

Wild Onions



2 0 2 5
HIDDEN ROOTS

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Wild Onions



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, fields, and roadsides. It blossoms into an unusual purple flower. The underground bulb yields a pungent, spicy flavor and scent. The wild onion symbolizes the commonplace, yet paradoxically surprising, beauty living and growing around us all the time. An uncultivated spice, it unexpectedly thrives and—if we take time to notice—enhances life.

The pages of *Wild Onions* are devoted to sharing creative writing and artistic work that seeks to describe and understand the experiences of health, illness, and treatment, especially caregiving and receiving care. The beauty of *Wild Onions* is its capacity to create a vibrant and expressive community of artists year after year. This edition features work by individuals affiliated with Penn State Health Milton S. Hershey Medical Center, including patients, students, faculty, physicians, residents, nurses, staff, volunteers, and family and community members.

Each year, we are fortunate to receive hundreds of high-quality submissions of original creative writing, photography, and artwork. All entries are reviewed by medical student editors, and a subset is selected for inclusion in the publication.

Submissions are due by January 15 of each calendar year and can be submitted online at: sites.psu.edu/wildonions/submitting or emailed to wildonions@pennstatehealth.psu.edu.

Visit our website to download a PDF copy of *Wild Onions* at sites.psu.edu/wildonions or view our online version at: sites.psu.edu/wildonionsonline

Welcome to the 2025 Edition of *Wild Onions*

Being senior editors this year has been an honor. Being trainees at Penn State Milton S. Hershey Medical Center has been an honor for several years. We have had the privilege of seeing the roots of our community both inside and outside the hospital. While life and circumstance shape all of us differently, we show up, tirelessly maintain everyday operations, and carry forward the shared goals of the health system. So too do the patients and community partners. The core of this publication is the fact that anyone attached to Penn State Health and College of Medicine can take part, allowing us to connect with each other and build community via creativity.

As such, this year's edition would not be possible without our community reflecting on their roots and being kind enough to share them with all of us. As you read through the magazine, we encourage you to think of all of the processes and people that shape your days, and hopefully find respites of time where you can learn more and lean on each other.

Himani Devabhaktuni and Muzna Ali



Himani Devabhaktuni, MSIV

Himani grew up in North Wales, PA, and has had a lifelong passion for the arts with a particular love for painting. While in medical school, she pursued an interest in the humanities via *Wild Onions* and the Graphic Medicine curriculum. Outside of medicine, she enjoys painting, reading, and playing rpg video games. She is excited to go on to train as a neurologist at Penn State Health Milton S. Hershey Medical Center.



Muzna Ali, MSIV

Muzna has had a passion for the arts from a young age, participating in local writing competitions and volunteering as an editor for nonprofit newsletters. Her involvement with *Wild Onions* has deepened her appreciation for the creative process and the powerful intersection between the arts and medicine. In her free time, she enjoys reading, writing, and trying out new recipes. Muzna is eager to incorporate lessons from her time with *Wild Onions* to help humanize healthcare delivery as an internal medicine resident.

Meet the 2025 Committee Chairs



Amber Carr
Writing Workshop



Hänel Eberly
Events



Kelan Fogarty
Outreach



Shivani Mattikalli
Social Media



Chaitanya Nimmagadda
Submissions

Anxiety

© **Judy Schaefer, RN**

*The Doctors Kienle Center for Humanistic Medicine
Board Member*

Then I walked out and saw the sea
The tide rushing in
Power I had never understood before
I felt small and alone
But secure that it wasn't all up to me

Origin - I Am a Tree

© **James McGarrity (Age 15 at time of writing)**

Family Member

You are not the same race.
And can feel so out of place,
But that's not quite my case.

Slanted eyes and yellow skin,
I give my family a different spin
"Adopted" is a simple term,
My mother's egg stood firm.

My roots made there have clearly been cut,
Any doors that were there are so tightly shut.
There's no place like home was an initial thought,
But every story has a beginning, an end and a plot.

So a whole different life was in store for me then,
And if rated I'd give it higher than a ten.
With some people assumptions are made
But with my different life, those things quickly fade.

I represent a risk and a chance,
You might just see that, with one single glance.
I could have been tossed, lines could have crossed,
And this thinking individual would have been lost.

Something that keeps my soul alive,
Is the fact that I'm different; it's my personal drive.
You may think I'm a neighbor, a foreign classmate or friend,
I'm actually part of this family from beginning to end.

I think of a family who lives in the shade
Like an old photograph, that's been darkened and greyed.
They gave me my freedom, for this I must note,
A tree is for life, and that I denote.



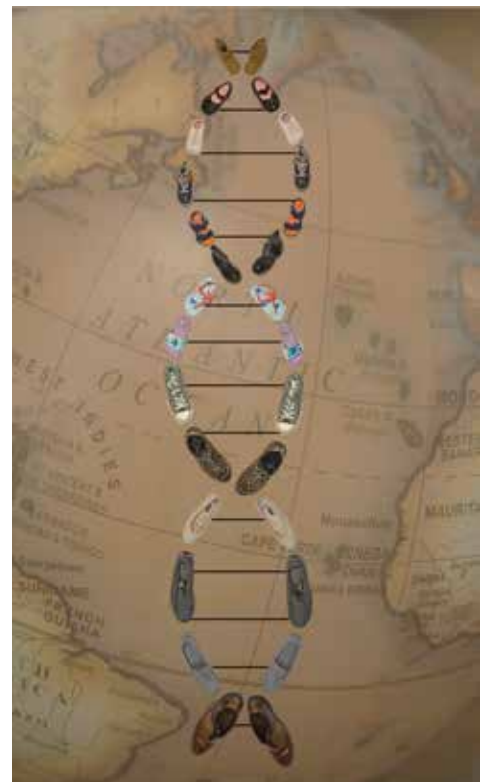
O' Sleep, Perchance to Dream

© **Michael C. Erdman**

*Retired Employee
Division of Health & Imaging Physics
Department of Radiology*

DNA

© **Marcia Riegle | Patient**



The Immigrant

© Susan Osgood | Patient

Aboard the Ocean Line Red Star
He strolled the deck of the ship Blucher
From out of the Schwarzwald journeyed far
Relief was his dream of a far off place
He saw the hope in every face
Not minding nights in a dark cramped space
Sailing proudly into the harbor
Yesterday he was merely a sojourner
Soon no longer will he be a foreigner
He saw Lady Liberty as his foundation
When he spoke he needed no translation
"Ich liebe Liberty" was his proclamation



Guardians

© Steven Zhang
Family Member

Quiet Discomfort

© Clara Wruck | Class of 2025

She took a steak knife to her brachial artery.
Homeschooled after bullying, sister recently died from glioblastoma, mother laid off, next meal nowhere in sight.
As I attempted to step into her shoes, stripped of their shoelaces, I asked her:
Why?
Fearing silent empathy more than answers obtained.
We ask too much.
Listen too little.



Snow Geese Migration

© Wilson Po, MD
Department of Anesthesiology and Perioperative Medicine

Mama, am I an immigrant? (My family is different)

© Lidija Petrovic-Dovat, MD

Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

To my children

Hi! My name is Mila. I was born in California, but I've lived all over the United States because my parents were doing something they call "training." Now they're finally done with school, and they take care of sick people. I really hope we don't have to move anymore. I lost so many friends and had to start all over again so many times.

I'm pretty tall, and I have dark brown hair and light skin. I don't really look like any of the groups of kids at school who look the same and hang out together. I always thought I was just like everybody else, and my family was like other families until people started asking my mom about her accent and where she's from.

At first, I didn't even know what an "accent" was because my parents have always talked like that. People ask them things like where they're from, when they came here, and why.

In school, we learned about minorities and immigrants. I asked my teacher if I was one of those, but I guess I'm not.

Sometimes I get upset that our names are pronounced differently. I just wish people could say my name and my parents' names right. Why does it have to be so hard? Maybe I'll change my name when I grow up.

I also feel a little embarrassed when my friends come over and we eat homemade food that nobody's ever heard of. Luckily, my mom always makes something familiar too, so it's not too bad.

My parents are proud to be Americans, but they're also proud of their traditions, language, and where they're from. I know some kids whose parents are from other countries, but those kids don't speak their parents' language. Some of them are embarrassed about it. Why do I have to be different? I speak three languages, know all these traditions, and have to figure out all these spelling rules. They don't.

It's kind of annoying that my family talks so loudly and waves their hands when they speak. When we meet friends or family, they hug and even kiss cheeks. Isn't that kind of weird? None of my friends' families do that.

Sometimes when we're out, I notice people acting

differently when they hear my parents talking. At first, they seem unsure, but when they get to know my parents it's usually fine. It's kind of funny—sometimes my mom gets really good discounts, and people show her cheaper stuff (I guess they assume she is not wealthy because of her accent?). I guess it's okay? But it is strange since we live in a nice neighborhood and travel a lot, so I think some other family, who might not speak with an accent, might need those discounts more.

It's so weird when people ask my mom if she had a TV in her country. That makes me laugh because everyone there loves gadgets and has the newest stuff.

My parents always say education is super important. They're always telling me to read, learn new languages, and play instruments. It is annoying to hear the same thing over and over again. They say education is the only thing you can keep with you if you lose everything. How can you lose everything? It will never happen here, I hope. I guess I'll understand it better when I'm older. Right now, it just makes me a bit mad and, sometimes, embarrassed.

Oh, and get this—even our major family holidays fall at different times!

So, I am not sure what I am. I know I am American. I know I am not an immigrant. But why do I feel different?

By the Seaside

© Lauren Iannacone, RN

PSH Lancaster Medical Center Endoscopy Center



Questions?

© **Marcia Riegle**
Patient

Who?

How?

What?

Where?

When?

Why?

Questions asked for generations.

Hidden

Seen

Transparent

Diguised

Understood

Misunderstood

Confused

Stories told.

Stories never shared.

Good or bad.

We seek to know...

We seek to know the past.

We seek to know for our future.



Phenomenon

© **Susan Landis, CRNA**
Retired, Department of Anesthesiology and Perioperative Medicine



The Beauty of Alaska

© **Justine Shultz** | *Public Health Sciences*

A Green Place

© Jamila Shah | Class of 2027

A green place is a place that makes you feel at home. A place where you belong. A place that grounds you when all things go wrong. A place that holds your stories of past and present. A place that transcends time and space. A place that anchors you to your roots.

Before December 14th, 2014: Home

It's 5:00 AM in a small village northeast of Kunduz, Afghanistan. The morning breaks with a familiar knock on the door. "The sun is already up, it's time to pray and tend to the animals," my grandma's voice echoes softly, a daily anchor in a world of uncertainty.

"Inah," I ask my mother, "when will we get to see abah [Father in Turkmen]? When is he going to bring us to Amreecah [America]?" For 6 years, she repeated the comforting refrain: "We will ask your father next time we speak to him." We never knew when that would be. The intervals stretched like seasons – sometimes weeks, sometimes months – waiting for the static crackle of my grandpa's old Nokia phone to bridge the distance.

Without school to attend, I learned sewing and weaving carpets from my mother and grandmother. The rhythmic motion of needle and thread, the tight weave of wool on a loom, became my education. I sketched whatever life offered: the golden fields of wheat in our farm, clothing I dreamed of making, and cartoon characters from forgotten books. In those moments, my routine, my curiosity, my family, and my hope for *something more* became my green place.

December 14th, 2014: My First Day in the USA

After an 18-hour flight, followed by a long day at the airport under the watch of an immigration officer, I finally saw my father. He had left when I was just 9 in 2009. Time had changed us both—I had grown taller, and he seemed older, more weathered by the years apart.

January 15th, 2015: My First Day of School

"A, B, C, D, E, F ..." "A as in apple, B as in boy, C as in cat ..."

My ESL teacher smiled as she asked, "What is your favorite color?" "My favorite color is pink,"

I replied, though it was not the truth. Pink was simply the only color I knew in English; thanks to the old and rugged Barbie dolls I treasured back home. Over the next few years, I completed hundreds of hours of Rosetta Stone and Language Live lessons, to learn the language of my new life.

After January 15th, 2015: High School & Beyond

"Phosphorylation is a process of adding a phosphate group to a protein for activation or inhibition," said my high school biology teacher one afternoon. I didn't know why, but I fell in love with the word. Phosphorylation. For the first time, I was not the only one in the room who needed to grasp the meaning. For the first time, I felt like I was learning alongside my peers. For the first time, I felt exhilarated to learn for the sake of learning. It was then that biology became my favorite, leading me to decide, perhaps naively, to pursue medicine. It couldn't be that hard, right?

College tested me in many ways—the uncertainty, the challenges of being a first-generation student, the daunting steps towards a medical career. But with the support of new friends and community, and in the warmth of Hawk's Nest [a cafe at Lehigh University], I found my green place once more.

December 14th, 2024: Medical School & Beyond

"Now, let's look at the management of acute stroke; first, you want to stabilize the patient by securing Airway, Breathing, and Circulation," instructs Dr. Lakshmi Shankar, the Neural and Behavioral Science (NBS) Course Director.

"A as in airway, B as in breathing, C as in circulation ..." I repeat to myself as I write my notes.

The words resonate, anchored in the echo of an ESL lesson, bridging a decade. The alphabet I once struggled with is now the backbone of my future. Each letter is a reminder of where I began, and of the green places I built to carry me forward.

Student Highlight

This piece holds so much value; the hospital and adult life can overwhelm us so.

To remember what got us here and share it is so important.

Last Rush

© Jeffrey Fehrer | Patient

In the middle of a session with my psychologist, for anxiety, intermittent depression and overt “self-monitoring,” came two light raps on his door.

It had to be important to interrupt. It was. Critical. He excused himself and before he stepped into the hall and closed the door, I glimpsed the psychiatrist whose office was a wall away. Their hurried shoes on the carpet faded to a whispering rush.

Fifteen or so minutes later he returned to his desk, keeping his glasses looking slightly askew of me. In a softer neutral voice: “We lost one. A boy. Teenager.”

My perfunctory condolence. Then I thought he was a son. I had sons. His parents They led me to how certain thinking can be as fatal as a corporeal morbidity.

Did they believe they had failed? Mired in grief, will they need counseling for this personal contagion? And these two psychoanalysts, their therapies, medications. Did it weigh on their minds? Could they dare this? Probing the cosmos of the cranium. Patient after patient, year upon year. Were sessions accumulative?

The boy's ghost, reduced to photographs, memories, dreams, an empty chair at the supper table, vacant bedroom, birthdays, Christmases, high school graduation, first part-time job, chores he did, marriage, grandchildren, his interests.

Everywhere. Hauntings. No futures. Sweet and cursed spirits rushing at them. The psychologist and I had more laconic pauses than normal, both infected.

Our time was up. “Clonazepam working? He asked.

“Seems to be. Still get down between 4 and 6. Like a clock. I call it the twilight zone. Biorhythms I guess.”

“Your thought or thoughts?”

“I don't know. A feeling.” I paused. “Another day slipping away.” Paused again. “We were all so young then. Kids, aunts and uncles, other relatives, class friends. Now, so many are gone. I can only picture them that way, what they looked like back then, visiting, working. Time is a vacuum, a black hole. Saddening.”

He nodded and scheduled another appointment.

