half a mess. Scraped and prepped like the calloused flesh of a long, dark fish, no longer alive; the plasticity of rigor mortis set.

We walk on the dead.

In the deep fall, I walk along the edge of the road, my daughter scampers atop the rising curb--then the grass--then the asphalt--then the grass. Her flowered skirt, pink leggings and stuffed coat can’t contain her mirth:

Life here is a giggle that bubbles between healthy teeth and smiles.

But our footprints can’t begin to feel the pulse over there.

A military helicopter drums over the mountain to the north. A candy wrapper flicked off by a child, the butt of a burnt-out cigarette the neighbor tries to hide from his wife.

Here, no corpses in trees, no sheets of metal, debris. Here, the drip-coffee makers, the wi-fi routers, and 50 kinds of toothpaste in our grocery store aisles.

A group of students sits on the bank of a hill behind the school and writes about the Philippines from here.
This is a candid photograph that succinctly captures the overall feeling of happiness and playfulness of the person holding the York patty. I was immediately drawn to this image because of the joy and simple accomplishment of the patty holder grasping the patty in her mouth instead of with her hand. It is this element of surprise that makes this image alluring.

This image works because it is black and white, even though it is grainy, and the three points of interest hold my attention and move my eye around the image.
**BIRDS**
© Kim King  Spouse of Steven H. King  
Department of Health Physics

Caffeine, red meat or sun may ripple pools inside the veins that lead to cancer nodes or hypertension, while abstaining fools just wait for words of “clear” or “come back in for tests” that may be likely false—or not, but swallows steal the bluebird nest and eggs, raccoons devour the jays, and comet tails still scatter glitter paint on turquoise skies. While drugs can crush the pain (or vodka will) my breast is left exposed and bruised by tubes that carried needles, but the hurt is less than when you stopped caressing it, the blue and yellow peak you kissed and held—a blown glass bird whose fragile wing broke off when wrapped and put away. Your healing lips will glue the wing, repair the bruise, and we will drink in cups of java sunshine served with steak.

**DEPRESSION**
© Farah Kauffman, MPH  
Department of Public Health Sciences

Ripped into the sky  
Twisting away in a silent storm  
Past sparkling fluorescence  
Spiraling towards melancholy  
Flailing frantically, grasping at air  
Reaching up but plummeting  
Frozen asphalt rises  
To greet this shattered spirit  
Beaten and buried in rubble  
Broken but aware of the cruel journey ahead  
Clawing out of the wreckage  
Wretched human, part zombie  
Zigzagging, straggling, stumbling  
Down an ashen brick road  
The pain, punishing  
It gnaws, threatens with every step  
In a blur, barely making out the path  
Sometimes slipping  
Tripping over dragging feet and busted bricks  
Everyone a stranger, staring, sentencing  
Some helping, pulling this reluctant traveler forward  
One foot, step, the other foot, step  
Slowly, until the brick road flattens and forgives  
And turns to gold

**A PART OF LIFE**
© Carmen Marcucci  Age 17  
Daughter of Gina Marcucci, Department of Neural and Behavioral Sciences
**BEHIND MY CLOSED DOOR**

*Sigmund David  Patient*

Solitude  
My need to retreat is paramount  
To mull over which direction to take  
To determine the next world I want to explore  
To dwell in the mysterious  
There is so much I don’t comprehend  
Or for that matter can perceive  
To recharge  
My world has become overwhelming  
I must slow down the pace  
And then quicken it again  
To be molded  
By a tiny voice  
That can only be heard  
When there is silence

**A DAY OF PALLIATIVE CARE**

*Jesse Blank  MSIV*

“The doctors told me  
The chemo won’t work anymore.”  
Long silence follows.  
A forest of lines  
Eight different IV pumps  
Tubed and quiet in bed  
“If there was a chance  
He said to do everything –”  
Yes, but for how long?  
Bruises like petals  
Platelet count twenty-seven  
How long must she wait?  
Whine of LVAD pump  
the mind wanders distant paths  
cannot journey yet

**CAT**

*Tory Bishop  
Daughter of Donald Bishop Jr., STAT Lab Technician*
Sensory Overload
© Robert Gyory  MSI

