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Plexus



UCI College of Medicine Journal of Arts & Humanities
2000 Edition • Volume 1



Central Market Square in Otavalo, Ecuador
Don Janes, Medical Student, Class of 2002

Front Cover Photo

Jose Ospina, M.D./Ph.D. Student

Back Cover Photo

Vinit Mahajan, M.D./Ph.D. Student

Plexus

UCI College of Medicine Journal of Arts & Humanities
2000 Edition • Volume 1

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My lips bloom toward you:
Paint them.
But do not consider this
Still life: the forms tessellate.
Your every stroke must capture
Curve upon curve.
Reveal only the impression of
Your lips
Against mine

Therese Amos

For Gabriel

With each passing moment, life grows sweeter,
Like a blossom, blooming, and full of flavor.
With each passing minute, life grows dearer,
And each breath of fresh air is a wonder to savor.
With each passing hour, life grows keener,
And each chirp of a bird is a treasure to the ear.
With each passing day, life grows more tender,
And each laugh of a child is a great joy to hear.
So one passing month, when the weather is fair,
Remember these words: love is always there.

Rachel Lie



Megan Jarvis-Wloszek
Medical Student, Class of 2001

TIBET

JUDITH HOPKINS
MS,RN,DEPARTMENT OF SURGERY



POTOLA PALACE

The Potala Palace was built by the 5th Dalai Lama in the 17th century. It is the largest and most important of the three great Tibetan palaces in Lhasa. The palace was built on the site of the former palace of the 5th Dalai Lama, who was the 14th Dalai Lama's predecessor. The palace was built by the 5th Dalai Lama, who was the 14th Dalai Lama's predecessor. The palace was built by the 5th Dalai Lama, who was the 14th Dalai Lama's predecessor.



TIBETAN LANDSCAPE

THE BEAUTIFUL AND BARREN TIBETAN LANDSCAPE IS THE ESSENCE OF THE BUDDHIST IDEA OF EMPTINESS. APPEARING EMPTY YET ENCOMPASSING EVERYTHING, IT SYMBOLIZES THE STRENGTH, STEADFASTNESS AND BEAUTY OF THE TIBETAN PEOPLE WHO STRUGGLE TO MAINTAIN THEIR CULTURAL IDENTITY.

The Year of Living

Helen Petroff, Medical Student, Class of 2003

When I was applying to medical school in 1998, I made a list of things I could do to procure some money. It sounds silly, but "go on Jeopardy" was one of them. In my first game, it came down to Final Jeopardy, and I was in second place behind Bill, an osteopath from Florida who had won three straight games.

Everyone has his or her own theory about how to bet on Final Jeopardy. Mine is as follows: if everyone gets the question right, the aggressive bidders will win; if everyone gets it wrong, the conservative bidders benefit. Since you can't tell in advance whether it will be better to be aggressive or conservative, your best bet is to be whatever the other two contestants aren't. From watching them play (and making certain sexist assumptions about middle-aged guys,) I figured that Bill and Dave were going to bet aggressively, so I decided to bet pretty conservatively. We were all within a couple thousand dollars of each other, so it was really a toss-up as to what was going to happen. The category was revealed as "1998" – not a lot of information to go on.

Once the category is revealed, taping stops and they give you some scratch paper, a pencil and as much time as you need to figure out your wager. Once you write the number down on the etch-a-sketch-like screen, you can't change it. When the show comes back from the last commercial break before Final Jeopardy, frosted glass partitions have mysteriously appeared between the podiums so that you can't glance over at your neighbor's bet or his answer. I had always assumed that someone presses a button and the partitions rise up like an automatic garage door, but in reality, a burly stage hand yanks them up and jams a 2x4 underneath them while you are trying to do arithmetic (without a calculator) to figure out your bet. Needless to say, it's a little distracting.

Also, they tell you in advance to write "Who" or "What" in the corner of your screen, so that you don't have to worry about putting your answer in the form of a question. You will notice that a lot of Final Jeopardy answers are lacking verbs, because they don't tell you whether to put "is" or "are" and by the time you write down the answer, you have forgotten all about grammatical correctness. They also specifically tell you not to write "hi mom" or other personal messages if you don't know the answer, which is why Alex always gets that pained expression when people do it. Spelling doesn't matter, as long as it's close enough for Alex to tell what you've written.

The only thing weirder than being on Jeopardy must be when you are the subject of a Jeopardy question.

The Final Jeopardy question was along the lines of "Bruce Jenner (and two other people I'd never heard of) attended her September 1998 funeral." Since Bruce Jenner is an Olympic athlete, I knew it had to be a female sports figure who died recently. Suddenly I remembered the newspaper headlines that speculated about the possibility that use of performance enhancing drugs caused her death (it turns out they didn't), and wrote down my answer. I didn't find it too hard to tune out the dreaded theme

music and concentrate on making my answer legible. I later discovered, however, that when you don't know the answer, the music seems much louder and more annoying, as if mocking you for the fact that your ignorance is about to become patently clear to millions of people.

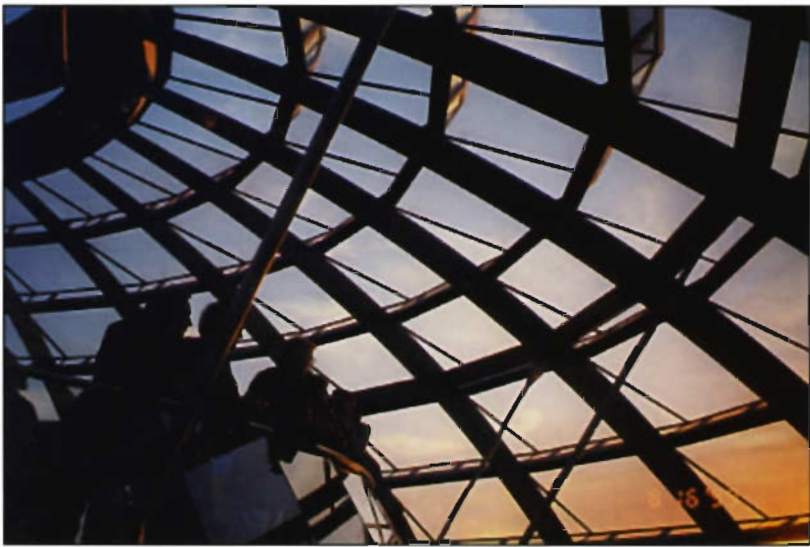
Alex started with Dave, who answered "Jackie Joyner-Kersey," who I knew for a fact is still alive. The only thing weirder than being on Jeopardy must be when you are the subject of a Jeopardy question. I was chuckling to myself about Jackie Joyner-Kersey watching the show at home and being somewhat annoyed that Dave thought she was dead as Alex came

Trivially

over to me and read my answer.¹ After he had verified that I was, in fact right, I started thinking about the trip to Grenada that my husband and I would get to go on as a result of Dave ending up in third place. As I was trying to recall what the news footage of the American invasion of Grenada from the early 80's looked like, I heard Alex telling Bill "Oh, I'm sorry" (he had also answered Jackie Joyner-Kersey) and realized that I had won.