During that one I'd tell him how I couldn't wait for Christmas to be over. All that commercialism and those sappy songs. Not the hymns but that radio redundancy. Yet I miss it afterward. Decorations taken down. I keep Christmas cards for months. Reminders maybe. Yuletide ain't for the alone, buddy. Good will toward men? Yeah, if you've got people in your life.

Outside, the summer day was more fragrant, brighter, warmer, active. Noisy and alive. Refreshing.

I would call my sons and book them and their kids for a Saturday afternoon of backyard Wiffle ball. They enjoyed watching the old man wander around gauging stratospheric fly balls and taking ferocious swings at curlicue pitches.

I savored and memorized every precious second.

We were in no rush.

But fast that time shadowed into twilight and they had wives and suppers and homelives waiting, contrasts to my divorcé existence.

Before six o'clock the yard was deserted again.

The Leavened Space

© Caroline Triscik | Patient

What do you pass to me through
your blood, your bones?
The grapes that grew wild
unpruned on the vine
holding stories under their
wrinkled skin, songs sung only
to the birds who perch
on the thin split-rail fence
that leans, resists
against the Northeast wind.

What does it keep
in? At night I imagine
the passing of bread
across tables, down wooden pews
in golden trays, remember
the days we walked
forward, collected
the wafers in the palms
of our hands
or tore a piece
from inside the mother
loaf, our fingers finding the empty
open places where
the dough exhaled
in its baking

Let us breathe in wonder
and mystery, breathe out
loneliness and shame

Maybe a day will come where
we might release
the words we have
carried in our bodies,
in our names. Voices rising,
filling in the leavened space

Iron Infusion in the Cancer Center

© Joseph Gascho, MD

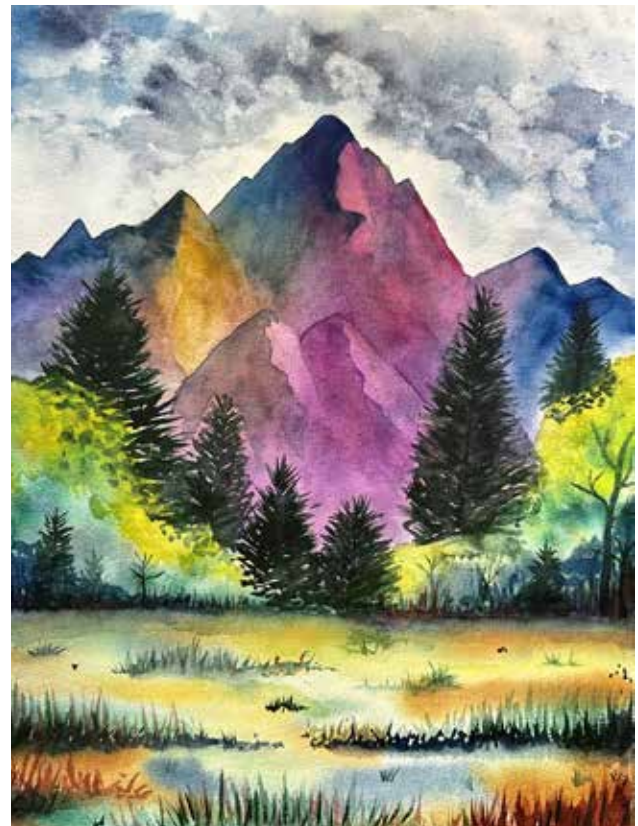
Emeritus, Departments of Medicine and Humanities

She tells me *hi*,
hands me an orange,
says her mother's here
to get the cancer-fighting mix
infused into an arm.

I can tell
she aches to know
my tumor name,
how long I've known,
what are my odds.

How do I tell her
that the reddish juice
dripping down into a vein
is only iron,
that there are
no angry cells
multiplying day and night?

As far as I could tell.



Purple Trees

© Kasia Skocik, MA

Behavioral Health, Holy Spirit Hospital

Oh ...

© Alyson Brooks | St. Joseph's Medical Center

It's been one year today. Surely, you're better now. You should have moved on from the pain that pushed you to the ground. But what Mother stops grieving for the loss of their little heart? What parent's soul stops hurting when that little heart departs? Today I should act normal, as if my world didn't end. Today I should be cheerful with all my family and my friends. But I am pushed back to the day when the doctor showed me you. Your tiny little body, my failed womb, your tomb. It took a while for time to resume and for sound to fill my ears. Once she said "There's no heartbeat" I couldn't see through the veil of tears. I couldn't breathe through wracking sobs with my arms holding you close. I couldn't get the damn words out, the ones I feared the most. I called my husband right away, hyperventilating with the pain. His cheerful voice filled my ears as my tears fell like rain. The only words that I could say were "She's gone, I'm so sorry." We cried together on the phone as my love flew to me in a hurry. He rushed me to a bigger place where they confirmed our destiny. All the while I hoped and prayed that this could not truly be. You know that moment when you are thrilled to go in and see your little one move? Well, when your baby has passed away, the room feels cold and blue. There is no sound of a heartbeat and they don't show them on the screen. I guess because each Mama would inevitably sob and scream. They ushered us into a room with a quiet, compassionate soul. They tell you they want to do a D&E, you'll be asleep, so you won't know. Take two pills to start the labor of your quiet little blip. And when you wake up, the room will be still but for the quivering of your lips. So, I went home, scared as hell, wanting to keep her inside me. There she would be safe and sound but if I kept her, I'd start dying. I took my earthbound daughter out for Halloween. Contractions started coming hard and I breathed throughout the pain. By the time that I got home that night, I started spotting red. That color, like a beacon to me, "You're a failure, Mommy", in my head. I hadn't even taken the pills and I was already in pain. The doctor coldly told me, "Take them anyway." Again, and again. My sweet Mama stayed with me and held my hand all night. I woke up at three am, contractions gripping me tight. I didn't want to wake her because she was more ill than I ever knew. And as I stood to go to the bathroom, blood poured, a dark red hue. It ran

down my legs in rivulets and puddled on the floor. I said "Mama, I don't wanna die", as she guided me through the door. I had to stand in the shower to wash the blood away. My mama and my husband wiping up the bloodstains. They helped me get dressed, bundled me warm and safe. My mama told me she loved me as my Husband took me away. He did 100 to the hospital as I groaned through each new hurt. The bright, full moon following us though time felt so inert. They put me in a wheelchair and quickly took me to my room. Located in the back, of course, *so I wouldn't hear other babies coo*. The doctor checked me right away and said "yep, you're delivering this baby." They rushed to get the IV in, and get the calming medicine ready. I shook and tensed and cried quietly as they blew three of my veins. On the fourth try, they got it, and pushed away some of the pain. But then the doctor came in, an unfeeling, careless being. She pushed her hand hard... So hard, where my baby lay unyielding. Within a matter of minutes, a rush of heat was born. She told me it was the placenta with her face looking slightly forlorn. I remember saying "Oh" because I thought she was already here but then another push from doc and I felt my Daughter's limbs reel. I felt her fall from me, only warm because of my heart. I was too scared to hold her, yet too afraid to be apart. It's something I regret every single day of my life. It's a Mother's job to hold their baby through pain and all strife. But I was not a brave woman. And I cried as they took her away. They gave us her little footprints that I hold to this very day. Smaller than my pinky tip, with toes just like her Dad's. She is my most precious gift that I never got to have. My Finnley Ann, my sweet angel baby, I'll love you with every breath. I will love you longer still, even with no breath left. I pray to God that when I'm gone, that I enter Heaven's gates. And as soon as I arrive, I hope you, Daddy, and Mama wait. I hope that I can hold you like I never could in life. I promise I will hold you all close for the rest of my afterlife. God picks the prettiest flowers and right now he holds my bouquet. I love you my Finnley Ann. Happy Heavenly Birthday. And please just know that I speak of you, with pride inside my heart. You have changed my life for the better even though we had to part. And I am grateful for the two pink lines that filled my life with bliss. You are tattooed on my soul forever, so please remember this. Because of you I am a mommy to another beautiful little girl. And even though you are in Heaven, my love, you will always be my world.

The Late Admit

© **Elias Harkins, MD, MEd**

Clinical Resident, Department of Pediatrics

5:45

The siren of sign-out is singing.

Then an alert.

She is here.

A 5-month-old with 6-months of hospital records.

All we were told was “RSV, complex history”

Complex,

A word with many meaningful roots.

It is social

- Parents are separated

It is historical

- Prognostication failure bred mistrust

It is medical

- Medicine lists larger than most medicine cabinets

It is human

- No one knows how she will grow up

I see the patient.

And I sign her out 50 minutes later.

“Complex 5 month old, getting oxygen for RSV, home medicines ordered”

And when I review the chart later

Every new note seems a small miracle.

Another trial completed

Another expectation beat

To be complex is to have succeeded

So tomorrow

When I see her again

I plan to revel in her lived depth

And celebrate that she is

Complex.



Shadow of Exhaustion

© **Aparajita Rao** | *Graduate Student, Class of 2025*



Energy

© **Robert Ganse** | *Information Services*



Harvest from the Roots

© **Thomas Spratt, PhD**

Biochemistry and Molecular Biology

Dandelion

© **Sudhanshu Bhatnagar, MD**

Penn State Health Cardiology

Penn State Health Medical Group - Millersville

Little sun, in the lawn,
Thanks for choosing me
To grow nearby, as my friend
Watched over but still free.
Little sun, down the road,
You changed and blew away.
Far away, miss you friend,
Nothing else to say.

Two Roots, One Dance

© **Ikram Mezghani, M.Sc.**

Graduate Student, Class 2027



Along the Fields

© **Anthony Sedun** | *Family Member*

The silhouettes of oak trees along the field
at dawn remain steadfast as sentries
of time itself—measured in days, seasons,
and decades. But time for the living
is meted out in generations, not
just the revolution of objects spinning
and enumeration of numbers
upwards.

Fourteen generations between Abraham and David.
Another fourteen between David and the
Babylonian exile. Ten fourteen more between the
Babylonian exile and the birth of the
Christ in Bethlehem.

Michael had a fitful sleep last night, coughing
and stirring on a toddler mattress beside
the Christmas tree. Outside, the wail of fire trucks,
ambulance, and police cars breaks
the morning quiet.

In a house on a hill near an old mountain,
a father weighs the light of the day ahead,
with whispered prayers for the strength
of oak trees and the tenderness of words
to bring silhouettes and landscapes and
sick children into harmony and health
in time.



Freedom

© Saiful Arefeen Sazed

Graduate Student, Class of 2028

Autumn Villanelle

© Emily Hess, RN | Penn State Cancer Institute

Shed leaves like red rose petals in mid-May.
Harbinger of the season turning new.
Soon, ashes, ashes, autumn fades to grey.

Blue birches dance a papery ballet,
Wind-worn, tempestuous waltz amongst trees who
Shed leaves like red rose petals in mid-May.

The harvest moon is Midas to the hay.
Its rays illuminate the chaff glazed gold with dew
As ashes, ashes, autumn fades to grey.

Swathed in wool sweaters, giddy children play,
Their ruddy cheeks are living mirrors to
Shed leaves like red rose petals in mid-May.

The air turns chill; the frost begets decay
In leaf-clogged gutters, damp with black mildew,
Ashes, ashes, autumn fades to grey.

As winter comes, Fall favors yet can stay.
Pressed pages keep the vibrant colors true.
Shed leaves like red rose petals in mid-May,
Then ashes, ashes, autumn fades to grey.

In the Hue of Pink and Blue

© Poppy Gears | Telecommunications

Pink or blue it labels you from birth.
Teaching young minds who likes what.
So young and fresh the assignment sticks
It lays like bricks,
Creating the foundation of you with pink and blue.

Pink and blue is all we knew.
Something doesn't sit quite right,
Until I learn something new.
This pink or blue making me feel askew.

Pink and blue both and neither is true
Altogether completely self-accepted
Who knew this was in hue of pink and blue?
Of all the colors I could be,
At last, I feel at home with pink AND blue.

Into Your Hands

© Makayla Lagerman, MD

Clinical Resident, Family and Community Medicine

“Ceased to breathe, will need pronounced, thanks!”

Benefit of the doubt: Exclamation point as a ladder.

Reality: Another day punched in at 18:55.

Cotton gauze, butterfly wings to eyelashes, grounded flight.

Into Your hands.

I will carry the weight-- time and date, cooling face-- nuntil it slows the next order placed
and her husband answers the other end of ringing line.

Station Bench

© Chet Davis | Patient



Student Highlight

Chet Davis does an exceptional job of capturing the visceral element of “waiting moments” by using a clear understanding of atmosphere and celebration of brushstroke.

For Him

© **Paras Chand**
Class of 2028

She clutched her side,
grimacing with each breath.
“How’s my husband?” she asked.
His seizure behind the wheel sent the car swerving;
she had taken control, steering into a truck to stop it.
Her ribs absorbed the impact.
Her face bruised.
Yet, she dismissed her pain,
each labored inhale bearing the thought for his safety.

Amaryllis

© **Kimberly Hays, MD, MSCR**
Department of Pediatrics

Legs swing playfully
red, superhero t-shirt worn thin
complementing the vibrant-colored amaryllis,
a non-descript painting on the wall.
“Joints look great!
Anything else?”
Softly, thumping spiderman shoes wait
“Any food boxes, mom asks?”
knowing I’d understand.
A final exchange:
“What made you smile today?”
“Momma”
The amaryllis blooms with little water
but not without light.

Student Highlight

The artist’s use of coloring and texture is quite nice here, allowing for a fun but full painting.



Dad Duty

© **Cameron Barber** | *Family Member*

Improv Pink Fish

© **Brielle Skocik (Age 7)** | *Family Member*



Looking at Roots with Tommy and Lisa

© Ananya Das | *Comparative Medicine*

Tommy came home from school really excited, “Look what we got at school today! A potted plant!”

His sister Lisa looked at the potted plant and rolled her eyes, “How boring!”

Tommy explained, “The one with the healthiest plant after three months is going to get a prize! I have to keep this pot in a proper place and water it every day. No one else can water it for me.”

Lisa laughed, “You will surely forget and your plant will dry up!”

Strangely enough he did not forget to water it.

A couple of weeks later he came back from school all teary eyed, “Elise’s Mom sent a picture of her plant to the teacher. It has grown and looks so green. Elise will surely get the prize. The teacher said her plant has strong roots by now. What are roots, Mom?”

“Well, the root is a part of the plant that grows underneath the soil. You cannot see it, but it has to be strong for the plant to grow well.”

A few days later Lisa noticed that Tommy’s plant looked sickly, yellowish and was not doing well at all. She decided to spy on Tommy to see what was going on. She watched him from behind the door and gave such a loud scream that their parents came running.

Tommy stood there petrified with the plant still in his hands.

Mom said, “Tommy! Why did you take the plant out of the pot?”

Tommy started wailing, “I was trying to see if the roots are growing strong!”

Lisa was laughing her head off, “He has been looking at the roots every day! No wonder the poor plant looks so sickly!”

Mom and Dad explained that it is best to leave with the roots alone and under the soil. Wrenching the plant out from the pot does not do it any good.

Tommy did not repeat his mistake, and the plant recovered. After three months everyone in class got a prize. A t-shirt that said, ‘I grew a plant!’