Sensory overload
Infinite sounds to comprehend
Blaring static and the dispatcher’s voice on the radio
The technician’s voice conversing with medical command, the only order in the chaos
The insistent beeping of the heart monitor; it nags like the child in the car’s back seat
Rumbling wheels upon the ground, clanking of the tire chains underneath the rig
Clanging of the litter wheels as they hit the ground, loud as the car hitting the tree
The siren is unbearably loud; it wails like the man they extracted from underneath the car
   It is all so overwhelming
Sensory overload
So many sights reach the eye
Blinding white from the overhead dome lights, as bright as the stars he saw on impact
The frenetic green waveform dancing to the tune of sinus tachycardia
Blood splashes red, clashes with the white sheets and the black boots
The yellow cap of the syringe flies across the ambulance, just like his child flew out of the car
Purple bruises and hematomas surround the white bone pushing through his leg to greet the air
   It is all so overwhelming
Sensory overload
Multiple smells assault the nose
The air is saturated with the metallic smell of iron from all the blood
Astringent alcohol cuts through the haze trying to sanitize the air and the skin
Damp, rich earth that cakes his face and his torso
The medications smell bitter, like the oil spilling from the car
His nostrils are clogged with blood, but he smells the last memory of his wife’s perfume
   It is all so overwhelming
Sensory overload
Too much tactile stimulation
A sharp, large bore needle pierces his skin, the pain unnoticeable among his injuries
The long, straight board is hard against his back, harder than the road was against his face
The probing touch of the technician’s hand against his abdomen lies in stark contrast to the caress of his
   wife’s hand against his cheek only hours before
The blood pressure cuff constricts his arm, but not as tight as his wife gripped it in fear before the crash
The pain from a dozen wounds threatens to overcome him, yet it is nothing compared to the emotional
   pain for his injured family
   It is all so overwhelming
Sensory overload
All of these tastes at once
The strong, metallic taste of clotted blood in his mouth, mixed with damp earth and road cinder
The tastelessness of plastic as the technician shoves a tube across his tongue to help him breathe
He begrudgingly tastes the distant memory of the last meal he shared with his son, almost ethereal and
   forever impossible to experience again
More easily, he can taste the very real anger he feels from his broken family and the crippling fear as the
tree drew closer
With great heartbreak, he recalls the taste of the last kiss he gave his wife and the grief at the loss of ever
   savoring it again
   It is all so overwhelming
Sensory overload
Infinite sensations all at once, overwhelming but still comprehensible
A single thought: incomprehensible
“How could this happen to me?”
“Why did it happen to my family, my love and my child?”
Grief overcomes him until unconsciousness forcefully shoves him into peace
Nothing overwhelms him again
My mother grew up in a little town in the endless gray-green countryside of northeastern Brazil. It was a town with a curious past; it had died and risen again. An irrigation project was developed in a faraway and important city and the town was a drowned casualty. What could they do? It was a small town with no influence. The people shrugged, built a new town out of the path of the coming waters, and called it by the same name as the dead town, as if nothing had ever been lost.

When my mother was fifteen or sixteen her cousin came knocking at her door in a panic. She needed my mother to run a message over to another cousin – the one who lived next to the town doctor. Her daughter was not well. She was only six, and she had gone to bed with a fever after a bout of vomiting. The fever was steadily rising, and it kindled her mother’s dread. My mother hurried over to her cousin’s house, and then my mother’s cousin promptly rushed over to the doctor’s house, and then the doctor seized his tools and ran briskly through the streets to reach the ailing girl.

As I said, it was a little town. There was no hospital. The town doctor had few tools, but the one behind his eyes was enough to tell him a story. The girl likely had a viral meningitis, and she had to be taken immediately to the nearest hospital – miles away in Juazeiro. Cars were not plentiful in the little town, but the people were galvanized and somehow a driver was found. The girl and her parents were bundled into the car and sped off into the growing darkness. My mother settled in to wait, but she did not have to wait long.

When she heard the distant wailing, she knew. A lonely funeral procession was limping back home. The little girl had died on the road on the way to the hospital, and it is terrible to die on a road. A road is neither here nor there; it is the Nothing that holds two points apart. If she had died a little sooner, she would have died in her own bed. If she had died a little later, she would have died in a hospital with doctors fighting to ease the choking grip of the virus on the delicate and springy-soft organ of her being. Instead she died in her parents’ arms in the back of a car rattling over long and eerie roads inhospitable to travelers to this day. And their anguish rolled over the gray-green grass and over shimmying lizards and dull, droning insects and eventually reached a girl of fifteen or sixteen, hardly more than a child herself, sitting at a window and waiting.

She was buried the next morning, the day after she had played and shrieked with her two sisters before complaining to her mother of feeling sick. It is a hot region, and there is no embalming tradition. Mourners stood vigil around her little body for the rest of the night, a lit candle propped in her hand to light the rest of her lonely road. Eventually, the girl’s mother had another daughter, and she named her after her dead sister, as if nothing had ever been lost.
It took her 20 minutes to open the email. She opened all other messages. Deleted and archived. Responded and replied. This message stayed bold.

Your baby at 24 weeks!
A familiar and generic heading met her. Garish turquoise and an informal greeting. Statistics and estimated measurements listed. You feel like you’ve swallowed a volleyball!

What was the difference, really? Between 23 and 24 weeks? A single digit. Seven days. Hardly a breath.

Lungs and brain are developing, taste buds too. The baby’s skin is thin and transparent. Your baby is the size of an ear of corn! What fun. 24 weeks, it read, the age of viability.

Such a simple word, viable. She mouthed it, tasted it, chewed it, and spat it out. That word was the difference. Between 23 and 24 weeks. Between life and death.

Her eyes scanned the message until they found it. Her cursor hovered above the word. She glanced out the window at the fields around her. Tractors were mowing down the cornstalks for silage. She clicked Unsubscribe.