For some reason, Alex decided that the appropriate thing to say at that point was "you go, girl!" I did a little shoulder-shimmy dance that hopefully advanced the notion that a hip, young person had won, and went to

stand on the little strips of electrical tape where the three contestants and Alex "chat" during the closing credits. You will notice that the "champ" always stands in the middle and Alex often looks off into space or at his watch. I'm sure Bill was quite annoyed that I had prevented him from winning five times and thus getting a car and a guaranteed spot on the tournament of champions, but he was quite gracious about it. In the morning, I had been talking to him about how I was trying to get into medical school, and he was explaining how lucrative and satisfying his D.O. practice was. So I didn't feel too bad for the guy.



Reichstag, Berlin, Germany
Tom Kang, Medical Student, Class of 2003

The best thing about winning the last show of the day is that you get to reign as Jeopardy champion until the next taping day. So I spent my weekend alternating between feeling very pleased with myself and stressed out about having to go through the whole thing again in a few days. I also had to call Loma Linda, the Adventist medical school where I was supposed to have my first interview and tell them that I had to reschedule because I had to appear on a game show. Since Adventists don't drink, smoke or wear jewelry, I was a bit concerned about their attitude toward Jeopardy, which, after all, involves gambling. Happily, I later discovered that the admissions director is a huge Jeopardy fan.

¹ Former Mission Viejo resident Florence Griffith Joyner, a.k.a. Flo Jo

Reflections in a Bubble

Chris Donnelly, Medical Student, Class of 2003

I was three when my parents first put me into the bubble. It just stood there, big and daunting, when I came into the living room on that bleak, dreary day. It had that fresh plastic smell—sort of like eau de 99cent store. I was terribly frightened.

"In you go," said my dad. And he shooed me in the big plastic door and locked it tight.

I could never get upstairs living in my bubble. Couldn't even get out of the living room, seeing as the bubble's diameter far outlengthed the width of the door frame. There was this one window in the corner. I would roll myself over there and watch the cat, forever outside the house, trying to get in.

Seven p.m. was family TV time. Dinner came with TV. Thin plastic trays with neat little dividers that kept the reheated peas from rolling over and mixing with the reconstituted meat products. I had a little door in my bubble for the TV dinner. "Suppertime!" my parents would yell while cramming the tray through the door.

I never did break any bones while in my bubble. Did get a few skinned knees when my bubble ran over our pet Chihuahua. The bubble stopped suddenly. My parents were quite upset.

I started etching into the bubble when I was twelve, inspired in part after watching an old black and white movie about a jail-break. It started as timeline: first haircut, first PG-13 movie, first pubic hair, first handjob. I guess the pictorial representation of these events was a natural succession. It wasn't until I had finished "Moonrise over Mr. Whiskers" that my parents noticed my artwork. They thought they had a marketable product, which is what led them to sell tickets for what they billed as "Gallery of Bubble Art." I guess my parents really needed the money after my dad got canned from his janitorial job at the meat-packing factory down the street.

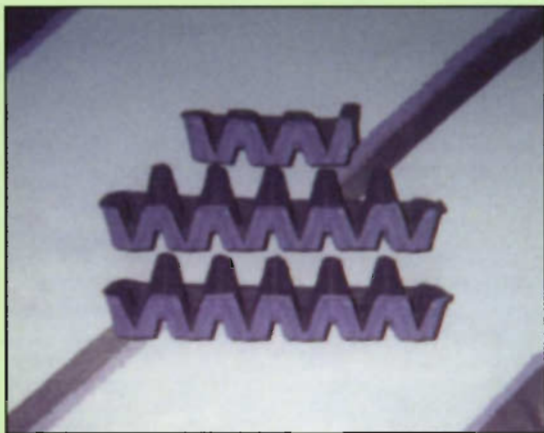
Well the media loved my art. I never imagined so many news cameras could fit in our small living room. In fact, it became quite

difficult for me to roll around the room, with all the people and wires and police officers. My parents disappeared soon after that, and there was quite a fuss about trying to get the door of my bubble open. Seems I had etched over the hinge, so the door couldn't be opened without ruining my carvings.

The quandary soon resolved itself with the dismantling of the roof over our living room. I got airlifted to the MOMA, where I had lots of room to roll, but was too short to see out the tall windows.



Michael Plowman, CVT
Department of Dermatology



things

Jack Voltner (alias)

and things to grow
and things to die
and things that fall
out of the sky

and things I think
within my head
that won't matter much
when I am dead

and things to hear
and things to touch
and too many things
and far too much

and tears that fall
from your cheeks
and mine unchanged
like barren creeks

and things to feel
and things to taste
and things ignored
must now be faced

for I am here now
as are you
and these are the things
which we shall do

and things to write
and things to read
the wretched hand
and goodly deed

and songs to sing
and songs to dance
with joyous heart
and sensual glance

and things to kill
and things to save
and the energy of
every wave

and things that rise
and things that fall
for all is one
and one is all

for you and I
we are that too
i know so much
so little too

and things to scorn
and things to fear
some things are hazy
and yet so clear

and things to talk of
and things to dream
childish laughter
painful scream

and things to drive
or sit upon
and though we die
it still goes on

for this is you
and this is me
i am you
and you are we

and these are the things
that make up life
of fear and joy
and love and strife

and these are the things
that make us whole
in and around
and about our soul

Selection from *The Gilded Path*

Schenley Chen
Staff, Department of Pharmacology

Among many people, the growth from adolescence to adulthood is marked with a single short transition period. Often, this transition occurs at the ages of 19-23 and occasionally it is a moment of conflict and inner struggle. *The Gilded Path* is the story of one such period of transition in which a life-threatening moment in a foreign country was the demarcation point between childhood innocence and the promising years of adulthood.

The following excerpt is a short introduction on my grandparents and the impact they have on my young life before I embark on my travels:

.....
I am lying down and staring at the grey sky. It is a light shade of grey but it is definitely a sunless sky. The snow flurries fall furiously around me and the wind gusts. The snowflakes are



Jose Ospina, M.D./Ph.D. Student

determined to stay on the ground, but the wind effortlessly picks up the weightless flurries and sends them flying in all different directions. The sidewalks will stay dry for now.

It is cold. I imagine the wind chill factor to be near minus ten degrees Celsius. But I am warm, as I lie down in the carriage wrapped in a snowsuit, a knitted woollen hat and mittens. The carriage canopy is half closed to prevent exposure to the biting wind, but my baby cheeks have already become cold to the touch and have turned a dark colour, representative of the colour red in my dreams.

We are moving along slowly along a road that I am familiar with. Finch Avenue is a wide six-lane road that runs east-west in the northern region of metropolitan Toronto. We only walk one block on the sidewalk that borders this road. Our walk will be short today, the storm is on its way.

