

# UC Irvine

## Plexus

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Peer reviewed



this edition of PLEXUS is dedicated to

**THOMAS SAGE HAND**

March 27, 1985 — January 15, 2012

# FOR THE SAGE

by Stephanie Bravo, MS3

With a twinkle in your eye  
And mischief in your smirk  
You wore your wild side with pride.  
You lived your life to the fullest  
Free and unrestricted.  
Now you truly are free.  
Free of the chains that held you down  
To this conventional life.  
You are nowhere near,  
Yet everywhere and all around.  
On the wind I'll hear your voice,  
Through the fire I'll feel your spirit,  
And in the earth I'll seek you out.  
Looking up at the night's sky  
I'll see you peering back at me  
With a twinkle in your eye.

In loving memory for my fellow kindred spirit  
and PRIME-LC brother Thomas Sage Hand.

EDGE OF LIFE by Trung Thai, MD // photography







**1. WHEN THE SUN GOES DOWN** by Tanni Thai, Senior Financial Analyst // photography **2. AZZIE MEMORIES** by Betty Wong, Fellowship Program Coordinator // oil on canvas **3. WAITING** by Audrey Nguyen, MS2 // photography **4. GRANDDAUGHTER AND GRANDMA** by Cipriano Hurtado, Security // photography **5. FLOWER IN CAMBODIA** by Carter English, MS1 // photography **6. ELEPHANTS AT DAI NAM** by David Tran, MS2 // photography **7. INSIDE A CRYSTAL** by Sharyn Danielson, Executive Assistant // photography

# PAINTED NAILS

by Samantha Costantini, MS2

I got them painted  
In my last weeks of life  
I don't know why  
There seemed more important things to do  
And yet I went

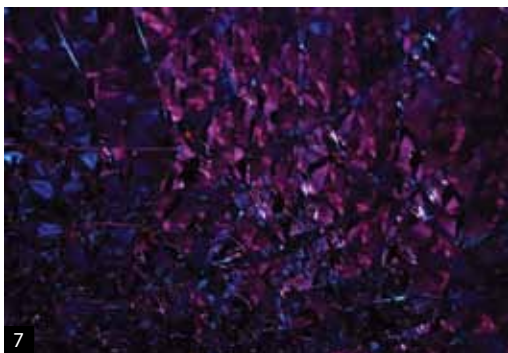
I picked the color of the first rose  
My husband ever gave to me  
Red was too romantic  
Yellow was too friendly  
So he chose a beautiful lavender  
And that same hue  
Graced my fingers  
From that afternoon  
Into the afterlife

And as I lay in the hospital bed  
Though my hands were obstructed  
By pipes and wires  
My nails, petals of that first bouquet  
Reminded me of the love  
That filled my life  
Until my last moments

Little did I know  
That a weary medical student  
Lost in the stress of a long day  
And far too busy for manicures  
Would notice a flash of purple  
In the stark white of the lab

And would realize, in that instant  
That the life before her was, in fact,  
A life

That through me, her first patient  
She would acquire the tools  
To touch the lives of so many others  
With her newly painted  
Lavender fingernails





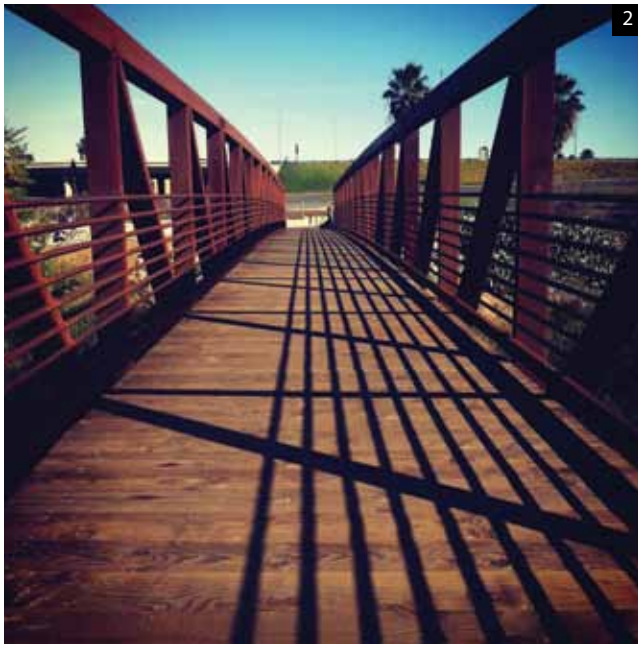
# IN PLAIN SIGHT

by Tiffany Tu, MS3

It's hard for me to imagine what her world was like. Silent, filled with undecipherable characters, communicating with the world by grunts and a sign language only her family and husband understood. She came to us for twisting abdominal pain on her right side. Somehow, with the help of her Spanish-speaking family, we managed to piece together that this pain had started this morning and persisted throughout the day. While she was in the ED, she noticed some vaginal bleeding as well. Her periods had never been regular, and were generally erratic and unpredictable. Her only pregnancy was one that had spontaneously aborted several years before. To distract her while the technician performed a vaginal ultrasound, I asked my patient and her husband how they had met. Through her signs and her husband's translation, I learned that they had both worked as dishwashers at the same restaurant. It was love at first sight for him, she played hard to get. A quick glance at her needed no translation; the mischievous look in her eyes was apparent as she recounted the story. But eventually she came around, and now they had been married for two years. She asked if I was married, and I told her that my then boyfriend, now fiancé, had been dating for two years. Giggling, she signed to her husband who told me that even though

