

UC Irvine

Plexus

Title

Plexus 2024: Navigate

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6xb01391>

Authors

Sahagian, Christopher

Gee, Caroline

Nguyen, Huan

et al.

Publication Date

2024-05-29

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

25TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

NAVIGATE

P L E X U S 2 0 2 4

UC IRVINE SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
JOURNAL OF ARTS & HUMANITIES

EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome to the 25th anniversary edition of *PLEXUS*, UC Irvine School of Medicine's annual student-organized Journal of Medical Humanities & Arts. To mark this celebratory milestone, it is with great pleasure that I present to you *NAVIGATE*.

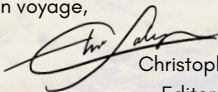
In the ever-evolving landscape of medicine, the ability to navigate through challenges and unforeseen obstacles is paramount. *NAVIGATE* serves as a timely invitation for our colleagues to reflect on the distances traversed and to envision the new horizons that lie ahead. We sought to highlight the constellation of tools utilized when we feel lost and to acknowledge the beacons that steer our actions. The subsequent pages offer its readers profound insights into the extraordinary journeys undertaken by the greater UCI Health community. We hope it delivers a sense of direction, solace, and clarity to all readers.

As we celebrate our 25th anniversary, we honor the visionaries, contributors, and readers that have propelled us forward on this remarkable voyage. Their collective support fuels our efforts to serve as a creative outlet for the community, catalyze meaningful discussions, and apply the tenets of medical humanities to foster a cohort of compassionate healers.

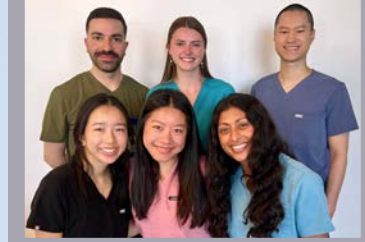
We extend our deepest gratitude to our faculty advisors Dr. Juliet McMullin and Dr. Tan Nguyen for their invaluable guidance and for sharing their expertise within the field. We thank the UCISOM Medical Humanities & Arts Program and the UCI Department of Family Medicine for their unwavering support.

I invite you to embark on this exploration with us, and witness the intricate tapestry of our contributors' lived experiences that defines our shared journey in healthcare.

Bon voyage,



Christopher Sahagian
Editor-in-Chief



THE TEAM

Editor-in-Chief – Christopher Sahagian

Creative Review – Caroline Gee

Creative Review – Huan Nguyen

Creative Review – Sana Shah

Design – Nicole Parker

Design – Britney Weng

Faculty Advisor – Dr. Juliet McMullin

Faculty Advisor – Dr. Tan Nguyen

Staff Advisor – Leonora Naser-Saravia

Cover:

NEW HEIGHTS

Britney Weng, MS1

San Pedro de Atacama, Chile

TRAVERSING

Britney Weng, MS1

Chile Route 23



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Navigating MEDICAL EDUCATION	1-5
Navigating PATIENT CARE	6-15
Navigating ILLNESS & DISEASE	16-23
Navigating GRIEF & LOSS	24-29
Navigating IDENTITY & LEGACY	30-35
Navigating LIFE	36-43
Navigating MENTAL HEALTH	44-49
Navigating THE WORLD	50-55
Index	56



MEDICAL STUDENT ART SHOWCASE HONOREES



LITERARY: Waves – Avery Robinson-Phelps
 Always on the Differential – Joanne Mendoza
 For P. – Allegra P Koch

VISUAL: The Guest – Sarah O'Dell
 El camino de la vida – Caitlyn Sing
 Pathways – Kellie Cho

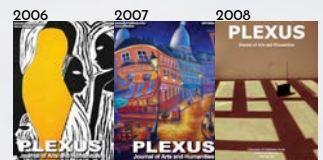
PERFORMING: Maha Ganapathim – Saloni Shah

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

For a quarter-century, *PLEXUS* has proudly served as a canvas upon which medical students, physicians, faculty, alumni, patients, and community members have showcased their talents, perspectives, and experiences, through art. To our knowledge, this marks us as one of the nation's the longest continuously run medical school-affiliated, student-organized medical humanities publication without adverts.

We owe this immense legacy to *PLEXUS* faculty founders Dr. Johanna Shapiro and Dr. Lloyd Rucker, and then-medical students Dr. Thomas Kang and Dr. Grainne McEvoy, for their pioneering vision that has guided this publication for all these years.

Cheers to 25 more years!



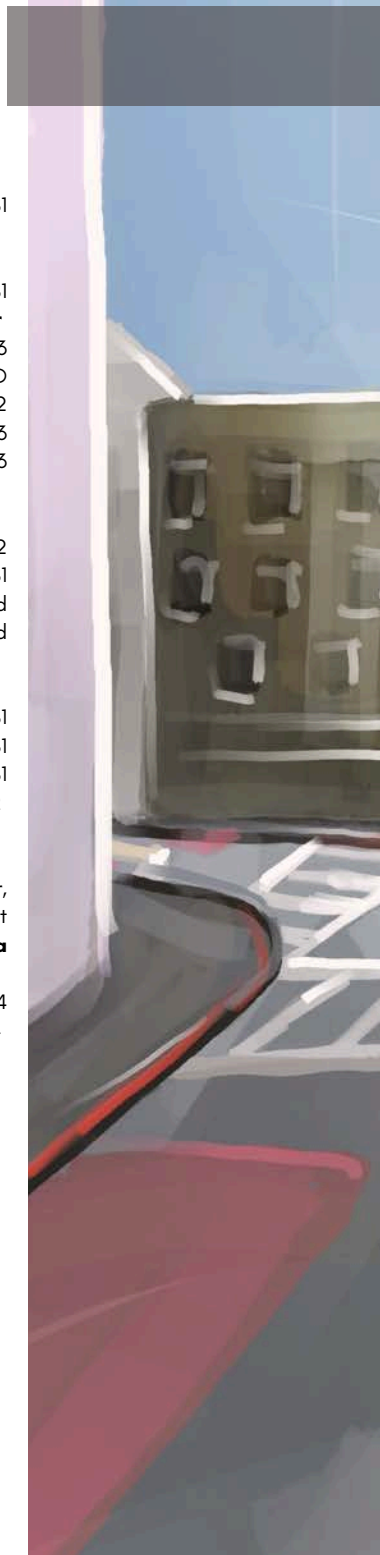
- 1..... **Pathways** – Kellie Cho, MS1

- 2..... **The Midnight Café** – Elaha Noori, MS1
Wandering Thoughts of a Student Doctor
– Fola Adesina, MS3
Journey To Lifelong Learning – Baotran Vo, MD
Message In A Bottle – Sunia Khan, MS2
The Last Carriage – Shivali Baveja, MS3
Decisions – Claire Marie Godenzi, MS3

- 3..... **Maha Ganapathim** – Saloni Shah, MS2
\$4.99 – Maria Angela D. Magpantay, MS1
Holder of the Dream – Areej Shaikh, UCI Undergrad
Balancing Act – Kristen Fong, UCI Undergrad

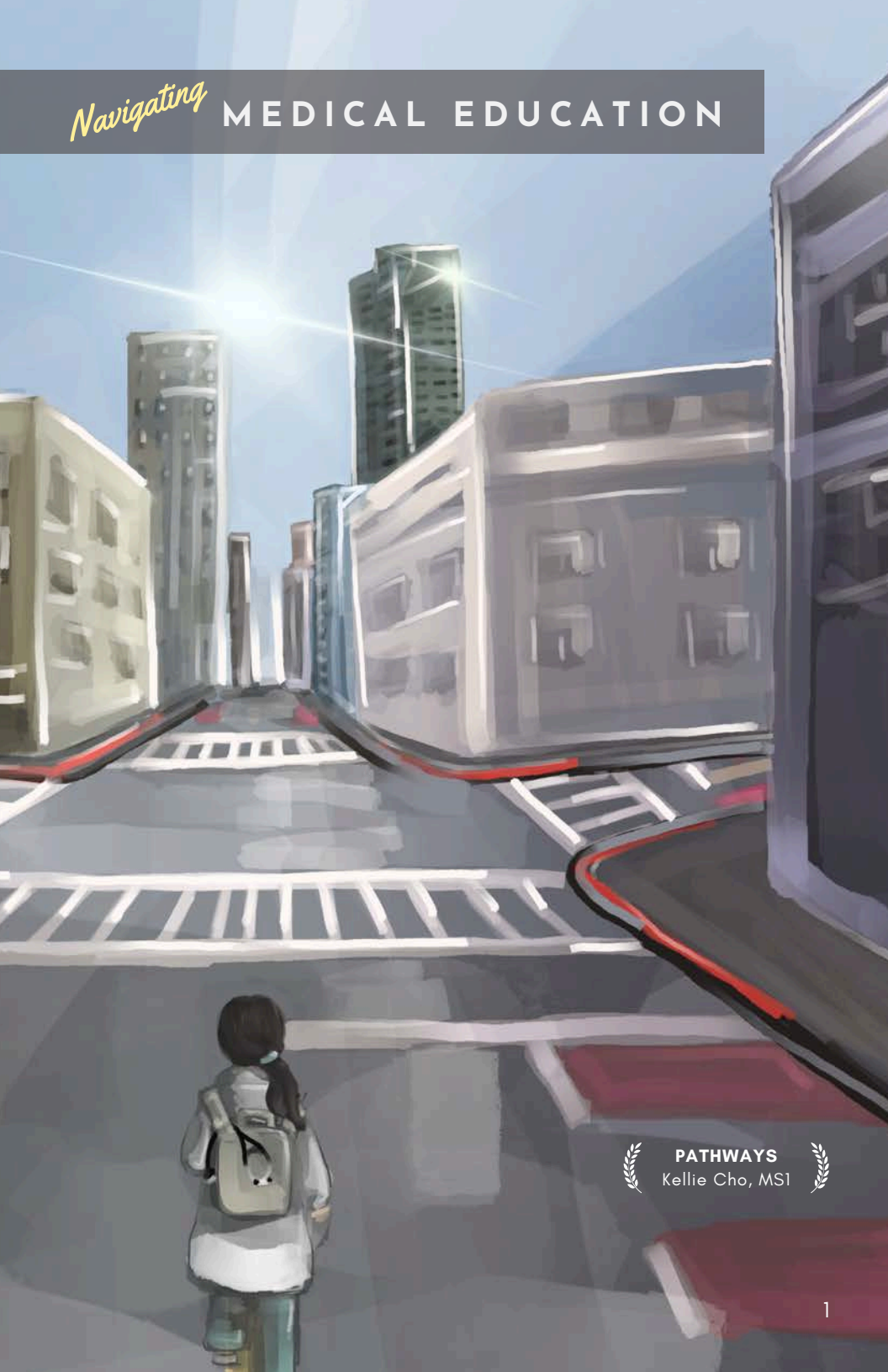
- 4..... **Swells** – Nicole Parker, MS1
For P. – Allegra P. Koch, MS1
memento mori – Emma Boyles, MS1
Gratitude – Surina Khurana, MS2

- 5..... **Resilience Along the Way** – Christian Makar,
MD/MPH Student
Solace in the Simple Pleasure of Sunday Morning Tea
– Elaha Noori, MS1
Hello, it's me again – Christopher Sahagian, MS4
The Summit – Pranathi Rao, MS4



Navigating

MEDICAL EDUCATION



PATHWAYS
Kellie Cho, MS1



THE MIDNIGHT CAFÉ

Elaha Noori, MS1

In the tranquil hours of night,
You'll find me alone but not lonely
Perched by the hearth in the seat
Once sat by those who came before me.