“By indirection, find we directions out,” says Hamlet. In this remarkable poem we are taken unawares, circuitously—by indirection—to the heart of loss. The ordinary task of scrolling through email, opening to the cutesy language of a weekly pregnancy update is transformed with the reader’s sudden recognition of what has occurred: this woman has just lost her baby, in the small space of a week before the baby was “viable.” In rendering this enormous sadness through the tiny action of unsubscribing to a website, the poet has allowed us to glimpse the sharp edge of her pain.
Mermaid’s Tale
© Rosanne Lamoreaux, BSN, RN  Hemophilia Center

There once was a little, blonde-haired girl from California,
Who loved being outdoors, especially spending time in the water.
As a child she used to think herself a real living, breathing mermaid,
And tell her friends that her father was none other than Neptune.
Her friends used to laugh and tell her that she was just being plain silly,
While her parents only smiled and thought her wonderfully imaginative.

But to this child the water was her special home, her place of refuge,
And the fishes, crabs, mussels and other living creatures, her relatives.
Her childhood was spent swimming in the ocean or riding the waves,
Happy with her own company, knowing that she was never alone.
Sensing that those below would always protect her from others on land,
She knew in her heart that they had accepted her as one of their own.

As the child grew, she spent less and less time swimming in the water,
For she was told that she had to go to school, had to follow the norm.
So she sat in a classroom day after day feeling awkward and out of place,
For she hated mathematics, didn't care about English or world history,
Found only geography, and the study of the world's seas most interesting.
She learned to tolerate others teasing her for her knowledge of the oceans.

When the little girl grew up, she married a very handsome and wealthy man,
Who fervently claimed his love for her over and over again in many ways,
Although when she asked him to take her to the ocean, he stubbornly refused.
He eventually revealed that he couldn't swim and feared the dark, cold, deep waters.
So one bright, sunny morning without saying a word, she left him for the sea,
Leaving behind a note acknowledging that the ocean had called her name.

Time went by and once again the woman met an educated man,
And he, too, fervently professed his love and devotion over and over again.
But this time she asked him long before accepting his ring or his name,
"Would you live on the ocean with me and swim daily with the fishes?"
He laughed and said, "Are you serious? Do you think yourself a mermaid?
My feet are firmly planted on the ground and will remain that way for life."

So the woman quietly left him too, without saying a word one moonlit night,
Without any regrets or a single backward glance or sorrow in her heart.
She walked and walked until she finally felt the warm sand under her feet.
Then and only then she knew she had found her home forever and felt peace.
They say that if you stand near the Cape May lighthouse on a clear, starry night
And look towards the full moon, you may just see her splash her feet in welcome.
“You’re the best doctor I’ve ever had.”
It should’ve ended there.
Instead the phone starts ringing, day after day.
I have no cure for what she has. Still, she’s out there with a smile and a wave.
How does she know where we live?
She’s in my dreams, and in my garbage.
We hide, she seeks.
The phone keeps ringing.
Until one day,
it stops.

If you can’t take it no more,
walk into the desert
and find yourself
a good rock to lie under.
At least that way,
the buzzards get to eat.

Rays of sunshine, dancing pole
To pole. Reflective
Shackles, infused with prayer.
OLFACTORY ORPHAN
© Sloan Royal Patient

What he would give
to smell his parents’ home again
his father’s workplace when he walked through the door
his occasional cigar on a summer evening
his mother’s perfume for church
laundry she did on Wednesday mornings
their wet cocker spaniel after a bath
piny living room from the Christmas tree
and a kitchen full and warm with Yule cookies
brewing coffee waking him for school
papery notebook and texts from classes
salty scent of friends during neighborhood athletics
leather from a young baseball glove and football
strawberries from his first job at an orchard
the upholstery and faint grease riding along in his first car
first girlfriend’s fragrance, brand name still recalled
the sea and low-tide jetties accompanying a honeymoon.
   But they’ve all passed to a better sleep
   leaving him alone in judgments.

WIND SONGS
© Lynelle Patient

Call to me, Winds of the Wild North Country
Bring me the sharp scent of snow on the air
Harsh is the land where the reindeer still run free
Blue ice & glaciers & white polar bear
Ice mansion igloos, the Midnight Sun story
Like Perry, like London, I long to be there.

Soft are the breezes that blow off the islands
Scented hibiscus & sweet sugar cane
Beckon to travelers; paradise opens
Beaches, smooth sands where the silky tides drain
Sails filled with equatorial trade winds
Carry me where, far away from life’s pain
Tropical waters of turquoise remain.

Swept from my world by a childlike yearning
Spun like the whirlwinds that swirl in the sand
To vast Africa, where the soul can unburden
Wild herds of zebra & wildebeest stand
Stretching as wide and as far as the land.

