

LIFELINES



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TRANSFORMATIONS

LIFELINES

VOLUME 13

*The Literary and Art Magazine of the
Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth*

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GLIMPSE *Kate Emlen*

This painting grows out of a contemplation about fleeting time and changing perceptions. I mean to convey an experience of the simultaneity of individual moments that are integrated within a sense of self.

2019
Oil on linen
50" x 40"

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The journal is open to submissions from all, regardless of background or institutional affiliation.

*To Shawn O'Leary,
a valued friend & advocate*

about **lifelines**

L*ifelines* is a print journal for literature and art in medicine. The journal was founded in 2002 by Sai Li (MED'06) and established with the publication of the first issue in Fall 2004. Subsequently, the journal was published annually. Lifelines has featured work by Guggenheim Fellows, winners of the William Carlos Williams Poetry Competition, physicians, patients, medical students, faculty, and undergraduates, as well as from new authors and artists. The journal is open to all.



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To Our Readers:

L*ifelines* is a literary magazine founded at Dartmouth College, located in the woods of New Hampshire. Every year, the trees around us slowly transform from barren branches covered in snow, to verdant boughs abound with life, to scarlet leaves that slowly spiral downwards as they fall to carpet the forest floor. We take inspiration for this year's theme, *Transformations*, not only from our physical surroundings, but also from the breadth of experiences we draw on as students, teachers, healthcare workers, and patients.

Transformations can occur within the span of a single encounter or can take place over the course of a lifetime. These transitions can occur knowingly or unknowingly, be wanted or unwanted, and can be minor or profound. The works chosen for this 13th issue of *Lifelines* draw from a range of unique yet universally human experiences and perspectives. We thank those who have submitted their work for consideration and hope we have managed to showcase the range of talent in our diverse community.

Thank you very much for reading *Lifelines*.

Sincerely,

Justine R. Araya-Colvin

Jamie J. Park

Natalie S. Chen

LIFELINES

Being More

SpiroAnthony Stathas

There are walls, and they are shrinking.

Stacy doesn't think there used to be walls here. I mean, she knew they *existed*, but they were never closing in on her like this. There's a faraway point where a setting sun might kiss the ocean- in the same way that such an eternal point *exists* yet feels deceptively distant, so too have these walls always been here.

But now Stacey's walls are shrinking, and they're doing so quickly. People are leaving. People have left without saying goodbye.

"I'm leaving," she says suddenly. Nobody's there to hear her.

She has moments of clarity – she does. Bright lights and beeping machines, a pulsating nausea with a concomitant panic. Her husband in the corner. The doctor kneeling down. The student hovering by her bed.

"I'm leaving," she says. This time, to herself.

The walls keep closing in. At some point, Stacey will find herself outside of them.

* * *

"And this anatomy class, what is it? Anatomy of what?"

I wiggle into my white coat. Swing open the bathroom door. I can make it across the hospital in seven minutes to get to preceptorship on time. Five if I move fast.

"Anatomy of the human body, giagia."

My grandmother leans forward, her face taking up my screen's entirety:

"Are they alive?" She pauses. "Are they clothed?"

"Giagia...no."

"No? To which question?"

"Giagia..."

"You mean they're-"

"Yes, giagia."

"And you study from them?"

"Yes, giagia."

Silence.

She squints at me. "What have you eaten today?"

"I can't remember."

"*Have* you eaten today?" Not a question this time. A threat.

"I'll have to go soon, giagia. I'll be seeing patients today."

"Do you tell your patients not to eat all day? Eh? Do you tell their grandmothers to worry for them?"

I smile at her. "You haven't called me in a while, you know that?"

"Because you are very busy. Very busy."

"Who told you that?"

She shrugs. "I know you are."

"I still want you to be calling me."

"And I still want you to be eating."

* * *

Stacey's eyes are wild.

I don't know how else to describe it. She's staring at me intensely, as if she's been ripped out of bed and shaken awake, perpetually stuck in that heart-pounding, two second window of transitioning from one state to the next.

Her forehead is peppered with sweat. Thick, stationary beads that she rubs at with a shaky hand.

The doctor takes a knee next to her husband as he cautiously delivers his assessment. It's a crushing yet merciful form of supportive care – a type of consolation devoid of false hopes.

My mind wanders from my growling stomach to the Anki card I just got wrong on thrombotic thrombocytopenic purpura. I think of the note I'll write up for Stacey's case, how I'll describe her appearance. There's a medical term for sweat, I think.

Perspiration? No. Diaphoresis. That's it.

I want to do something more for Stacey. To wipe her forehead, to rest my hand on her shoulder...the only natural thing to do seems to be to reach down and hug her, yet something about my white coat makes that feel too prohibitive.

"Hamburger?" she asks.

I freeze. She claws at her gown, waving her hands erratically. "Take some, take some!"

"I'm alright," I whisper. "Thank you, though."

I follow the doctor out of the room. We have another patient waiting.

And I try to reset, I do, but I'm not as good at that part of the job yet. To be transparent, I don't know if I want to be. I know I could have done more for Stacey, and that's not an easily ignorable truth.

I've come to enjoy most of my first two years of medical school- the busyness has been no exception to this. There's a type of fulfilled joy that I've come to learn feels a bit cheap without the struggle. The love falls flat without the sacrifice.

And so I accept that both are true. There is not much else I can do for Stacey, and yet I could have done more. With this in mind, I commit to visiting her tomorrow. I'll stop by after my classes.

* * *

CLINICAL WRITEUP, STACEY

...not oriented to time or place, excessive diaphoresis sweating...multiple cerebral emboli on CT...comfort measures...

...Stacey passed away this morning surrounded by family...



**physical
examination** *Suchi Jain*

Our First Patient

Adina Harri

“Remove the lungs.”

Our group paused when we reached that sentence.
We’d had no trouble in our dissection so far –
didn’t stop
when we’d reflected
the chest wall, sawed
through the manubrium, or removed
her ribs, but as it came time to remove the lungs –
those shiny, slippery, scarred, beautiful lungs –
we hesitated.

I wondered, who wouldn’t take a moment
to pause
after sawing through someone’s chest?

Our donor died of emphysema. Some days,
when I run along the White River, sun peeking through overcast sky,
body melting the cold air in my chest,
I feel bulletproof. Today,
I am reminded that her lungs failed her.
Mine could just as easily fail me.

My breath frosts in the squall. A puff of smoke,
gathering, then retreating. In, and out. In, and out.

On Grief in Medical School

Daniella Azulai

One of my best friends, my aunt, and my dog died this past year. After these losses, life felt like a fever dream. Dissonance overtook me; it was difficult to overlay the intense inner turmoil with school beating the same monotonous drum. Studying for yet another exam as my stomach filled with leaden grief.

In the face of sudden loss, how could I heal while the eddies of medical school surged around me? I felt simultaneously overwhelmed and unmotivated by the unforgiving onslaught of information, maintenance of academic success and social engagement – all the while, disappointed in myself for not caring and anxious that others would find me lacking. Feeling forlorn, I slowly retreated into myself. I questioned my decision to come to medical school in the first place. I was trapped in limbo: relentlessly working for something that I now resented for keeping me from mourning with and supporting my loved ones as they struggled.

I wrote down how I was feeling, because it tethered the thoughts that felt dense and expansive enough to fill a hot air balloon to the thin pages of my journal. In attempting to understand these new feelings and figure out how to be okay, I began to see that my sense of self, my wholeness, is not constructed of extrinsic standards and actions. It's leaning into what brings me awe, approaching myself (and others) with leniency and compassion, and remembering to breathe and laugh. I held onto these sentiments of hope that peeked out at me, shy and green.