Happy Childhood

© Oana Bollt, BS | *Genome Sciences Core Facility*

Roots

© YuAn Du (Age 13) | *Family Member*



“We Are Not Anasazi”

© Richard Cary Joel | Family Member

The people of this place
have been here for millennia,
nearly as long
as has the Juniper Tree ...
Our roots have grown strong,
spreading far and wide,
plunging deeply into sand and rock
holding fast
as if the talons of a hawk
to this arid land we call home.

The land of my ancestors
who are now gone from this place,
but still live in the laughter of our children,
and the tears of the aged
and in the lines and furrows, carved deeply into Puebloan faces
by a blazing New Mexico sun.
They live as rainmakers in the storm clouds,
which pass over us,
carrying precious water,
to the people, plants and animals of this place.

Juniperus monosperma and the Pueblo Nation
still stand tall ...
though gnarled and twisted by the ravages of time
and the harshness of an unforgiving desert.

Our skin has grown thick, and hardwearing, out of necessity ...
and we have learned to survive in this difficult terrain together,
but always as friends ...
never ...
as Anasazi.

For we have taken from you only what's needed
and in return, have spread your seed to every corner
of this land they have called New Mexico.
Your wood and bark have fed our cooking fires,
formed the beams and ladders of our homes,
cradles for the young and sleeping mats for the tired,
torches for light, and the warmth we've sought,
on cold south-western desert nights.

Yes, our roots have grown deep,
and they have grown as one,
intermingling and interwoven
throughout the mountains, mesa and canyons of this sacred land,
A land that has always been ...
and will always be ...
the home of the Pueblo people.



Mushroom Village

© XinAn Du (Age 7)
Family Member

Context

The word Anasazi is not a Pueblo, but a Navajo term. It was used by them to describe the Ancestral Pueblo people. The term is considered by many, to be inappropriate or even disrespectful. This is because it literally translates to “ancient enemy” or “enemy of our ancestors,” capturing the ambivalence the Navajos felt toward their predecessors. Many modern Pueblos, who are descendants of the Ancestral Pueblo people, see this name as derogatory and prefer to use the term “Ancestral Pueblos” instead.

Nerves

© **Fiona Chambers (Age 10)**
Family Member

I really love nerves
Aren't they so interesting?
Like the Vestibulocochlear nerve
Actually, it consists of two nerves in one
And transmits sound from your inner ear to your brain
And it even helps with your balance
Though it is incredible,
I really hope it is not on my spelling list.

Next, I love the optic nerve
This one is quite a sight
It helps transmit visual information to the brain
That way you can see if the sky is cloudless
Or if it is going to rain
I would thank your optic nerves
For without them, you would not be able to read this.

Another interesting nerve is the sympathetic cholinergic
nerve

Ahh, one of the best
It helps us cool down when we are hot
By activating the sweat glands
However, I don't love this one in PE
You wouldn't either if you were standing next to me.

Finally, we have the most dangerous nerve of the bunch
This one is one for which I am always on guard
And I usually don't try to test
I would like to inform you
That it is my sister's last nerve.



Field of Splotches

© **Brandon D'Souza** | *Class of 2027*



Far From the Tree

© **Xuexin Zhang** | *Heart and Vascular Institute*



This is My Wife's Family

© **Robert Plotkin** | *Family Member*

Easter Sunday 1959

© Mary Arguelles | Patient

I run my fingers across the glossy finish of the black and white photograph, bump my index finger along its rickrack edges. The photo captures a long-ago Easter Sunday. My cousin Johnny and I stand side by side. Outside the margins of the picture, I can hear voices saying, “Oh, come on. Just one.” We look thrown together; I’m dolled up in Easter Sunday finery with my crisp new floral-print dress, scalloped straw hat, and short white gloves clutching a purse just out of view. Johnny, on the other hand, looks like he didn’t get the memo. He’s clad in a long-sleeved striped shirt with a crumpled collar, and a pair of play pants held up with suspenders. The sidelong glance I’m sending his way tells a story all its own.

On my refrigerator a Papa John’s Pizza magnet holds up a recent color photo of my cousin, Johnny. He’s holding a card I sent him along with a bag of

homemade fastnachts (doughnuts to the uninitiated). The card is partially open, and all I can read are the words “these babies”—referring to the fastnachts. I can’t remember what I wrote. “I made these babies just for you” or “I hope these babies stayed fresh”. In the photo, he’s holding up the bag and taking a pretend bite out of it. He looks downright robust. Stylish even with his wool cap set at a jaunty angle. From beneath the Papa John’s magnet, he gives me a sidelong glance that tells a story not apparent from the photo.

When exactly does cancer send down its roots into the subterranean soil of the brain so that glioblastomas can come into full flower? Was the seed already planted that long-ago Easter Sunday? Or did it embed itself later, a scattered seed blown by an unknown toxin on the wind?

The photos we keep only tell side A of the story. Underneath, side B spins its tune, the stories out of view.

Portrait of Leo Segedin, an artist friend from Chicago, who recently died at age 97

© Michael J. Green, MD | Departments of General and Internal Medicine and Humanities



It'll Never Be This Way Again

© Makayla Lagerman, MD

Clinical Resident, Family and Community Medicine

A love letter to my med school friends as they prepared to start intern year.

West Caracas learned all our stories-
Folding chairs with night in our eyes.
Not knowing our naive glory days
Would be a golden thread in our lives.
Days spent learning a new language.
I claim a parking spot at your place.
And the days couldn't go by quick enough
For us to start making our own change.

Then, full bloom, it was June.
It'll never be this way again.

Some weekends, I went to see your hometown;
On others, we stared death in the face.
We knew normalcy was relative.
Eyes fixed ahead on the race.
Felt like toddlers playing dress up;
It's hard to ever feel sure.
Days were long, yet they would not slow down.
Home was dinner.

Three more shut eyes til the rest of our lives.
It'll never be this way again.

Silly felt hats and gathered parents.
We cross a stage, then pack the car.
West Caracas may get a new tenant,
But I'll hold its memories in my heart.
And next time we see one another
There will be even more little feet
We'll go through saved old photographs
And wonder, "Did we ever truly leave?"

As time goes on, this love evolves.
It'll never be this way again.

And somehow that's a blessing in the end.



Splash

© Chaitanya Tiwari (Age 8) | Family Member



Road Ahead

© Zhuolin Wang
Patient

The Boys I Knew in High School

© Amber Carr | Class of 2027

wrestlers, football players, runners
AP students, artists, musicians
white shirts and ties
church every Sunday
Prom dates and parties
night games and loud music
infuriating
endearing
boys

now men, now fathers

a colectomy before age 30
a daughter with Down Syndrome
a toddler in chemotherapy
two babies buried
an 8-year-old in DKA
a son in early intervention
loving
unwavering
men



The Workings Within

© Ritisha Rao (Age 12) | Family Member

Memories, Unbundled

© Christine Quimby, MA | Department of Medicine

A tree can lose up to a third of its roots and still survive,
But the lost roots lack purpose, except to disintegrate and become fertile ground for another life;
Unless they are pulled from the ground and woven into a basket to bear the weight of a bountiful harvest;
Or crafted, like a talisman, into an odd but beautiful necklace;
Or twisted up and locked away;
Or made into a swing that flies someone, weightless and joyful, into the treetops;
And once the roots are dry and can no longer bend, they can hold a flame that casts a glow into the world
they are leaving behind, their final ashes afloat in the dusty darkness.

Alpseebad Hohenschwangau © Annie Du | Class of 2027





Lonely Tree

© Michael J. Green, MD
Departments of General and Internal
Medicine and Humanities

Rebirth From Death

© Taylor Lan | Class of 2026



Lung Sounds

© Pabitra Roy | Class of 2027

Salt-and-pepper beard, weather-worn smile;
Deep eyes that bored through you,
Seeking the truths you hide.
He questioned me: *Kemon accho?*
Words I expected on phone calls overseas,
Not the suffocating sterility of the exam room.
I stumbled for an answer, my face flushing.
As my voice cracked, he chuckled and shook his head.
Chinta koro na. Don't worry.
He told me stories:
Of fragrant mangos, rickety tea stalls,
Painted rickshaws down alleyways,
Paddle boat races over murky rivers,
Hiding secrets, ancient and deep.
Tales at once new and familiar,
Spoken wistfully and reverently,
Amidst heaving coughs tinged with blood.
He had a mass:
A tumor in his right lung
First a pea; then a quarter, then a golf ball,
Growing, spreading, consuming him from inside.
He gave so much to me; and yet all I could give him was:
Chinta koren na. Don't worry. Everything will be okay.
That was the last I ever saw him.

Lineage

© Zainab Bhatti | Class of 2028

my hooked nose
reminds me of my mother
reminds my mother of her sister
a symbol of a dear culture
the other side

my tired eyes
carry the pain of my mother
carry the suffering of her ancestors
a symbol of discrimination
native genocide

my lineage
connects me and my mother
connects me to my ancestors
a symbol of my origin
profound pride

The Kitchen Floor

© Mary Louise Osevala | Family Member

You could smell the pine sol when you walked in the back door. The tiny basement kitchen was the center of the family of 9. A large brown refrigerator was in the left corner, the pride of Mom's hard work; very modern for the time, with a pull-out freezer on the bottom. Immediately to the left of the back door hung the wall telephone, the only phone in the home, on a party line with a family 3 blocks way. The coal stove was against the back wall, a 2-burner unit, with a black pipe extending up and over into the chimney. Next to the stove was a tan vinyl accordion floor length curtain that kept out the draft from the adjoining basement, which housed the washer, dryer, furnace and the only bathing area in the house, the cinder block shower paved with leftover tile from a high school pool that Dad worked on as a bricklayer.

Mom stood with her back to the door, always, at the stove, cooking supper for her brood. "Take your shoes off!" The usual abrupt command that I really should have known. I had three pairs of shoes. These were my play sneakers: white, pointy ones Mom bought for 50 cents at Jupiters. My other shoes were brown leather Mary Janes (for school only) and black patent leather Mary Janes delegated to Sunday Mass and just maybe, dressing up on Friday night to walk to town to go to Jupiters.

Shoes off, I tried to sneak up the stairs that were to the right, up to the second floor where an old model TV could be heard playing. Too late. "Set the table and call your brothers and sister, supper's ready," Mom said, with an edge of impatience in her voice. Being 6th out of 7 kids, (5 brothers with me being the youngest of the 2 girls,) I mumbled something like, "why do I always have to set the table." wrong thing to do. "Just do what I say" her voice getting louder and edgier. Yelling out 6 names like a rehearsed nurse rhyme, Michael, Billy, Tommy, Johnny, Susan, Danny....

Phone rings. You wait for a single ring tone or double ring tone to know if it was for our home or the party line. Not our call.

Pounding feet on distant staircase is heard. The boys slept in the attic, 3 flights up. My sister and I shared a room with no door that my brothers had to walk through to get to their bedroom above us. The bathroom that had a toilet, sink and medicine cabinet was actually built into the right corner of my room.

The boys came flying down the steps and hurriedly sit at their seat. Me, being the smallest, sat on the bench against the wall with John next and then Tom. My older brothers and sister sat across from us. Mom anchored the metal '50 style chair closest to the back door. Dad, when he would arrive, sat by me, with his back to the basement curtain/door. Of course, we couldn't start to eat until Dad came home. His daily routine, part of the Coal Region blue collar working class, was to stop for a beer or two before entering a house full of hungry kids and an irritated wife. Guess he needed to bolster himself up for that!

Friday night meant toasted cheese sandwiches and cream of tomato soup. A whole big loaf of bread and 2 lbs of cheese disappear in 5 seconds flat. All I could see is the top of my big brothers' scalps as they wolfed down the first sandwich, their arm already stretched to the center of the table for seconds and thirds. All this masticating before I had one bite of my sandwich...no wonder I was small! The baby, Danny, had already been fed and was upstairs in a crib.

We took turns doing the dishes by the week-usually John back peddled out of there before anyone noticed or would bribe me to take his turn. Dishes done, Mom would sweep and get out the scrub bucket. As we finished and headed upstairs, she would be on her hands and knees, washing the floor with impressive determination. So much so, the original speckled tan floor eventually became a solid tan.

We sort of knew we were poor. But we did get new Easter outfits every other year. And we all went to the local Catholic Polish school. Tuition was free after the third kid. And 25cents went into those tiny brown envelopes every week so we could have warm milk that sat on the chalkboard ledge at school.

Scrubbing the floor, mom said, was how she completed her day. She had standards and oddly, a clean kitchen floor at the end of the day was one of them. She had other standards as well. You never said anything bad about our dad, though he had faults that embarrassed me at times. All clothes including T shirts and pillow cases had to be ironed (that was my chore-Dad's T shirt were as big as a tablecloth to a 10-year-old). Beds had to made-and not just kid-made...drop a pin- to -bounce- off sheet made.

I learned from my proud, stoic, Polish Mom, that you finish what you start. Be it ironing big ass T shirts, scrubbing an old linoleum kitchen floor, or respecting your elders.

Mom, thank you.



Eclipse Over Time in a Cesna

© David Green | *Family Member*

A Song of the Heart

© Charlotte Chambers (Age 13) | *Family Member*

In the silence of the night,
When shadows dance below the moon,
A song calls, soft and sweet, gentle and safe,
The quiet beckons, emotions exploding outward.
From the depths of our souls, it sings,
The melody of hopes and the dreams it brings, creating
a trance
Unseen, unheard, yet felt in the full depths of the soul,
A call that beckons as we sleep.
Through the laughter of a summer's day,
In the silent tears left unshed,
A song of sadness, euphoria, and fear,
Emotions speak for all to hear,
Yet remain a secret in your soul.
In a glance, a touch, a fleeting smile,
In moments that linger and define our world,
The heart's purest language, enveloping truth and rarity,
Calls out to souls who truly care.

Unexpected, it arrives unplanned, unpredicted
except in the depths of your being
In the grasp of a firm hand,
Or the warmth of a kind embrace,
In the love that time cannot define.
A symphony of feelings and thought,
In every heartbeat every silent moment, its
rhythm remains,
A song of life, pain, of grace, of love,
Emotions calling from a sacred place, the purest
things to exist.
Hear the song that hearts compose,
In the silent echo of time,
And in the pure silence that fills the air,
Emotions calling everywhere.
Will you listen to the song your heart sings?

The Fledgling

© Joseph Gascho, MD

Emeritus, Departments of Medicine and Humanities

Interrupted by a chirp
while sitting reading
underneath an oak
I raised my eyes
and saw a fledgling plummeting
down from its maiden flight.

It cocked its head,
looked up at me
steadily,
took off again.
And then again.
And then again.

And then I saw a cat
crouched, about to spring.
I heaved my book. It fled
but would creep back I knew.

My lecture loomed.
I ended it at 10 till 12
rushed back and spied the cat
but not the fledgling anywhere,
and thought about
that first day
I, too, tried to fly.