FLOWER POT
© Daniel George, Ph.D.
Department of Humanities
Why did the chicken cross the road? The question remains. There are, however, no questions about the effectiveness of the artist’s bold use of color and design elements with the large chicken painted over a collage of road maps. The blue sky is broken up by the monochromatic “Why,” as well as the echoed shape of the chicken filled in by the road map.
Snowdrifts: An Unplanned Journey of remembrance

© Jean Henry  Patient

The day is cold,
snow drifts
making fantastic shapes
as they block the road.
Thoughts of you,
crystalline,
fall,
spreading, lifting, filling every space.
I cannot move;
I stand paralyzed,
my mind drifting.
I float, as in a Chagall painting,
a bouquet of spring jonquils in hand,
held by the storm
in perpetuity
for all to see,
waiting…
Will you still embrace me?
Warmed, will the ice melt?
And if not you, will your thoughts
seek mine across the fields of time.
Can we, will we leap free,

I remember picnics in a warmer place;
the Presidio was ours then.
We held hands,
looked into each other’s eyes
and swore we’d stay together.

Reading poetry,
T.S. Eliot’s “Pruufrock,” Auden, Cummings
and all the Beats;
we talked about change, not stagnation,
a better life, freer…

Now there is a “Beat” retrospective at the MOMA.
Can you imagine, frozen in time,
Kerouac, Ginsberg, Corso,
their sons and daughters interviewed,
out of place, out of time,
history reinvented for our children?
To see that all should be the same:
that we should be remembered by,
bound by the ice of tradition
not the freedom that was ours.

1996

Looking Out

© Brian Piazza  MSIV
I don’t remember when I stopped believing in Santa Claus per se. Saint? Symbol? You’ll have to figure it out, walk the maze of memory like so many city blocks until you sweat in the early morning heat, finding your own way.

You’ll never remember your first trip to Manhattan. Not like your sisters. The Best Western on 1-9 in Rahway. The Holland Tunnel. $15 to park between the Pratt and Parsons. Even on a Saturday, a good price.

You’ve always been so laid back. A good sport. A real trooper. A happy baby. Since birth, everyone’s always said as much.

Tucked in a sling, you hadn’t a clue where we walked.

Four months old, you saw fresh flowers on the corner of West 14th Street outside the convenience store. Uncut sunlight barreling down the south-side of the street. A skinny girl squat on a stoop, body balled up, tense, fighting back with someone on the other end of her cell phone and losing near a public square.

You saw this, but who knows if you’ll believe it. Years later, the artifacts of this early life may sit in the back pew unnoticed as an old woman mumbling her rosary in the dark.

The Pratt. Second floor. A woman named Lisa fawned over you as you slept. “I came to look at the art but couldn’t take my eyes off of your little one.”

A couple of slices at Village Pizza. The large man at the counter in a white T-shirt spoke through bad teeth: “We only take cash.”

And then, surprised by Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, we walked up the steep steps to the dark church. Everything Spanish, everything language I barely understood.

You won’t remember the seven blocks to the High Line. Or the Statue of Liberty far off and framed from the Northern Spur.

Little graffiti here, near Chelsea Market. Amy’s Bread. A brief respite from the late May heat, as we trekked back to the parking garage.

In the space between now and then, you’ll come back to this city. You will. Despite our best efforts, some boy may whisper secret swear words after school, a post on social media may trigger wild imaginings, who knows? You may even walk into a fire hydrant and hope nobody saw.

Santa won’t ever write back. Instead, you may find the present in a dark church in a boxy city where legends just wait to be taken from the white buckets, like fresh-cut flowers on a morning in Manhattan.

But I hope you’ll remember, somehow, the day we spent walking the maze, believing in signs all the same.
Just Be Home In Time
for Supper
© Jessica Frey  MSII

Let’s go back to
Telekinesis
To where all the hopscotches and
All the chalk and all the numbers
Can only be removed by the rain.
Let’s go back to hopping over stones
Instead of tripping
Let’s get all tangled in shoe laces
And jump in puddles,
Convinced that all puddles are portals
To parallel universes
And maybe if we splash hard enough
We’ll end up back in our dreams.
Let’s go back to dandelions and eye lashes
Because wishes are real things
And to skinned knees
And sunbaked cheeks
Let’s laugh and let’s laugh and let’s laugh and
Then let’s get taffy stuck in our teeth.
Let’s sip hot chocolate and shove
Marshmallows in our mouths and
Let’s go back to seeing ducks and elephants
Form in the puffy white clouds in the sky.
Let’s go back to crickets and bullfrogs
And glass jars filled with fireflies
And let’s hold seashells to our ears,
Certain the ocean really is tumbling around in there
Let’s fight off sea monsters and
Dragons and pirates and witches
And then let’s read poetry
Without knowing how it’s going to end.

Arion Arbor
© Sudhanshu Bhatnagar  MSI

On the highway to Key West,
A lonely, otherworldly belt of road that cuts through
Poseidon’s pasture,
There is a stretch where you can see the old bridge.
It is dilapidated and broken.
Pieces that remain stand up
Like kindergarteners in a wading pool.
On one spire of this abandoned way
Stands a tree
Stalwart and gracefully green.
When I look at this tree, growing where we no longer tread,
I can’t help but smile and think
We’ve been forgiven.