The following few paragraphs are a collection of those past written thoughts, with some post-hoc adjustments. Medical school leaves little room for grief, and I hope anyone who has felt the same will find community in my words – I'm here for you should you ever need.

* * *

I read something recently about how a lot of growing up is pivoting. You don't plan for big changes – they just happen to you. And you don't even realize that was the last time you'd see that version of yourself – and you "didn't even get to say goodbye." Repeating those words in my mind, I orbited closer to understanding the grief that tugged at my heart.

What evil chance of fate, what spirit, sent a stray electrical current into my friend's heart, never to restart again? My sweet girl, gone far too soon. There is a small part of me that frequently forgets. I imagine she is right where I left her: in her SF apartment, light filled and laughing, with her spare key and extra towel folded for me. It's usually during the quiet, beautiful moments alone that I think of her most. Like when I sat at the river tonight and watched the stars reflect off the water. It's funny to see them wag back and forth, when they are usually constant celestial giants fixed to the human eye.

Sometimes I just want to rage – I want to push and scream against everything that steals my light and weakens my roots. Against all the poison of the world. All the death. To yell until it's just me and my breath and the air filtering its way around me, slowly, like dust glittering in the sun. It's hard to be so sad all the time, and shockingly easy to fake being happy.

I printed a picture of us today and hung it on my wall. Maybe that's why I can't stop thinking about you. Anyway, it's raining and still, here, forming tracks on my cheeks for the tears to follow. You'd tell me not to give up, and I promise I'm listening.

It's a lot. To be alive and thinking swirling thoughts every day. I'm grateful. And full of dread, too. But Time will pass. And this will get easier.



2023
gouache on paper
5" x 4"

Unknown Trail *Justine Araya-Colvin*

Numb

Christopher Lee

“To start, do you have any questions for me?”

“Yes, I do,” the parent says as she pulls out a list of questions scrawled on a piece of folded paper from her purse. She goes through these questions at a frantic pace. She is worried about her kid and is doing everything she can. But everything may not be enough.

Midway through, the physician asks, “How are you feeling? Are you doing okay?”

The mother pauses before breaking down and sobbing.

* * *

When medicine pushed one of my friend’s leukemia into remission, I remember how ecstatic we were. Then, the cancer reoccurred and he passed away. I cried when I heard the news, I cried during the assembly we had for him, and I cried during his funeral. I cried because of the pain of losing him, but also for myself and the guilt that gnawed at my heart.

During the funeral, I sat beside my 3rd-grade teacher, who looked at me and said, “Oh... you and Theo were such good friends.” It was true, we were good friends. But I felt guilty because I never visited him at the hospital. If I were honest, I would have told her that I never visited him at the hospital. Our time was limited to Skype calls. The things that seemed so big at the time: my childhood crush and an upcoming math exam, suddenly seemed so insignificant. If I were honest, I would have told her that I hadn’t seen him in person for over a year. Honesty is hard: I merely nodded. Can one lie by omission?

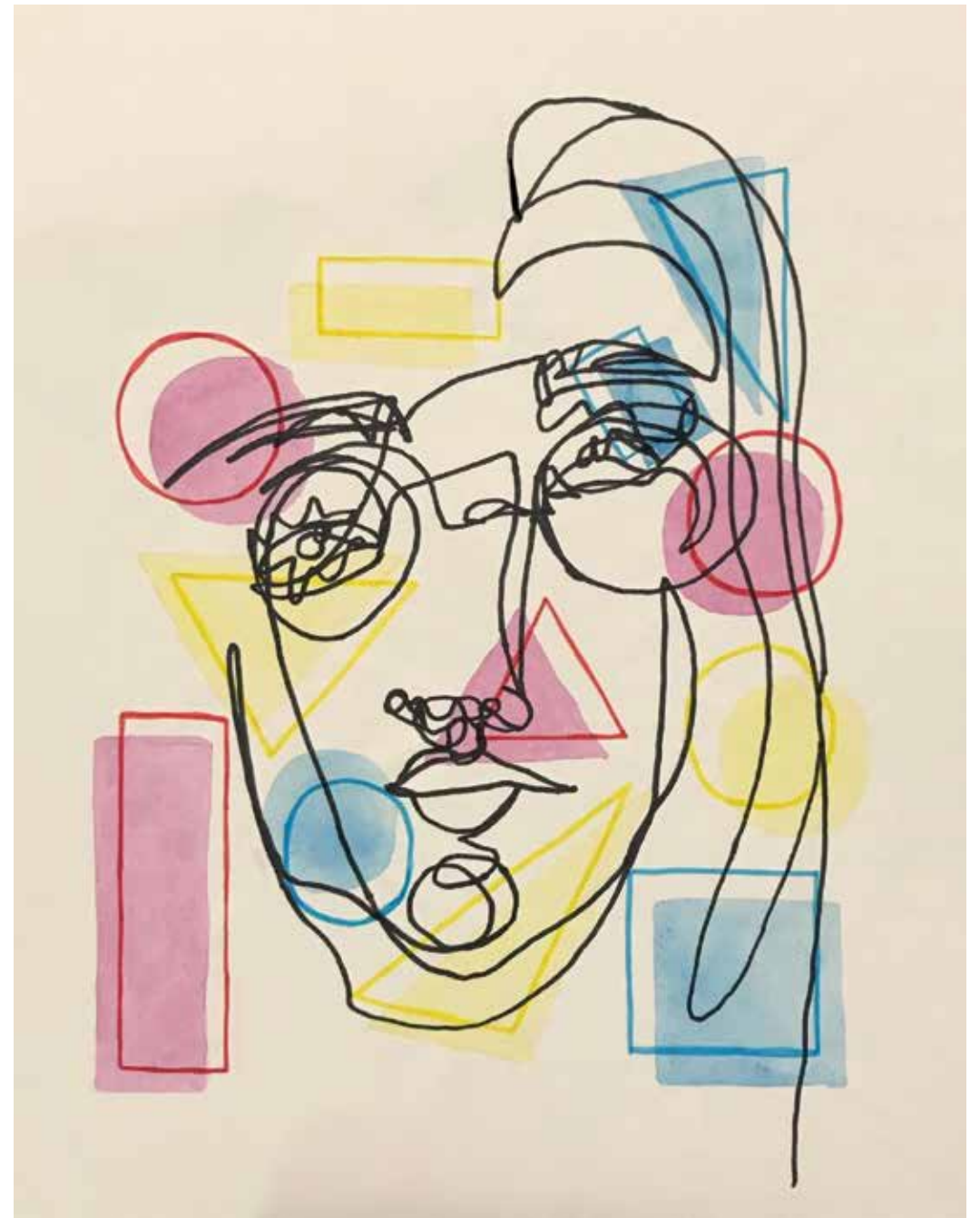
My naivety about medicine – and my heart – shattered when I heard he passed away. What went wrong? Why couldn’t they save him?

* * *

I never visited Theo at the hospital, but today I visited a child who reminds me of him. He was diagnosed only hours earlier with a brain tumor. I am introduced not as a student, but as a colleague, despite my utter lack of knowledge and help. The father does not say much. His quiet gaze is glued on his little son bundled up in the hospital sheets – sheets that have been sanitized countless times to hold countless children before. When the father does look up, I wish I could assure him that his son will be okay and tell him this is all a bad dream, and that he can wake up now.

But I cannot. And I know that all the knowledge and all the doctors in the world cannot save all the patients they want to.

When I get home, my emotions pour out in the shower where at least my tears can attempt to hide in the clear and cleansing water. As I close my eyes and try to sleep that night, I am left wondering if my journey into medicine and the experiences of repeated illness will make me more numb to loss and if I should hope or dread when that time will finally arrive for me.