An ambience set by the crackling fire,
And the blue fluorescence of my screen
Would otherwise lull me to sleep if not
For the steaming carafe of tea.

At times the liquid too hot, too bitter,
But no cup shall return unempty.
Such is the rule of the Midnight Café
Even if elusion is tempting.

Tonight it seems my only companion
The stains on the red mahogany.
But the familiar chime of the café door
Signals the entry of the progeny.

They know not yet what waits
before them,
As they scour the menu of opportunity.
One meets my gaze with
furrowed brows,
As she looks to her future with scrutiny.

When the dawn breaks
and morning comes,
I'll look to my own
in similar sentiment.

Taking with me
the lessons of the café,
Soon I, too, shall step into
a new element.

MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

Sunia Khan, MS2

I drew this during my study breaks, so whenever I see this drawing it reinforces a message to myself to make time for things that bring me happiness.



WANDERING THOUGHTS OF A STUDENT DOCTOR

Fola Adesina, MS3

Nestled in the juncture of learner and teacher
Analyzing daily trends in patients' charts
Vexed too often by the bottomless well of knowledge
that spurs medicine
Invariably driven by passion – to heal, to advocate,
to listen, to learn
Grappling with the fragility of life
Absorbing information in an ever-changing landscape
Tying the threads of care, compassion and culture together
Emerging a physician whose greatest adventures are to come

JOURNEY TO LIFELONG LEARNING

Boatran Vo, MD



THE LAST CARRIAGE

Shivali Baveja, MS3

last night, the train was
full of passengers she knew,
they sat, silent staring out
the inner tunnel view

shook their hands one
by one, greeted them in kind,
walked though every open car's
locked front doors from behind

every time they spoke aloud
her voice stood backing down,
they watched her at the carriage
side, eyeing steady ground

she pried apart the metal
frame, torn into a few
pieces of simple pleasantries,
and jumped straight out of view

DECISIONS

Claire Marie Godenzi, MS3

I wander, lost
Off the path I had always ridden
Clubs, electives, mentors
I had been committed
To a future in primary care
Now confronting a new idea...

Could it be.. this not my pair?

Struck from my course
Hit hard by a new experience
Igniting my heart, my mind
Psychiatry

My soul left the cheeriest

Now

In the weeds
Looking back to the trodden path
Temptation – no need to restart

Should I just turn back?
Or follow my heart



MAHA GANAPATHIM

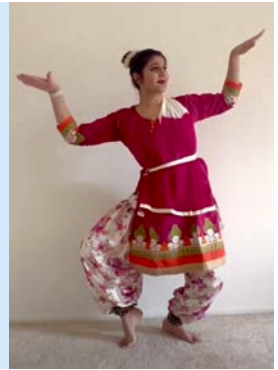
Saloni Shah, MS2



Maha Ganpathim is an ode to Lord Ganesha, a God that is a remover of obstacles. Hindus pray to Lord Ganesha before starting a new venture for auspiciousness as well as in times of great adversity. This piece is an original Bharatanatyam piece that I choreographed to express the journey of a child as they grow up and face the challenges of entering a profession that requires immense training and the weight of other peoples lives. They meditate to Lord Ganesha and depict his many commonly praised attributes as they find inner peace and strength to continue on their path.



Please scan the QR code to access the full performance.



\$4.99

Maria Angela D. Magpantay, MS1

Everyone navigates through their own course of life; I am currently navigating one called "medical student." I need to find ways to take care of myself; to tend to my ship to avoid sinking. As the captain, I must equip my vessel well for the daunting waves ahead. And so, I named my piece "\$4.99"—the cheapest price for a bundle of flowers I bought at Trader Joe's. These flowers remind me that though there will be dark and stormy nights, the warmth of the sun—a new day—will always welcome me on the other side.



BALANCING ACT

Kristen Fong
UCI Undergraduate

HOLDER OF THE DREAM

Areej Shaikh
UCI Undergraduate

I made this medical pencil holder in my ceramics class. The stethoscopes and first aid kit represent a manifestation of my future, a stethoscope that will be wrapped around my neck, and a first aid kit to alleviate the suffering of others. It is not just a static piece of artwork that occupies a small place on my study desk but a constant source of inspiration that makes me resilient in times of difficulty, exhaustion, and self-doubt. It helps me navigate challenging moments by providing a tangible way to connect with my dreams and future of becoming a skilled and compassionate physician. It holds my commitment and resiliency, propelling me toward the reality it symbolizes.



SWELLS

Nicole Parker, MS1

My heart swells.
 Engulfed in sterile lab lights
 I see another human,
 Just like me.
 A sister, a daughter, a friend.
 Yet they lay beneath
 a white sheet.
 Tears swell.
 Overcome with gratitude,
 overwhelmed by mortality,
 I treasure the sacrifice
 yet struggle to learn from beneath
 my white coat.
 I allow myself to feel:
 My swollen heart,
 My swollen eyes.
 Scary as they can be,
 Ocean swells guide a captain at sea.
 To discover the uncharted,
 It takes one to listen deeply.
 Ignoring the waves,
 Will only challenge a sailor's journey.

Swells may be daunting,
 Those from the ocean
 and those from the heart.
 But they can lead you to greatness,
 If you allow yourself to feel them
 From the start.



FOR P.

Allegra P. Koch, MS1



I pick up the brain in front of me and feel its shape
 I reel in awe—I have an entire person in just the cupped palms
 of my gloved hands
 I run my fingers over the folds and wonder who they were
 What shape they took in life
 How much love and pain and existence coursed through
 the impossibly small axons
 under my fingers
 And I think of you
 Of your brain matter spread across the highway
 Soft, pale pink on cold tar
 The piece on the divider was your laugh
 The piece on the shoulder our last day together
 Pons, cerebellum, thalamus spread out like a macabre painting
 The beautiful whole of you strewn in messy pieces
 across lanes of traffic
 One day, when my brain is in someone's hands
 They will run their fingers over each bump in awe
 And they will feel in every ridge how much I have missed you

MEMENTO MORI

Emma Boyles, MS1



GRATITUDE

Surina Khurana, MS2

*As I consider my journey thus far
 in navigating medical school and
 pursuing a career in medicine,
 there have been a handful of
 particularly grounding forces.
 The anatomy lab, made possible
 by those who donated their
 bodies to the Willed Body
 Program, has been one of those
 forces. As I continue to navigate
 through what may lay ahead, I
 will always have profound
 gratitude for the grounding,
 formative experiences I had in
 the anatomy lab and the awe it
 instilled in me.*

I don't know where to start
 The thanks I must say
 It feels so full, my heart
 I think about it as I lay

I left the anatomy lab
 overflowing with wonder
 In awe knowing what I had viewed
 It overtakes me like thunder
 I feel gratitude

I think about the donors
 and their loved ones
 Of their decision of great magnitude
 They have taught us tons
 I feel immense gratitude

Far from the lab
 I practice my skills
 I build my aptitude and review
 Thinking back to the donors,
 I always will
 I feel struck with gratitude
 The course is already done
 It was far more than a prelude
 My journey has just begun
 I am overwhelmed with gratitude

**RESILIENCE
ALONG THE WAY**

Christian Makar, MD/MPH Student

A short series of haikus meant to show what has taught me resilience as I navigated each year in medical school, from my first year in the pre-clinical setting to my third and fourth years as an almost independent provider that has finally shaped into the resident I've wanted to be.

Late nights, endless slides,
Resilient hearts find the strength,
To heal and inspire.

Patients inspire,
Strength to heal and to succeed,
In medical school.

Though mountains may rise,
Endurance fuels my spirit,
Success waits beyond.

White coats mark the way,
Resilience fuels our stride,
Doctors in making.

HELLO, IT'S ME AGAIN

Christopher Sahagian, MS4

Who do we phone when we need expert guidance? The heavens? Or the on-call nephrologist? This is an homage to the countless consult calls we make to navigate challenging clinical questions.



**SOLACE IN THE SIMPLE PLEASURE
OF SUNDAY MORNING TEA**

Elaha Noori, MS1



THE SUMMIT

Pranathi Rao, MS4

Medicine is Sisyphus pushing his boulder
It is the hands on the clock that never stop moving
Time sprints faster than the mind understands
It is the shelves of books that all need perusal
A storm of facts that hurtle downwind at lightning speed
It is the hordes of intelligence that make me feel small
The pedestal is high and the summit feels out of reach

But

Medicine is also freedom
It is every new discovery that grows a branch
in the tree of knowledge
Leaves fall with every season as new information
debunks the old
It is the cycle of learning and sharing that never ceases
The teacher becomes a student becomes a teacher

Medicine is unity
It is the hands that guide me through every step
The many shoulders I can stand on to reach a new height
It is the donated bodies I touch that once breathed life
An honor to learn about humanity from humans

Medicine is family
Sisyphus embarked on his journey alone
A price he paid for his trickery and greed
But my boulder has a hundred hands
to help push it to the peak
For it takes a whole village to raise a doctor

- 7..... **Fall** – Clifford Danza, MS2
- 8..... **Goals of Care** – Pranathi Rao, MS4
Ambulance Confessional – Alison Lawrence, MS1
- 9..... **Through My Eyes** – Nicole Parker, MS1
Rolodex – Caroline Given, MS2
Finding Air In Between – Caroline Gee, MS1
TTP – Johanna Shapiro, PhD
Back to Sea – Jenny N. Wang, MS3
- 10..... **Meditation On Considering Retirement**
– Gabriella Miotto, MD
You Have My Back – Britney Weng, MS1
The Best Medicine? – Nicole Parker, MS1
- 11..... **Track Lines** – Elaine Chiao, MS3
- 12..... **The Doctor Will Be With You Shortly**
– Audrey Goodman, MS1
Weight Check – Cindy Flores, MS3
Untitled – Clifford Danza, MS2
- 13..... **First Times Last** – Ashley Hope, MS4
- 14..... **Pause, Listen, Reflect, Navigate** – Cynthia Haq, MD
- 15..... **Last Patient of the Day** – Johanna Shapiro, PhD

Navigating PATIENT CARE



FALL
Clifford Danza, MS2

GOALS OF CARE

Pranathi Rao, MS4

She came with a chest tube, but no words.
Tachypneic, febrile, non-responsive
I knew this about her before I knew her name.
She was tiny and defenseless
As her own body waged war.
A newfound cancer in her lungs
That had stayed hidden for so long but now rampaged.
Searing through her body
With no remorse for the casualties.

I wonder what she was thinking
when she finally opened her eyes.
And saw tubes sprouting from her body
With a new face peering down at her every few minutes
As I felt for her pulse, she grabbed my hand and squeezed
My own heart raced as I naively hoped for good news
I squeezed back with all the comfort I could push
into my hands
But my squeeze went unanswered
and I wondered if she knew
How much heartbreak she could evoke in a stranger?

Capacity
A heavy word thrown around repeatedly.
I wonder if she knew she was being evaluated.
Even as she was trying to catch her breath
As her lungs filled with fluid and air
And as she slowly drowned in her own body
In another life, she would have been somebody's
grandmother.
But in this reality, she was a frail child
In mind and body, despite her true age

Losing the right to your body
Seems like the worst kind of torture
But medicine can be ruthless in its mission to heal
And there was no ambiguity in her abilities
As she weaved in and out of consciousness
Without a single word uttered from her lips
I called her family for they bore the burden of her fate
I wonder if she dreamt of pleasant things
As that painful conversation took place

Her sister had flown in to discuss next steps
After an hour, her entire future was set
Goodbyes were said, and then her sister left
Too scared to witness what would inevitably come next
One by one, each tube was removed
Eventually, she took her last breath
She may have died amongst strangers
But her family chose to set her free
I hope now she can finally breathe

AMBULANCE CONFSSIONAL

Alison Lawrence, MS1

Come to me in the dark.
Swaying straps and trailing cords
listen to you in our
unorthodox box,
the beeps, a bell,
counting the tolls of your heart.