The person who pushes the carriage is my great-grandmother. I call her "Ah-Tai", the Shanghainese designation for great-grandmother on father's side of family. She is also the matriarchal figure of the family. She is the holder of the traditions and keeper of history of my family's distant past. She shuffles along the sidewalk in her black heavy coat and her light blue knee high boots. Her wispy hair is greying and her round lens glasses balance delicately on her nose. The wrinkles on her face speak of untold experiences in her homeland in China, experiences that I have never been able to hear about or understand. I can only imagine.

She smiles kindly at me. We walk every one or two days. Sometimes she sings in a language I do not understand, and sometimes she talks to me in that same strange dialect. I do not understand a word of her native dialect, but dreams transcend these earthly barriers and this time I can

comprehend. "Schenley," she intones, "you must obey your parents." I stare at her silently, incapable of response at my age. It is November, 1974. I am fourteen months old.

We return to her home, number seventy-five. My father and mother live in number seventy-seven, on the other side of the duplex. Ah-Tai takes off her winter coat and boots and slips her tiny feet into intricately embroidered black slippers. She shuffles up the stairs and helps take off my snowsuit. I see that she has bound feet, a remnant of the customs of dynastical China in which women were subjugated to this tortuous process of foot compression in order to maintain a level of feminine daintiness that was desired in the male-dominated, pre-modern Chinese society of the late nineteenth century.

My grandmother comes to greet us. I call her "Ah-Nia," the Shianghainese expression for father's mother. She picks me up and pats me on the back soothingly. Ah-Nia is twenty years younger than her mother, Ah-Tai, and fifty years older than me. She still has black hair and she keeps it curly and fashionable. She is a little taller than Ah-Tai. Both of them tower over me at five foot one and five foot three. I notice that Ah-Nia does not have bound feet. She walks in strides.

Ah-Tai retires to her room while Ah-Nia places me in the toddler seat and sits in the chair in front of me. She begins to tell me a story of a prophet named Siddartha and his struggle to overcome human suffering and vices. I listen to this story though she knows that I cannot possibly understand. She holds meditation beads in her hands and subconsciously chants while speaking to me. I may not understand her now but she will tell me the story when I understand. She knows I need her help to reach enlightenment, just as Siddartha did.

Tell Me About the War

Lloyd Rucker, M.D., Department of Medicine

My father will never speak
About his War.

From him
I know the names of men or what they were called.
I know the dates and the times or what they would have
been.
I feel the sand in my boots but cannot know the currents:
This is the sticky, bloody sand of time that can not flow
Through the hourglass.
A bottleneck of unaccountable emotion and memory.

This is what I imagine.
Quiet places, suddenly deeply disturbed.
Places where currents and fevers run deep.
I imagine the glittering sunset turned upside down and
breathless.

I imagine the sense of every heartbeat
And think about my own fear.
I can see arms tentatively waving farewell to their shoul-
ders.
And I think about my fear.
I hear sounds too loud to hear.
And I think about my fear.
Sting of slow bullet, near miss.
Recoil.
First kill.
First blood.
Shout of last breath.

This is a practical world, nonetheless.
"Tell me about this, old man."

The smile,
Purse the lips and curl slightly the corners of mouth.
Left more than right.
"Why do you want to know?"

"Tell me so I can understand who you are!
So I will know who I might have been."

...There was Crabby and Little Moses and Wise Bob.
And they died. And they were not happy about
That.

And there were some who did not
But who might as well have.
And all were touched.
There was great temptation
Who do you save?
There were hours of nothing much
But not enough of them.
And when the gates crashed down
On the great transports
And men with other men on their backs
Carrying their guns and the weight of a nation
And toting the calculus of strategy
Did not have time to think about why.
But could only anticipate what could not be known:

Am I a coward?

Two years of grunting and sweating to prepare but
So much left unexplained because it could not be.
Could not be.
Could not be.

And still can not.

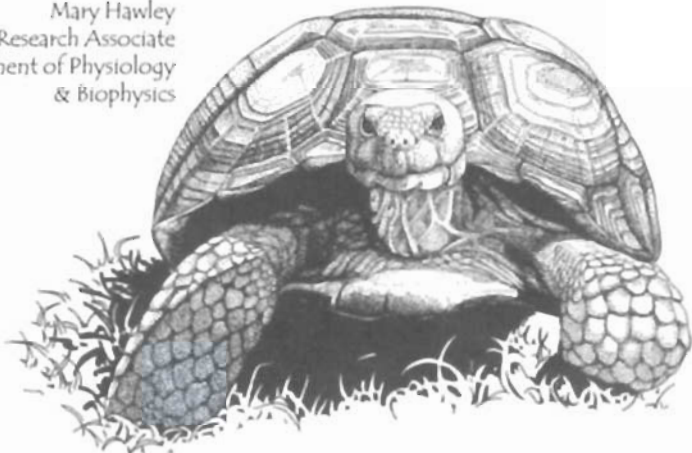
And so there is snow on the sill.
I walk in the fields and grasp the flakes as they
Fall. And each melts in my hand.
And cannot be understood.

And still can not.



Streetcar, Frankfurt, Germany

Diane Wilson, Financial Analyst, Beckman Laser Institute



Patient Relationships

Brita Moilanen, Medical Student, Class of 2001

When we admitted you, you thought I was a nurse.
You told me to find a good looking doctor and settle down.
You asked why I wasn't out dancing on a Saturday night.
And I laughed, and said:
Those are good ideas.

When I woke you in the morning to listen to your lungs
You growled at me and hid under the blankets and refused to cooperate.
And I thought of rounding with the attending,
And the inevitable questions,
And what if, under the hot lights, I am not really sure...
So I pulled back your blankets, woke you up,
Insisted.

When I drew your blood with just one stick,
And found another blanket to keep you warm...
When I made sure you got the right meds, you said:
Thanks, kid.
And I smiled.

But when I told you needed a dangerous surgery,
When I said:
This treatment might help, but it will hurt.
When I said:
These are the options, what would you like to do?
You said:
Whatever you say, Doc.

And I felt the space open up between us.

Always on Call

Brad J. Kolls, M.D./Ph.D. Student, Class of 2001

I am awakened, tired
For the third time that night
I think?
I'm not on call...
At the hospital at least
I wonder when the sun will rise today
No matter, I will be indoors
They will care
Must dress appropriately...
Sunscreen!
I knew I forgot something at the store
Now I will worry all day

I arrive,
"HAPPY"
Ready to work with no complaints
I wonder what they think of me?
The question haunts me 24 hours a day
Everywhere I go.
All day long...
Are they happy?