This is a 8"x11" mixed media piece primarily using watercolor. It is a self-portrait emphasizing the way we can lose ourselves when faced with the sudden onset of an overwhelming amount of hard facts.

Lost in Translation

Elizabeth Teets



**Self Portrait
Reconstructed** *Carl-Peter Mayer*

wingless dreams

Holly O'Hara

I wonder what it's like to fly.

Maybe if I were a bird –
With vibrant feathers from head to tail,
Thick with confidence and beauty.
I could sing from the treetops,
And dance in the sky with the butterflies and lightening bugs.
I would dive from branches with my wings spread wide,
And catch myself in the wind.

Catch myself –
How is that done?

Maybe I am the wind.
I've felt it rumbling inside of me,
Swelling like a storm.
It lasted too long;
And when it passed,
My friends had already left to go south for the winter.

But I can still fly.
I know how to fly.
I will fly again.

If I were a bird

Courageously me

Kanicia Green

For anyone other than a medical student, July is fun. Summer time means family barbecues, nice weather, and pool parties. However, for me, entering my final year of med school, July meant 12 hour days in the library preparing for boards, chasing down my letter writers like Usain Bolt, hiding from the Chase Banking App after the damage of away rotations, and daily panic attacks because my NBME practice scores just won't budge. I was days away from taking the most important exam of my life and as if things could not get worse, here comes an email from Cherie. Just kidding Cherie. The email read "It's time to schedule senior pictures. Picture day is in two weeks."

Sigh. I reluctantly looked at the nest that spawned atop my head as I'd regrettably neglected self care in the thick of dedicated study time. What was I going to do with my hair on picture day? The temperature was nearly 100 degrees. I had two tiresome sub-internships lined up back-to-back. Exams were coming. The government just announced that aliens are real. There's a submarine trapped at the bottom of the ocean. I don't have time to worry about my hair right now! Then, as soon as my downward spiral of anxiety came, it left. Wait, I know the cure for this: braids. Box braids are low maintenance and perfect for this heat. I'll look good and feel good too. Plus, I can use the time I would have spent styling my hair to focus on the things that really need my attention. I smiled knowing I had the perfect solution.

Right before I hit the 'Confirm Appointment' button on my favorite hair stylist's booking website, I stopped dead in my tracks. I remembered my senior picture would be sent to residency programs. This picture would be the first thing program directors saw before considering my application for review. What story would my senior picture tell? What assumptions would they make about me and my braids? Would I kill my chances of an interview before I could even plead my case? Would they trust me to remain professional? I became extremely aware of my Blackness and how others viewed it. This made me uncomfortable, nauseous, and utterly defeated. Could my hair get in between me and something I had worked my entire life to obtain?

I was stuck. So, I did what I always do as a first generation medical student; I looked at my mentors. I thumbed through my contact list of Black and Brown physicians, realizing I could not recall a single Black doctor with braids. Sure, there were some with natural hair and fros, but never braids. I moved to Google. My search history included "Are braids

still unprofessional in 2023", "Black girl with braids in residency", "professional headshot with braids", "OBGYN with braids." After being unsatisfied with my results, I then asked virtually everyone I knew: 'Would you feel safe in the care of a physician with box braids'? I was met with mixed replies. The most common response was yes, they'd feel safe but warned not to wear the braids for pictures as it may limit my opportunities. But one piece of advice struck me the hardest. It came from a girlfriend that told me a residency program unaccepting of my hairstyle did not deserve to have me on their team. So, I took a leap of faith. I wore the braids. And to be honest, I loved the result. I thought my senior picture told a story of confidence, professionalism, and authenticity.

Weeks after senior pictures, I was once again met at the crossroads of Be Yourself Blvd and Just Play The Part Avenue. I'm in the OR at an acting internship at a program far away from home preparing for the patient's entrance with the nurses, residents, and attending physicians. Music is playing overhead and a beat that's all too familiar begins to play from a Pandora mix. The song is Monster by Kanye West featuring none other than Onika Maraj. Great. This is without a doubt, a set-up. The program directors themselves had to have sat in a dark room at a big table asking the question, 'how can we ruin Kanicia's day today'. They had to have known that there is absolutely no way in hell my Black behind is not going to rap every syllable to Nicki Minaj's verse to utter perfection. My first full sentence as a baby was practically "This one is for the boys with the booming system, top down, A/C with the cooling system." So, without missing a beat, "Pull up in the monster, automobile gangsta. With a bad girl that came from Sri Lanka. Yeah, I'm in that Tonka, color of Willy Wonka. You could be the king, but watch the queen conquer." I was met with a couple of side eyes, blatant disregard, and awkward smirks. As uncomfortable as it may have seemed, I felt at ease.

Finding my professional identity while navigating unfamiliar spaces is getting smoother with each attempt. I've begun to realize that refusing to embrace who I truly am undermines all of my work to this point. I cannot pretend to be someone I am not, just to pacify those uncomfortable with diversity. I could not truly be that passionate about creating representation, as I claim to be, if I chose not to be authentically me. I can still provide compassionate, professional patient care while also being true to myself. So in the famous words of Lee Ann Womack, "if you get the choice to sit it out or dance, I hope you dance." Or better yet, in the infamous lyrics of Crime Mob, "knuck if you buck." Whether it be the braids in your hair, the music you bump on the way to rotations, the Jordan shoes you wear with your scrubs, be courageously you every step of the way. Take up every inch of space possible, because you've earned it. Differences in culture are beautiful. Be Black as hell unapologetically in your white coat.



2022
graphite on paper
3" x 3"

**Girl With
Curls** *Justine Araya-Colvin*

Phoenix

Mishka Murad

I have been told that to succeed,
I must play the game.
To be something to someone,
And someone who always offers something.

I have been told that to be happy,
I must fake it till I make it.
To smile through the pain,
To not let the pain keep me from a pretense of overjoy.