the acquisition room was dark, she could still see me blushing. Somehow, her silent world had managed to keep her spirit and sense of humor intact. Watching the two of them was a strangely beautiful experience. He adored her, and she trusted him completely. It didn't matter to him that her world was silent and had no words. He was her husband, she was his wife, and in them I could see that love "always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." The technician finished her exam and as my resident came in her forehead furrowed as she reviewed the images. Though her urine pregnancy test was positive, her blood levels of B-hCG, the "pregnancy hormone" were not sufficiently elevated. Her ultrasound had revealed a potential pregnancy in her Fallopian tubes, and fluid in the dependent portions of her abdominal cavity, likely blood. She was told she needed emergent surgery to remove the mis-implanted pregnancy, and the residents scurried around to make sure everything was in place to take her to the operating room. When she was brought in, I imagined how terrified she must feel, at the complete mercy of those around her without her family or husband at her side. Hoping she would recognize me in spite of my scrubs, mask, and blue bouffant cap, I took her hand until the anesthesia worked its magic.





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Fortunately, the surgery progressed uneventfully, and I helped explain to the family the specifics of her follow-up care.

“He adored her, and she trusted him completely. It didn’t matter to him that her world was silent and had no words.”

I thought of this couple often for the next several days, even though she was discharged in stable condition the night of her surgery. His quiet, simple devotion to her. Her trust in him—and in us, medical students, residents, staff—even though we were strangers. That as I daily attempt to understand and dissect the nuances, rationalizations, controversies that permeate my life, they shouldn’t crowd out the simple things I know to be true. That sometimes, as we struggle to piece things together, we realize the answers have always been there—just hiding in plain sight.



5

1. **MORNING ON LAKE TITICACA** by Lorianne Burns, MS1 // photography 2. **BRIDGE FROM THE DOG PARK** by Linda Mah, Administrative Analyst // photography 3. **TIS A RUFF PUPPY LIFE** by Erica Dorfman, MS2 // photography 4. **MY DREAMS** by Fatima Manesh, Cancer Survivor // watercolor 5. **PAINTED LADIES** by Samantha Costantini, MS2 // photography





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3



# DOWNSTAIRS MY FATHER IS DYING

by Johanna Shapiro, PhD



Downstairs my father is dying  
Upstairs we are sleeping  
It is 4:00 in the morning  
A noise below jerks me awake

The death rattle? A call for help?  
Heart thudding, I hurry down  
the steep stairwell

In his hospital bed  
my father is singing  
his voice quavering  
yet startlingly loud

I recognize  
a sturdy hymn  
from my childhood  
A Mighty Fortress is our God

What are you doing, dad?  
I ask unnecessarily  
Singing, damnit, he replies  
Annoyed at the interruption

It is 4:00 in the morning  
We should be sleeping not singing  
But what can I do?  
He is my father  
And he is dying

On the next line I join in  
a little late  
Luther's sonorous melody  
our only bulwark  
against the dark



**1. PARISIANNE AFTERNOON** by Minh-Ha Tran, DO // photography **2. IN A HURRY** by Trung Thai, MD // photography **3. PORTRAIT OF MARA** by Rolanda Engstrom, Art for the Soul // oil on wood **4. B&W** by Stefano Sensi, MD, PhD // photography **5. CAMBODIA** by Daniel Nagasawa, MS4 // photography **6. GRAND CANYON** by Earl Stauffer, Quest Project Analyst // photography



1

# QUESTIONS FOR A NEWBORN

by Ryan Serrano, MS3



2

What is going on in that tiny, albeit sometimes massive, odd-shaped head of yours?

What are you seeing? What are you feeling? How much of this are you processing? How exactly do you perceive the world? If only you knew that I don't actually disappear when I hide my face behind my hands.

Why do you cry when I play with your legs? Does it hurt? Or does it just terrify you because no one has ever done that before?

Do you realize how much pain you just put your mom through? Don't worry, she would do it again in a heartbeat.

Does it annoy you that I've tested your Moro reflex 10 times just because I think it's funny?

Why does putting you in a 'burrito' have the uncanny ability to put you to sleep?

Do you know how much your parents love you? You could push another baby out of a crib and your Dad would probably say "That's my boy!"

And your mom – your mom was sent home by the doctors two days after your delivery, but she refused to step foot outside without you in her arms. Twelve days later, she still won't leave your incubator.

Did you know you made me so nervous that I was sweating from head to toe in a room full of your parents and family? Thank you so much for not crying uncontrollably. Now, if you don't go to Harvard, they will blame it on their obstetrician and not the third year medical student that woke you up from your nap.

Do you have any memories of your sister? You guys spent seven and a half months cramped into a space only meant for one, so I know you must have made some sort of connection. And although I know you cry because you are hungry, on some level you must also be weeping for the loss of what would have been your best friend.