Growing

© Charlotte Chambers (Age 13)

Family Member



Himalayan Blue Poppy

© Manish Shukla | *Family Member*



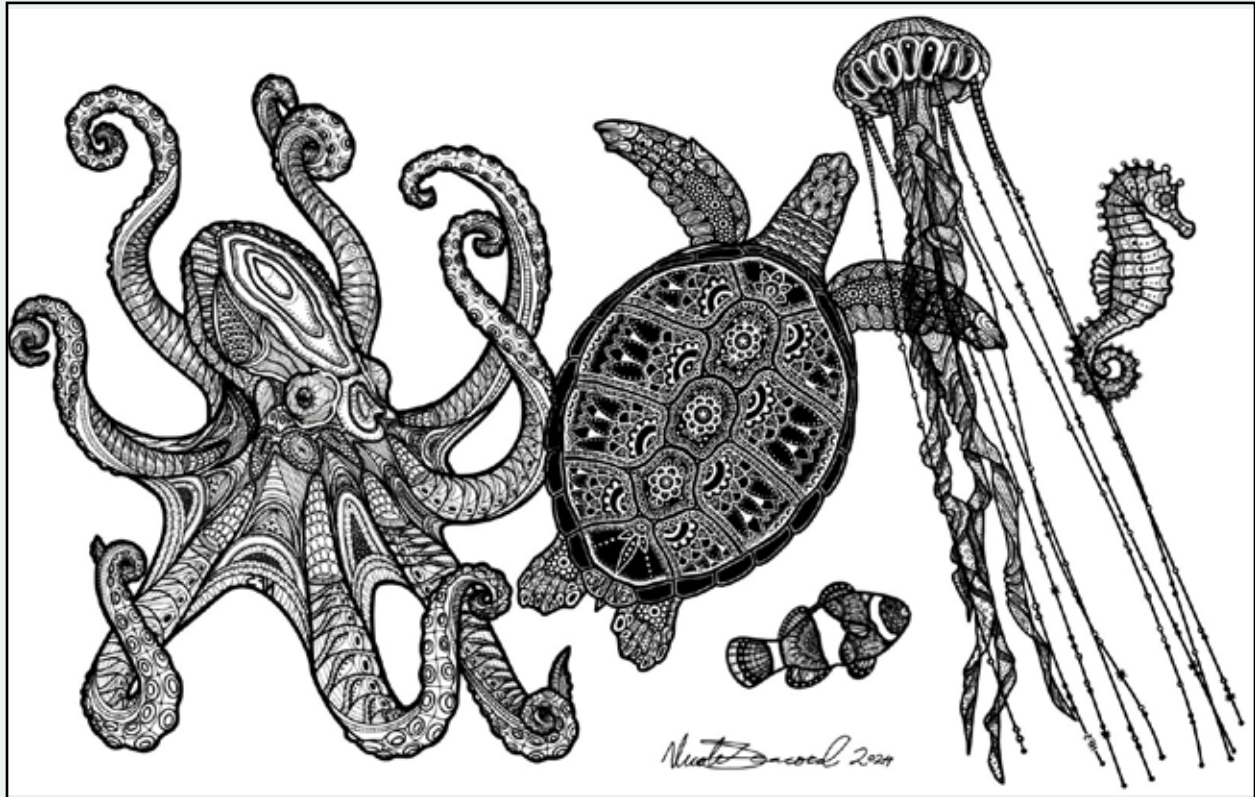
Time

© Daniel Egert, DO | Division of Hematology/Oncology

Flowing down a mountain, varying in speed yet maintaining constant direction.

Breathing, expanding and contracting against our wishes.

How dare it? We, the few consciousnesses who create the landmarks and milestones which define the relativity of time, shackled and chained to its impersonal stubbornness.



Beauty in Diversity

© Nicole Seacord | Patient

Arboreal Détente

© Brandt Groh, MD | Department of Pediatrics, Adolescent Medicine

A majestic oak of 250 years is buffeted by discordant winds in a season of discontent.

Said the roots to the leaves:

We derive our elemental sustenance from the good earth. We have endured many a harsh winter, grounded in righteous traditions of extraction and stability. We have no need of ephemeral leaves swaying to and fro in the fickle breezes and retreating with the first hint of frost.

Said the leaves to the roots:

How pitiful to be buried in the stultifying sameness of brown earth! If only you could experience the freedom of movement and the vibrant colors of our airy world. We are clever and creative, deriving our sustenance from an agnostic star that cares not about your traditions or the convictions of righteous roots.

Said the branches to the roots and leaves:

And yet, you are both connected through our trunk and branches that convey liquid minerals to you leaves and sap to you roots, lest you both wither and die. Together, we sustain a village of biologic diversity, and collectively our villages have provided the building materials of a great nation. Yet our legacy is flammable. The heat of your disagreement risks an all-consuming inferno that will erase any memory of your righteousness, traditions, freedom, and creativity.

Mom's Mammo

© Marian Wolbers, MS | Patient

A voicemail from Central Scheduling:

"Call back, please ..."

At 71, I wondered

Why go get a mammogram

When my body is lump-free, as carefree

As when I was 20?

Then I shook my own self

Suddenly remembering that recent text:

My daughter, who lives far away,

Found a lump. She ...

Would have to take a day off work, wait

Two weeks to drive 45 minutes

Just for closer imaging. My heart

Clutched. My head thumped,

Felt swollen with The White Noise

Of Worry. Worry for her, for us all:

What if ...?

In the end: her loving husband

"played hooky" from his job,

she said,

"and drove me."

And the final results?

"All's well."

Whe-e-e-w.

How stupid of me:

Self-centered.

Pompous.

My dearest hospital is but 10 minutes

From my house.

Appointment—easy.

Access—immediate.

Equipment—topnotch, shiny new.

Approach to patients—tender,

Professional. Assuring.

I made that call back to Central

Scheduling

(Sheepishly)

Willfully,

Gratefully.



Roots 2025

© Julia Hennrikus | Family Member

Student Highlight

This drawing immediately stood out to us. The movement, position, and subtle eye contact with the viewer is not only technically stunning but communicates a familiar feeling.

Chemo Window: Room With A View

© Virginia Parkum | Patient

Softly falling rain
my tears
my heart

wasp
SUV
clouds

even here
pine needles
tremble in the wind
infusion confusion



From Whence We Came

© Evan Goldman, PhD

*Radiology and Neural/Behavioral Sciences,
Program of Education in Human Structure (Anatomy)*

Fruitless

© Paul Haidet, MD, MPH

Departments of Medicine, Humanities, and Public Health Sciences

I've known him ten years. Ten years, and he's still on the same two meds we started with. Ten years of missed appointments and sporadic follow through. My task list screams.

"Doktor, God bless you and your family!" So much gratitude for so little intervention. 90 years old. Haitian survivor. Defiantly good health.

Despite me.

Commentary: "Fruitless" is a 55-word lament based on the inner conflict between the voice of medicine, which screams at us to always do something, and the voice of the healer, which reminds us that, sometimes, our presence is what matters most.

Abandoned Church Interior

© D. Scott Calhoun | Family Member

Off Balance

© Cameron Pauly

MD/PhD Student | Class of 2031

Though the growth emerged from the balance nerve, hearing was the first to falter. Ringing, difficulty hearing, a concerned neurologist, an MRI. A bright white warning light in her brain.

Two centimeters, smaller than a grape. Two brain surgeries, ten hours each. Two children, trying to be strong for mom who's always strong for them.



I Am From ...

© **Brenda Grubb** | *Emergency Department*

I am from the towns of rolling hills where the creeks flow out through small mountain valleys to meet at the rivers.

I am from a time and era where you didn't know that you ain't had nothing, 'cause you always made due with what you had and were happy for it.

I am from a home bursting at its seams. Laughter, tears and too many mouths to feed. There was always enough time for naptime stories but never enough room on mom's lap. Dad was always around but never there.

I am from home butchering's where everything was eaten but the squeal. Sweltering Summer days of home canning and preserving the gathered harvest for the months ahead. Late Winter Saturday nights, ice was gathered from the creek banks to make homemade ice cream. Sunday nights were for popping popcorn and visiting kin.

I am from a long line of church going Brethren whose roots started in Germany. I am also from a long line of those that only stepped in church doors for weddn's and burials.

I am from a time that every Sunday's meal was spent at a grandparents' dinner table with more cousins than you can count on your hands and toes. Chevrolet rides over the rivers and through the woods sitting quietly in the backseat not to disturb dad listening to the radio.

I am from a Summer time of grabbing a kitchen cook pot and going outside to pick wild raspberries before noon and have a custard pie made by supertime. The clothes are hung on the lines to dry. Spring peepers, crickets and cicadas serenading each other in the long Spring and Summer nights. Catching fireflies, box turtles and wooly caterpillars only to look and release.

I am from a time of weathered, dirt and tear stained faces. Dull eyes that have seen too much pain and few laugh lines. Family loyalty was something you never doubted.

I am from a time when young people were taught how to work hard with their hands, use their minds, and know the value of a dollar. Where kids were able to stay innocent till junior high.

I am from the last era when the days were slow and sled rides were long. Kids were allowed to climb trees and play in the mud puddles. Porch lights were turned on to let them know it was time to come home.

I am from a time when many of kids have left home never to return, but home is never far from their mind.

I am from a long line of the rural kind.

Hope for a New Day

© **John Scipione, RN** | *Employee Health*



Komorebi

© Annie Du | Class of 2027

For my hometown Parkland, Florida 2018.

Palm fronds sigh in balmy air.
Tall sawgrasses with nimble teeth
soothingly sway as fairer sky parts the gray.
In neighboring misty mourning wetland,
seraphic shades of dawn tree-light
suffuse our lush and lasting everglade.

Our marsh preserves nights we waded through
those sinking pools innocence emptied into; those
rivers once brimmed of promises for enduring youth.
Each day now shared, we rise, sow our seeds
readying birdsong for soft emerging spring.
Fond remembrances we immortalize, for
Our dearly beloved valentines.

Harmony and Devotion

© Saiful Arefeen Sazed

Graduate Student, Class of 2028

From

© Sudhanshu Bhatnagar, MD

Penn State Health Cardiology

Penn State Health Medical Group - Millersville

Where are you from?
Easy question, easy answer?
Would be,
If that was the real question.

They wanna know my heritage,
My story
How history wove its way to me.
Why am I not them?

Where am I from is really
Where am I really from?
They want the fun of it,
But I'm just me.

I'm whoever I am that day
The sum;
The cumulative of the time
And places and people.

Where am I from,
Easy question,
Impossible answer ...
But I'll say Boston.



Beyond the Uniform

© Morgan Voulo, BS | Class of 2025

The earth is quiet,
the sky is dark.
My partner still sleeping,
but it is time to wake.

I dress in silence,
clothes laid out the night before.
Camo drapes over me,
steel-toed boots ground me firm.

Coffee in hand,
I descend the stairs,
cooking breakfast,
and packing the boys' lunches.

The cold air bites,
my breath lingers in the dawn.
A familiar chill,
a familiar ritual.

I swipe my badge,
allowed to enter.
Armor in place,
my team stands ready.

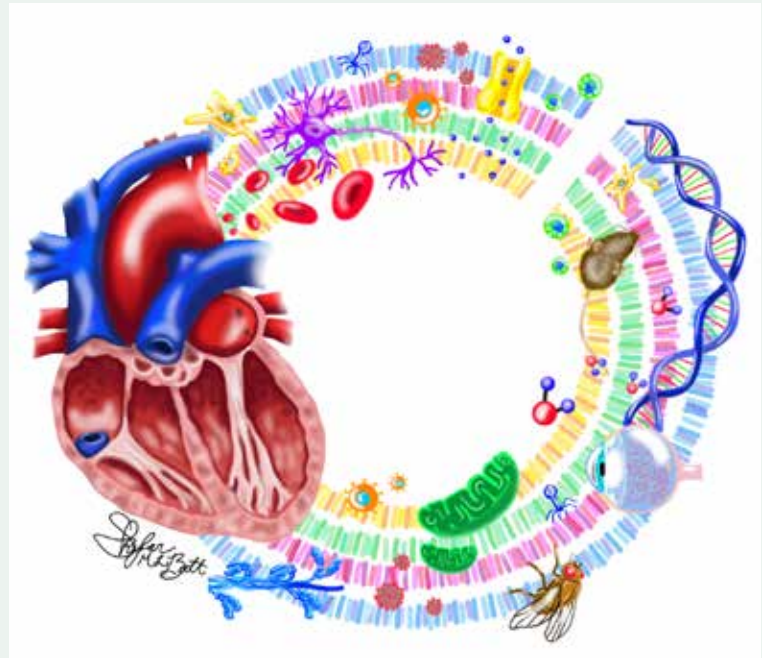
Out in the field,
we move as one,
bodies pressed to the earth,
every eye locked on the target.

Shots rings out.
The leaders nod.
Another day,
another cycle complete.

High-fives all around,
our duty is done.
I head home,
where love waits for me.

My spouse, my children,
their arms open wide.
If only you knew—

He was a She.



Future Pulse

© Skyler Bodt

Graduate Student, Class of 2025

Full Circle

© Hayley Sholansky, MD

Department of Family and Community Medicine

I walk the halls of the same place I took my first breath
The same tiles, the same beeps
Bringing life into the world the same way I came into it

Once I was the infant, swaddled and wide eyed
Now I provide prescriptions of hope
A stethoscope instead of a lullaby

These walls, they know me,
Held my mother's prayers, her fears
Her hope that I would grow into something more

I wonder if the doctor who held me
Ever imagined I'd return wearing
The same coat he once wore

And so I continue the circle on
From one room, to the next
For a circle never ends

In Retirement

© **Ronald Domen, MD**

Emeritus Professor of Pathology, Medicine, and Humanities

I quietly rise in the early morning trying
not to wake my wife and take the two
dogs out to the backyard. No matter
the weather I go out with them and stand
and keep watch and look east toward the rising sun
as the pups do their thing. It's a sort of meditation,
a greeting of the day, a time of silent reflection
and observation. When we come back inside I feed
them, put a kettle of water on the stove to heat
and ready two cups of (pour over) coffee and wait
for my wife to wake and join me. Later in the morning,
I will occasionally write down any observations
thoughts and impressions, maybe a poem will
come, or I work on a letter to a friend, the old
fashioned kind that requires licking the gummed
flap of the envelope, putting on a stamp and dropping
in a mailbox to wait weeks or months for a reply. Or I will
work on my memoir hoping to leave a few scraps
about one link in that long ancestral chain.
To leave some remembrance
for those who follow.

Whispering Salam

© **Abdul-Jawad Majeed**

Class of 2026

A towering white coat,
A diagnosis uttered but poorly understood,
A student standing in the corner,
A greeting of peace and blessings quietly exchanged,
A soothing sense of relief with the remembrance of faith,
A plan is made to again feel safe.



Serenity in the MIMCU

© **Richard Michaelian** | *Contractor*

Taking Root

© **Laura Patton** | *Department of Medicine*



Where the Waves Break

© **Zelie Burtis** | *Family of Patient*

On the last day of our family beach vacation in the Outer Banks, when the storms had finally let up for a few hours, we ventured out to the water. My dad held my 6 month old son bundled up in towels to keep the sandy wind off his face while my husband, brother, and I waded out to sea. I stopped much sooner than they did, afraid of being pulled underneath the waves. I stood on broken shells, caught between the crashing waves, trying to maintain my composure. It would have been easier to swim past the waves or to venture back to land, but I liked feeling the force of the water hit me. The phrase “where the waves break” came into my mind and I thought that would be a nice title to some future writing piece.

Twenty four hours later, I found myself in the emergency room at Penn State Hershey after an exhausting 12 hour drive home. My son was making strange movements on and off with his eyes and arms that scared my husband and me. He would lose control of his head and torso for a moment or two, then come back. In and out, in and out. Please come back, my baby, I prayed. In and out, in and out. Please come back, my baby.