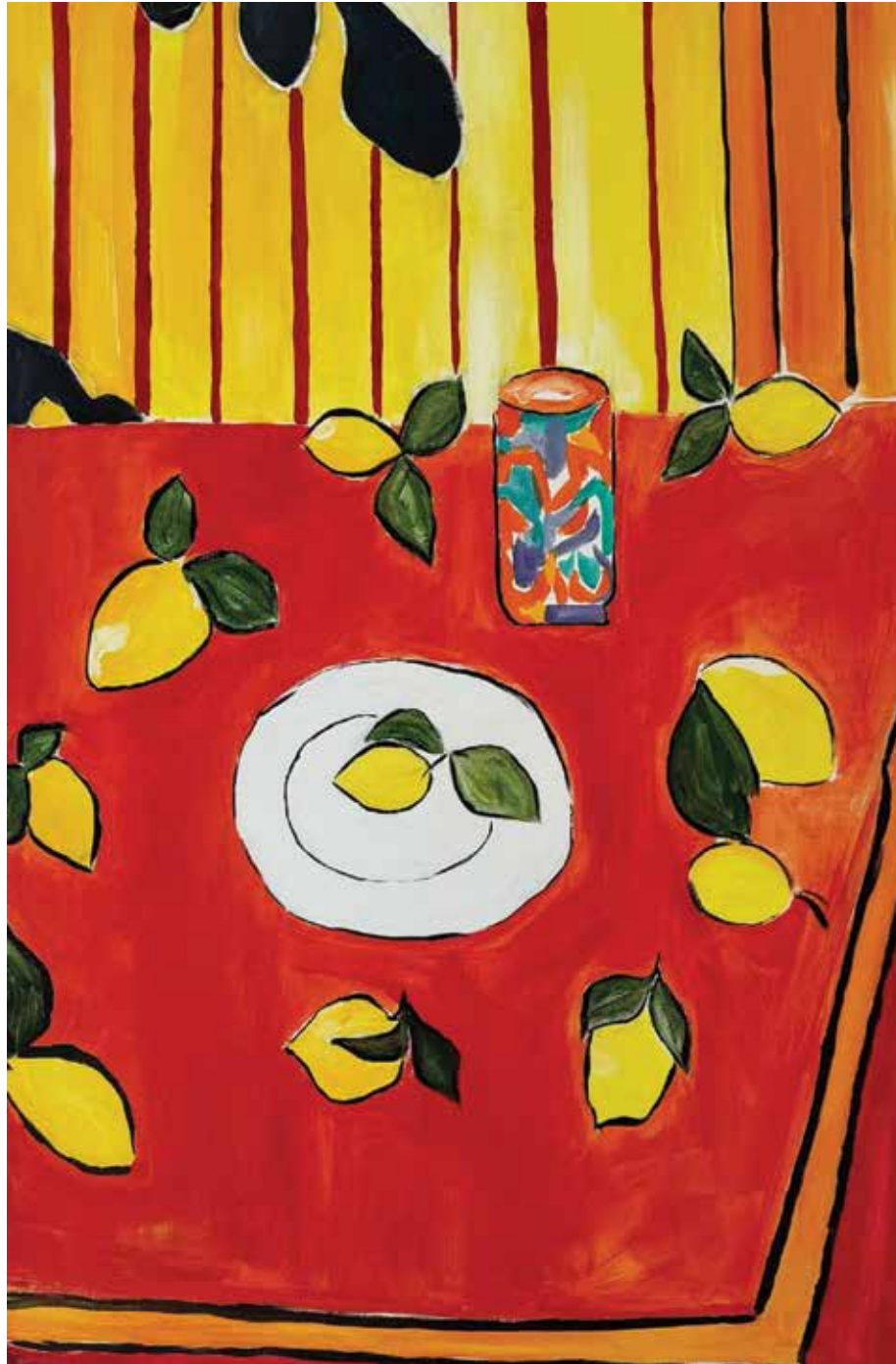
I have been told that for folks to like me,
I must change the tone and words I use when I speak.
To make sure no matter what they say,
I stay understanding, neutral and kind.

I have been told to get ahead in life,
I must assimilate and give up my brownness.
To make sure my accent is clear,
And I stay abreast of US memes and pop culture.

But when I was little,
My mother once said:
“Don’t listen to people,
Nor the negative voices in your head.
As a woman you must work twice as hard,
Using your heart and your head.”

When I grew up,
My father would say:
“You have fire within you,
And fire can burn or brighten one’s day.
But don’t extinguish or dull that flame,
Simply because others are mediocre & you are where they place the blame.”

All these years later,
Having survived traumas and obtained scars,
I listen to what people say,
But it is my parents’ words that stay close to my heart.
For as an adult, I know the trials life brings,
But my parents were right,
And no one gets to clip these wings.



Lemons

Anastasia Kapitonava

On Fire

Christopher Lee

In our living room, my uncle commits arson. I stand on my tiptoes near the window, gasping for fresh air. After terse minutes of panic and praying to a God I did not believe in when I woke up that morning, I hear sirens pierce through the night.

Later, the rapid *thump thump thump* of blood pounding in my ears wards off any chance of sleep. My family soon moved out of that building, but it took much longer for us to move on from that day. It was a heavy experience for my little not-even-a-teenager body to carry. There would be other restless nights too, when I had to climb out of bed because even smokeless air could suffocate.

After being exposed to the fragile nature of my life, people and the time we shared suddenly seemed more precious. Despite not yet mustering the bravery to ask out my childhood crush, I overcame some of my natural introversion to become more of a sweet talker who did not hesitate to compliment people or tell them what I liked about them. As I began to take more appreciation of people and simple aspects of nature, like the beautiful allure of a sunset or morning dew on a leaf, I thought people ought to experience near-death experiences more often.

Reality was not as rosy. That fateful day still left me scared, scarred, angry, and confused about my uncle. A cloud of negative feelings lingered and rained inside my soul despite countless attempts to push it away or wait it out. Sometimes, I wondered if I put on a theatre, an act of contentedness to mask the precipitation of my negative, repressed feelings. Perhaps I thought if I wove enough light strings into the tapestry of my life, I could hide the dark, burnt strings.

Being forged in a fire can make something sturdy and strong – like steel. But it can also make something delicate and fragile – like glass. I wonder what that fire did to me. Did it make me strong, or weak?

* * *

On my grandmother's farm, I stare at the flickering flame dancing inside the traditional stone oven. Flakes of ash float in the air and branches of wood crinkle down, seared into black dust as the fire consumes them. Using the fire, we are cooking sweet potatoes. Once they are roasted to perfection, I peel back burnt skin to expose honeyed, yellow gold. Its sweetness has intensified in the fire and I lick my lips, imagining the taste melting on my taste buds. However, it is still too hot. I gasp for fresh air to blow on it.

After enjoying our delicious snack, my uncle and I go to the creek to catch frogs. Wading in the shallow water, each of us is armed with one of his big white Crocs and we launch haphazard scoops at the sight of any amphibian-resembling shapes. If our intention was to collect assorted species of aquatic flora, our efforts could be considered an immense success.

“Do you have a girlfriend? Shouldn't you marry soon?” I ask him. At the time, I must have been ten and he was approaching his thirties.

He chuckles and says, “Maybe one day.” I could use a new baby cousin to play with, but it seems I will have to wait.

Finally, my uncle catches a frog, which attempts to squirm through one of the holes. From the bulging frog head on the outside of the Croc, the rest of the frog body emerges, and we giggle as we watch this admirable journey to freedom.

* * *

continued on next page

When my uncle first began to experience psychotic breaks, my grandmother pursued certain cultural “treatments.” Among these, the most severe involved hiring a shaman to “whip the devil out of him.” What can so clearly be identified as ineffective to me and you was not so apparent to my grandmother. Growing up two generations ago in rural Korea as the eldest daughter, she did not have the opportunity to finish middle school because she was expected to care for her seven younger siblings. Additionally, her cultural beliefs dictated that this would be the best solution. I know my grandmother had no ill intentions and simply wanted the best for her only son. A desperate want.

After the fire, my uncle was arrested for arson and began taking antipsychotic medication for his schizophrenia. He no longer talked, smiled, or laughed as much, and I could not believe this was the same uncle I used to giggle with while we caught frogs. I thought the medication took part of his soul – but there were no more fires. This experience gave me mixed feelings about the multifaceted effects of medicine. Was there no perfect solution?

At the time, I solely blamed his medication for his emotional freeze. If I am being honest, our relationship also changed after that fateful day because I treated him and looked at him differently. If I am being painfully honest, I hardly looked at or spoke to him at all. I did not know The Right Words to Say, and even if I did, would I have uttered a word? How is it that I would prefer to speak to a random stranger on the street over my own uncle in my home? I brought a coldness to our relationship, and the ensuing guilt gnawed at my heart for many years.

* * *

At lunch, my friends tease each other.

“What are you, a schizo?”

Their laughs echo and rattle in my head. I manage a tight smile, which conceals a wave of worrying thoughts swirling in my head. *Flashbacks of smoke and fire. My uncle has genes that run through me too. Do I have an internal bomb? Tick tick tick. The first symptoms could occur even in my thirties. What if I am married or have kids by then? What will I do if I hear voices one day?*

* * *

Although that fateful fire did not leave any burn scars on my skin, it left scars on my soul that no longer hurt, but I think will perpetually be in a state of healing. In addition to my feelings of fear and anguish, I also found feelings of confusion and curiosity about what had occurred. This event precipitated my interest in neuroscience, which I would later study as an undergraduate. In one of my classes, we learned how people afflicted with psychotic events have higher activity in their visual and auditory cortex during their delusions because they truly do see and hear things.