OK, reprieve from aforementioned question
New question...
Is the sun coming or going?
Well, I am driving home and it's behind me...
So it must be going down
The use of logic
Never ending
Wow the sun,
The sun is good...
As is home on most days
Home and sun
Two things I have not seen much of this week

Exhausted would be a start
In describing my condition
But the fun has just begun
I am reminded of the sunscreen
As I step through the door
And greet two lobsters
The sun is bad...
Store trip on our list tonight dear?
Forget that other medical thing I was going to do
I can get up early in the morning and work on it
Right?

I come home for the second time today
I wish it was a rarity
The kids protest
Then immediately fall asleep
She can't resist and gives in to the pace of her day
It is finally my time
I stare at the page but read nothing
I look at the title,
But think nothing of the topic
I take a sip
Water not wine
And sinfully close my eyes
I am awakened
For the first time that night
I'm not on call...
At the hospital at least

LOVER'S LAMENT

HOUCANG MODANLOU, PROFESSOR
DEPARTMENT OF PEDIATRICS

Where are kind people? Have not seen any of late.
Where are my friends? Have not seen any soul mate

Sweet water of the creek dried, at an early spring date
Flowers changed colors, has the spring rain forget?

Thousand roses bloomed, nightingale wasn't seen in flight
Her heart and lips are cold; sun will not shine at night

Din't seek your lover's pity Sufi, pursue your fate
Sun will shine, wind will blow, and snow will show it's flake

Joseph was lost to his father. near the Damascus' gate
Gabriel shall blow his horn, telling his return is in sight

UNTITLED

ERIK (ALIAS). STAFF, LONG BEACH MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

INTRODUCTION:

I wish I had a gentle pencil and not this pen. But you can't wait, I know.
I've said to you so many things that like frightened notes left my memory,
and now I'm supposed, and have been asked, to tell the story.
Of course I have to do it, how I will, I still ignore. I know though, that in these few lines you will be everywhere, and in the end I will just be an instrument to play your voice.
I have to clarify before I start that I seriously think this story limps, and that even so, it was her decision to walk away and not tell everything.

I left her autumn leaves at your door, my love, and not in the paper, because they belong to you.
I could say that in the end I've discovered you too late, when my soul is already covered with this cold and sentimental snow.

I will miss you.

I (ABOUT YOU AND EROS)

Your taste comes from deep from the earth or from the heart or from the heart of a flower
I know
when I taste your breasts gently beating between my lips
I know
when I hear your voice finally opening to the sun.

Trembling, my hands travel down to where your body divides
And you are born again and expand
shaping my world

Cold, smiling
pain
It is your skin that invades my eyes,
my heart
my breathing love.
With endless patience I taste you

and I'm back, and I'm gone
and I'm back

Covered by your delicate hand, I feel my blood
and it's perfect

I breathe again
Suddenly lost in your eyes
And I die

II (EROS, CONTINUATION)

I dance to your soul
To your center I go with so many questions
and all this drops that want to explode.

Drops of contained love
and this need
that drive my hidden voice

Who owns who, is it you,
I think
is it over
is it over?

I need to find myself out
of your secret pubis
your hands, eyes, skin, lips
blankets covered with water
from you and from me

Have we lost this time?

I can't move
my love

III (DARK STREET)

Black smile, I have drawn you many times
and now I could say I know you like I know myself.
And yet my hands are bleeding alone.

In the end you are not more than a voice, a thought, a slow
road to
nowhere.

Prisoner of you
I calmly surrender to the certainty that I was blinded by time.

You belonged to me I thought, and yet that knowledge caused
so much pain.

I adored you for so long, and it was so brief
Everything in you I made from rain, from love and clay
Every look, every move, and still
I continued to die, second after second.

Bleeding from the wound of the rose's spine
the rose of the beginning and the end
I feel my lips dried up now with answers,
my mouth closed with words
and the need
to fill your voice.

Tell me
if my hands should continue to bleed.

IV (CONCLUSION)

All these words, and in the end, just simple feelings
temporary tears like winters
brief rains like songs.

I wish I knew better your words
More of them
so many I would create
infinity
or love
with ink
or a change in the days and the nights.

Let me dream while I wait for her to go
Give me the honor of creating a moment
of life.
Allow me to sell my soul
if that is what you want.

Paint me next to her
and let me laugh.

Make me free between her thighs
and then burn me

Let the flames
disguise my soul

for then
I would not care
I would be gone

Living with Cancer

Johanna Shapiro, Ph.D., Department of Family Medicine

What I wonder about
What I worry about
Is that we really didn't talk about it
Enough
Or really at all
Only obliquely
The way light bounces off a mirror
At an angle
The way eyes inadvertently
Slant from an ugly face
All our conversations on the subject
Dribbled away
"Let's wait and see"
"I just don't know"
We told each other

We'd been friends
For more than fifteen years
So of course we talked about everything
Why our children
Didn't get married
Or were they going to marry
The wrong people
Would they ever find themselves?
Were we ever going to find ourselves?
How sex was with our husbands
And how sex was without our husbands
Was it too late to start a new career
Was it too late to be a different person?

And of course we did talk
About the big C
Since her husband was a doctor
She a Ph.D., and I a professor
We were very mature
About the whole thing
Oh yes, we definitely talked cancer
First breast, then ovarian,
Later still lung mets, liver mets,
Brain mets

We learned the lingo of chemo
Wordsmiths both, we grew to love the sound
Of words that really are horrible
Although they did good for awhile
Bought time, postponed the inevitable

But we never really talked about
The big D
Yes, that big D -
The grim reaper, the bogeyman,
The ultimate emptiness,
Death, death, death

And because I'd read about
Women with cancer
And talked to other friends who had cancer
And even taught Adrienne Rich's poem
About the guilt she felt
For never having talked to her lover about
Her cancer, I knew we should talk not only about
Cancer, I knew we should talk about... death

At least once,
Just to show we could do it

Give us credit - we tried
Once or twice, half-heartedly
We'd sidle up to it
The path greased with chemo and platitudes
Slippery with anxiety and dread
And all at once we'd bump up against
A mountain so mighty, so fearsome
It'd make our teeth shake
It was one thing to live with cancer -
We'd grown used to that -
But dying with cancer
Well, that was a different story
We couldn't find our way into it
Up it, over it, through it

In the end, we never did talk about the big D
Death never entered our lexicon
In any guise - cruel hatchetman
Welcome liberator
No, he just didn't show up
Although we both sensed him
Lurking on the premises

Oh well - we never let him in
Maybe we weren't brave enough
Or maybe we just didn't have time enough
For Mr. Death

We did a lot of laughing though
Planned jail-break escapes from her hospital room
That we never quite pulled off
But that would have made us famous
Bought funny hats when her hair fell out
That looked a lot better on her
Than they did on me
Wrote each other letters about
How much suffering sucks
And where are the big answers
The answers you can count on
When you really need them?
We cried a lot too - pretty much about
The same things

When she fell into a coma
We still hadn't had the big D conversation
And I knew Adrienne Rich would be
Disappointed in me
So after she'd been in a coma about
A month, and I knew we'd never talk anymore about
Our children, or which type of bagel
We liked best with black coffee
Whether our husbands cried in the same
Kinds of movies
And how to travel to Nepal when you're old
We ended up talking about death

It was kind of a one-sided conversation
But that's how she wanted it
I didn't say much and
She didn't say anything at all
I told her what a great friend she'd been
What a cherished wife and beloved mother
A woman valued above rubies
Was how I put it, finally finding a
Big answer that seemed to serve
I told her it was time to go, time to let go
Without fear, uncertainty, recrimination
Nothing left here that needed to be done
Time to move on.