Harrisburg Bridges
© Daniel Shapiro, Ph.D.  Department of Humanities
A simple, elegant image of the three ponies perfectly placed and connected. The diagonal lines of the two outside ponies’ bodies and the inward sweep of the heads draw one’s eye up and inward towards the central pony. The gentle inward sweep on the outside ponies’ manes further pulls one’s eye centrally. The light on the manes and the contrasting light and dark of their lighter manes to their bodies is what makes this image. It is an image of connection, warmth and freedom as one is aware of the sea in the background, and we know that they are wild.
Like any active, 10-year-old girl about to have a yearly physical exam, I viewed it as an inconvenience and intrusion of my privacy to have this older man, a family friend, pulling up my shirt, then examining my shoulders before asking me to bend over.

His visual hunch after seeing my lopsided shoulders was confirmed by my rounded back. Scoliosis, he pronounced, although it sounded foreign to my startled mother and me. What did or would this mean?

As a child of the ’70s, it meant one of two things: bracing or surgery, neither of which held any appeal to a precocious pre-teen who had recently discovered boys, bell bottoms and peace necklaces. After the diagnosis, my mom pulled out the photo album, scanning photos of me to convince herself and me that the doctor was right. We were shocked to see the evidence in my first-day of fifth-grade photo, where my shiny, straight long hair wasn’t enough to hide that my left shoulder was definitely lower than my right, inside the sleeves of my favorite hand-sewn purple calico print dress.

That affirmation led us to orthopedic specialists and my first torture device, the Milwaukee Brace: a medieval-looking contraption of steel bars, pads, straps, buckles, and molded plastic girdle fitted especially for me, to hold me in position to counter the curvature of my spine. I wore it under my clothes, but unless I wore maternity-like dresses, clothes were not enough to hide the bumps. I had a concave stomach and a bar with a chin rest pushing out of my collar. Instead of hip curves to attract the boys, I had an S-curve barricaded by metal to repel them. It worked better than a chastity belt.

I qualified for adaptive phys. ed. I refused. I could play crab soccer and volleyball just as easily as everyone else, even in my brace. Gymnastics and thunderstorms were my antidotes – they earned me blissful freedom from the lightning rod when I could pretend that I was as normal as the next girl falling backwards into a back bend. The static friction of thunderstorms held a new romantic appeal when I could roll into a ball free of the rigidity of the brace and curl up with a book to escape reality. I wanted to be normal, not like the other two girls from my grade also trapped inside back braces who took the accommodations and played the role of poor, special, challenged disabled person. Their reluctance pushed me to prove that I was the same as everyone else. I played softball, ran track, played soccer and football with the boys, wore makeup and went to dances. The brace would not hold me back.

I was the Bionic Woman – if only boys would see me that way.

Whenever I felt despair at the lack of a date or the occasional taunts of stupid kids, my mom would point out the girl who had made a shocking third choice: no brace and no surgery. A few years later, she appeared to be shrinking in size, her ribs protruding, her body twisted and her gait uneven and labored. She scared me. I didn’t want to look like that, so I endured, and finally, the Boston Brace emerged to replace the Milwaukee Brace. Shorter name, shorter brace that fit more neatly under clothes since it stopped below my breasts. I still boasted a non-existent stomach, and protrusions when I bent over, but a much better camouflage, especially to strangers who didn’t know.

All through high school, that brace followed me, although each year brought a few new freedoms from it until by senior year, I wore it only to sleep. The day I’d been waiting for came shortly before college when finally – finally! – the white lines indicating growth plates on my X-rays all turned to gray, indicating that I was done growing. I went to college; my brace stayed at home. The time had arrived to be able to create the new me that no one had ever known inside the smart, nerdy girl with the brace.

Years later, the girl who had chosen door number three died. Her scoliosis became so severe that her internal organs no longer had enough space to function properly, leading to her early and tragic death. “This is what happens when parents give in to their kids,” my mom said somberly. My mom had suffered as much as I had from the social and emotional effects of my brace. No parent wants to see a child suffer or to feel ostracized. Sadly, this girl’s death showed us both that the suffering, while
especially difficult during teen years, had saved me and given me a future that was no longer lopsided. I hugged my mom.

Ten or twenty years after I had left my brace far behind, orthopedic surgeons questioned whether bracing was really necessary. Severe cases were now operative, and some others were no longer treated. Had I spent seven years of my youth – the most impressionable years – trapped in a brace that had done nothing? What about the girl who had chosen nothing, I wondered? Evidence would lead us to believe that her curve had been far more severe. I might not have come to that end without the brace.

But would I have become the person I am today without the brace?

That’s hard to tell. I never thought I would credit the brace for anything positive, yet maybe it gave me strength. Maybe it gave me compassion. Maybe it gave me wisdom. Maybe it gave me patience. Maybe it gave me empathy. Maybe that led to my career. Maybe that led me to my husband. Maybe that gave me my two beautiful kids. Maybe it kept me thin. Maybe it taught me about tolerance, perseverance, and appreciation for all the small freedoms that we often take for granted. Maybe that brace didn’t straighten my curve, but instead gave me the ability to stand up straight and to feel proud of who I became.