* * *

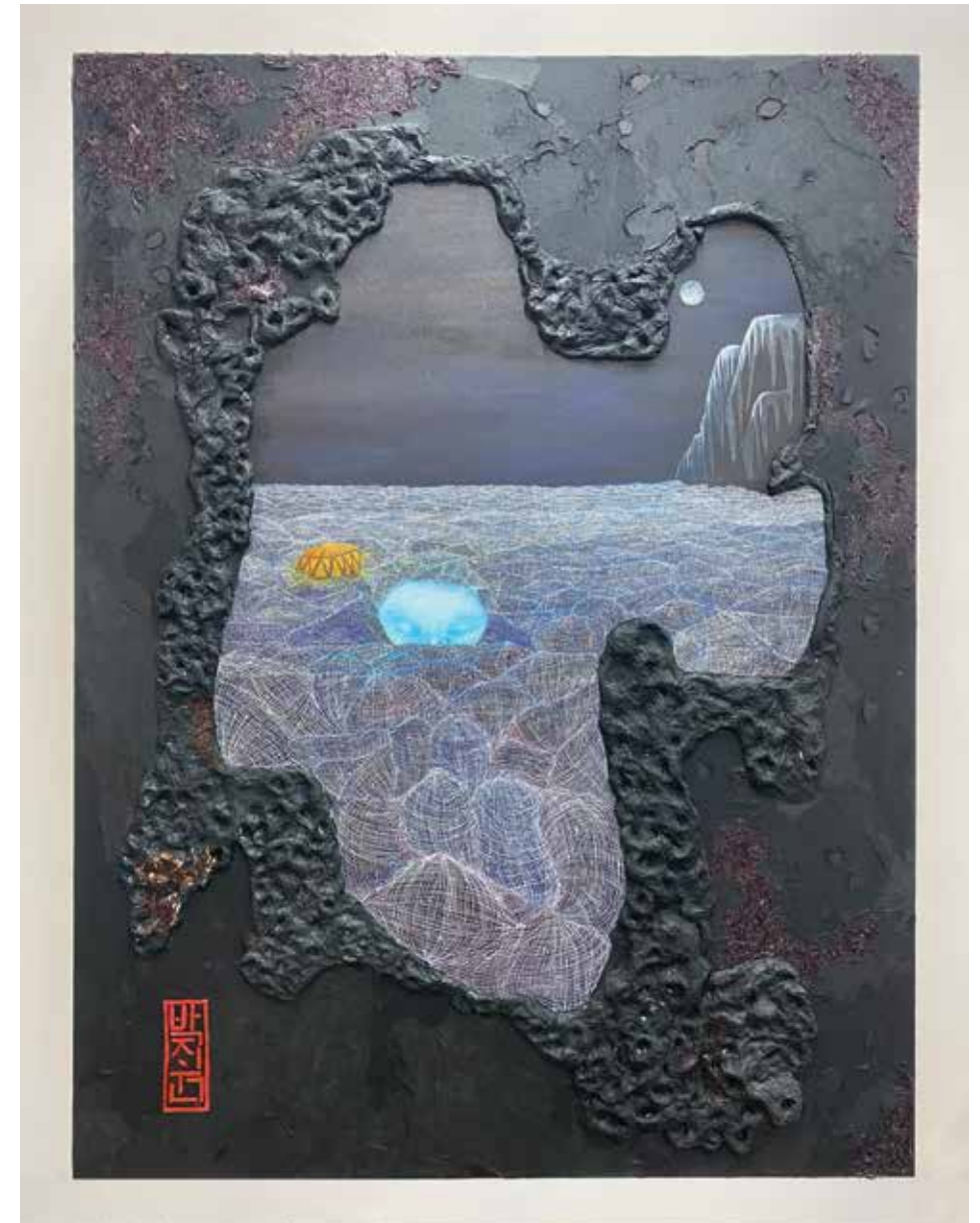
Fire can serve as a symbol of destruction and pain, and drive and light/vitality. These seemingly dichotomic messages are often intertwined. For example, in nature, some forms of life can only flourish in the wake of a devastating wildfire: fire triggers the release of seeds in some plants, fire beetles lay eggs in burnt bark, and fire lilies only flower after a wildfire.

For many years, the United States practiced wildfire suppression, which is now known to be detrimental to the health of many ecosystems. Similarly, I suppressed my feelings and let them fester inside of me. We have both since learned that fire is not always something to avoid, and letting it run through its natural progression can be beneficial. Something must die to make way for something new.

It has taken a decade, but I now try to find the courage to forgive my uncle, and myself. It begins with a simple hello and a smile, and in the burnt, barren land of our relationship, a flower begins to bloom.

SORA'S HOME

Jamie Jiwon Park



2023
36" x 48
hanji, seaweed, acrylic on canvas



**the room you
left behind** *Nathania Hartojo*

Heads or Tails

Reem Khader

I am a fraud
 I have been born into this life, a fraud
 When life flipped the coin,
 I serendipitously said “heads”
 And so, it was “heads”
 While another girl,
 Same age, same color, same hair, same blood
 Ended with “tails”
 I smell candles burning on a calm Sunday afternoon,
 While she smells smoke and charred bodies coming from her carpet bombed neighborhood.
 We are the same. Same age. Same color. Same hair. Same blood.
 But for whatever unknown reason,
 Because I decided to say heads,
 I never have to take cover in fear that my time may be coming
 I never have to wonder if my brothers or my father are the ones being taken next
 My everyday thoughts are not consumed by survival, or lack thereof.
 We are the same,
 But she is “barbaric”
 While I am “civilized”
 Although I have touched Palestinian olive trees,
 I have never had to navigate through missile-struck lands like she has,
 I am so sorry to the girl who looks just like me,
 Because I said “heads”
 And I always wonder what life would be like,
 If I decided to say “tails”

Jordan's in the ED. Nothing over 14s are acceptable

Joshua Ellis

“Nice Fours” – I said confidently as I walked through the door and met my patient for the first time. I could see his eyes glance down and notice we had the same Jordans on.
“Nothing over 14 is acceptable” – he replied with a wide grin on his face.

I then asked this young Black teenager what happened to his arm, the clear reason he presented to our Emergency Department.

Later I would ask him about his grades and aspirations and what college he wanted to attend.

His mother didn't say much but the warmth in the room was palpable. Her son was seeing a young Black physician for the first time.

Whatever doubts she had about buying these shoes had completely vanished.