- 1. FEBRUARY BLOSSOM** by Aurora Cruz, MS1 // photography  
**2. WONDER** by Linda Hogsett, Ultrasound Technologist // photography  
**3. AMAZON RAINBOW** by Lorianne Burns, MS1 // photography  
**4. RED ROOM** by Gina Youn, Patient // acrylic





3

# SONNET FOR THE WAITING ROOM

by Steven Cramer, MD

At times I still can find your loving glow  
Unspoken soft caress that made two one  
It grabbed my heart and breath so long ago  
And warmed our years forever midnight sun

But now these days a shadow from inside  
The fear, it takes much more than meets the eye  
In darkness all connections are denied  
Your hand so cold retracts, and I know why

You worry that the news will be the least  
And that I'll crumble, scared to see things through  
But love is not the thing of feral beasts  
The holes I fill they lead me back to you

The doctor enters, looks at you then me  
I find your hand and grip it naturally



4



# THE FIRST DAY

by Rolanda Engstrom. Art for the Soul

The fall afternoon rose- orange sun has plenty of room to shine through the bare trees. A lazy breeze rustles the papers people carry to and from the many buildings of the UCI Cancer Center. Sitting on a bench under the trees I wait with my pen and sketchbook looking for a face that speaks to me, one with a story to tell, feelings to draw, and emotions to color.

A blue, sedan pulls up in front of me. The passengers look vaguely familiar. A few weeks back, I passed them in the elevator. She drives; he is in the passenger's seat. She parks the car talking all the while. He just listens, or does he? The fear and uncertainty in his eyes tell all. Getting out of the car, he stumbles. He is unsteady on his feet, turning slightly in circles, unsure of where to go. She takes his hand with the ease of a wife, partner and now caregiver. Holding his hand, she walks slightly ahead of him. Is he holding back afraid of what is to come? The building they enter will become very familiar to them for the next two months. Will they make friends of fellow patients, compare battle strategies, count tears shed, or construct an invisible wall to hold the suffering and pain from curious eyes?

I note his long hair, jeans, t-shirt and work boots. Did he meet cancer at work or at play? His wife is petite and wiry with a no-nonsense demeanor. They both possess a sun- weathered, smoker's dry complexion. Their blond hair is parched and brittle from too much time in the sun. What type of cancer does he have? Where did this dark, unwelcome visitor decide to take up residence in his body?

A couple of weeks ago, they carried MRI and blood test reports with them as they navigated the maze of medical departments. This week, the appointments are in order: hydration, radiation, and a little chemo for good measure. The battle has begun.

She walks briskly back to the car. He follows, hands in pockets, at a slow uneven pace. She is in the car and on the phone before he opens the door on his side. Is she reporting to family members, a son or daughter perhaps? His first treatment of radiation leaves him feeling stunned and thirsty. The leather of his face has changed from deep tan to a chalky, pale rose. She hands him the phone. He declines with a pass of his hand. Someone wants to know how his first day went.





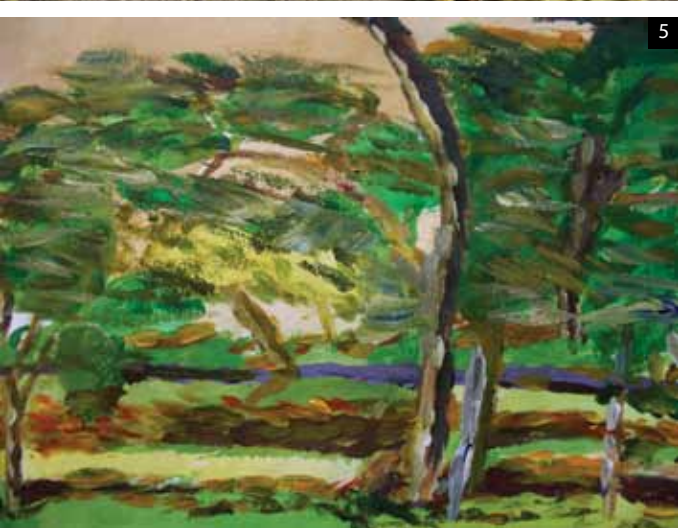
2



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6

1. **A VIEW FROM AN ANGLE** by Tanni Thai, Senior Financial Analyst // photography 2. **ANIA** by Aurelia Thompson, RN // oil 3. **LIFE ON THE AMAZON** by Lorianne Burns, MS1 // photography 4. **PINTO BASIN** by Shawna Roberts, MS3 // photography 5. **WIND STORM** by Ben Franco, Caregiver // watercolor, acrylic 6. **JUNE 5TH** by Renee Marinelli, MS3 rola // acrylic







2

# WHEN I'M WITH YOU

Anonymous Submission

The air in the room is frigid,  
like the cadaver next to me.  
Stiff, lifeless, and alone.  
I have dissected him--  
studying the contours,  
examining the patterns,  
following the routes.  
Layer by layer, knowledge revealed.  
I have become intimate with the intricacies  
of life that has become death in this body.  
But still I will never learn the secrets  
That made his life worth living.

When I'm with you, the room is warm.  
And I feel your heart beat next to mine.  
I have traced the maps of your body  
And have oriented myself next to you.  
In this moment I hold life closely--  
existence entwined in my arms.  
But I cannot probe the mysteries  
which invest the essence of you.  
I have never felt so alive--  
yet life still escapes me.



3



4

**1. IN LIVING COLOR** by Michael O'Leary, MS4 // photography **2. AITUTAKI** by Kip Green, MS4, MD/MBA candidate // photography **3. NIGHT MARKETS** by David Tran, MS2 // photography **4. BRIDGE** by Andrew Treister, MS2 // watercolor



# NOT ENOUGH

by Frank Meyskens, MD

I have been your doctor for eighteen years  
often wondering from whence came the fortitude  
that allowed you to live , with a grace and ready smile,  
with a disease that was there for all to see.

Ulcerating, fungating, penetrating year after year  
but always responding, at least for a while  
to our latest potion or manipulation,  
us one step ahead of the transformation.

and your laughter and love of life always there,  
But not this time, not today.