AGING
© Joseph Gascho, M.D.
Departments of Medicine and Humanities

Heart hardens,
Mind muddles,
Bone brittles.

Skin thins.

LONGING FOR HOME
© J. Spence Reid, M.D.
Department of Orthopaedics and Rehabilitation
I stand with my father on the cemetery hill amongst slabs of cold granite embedded with rosary beads. From this vantage our ancestors can see the town they created. They can see its destruction. Gray stillness has replaced the furious black smoke.

My father told me the men worked their guts out and then died young. I see a small house full of people speaking with words I don’t understand. The women are preparing a feast in massive cauldrons.

The men have returned from even bigger cauldrons holding molten steel. I see my young grandfather playing outside with a ball.

I stand with my father amongst slabs of cold granite embedded with rosary beads. A gust of biting wind constricts the vessels carrying my blood as if to protect what those underneath me struggled to give me.
Noncustodial
© Chelsea Mansure    Patient

Cartoon channel left
on so he never returned
    to a still, dark home

    but a toy here, a
crayon drawing there, pouncing
when the door opened.

(doublet haiku)

The reader of this magnificent “doublet
haiku” enters the space of the poem with
wonder, as the poet has created a world
and circumstance with so few words.
What drama has befallen this house? We
surmise the loss—and imagine the one
who enters and experiences “the pounce”
— not of a child, but of painful traces. The
words of the poem belong to a child’s
world, and they vivify the emptiness that
now occupies the space left behind.
Billerica, MA
© Scott Paradise MSII

Waking up with battered knees
and senile joints that creaked like the cold floorboards splintering where they greeted the wall,
Papa walked down to the kitchen to start the kettle that would warm him.
Through cold windows with worn wooden panes from which Winter was slowly removing white, flecky paint,
he could see that outside it was snowing; he’ll have to shovel the walk.
Calloused hands like salted pavement fumbled to put together the buttons on his shirt, and the kettle hissed.
He made toast, and he poured the hot water over instant coffee from a jar collected on a trip
that he and Mama took to the continent years before.

His old, woolen scarf and hat kept him warm outside,
and his gloves lessened the pain of the cold shovel on his palms.
The wood and metal shovel twisted in his firm grip and dragged along the walkway scraping protruding titian brick and jasper moss
while cold wind exposed his freshly shaven pores.
He had cut himself shaving that morning, and the benign but sharp pain reminded his arthritic hands to be more attentive in the future.
In the distance, a fox trotted between trees with industrious indifference to Papa's shoveling.

Softly falling snow woke up the slumbering hairs on the back of Papa's neck and caused him to look, momentarily, upward before returning to his shovel.
The snow challenged Papa's twisting tendons and aging sinews before the walkway was cleared,
and the shovel's once-cold ferrule was now warm from the friction of Papa's gloves.

When Money Talks
© Hayk Stepanyan MSI
Grandma B
© Daniel Lapp  MSIII

Shuffling toward the end of her first century, with as many descendants as years, her lucid eyes shine brightly,
*Who are you two?*

I see that her pluck is still robust as she tells me how the middle-aged nurse walks around as if she were the centarian.
*Oh, you’re my grandson’s children.*

She has outlived a dozen presidents, two world wars and one husband. Maybe she has outlived herself.
*My, what a beautiful name.*

She uses a walker now – a prop to bolster a frame battered by time. There is no similar prop for memory. *It’s nice to meet you both.*

On her horizon creeps a fog, thick like congealed gravy, that she must traverse alone.
*Now, who are you two?*

---

ALS Wasted
© Karen Williams  Patient

Words... torrents of words
Loud angry, accusing
Critical, always critical

Diagnosis...

Tears... torrents of tears
But all for yourself

The voice weakens...

The words become unintelligible
But the pain remains

Life ends...
And we are not healed

---

French Press
© Daniel R. George, Ph.D.
Department of Humanities
The Weary Guardian
© Tony Lin  MSI

Forgive me
I could not part the seas
Succumbing, Falling
Limited by my own body

Forgive me
I can no longer stand tall
Wilting, Withering
Against my own will

Forgive me
For I have failed
Trapped, Bound
By my own mortal body

Forgive me
I am not well
exhausted, tired
I lie down to rest

Forgive me

Lunch with Llamas
© Andrew Martin  MSI
Honorable Mention Art

Painted on location, “en plein air,” these four pieces have a fresh painterly quality with a well observed variety of hard and soft edges to carry the eye through the middle-ground valleys to the distant mountains. The artist manages to use remarkably intense hues of color throughout this scene without compromising the underlying sense of vast space and atmosphere. The quadriptych arrangement of these pieces allows the crests of the various mountain ridges to line up, lending a further sense of unity to the four different scenes.

FINALE   PERUGIA, ITALY

® Bettina Rupp
Daughter of Sally Rupp, Medical Education
My neighbor two doors down – we call him Smitty, and when we need automotive repairs – leaves for work before dawn. Within minutes, a half hour at the latest, different cars at different, sequential times fill his vacancy.