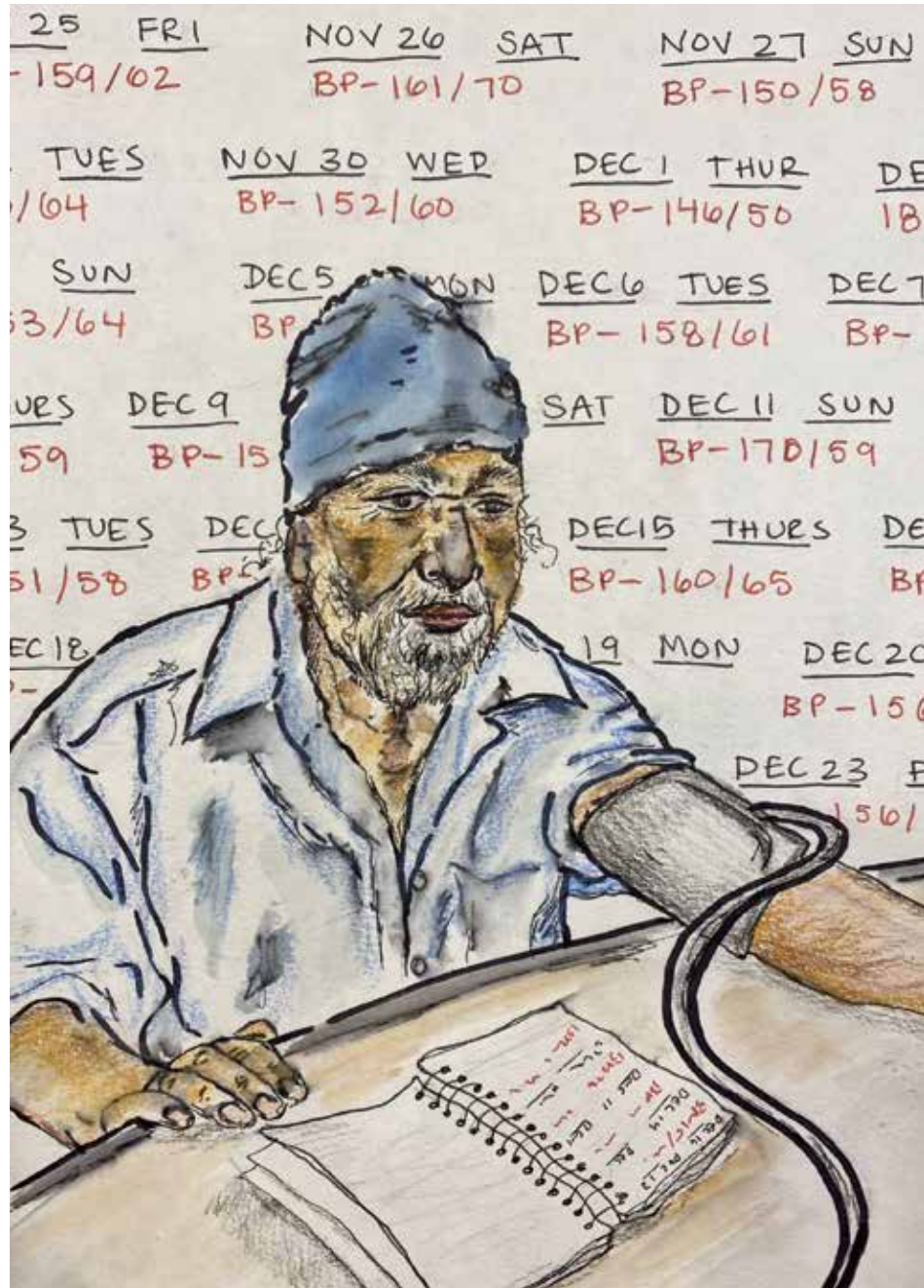
“Cool shoes! You're not worried about getting blood on them?” – later, a consulting physician asked upon meeting me for the first time.
“Haha hasn't happened yet and I think I'll be able to afford another pair.” – I replied playfully with a wide and non-threatening grin.

Whatever doubts I had about buying these shoes had already completely vanished.



A depiction of the more unfortunate lessons learned in medical school, digital

Learning Curve Anonymous



DEC 27 BP- 158/62

Anonymous

Bad Back

Matthew J. Spireng

Sometimes it's just the expectation of pain.
You're poised for the jolt or the dull ache
and although there's none, you're ready,

tensed, which, of course, will bring it on.
But most mornings, it's more than
expectation. You twist to get out of bed

and you're reminded. Try touching
you're toes, but that doesn't help

anymore. A struggle to get pants on,
descend the stairs, but you cope.

Later, after pills, a drive in the car,
short walks into and out of, you
expect the pain, walk a little funny

so anyone can tell you've a bad back,
though if you think about it, it's only
that: expectation. And you go through

the day with pain or expectation of pain,
wondering if you'll ever be able
to stop telling people you've a bad back.

A Tale of Two Worlds

Melissa Huddleston

It was the most joyful of times;
it was the most horrific of times.
A week before my first child was born
an act of terror occurred on the other side of the world,
and ever since that terrible day, violence has steadily escalated.
My family has grown, while others are decimated.
I celebrate with my son as he grows and showers us with smiles;
others search for their children amongst the rubble piles.
I hope and pray for my child to sleep through the night;
others beg for their child to wake up with all of their might.
I remember my son's birth and the pain that nearly broke me
and think of the mothers in labor as they also try to flee.
As a new mother and pediatrician,
I feel I must make clear my position.
All children deserve a chance to grow up in peace, and
for that to happen, the bombings must cease.
No one should die while waving a white flag.
Hospitals and schools should not be under attack.
Where has our humanity gone
to allow such violence to continue on?
How can I live in comfort on my side of the world,
while innocent families are being slaughtered?
Raise your voice, donate, do whatever you can.
We cannot be complacent or bury our heads in the sand.
My world is their world; we are all part of the human race,
and the value of each soul is of equal weight.



Walk On
Krista Schemitsch

Normal is a moving target

Oluwatoyin Asojo

Stuff like this should not happen to me,
I am a statistical anomaly...
Under 40 and no family history...
Yeah right!
The radiologist said: "There is nothing on the
mammogram
I do not want to over-biopsy."
Months of watching it grow gave me a voice.
I refused to watch and wait...
I insisted on a biopsy... invasive breast cancer
And normal became an elusive target.

Normal is a moving target...
Blue dyes, blue pee, blue skin – bills,
Cuts, scars, keloids, ports, needles, scans – pills
Anesthesia, labs, specialists, Oncotype, genetics – bills,
4 rounds of chemo (losing 15 pounds in a week),
weeping in agony and pain – bills,
steroids, and other drugs – relief
Looking like Mr. Cleans' bloated half-sister
with 1.5 boobs and no hair – bills
Menopause, insomnia, fatigue
and roid rage – more bills
Contortionist tables and maneuvers for radiation – bills
Please keep still...

Normal is a moving target...
Elusive as I lost all dignity,
stripped naked in front of so many eyes,
A stranger even to myself.
Two years later, another lump!
Another mammogram!
Another ultrasound! Another city! Déjà vu!
Another radiologist – same words
"Let's watch and wait,
I don't want to over-biopsy!
See you at your next check-up"
Please, can you hear me? Have you read my files?
Normal is a moving target...

I have been here before. I cannot go through this again.
I use my inside voice this time:
No! I am not choosing a bilateral mastectomy because
of Angelina.
No! I am not lucky to have cancer...
"To get free new boobs"
Bills and copays don't pay themselves.
Every year, I stop looking at the bills after \$4000
Out of pocket and yes I have good insurance...
Please don't shout at me.
Can you see me? Do you see me?

Normal is a moving target...
Where I have the privilege of defending symptoms
(As if I got breast cancer because I am depressed).
Where I aged – 3 decades in 3 years
And I can barely walk a mile (I easily ran 5 before).
Can I have my old life and saggy old boobs back?
Cancer kicked me in the guts
Set limitations, mortality, and strengths.
Cancer sucks, keloids and scars itch,
Brain farts and fogs,
Forgetfulness, insomnia, and pain – daily companions.

Normal is a moving target...
I am not a hero,
Just a statistical anomaly,
A data point on a cancer survival curve...
I survived because I found my voice...
And chose to be over-biopsied,
Instead of watching and waiting!
I am just a mom/wife/sister/daughter/friend
Who had to learn to depend on others,
husband, siblings, parents, children, friends, enemies
Who discovered that hair grows back,
Change is inevitable, but fat lingers and grows...
Who found my voice and learned to use it...
(To choose a care team that hears and sees me)
Who insists on smiling
since normal remains an elusive, moving target,
And I don't even like pink!

Family Visit: Mother, Clinician, and Son

Anonymous

Mother, the fish is a cod, the car is a Buick, and the flower is a carnation

She stares ahead.

Mother, what's the car?

You don't let me drive anymore!

What is the flower?