And she did
End of conversation.



Tegulcigapa, Honduras Aftermath of Hurricane Mitch

Stephanie Doniger, Medical Student
Class of 2001



Normita

Stephanie Doniger, Medical Student, Class of 2001

I never really knew what the heart of medicine was all about until I met Normita. While working at the Flying Samaritan Clinic in El Testerazo, Mexico, I met this wonderful little 1-1/2 year old girl. The giant smile on her face masked her dire need for medical assistance, while the pain and desperation was evident in her mother Norma's face. Normita had a congenital heart condition called Transposition of the Great Vessels. Her cardiovascular exam was nothing but murmurs and thrills. Norma told us that Normita would turn blue when she began playing, and that she would squat down in order to breathe more easily. Nothing could be done for them in Mexico.

They were referred to our clinic, because they thought we could help them. The only hope for

Normita was to have a costly surgery for the repair of the Transposition. Otherwise, she would die. We, the Flying Samaritans, worked in concert with Healing the Children and Cedars Sinai in order to make her surgery a possibility. The only thing standing in our way was raising \$8000. The clinic coordinator and the Flying Samaritans worked day and night in order to raise money for her surgery. In order to further raise money, I figured that the medical students would be willing to help her too. I guess I didn't realize how much of an emotional impact this little girl had on me, until I stood up in front of the class and began to shed tears when I told them, "if she doesn't have this surgery, she is going to die." Needless to say, between the two classes— 2001 and 2002— we raised over \$2000. Everyone showed an overwhelming amount of

Scan Day

Anthony Vu Nguyen, Medical Student

support. Meanwhile, through the endless doctors' visits and studies, we all became very close to Normita and her family.

In November 1998, her surgery was performed at Cedars Sinai. She did amazingly well, and recovered far more quickly than anyone had anticipated. The next time I saw her was at a Healing the Children Christmas party. The beaming smile on her face made her indistinguishable from any other 2-year-old girl. The only thing that set her apart was the enormous scar across her chest.

A few months later, I received a call. It was all a blur. "Something happened... it doesn't look good... she's on a bypass machine." A group of us went to visit Normita and her family. She was in the PICU at Cedars Sinai—she was attached to a million tubes, and her body appeared lifeless. Norma was sobbing at her bedside. No one knew what had gone wrong—the surgeon was removing a granuloma from her scar, under the same anesthesia which had been used during the surgery. All of a sudden, her heart had stopped. This shouldn't have happened.

After two days, her kidneys had failed... and so had her brain. The decision was made to withdraw life support. At that time, a group of us were actually stuck in traffic. We got to the hospital once it was all over. The first thing I saw, and I will never forget, was the look on Norma's face. Never have I seen so much pain and anguish as I saw in her face at that moment. Her baby was gone.

It was difficult to imagine how something like this could have happened. It still brings tears to my eyes when I think about it. The one thing we can take comfort in is that Normita would allow other children like herself to receive life-saving surgeries. Just a few months ago, this tragedy helped pave the way to raise funds for a little boy from our clinic named David to receive a surgery. David is doing well. Now our clinic in El Teresero is virtually being flooded by potential candidates for surgeries.

Clutch the familiar heavy, green jacket of scans tightly. I have been sent to valiantly escort the CT scans to the team. Walk briskly through the halls. Press the elevator button, no ring. Quickly move into the lobby and press the waiting room elevator button. When your team awaits every second counts. As I pass through the waiting room, I see the curious, scared people who are having their Scan day. As I pass, I began to remember how much I hated Scan Day.

I remember missing anatomy lecture which I didn't mind too much. I remember driving my dad to the outpatient imaging center for our first Scan Day. It was like sentencing day in court but instead of wearing a clean professional suit, they dressed him in a thin polka dotted cotton gown with "Property of Fountain Valley Medical Center," printed in a regular pattern all around. Next was the milky white contrast which they made him drink, he could barely hold it down after all of the cisplatin.

"Don't worry" I would reassure him "it's just contrast, its not like the chemo" I would translate in Vietnamese.

He would ask for a blanket, for the room was icy cold like a refrigerator, the technologists would reply, "hold you breath... good". Lying supine made him short of breath, he usually always lies on his right side. He gets more oxygen that way or at least that's how he likes lying at home. As he passes through, I cannot stop thinking about our verdict, the inevitable sentence that we will be soon given.

What will those guys in those dark reading rooms monotonously mutter into their small microphones? Will there be densities in the liver? Did he get more time? How much did it grow? Was all of that damn chemo necessary? On that Scan Day we got away with more time.

A loud ring pierces the silence of the basement floor. The elevator cue signals. My senses were numbed, it was back to reality. I must rush PF # 15653505-1 to the team. I'm the man for the job. I quickly shuffled away carrying the verdict of another patient's Scan Day.

Composure

Anh-Quan Nguyen, Medical Student, Class of 2001

He gags
(tube slithering from his nose)
a deep red deluge pours from his mouth to sheets
Mr. Varices! Was it like this?
It was like this.
the nurse clears the congealed mess
And I do not flinch.

fast forward

I turn over Mr. Sclerosis
(a tube has found its way into his penis)
ulcers had developed
where the bed had attacked him
and I am greeted by the fragrant odor
of dried green feces
And I do not flinch.

fast forward

Look at this! Have you seen one so big?
Mr. Heroin lies on the bed,
(currently tubeless)
as a continent of bacteria eat through his calf
leaving his bone
the surgeon casually discusses amputation
my lying face tells him
that I have seen far worse
And I do not flinch

fast forward

Ms. Lupus cries out in pain
at the 87th needle to enter her body
her limbs are all scarred
from previous attempts
a black pool of blood encompasses her right thigh

And I do not flinch.

fast forward

He lies, stiff
his mouth open

my intern groans inside
at the paperwork he's just inherited
my resident's look of concern
masks his thoughts of the next admission

And the love of 40 years looks on
"he looks like he's sleeping"
I embrace her
And I silently weep
For the tears that do not come



Azin Meshkinpour
Resident Physician
Internal Medicine

Ethel

Eilly LaRoque, Medical Student, Class of 2001

My attending for ambulatory care, Dr. Henry, was skiing up at Mammoth for a long weekend, so I decided to tag along with Dr. Hawkins, a cardiologist in the same practice, for a Friday afternoon.