Hospice.

The last vehicle departs ten minutes after he arrives home.

His son’s truck hasn’t moved in months.

Last summer good gossip had him in remission, but several weeks ago the twin halos of high beams from an ambulance idling at Smitty’s house glared off my front door. Then, telltale, its rear doors opened, ingested a litter, closed.

When John was a preteen around my sons’ ages, he’d amble up to my yard with practically every other kid in the neighborhood for great wiffle baseball games – a red-headed, freckled, quiet and affable boy.

The other twilight, cold, gray, smelling of drizzle, I walked down to Smitty’s place. He rolled out from under someone’s car, stood, a tall, gaunt, bent man. His handshake was weak.

He’s doing real good, he said of his son. They had a little Christmas tree up, presents, friends and relatives were visiting. He can even walk around a little bit. Oh, sometimes he’ll stagger and Pop catches him. He’s on this website prayer list of names. Over thirty thousand souls praying for him.

Besides how his son felt much of the days and night, what his traitorous body and mind were telling him, this influx of people had to be a further ominous sign. Pre-mourners I called them, paying living respects while they could, with the time they had. I’d seen it before. Smitty had to know it, too, turning his back and thoughts on it while welcoming every knock on his door.

I said I was also praying for him, for both of them. Smitty seemed animated with enthusiasm and hope, talking fast, a lot with his spidery hands. I told him what a good, polite kid his boy was when we played baseball... and he grew up the same way.


But I knew this brief, free time outside was only a reprieve from the battlefield in his living room. Purple Heart worthy, hard enough to take the blows of grief and anger yet alloy-tempered and malleable to administer care, sympathy, prayer, denial of the odds – one dream within this escalating, constant nightmare and to an inevitable future always tainted less brightly.

Pinned to him was a medal of merit, of fear and weariness but persistence, an invisible badge for their combat against an invisible winning enemy.

I shook his rough, limp hand again and started up the street his son had walked twenty years earlier. Against the darkening, chilling night I imagined a summery, shouting yard with wiffle balls floating down like puffs of cumulus toward youthful, healthy clutches.

I wondered if Smitty and his son wondered, while watching the evening news together, about their government spending billions on wars and Mars, interrupted by private enterprise commercials pleading for oncological research dollars.

Recent gossip has January, February at the latest.

Then one brittle late-January day, when the gray air seemed frozen enough to shatter, the boy’s truck was gone, and the hospice car.
No Silent Symphony
© Jeff Feehrer  Patient

Art imitates life he believed for a while.
But there was never any music on the sets, in the scenes and acts underscoring or magnifying the drama, the tragedy, mystery – the moods of his life’s play. Props and characters, yes, but no musical leitmotifs.
Art should somehow mimic a silent intermezzo.
No crescendo horn or drum when he bolted across a field toward a bent, steaming car and pulled the driver through a window; no imperious and mellow saxophone when he turned and queried with his gaze the halted parade of traffic on the same road behind him and the gawking, immobile witnesses.
Or any harmony in the desperate thrashing and splashing panic of a drowning man he finally snared and floated away from death. Just the mute expression of gratitude on his teared face and in his dripping handshake.
He didn’t hear a soft, classical requiem when he read of his best adolescent friend’s demise in Vietnam; but a soundless something in that clip staggered him against a wall.
Neither a poignant violin note held when he and his wife shared their last marital talk nor when the engagement diamond was slipped off into the mail and would ring at his door.
Missed were a winging choir, organ, panpipes, harp when his mother then father passed before his eyes, leaving a heavy, soundless pall and silent-screen memories.
Also the day his adult sons walked forever from his home into their lives, no background scoring this outtake, no theme song. He listened instead to that overture of the silent symphony.
Now he wonders when or why he’ll hear accompaniment music.
For real life is silence with its own chords.
At this act in the theater of his thinning performances, however, the boards are empty, the footlights dimmed, the curtains are still parted but the seats are receded and tilted symbolically upward.

Highland Song
© Neil Manering  MSIII
Seven Sorrows
© Sloan Royal Patient

The little carnival
is packed away
unstaked, unbolted, folded
into trucks and campers and tractor trailers
rides, concessions, tents, attendants
for miles to travel and people to see
in another seasonal, scheduled, anonymous town
leaving behind the older playground
at recess time.

A breeze like phantom revelers
kicks empty cups, fingers napkins, a stray ticket.
In it, searching the nuance of food and diesel fuel.

Strung lights coiled
joyfully shrieking, swirling, twirling physics
evaporated in the dark to silent basketball rims
empty elementary windows reflecting blankly;
school’s on vacation, carnival’s gone for a year
into a night which blossomed it
both awaiting life again.

Aran Islands, Ireland
© Georgia Brown Faulkner, M.S., R.N.
Public Health Sciences
Light, beauty and peace are what come to mind as I look at this image. The moving grasses and the white diagonal fence draw one's eye into the image. The brick texture of the building contrasts the smooth foreground grasses, and the diagonal fence recedes into the mist as do the background trees. Overall this is a very pleasing image.
Maggie viewed her new badge with suspicion. It did not come with a GPS. She wandered and got lost for the first seven-and-a-half minutes of every call, on every shift, for three months.