Pastor cannot see it,
but God and I can,
the sacred peaks and valleys, electric.
Tell me, what's on your heart?
What's in it?

Come, child,
let us lay hands on you
as a congregation might.
Will they press hard enough
to stop your bleeding, as I do?

Allow me to anoint you
with the breath of life,
baptize you in holy oxygen,
such that your lungs are as full
as your heart of hearts.

Tonight, neighbors fall
on their knees for you,
their clasped hands
as much a prayer as my push
that keeps the blood
of the Lamb flowing.

What other hymn
produces wails that part the seas?
Who but Moses and I
artifice a safe passage home?
Your ark, in the heavy rain.

The forgotten priests drag their
own flesh
through the ash for you,
deliverance from the flames.
This is my body,
given for you.

I do this,
for the remembrance of you
in that zeroth hour,
my gloved hand in yours,
a covenant,
my eyes, an oath
to bear witness to you,
and only you,
as the heavenly lines converge
and flatten.

THROUGH MY EYES

Nicole Parker, MS1

As I begin to learn more regarding medicine and become more confident in my professional life, I want to continuously navigate my interpersonal interactions prioritizing the perspective of others.



FINDING AIR IN BETWEEN

Caroline Gee, MS1

A View of Manarola, Cinque Terre



TTP

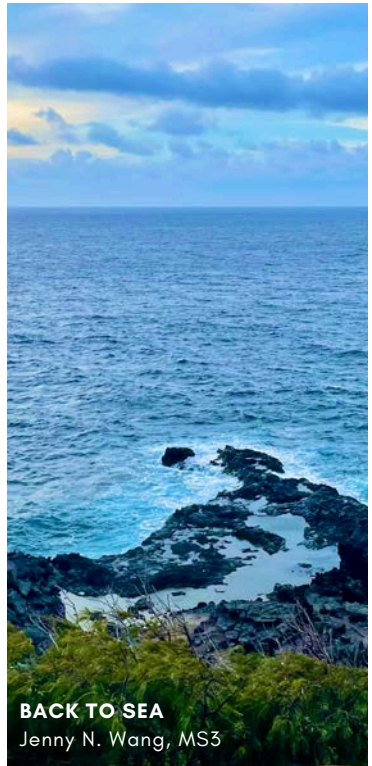
Johanna Shapiro, PhD

18 year old boy
No one expected him to die
But he did anyway
Blood everywhere
Social worker: I should have prepared mom better
Resident: We quickly went on with our rounds
 Other patients to see
 No choice
Social worker: He reminded me of my son
Resident: He reminded me of my brother
 Too bad

ROLODEX

Caroline Given, MS2

I have a rolodex of souls
outdated and obsolete
but I can't throw it out
so I peruse it from time to time
sample size hand cream, lime Perrier,
Toro y Moi
Marisol, David, or
the lady whose name I can't remember
who never
got her transplant because of an
ECMO
cannulation and a punctured ventricle
(she liked cheese puffs)
it's awkward, this antiquated index
but sometimes
when my phone dies
and I'm unmoored, off-course, on
unknown streets
my rolodex has the address



BACK TO SEA

Jenny N. Wang, MS3

**MEDITATION ON
CONSIDERING RETIREMENT**

Gabriella Miotto, MD

This job is a pilgrimage
so many stops in a single day
so many landscapes
the compass of the stethoscope at my ear
guiding me to the wind of your lungs
the waterfall of your heart
my hand uncovering the stone hidden in your breast
the red tributary of your recent scar.

This job is sacred geometry
our voices a call and response
in an exam room of four squared walls
the circle of your iris
brown earth, blue lake, crushed olive
beholding me beholding you
a slight tilt of shoulder
a bowed head.

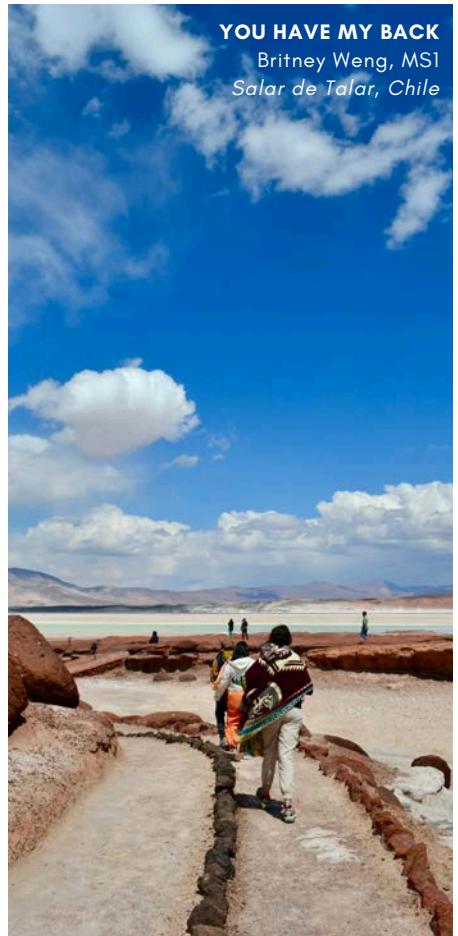
This job is hell
the running late and stealing your time
the incessant push to productivity
the numbers, numbers, numbers
and blue light of the computer screen
well beyond our dreamtime.

*

Physician, heal thyself!
My prescription?
the unflinching gaze of a yellow daffodil
after winter.

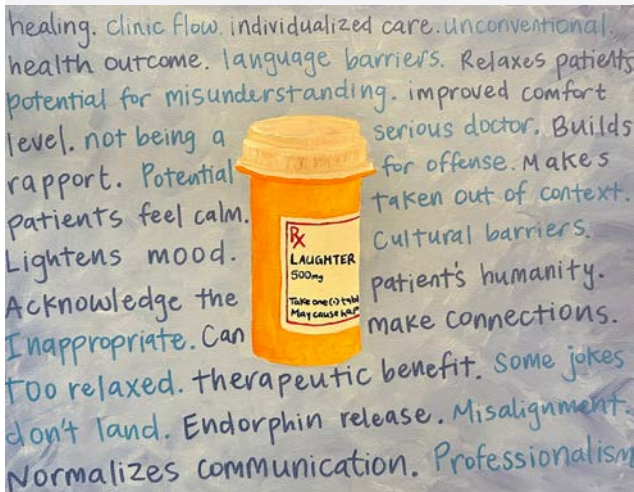
YOU HAVE MY BACK

Britney Weng, MS1
Salar de Talar, Chile



THE BEST MEDICINE?

Nicole Parker, MS1



TRACK LINES

Elaine Chiao, MS3

The MRI findings stood out with stark, unmistakable clarity. Even as a third-year medical student in the naïve stages of training, I found myself identifying the abnormalities before my eyes: multiple

enhancing lesions scattered across the brain, one of which compressing against the dural venous sinus and causing increased intracranial pressure.

Metastatic brain cancer is not a concept completely foreign to me. Years prior in college, I had worked with radiating oncologists who guided me through anatomic landmarks and the course of palliative radiation in the setting of brain metastases. Earlier last week in the neurooncology clinic, I saw an elderly patient who came for a follow-up appointment to monitor brain nodules that had disseminated from his primary lung cancer. Despite the echoes of familiarity, an unsettling feeling lingered. There was something different about today's scan. It belonged to a 26-year-old patient.

She was peacefully asleep when I walked up to her bed. In the early hour of dawn, rays of golden sunlight peeked through the hospital curtain and graced her face. In that moment, I remembered that we are only one year apart in age. We are both in healthcare, she a former ICU nurse and I a medical student. If we did not meet under the circumstances of IV drips and respiratory monitors, I would have never imagined the terminal prognosis festering inside her youthful body – stage IV melanoma metastatic to the breast, lungs, liver, pancreas, adrenal glands, and now, the brain.

As I was lost in my thoughts, she had opened her eyes gently to my footsteps. Her right eyelid was completely drooped, the result of a newfound brain tumor compromising her extraocular muscles. However, it did not take away her smile. I smiled back, properly introduced myself, and proceeded to assess her neurological status. I complimented the elaborate tattoos on her fingers, while she gradually opened up to me about her new fiancé and planning her wedding.

Over the next week, we reviewed her case in tumor board and consulted with other specialties. In the meantime, her clinical status was rapidly deteriorating. One of her brain metastases had increased 3mm in just a few days. She had already experienced disease progression after two surgeries, six months of radiation, and three lines of aggressive immunotherapies. Her cancer is now refractory to treatment.

"I feel like I have been running a marathon that I never signed up for," she said with a quiet pause. "And I am glad that I am reaching the finish point." Her mother, who had been silently accompanying her the whole time, turned her head away, and the ground underneath became moist.

Time sped up from that point. Her oxygen requirements rapidly increased overnight, with a chest X-ray confirming atelectasis with superimposed pneumonia and multiple bleeding tumors in her lungs. She officially signed the consent for transferral to hospice care. The beautiful wedding she had envisioned materialized into a last-minute exchange of vows in the hospital with a white dress and an oxygen mask. The call where she was supposed to ask her best friend to be her bridesmaid turned into a final bidding of farewell.

As I prepared for bed that night, I thought about how we are both going to sleep, but I will wake up to my 6 AM alarm the next morning while she will be continuously infused with Ativan and Dilaudid until she draws a quiet, final breath. In this moment, I felt acutely aware of the senselessness of life and how medicine has failed those who deserve a chance at it the most.

I came to realize that, although a cancer diagnosis is messy and complicated, it also simplifies. It strips away the defenses and values that society taught us are important to reveal the soft, nourishing truths underneath—the blessing of fresh air filling our lungs, the beauty of overlooked sunrises and sunsets, the gift of vulnerability in fully loving and entrusting another human being to hold your hand through the darkest times.

In my career, I know I will experience the privilege of walking alongside many others on this difficult journey. Our patients embark on a marathon they never signed up for, yet manage to traverse the journey with dignity and intention. They begin to think less about the things that an illness would strip them from, and more about what they could give in this life to show a bit more kindness to the world and the people they love. They find fewer reasons to ask "Why me?" and more reasons to embrace each passing day with gratitude and introspection. They are never tragedies in need of sympathy or saving, but warriors seeking a moment's rest, navigating the blurred boundaries of life with grace and purpose.

**THE DOCTOR WILL BE WITH YOU
SHORTLY**

Audrey Goodman, MS1

In the clinic's busy halls the doctor raced
While a patient faced cancer's cold embrace
Metastases everywhere, his diagnosis was stark
As he was left alone in the dark

As the doctor rushed from room to room
He sat distressed, filled with doom
Impatience brewed as the doctor ran late
I softly said, "I'm so sorry for the wait"

His eyes were filled with anger and fear
He slammed the door for all to hear
The doctor's time, a precious cost
A storm unleashed, frustration tossed

Weeks turned to months, many visits passed
Despite the chemotherapy the cancer moved fast
A journey marked by aches and pain
He sung of compassion in his final refrain

He spoke of the doctor, in retrospective light
Of his dedication and kindness and being a part of the fight
He thanked me for my patience in times of despair
A hand extended, a burden shared with care

He was unable to defeat the grasp of death
But he showed me understanding with his parting breath
Lessons learned in the quiet of the night
To honor each soul in the healing light

WEIGHT CHECK

Cindy Flores, MS3

Just a few more pounds to lose,
Just another fatphobic ad on the news.
They criticize my body day after day,
Unknowingly making me feel a certain way.