The persistent beep of an oxygen monitor made me feel like I was on a medical TV show. Doctors said maybe it's reflux, try to give him some cereal. But I knew that was not my baby. His eyes rolled in and out of consciousness, pulled out to sea.

A relic of the true cross laid beside him in his crib. A Catholic nurse on the night shift said to us, “We need the Eucharist, what would we do without it?” In the midst of our suffering, God sent this kind woman who shared our faith as a buoy to hold onto.

Mummy tape covered the wig of electrodes protruding from his perfect round little head. His budding blonde curls were matted with sterile smelling glue. The springtime of infancy, hardly six months out of the womb.

An EEG confirmed he was having seizures, infantile spasms.

Is it my fault

Is it my fault

Is it my fault

I don't know how to process this

Do I really have hope in God

Yes

I think

Maybe

After wheeling our son down in his portable crib to get an MRI, I ordered dinner and pumped breast milk for him to keep up my supply. An older lady named Lisa brought in my dinner tray and seeing the empty room, said “Oh there's something missing here.” I waded through the emptiness towards her and said, “Yes, there is.” I smiled and then immediately sobbed.

“Oh honey!” Lisa threw the dinner tray on the recliner and pulled me in for a hug. My husband came behind me and cried with us. I was rubbing Lisa's arm like she was my own grandmother. She asked if we could pray and somehow through the tears, still huddled together, we did.

“Are you Christian?” asked Lisa.

“Yes, we're Catholic,” I said.

“Oh, me too! I always wear my miraculous medal!” Lisa said with a smile, pulling out her necklace as proof. “You're in the best place possible, really.”

We were told that the MRI results could take a few hours. Eager for a break from the whirlwind of the last few days, my husband and I walked into our hospital room with our son in his crib on wheels looking forward to bedtime.

The neurologist was waiting for us in the room and asked to speak to us immediately. She took us to her office and showed us the MRI image. A white mass in his little skull. A brain tumor. Waking up from anesthesia, head bobbing and mouth babbling, my little baby was unaware of the waves crashing around him.

Where the waves break.

I texted my dad this phrase that had been carrying me through our hospital stay. He replied, “Stand against those waves. For baby.”

I felt guilty sleeping. I felt guilty eating. I felt guilty asking for anything for myself. I tried to pray the rosary, but I could only manage to hold the beads in my clenched fist, no prayer but a resounding why ringing in my mind.

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

Two years ago, almost to the day we entered the hospital, I was praying in church when an image of Jesus walking on water through a terrible storm came to my mind. His hand reached out to me, beckoning me into the raging sea and storm with him. He smiled at me reassuringly, seemingly unaware of the tempest surrounding him. I couldn't explain it at the time, but I had a feeling that one day I would have a child that needed my care and attention for some medical issue or disability.

I know that despite the trials our family has been through, God has been with us through it all. I had no choice but to throw myself into the fire of Jesus' purifying love and endless mercy. I had no choice but to keep eating in order to nurse my son, to stay calm in order to understand the doctors' advice, and to rock my baby to sleep for the second, third, fourth time in one night. I was tempted to self pity and to wallow in sorrow, but the Lord soothed my worry and restored my peace. A peace that surpasses all understanding.



Contemporary Burst

© Brett Mays, CDT
Patient

Bookshelf

© Kasia Skocik, MA | Behavioral Health, Holy Spirit Hospital



An Ode to the Resident Crying in the Supply Closet

© Hayley Sholansky, MD

Department of Family & Community Medicine

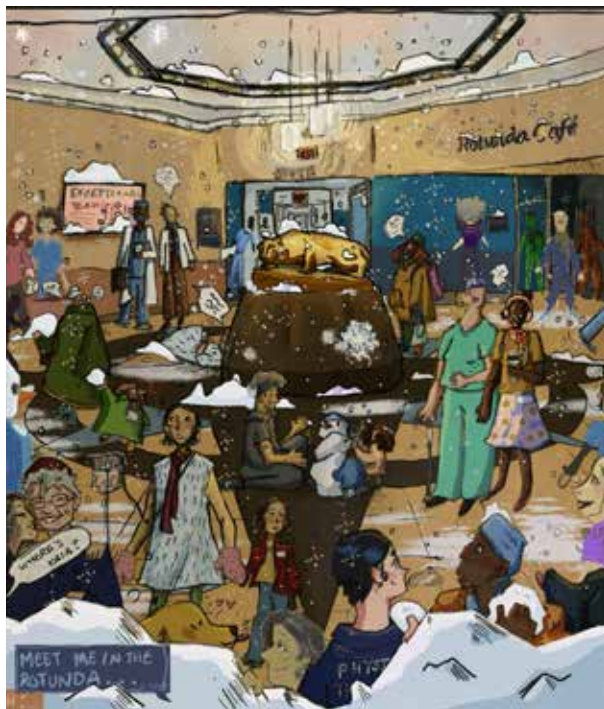
I see you there,
In the harsh glow of fluorescent lights,
Your shoulders too heavy with the weight
Of lives too fragile to carry alone.
You don't cry in the halls or in front of us,
But here, In the small room of cold white tiles,
Among the sterile bandages and stacked boxes of gauze
You finally let go.

You sit there, fingers wrapped around a cup of coffee
That has long gone cold, while mascara runs down your face.
I wonder if you know how much strength it takes to weep
To finally feel the depth of loss and sleepless nights.

I admire you, though you don't know it.
You, who hold the lives of strangers with steady hands,
Despite your heart slowly fracturing.
If I could be anyone, it would be you.

Our world is full of beeps and rush,
But you remember the ones we lose,
The things we cannot fix.
So here, in this quiet corner,
Amongst the shelves of syringe packaging
I see your pain
In the flicker of a moment when the door is closed
You allow yourself to be human for just a second.

I don't know if you'll ever know
How much I look up to you,
The resident brave enough to cry in the supply closet
Who will still walk out wearing the white coat with grace.
You are stronger than anyone understands.



Progress

© Kelly Chambers, CRNA

*Department of Anesthesiology
and Perioperative Services*

It was what it was
And remember when ...
The care was built
Of words and hands

The bottles were glass
The linens were real
The IVs were started
Just by feel

Now it is what it is
And go get the vein finder
Care is defined
By if we could have been kinder

I'm further away
In electronic charts
Treat the text or call bell
Or computer restart

But care is safer
Better quality of life, drastic
All it took was each scrub
Wrapped in plastic

Evolution is progress
Advancement I can't dispute
But sometimes I would rather
Lean back on our roots

When it was what it was
And remember when ...
The care was built
Of words and hands

Meet Me In The Rotunda

© Himani Devabhaktuni | Class of 2025

Who Heals the Healer?

© Daniel Egert, DO

Division of Hematology/Oncology

The clock strikes again, as I open my eyes.
Endless eternities reflect in the starry skies.
To whom does it matter? As I toil away.
The sick never ending, each hour, each day.

We cling onto goodness, in others, ourself.
While searching for meaning, emotions are shelved.
Who heals the healer? No one does say.
Just look forward to next year, next hour, next day.

We're told to be grateful, after all it's your dream.
Though in my mind echoes each death, each scream.
The days blur together, when will it all end?
I find myself losing the skill to portend.

The clock strikes again, as my eyes flutter shut.
These hours all worked, but is it for naught?
Who heals the healer? I wonder each night.
Then ready my soul for the day's coming fight.

The Life of a Clerkship Student

© Nabeel Akhtar, MD, MEd, FACP

Department of General and Internal Medicine

Ringin' smartphones.
Walking traffic in University Manor.
Interviewing patients of all ages and races and
Examining with stethoscopes, reflex hammers, and flashlights.
Observing endless surgeries and codes and heated family meetings.
Writing H&Ps, progress notes, and brief operative notes.
Informing team members, patients, and families while
Facing microaggressions, discordant teams, and burnout.
Skipping meals, personal time, and family events for
Studying textbooks, question banks, and CANVAS resources.
Looking out the brick walls at passing seasons of clerkships.
Building up of loans, research, and waist sizes.
Logging onto Zoom and
Asking, "What the HAC are we doing with our lives?"

Sunrise at the Beach

© Albert Fulvio

Patient



Loch Lomond

© Jonathan Foulds, PhD | *Public Health Sciences*



Isolation

© John Scipione, RN | *Employee Health*



White Noise

© Zainab Bhatti | Class of 2028

in my parents' home
the white noise is different
than the one in my apartment
I hear a man speaking from the TV screen
in a language
I can't understand
the national language
of my parents' country
that they themselves
understand
but don't like speaking
"it was forced upon us"
"the partition brought discrimination
and violence"
"they wanted us off our own land"
and then I hear
my parents speaking
the beautiful dialect
of our ancestors
an intricate
complex
language
very few can speak
write
read
or understand
I can't speak
write
or read
but I can understand
and I cherish that I can understand
thinking of the day
when there would be no
white noise like
the one cradling
my ears now
so despite my desire
for silence
I allowed
my parents' chatter
to be the lullaby
that lulled me to sleep
just as it used to
when I was a child



Bodyland

© Mary Hazboun
Friend of Medical Student



Edge of the French Quarter

© Jonathan Frazier
Center Stage Arts in Health

My Roots Do Not Restrain Me

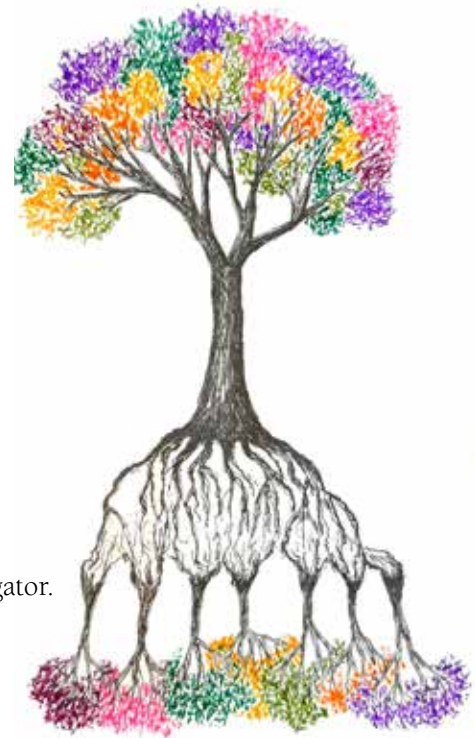
© Kathrine Rineer | Penn State Cancer Institute

My roots do not restrain me.
I plant new ones everywhere I go
With everything I learn and every bit I grow.

Homo sapiens, a mammal, a genetic lot,
Scottish, Lebanese, the American Melting pot,
A religious dissident, a spiritual being, a miraculous wonder,
A data cruncher, a helper, a worker bee with no thunder,
A partner, mother, daughter, sister, aunt, and caretaker,
A playmate, a confidant, a snuggler, and a treat maker.

Each moment changes what I choose to be
And to you, I am what you choose to see.
I am loving, fearful, forgiving, angry, kind and sometimes rude.
I am happy, sad, generous, selfish, humble and have an attitude.
I am a friend, an enemy, a hero, a villain, a peacekeeper and an instigator.
I am playful, boring, helpful, hurtful, innocent, and the perpetrator.

My roots do not restrain me.
Seeing only what I've already done,
Would mean missing all the great things that I'm yet to become.



Symbiotically Disposed

© John Garman, MD
Department of Psychiatry

Infinite Flow

© Michael Flanagan, MD
Department of Family and Community Medicine
University Park Campus



Planning

© Fiona Chambers (Age 10)
Family Member

I am trying out new things
Let's give this a start
What about writing?
I like it but my hand is starting to hurt

Maybe I like editing
So crisp, so clear
But so many rules!
How will I remember them all?

Maybe I like technology
Yes, that would be cool
Oh dear, what is this robotic language?
Maybe we can scratch that off the list

Oh well, I am still really young
For now, I will learn all I can
I will find what is right for me
Even if things don't go exactly as planned

A Posteriori

© **Amber Kulaga** | *Patient*

Bits of energy and matter,
bumbling around
as the universe expands
and expresses itself.
Endlessly, relentlessly.

Rooted in what?
that can accommodate this growth.
-There are equations for that.

And here we stay,
tied in obvious roots
to respiration and photosynthesis,
sustenance and chemical magic.

Complicated growth,
and decay,
symbiotically perfected.

Mathematical despite our
best efforts.

We add and subtract,
divide and multiply.

Searching for an
intractable root.

The why.

Somewhere in our expanding,
our computing,
in all our holding on-
The root was buried in the asking.

The taproot recovered,
The serendipitous fact.
We are still here.

The Creek

© **Ry Hillyard**
Family Member

I amble slowly under the bridge,
the cool water is at my ankles.
I hear water splashing,
animals scurrying,
and occasionally a car whizzing over my head.
I see the gleam of golf balls,
resting in the sand beneath.
With every stride I take,
little minnows scatter.
I check the time.
Woops, I'm late for dinner,
have to get home.
Maybe next time,
you can come too.

It's ok to be Afraid

© **Judy Schaefer, RN**
*The Doctors Kienle Center for Humanistic Medicine
Board Member*

Each cell will reach out
to live
to heal
even when you are scared

Soldiers of the Bay

© **Evan Goldman, PhD**
*Radiology and Neural and Behavioral Sciences
Program of Education in Human Structure (Anatomy)*



Bound By Olive Trees

© Ikram Mezghani, MSc

Graduate Student, Class of 2027

Beneath the olive trees,
a timeless shade,
The earth holds whispers
of roots that cascade.
The trees carry stories,
both near and far,
Binding lands together,
underneath the same stars.
From Tunisia's golden shores,
where the olives sway,
To Palestine's mighty hills,
where they defy decay.
The olive trees whisper,
a song of roots that run deep,
Of histories carried in sap, soil, and fruit—
they weep.
In Tunisia,
the trees stretch wide,
Drinking the sun's warmth,
they thrive.
A witness to life in simple delights,
Where joy blooms through tranquil nights.
In harmony,
the olive branches sway,
With peace and grace,
they greet the day.
In Palestine,
the same branches stand,
Though scarred by time and strife,
they withstand.
They cradle hopes,
despite endless pain,
A symbol of strength,
they will remain.
They shelter dreams through nights of fear,
With roots that anchor,
firm and deep.

The song of two lands,
United by olive strands.
One freed from chains,
The other will rise,
unchained.
Their branches reach across the sky,
A call for justice,
soaring high.
From Tunisia to Palestine,
where the olive trees grow,
United by the olives,
a symbol of resilience we know.
The olives know no borders,
Their trees stand tall and proud.
Roots weaving through the earth's veins,
Binding past and future, unbowed.
In their fruit,
stories are told.
In their soil,
resilience is bold.
A heritage unbroken,
forever pure.
May we listen to the olive trees' whisper,
Heed the call of uprooted trees and remember,
That the roots of one,
are the roots of all.
Bound by the olive trees,
In unity,
we shall never fall.

Rooted in Resistance

© Ikram Mezghani, MSc

Graduate Student, Class of 2027



Shorn

© Mary Arguelles | Patient

Kneeling over the bathtub,
head bowed low,
the clippers at the nape of my neck
start in to sing,
calling me to prayer.

Wounded locks of hair
fall from my head,
casualties of war.
Limp and lifeless on the porcelain snow,
they mount with each pass.

My shearer reminds me
it's the treatment,
not the illness,
that's killing my hair.
It will come back.