On the other hand, it was a sweet passport. The badge opened doors – literally. She couldn’t always remember the difference between MICU, PICU, NICU, SICU and KICU (a tired practical joke for new chaplains), but she knew that when she waved the badge, a whole bunch of doors would swing wide open:

“What’s going on? I’ll tell you what’s going on. I had 13 overdue books and an overdue baby in my belly. I took the 18-month-old with me. I left the three-year-old at home with my husband’s brother and hot-footed it to the library. I’m gone for maybe 20 minutes. In that time, the three-year-old and the 36-year-old get into a fight about the music she wants to listen to. I’m not kidding. I wish I were. She goes upstairs to her bedroom, opens the window and starts screaming. He runs up after her, whacks his head on the banister, and bleeds all over. A neighbor hears my daughter screaming and calls the cops. They show up. Her uncle answers the door with blood all over his hands. She’s still screaming. I pull into the driveway, and fall while running to the house. So now I’m waiting for an x-ray to see if my ankle is broken. I’m waiting for an ultrasound to make sure my baby is OK. The girls are here because my husband is out of town and I couldn’t leave them with Uncle Junior. Child Protective Services is out in the hallway. I’m as big as a house and I have to pee. That’s what’s going on. Do you have children, Chaplain?”

“Chaplain, I could have told you my wife was going to pass away yesterday. Coulda put on the calendar 27 years ago. Those three letters killed her. Listen to me, now. Catherine decided to go back to school. She fell in love with art history so much that she wanted a Ph.D. No one made it easy. No one. At Bethany, they told her she had to take gym. She was 52. They failed her three times before they gave her a D just to get her out of their hair. At Penn they told her to go back to her garden club. She took German and French. Then they changed the requirement and she had to take Dutch, too. She learned how to use the computer – and swear at the same time. But she did it. She always said by the time she got her Ph.D. it would be stamped on her tombstone. She took her last test – hooked up to an oxygen tank – day before yesterday. Ph.D. I was proud of her, but, I’ll tell you, Chaplain, I hated to see the sun come up on that day.”

“How did I meet my husband? Preacher, my whole family met him at the same time! Preacher, do you know about smelt? They’re teeny silver fish that run in the late spring. People go out to where the rivers feed into the lake and they take big nets and scoop up the smelt as they go rushing by. Fry ’em and eat ’em, skin, bones and all. All the men go smelting in the spring. Well, Harold was our paper boy. He liked me, but he didn’t know me. Daddy claimed that bringing in the paper was an important job. Harold would watch me scoot out every morning before breakfast. One day I went to get the paper, and there it was in the driveway. ‘Please be my Valentine!’ inside a big heart. All spelled out in smelt. Harold thought I’d see it first and get a good laugh, but Daddy had to make a house-call and backed the Oldsmobile out of the garage. All over my valentine. Harold was waiting behind the lilac bush. So first he met Daddy. And then he scrubbed the driveway. And then he met me. And that was 57 years ago next week.”

“They’ll tell you nurses make the worst patients. It’s not true. Ministers are the worst. They sound nice on Sundays, but they sound like sailors when they see a syringe. Soldiers are the best. So far from home and...
The chaplain’s badge gives Maggie access to parts of the hospital she had not known before, and it opens other doors to her as well, as people share parts of themselves with her through their stories. This glorious piece brings to mind what Martin Luther King referred to as “the miracle of personality.” The voices here ring out with the urgency to tell—and to be heard. This lovely writer listens beautifully, and her listening in turn invites such rich telling. These stories carry the grace of gratitude, and each one delights us with surprise—each one a miracle of personality.

---

Let Her Soul Float Like Clouds Across the Sky

© Allison Weinstock  MSI

Let her soul float like clouds across the sky,
A tiny light that flickers through the night.
Freeze her as a memory in your eye.
A young child, confident that she can fly,
Shakes with innocence before that long fight—
Let her soul float like clouds across the sky.
Paralyzed by the thought of death so nigh,
She dons a fierce façade to make the flight.
Freeze her as a memory in your eye.
Yet, far away, she crumbles to the cry
Of Spring’s past flowers and Winter’s fresh might.
Let her soul float like clouds across the sky.
I conjure a calm, brave front for her; aye,
My futile attempt to ignore our plight.
Freeze her as a memory in your eye.
Praying for Death’s austere peace to come, I
Now drink to faint music of the child’s light.
Let her soul float like clouds across the sky.
Freeze her as a memory in your eye.

This stunning poem is a villanelle, one of the most challenging of poetic forms. Notice the complex repeating rhyme schemes and the two delicate refrains. Here the poet is drawn to a series of elaborate formal constraints to achieve a poignant exhortation: the poet seeks both to release a soul “across the sky” and to “freeze her as a memory in your eye.” The villanelle form invites an inflation of language that is not typical of free verse, and the effect is magnificent.
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