What's it now, regimen eight or nine,  
the ugliness now crawling where it was  
not supposed to go...  
rotting your face as if you were a leper.

Dressed in your best finery, today a brave smile,  
a single tear and then tears, more tears, and then a flood.  
A hand-written note entreating me not to abandon you,  
like an arrow through my heart.

“There has to be something, Dr. Meyskens”

Yes a new medicine, and the cancer is in retreat  
“But I am sleepy all the time and I can't enjoy life”  
Not enough, not enough, even at seven-eight.



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7

**1. SMILING WOMAN** by Robert Detrano, MD, PhD // photography **2. FISHING BOAT IN CHENNAI INDIA** by Carter English, MS1 // photography **3. BRYCE'S SANDCASTLES** by Maureen Cross, PhysicalTherapist // photography **4. LANG TU DUC** by David Tran, MS2 // photography **5. MORNING GLORY** by Duy Phan, MD // photography **6. ROOM FOR ONE MORE** by Sandra Ruiz, Cancer Survivor // pastel **7. CENTRAL PARK** by Taleen Arslanian, Program in Geriatrics // photography



1



4







# 2 DI'S STRATEGIES AGAINST GRAVITY

by Virginia Liu, MD/PhD Candidate

**H**ands folded across her chest  
As her little figure flipped upside down in the velvet red  
leotard

A few more bold tumbles after the aerial, as a protest  
To not have her bare feet return to the ground

Into the ground, the spikes of the track shoes dug deep  
As she snatched the baton and ran anchor of the team  
Faster and faster! To threshold speed  
Eventually the wheels of the plane lift off from asphalt

Shades of grey and sharp lines of empty skyscraper windows  
With a single white dove escaping the cold cityscape sketch  
Always careful attention to the wings, the fine feathers that flutter  
If drawn to perfection they come close to reality

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times”  
A winter of words and a prevailing theme  
They call it falling in love, but to her, it felt like flying  
Maybe...conquering requires giving in

Gravity wins and makes no exceptions  
Nineteen years is just not enough—  
So she risked, she stumbled, she fell  
Eyes to the sky and arms outstretched.



3

**1. WINTER WONDERLAND** by Eric Cui, Assistant Clinical Research Coordinator // photography  
**2. BABY POSSUM** by Bev Kilpatrick, Cancer Survivor // watercolor **3. POPPIES** by Earl Stauffer,  
Quest Project Analyst // photography **4. STRIKE FOR MEAL** by Trung Thai, MD // photography





# THIS IS WHY I A CAREER

ASYMMETRY by Stephanie Le, MS3 // photography

When I was around 4 or 5 years old, not once, but twice, I managed to wake my mother up in the middle of the night by vomiting on her face. It actually didn't strike me as particularly out-of-line at the time—I was sick, and as my mother's world clearly revolved around me, she should be the first to know. (And she was). Nor was my mother's reaction—on both occasions—any less than what I would expect. Pausing only briefly to wipe my gastric contents out of her eyes, she dabbed my forehead with a damp washcloth and tucked me soothingly back into bed. I do recall, however, following my encore performance, my mother taking a minute or two to rehearse with me the preferred sequence of events, should the opportunity arise again—"okay, so where should you go first? That's right, the potty. *Then* tell me about it."

I predominantly reserve this anecdote for my in-laws, when they ask, after 10 years of marriage, why my husband and I have no children. I am simply not ready to be the sort of person my mother was. The reasoning is accurate, albeit tongue-in-cheek. Or, rather, it used to be accurate. Following the birth of her second kid, my childhood best friend pointed out, from under her burping rag, that our lives were not all that different. How's that, exactly? I am a frazzled chief resident in general surgery, hoping madly in the next few months to pass my boards, move cross-country to my fellowship in

# WANT IN TRAUMA

by Meghann Kaiser, MD

Trauma/ Critical Care, and maybe even have my roots done; she is the epitome of maternal, elegant homemaking with the Betty Crocker touch. “Well, we are both up most of the night, taking care of someone else, cleaning up after them, worrying about them. We choose to be gross and tired all the time because they need us, and it’s what we love. Of course,” she added, because it had to be said, “my babies are cuter.”

Parenthood and trauma surgery are all about reactions; specifically, about making the conscious decision in a crucial moment to push past your own instincts and creature comforts, whether that entails hanging around in the ICU post-call because your patient just doesn’t look right, or comforting your vomiting child when you’d really rather be vomiting yourself. And its more than just what you do, it is how you do it. It’s not enough just showing up in the trauma bay at 4 am to care for the 19-year-old drunk driver suddenly colliding with the consequences of her own decisions. It must be done an attitude of respect, recognizing that we are all human, and, in our time of need, a caring touch is worth infinitely more than our gut inclination to judge or dismiss. On a more selfish level, it is also about the enormous amount of fulfillment which I realize (after I’ve had a chance to nap and shower and gather my wits about me) only comes from doing the right thing. And, as one of my attendings is fond of my reminding me, “whatever is the least

convenient, requires the most energy and takes the longest is generally the right thing to do.”