You don't have any with you.

The flower?

I don't see any.

What is the fish?

She stares ahead.

Mother, what is the fish?

It swam away!

The fish?

I told you; it swam away!

He stands close, though not far from white coat in the car

She sits upright, rolling matching blue eyes

I hold her hand, recalling the picture

she took of him as a towhead, smiling, holding up a fish

The picture that once lived not far from the camellias

her husband grew and named after her

and the car they loaned their boys to drive to Mexico

Mrs. Pozzoli

Ford von Reyn

It was the morning of her hospital discharge. Gone was the faded johnny, the frazzled hair, the pasty complexion, the worried look. Mrs. Pozzoli was energized by that spirit of optimism that follows surviving a near miss. When I went in her room to examine her one more time, she was already standing beside her bed – fully dressed in a loose-fitting black and white dress and wearing bright red lipstick. She had always been what we now call a plus-sized woman, but 20 pounds were gone, and she had visions of a new self. “Doctor, when I come back to see you in a month, I’m gonna look like Sophia Loren.” Mrs Pozzoli knew how to pronounce “Sophia Loren”; she was from Italy.

I met her two weeks earlier in the ICU, where we treated her life-threatening pneumonia. When the diagnosis of PCP was confirmed, I asked Mario if his wife had ever had a blood transfusion. Yes, 7 years ago when she almost died after back surgery at Mass General. That explained it. We just called it AIDS then, not HIV infection. There were no antiviral drugs yet, and AIDS was a 1-2 year death sentence.

Mrs Pozzoli was from Naples, the city Goethe considered the most beautiful in the world – one didn’t need to do anything else in life after seeing it. The details of her path to America emerged during her subsequent monthly office visits, always with Mario at her side. He said it wasn’t easy to court a girl from that city and get permission to marry and bring her here.

It all started when he was working for the summer at his uncle’s two-bay garage in the North End. Gino had dropped his wallet, scattering money and photos on the greasy floor. Mario bent down to collect the soiled contents and singled out one photo. “Who is this beautiful girl, Uncle?” “That’s Floria, one of my sister’s girls in Napoli.” That oil-stained photograph was transferred from one wallet to another, where it still resides.

Mario got her address, and with help from his mother wrote the first short letter, the one that tells who you are and what you do. Italian and English. “Mi chiamo Mario.” He added that he was not a poet, could not write fancy words, but had a job and could support a family, an Italian-American family. Would she write to him? Three weeks later he received a letter stamped “Italiane, Poste Area, L 1000.” Floria would be happy to write him, but added that she wasn’t ready to think about a family, “Let’s take things slowly.”

It was two years of “slowly”, with weeks between each letter and a steadily growing understanding that they should try to meet. Mario saved the money and flew to Naples to meet Floria. Rather, he met the family. The two of them were never permitted to be alone but the intimacies had already been expressed in the letters. The wedding plans were hatched in whispers on their chaperoned walks. Marriage in Italy, then a move to America.

Her visits to my office visits not only brought stories, but gifts: a Pavarotti tape, biscotti, home-made pasta...and something for my nurse. After a year she arranged a party for all her caregivers, those of us here at the hospital, and her local doctors and nurses in St. Johnsbury, an hour away. Not pizza from the pizza parlor they ran in town, but home-made tagliatelle, stuffed whole peppers, and cannoli. We felt like she was taking care of us, rather than vice-versa.

The weight loss continued and there was nothing I could do to stop it. She started talking about making a trip back to Italy to see her family one last time. Mario had to hold her up as she came into the office. She was so weak that I couldn’t imagine how she could travel. She could not be dissuaded.

When the Alitalia reservations were confirmed I decided to do something I had never done for another patient with AIDS: I put her on prednisone. It would increase her susceptibility to opportunistic infections, but the likely boost in the energy, and the euphoria would help her make the trip. It was a risk.

Mario called me two weeks after they returned to tell the story of their trip. Mrs. Pozzoli had become Sophia Loren in Naples – full of life and charm with all the family, singing Vissi d’arte, eating her favorite Neapolitan delicacies, and praying in the family chapel. But when she got the airport to fly home, she could no longer walk. Mario wheeled her to the plane, and the flight attendants moved 3 passengers around so she could lie down across their seats. Mrs. Pozzoli died a week later. Mario finished his story with Goethe’s famous quote: “Vedi Napoli e poi muori” – See Naples and then die.

Interloper

Kamil Hester

I've been reading blog posts for hours when my belly forces me downstairs. It growls as I tip-toe down the creaky stairs. I don't go down here. But, the ripples of empty that fan from my navel to my spine push me forward.

In the kitchen, I shake a handful of peanuts into my palm. I'm fourteen and finally body conscious, aware of perception. It's grown up, being this dissatisfied.

"Abby!" My grandmother calls.

I'm halfway across the living room and rushing for the stairs. Peanuts scatter across the yellow tile floors. I don't feel empathy for my mother yet. So, I leave them.

"Coming!" I call as I slip through the heavy maroon curtains to the dining room.

Her hospital bed sits where our mahogany dining table once stood. My father's first big purchase for the house. The bed's off-white guardrail is stark against the pale green walls. My grandmother lays in the center of the bed, covered in a cocoon of multicolor blankets. She can't move on her own anymore. She still looks the same, even with round walnut-shaped cheeks, puffed from Prednisone.

I don't really know what's going on with her. A nurse comes once a day, a nice stocky lady with a glucose monitor on her hip. She gets my grandmother out of bed and bathes her with water from the kitchen sink.

I hear glimmers of "sick," "genetic," "permanent."

My mother riddles me with questions every day before school.

"Do your legs hurt?"

"Do you feel sick?"

"Do you feel weak?"

"No, no, no," I reply.

My coily hair sizzles in my ears as she flattens out the kinks with the red hot plates of a flatiron. She stands behind me in our cramped half-bath as I stare at myself in the mirror.

Nothing looks any different. But, my bones feel heavier.

I could be 'it' in a simple game of 'tag' for hours.

"Alright, let's switch out," the teacher would say during Duck, Duck, Goose.

I start high school in a month. My stomach grinds at the thought of running 5280 feet, a mile.

"God told me not to marry your grandfather," my grandmother says.

Her conversation jarring as always, more so now that she wasn't feeling herself.

I crawl into bed with her, careful of her swollen legs, burning to the touch. My younger brother refuses to do so. But, I'm certain whatever pathogen this is, I've already got it.

I'm the only female grandchild. Sometimes, as my mother and grandmother snip at each other each morning, I wonder if that's why.

"When my grandfather took me to see Mother Alice she was the same way," my father said once. We held up in the basement, the asking price for my father's childhood home blinking back at us from the screen.

"Mother Alice?" I ask.

"The aunt that raised him. His mother died in childbirth, remember?" I nod. "No one knew what her problem was."

"Polymyositis," I say, trying out the word on my lips. They feel chapped.



1957

Amy Eilertsen

artist biographies

Oluwatoyin Asojo | *Associate Director of Strategic Initiatives at Dartmouth Cancer Center and Adjunct Professor of Biochemistry and Cell Biology*

Oluwatoyin Asojo is a wandering prodigal and catalyst.

Daniella Azulai | *Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth College*

Daniella is a second-year medical student from Brooklyn, New York. She graduated from Bard College in 2017 with a BA in Biology. Unequivocally preferring essays to mathematical equations, Daniella hopes to continue her proclivity for language by practicing Narrative Medicine throughout her medical career. In the words of Ursula LeGuin: “We read books to find out who we are. What other people, real or imaginary, do and think and feel... is an essential guide to our understanding of what we ourselves are and may become.”