Another 'weight check' on the trackboard,
I know this one can't be ignored.
Preceptors don't feel the same,
They think patients are the one to blame.

The day has finally come,
Will I be made to feel dumb?
Escorted to my room,
To wait another hour, I assume.

Hello, I say, what brings you in today?
Hoping they're feeling at least okay.
My goal is to focus on energy, not weight.
Hopefully I can find a way to relate.

This is something strange,
Is it possible there's finally a change?
Weight has not been mentioned yet,
This medical student has made me forget.

Looking, I notice she starts to smile
She hasn't looked at the scale in a while.
She's looking at me and we both wait,
This is about who we are, let's not weight.

UNTITLED

Clifford Danza, MS2



FIRST TIMES LAST

Ashley Hope, MS4

I made a running list of firsts when I started my internal medicine rotation. It was not a very exciting list.

Monday, Week 1

- First day of IM wards!
- First primary patient
- First time consulting ID
- First time calling family

I never meant to write it down – these were just little things I said out loud as I took in the novelty of being here – but my intern loved it. We commemorated my first fax sent and my first fax received. We made a game out of seeing how many things I could put on the list in one day. The longest one is:

Friday, Week 1

- First COVID patient
- First time calling pharmacy
- First time dosing IV antibiotics
- First time pending discharge orders
- First cancelled discharge
- First time getting yelled at by family
- First time family hung up on me
- First patient to leave AMA

Still not terribly exciting, but I promised to keep this list running, at least until we found someone else who would enjoy it as much as we did. To my surprise we did. Even more surprising, there was a day when I had nothing to add, so soon after, I stopped maintaining the list.

I wish I kept it going.

Sometime in weeks 5-7

- I diagnosed a patient with cancer for the first time. Rare, metastatic cancer.
- I found my patient in respiratory collapse and called his son to tell him that his father was upgraded to the ICU, a first for both of us.
- I consulted palliative care for the first time on a patient who was homeless, had no family, and was admitted in violent delirium for altered mental status.
- I rounded on a patient who was “comfort care only” for the first time.

- When my patient died, I was sitting next to the resident who answered the phone and not a second after the announcement we were to write the discharge summary and death summary because it was almost time for sign out. I drove home numb and sat in my car in the dark for several moments before going inside. It was the first time I'd lost a patient.

Before I started my clinical rotations, I thought often about what my firsts would be like. Perhaps strangely, I had imagined what it might be like to lose a patient. It was not like this.

I knew my patient's full name. It was the only thing he said to me. I knew the trending values of his troponin and creatinine. I knew the dosages of every antihypertensive medication he was on and the changes we carefully titrated every day. I knew that sometime in the last four years he had lost his family, his home, and his mind. I knew, one day, when I received the results of his brain MRI, that he would remain lost.

In the days that followed, I couldn't help but feel that I was lost in some way too. My team continued working without missing a beat. After all, the hospital was still operating; notes needed writing, orders needed placing, and other patients needed our attention. I moved along but I couldn't shake the vague sadness that in doing so I had failed my patient, who was now lost forever, and that I had also failed myself – that I'd lost the part of myself I always thought would make me a good doctor. I was terrified I would never find it again.

At the end of the week, my former intern reached out to me. He had seen my patient on the palliative service and asked if I needed to talk. I remember sitting in my car in the dark looking at his message when suddenly the weight of this patient's life and death hit me.

I thought of the long moments I spent at his bedside, looking into his eyes for a glimpse of who he was, his anguished gaze and urgent repetition of his name the only response. I was filled with sorrowful purpose thinking of my patient coming to us in distress with nothing and no one, not knowing that the hospital bed would be his last place of rest and that we would be the final witnesses to his life. It was a grave responsibility and an incredibly precious honor.

Sitting in the parking lot with tears falling, knowing my friend was on the other side of the phone thinking about my patient too, I closed my eyes and finally felt the moment of stillness and reverent silence I needed to settle that vague sadness into a sense of peace and purpose.

I drove home and started writing again – not just for the firsts and the lasts, but also for everyone in between, to recreate the moments I needed to remember.

PAUSE, LISTEN, REFLECT, NAVIGATE

Cynthia Haq, MD

originally published in *Every Doctor:
Healthier Doctors = Healthier Patients*

The University of California, Irvine received urgent requests in early 2020. “We are overwhelmed! We need support. Can you help?” As a family physician with decades of experience, my response came naturally. “What can we do? Where are the needs greatest?”

Within days, a resident and I were donning gowns, gloves, and masks to assess our first patient suspected with COVID-19 at our after-hours clinic, “How can we help you?” Beatrice, a 35-year-old woman responded, “I’m terrified. I feel like I can’t breathe. The restaurant where I worked closed due to the pandemic. I lost my job. I’m exhausted. I can’t pay rent and don’t know how I can buy food. Can you help me?” We did our best as we wondered, how could we help her navigate the challenges she faced?

As the pandemic continued, we confronted additional crises. The brutal murder of George Floyd, a Black man, by a White police officer who knelt on his neck for more than 9 minutes while he pleaded “I can’t breathe”, was captured on video and broadcast to the world. People of color including Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans contracted COVID-19 and died at much higher rates than Whites. These stories illustrated the horrors and persistent damages from racism and discrimination in health care and in our society.

Concurrently, California experienced raging wildfires. The sky became dark; ashes rained down like snow as millions of acres burned. We couldn’t go outdoors due to dangerous air pollution; we couldn’t remain safely indoors with others due to the risk of contracting COVID-19. The deleterious impacts of global warming, drought, flooding, fires, and climate anxieties threatened more people, animals and communities, with the greatest harms falling on the most vulnerable.

Physicians are called to navigate complex, and emerging health challenges and to:

- Protect ourselves, clinicians, staff members, and patients.
- Listen and examine to understand and effectively respond to the changing circumstances and needs of our patients, communities, and times.
- Expand our capacity to care for greater numbers of patients.
- Sift through mountains of emerging information to determine safe, innovative practices to transform patient care, medical education, research, and community engagement.
- Enable the disadvantaged to receive care remotely.
- Reduce harms from damaging effects of racism and climate change.
- Remain calm, compassionate, and provide clear guidance despite uncertainties.

The enormity of these challenges compels us to recall our values and to select priorities. Family Medicine faculty, residents and staff drew on upon their core values to navigate through troubled waters.

- Excellence: deliver high quality clinical services and education through continuous improvement, innovation, and scholarship.
- Professionalism: demonstrate respect, integrity, humility, and compassion.
- Diversity and inclusion: value the unique contributions of every department member. Foster interdisciplinary team-based collaborations.
- Advocacy: promote health equity and social justice.
- Sustainability: ensure careful planning, organization, accountability, and efficient use of resources.
- Salutogenesis: cultivate nurturing environments for patients, trainees, staff, and faculty.

How did I personally navigate these times? After decades of intense practice, teaching, raising children, and unexpectedly losing my husband, I was weary from rushing to the next thing. I paused, found teachers, and learned from their experience and wisdom. I discovered a community of practice through the Institute for Zen Leadership, committed to meditation practice, and applied lessons that sustain me.

“Become the other, go from there.” When doctors lead emergency responses, we must act quickly to take charge, assess, diagnose, and transmit orders to save patients in distress. As leaders, it is important to listen and restrain tendencies to act too quickly. Rather than imposing my ideas and/or withdrawing from conflicts, I find it is valuable to pause, relax, listen, notice, resonate with the energy of the situation, and then determine how to add value. How can leaders guide a group or system to facilitate what needs to happen next?

“Leadership comes through me but is not about me.” A multitude of conditions and circumstances far beyond our control shape everything from the conditions of our birth to the “wicked problems” of our times. Our knowledge, skills, experiences, and values are derived from this vast web that includes gifts of from our ancestors, knowledge transmitted from prior generations, love from our family and friends, and practice with patients who enable tentative students to become competent physicians. My individual self is an illusion. I’m intimately interconnected with all of life on earth. Resonating with this sense of what Thich Nhat Hanh calls interbeing allows me to savor the miracle of being alive in each moment.

Returning to Beatrice, we paused, listened, examined, and found she was afebrile with normal respirations and blood oxygen, no cough, and few symptoms of COVID-19. We provided medical reassurance while we acknowledged she was anxious, fearful, overwhelmed, and uncertain. We knew she needed more; we offered breathing exercises and referral to social services for counseling, housing, and emergency food assistance. She trusted us enough to return later for COVID-19 vaccines.

We need effective, compassionate physicians and leaders to navigate the complex challenges of our profession and our times. I invite you, dear readers, to connect and share with colleagues the values that guide your priorities, to pause and listen for when you can add value, and to be sustained by remembering that we are each a brilliant thread in the rich tapestry of life.

LAST PATIENT OF THE DAY

Johanna Shapiro, PhD

It was late in the afternoon and the family medicine clinic had been unusually busy – filled with medically complicated patients whose life circumstances were even more complex. And it was the start of July, when yesterday our learners were medical students somewhere, and today they were our doctors.

I was observing one of the new interns as he started his final interview of the day. It appeared to be a straightforward case – according to the chart, the patient had “a cold.” The intern, visibly exhausted and also visibly relieved that he was almost home free, at least for today, began his interrogation.

When did the symptoms first present? Were they getting better or worse? Had the patient had similar symptoms before? His patient was compliant and eager to help. She answered all of the intern’s questions in a soft but clear voice. She was not tangential or nonresponsive. She knew her dates and times. She was, in short, a perfect patient.

At the end of a sentence describing her cough, the patient said in exactly the same tone of voice, “I’m thinking of killing myself.”

I just about fell off my chair, alarm bells jangling in my head, my heart thudding like a heavy boot hitting the pavement. I glanced at the intern, the suicide assessment protocol already racing through my mind.

The intern was typing his note. He glanced up with a mildly concerned expression.

“Any fevers?”



Wait, what? Before I could collect my thoughts, the intern stood up to leave.

“Nice meeting you,” he said.

This story has a happy ending. The intern and I debriefed outside the exam room, he went back inside, evaluated the patient for suicidality, judged that she was not immediately in danger of harming herself, and made an appropriate mental health referral. He was kind, thorough, and desperate to prove he knew how to handle the situation. And he did.

During that follow-up conversation with the patient, initially both she and the intern were awkward and embarrassed. The patient struggled with her sense of stigma about mental illness. The intern worried that, through inattention and excessive reliance on algorithmic medicine, he could have killed his patient. At the same time, they seemed to bond over their mutual distress. They saw each other and they saw each other’s suffering. And as the sun sank, casting ever-deepening shadows, in that room there was a kind of joy that each of them, at least for today, had averted disaster.