So now these are innocents in the snow,
mothers and children intertwined,
collateral damage
the rubble of school yards,
the refuse, roots, and refuge
of unintended wrongs.

Be it in sorrow
or be it in sin,
this contrition conjures company --
others who, so prone
stumble upon prayer
and fall
unexpectedly
toward
grace.



Petals of Beauty

© Gabriella Schilling (Age 12)
Family Member



Colorful Animals

© Chaitanya Tiwari (Age 8)
Family Member

For who

© Julie Vallati, RN | *Developmental Pediatrics*

I watch the joy drain from their faces trickle down their cheeks as they are left brokenhearted again
I am left struggling with the yoke that is too heavy to bear.
Raise her kids, live my life, pretend to forget
In some disparity trying to hold on to normal life.
These are beautiful little people; blessings and they are also mine
I see their little lights trying to shine
I pick them up love them and they start to glow to shine brighter.
I can give them hope, I can give them love I can help
But...who will be there if ... dare I say?
Yes, if she comes back, if somehow, she returns?
The her that is hidden deep inside this monster strangled by addiction.
If someday the chains wrapped around her break and the demon that is attached to her very soul
may leap from her.
Freeing her restoring her life!
Who will be there then? who remains?
Is she now the one left hurting, helpless and alone?
The remnants of her choices floundering around, lost
being pushed here and there with no soft place to land
Who will be there then?

Butterfly Effect

© Hong Wang
Department of Neurology



Hiding Inside

© Marian Wolbers | *Patient*

A seashell travels to arrive at the shore
smooth-edged atop, all pearly and smooth
But underneath, edges jagged and worn.

I am that glossy seashell
to the people I pass
my insides held tight like a rusty old bell.

Yearning to find the right way to say
a thanks from the heart –
how beloved my parents, now gone to the grave.

They taught me to gaze beyond clothing and skin,
to ask, “Where do you live?”
“Here’s a safe harbor. Why don’t you come in?”

Mother was a farm girl who danced through the air
Her self keen to master
All gestures, all cultures, a joy to compare.

My father much taller, a boy from the city,
enamored of sports, he traveled and learned;
Long motherless but strong, not one for self-pity.
Active and healthy were the sons and daughters;
all folks who met them
found aid and solace, their abilities fostered.

I’ve gone ’round the world like that shell I so loved,
flew high and fell hard, cried and got broken
yet somehow, somehow, I knew I’d recover.

Somewhere a new shell is just waiting for me
as I hope to exist ever more honestly...
Oh Grace! Oh Mercy! Over there—in the sea.

To a Child in Need of a BandAid

© Clara Wruck | Class of 2025

It's for the small wounds
The ones you can hide, the ones
You can pretend are not there:
Perhaps out of sight
can mean out of mind.

A small wound may take up big space,
A big peace of mind
And misplace your usual grace.

And so, a small band-aid
has a big job to do.
Hugging the wound until
new skin comes.

Allowing you to live fearlessly again
Free from fear of skinned knees
And the anguish of IVs

In its place, you may see a scar.
A sign of healing
On your skin
A sign of strength,
symbolic of where you've been

Despite this, sometimes a band-aid
is not enough.

Sometimes your skin can't contain your love.
And when you spill out, a hug softens the pain
Still felt, still real.

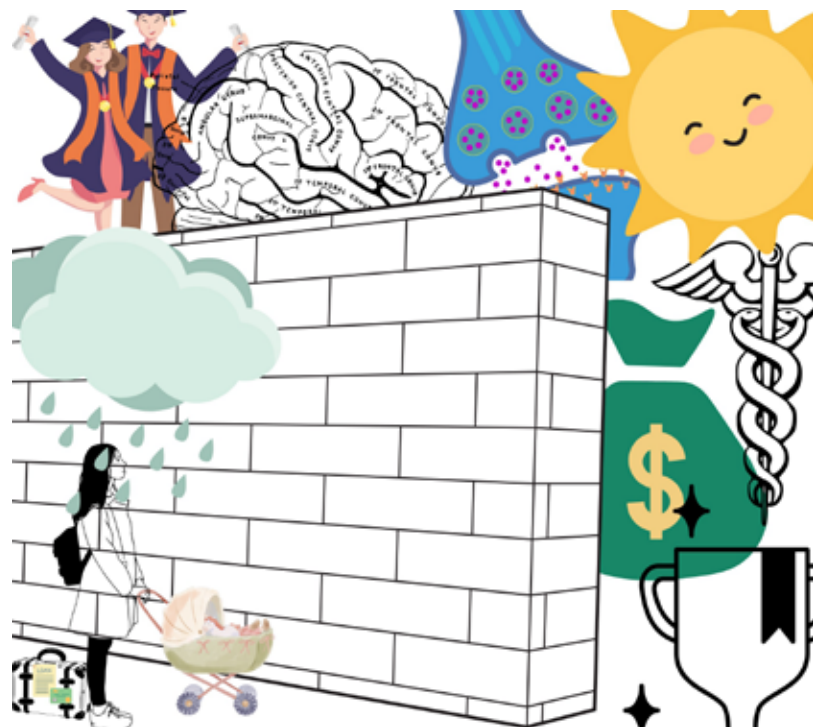
Sometimes it's the support of people
you really want to feel.

You may never regain that which you lost.
But you try to be whole with a little less.



Happy Occassion

© Himani Devabhaktuni | Class of 2025



Journey of Motherhood in Medicine

© Rachel Roy | Class of 2025

Rarity

© Hope Pesner | Patient

Rooted in the earth
Always growing
A birth
Tendrils showing
Shared memories
different perceptions
But eventually
Moving in a new direction.

Always reaching
Looking to learn
Moments teaching
Taking a turn.

Twisting roads
Encounters by chance
New abodes
Sharing a dance

Changing parts
Forward moving
In my heart
Time consuming

The steps I take
Where I go
Help to make
The destination known.

A role to play
In many tales
I'll have my say
Without fail.

Branching off
The what-ifs
Some may scoff
Push me over the cliff.

Uncertain
What I want
Pull back the curtain
Make a détente.

Days into years
Time passing
Alleviate my fears
Avoid crashing.

Due for inspection
A moment of candor
No chance of rejection
Still the road meanders

I see clarity
Deep in my soul
A rarity
I am my own.



Waiting

© Zhuolin Wang
Patient

Country Home

© Kimberly Perkins, RN, CCRC
Clinical Trials Office



Feather Brained and Giddy with Delight

© Linda Amos | Patient

As a small child I led a very plain and prim existence.
There was sickness and quiet desperation in our home.
My Grandpa suffered with dreaded Parkinson's Disease
And its presence haunted out every waking moment.

I was constantly being told to be quiet
Or else I was ferreted out the backdoor
And set on pillows on the porch swing like a fancy ornament
So he could rest after his seizures.

There was no humor in our household except
On the days when my Great Aunt Polly would arrive.
She'd sash shay her way in to house, unannounced
Wearing a hat with peacock plumes and ostrich feathers.

She was not a feather brained female
But, she always paraded wherever she went
In her big wide brimmed picture hats
Decorated with ostrich and bright colored feathers!

Anyone who ever saw her never knew
She was a silk weaver, who wore roller-skates
And scissors on her nimble fingers.
She was instead the embodiment of frivolousness!



Ornamental Radiance

© John Triscik
Patient

Evolve

© Charlotte Chambers (Age 13) | Family Member

Where once we were simple,
Life is so much more,
When life became complicated,
People called it "evolution."
But is it always better?
Why do we call it evolution?
Is it best for everybody?
Some people don't evolve like others,
Yet we think of evolution as progress.
When we hunted for food,
People still worked together,
Instead of fighting each other,
In nature's dance, a shared challenge.
Now we navigate a complex maze,
Where progress seems fleeting,
But as we strive for something grand,
We forget the strength of joining together.
So let us ponder what we've gained,
And what we've lost to time,
For in simplicity and ancient ties,
Lies the wisdom that modern life extinguishes.

Chimborazo

© Daniel R. George, PhD
Department of Humanities



The Bezoar

© Matthew Turner, MD

Department of Emergency Medicine

Based on an actual case from 1567.

It was too pretty a day to die, Jean thought glumly as he gazed out the window of his cell. He would have preferred a nice thunderstorm, perhaps some rain; even a good fog would've been preferable to the bright sunshine that baked the walls of the prison. Down in the courtyard below, he could just make out the red-stained block that they customarily used for nobles.

But they wouldn't be using that for a commoner, even if he had once been the personal chef to Charles, Ninth of His Name. Beheading was a luxury reserved for nobility. For Jean Crecy, the end would come at the end of the long rope dangling from the gallows next to the chopping-block.

Jean nervously rubbed at his throat and swallowed. He had been to his fair share of hangings – after all, who hadn't? Next to dancing bears and the occasional drunken riot, public executions were some of the best fun you could have in Paris – but being on the other side of the experience was not something that he was looking forward to.

Shouldn't have stolen those crucifixes, he cursed himself. After a moment's reflection, he amended the thought: *Shouldn't have gotten caught*. It was just his rotten luck that the Groom of the Stool had walked into the chapel at the worst possible time – and good King Charles did not abide thievery, not even from his cook.

Maybe it'll be quick, Jean thought glumly. Maybe the King would have mercy and have the executioner wrench on his feet to quickly snap his neck instead of leaving him to dangle in the wind for hours ... He let out a despairing sigh.

Behind him, the cell door creaked open. Jean steeled himself, said a silent prayer, and turned around.

"Hell-o!" The cheerful greeting caught him completely off-guard.

Jean blinked in surprise. Instead of one of the ironclad soldiers that guarded the king's prison, he found himself face-to-face with a smiling man nearly a foot shorter than him. "Uh, hello?" he said carefully.

The little man's smile widened. "Jean Crecy, is that right?" He had both of his hands clasped behind the small of his back, as if he was hiding something back there. Curious, Jean leaned to the side, but the man shifted to block his view. "No, no, no peeking!" he laughed. "Not yet."

"Um, yes," Jean nodded. "Jean Crecy, that's me." Was this some sort of trick?

"Ah, good." The man kept his hands behind his back, but he nodded pleasantly in Jean's general direction. "Lovely to meet you. I am Ambroise Paré, barber-surgeon to His Highness."

Now that Jean was looking more closely at the man, he *did* look vaguely familiar – he *had* seen that clever smile lurking around the royal court, come to think of it. "Uh, likewise."

"You have a problem, my friend," Paré shook his head and tutted. "In a few hours, those guards out there are going to trot you down to the gallows and hang you. Not even *I* can fix that."

"That, uh, that is a problem," Jean agreed meekly. "Do you think the king might –"

"And I have a problem," Paré went on. He extended out his right hand toward Jean. In the center of his palm was a small pebble-like structure, about the size and shape of a human thumb. "Know what this is?"

"It's a rock." Jean felt very stupid saying this.

"It's a *bezoar*," Paré corrected him. "Taken from the intestine of a goat. The University says it can cure any and all poisons, no matter the dose, no matter the severity. My problem is that there is no evidence for this. Nothing. Not a speck of evidence! The professors only say it because their professors told them that and *their* professors told them that!"

"I'm not following," Jean scratched his head.

"Proof," Paré breathed. "I want proof. Medicine needs to be built on logic and *proof*, not the words of some Greeks that died a thousand years ago! So I talked to the King, and I have a proposal for you, Jean."

Out came the left hand – this one holding a small crystal vial.

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

“Corrosive sublimate,” Paré explained. “Take this, and take the bezoar, and His Majesty declares that your sentence is completely commuted. You will walk out of this place a free man.”

Jean didn’t even need to think – he immediately grabbed for the vial, but Paré quickly jerked it away. One of the guards leaned around the door at the sound of the commotion and shot Jean a nasty glare. He quickly backed away.

“I should warn you,” the barber-surgeon said, “There is, ah, a *slight* chance of agonizing death if the bezoar doesn’t work. But it should.” He shrugged. “I think. All the experts say it will, anyway. Maybe.”

Slight chance of agonizing death or certainty of hanging? It was no choice at all. This time, Paré didn’t pull the poison away when Jean wrenched it from his fingers. “Bottoms up,” he said as he uncorked the vial and guzzled down the liquid. It went down surprisingly smooth.

Paré handed over the bezoar, and Jean quickly swallowed it down.

“Well?” the physician asked. “How do you feel?”

Jean shrugged. “Not that bad, actually. How long does it take to work?”

“Corrosive sublimate is *quite* fast. The dose I gave you could kill an elephant in just a – ”

~

It was the most satisfying lecture that Paré had ever given. He had waited years for an opportunity to rub such a victory in the face of the University’s most prestigious scholars, and he delivered his conclusion with venomous satisfaction.

“And *that*, gentlemen–” He made a great show of dropping an expensive bezoar on the floor, then crushing it beneath his heel. “–is proof that bezoars do not work!”



Mommy and Me

© Janhavi Mandal (Age 6) | Family Member



Mama & Baby Fox Journey Together

© Anabella Kalbach (Age 8)
Patient

Noon

© Mark Graboski

Sodexo Management, Food and Nutrition

A constant beep keeps me awake, the noise keeps me feeling away.
A smile comes across but it's mostly fake, these sounds don't keep my anxiety at bay.
A comfort is what I seek, a compassionate feeling is what I need.
Thoughts in my mind constantly leak, something to drink would be a good deed.
Passer-bys are constant, talking and typing are in my head.
I sit here and simply orant, what makes me stay in this bed
No idea why I am here, no idea when I can go home
No smiles to be had I fear, everything is shiny, everything chrome
Poked and prodded, no sleep I can find, nothing to eat or drink to make time go by.
My mind is full of thoughts to the point of a bind, all I want to do is go and say good-bye.
No one smiles in here makes me feel scared, no one tells me anything I fear I might just be dead.
Loneliness creeps in, I am unprepared, what will happen to me, tell me something, I should not have to dread.
Everyone walks by and I feel I have been here too long, I just want to go home, I want to go today.
This station needs to change, I can't stand the song. It feels like forever, but I feel I must stay.
I don't know what's wrong, I feel pain. Someone tell me something soon.
This is testing my patience; I don't want to be here long. I've been here since seven am and it's only noon.

Beach Path

© Jonathan Frazier | *Center Stage Arts in Health*



A Hospital's Hidden Roots

© **Andreas M. Wingert** | *Volunteer*

When you venture outside, take a look around
You'll see trees and plants above the ground
They depend on hidden roots to stay alive
They need that support in order to thrive!

A hospital functions in much the same way
With devoted, caring doctors helping every day
But without their support staff to keep them on track
They could not reliably have your back!

Like hidden roots which support your favorite tree
The oft-unheralded support staff help you and me
They ensure quality hospital care to make patients well
And put them on the path to feeling swell!

Food service specialists ensure everyone has a good meal
Since medical staff need nutrients to perform with zeal
Healthy food for each patient and guest
Helps make the hospital a place to heal and rest!

Environmental services staff ensure each surface is pristine
Fighting germs to keep the hospital clean
Infections are prevented since the clinics are pure
So patients and healthcare workers can feel secure!

You may notice that the life of a nurse
Involves doctors and patients with whom they converse
They work so hard, always on the go
Making good use of the myriad things they know!

Healthcare technicians collect samples and perform tests
They offer comfort to patients and families who feel stressed
Providing the medical team with information they need
And doing so much to help the patient succeed!