Justine Araya-Colvin | *Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth College*

Justine Rose Araya-Colvin is a third year medical student at Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth who has cultivated a life-long art practice. As a Chilean-Irish American raised in a beach town on Long Island, she uses her artwork to explore identity and appreciation for the natural world. Informed by her early training with oil paint, her work is centered around the use of light and color to convey the emotion behind a particular piece. Through this communication with her viewer, Justine hopes to share her perspective of the world around her.

Amy Eilertsen | *Dartmouth Hitchcock Health*

Amy Eilertsen, MN RN, holds a PGDip in Photography from Falmouth University in Falmouth, UK. Through visual art, Amy has explored themes of willful blindness, memento vivere, hubris and mid-century America and women's work. Amy's work has been exhibited at the Griffin Museum of Photography in Winchester MA; in Landings, a student exhibition at Falmouth University; exhibited images at Les Rencontres d'Arles in Arles, France; featured in a BBC Cornwall interview about her digital collage work; and was awarded the Juror's choice award for her work in “Women's Work” at the Photographer's Gallery in Middlebury, Vermont.

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Joshua Ellis | *Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center*

Dr. Joshua Ellis is a faculty physician in Emergency Medicine at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center (BIDMC) and Harvard Medical School. He graduated from Howard University College of Medicine and completed his residency at the Mayo Clinic. He then went on to complete a master's in public health at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and his education fellowship at HMS and BIDMC. He now serves as the Assistant Clerkship Director for the EM Clerkship and the Director of Diversity Recruitment for the EM Residency. He also is the faculty chair of the LGBT Dean's advisory committee at Harvard Medical School and the current co-chair of the national ADIEM LGBT subcommittee.

Kate Emlen | *Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth College*

Kate Emlen is a psychoanalyst and painter who spends her time between Norwich, Vermont and Brooksville, Maine. She teaches first year medical students in the Psychology of Illness course and has a private practice in Norwich. She did her training at the Boston Graduate School of Psychoanalysis and earned an MFA from Yale.

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Kanicia Green | *Southern Illinois University School of Medicine*

Kanicia Green is a fourth year medical student at Southern Illinois University School of Medicine in Springfield, Illinois. She received her B.S. in Biology at Howard University and will receive her MD from SIUSOM this Spring. Kanicia is a first generate college and medical school graduate aiming to decrease health disparities and mentor the next generation of doctors.

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Adina Harri | *Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth College*

Adina (she/her) is a rising fourth-year medical student at the Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth, where she has led efforts with the Health and Humanities Scholars, Rural Health Scholars, White Coats for Black Lives student groups, and the Good Neighbor Health Clinic. She is currently on an Academic Scholar Year pursuing clinical trials research in orthopaedics at Dartmouth, and is passionate about efforts surrounding health equity, DEI, and narrative medicine.

Nathania Hartojo | *Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth College*

Kamil Hester | *Southern Illinois University School of Medicine*

Kamil is a second-year medical student at Southern Illinois University School of Medicine. She is interested in Interventional Radiology with a focus on oncology. In her free time, she loves reading, indie animation, yoga, and meditation.

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Melissa Huddleston | *UF Health Shands Children's Hospital*

Melissa Huddleston is a first-year pediatrics resident at University of Florida. She completed her medical training at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center Paul L. Foster School of Medicine in El Paso, Texas. In 2016, she graduated from Baylor University with a Bachelor of Science in informatics and a secondary major in classics, and in 2018, she graduated from Baylor University with a Master of Public Health in community health education.

Suchi Jain | *Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth College*

Suchi is a second-year medical student from Kennett Square, Pennsylvania. Her passion for medicine has always been informed by her love of art. She believes that the arts are the greatest teacher of humanity and compassionate, the two most important qualities of a physician. Suchi loves to paint and draw in her free time, and has a particular affinity towards portrait art.

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Anastasia Kapitonava | *Drexel University College of Medicine***Reem Khader** | *Southern Illinois University School of Medicine***Christopher Lee** | *University of Washington*

Christopher is a recent graduate from the University of Washington. He hopes to become a physician in the future.

Carl-Peter Mayer | *Silkscreen Artist*

Carl-Peter Mayer is a silk-screen artist and also enjoys stone balancing and photography. His dominant hand was crushed and “degloved” ten years ago, an injury from which he recovered to the extent he can resume manual arts. He resides in Franconia, NH and Sharon, MA.

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Mishka Murad | *Dartmouth College*

Mishka Murad (PhD) has lived and worked in six different countries, and thinks a lot about belonging and finding home. Her life in different countries and cultures has brought her great joy, and also made evident that perhaps we need to do a better job in contextualizing folks who come from other places, versus ascribing our beliefs and norms onto their ways of being.

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Holly O’Hara | *Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth College*

Holly was raised in Southern Ohio and attended Northern Kentucky University where she majored in nursing. She is a third-year medical student who enjoys cooking, running, outdoor activities of all types, relaxing on the porch with a cup of coffee, and writing to process the experience of life.

Jamie Jiwon Park | *Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth College*

Jamie Jiwon Park is a painter and third year medical student at Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth. Raised in Los Angeles by Korean immigrants, Park pulls from collective habits, traditions and personal memories to visualize alternate futures for their lineage. Their work reflects them questioning ties to tradition and cultural preservation where prejudice is often a byproduct. The references in their pieces go beyond the visual as Park incorporates non-traditional painting materials in their work, such as Korean spices, grains, and mulberry paper, as well as U.S.-sourced dry ingredients.

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Krista Schemnitsch | *Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth College*

Krista Schemnitsch is a '24 at Dartmouth College on the pre-med track majoring in psychology and minoring in studio art. She is passionate about childhood behavioral development and mental health and is looking to pursue these topics in the medical field.

Matthew J. Spireng | *Poet & Writer*

Matthew J. Spireng’s 2019 Sinclair Poetry Prize-winning book *Good Work* was published by Evening Street Press. A 12-time Pushcart Prize nominee, he is the author of two other full-length poetry books, *What Focus Is* and *Out of Body*, winner of the 2004 Bluestem Poetry Award, and five chapbooks, *Clear Cut*; *Young Farmer*; *Encounters*; *Inspiration Point*, winner of the 2000 Bright Hill Press Poetry Chapbook Competition; and *Just This*.

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SpiroAnthony Stathas | *Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth College*

SpiroAnthony is a second-year medical student at the Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth. He received his BA in neuroscience and completed a minor in creative writing at the College of the Holy Cross in 2022. He has published two pieces in Holy Cross’s literary journal *The Purple* and was the 2022 recipient of the James H. Reilly Memorial Award for his nonfiction piece “*On the Study of Eternal Memory*.” Currently, SpiroAnthony enjoys writing both creative nonfiction and historical fiction, exploring themes related to the medical field and family immigration stories.

Elizabeth Teets | *Florida State University College of Medicine*

Born and raised in Pensacola, Florida, Elizabeth Teets finds solace and inspiration in creating charcoal drawings. Currently an M1 at the Florida State University College of Medicine, she uses the medium as a break from her studies and as a tool to express themes that she encounters in the medical field. Elizabeth also currently serves as the lead editor for FSU’s *HEAL* Journal, which emphasizes the importance of humanism in medicine. Medicine is a highly rewarding field, but it can be easy to become engulfed by it. She believes that it is important to use art and other forms of creative expression to process the situations that we may encounter throughout this journey in order to remain true to ourselves.

Ford von Reyn | *Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth College*

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LIFELINES

is a literary and art journal featuring works of creativity and nonfiction from students, healthcare professionals, current and former patients, and authors and artists. A student-run publication at Dartmouth, the journal is open to all.

The mission of Lifelines is reflected in its name: to be a thread winding amongst all those who have been touched by the medical experience, and to weave a literary tapestry offering the much-needed creative outlet for doctors, medical professionals, and patients alike.