I immediately recognized that his patients tended to be much sicker than the fairly healthy, educated and motivated geriatric population that makes up most of Dr. Henry's patient base. One of the patients was sitting in her room with what I could tell was her daughter. Dr. Hawkins introduced me to Kathy, the patient's daughter, and then Kathy introduced me to her mom, Ethel. "I like the name Ethel," I said. "I am named after my grandmother Ethel who died before I was born." Kathy had to explain it again to Ethel in a loud voice. Then Ethel looked at me and smiled without opening her mouth, her puckered lips stretching a little showing her pink lines that wind in to mold to her gums. She gazed at me for the next minute with her big blue eyes behind her glasses and she looked so peaceful. Her eyes were warm and there was a look of satisfaction in them to a life long lived— she was 95 and she almost looked like she was ready to close her eyes and pass on. Her nostrils were filled with catheters from her O2 nasal cannula and the machine would make a sound like a ventilator with a rush of air every couple of breaths. Kathy had the box for the oxygen strapped over her left shoulder. Although Ethel's breathing looked shallow, it still looked effortless, and peaceful is the best word I can use to describe her.

Dr. Hawkins immediately commented on Ethel's bruises on her shins and Kathy said her mom has had more and more difficulty getting around. I asked if she walked from the parking lot to the office and Kathy said, "Mom always wants to walk, but this time I wouldn't let her and I told her she would have to use a wheelchair." Kathy did not once let go of her mom's hand and would stroke it whenever she could remember. She would offer her mom water in a cup and her mom would say no and then as the water got closer she would say yes and Kathy would help her take a sip. Kathy asked her mom if she would be more comfortable with her legs dangling down after we inspected her bruises and she said yes. We slid in the lower leg ledge and Ethel said, "Yes, that's better." Then for the rest of the visit, Ethel had her eyes closed most of the time and Kathy said it was time for her mom's nap. Ethel had been living with Kathy and her family for the last three years since she had been unable to function on her own due to her CHF. Kathy said her mother is the sweetest lady and is so appreciative of what Kathy does for her. Kathy's eyes were glassy the entire visit and there was a tremble in her voice. You could tell she loved her mother in the deepest way to the

point that she could not get enough of her or do enough for her, and she wanted so badly for her mom to be in peace. Kathy was asked other questions by Dr. Hawkins such as how her mom is breathing, sleeping and eating. Kathy wakes up with her mom in the middle of the night about three times for breathing treatments and her mom sleeps sitting up with pillows behind her back and head, just as she was snoring in the office. Kathy usually gives her mom one lasix but she gives her mom two if she can tell she's having problems breathing. She has to spoon feed her mom, otherwise her mom will not eat. It amazed me how Kathy treated and knew her mother just as a mother would know her young daughter. Dr. Hawkins asked Kathy if her mom had problems with getting agitated. She said she does only when there are problems that arise with Kathy's brother. Supposedly he wants to run off with Ethel, and he loves her dearly but he does not understand the severity of her physical condition. He also drained her entire bank account and has just recently put about half the money back. Kathy and her brother have had a rocky relationship for all their adult lives and Kathy said that at one point they did not speak to each other for 12 years.

We then went into Dr. Hawkins' office to talk about what we referred to as the "H" word when we were in the exam room with Ethel. She was not involved in this conversation; it was only Dr. Hawkins, Kathy and me. Dr. Hawkins opened the hospice conversation which supposedly he had mentioned to Kathy before, by saying, "It seems that the only real quality your mom has in her life is her relationship with you." Kathy acknowledged that this was true, and Dr. Hawkins said, "Your mom will be very comfortable there but you have to understand that your mom may die sooner than you would think. They make sure she is comfortable and surrounded by support, but there are no heroic measures. It may be the least stressful and happiest solution for both of you. It is time for your mom to go soon." Kathy agreed and said that her mom had told her a couple of times recently that she wanted to die and that she wanted to be with her husband. "My lungs are not meant to live this long," she once said. The conversation ended by Dr. Hawkins saying that he would contact her with more information about the hospice after she had a few days to think about it.

After seeing the next patient, Dr. Hawkins' nurse showed us pictures of Ethel's chest. It looked like a snow storm on the frontal view, and on the side view her bony structures looked like a candy cane with her osteoporosis. "Call Kathy and tell her to give her mom another two lasix," Dr. Hawkins said to his nurse.

The Sun Has Set

Faizi Jamal, Medical Student, Class of 2003

January 24, 2000; 2:55am

Death consumes me. I lie awake in darkness, wondering what does it "feel" like? Is it really nothingness? Or is there something, anything? I am a student of medicine, yet I know not the meaning of life or death.

When a child is born, and her lungs fill with her first breath of life, is that anything less than a miracle? Staggering are the millions of biochemical reactions that go on within the cells of our bodies every moment of our lives. I stand truly amazed with the realization of how miraculous it is that different combinations of just four nucleotides lead to the eventual production of the incredible machines that walk this great earth. Always fascinated by the immensely intricate workings of a human being, studying subjects like biochemistry, molecular biology, genetics, and embryology have served to further my respect.

My thoughts and feelings are changing now. When we went to Anatomy lab for the first time and began our dissections, I remember a feeling of plain awe. It was then that my battle with the concept of death began. To this day, a superficial glance is frightening; it is shocking to see how lifeless these cadavers lie. Not lifeless in a physical sense, but in the sense that it doesn't even seem like they had ever been anything significant, anything more than what just lies there. When I think about them though, yes, I know they had lives, they had feelings, they felt emotions of love, anger, passion, wonder, everything. All that went on in those bodies. They were just like me at one time: full of feelings, memories, so much, so much. Full of Life.

In the daily engrossment of the science and the known, I sometimes forget the mysteries. I fall prey to thoughts of absolute death, thoughts evoked by knowledge that is seemingly complete. So, if this is how I am alive, if this is how things work within me, ok then—then what is the point, if this is all that I am? If all I am is a collection of arteries, veins, nerves, and tissues working in synchrony, what is the purpose? Sure, it's not like this reality didn't exist before, but it's just becoming more real and more plain now. It lies before me everyday, for me to see and KNOW. Before I used to look at those cadavers and still see people. They were dead people to me; when I go in now, I don't see people anymore; I just see cadavers, just another learning tool. They're

like books: I look at them, I open them, I get lost in my education, and I do not even think about the FACT that these are PEOPLE. This woman that lies exposed before me, whom I have cut apart—she used to wake up every morning, eat, go to work, she had children, she was someone's daughter, someone's wife, someone's sister perhaps. She traveled, she was born somewhere, and she died somewhere. None of that comes to mind anymore: it is just an arm, a head, a neck, a brachial plexus, a subclavian artery.

At one time, they were full of life. Now, it appears that "life" was nothing more than a bunch of electricity. Just a mix of chemicals jumping around, electrons moving here and there, that's all. What else is life?