- 17..... **The Guest** – Sarah O'Dell, MD/PhD Student
- 18..... **Illness Doesn't Stop Me From Enjoying My Life**
 – BaoTRAN Vo, MD
Larger Than the Walls Which Enclose It
 – Sana Shah, MS1
Jean-Pierre Pascal – Chloe Pascal, UCI Undergrad
Antidote – Gabriella Miotto, MD
- 19..... **Adversity from Within** – Luigi Gonzales, MS3
Baby Blues 2 – Sarah Hoenicke Flores, UCI PhD Student
Gratitude – Sunia Khan, MS2
- 20..... **Have You Eaten Yet?** – Nancy Dang, Alumnus
Night is a One Eyed Pirate – Gabriella Miotto, MD
Rise – Christopher Sahagian, MS4
- 21..... **It's the Pain Talking** – Frank L. Meyskens, MD
Take a Seat – Nicole Parker, MS1
Morning Casting – Stuart Alan Green, MD
- 22... **Navigating in Turbulent Waters** – Eileen Thereasa Span,
 UCI Undergrad
- 23..... **Field of Green** – Nicole Parker, MS1
Convergence – Celina Yang, MD/PhD Student
Forging Ahead – Jenny N. Wang, MS3


THE GUEST

 Sarah O'Dell
 MD/PhD Student

This is a photograph of a multi-media diorama made in 1:12 scale, where each inch corresponds to one foot. The presence of a life-sized pill bottle disrupts the miniature scene, rendering both the tiny environment and the medicine itself uncanny. This piece examines what happens when illness - or treatment - looms large in our mental and physical environments. If medicine, here, is the disproportionate "guest," how do patients navigate the shifts in perspective forced by the larger-than-life intrusion of illness or treatment? How can providers help navigate this altered sense of perspective, especially when the objects and perspectives of the clinic (e.g., the pill bottle) threaten to overwhelm domestic spaces?



Navigating

ILLNESS & DISEASE



**ILLNESS DOESN'T STOP ME FROM
ENJOYING MY LIFE**

BaoTRAN Vo, MD

Kids teach us to look on the brighter side and find ways to enjoy life despite the cards dealt to us.



ANTIDOTE

Gabriella Miotto, MD

When the geriatrician tells us you have Alzheimer's I want to throw something, anything like the dough in your Triestin recipe for strucolo

which is supposed to be "heaved with violence against the table" in preparation for its journey in the oven, filled with sweet apples and pine nuts.

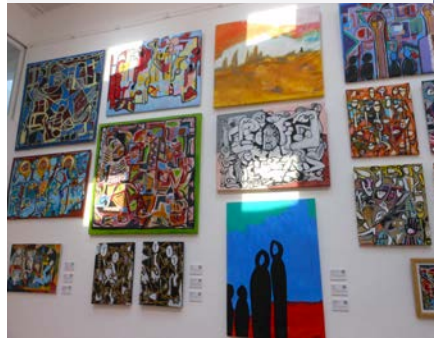
I want to hide under the earth, white truffle to my oak, wait for the chosen dog to find me, murmuring prayers to the Madonna from Alba

readied to be sliced memory by memory releasing the aroma of moments and years.

Instead, I hold your ringed and wrinkled hand in mine.

**LARGER THAN THE WALLS
WHICH ENCLOSE IT**

Sana Shah, MS1



JEAN-PIERRE PASCAL

Chloe Katherine Pascal
UCI Undergraduate

This is a photo of my grandfather which I took after he spent over two months in the hospital in recovery after undergoing a stroke while he was on vacation visiting family in France. Thousands of miles away from home and comfort, this was a terrifying experience for many reasons. This photo I took on my last hospital visit with him, just days before he was granted the knowledge that he was well enough to fly home and receive care in America. This photograph captures the hope for the future and the next stage in his road to recovery and our relationship through his magnetic gaze.



ADVERSITY FROM WITHIN

Luigi Gonzales, MS3

One of the most important life experiences I've ever had was my battle with Primary Mediastinal B-Cell Lymphoma. It has been a major motivator for my decision to pursue a career in medicine. Most importantly, it is a constant reminder to live life to the fullest because we never know what could happen.



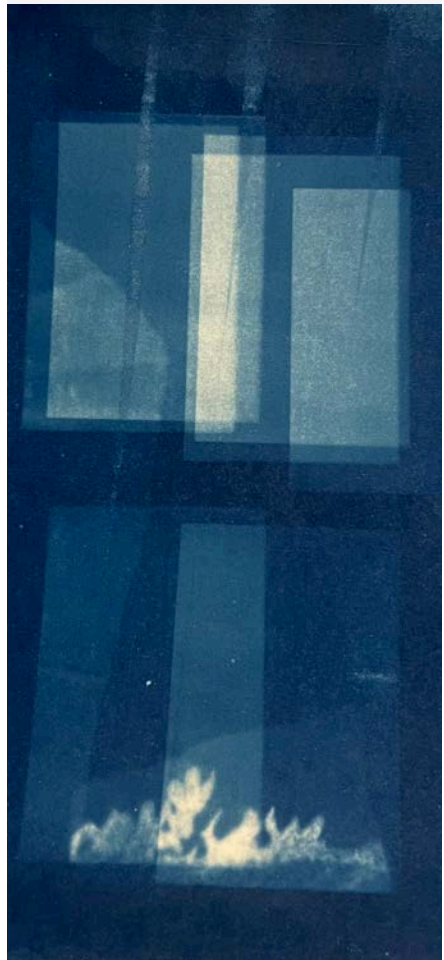
GRATITUDE

Sunia Khan, MS2

BABY BLUES 2

Sarah Hoenicke Flores
UCI PhD Student

During the period just after my child was born, I spent a lot of time in bed, watching the lights from the insensate world outside pass over the bedroom walls. The submitted piece is a simulacrum of that movement. Created using cut paper, oil pastel, and cyanotype preparation fluid, it is an attempt to capture both the light and the blues of postpartum, its cyclical and sense of endlessness. It is also, now, an emblem of having made it through.



HAVE YOU EATEN YET?

Nancy Dang, Alumnus

This piece is inspired by my experience with navigating my dad's dementia and the changes in my family's lives as we adapt to his condition.

It was 7pm and I was still building my couch fort
You walked over, holding a bowl of
stir fried veggies and a spoon
I reluctantly crawled out of my fort
to be fed a spoonful of rice.
You made sure that your daughter
would never have to endure
the starvation and poverty that you did.

I was off to elementary school,
Each day I carried my pink sparkly lunch box,
tightly packed with food and snacks.
In third grade, I started to
learn multiplication and division,
So you bought a pack of flashcards to practice at home
You made sure that math was my strong suit.

In high school, I saw you three times a day there:
in the morning, during lunch, and after school.
You stopped by during lunch to drop off hot,
freshly made food.
I also learned to drive.
You taught me how to drive home from school
and the directions to Little Saigon.
You made sure I knew how to navigate without GPS.

In college, you asked every morning
if I had enough money for lunch
(To which I insistently said yes)
Whenever I came home, you greeted me with,
"Have you eaten yet?"
You also asked one day, "Did I pay the internet bill yet?"
You did, last week.
What seemed like an innocent question
was the beginning of a new side of you.

As time passed, "Have you eaten yet?" became
"Have I eaten yet?"
along with other questions:
"What day of the week is it?"
"Where are we going?"
"What did we buy from the grocery store earlier?"

I am now the one driving you to Little Saigon,
reminding you of the plazas
and street names that you used to teach me.
I am now the one holding up the math flashcards,
to which you pause at each one to figure out the answer.
Now, after getting home from work,
I greet you with, "Have you eaten yet?"

NIGHT IS A ONE EYED PIRATE

Gabriella Miotto, MD

of amber moon
watching us make our way home
on the asphalt seas of
California freeways.

But no way is ever free, is it?
and moonlight decides
what is the toll for this route tonight:

to watch a father, bedside,
navigating the syncopated rhythm
of his heart
grabbing the promise of a pacemaker,
a life foreshortened
brought back into measure
with sounds of dialect

words long-buried
inching out from dark crevasses
a mortar binding the looks in eyes

to the flow and sequence of the heart,
a consequential love
from there to here

this way back,
the patrimony
between father and daughter.

And night plunders
the jeweled resin
where memories lie trapped

'til, rubbed free of grime and time,
that which was static between us
becomes electric once more.

RISE

Christopher Sahagian, MS4



IT'S THE PAIN TALKING

Frank L. Meyskens, MD

originally published in *ASCO Connection: Healing Conversations and Poetry*

Severe pain can lead one to places that are uncharted, unfamiliar, and unknown. Whether the paths are physical, emotional, or existential, the devastation is life-changing and undeniable. These unwelcome and unrelenting feelings often permeate every aspect of daily life and can deeply affect relationships with loved ones, friends, and caregivers. The feeling that, in a way, you have been betrayed by your own body, can be profound and lasting.

Five years ago the rocket exhausted its fuel,
nearly disintegrating, crashing hard.
Healing these past few years, ready to go again.
But it was not to be.

Sacrificing your time to gently care for me
as my long-hidden illness overwhelmed.
Becoming public by a collar,
rigid around my neck.

A beautiful date the evening before.
Dinner by firelight, a briskness in the air,
Your smile shining in the darkness.
All go, even with challenges in the way,

I anticipated meaning restored to my life.
Productivity, love, and courage within sight,
yearning for my heart restored.
But it was not to be.

Awakening early with nine-plus pain
in the neck, the back, everywhere.
My response to your morning greeting
Hurtful

I held my breath,
suppressing words
I should never say.
The promise of redemption put on hold,
your kindness quashed.

The Pain talks, overriding my deep love for you,
producing more regrets,
adding to the burden of existence in a changing world
that I try to accommodate, but no longer recognize.

I pull back once again from the temptations of the
Golden Gate.
Ripping off the collar,
screaming in the enveloping darkness,
for the damage to us that I have done.

I open my eyes and You are still there.

TAKE A SEAT

Nicole Parker, MS1



MORNING CASTING

Stuart Alan Green, MD
Dianchi Lake, Kunming, China



NAVIGATING IN TURBULENT WATERS

Eileen Thereasa Span
UCI Undergraduate

Two days before receiving my University of California, Irvine student ID card, I was in the Dermatologist's office because I needed a biopsy on my lip. The results were brutal, and my appearance looked as if I had been in

a fight and lost the battle. That night, I was scheduled to coach a practice on the pool deck in Mission Viejo and as I called out each set, I tried to hide my distorted face, and not think about the future. But I could not hide for long, school was going to start and navigating my education and career became a task that needed precise planning and really, what choice did I have? You either sink and fail, or you tread water and fight for survival.

School began and for the first time I was grateful for masks. The professors did not know behind that thin cloth there was a blossoming cancer that spread from the lip to the inside of my mouth. I had visited multiple surgeons and their opinions all included immediate action with either radiation or surgery with mouth reconstruction. Physically and mentally the energy needed to attend school was fading, and with each day I questioned my goal of obtaining a college degree as the task seemed impossible. The anticipated agony of the classroom never transpired, and the experience was just the opposite of what I had feared. Writing, speaking and yes, even exams gave me a break from reality and so I immersed myself in my studies, escaping into the world of Literature.

The first two quarters I somehow managed to work in the early morning, drive to the cancer center to receive radiation and still make it to class on time. My husband would leave work and drive me to school because I began to weaken to the point where it was difficult to walk from the parking lot to class. The effects of the radiation were spreading, and the tumor would just bleed continuously. My mask was black, hiding the deep red stains and allowing me to pretend I was normal. One of my classes involved not just writing but also acting out the scenes in front of the class. Standing in front of the seventy students, I could play a role, and for that small moment lose myself in the tragedies of the past. Mentally the class was my savior, physically I was just getting worse.