That’s the secret. “Whatever takes the longest” goes far beyond even those instantaneous reactions. It’s about the time in-between—the moments-of-truth spent preparing. It’s about making a commitment to a complete stranger that you will spend your lifetime to give them a lifetime. A young mother looks at her newborn for the first time and takes that vow. A trauma surgeon promises decades in advance—while cramming for the organic chemistry final, or inhaling the fumes of the anatomy lab, or mentally rehearsing the steps of an ex-lap for the 900th time—well before the patient whose life she will save even rolls into the trauma bay. The next morning, sitting on the edge of the bed, casually chatting with the thirteen-year-old who had my thumb in his heart 12 hours before, I know I have given my patient—and myself—a rebirth.

These moments—and a lifetime constructed around these moments—are why I chose a career in trauma surgery. I couldn’t find that degree of connection to myself and my fellow human being any other way. Without overdosing on the Barney song, that is.

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# HOMELESS

by Thomas Sage Hand

“And a little bit of pot helps with my appetite, too,” he laughs, studies me for disappointment. His neck muscles are marionette strings dancing beneath tan skin. He looks good, considering.

I have a doctorate in adjectives. Our first visit, two adjectives in his chart told me exactly how he would die. How he lives was described economically in just one.

He circuits Orange County parking lots. He’s grateful for his van, public bathrooms with shower stalls, the heat. Tight joints rolled with Marlboro tobacco, medicinal pot. And the surf instructor of the YMCA summer camp. Sharing erotic chatter about surf conditions, some mornings they stare seaward together, connecting their breaths, as mariners do, to waves. To him her smile is the heady onrush of strong drink.

In my office he wears a baseball hat low. His eyelashes are there. “Well, you look amazing, Charlie.”

“Thanks, I’m really taking better care of myself now.”

“And keep doing whatever helps your appetite, but let me know if that stops working.”

“Can do,” he says, chuckles.

“How’s the surf this month?”

“It’s great. I just go until I can’t anymore, then I lay in the sun. I’m kind of like a snake now ‘cause I have to lay out on the hot sand after sessions.” He thinks, frowns, perks up again, “But now that I’m back in the water I’m getting stronger. I can feel my body fighting, and I’m not sad about the whole thing anymore.”

Leaving, his handshake is a hydraulic press. His eyes linger, like the dying, on mine. He’ll go sooner than is just, but he still surfs, smokes pot, suns his bones. And as cool nighttime air sifts through his van, he imagines the surf camp girl, an untied bikini dropping from hips, buttocks, a wide smile, teeth that shimmer like whitecaps, catching light, passing it on.





**1. GREEK AQUEDUCT** by Valentina Bonev, MS2 // photography **2. TEDDY-BEAR CHOLLA** by Shawna Roberts, MS3 // photography **3. WHITE LILY** by Maureen Cross, Physical Therapist // photography **4. WATER IN THE DESERT** by Linda Hogsett, Ultrasound Technologist // photography **5. DANCING GULLS** by Earl Stauffer, Quest Project Analyst // photography







1

# I, THEY

by Valentina Bonev, MS2

I roll,  
They push.

The gurney glides,  
Across the white linoleum floors,  
Towards a set of double gray doors.  
I gaze,  
At the ceiling,  
The bright lights shine,  
On my droopy eyelids.

I stop,  
They gather.

They're dressed for outer space,  
In blue gowns, masks, gloves, and booties.  
They look like martians,  
But I feel like the alien.

I cringe,  
They concentrate.

A needle is jabbed into my right arm.  
Blood drips down,  
Like a sad raindrop,  
Rolling down a windowsill.  
My eyes close,  
But I'm awake.

I listen,  
They chatter.

I hear simultaneous conversations,  
About a son with a broken arm,  
A funny birthday gift,  
And a ski trip to Colorado.

I bleed,  
They slice.

The scalpel in the doctor's hand glistens,  
Under the intense lamp.  
I feel like I'm staring at the sun,



But I'm cold,  
So cold.  
I reach for a blanket,  
But my arm remains limp,  
Like a log,  
Roasting in the fireplace.

I wonder,  
They work.

Blood dribbles,  
Down my temple,  
Into my ear.  
Shiny tools appear,  
As if a toolbox was opened.  
They chisel away,  
Diligently working,  
Like sweaty slaves,  
Building the next monument.

I wait,  
They continue.

Hours pass,  
I lose interest,  
I become listless.  
A clump of slimy gray brain,  
Dangles in front of my face,  
Then is set on the table.  
He was right:  
It is large,  
Like a tennis ball.  
They close my skull,  
And wrap my head in gauze,  
Like a mummy.  
They pack up their tools,  
Like they're leaving the mine,  
For the day.  
They turn off the machines,  
The equipment,  
And the lights.

I thank,  
They accept.



1

- 1. MORNING LIGHT** by  
Samantha  
Costantini, MS2 //  
photography
- 2. ISHII'S GAZELLE** by  
Alexander  
Nguyen, MS2 //  
photography







# CHASING THE SUNSET

by Robin A Eckert, MD

It is neither 9:30 pm East or 6:30 pm West,  
But in the between

Hydroplaning above the cloud cover, a sentinel  
Light pierces the blanket below like a northern  
star.

Am I up or am I down?  
What coordinates do I reside on, on this  
unfathomable carpet ride?

In this trajectory, as if swooping from above I  
am here now, for a moment returning to the vast infinite illusory horizon.

The radiance calls me, a distant glow,  
pulling, leading me westward.

The great metal bird, magnetically drawn beyond into  
the twilight, subtle azure...  
here I bend into the luminance.

A silent state I glide, in relative stillness soaring,

A delicate Lila with gravity I ride, like a stone skipping  
upon the meniscus of phase, tethered gently to the  
Earth, releasing inertia to transcend the night sky,

Stars above, constellations & communities below,

No bearings, no boundaries, one with the microcosm, mirroring the  
cosmos,  
suspended into the immanence.