Like hidden roots which support your favorite tree
The oft-unheralded support staff help you and me
They ensure quality hospital care to make patients well
And put them on the path to feeling swell!



Upside Down Tree

© **Malgorzata Sudol**
Department of Medicine



Hidden Roots—Prince of Peace Abby, California

© **Eileen Hennrikus, MD**
Department of General and Internal Medicine

In Your House

© Anthony Sedun | Family Member

My left-handedness is becoming a problem these days
as I re-learn my letters, writing, drawing, and the like.
It's not that I've suffered a malady—minor or severe
—or acute trauma of the sort a soldier or airman
might get along the battle lines.

Rather, with every cycle of suns and moons, I grow more aware
how far my script slouches away from the tidy cul-de-sacs
and bold, confident boulevards of letters I've striven
to master since my first days here.

Writing. Drawing. Sketching. Scribbling.
All of it amounts to a quiet alchemy of sorts:
bending lines toward an unseen majesty.
Grasping the ordinary and forcing it—even in the face
of apparent or abject futility—toward a filigree of fortune
as yet unseen. The writer, after all, is a seer—above all,
a dreamer—a driver of dreams.

I suppose the silence of the page is temporary.
A toll to be paid. A laurel to be won. A plan to be saved.

So it is. An achievement a word at a time.
In time, a phrase. A clause. All together.
Akin to notes that await the violinist's gaze
and translation to a life writ aloud.

Call it song. Call it story. Remember: the strings
of the violin are round, and the movement of the arm
is infinite to infinite sound.
Then rest.

After all, physics acknowledges the stillness and the sound.
Here, we live along the lines of letters, the curls and
turns of geometry, acoustics, and light. Here,
we share the joy of ordinary insight.

In your house, the quiet is a cave where I retreat
—moment by moment, string—till I, unsettled with security,
step out to begin life all over again.

In your house, all the pages I ever wrote are saved: dropped
leaves of gnarly oak trees, and the Lord's own steps,
an autumn breeze along the field out back.

When I leave you and the kids in late spring,
I will remember our walks around the cul-de-sac and yard,
the ways we'd plan to finish the basement, and the smell
of fresh sourdough and coffee through the house.

For a time that seems interminable, I'll be away,
endeavoring to write again in almost another tongue,
a script so different than my daily scrawl of dad and
teacher and friend.

May your sighs become a prayer and your tears
become a well where you, too, encounter our Lord
who seeks you there.

Despite the palsy and poverty of my script—my scattered
leaves of love—I lift my life as a pen, one end scraping
the dirt and the other, like hands orans, pointing up
toward the atmosphere and light.



Adapting to Change

© Nicole Seacord | Patient

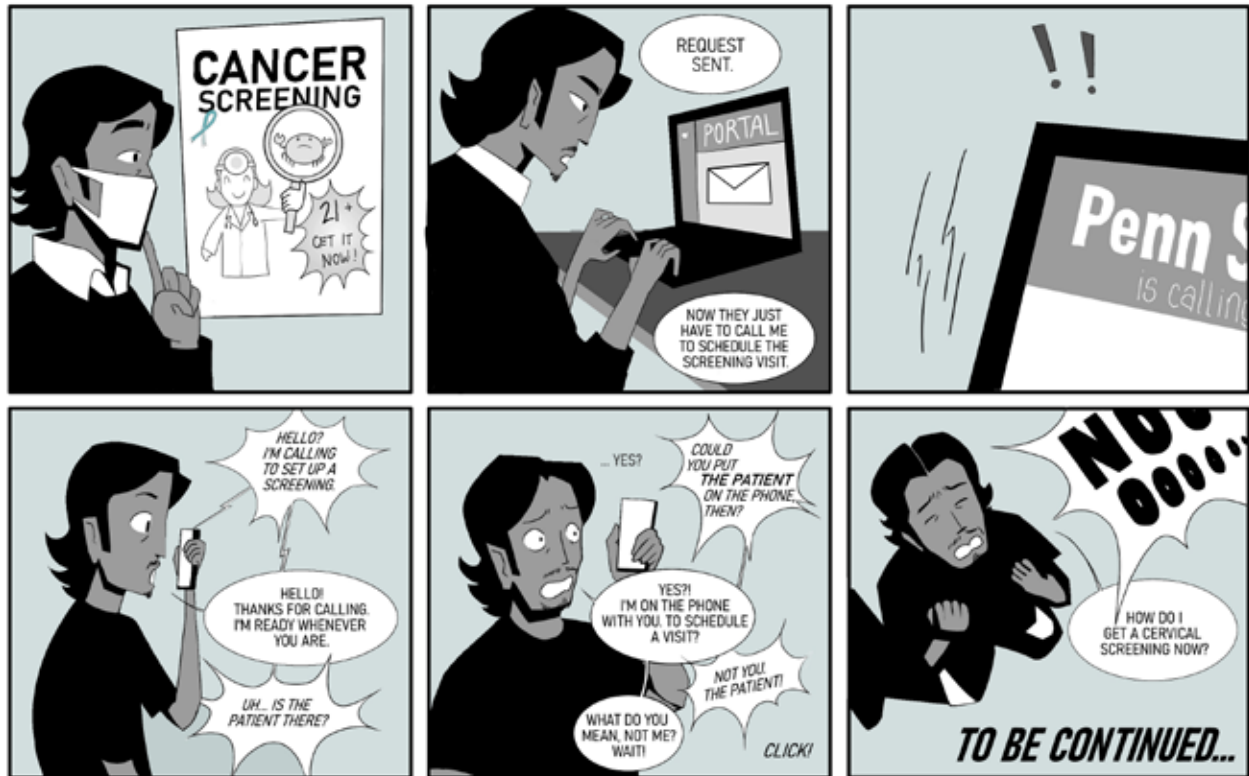
Student Highlight

This piece creates such a fun world and shows great care and attention to detail from the photographer.



A Sticky Job

© Devin DePamphilis
Family Member



The Screening: Part I

© Aparajita Rao | Graduate Student, Class of 2025

Hic

© David Carnish, M.A., M. Div., BCC
Clinical Pastoral Education

*This poem was written as a reflection while viewing
Caspar David Friedrich's work Monastery Ruins with Monks.*

The winter came
Wispings among the branches
Dusk or dawn
We knew not
Gothic now eerie
Markers unkept not forgotten
Of a time, we could remember
Though not retrieve
Whiteness had blanketed the earth
But roots are an Eastertide
Tearing through
Going into the depths
Vaulting to the heavens
Ruins mark what one was
As a procession not of what became of us
This is what we've risen above.



Frost and Flame

© Xuexin Zhang | Heart and Vascular Institute

Old Friend

© **Richard Cary Joel** | *Family Member*

Hello there, old friend,
it's me again,
I'd like you to know
that I put aside everything I was doing today,
to come out here for a visit with you.
Yes, I know it's been a long time ... admittedly, too long,
and I'm truly sorry for that,
but I'm afraid, the trip's not quite as easy as it used to be ...
Not, with these old bones of mine.

Ya know, one of the nicest things about being your friend,
is that I always know where to find you.
You put down those roots of yours ages ago,
and you're still here,
in the same spot where I first found you ...
Steadfast and reliable, I'd have to say,
not at all affected by the changing times,
or those silly fads which keep people so darn busy these days.

You're one heck of a good listener too,
and that's a quality rather hard to come by,
as most folks just love to hear themselves talk.

We've been friends for longer than I care to admit,
but I do feel, that the years have been kind to the both of us,
Now, I realize my hair's gotten a bit thinner and a good deal greyer,
and perhaps I've acquired a few more wrinkles than when you last saw me,
but frankly, your bark isn't as smooth as it used to be either,
and as I run my hand up and down your trunk,
I can't help but notice, that it's more like sandpaper, than silk ...
and you do have a good deal more of those bumps ...
I mean, burls ... than you used to.

But you and I've been around long enough to know,
that it's not what's on the outside, but on the inside, that counts.
I'd guess, at this point,
you've managed to accumulate about sixty of those rings of yours,
and I, a good deal of that Arthur-itis,
but I do believe our hearts are still as youthful,
as when I first came out here as a child,
and happened upon a spry young sapling ... that was you.

Now, that I look,
I see the swing I made when twelve,
is still hanging from that old limb of yours ...
Thought it would have fallen off years ago?
I can only assume that your canopy served to shield it from the elements.
No ... I'm not going to try, so don't bother asking,
because at my age, I'm no longer a swinger,
and I sincerely doubt those frayed ropes would hold me up,
even if I was.



Mt. Greylock

© **Erin White, BA, CPhT, CNA**
Medical Intermediate Care Unit

continued on next page

Continued from previous page

We certainly have shared a lot over the decades, haven't we,
and before I go ... I'd like you to know,
that I feel truly blessed.
I've cherished every moment we've ever spent together,
and I've no doubt, you have as well...
So rest assured, my woody pal,
that I'll keep on coming out here,
until that fateful day arrives,
when these old legs fail to carry me,
or your roots no longer hold you to the ground,
because I'm sure you'll agree
there's nothing more important,
than having an old friend.

Beetles

© **Emily Hess, RN** | *Penn State Cancer Institute*

My first lesson in death was the beetles
We drowned each summer.
They ate our grape vines, gnawed the leaves
to a fine lattice of thin brown spindles.
We came each morning, toting buckets frothed with rainwater
And dishsoap.
It's an art, to flick a glutton-drowsy beetle
Into the bucket without spurring it to flight,
To keep it unaware until it falls into the sticky suds
That traps its wings.
Their bodies bloating in the water was a lesson
In the stages of decay. They would burst
And fester in the sun-ripe slaw, the live thrashing
Against the split shells of drowned brethren.
I can't eat grapes without thinking of them,
Without smelling the rancid stench of rot
That rose in waves from the brown slurry.
They might have been beautiful, a lesson in aesthetics,
their coppery frames
Iridescent with turquoise and emerald, wings
Burnished metal-bright,
The little knob of their bodies edged in twin triplets
Of hinged black legs. If only they didn't threaten to turn
Our Concord bounty to a reticulation of shorn vines.

A Huddle of Cygnets

© **Susan Landis, CRNA**

Retired, Department of Anesthesiology and Perioperative Medicine



Fall at the Mill

© **Oana Bollt, BS** | *Genome Sciences Core Facility*



In the Light of Small Things

© **Hannah Heselton** | *Class of 2027*



A Recipe to Heal the World

© Michael P. Hayes, PhD | Penn State Cancer Institute

Now hold onto your hat here, this recipe is much like an upside-down pineapple cake. The secret of this recipe is not about what to put in. Oh, no – most definitely not. To heal the world, this recipe calls out rather than for – note, importantly, not for – what must be taken out.

- To begin, do not waste the heart on fear. Please, you must remove every last drop.
- Next, hand-in-hand with fear, extract every molecule of hate. Exercise great care to ensure not a single molecule remains.
- Then, sift fine. Discard any grains of yours/no mine, right/wrong, win/lose, us/them as there's no place in healing for the zero-sum disgrace.
- Too, allow the healing to compost. Give ample space for the noise and distaste to dissipate.
- Importantly, lop off the top and dispose – like toxic waste – all remaining mistrust. Even a smidge feeds great distaste.

After what remains warms, fully forms, and comes to rest, take an ample portion to slowly digest the healing. Healing that is rooted in great measure of compassion and CARE for you, for me, and for everyone everywhere.

Death of a Friend

© Ronald Domen, MD
*Emeritus Professor of Pathology,
Medicine, and Humanities*

Awake in that early morning hour
before the sound of the alarm
listening to the rain and wind beat
against the house like the ventilator
trying to pound air into your diseased
unforgiving lungs and your oxygen
starved heart failing because cancer
has consumed everything your body
had to offer. In that moment I knew
that you were gone despite
the drug induced coma
meant to ease your fight for air,
as if death could be sedated away.
Now only the memories remain.

A chilly late September morning
welcomes the first day of fall.

Your favorite season when
it all goes back to simplicity,
a time of renewal. A fine
misty rain is in the air,
a female rain. The wild geese
are flying south.

Forgotten

© Ananya Das
Comparative Medicine

Today I deleted the picture you sent me.
I do not need to see it anymore now.
The image is etched against my heart
and its colors are rooted in my brain.
Your smile, pleasing like the gentle dew drops
kissing the innocence of the unopened buds,
brings back memories of the halcyon days,
nights and morns of togetherness and sharing.
Jealousy worms its roots within me.
Did I ever make you smile like that?
Melancholy settles down
like a think blanket around me
and strains of gloom travel through my veins.
You do not need me
to fill your world with happiness anymore.

Subterranean Bloom

© John Garman, MD

Department of Psychiatry

Trees with roots
Roots with trees
A bidirectional constant
Symbiotically disposed
Growth from the dirt
from below all awareness
Shaped by the weather
of the days
and the collection of seasons

Life in the air
of fresh breezes,
harsh winds,
gentle rains and storms
Felt by the bark and branches,
and the leaves
Leaving traces of presence
(fruits of our labor)
scattered to the earth
Decaying and descending
To be taken up again

Atop the depths
Starved and fed
by anchors in the ground
Blood pumping through time
Thirst quenched by xylem vessels
Deep needs and hunger
satiated by phloem

The blossoms and the falls,
swayed by the soil
The extension of roots,
paved by the walking tree,
extending its reach
and exposed

That subterranean bloom
of life above the surface
That collection of trees
underneath and unseen
Both always present
and felt by the world



Agua Fresca, Camino de Santiago

© Michael Flanagan, MD

*Department of Family and Community Medicine
University Park Campus*



North Shore Beach - Hawaii

© Albert Fulvio

Patient

My Child, My Dread

© Julie Vallati, RN | *Developmental Pediatrics*

When I see her, I don't recognize this person?
A dark shroud covers the tomb that once was her
I see a hollow shell, a deeply gutted being of sorrow.
I see despair, sadness, and hopelessness.
Unkept, uncaring and unclean
How can she offend me?
Total disregard for the life and the body she was given.
The body and the life I gave her.
I love her, I fought fiercely for years to bring her back
I hoped, prayed, begged and believed.
At times I see a small glimmer of the child I had held, loved, and nurtured.
But it is never long before the darkness overtakes her again.
This sadness is more than heartbreak, it is devastation.
The pain so deep I feel it in my bones, it tightens my chest when I breathe
penetrating my soul.
Can anything ease this pain?
Or will it continue to grow, to fester, to ooze out into the other areas of my life.
To taint my thoughts and squash the joy to overtake the good.
Will I let it?