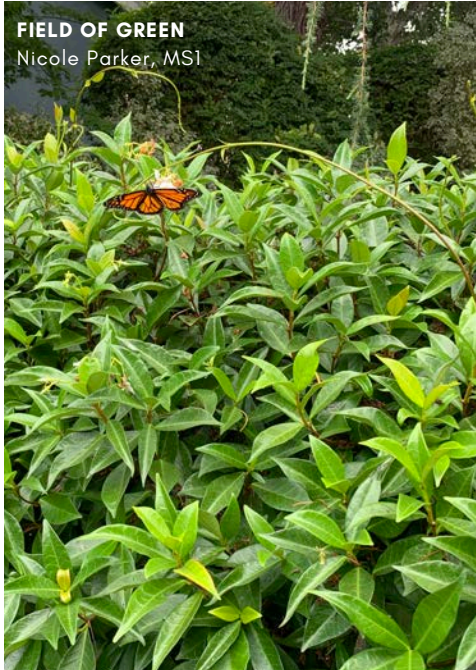
At the end of the thirty-two radiation sessions, I was told that not only had the treatments not helped, but it made my condition worse by radiating a tumor that kept growing. Surgery was my only option and needed to be broken down into three procedures. One to remove the tumor on the surface, the second to remove the cancer inside my mouth and the third to reconstruct the damage done by the first two surgeries. School became even more important because I needed the lectures not only to succeed in class, but also to give me the confidence that I was still just an ordinary student, navigating my path towards graduation. My attendance in the classroom every day was imperative for me to maintain normalcy. I scheduled a meeting with each professor and let them know the week before finals, I might miss a day. When the surgeon heard this, he was skeptical that I would be able to return so quickly. Fighting to prove my mind was still intact, I offered to do a presentation for extra credit, two days after the first surgery. Wearing the mask gave me courage. The encouragement from the Professor and the applause from the class after the presentation gave me the strength, I needed to face the next surgery.

The last surgery was scheduled for the same week as finals. I had to be ready to take the class exams and also write the take home essays. This proved surprisingly therapeutic, and I lost myself in my studies, but everyday activities became a nightmare. Two of the finals were in the same room and would take a total of about four hours to finish. During the exams, taking a sip of water is normally an easy task, but I did not want to even partially remove my mask and risk that someone might see my bandaged mouth. I focused on the task at hand and while waiting for my next exam, I remembered with a smile, the fact that I had finished my final paper in the doctor's office minutes prior to the second surgery and right before the anesthesiologist arrived to place me in my dreamlike state. The satisfaction of knowing that I could still write, even in the worst of scenarios, contributed to the healing process.

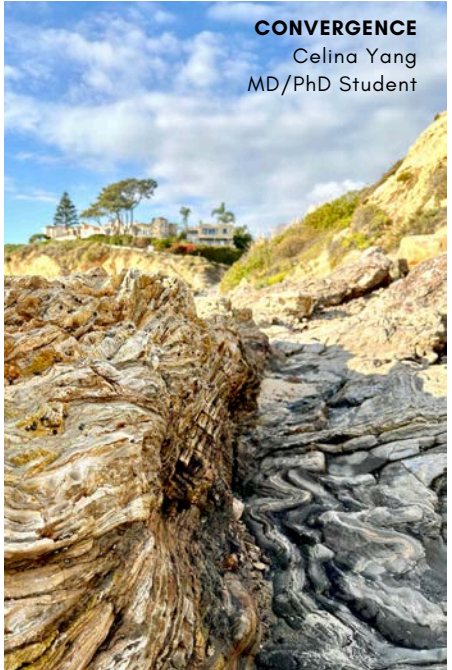
Exams were completed and all papers were submitted. I now had the summer to heal. Unfortunately, most of my lower lip had been removed and three long scars from lip to chin were permanent evidence that the surgeon had tried to make me whole again. I struggled to articulate and each time I would try to speak, the result was nonsense. School was starting again in the fall, and I was hoping not to wear a mask. I was determined to speak, participate, and attend every class. I kept telling myself, that looks do not matter, but

22 I still felt different and weak. The beginning of a new quarter would force me to look beyond physical appearances as I refused to accept the negative thoughts that daily haunted my space.

I did not tell the new Professors what had transpired in the last year. I was grateful to be in class without the mask and tried to convince myself that if anyone had an opinion on how I looked or how I spoke, it just did not matter. Navigating my life has taken me in so many different directions, from traveling by car seventeen times coast to coast as a Navy wife, to swimming with just a swimsuit, goggles, and a swim cap in a night relay to Catalina from San Pedro. I do not have time to meditate on the difficulties, but only on what I want for my future. Education is my own personal goal and the pain that physically pushed me backwards will not stop that drive to learn. I am one of the lucky ones, and I look forward to embracing my differences, as I continue to walk to the front of the class and perform my destiny.



FIELD OF GREEN
Nicole Parker, MS1



CONVERGENCE
Celina Yang
MD/PhD Student



FORGING AHEAD
Jenny N. Wang, MS3

25..... **Finding Light** – Huan Nguyen, MS2

26..... **Waves** – Avery Robinson-Phelps, MS2

Memorial at Mugu Rock – Avery Robinson-Phelps, MS2

As the sun kisses the flower – Chalal Rajaram, MD

Palette – Clifford Danza, MS2

27..... **His Hand** – Jaclyn G. Heilman, MD

Greater Later – Isabela Carmela Gopez Tan,

UCI Undergrad

Untitled – Clifford Danza, MS2

28..... **Mourning Blues: On Navigating Grief**

– Edward Fowler

Meet Me at the Horizon – Britney Weng, MS1

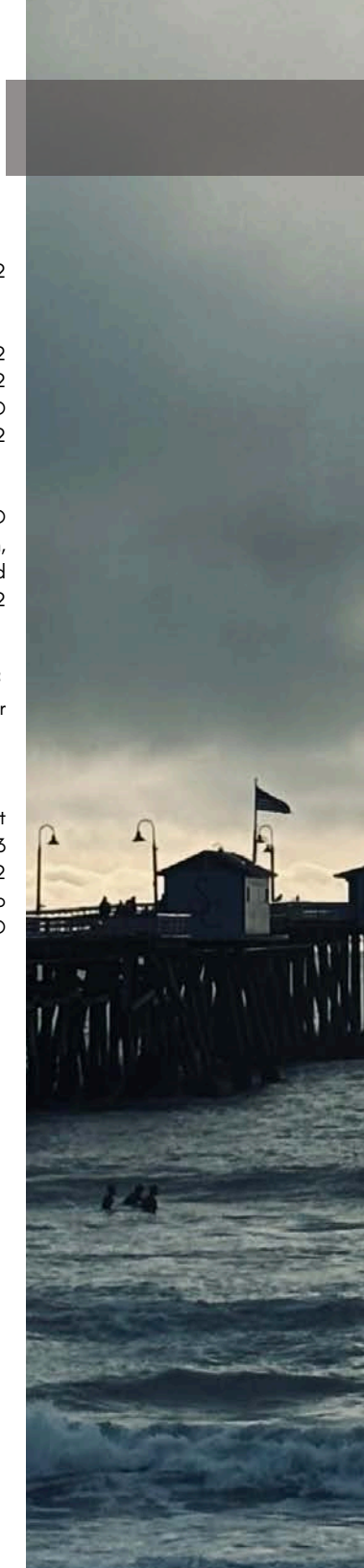
29..... **Fate** – Danely Segoviano, UCI PhD Student

Always on the Differential – Joanne Mendoza, MS3

Balboa – Clifford Danza, MS2

In Honor of M. Cristina Kenney – Shari Atilano

Returning to Zanzibar – Stuart Alan Green, MD





Navigating **GRIEF & LOSS**

FINDING LIGHT

Huan Nguyen, MS2

Dedicated to "Milou." This piece aims to inspire others to find their light during difficult times.



Avery Robinson-Phelps, MS2



This poem is about losing 4 family members in a car accident a few months after starting medical school. It is mournful, but I hope that folks find it hopeful as well.

“It comes in waves, you know,”
 They say of grief.
 How beautiful, that such a melancholy emotion
 Could embody the graceful movement of the ocean
 Or the sleepy lull of a deep, deep lake.

I recall being surprised once by the strength of the
 ocean’s waves.
 My back naively turned to the froth
 All the earth was quiet for a moment too long
 Then I found myself falling, sputtering, tumbling,
 Grasping handfuls of sand
 Finding no solid ground upon which to right myself.

Grief came in much the same way.
 I imagine it happened too quickly to notice,
 The crash.
 The wave that sent us all off our axis,
 Sweeping away 4 souls without warning or explanation.

There I was, on my maiden voyage,
 Sailing toward the dream that brought me color and
 purpose,
 When the tempest of grief brought dark clouds out of
 nowhere
 With angry tides that flung me out to sea
 Flooding me up to my salt-stung eyes
 In cold, cold, blue.

How do you move forward
 When the wind in your sails is gone?

With burning arms, I paddle.
 For life, I swim.
 The night may be long, but the morning is inevitable.

The clouds give way to faint, faint stars
 The moon lovingly beckons the waves to fall
 a little softer,
 A little quieter,
 And grief ebbs to make way for joy.



AS THE SUN KISSES THE FLOWER

Chalat Rajaram, MD

*originally published in Firefly racing
 with the dolphins*

As the sun kisses the flower,
 I let my thoughts hover.
 Of the year going by,
 What, when, how and why.

The people and friends matter,
 During clear sky, and when clouds gather.
 During typhoon or hurricane,
 Much more, during the pouring rain.

The rain brings new life around,
 Where birds, leaves, flowers abound.
 Too much rain then landslides,
 After the fires parch the hillsides.

Nature, happiness and sorrow.
 Yet, who really wants to borrow?
 It all goes together, happens side by side.
 Face it my friend, there’s no place to hide.

A third birthday without you dear.
 To face life, and go forward without fear.
 Such has been the way forever,
 Birth, life and death and ties to sever.



PALETTE

Clifford Danza, MS2

HIS HAND

Jaclyn G. Heilman, MD
Fellow, Colorectal Surgery

*What power a hand can hold. The potential to comfort.
To protect. To love. To heal.*

When I close my eyes, I can still easily see my father's hand above my head as a young child, lending his index finger to my little hand. I would reach up and grip it tightly. He was safety. I held on for dear life as we walked across a street or took an adventure on a trail in the woods. These moments were filled with the awe of Nature's beauty. He told me how the Blue Jays warned the forest of our presence. He taught me that black walnuts could be cracked open to make dark brown dyes for clothing. We filled 5-gallon buckets with them to do just that. He shared how the worms left their homes in the rain and that then was the best time to gather them for fishing. I felt so special and that nothing could go wrong when he held me on his shoulders; my hands in his. His hands were strong. They had all the calluses of working hands and of a man who played the guitar every night. He provided for us as he hunted and brought home venison, fixed our cars, and shoveled manure to fertilize the soil to grow tomatoes.

Then metastatic colon cancer stole away his strength, and his hands became thin and frail. Those hands were not my father's, and it was torture to see him that way. He is gone now and I miss him dearly. As a surgeon, I aspire to use my hands in an attempt to prevent my patients' hands from becoming so weak and frail as I seek to cure colorectal cancer



GREATER LATER

Isabela Carmela Gopez Tan
UCI Undergraduate

In the hush of study's serenade,
I sat, a raccoon-eyed crusade.
Organic realms on pages spread,
Chemical structures, a dance in my head.

Popcorn ceilings, confinements tight,
A question stirred in the quiet night.
Would knowledge sown in textbook lore,
Blossom into a life-saving spore?