No time, non time.....

Witness arising anticipation as called to descend the waves of turbulence,  
while journeying the Mobius strip of life, cutting through thunderheads,  
smoke, winds and cruising the deep clear water as I land.

I arrive equanimous & infinite,

I find myself at home.



# WE HAVE NOT YET

by Sharine Wittkopp, MD, PhD

# LEARNED

She WAS falling apart. There was no denying that. We've all had our good days and our bad days, but she couldn't walk any more, had to get around in a wheelchair. She was overweight, but, really, you can't hold that against her; everyone's a little overweight these days. Mostly it was her liver that was failing.

It doesn't matter how good a person you are now, how many days a week you go to mass, or give to charity, buy lunch for a homeless man. It just doesn't matter. What matters to your liver now is that once, one day a long time ago, you used a needle. Maybe someone else's needle.

So she needed some help, medicine to control the blood pressure, medicine to control the blood sugar, medicine to control the liver, medicine to control the medicine, medicine to control the pain, medicine to control the pain... once that pen stroke, keystroke, inkjet, test result hit. She wheeled in on her back one day, never a good thing. An episode, they would call it. They stabilized her. Managed to get her upright to wheel back out in a few. Sent her on her way, take care.



You know, there aren't any people at that emergency department who speak her language. They don't know what to do with someone who may have used drugs in the past. They don't know what to do with someone who can't live without her pain medicine. They don't know how to deal with someone who might not see the next year, or the year after that. But mostly they don't know what to do with her "friend."

// In the moments when she needed help the most, she was left alone.

Forced alone.

Separated by a single word // and oceans of ignorance.

They weren't married, you see, so the "friend" wouldn't be allowed in past visiting hours, oh no. They had lived with and taken care of each other through all of it. Through those dark and trembling needle days, through the triumphant return to freedom from that disease, through the gavel strike diagnosis of this one, to today, yesterday, tomorrow. Yet "friends" would not be let in. Left to sit in the cold, television-playing, last week's magazine, hard-chair waiting room.

In the moments when she needed help the most, she was left alone. Forced alone. Separated by a single word. and oceans of ignorance. They were not married. She got through this episode, alright, and was sent home without help. No social worker to make sure she would recover, get the resources she needs. No assistance.

The stress of the situation staining her clarity, she could have used her partner. Another set of eyes careful and observant. Another set of ears, and understanding. She needed all the help she could get to make these last few days, months, minutes on this planet as comfortable as possible. Instead

she was separated, and when she finally left that hospital they were both shaken and confused.

You know, it doesn't matter how great a person you are, how many times a week you pray, how often you call your mother. Once they see that track mark, label, scar, orientation, they never look at you the same. You become a category. You become something that must be dealt with and sent along, stabilized and sent home. Once they see that, they don't ask you what you're doing for Thanksgiving because it might be something gay, drugs, illegal, ethnic, heaven forbid. Assumptions, assumptions. And then they just wouldn't know what to say. But at the center of it all, you just need someone to turn to.

I don't know if she's still alive. But either way, her partner had it pretty bad, caring so deeply for someone and being so thoroughly excluded from her care. Wanting nothing more than to help make it better, and being actively prevented from it. You know, sometimes it makes everything better just to have the people you love nearby. Being allowed in can make all the difference in the world, being allowed to cross that threshold, walk the fifteen meters down the hall, step out of the waiting room and actively, openly care. All of us want to not travel that last distance alone; to do our final falling apart with those we love to pick up the pieces, to kiss them one by one, cherish them and let us feel loved. All any of us wants is some compassion, dignity. And yet a single word can separate us. Black, poor, AIDS, deaf, gay, latina, muslim, homeless, hepatitis, addict, different, different, different, different.

We have not yet learned.



2

**1. CAUSE, CONDITION, EFFECT** by Lili Chen, Payroll Representative // oil on canvas **2. TAIWAN STROLL** by Betty Wong, Fellowship Program Coordinator // oil on canvas **3. GENERATION COUNTING** by Michael O'Leary, MS4 // photography **4. HOI AN BY DAY** by David Tran, MS2 // photography



3



4



# SILHOUETTES

by David Cheng, MS3

**S**targazers are born under the heat of summer  
They are romantics under the blanket of  
night  
Nature's fireworks on planetary display  
Casts of light in a velvet sky  
The sway of stars and your earrings  
Silvery midnight, the chill of wilderness  
Warmth, sinking softness of your body  
A mountain climbed, a ring, my promise to make  
you mine, now until...

Choked hearts and choked cords of words  
A weeping window and its clouded panes  
Your eyes, watery pools of melting copper  
Halos of smeared makeup  
Spiraling delirium  
Our screen door slammed shut  
The creaking, the sound of footsteps in the rain  
The rain

Through a downpour of frantic need  
I find your hand, snug in the palm of my hand  
I wrap your body in mine, squirrel you away from  
the cold and the pain  
I will be your silhouette

Outside, a grey morning cracked by lines of dawn  
A wrinkle left in a half-empty bed  
Not a word why

When you cried, I wanted to see the girl who loved  
salsa eating contests again  
When you screamed, I wanted to hear the airy  
happiness your laughter left in its wake again  
When you left, I just wanted to remember, to  
forget now

Home is where my heart was  
Beneath a silhouette murky with doubt  
Within a chest wrought of rotted uncertainty  
You will find mine  
Shriveled by the floods of memory  
Floating, drowning, lost  
I'm weak without you.