Some organic compounds composed of a few select elements, chemical reactions, and together they form the most complex creations known to man: intelligence, sense, feeling, human life. Yet to REALIZE that this is ALL there is—this is ALL WE ARE, that is all that I am? All I am is some incredibly complex electro-chemical composition? My feelings, my most profound memories, the intensity of the passions I hold in my heart—all this love that I feel is so divine and just so incredible—all nothing? Nothing special? Just chemistry?

NO. I've decided that the life that I hold CANNOT be that simple. There is essence within me that is beyond biological in nature. I have a soul. Don't I? I must: I feel SO strongly. I FEEL SO STRONGLY. I'm ALIVE! Perhaps this is denial, but HOW can this feeling be nothing but science? I must be alive, in a "higher" respect. I said before that I knew not what life was—I realize now: THIS is life. Feelings, experiences, memories, the reality of it all this is life. This experience of truth, of emotion—they all point to the existence of a true Life; and this Life, this Soul, cannot die.

So how am I convinced that I have a "soul"? Is there any evidence other than these "true and real" feelings of essence and being that refuse to accept mortality? Could these intense thoughts be nothing more than just that—thoughts, productions of my human imagination? While even that thought process in itself may provide proof of a "higher" source, Faith in God brings reassurance and ultimate faith in myself, in the existence of my soul. With this faith, I realize tranquility. Yet, how do I know that He is? To this reality, I



Honduras Sunset

Stephanie Doniger, Medical Student, Class of 2001

have seen countless testimonies in life. The human body itself used to suffice; with increasing knowledge, of late I have questioned whether its consummate perfection reflects Divine origin. Is it really proof for my soul or for higher forces than those that are known to us?

It matters not; there are other proofs in our lives. One is simply love. With usual animal experiences, a certain stimulus elicits a certain response. With the human emotion of love, things somehow feel different. One doesn't even need stimulation—just the sight of her eyes, or even just a spontaneous thought, can do something inside that is indescribable; indescribable in terms of this human body that we are dissecting. I knew not what life was before, but I know now, THIS is Life. The emotions that flow, the combination of awe and love that fills a mother's entire being when she holds her baby for the first time; no anatomist or physiologist can explain the depth of these feelings. This is Life. The question "how" comes to mind repeatedly... while it may hap-

pen within this body, I feel the ultimate answer lies only with one force. Only God knows, and I'm grateful that there is SOME mystery left, for it is these enigmas of being that maintain and nurture my Faith.

We have cut into the Creation of Man—dissecting it inside and out, learning exactly how EVERYTHING within this complexity operates, how life itself is sustained. Yet, there will always be wonders that remain unexplained, and perhaps this is the way it was meant to be. I feel at peace now. While these cadavers are now nothing more than biological remnants of what was once a human, the people live on. May their souls rest in eternal peace.

The sun has set. All around is darkness, but it no longer torments my mind. I can sleep now; for I rest knowing that while I may not see its light any longer, it has not ceased to exist. As the sun sets here in my world, it rises in another... and in this new tomorrow, a brilliant morning will come again.

Two Koan Poems

Stephen C. Bondy, Ph.D.

Professor, Department of Community and Environmental Medicine

The soft night rain is over
Subdued sounds eddy over darkly shining streets
With sorrowful crystalinity

Time chisels stone to find the form within
Caprice, wit and passion fly off
Concern and hope are chipped away
A bare outline emerges
Bare polished nugget of existence