At 12:26, a spectral ring,
Mother's call, a chilling thing.
Flatline echoes, death's refrain,
Heart sinks, gripped by silent pain

Tears embraced my textbook's sheet,
In chaos, ink and paper meet.
No healing found in words confined,
No perfect formula, solace to find.

How does one move through the grief,
When the heart's breaks defy relief?
Years of toil, knowledge still small,
No qualifications to save, but a heart
standing tall

"I've worked and learned, though little I know,
Yet, greatness is a process, a constant flow.
To the top, I've climbed, graduation's near,
Are you proud of me, can you hear?"

Oh, the yearning for a last goodbye,
A chance to speak before you fly.
Yet in the future, a healer I'll be,
A journey of healing, perhaps even for me.



UNTITLED
Clifford Danza, MS2

MOURNING BLUES: ON NAVIGATING GRIEF

Edward Fowler

Emeritus Professor, School of Humanities

hosted by an Orange County hospital and advertised in its newsletter, invitingly, as “New Beginnings.”

Seven women and three men, ranging in age from forty- to seventy-something, gathered in a circle of folding chairs early one balmy March evening in the hospital annex. Two were about my age, around fifty. Most, including me, had lost their spouses to cancer.

All were asked what we hoped to gain from our meetings. “I want to relive the good times, no matter how odd,” one man said. “I miss that someone to depend on – you know, telling me when my shirt is rumpled or when I have bad breath.”

I entertained no specific hope, it being too soon after my wife’s death to know what was what. But I felt the need to plumb an emotion that acquaintances assumed had waned. “Grief,” Kay Redfield Jamison poignantly reminds us in her memoir, *Nothing Was the Same*, “is a journey one must take largely unattended.” I had also learned that grief was best kept to myself, lest I be told impatiently, “Time’s up.” I sought its company and its space for contemplation – acutely aware, as the poet Charlie Smith observes in “The Meaning of Birds,” that “our griefs / are difficult to translate into a language / understood by others.”

All in the group duly acknowledged membership in the community of the bereaved. Yet the group’s size prevented any sustained exploration of grief. In each session, the conversation moved around the circle to the next person, the next topic, scratching the same well-marked surface. My instinct to observe from afar was soon bested by the urge to peer over the brink.

I joined another group, hosted by the firm that administered my wife’s hospice care. We met afterhours in a small, windowless room. This group had only three sessions, and I had missed the first. It was a far more intimate affair; we were almost too close for comfort. Two of the four present were counselors. Cathy, the leader, exuded an authority that was leavened by uncommon warmth.

Bridget, the other participant, had lost her spouse to colon cancer. A comely, pensive woman, she rehearsed her struggles keeping house for two grown sons and managing the family business. She acknowledged that she was going out on dates just four months after the funeral.

“Cathy’s right, you know.” Bridget, nursing her coffee, was weighing the counselor’s advice during recess, when we had the room to ourselves. “Any man coming into my life now would be a surrogate, not a mate.”

I confessed that I wasn’t ready to date, let alone consider remarrying, and that my primary obligation was to my young teenage son.

“Sounds like you’re married to him.”

“I am, in a way. We cling to each other.

He’s probably thinking I’ll stay single.”

“Hmm – is that an insight on his part or a demand?”

“Maybe both.”

Bridget and Cathy’s assistant were absent at the final session. The foursome was down to two. The vulnerability I’d felt before now bordered on alarm. The room’s windowless walls pressed in on me. I kept my guard up, deflecting each probe. But Cathy stalked me relentlessly until I was cornered and disarmed.

No, I’d gotten myself cornered. All Cathy did was let me talk. I succumbed to my pent-up emotion and to that aura of authority, that warmth. I recalled aloud Bridget hankering after a companion and my resistance to the same. I insisted on the truth of what I’d told her – that I was satisfied with being “married” to my son. I couldn’t tell whether the tears, which were flowing freely, spoke for my sincerity or blatantly contradicted what I said.

It didn’t matter either way, because the session was at an end. I stood up and held out my hand. Cathy, smiling, embraced me. I stiffened at first, then yielded. My hands ran down her back. I felt no ribs, only ample, pliant flesh. I wished the hug would last forever but of course it wouldn’t because nothing lasts forever and everything comes to an end. Once I walked out that door, I would never see her again. She was out of my life, gone for good, and I’d never see her again.

When taking part in a support group for bereaved spouses, my instinct was to observe from afar, aware though I was of the lie in appearing detached just ten weeks after my wife’s death. The support group was

MEET ME AT THE HORIZON

Britney Weng, MSJ

Reserva Nacional De Flamencos, Chile



FATE

Danely Segoviano
UCI PhD Student

I've been hit with a realization.
I can't write about life.
Not like other poets, at least.
Death has a grip on my tragedy.
I can't write something new.
I write the same old tragedy,
 A symptom - the malady of contradictions;
Time to cut me open,
Excise the narcissism that demands novelty.
Where are the scissors to cut the flesh?
Where is the thread, the string of a woven life?
Held up by helping hands, it's hardly visible in the light.
Instruments of death or gifts of life?
I write the same old poems,
Like artists paint the same old painting.



ALWAYS ON THE DIFFERENTIAL

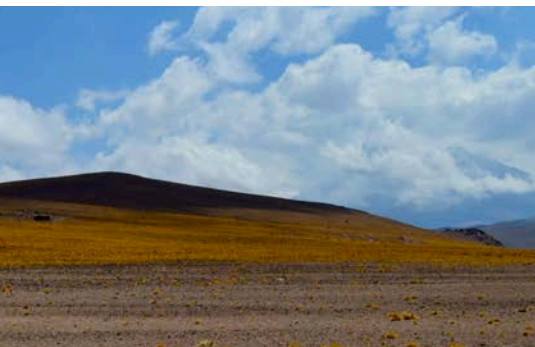
Joanne Mendoza, MS3



You were just another organ
A common presenter known well
Creating pearls of pain
With the stones you make
Low risk, I thought
Before school I didn't know you
But now I'll never forget your purpose.
It made sense with all the toxins you retain
With everything passed down to you
Like the generational trauma we hold
Los frijoles were the cure back home
Flushing your contents and wasting iron
From the tainted water of abandoned
American Mines
Is that what made you sick?
The irony of water as 'healing'
Or was it the chemical baths: The cost
of the American dream for immigrants.
Or was it on the fruit we eat
The leaves he touched.
His body always exposed
After 96 years, it came down to you.
You will always be more than
Just the gallbladder
Your name imprinted on me
As the cancer that took my abuelo away

BALBOA

Clifford Danza, MS2



RETURNING TO ZANZIBAR

Stuart Alan Green, MD



IN HONOR OF M. CRISTINA KENNEY

Shari Atilano

My P.I. was very fond of birdwatching. I took this photo of a Rufous hummingbird outside of Hewitt Hall where we worked together. She enjoyed the photo very much, especially the pollen on the beak. She passed away in December 2023.

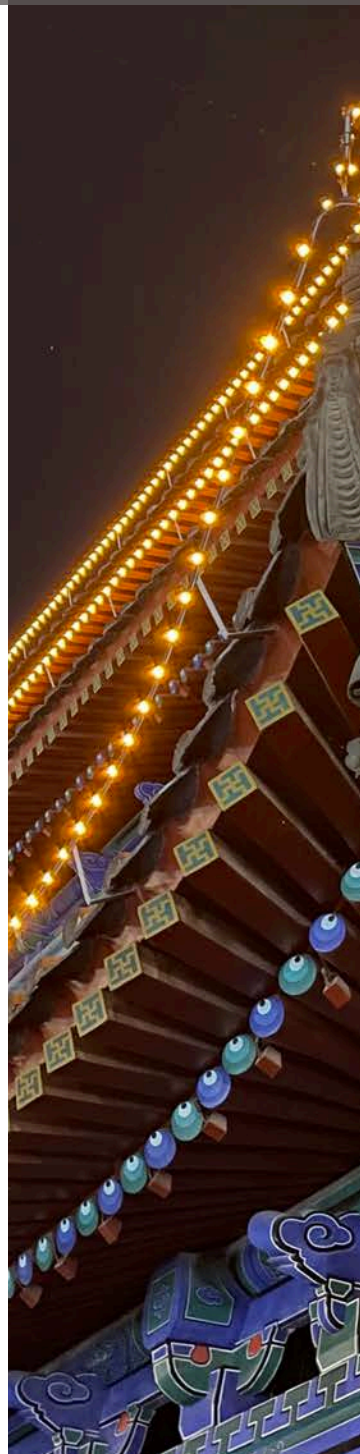


- 31.....**Ancestors' Legacy Carried Forward**
— Jenny N. Wang, MS3
- 32..... **El Camino de la vida** – Caitlyn Sing, MS3
Navigating the Nile River – Stuart Alan Green, MD
A Rainy Day in Hanalei Bay – Shirin Salehi, MS3
- 33.....**The Journey Lives On: Reflections of a Salvadoran Immigrant's Daughter** – Jenny Ventura, MD/MPH Student
Conversation with a T-shirt – Johanna Shapiro, PhD
Shoulders – Christopher Sahagian, MS4
- 34.....**Mama Says** – A. Ja'Nea James, MS1
The Path We Chose – Jessica Martin, MS1
Our Humble Abode – Jenny N. Wang, MS3
- 35.....**When I Was Lost** – Christian J. Andrade Herrera,
UCI PhD Student

ANCESTORS' LEGACY CARRIED FORWARD

Jenny N. Wang, MS3

Taken at an ancient military stronghold tower in Xi'An, China, this shows the veneration of ancient relics by the care the local people have taken to restore the paint and continue the legacy by adding modern lights to bring this relic along into the modern world.



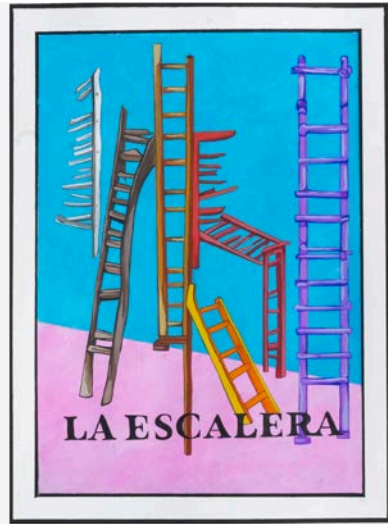
Navigating

IDENTITY & LEGACY



EL CAMINO DE LA VIDA
Caitlyn Sing, MS3

This piece represents the unpredictable journey of medicine and the distinctive paths each individual must navigate. Moreover, it aims to underscore the adversities and obstacles encountered are influenced by the hands we are dealt at birth, represented by one of my favorite childhood games Lotería. As one of the most emblematic cards in the deck, La escalera symbolizes a literal obstacle or a route to ascend to greater heights, depending on one's perspective at a particular moment in time. My journey to medicine is deeply rooted in my passion for helping under-resourced communities, where I draw inspiration from my Latino background and support from my family.



NAVIGATING THE NILE RIVER
Stuart Alan Green, MD



A RAINY DAY IN HANAIEI BAY
Shirin Salehi, MS3

Upon the shore of Hanalei Bay, I stand,
Where raindrops weave silvery threads,
A tale of foreign dreams, an unknown land,
In somber shades where memories are bred.
My parents, immigrants from different shores,
Never glimpsed this bay, its beauty a story untold,
Through rain-soaked mist, my gaze soars and soars,
On tales of home, where destiny is controlled.