Fill this heart with ethereal air,  
Fill it with hope, helium hope, and let it rise into  
the sky blue  
Gossamer thin, let it slip from its calcified cage  
Sail



2

A door  
 The last stop before possibility becomes certainty  
 A hospital curtain  
 Behind which a ball of disappointment,  
 reconciliation, happiness, hurt, acceptance,  
 threads apart, could unfurl  
 And there was only you, waiting with more tears

Dying  
 She says that she didn't want to spend our last  
 moments like this -- no, that's not you anymore  
 I sit there  
 We hold hands

For every hour of darkness, there will be a time of  
 light waiting  
 From the leathery casing of our hearts  
 Let fall a seed  
 Tender tendrils through darkness  
 From that womb of the underworld  
 A flower emerge

Behind you  
 is us

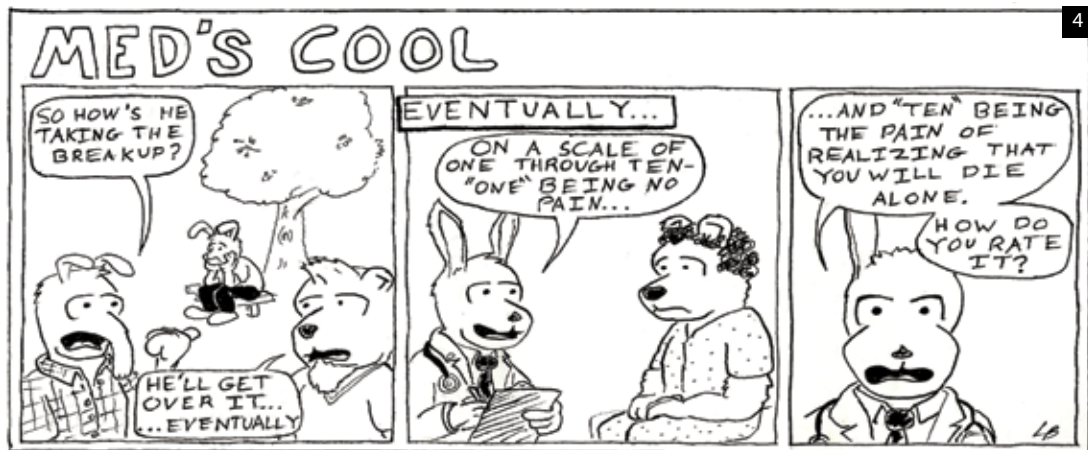


3

1. **TIE DYE SKY** by Erica Dorfman, MS2 // photography 2. **SPECTRUM** by Aurora Cruz, MS1 // photography 3. **THE GATE** by David Richter, MS1 // photography



1. **FROLICK** by Sue Wang, MS3 // photography 2. **LUCY** by Sandra Ruiz, Cancer Survivor // pastel 3. **PARDON ME, I'M JUST PEOPLE WATCHING** by Kimberly Truong, MS2 // photography 4. **FIRST DO NO HARM (TO YOURSELF)** by Lance Beier, MS1 // ink sketch 5. **WHATEVER** by Neal Patel, Radiation Oncology // photography





5

# HEART BREAKER

by Aliyah Khan, MS3

Normally gentle, loving and more  
I did not hesitate to break his heart  
Severing vessels, cutting to the core  
Callously tearing structures apart

Normally sympathetic, patient and kind  
I did not hesitate to think of his pain  
How his heart ached when she left him behind  
Thinking he would never love again

Focusing on mastering the anatomy  
I did not hesitate to think of the man  
How blood coursed through each artery  
For a distinct purpose, part of a plan

Fooled by the calcification and clots  
Into forgetting the delicacy of the human heart







# THE ART OF MEDICINE

by Lorianne Burns, MS1



I've come to learn that medicine is a language.  
More than a language of words  
that we say to impress or confuse.  
It's a language of understanding,  
visualization,  
silent wisdom.

The other day, I saw my sister more clearly,  
for the first time in 22 years.  
Through knowledge, everything connects.  
From the rhythms of the body,  
to the pain on her face,  
The public discomfort,  
the anticipated concern.



Medicine humbles me,  
by setting the context of any life.

It is the author's biography  
within the pages of a novel;  
It is the artist's colors on the palette  
before the picture is painted  
It is the score of a symphony,  
before it is played.



**1. CELEBRATION** by Betty Wong, Fellowship Program Coordinator // oil on canvas  
**2. MONASTERY IN THE MOUNTAINS** by Valentina Bonev, MS2 // photography  
**3. VIETNAM** by Daniel Nagasawa, MS4 // photography **4. INCENSE** by David Tran, MS2 // photography **5. LAST SUNRAYS OF THE DAY** by Trung Thai, MD // photography

# UNDERNEATH THE WHITE TENT

Underneath the white tent lies a land  
That I must explore and document

This is a traditional world  
Where respect still stands  
And I pause before each journey  
Thankful for the honor of exploration

Most countries here are identified  
By beautifully colored maps  
Though the hue of the land  
Has changed greatly  
Since Mr. Netter's visit  
I still squint over his account  
Of quests long ended

Here, my compass is reversed,  
My right, the left of the land  
But north always points  
To an ominously wrapped monarch  
Who once ruled this kingdom  
But has long since lost his crown

I have comrades with me on this quest  
Timid at first  
Now bold as the sciatic nerve  
All with an impossible amount of knowledge  
About this once foreign terrain

We stop along the way  
To pick for gold and sapphires  
Among the caves of adipose  
A nerve here, a vessel there  
What joy there is in successful mining!