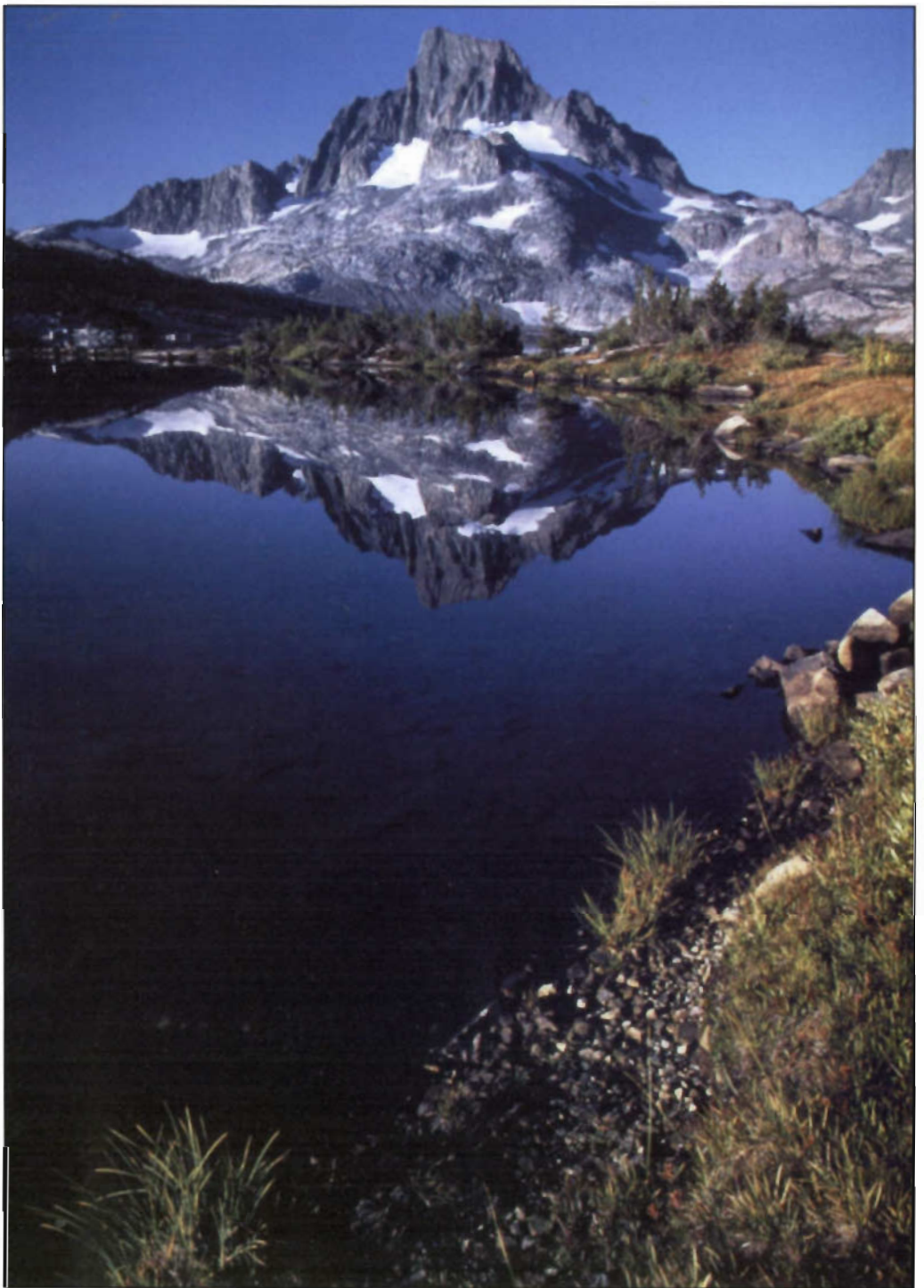
Rain and the Cattletrain

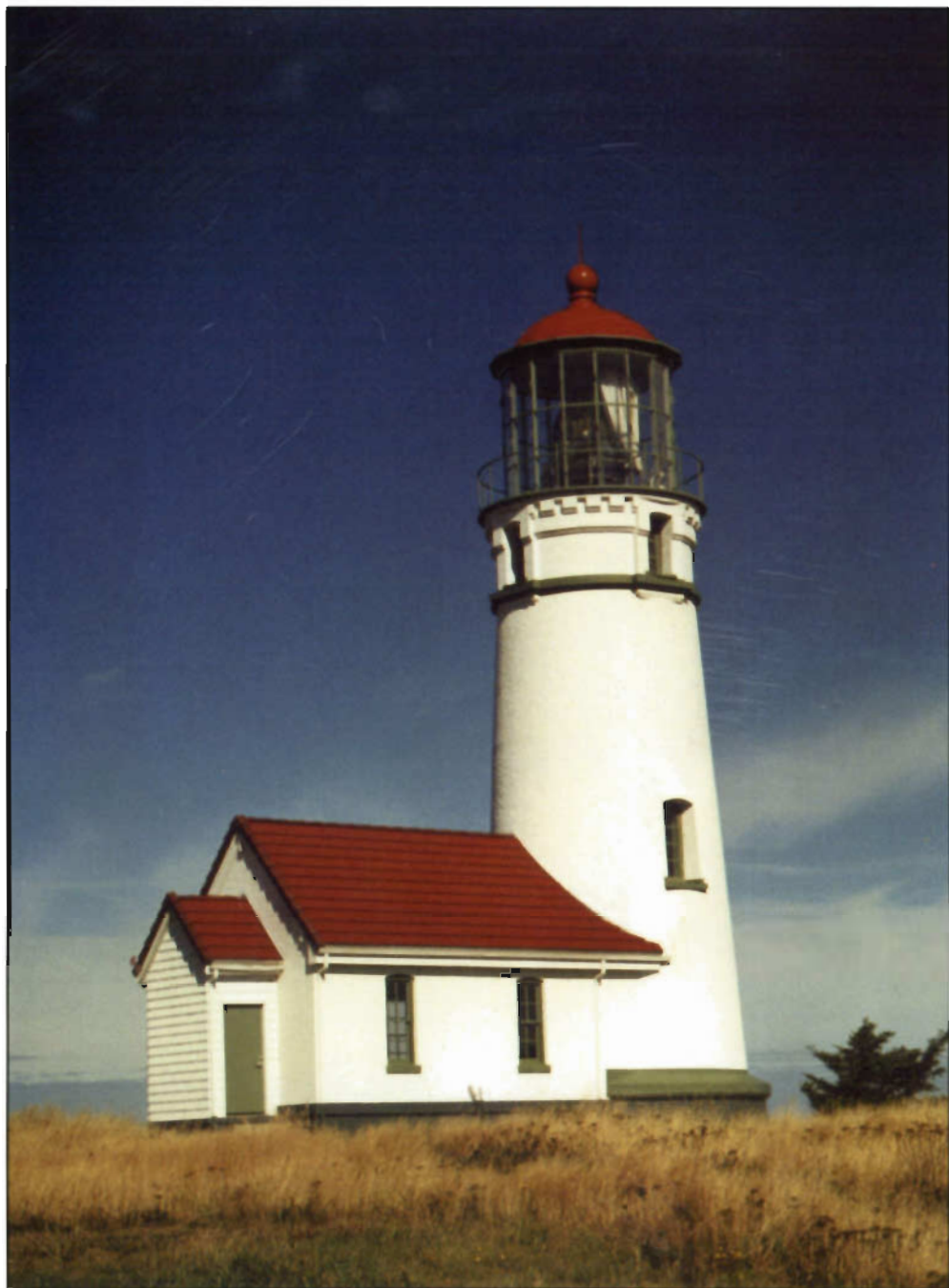
Andrei Novac, M.D., Department of Psychiatry

A pouring of Elixir of life.
An ignored cry for help in a dry land,
A first curtain of doubts about past sins,
A reminder of present joys are blown away by time.

To see ashes of friends scattered at sea,
To know about someone's pain waiting for soothing words,
To feel that soothing words are waiting for timeless devotion,
A space of solitude granted by God.

Dreamy fields of sunflowers scorched on a summer canvas
Reminding of the nighttime wailing of the grieving parent,
The magic of lively youth turned into flat, inescapable white noise.
Hold me please, I see no sky but just gray air behind the rusty bars.





Jose Ospina, M.D./Ph.D. Student

The Low Country

Elizabeth Morrison, MD, Department of Family Medicine

I. Great Aunt Edna

The city is swallowing this town
Your fathers and mothers fashioned
From calico and oak.
Bulldozers overturn earth that once
Bore cotton, corn, and tobacco.

Laughter and the Carolina sun
Have carved the soft places
Around your mouth and eyes.
You throw open the closet
To display racks of ballgowns
That rustle in your hands,
Demure, strong,
None of your dancing husbands
Has outlived you.

"That's your great uncle Johnnie,"
You say, pointing at a picture,
Sparrow-black eyes on my face.
"You do favor your kin."

Yours was a difficult legacy
But you have endured
And still you laugh
As you drink the nectar of each waltz.

II. Uncle Jack

Does she come softly to farmers?
(Whose arms bore down the plow into
The mule's footprints.)
Will it matter now that you knew her seasons,
The moon tides and the hot sun's orbit?

You would not die at Mindanao
Waiting behind the metal ramp of the LST,
Though death rose vaporous
From the jungle and the black water.
It was too far from home and
Southern boys must not die on foreign beaches.

In the summer after dinner
You drank with your brother on the porch
Flipping quail heads across the yard
Under the sycamores.
The rasp of your laughter
Betrayed a trail of drunken years
That night creatures could sniff out.

Years later, your brother has left you
Alone by the Edisto River,
Your skin clinging to bones
Tired of new islands.
No cotton grows here but
The milkweed still remembers.

III. Jean Emily, my mother

The walls are too old to cry
In the house your granddaddy built.
On a January midnight
Your mother laid herself open
In a room too small to hold in your first cries.

High above my head
Daguerrotyped ancestors
Look down time's narrow planks.
There is the photograph
Of you and your sister as little girls,
Her eyes avoiding the camera's touch.
Her arm shields you,
Safe, for now,
From the secrets of a Southern family.

But your eyes teach me reverence
And the importance of survival.

We don't speak of Knightsville now.
My mouth can't fit around
The peeling bark of Southern words.

And I could never ask you
To move the snows of forty Northern winters
That cover those wounds.



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