Foundations

© David Simmons, DMin, BCC | *Pastoral Services*



If It Can't Be Seen, It Can't Be Heard

© Akram Imam, MD, MS

Clinical Resident, Department of General and Internal Medicine

I remember the hard moments and I want it to all be lie
My smiles masking the pain, my soul letting out a cry
I want to scream for help at the top of my lungs but I am mute
Mute, as there is no space for my emotions; it's just a fute
I turn my cheek and turn of my mind
Mindless; going throughout the day leaving my feelings behind
How can I express my pain to someone, will they then carry that burden?
I don't want them to witness my demons; I'm certain
It's a lose lose; I don't want to cause any pain
I have no out I am suppressed by these feelings; chained
There is one thing to do and bury it deep within
To forget all those feelings, and start from ground zero; begin
A beginning, the fresh start I desired
But what i didn't know, my emotions were kindling; a burning fire
This fire has grown and left me with ash
Grey and hopeless; can no longer run away from the feelings; dash
I dismissed my feelings as if they were small
Yet they compounded to something much more and made me fall
I can't bear this feeling any more
I need to let out my scream; kick down that door
That door that trapped my feelings in a deep dark place
Let the light be shone on my emotions, and enjoy the taste
The taste of sharing my feelings and being free
Those who truly love do not consider it a burden; but rather glee
Glee to the fact that the person they love is in a better state of mind
Able to acknowledge my feelings and not walk this earth blind

About the piece:

I initially wrote this piece to shed light on the struggles patients endure—PTSD after hospitalization, chronic pain, and the heartbreak families face watching loved ones suffer. It transcends patient care, reflecting universal battles we all face. Ultimately, it's a reminder that you're not alone—we're in this together.

Musical Reflections

© Christy Obetz | Family Member



Dead Sticks

© Brenda Grubb

Emergency Department Observation Unit

"Oh, Death where is your sting?"
She grabs another twig and snaps it in half.
Long pieces, short pieces all with different ends.
She stops after every couple of bends to the ground
to stare at the old decaying tree.
Is it truly old or just dying away?
Will the tree make it through the Winter or will Winter's
relentless wind do it in?
Dead twigs, nothing but dead pieces of the tree.
What does it mean?
These twigs at one time did have a purpose – they
were a part of this tree.
They had life in them. They produced leaves that
provided for the tree.
Don't we all have pieces of dead Dead twigs, that
we shed off and throw to the side.
The harshness of life pulls and breaks parts of us.
Past relationships, hopes, and dreams that have been
scattered and laid to the side.
Diseases and sicknesses that literally take us
piece by piece and bring on decay.
Twig by twig, piece by piece she picks at them.
She throws them in the pile.
Some of the sticks she doesn't even look at.
One catches her eyes.
Three small, intricate, delicate lichens hanging
upside down like umbrellas.
They cling to this twig.
She marvels at the beauty of them.
Sometimes there is beauty in death.
The passing into peace and rest.
The healing of relationships.
She glances around, no other intricate designs.
Only signs of decay on the branches.
Some deaths do bring on decay for others.

The decay pulls them down, takes the life from them.
The effects of death never leave, just infects others
around them. She flings these sticks hard.
Those relationships that were a fungus from the
beginning. She thought they were new and alive,
but from the beginning they drained her.
She looks around again, so many twigs.
She should use a rake to make it easier for herself.
Trying to gather every one of them,
overwhelms her.
No use worrying about all those little pieces,
by Spring more of the tree will come down and
the true cleaning will begin.
The rest of the woods will be showered by the light
of the fire
when the rest of the dead sticks will be
consumed by fire.
Nothing but Dead Sticks.



Nature's Gift

© Ann Hubbard

Gift Shop, Holy Spirit Medical Center

Echoes in the Garden

© **Jamilette Cintron** | *Penn State Cancer Institute*

It was the strangest feeling, almost indescribable. The air seemed to have been suctioned out of the room, yet I was still breathing. My vision hyper-focused on the most unnecessary details. For instance, I had never realized my doctor had streaks of red dancing in her hair.

My hearing faded, as though I had stepped into an old Charlie Brown cartoon. “Whomp, whomp, whomp ...

Terminal ... Whomp, whomp, whomp... Darla.”

“Do you understand what I’m saying?” she asked sharply.

I slowly looked up into her hazel eyes, another detail I had never noticed before. “You have really beautiful eyes, Doc.”

“Darla, I’m sorry; there isn’t anything else we can do for you.” Her voice was kind, but my compliment meant little to her at that moment.

I nodded slowly, nervously biting my top lip, a bad habit I’d had for as long as I could remember.

“I understand.” I rose to my feet, grabbing my coat from the oversized chair. My movements felt sluggish, as if I were walking through water. When my hand touched the cold door handle, I glanced over my shoulder. “How much longer?”

She looked away. “Three months.”

I raised an eyebrow, almost surprised. “Thanks for everything, Doc.”

I thought I was walking to my car, but somehow, I ended up in the hospital garden.

It was a beautiful little space four cherry blossom trees, a wishing fountain in the middle, and lush bushes that secluded the garden from the hustle and bustle of the hospital.

I sat on the black iron bench. December always had a certain magic glow to it, but today, it seemed blue. The magic felt depleted, as if the world itself mourned. The sun was dimmer, and even the cold wind had lost its sting when it kissed my cheek.

In its place, there was nothing. I felt like a walking zombie, an empty shell of the woman I once was.

The volume of my self-pity was broken by a familiar voice echoing in my mind. A voice that once brought peace now filled me with sorrow.

“Death comes for us all.”

It sliced through my chaotic thoughts, settling into the quiet corners of my heart.

My grandmother had always been a wise woman. Her words carried me through life’s battles, shaping me into a better mother, wife, and woman. I never imagined that her beauty and strength would come back to haunt me.

“Death comes for us all.”

The memory sent me spiraling back to the day she passed. I remembered her soft brown face, illuminated by the sun filtering through the open window. The breeze whispered peace into the room.

“Mi hija,” she had called, pulling me close. I recalled her lips brushing against my ear, but her final words were drowned by the weight of shock as she drifted from this world to the next.

A bright red cardinal fluttered by, interrupting my thoughts and pulling me back to the present. His vibrant wings painted the garden in color.

And then, like the flick of a light switch, I remembered her whisper.

“Death comes for us all. Embrace the peace she brings. Remember the love life provided. Use the memories to light your path. And know that I will always be waiting.”

Finally, my troubled soul found a sliver of peace. I stood, watching as the magic gradually returned to the world around me. It granted me the strength to face another day.

Facing death offers us a rare opportunity to become the most selfless version of ourselves.

Back to the Ship

© Christy Lucas, MD | *Alumnus, Class of 2020*

Walking into your house, I smell the smell of *your* house. I don't quite know how to describe it, other than when I breathe it in, I immediately know where I am, what I will see, who I should see. Only, you aren't there. Your favorite chair – your chair – sits facing the TV like it always has, the headrest worn down by the friction and oils of your gentle gray hair. I look at it and swear I can almost see your face looking back at me, feeling like one of those people who sees the Virgin Mother in a burrito. I wait for you to come in from the kitchen, walk up the stairs, anything, then sit in your chair. I sit on the couch, and I see you sitting in that chair in the clothes I had dressed you in leaving the hospital, telling a story of visiting Dorchester, Massachusetts in the Navy, asking me if I liked my job, naming all of your medications with unexpected accuracy for age 93, wondering if God loved you, eating scrambled eggs, apologizing for a different Christmas, telling me you knew that I loved you.

I walk through out your house, feeling nebbly as I ruffle through your drawers and cabinets, waiting for you to say, “Whatcha doin’.” Only you don’t.

Your pillbox on the kitchen table stands as a record of your last days. Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday are empty. Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday remain filled, just as I had left them a week ago. I open the black-and-gold kitchen cabinet, and I take the only thing I want from your house—the plate from your scrambled eggs and ketchup that you ate with a spoon. The last supper I made you.

Your bedroom is just how you left it. Your clothes in the closet still smell like you. Your sweaters are studded with small, shed, silvery strands. I find snapshots and newspaper clippings that you have hidden away and saved, certainly because they gave you meaning; I try to understand the story you are telling me in saving these.

Your shoes line the floor, waiting for you to step into them. To leave and come back. Come back and leave. Come back. How cruel it is to be in your house, and you are not there. The voicemail of your phone is filled with missed calls, requesting your call back. Please call back. I want to tell them he is not home. But he is home. He always makes it back to the ship. He told me so.



Saturday Night

© Tim Attinger | *Family Member*



Moonlight Jubilee

© Daniel R. George, PhD | *Department of Humanities*

Re-Mothering

© Caroline Triscik | *Patient*

Inside myself, a bear
awakens from a hibernation —
a sleep of self-doubt, a voice
buried, frozen in the longest
winter, a paralyzed bellow —
she raises herself up
with the spring crocuses, widens
her gaze to see
the reflection in the thawing
lake, the shape of her
self-assured body —
pats her palms in the water,
stirs it like anger, righteous
and without fear —
unlike the rage she had
turned toward herself

I discover my great-great-great
grandmother's name was Seraphina,
fiery one, falling between
the branch of Carolines
from whom I am named. She
stands alone
and with me, finding
her life and spirit
within myself, raising
my voice
like the mother bear raises
her cubs up in her mouth, lifts
them in praise to the sky, carries
them on her back

I hear that humans are the only
species who produce tears,
not even primates have
this capacity, yet there are
other ways to cry
mothers circled around,
standing together
raising ourselves, beating
our breasts to create
the sound of thunder —
to speak our place
with our bodies

Echoes of Forgotten Walls

© Hannah Heselton | *Class of 2027*



Stories Written in Silence

© Megan Jones | *Family Member*



Her Dilemma

© Barbara Junker | Patient

The mother was a middle school teacher, her husband a physician. Their son was a sophomore and reserve quarterback at Penn State. His sister was a junior in high school and played basketball. Both academic achievers, guided and advised, not pushed, with the usual sibling squabbles, taunts and creative thought comically appalling designations that made their mother exclaim Oh dear Lord! The language in this house! And her husband smiled at all three retorts. He'd studied adolescent psychology. Big brother called her Stretch from her increasing height, Too Tall and Uncoordinated Consortium of Rabid Calcium, Redwood, Boy! Warned her to avoid sunlight because she grew another inch, soon the tallest girl in school. Her hypothalamus could no longer maintain and control that fathoming body, brother diagnosed. In response, she called him Shorty, Aphid, Fly Spittle and threatened to squash him underfoot.

Merciful Heavens! Children, please! cried the kitchen wafting supper. Where was their father in all of this!

Starving to death, she heard from the living room as he folded a medical magazine and his bifocals.

The brother of Beelzebub taught Stretch to jump shoot and rehearsed with her in the carport and borough park, however. She hugged him hard before his commute back to State College, eyes turning misty yet vowing to run onto the field and kick him if he got injured.

She could, being the biggest one out there, he replied as his embrace reciprocated.

A handsome family and home. Attractive, focused kids. Caring and sharing parents in and outside the household, at work and church. Idyllic, blessed. The family portrait hung in the living room showed a mother and father standing behind, hands on the shoulders of their sitting, respective gender progeny. Warm smiles—on somewhat mischievously—gazes forward to follow viewers across the room.

The living room.

Then the house caved in.

A winter Sunday night when Vile Bro had already departed, and she was walking carefully back from her bestest gal pal's house. A solitary sea gull—a river gull this far inland—shrieked once from the blank

heavy sky, startling her. A block on, a neighbor's crimson shovel chopped frozen sludge, flickering like an emergency light. She arrived just as the state police cruiser, Nittany Lion white with a huge blue 32 on its roof, pulled silently away.

All the windows and front yard lamp were dark. She ran, fell, slipping up, running, falling, a wild stagger, clumsier than her brother's critiques.

She tore through the front door into a vacuum.

A high school graduation gift, his car and he had flown off black ice.

They were hypnotized, ordered about by procedures like each eating alone and washing a plate, utensils, sleeplessness, passing one another with a glance, perfunctory unfelt smiles, eyes downcast again at a closed door and empty bedroom, accepting visitors, players, adult and school friends, phone calls, thanking condolences, the horror and unbelievability of a funeral. Benumbed fortunately during an episode when they would've curled up under the shower or in a closet hugging their knees and wide unblinking eyes seeing nothing.

Sometimes a mother's nocturnal scream as this nightmare was reality. Silence and muteness in the imploded house. Living suspended to leaves randomly adrift in a stream without end. Even the doctor-dad a witness before but never up close.

In this timelessness somehow came a Sunday morning and a crack in the trance. Slight normalcy finally tilting back. Dressed for church, her parents sat at the breakfast table, murmuring so it appeared to their coffee cups. She entered wearing a bathrobe. Her gorgeous violet eyes blazed. They looked up questioningly.

She wasn't going.

Oh sweetheart, mom began. She should—

She should what? Attend the service like before? Pray? Worship Him? Give thanks? Profess faith? Sorry. She was a little short of all that stuff right now.

Honey, it's a test of their—

A test! Taking a life?

His ways are mysterious. He didn't do that, take her brother's life.

Continued from previous page

The sister's irises turned molten, liquid melted gems. Right! Correct! He didn't do that! He didn't do anything! Didn't protect him, didn't save him, an environmental engineering student who planned to better this polluted world of His. That sure makes sense.

He understands. Omniscient. He lost a Son, too.

An *immortal* Son. Was hers?

Their mother jerked like slapped and immediately her girl-child apologized, softer, but her gaze was anger, near-hatred.

Baby, don't lose faith, belief, because of this

Oh, she hadn't. She truly believed in His existence, just wondered where it was. Mighty obedient and devout of her mother and father though. Wow. Maybe God should ask for her forgiveness. Now that's a switch, a paradox, no? Or anger Him, snuff her, also? Maybe He could find her, unlike her brother.

Their coffees had cooled. Let her go, the physician gently diagnosed to his wife, his reassuring bedside timbre for the ailing. They left for church and she went to her room to dress, not daring a glimpse at brother's door.

The house was still collapsing, shrinking in a different way, the quietude of alone, no people, the walls closing in and curiously echoing the soundlessness of vacant. This weighty hush and the bleak *feel* like a smoke, drowning and thick, paralyzing her lungs. She could hear the forlorn wail of a train horn miles away.

Wrestling into stubborn clothes, she took the stairs in two leggy bounds and literally sprawled into her mother's car, screeching rubber to escape that dark gravity of the rooms, carport basketball court, front yard, reaching to grip and cage her again.

But a tentacle of memories still coiled about her mind.

She sat hugging her knees in the bleachers of the field where he had played. Deadened light towers and scoreboard and shuttered concession stand waiting for the next season because there is a season for everything and everyone. Alone with only the smell of winter and ghosts rippling the grass. On this Sunday, her sanctuary.

She prayed earnestly. Amid the crashing waves of every single negative emotion she clambered and stuttered and threw herself, her writhing thoughts

heavenward. White temper, acrimony, sarcasm, sorrow, confusion, lostness, panic, fear, helpless and hopeless. She apologized. Heard, accepted, or ignored but she was a human.

The conundrum of the cross. Up—excellent! Down—bad. Straying left or right—hange, appeal. Besides the greatest gift, sacrifice and debt, it symbolized to her arms outstretched.

Guess she needed a sign, she concluded.

A finger tapped her shoulder. She didn't jump: God knew where she was. Her bestest friend slid down beside her. Hadn't seen her in church with her folks. Figured she might be here. Great minds, huh?

Wordless for minutes, then gal pal offered what would big, bad brother be doing in this situation? Fighting and winning. What would he want for clumsy Stretch, be doing for her? Shaking his head in dismay, then demonstrating and encouraging, right? Her tall gal pal had to nod.

Basketball began. She got a boyfriend and her parents got worried. He was tall, too, a tight end on the football team, attending and grinning at the girl's hoops. He wasn't alone. Once during every game, galloping across court, she'd glance into the bleachers, smirk, offer a little finger wave, knowing big brother also was nearby, certainly in heart and memory.



Watching

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Biochemistry & Molecular Biology

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