Sometimes we even pound a chisel

In the search  
For grey-matter butterflies  
While it may not be as glamorous  
As wielding a net through a field  
The results are just as mesmerizing

There lies a labyrinth in the middle  
It may look complicated  
But there's only one way out

And though I much prefer the entrance  
To the posterior exit  
I have spent ample time in both

But this quiet countryside  
Represents a more rhythmic one waiting  
Though the risks will be much higher  
And the explorations much more delicate

Though the rivers and streams  
Will flow in my future patients  
And the grey hillsides replaced  
By a vibrant red

Though the mountains and valleys  
Will be bathed in warmth  
And the drum of the heart  
Will audibly announce my arrival  
As the tide of the lungs  
Rolls in and back out again

Though my travels will take me  
To these different, living lands  
I won't soon be forgetting my journey  
Underneath the white tent



2



3

**1. REST** by Martin Hofmann, MS2 // photography  
**2. HUNTINGTON BEACH PIER SUNSET** by Trung Thai, MD // photography  
**3. BOSSIE** by Sandra Ruiz, Cancer Survivor // watercolor  
**4. RETIREMENT** by Arya Amini, MS4 // photography  
**5. EMBRACE** by Abbie Baker, Site Office Visit Coordinator // acrylic



4



5





1



**1. CAMBODIA** by Daniel Nagasawa, MS4 // photography  
**2. MOUNT RUSHMORE** by Earl Stauffer, Quest Project Analyst // photography  
**3. HARVEST** by Martin Hofmann, MS2 // photography  
**4. LEOPARD IN SOUTH AFRICA** by Carter English, MS1 // photography



4



# AMONG GIANTS

by Samantha Costantini, MS2

You all deserve to be here  
 She said  
 Convincingly  
 Yet in the recesses  
 Of my hand-selected brain  
 I doubted  
 Perhaps I was the exception  
 The mistake

A self fulfilling prophecy  
 I soon found myself  
 Walking among giants  
 In my oversized coat  
 Pretending I was more

And when that failed  
 I avoided them  
 Especially before exams  
 So as not to be crushed  
 By their heavy footsteps

How I longed  
 For those extra inches  
 Finding book after book  
 To stand upon  
 Without success

Some days I still wish  
 For their place in the clouds  
 But then remember  
 It's much easier to treat a patient  
 When you can fit into their room



# THE PHYSICIAN

by Amish A Dangodara, MD

The burden of Death  
Weighs heavy upon me  
Pressing oppressing me  
I am not in control  
Of how and when  
He takes his hold  
But I think I know  
How to foil his plan  
Circumvent his demand  
That you should succumb,  
Your soul at stake,  
He challenges and welcomes  
Every decision I make  
He waits for you  
As I enter the room  
Filled with hope and gloom  
This tense odd mixture  
With somber light mute  
On walls transfixtured  
And respectful darkness  
Voices hope, whisper...  
Pray  
That I may drive him away  
But only shadows run  
From themselves in fear  
His stench lingers here  
And I have knowledge  
That he will take his toll  
Of me and of you to claim  
His soul that I refuse  
I greet him every day  
Death, he never smiles  
Heavy upon me he weighs  
Many forms he takes  
But I know him well  
And I know his ways  
And I know his place  
I have forgotten to fear  
Forgotten to shed a tear  
I no longer grieve...  
As he takes his piece  
Of me, greet him in peace  
So I may cling to Grace  
To replace what he would take







**1. THE STRIPED VASE** by Shwu Cha, Cancer Survivor // watercolor **2. PLATE 301** by Raja R. Narayan, MS2 // pastel **3. THE EXOTICS** by Ricardo Perez, Cancer Survivor // watercolor **4. UNCLE BEN** by Val Engstrom, Art for the Soul // graphite **5. LAVENDER FIELD** by Sandra Ruiz, Cancer Survivor // pastel **6. FEMME FATALE** by Maggie Cha, Caregiver // watercolor



# KILIMANJARO

by Alexander Nguyen, MS2

A peculiar song I remember—soft incandescence glowing from your lips, with wide eyes open to the sun you sneezed, while my own eyes were closed, thinking for a moment about infinite colors.

When I stood to walk, the feeling familiar, the air pulled back; the crevasse sharpened, like a dagger etched into the mountain, and the generations were new again.

We weren't afraid then of the twin peaks, cut into the curves of Africa, with our mobility and our hearts reassuring at each step.

The oldness of the earth was an emperor to none and I knew the way up, slowly, slowly, life after life.

The way down was different, the headiness of times ahead now behind, the path in the snow now calling us stumbling home, each fallen breath a lost mitten, a reminder of

the glance I gave, shouting I told you, "I am the lark and you the cartographer."

Words that do not echo across the road, let alone down from the height of nineteen thousand feet, travel with me still, a different scent, stronger this time.



2

1. MAWENZI PEAK by Alexander Nguyen, MS2 // photography 2. CHURCH OF THE NATIVITY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST, SERGIYEV POSAD, RUSSIA by Stuart Green, MD // photography 3. ROMAN WAY by Minh-Ha Tran, DO // photography 4. NIGHT AT THE FORBIDDEN CITY by Byron He, Radiation Physicist // photography



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