The dinner table, witness to discourse,
Echoes the past, a political stage,
Of fervent hope, a hesitant recourse,
Yet, still, their hearts in a nostalgic cage.

And what if fates had taken gentler turns,
A nation's path, a history unburned,
To yearn for what might be, our spirit yearns,
In raindrops' dance, our sorrow at once discerned.

Yet, as the rain, life's course will ebb and flow,
Charting seas, unknown paths we stow.



THE JOURNEY LIVES ON: REFLECTIONS OF A SALVADORAN IMMIGRANT'S DAUGHTER

Jenny Ventura, MD/MPH Student

Three borders, each worse than before
Few updates, no conversations, it's hard to ignore
Days go by and families don't know where you are
We're so far away yet covered by the same star

I am warm in my home, mindlessly scrolling
Seeing anti-migrant laws, almost like trolling
I am safe in my home, perhaps eating in excess
Knowing migrants have little food and much distress

I am comfortable in my home, praying they make it alive
Knowing very well it took luck for my parents to survive
They braved this cursed journey nearly forty years ago
But the desert hasn't changed, it's still an inferno

Nothing has changed, let that sink in
They're seeking safety, security, oh what a sin
Make them stop, there is no space for them, Americans say
But whose country is this at the end of the day?

Just a piece of land, so bloody, so grand
That was programed to learn how to ban and expand
It's not yours, it's not mine, it's not theirs
It's for anyone willing to do their share

Whether it's in farming, food, cleaning, or cooking
You'll find us anywhere you're looking
Future doctor, surgeon, what more can I do
But represent that migrants raise kids who will one day heal you

I am learning to navigate my privilege and power
Hoping for an embrace that grows, like the mustard flower

CONVERSATION WITH A T-SHIRT

Johanna Shapiro, PhD

When I open my closet

I see a tee
nestled among others
End Hunger
Save Tibet
Peace Not War
White letters on black
Black Lives Matter

It is carefully washed
neatly folded
empty and flat
It stares at me
Implacable

Wear me
my tee demands
Wear me till my blackness
scorches your white skin
Wear me till my tightness
squeezes your breath
Wear me like a hair shirt
Wear me like a punishment
Wear me like Hope

Stop trying to wash me clean
after 400 years of violence and
oppression

Stop trying to fold me away
in a drawer or a prison
Don't be that liberal person of
privilege
with a tee shirt for every cause
du jour

Wear me
until I fall in tatters
from your shoulders
Wear me until I am
no longer needed
Wear me till your nakedness says
Black Lives Matter

SHOULDERS

Christopher Sahagian, MS4

We stand firmly on the shoulders of giants, to catch a glimpse of what lies at the horizon. This photograph celebrates the greats that came before us, those who afforded us the privilege of navigating the unknowns up ahead.



MAMA SAYS

A. Ja'Nea James, MSI

Granny says watch ya mouth
Wash ya mouth
A chile don't talk back
You mind ya mama
Mind ya words
A chile should be seen
Not heard.

M'dia says watch your words
Girls do not say that
—*You don't want no trouble*
Not even in their heads
Those words are filthy words
They sully your soul
Sear your heart
Weaken your will
They soil your thoughts.

The teacher says
watch your tone
Your sneer
You didn't notice?
—*This world is a loaded gun*
How you say it matters
You're a smart girl
A sweet girl
Who will go far
But that attitude, that
Anger
Will be the source of
your scars.

The blond boy says
watch your voice,
Your clothes,
Your hair,
Your shoes...
Your laugh,
Your mind,
Your presence in real time
I like who you are
Under that act
You're beautiful girl
But you act
Too
black—*Pointing aimlessly in the dark.*

Dems say speak your mind
Be truly
Who you are
Love your hair
Your skin
Your culture
Your sins
Be here
Be queer
Be bold
But let me be clear:
Don't be
Too—
Loud— *your echo*
Control your anger
I'm sorry
emotions
This pain you project
Causes too much commotion.
Mama says watch your mouth.
You don't want no trouble.
This world is a loaded gun,
Pointing aimlessly in the dark.
Don't let it catch *your echo.*

THE PATH WE CHOSE

Jessica Martin, MSI

The road that lies ahead
that path has long been paved
countless feet have smoothed the land
and hands have cleared the way

The road beneath your feet
as ancient as the trepan
remodeled as the years go by
and further up, it grows with time

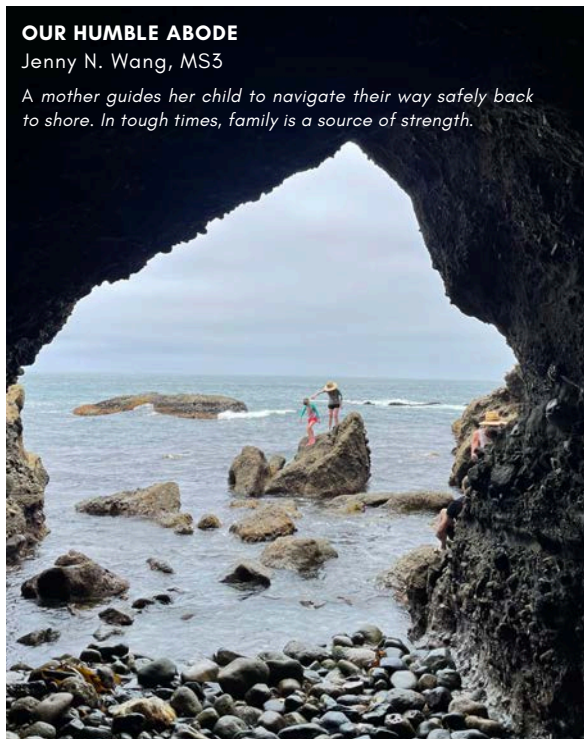
The road that you now walk
unknown but far from new
you travel not alone this way
there's many feet beside you

The road is hard to find
and most you know don't walk it
but with it, you cannot be lost
so travel proud across!

OUR HUMBLE ABODE

Jenny N. Wang, MS3

A mother guides her child to navigate their way safely back to shore. In tough times, family is a source of strength.



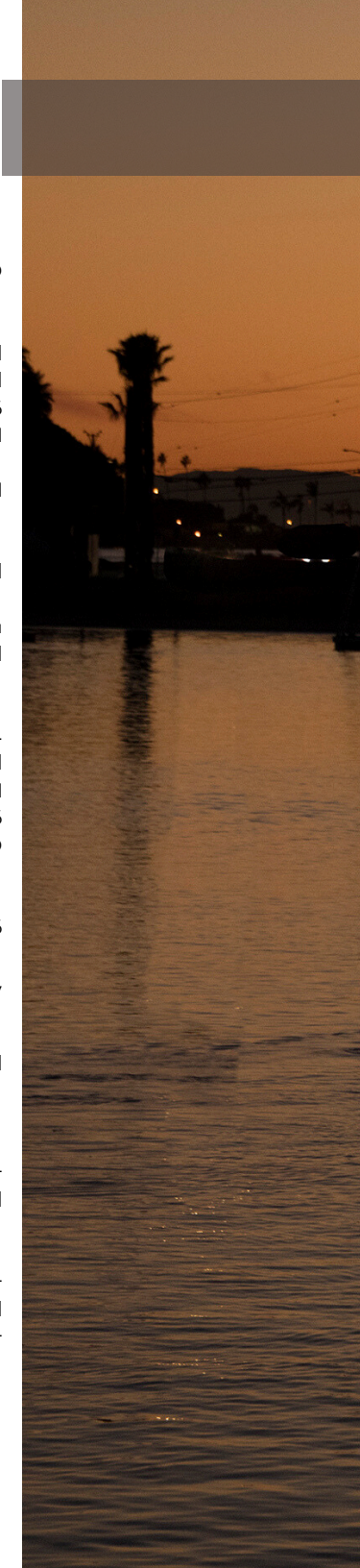
WHEN I WAS LOST

Christian J. Andrade Herrera
UCI PhD Student

I don't remember when it happened.
The day, the month, or the year I got lost
But I remember when I found out
At some point in my youth,
I let my identity flee from me
It was a friend who confirmed it
When she asked me who are you?
I couldn't answer.
All my answers were only little pieces of
WHAT I was,
not WHO I am
I thought I was my sexuality
I'm my sexuality! I proudly claimed
Sure, you are, but so is everyone else
Yet people don't make their
sexual orientation their whole personality
I reasoned to myself
Of course, that was right
I wore it as a skin and as a shield
using it to deflect the hurt, anger, and fears
Lacking role models, I turned to the horrible
portrayal in the media
Which wasn't me
I'm an honors student, I said next
To which my inner voice rebuttal
You're more than your grades
Being dedicated to your studies
isn't a personality
Being good at memorizing things
doesn't make you who you are
Often, in undergrad,
we gave ourselves little identities
I am pre-med
I am pre-law
I am nursing
We took ownership of our major
Like we were afraid to lose it
Like we were trying to converse ourselves,
we could be those professions
No one is their profession

I'm my nationality.
I said my answer a bit less confident
I was not sure of my answers, and more
You are more than your nationality
Being of one nation doesn't mean you're connected to a
culture or connected to an ethnic group.
Man-made borders do not give you an identity
What does it mean to be Mexican?
It sure isn't an ethnicity or a race
Is a person born in Mexico still Mexican
if we were never engaged in that culture?
I don't know how long I spent trying to figure out
who I was
I was lost for quite some time
But being lost was what I needed to be to find myself
Those identities I hold are part of what makes me
who I am,
They only play a small part in my life
We are a combination of so many lived experiences
and events.
Those who don't change haven't grown
And those who don't grow never reach their full potential
Do the sequoia trees tell themselves that they are just seeds?
Or do they understand that being a seed
is part of who they were
a small phase in life in their long lives
I still meet people who seem lost
People who still use their sexual orientations
as their primary identities
I met people who realized early enough your worth is not
tied to your academic performance
It is a hard pill to swallow at any stage of life
I met people who claim a nationality out of convenience
But what does it mean to be American?
Is it cheeseburgers, fries, and a small drink?
Is it Apple pie and The Alamo?
As I have grown and matured, I learned many lessons
The journeys I have been on
Serve as maps for my identity
As a guide to myself
It's easy to get distracted and start to lose yourself
To emphasize one identity too much and neglect the others
It is hard to balance the experiences that are guided by our
identities
It is hard to balance our identities, shape and drive our
experiences

- 37..... **Navigating Christmas Lights** – Stuart Alan Green, MD
- 38..... **An Individual Path** – Jeannie Mai, UCI Undergrad
Hill of Hope – Matthew John Sanford
One Direction – Olamide Sonuga, MS3
Two Wolves – Zoe Adams, MS1
When Traversing Mountains, Forget Not to Behold the View – Elaha Noori, MS1
- 39..... **Blossoming Vitality** – Hannah Choi, UCI Undergrad
Not Just a Flower – Samantha Bolotsky, UCI Undergrad
Together Above – Trina Nguyen, UCI Undergrad
Serenity's Lookout – Zohal Noori, UCI Undergrad
- 40..... **Dialogue** – Christopher Sahagian, MS4
Though They Slay Me – Dee Statum, UCI Undergrad
Open Minds Open Life – Nicole Parker, MS1
Interlaken – Jenny N. Wang, MS3
Limbo – Catherine Diamond, MD
- 41..... **Chasing Daybreak** – Jenny N. Wang, MS3
Post Tenebras Lux – Elaha Noori, MS1
Finding the Light – Michael Gabriel Crisostomo Villora,
UCI BSN Student
Source of Tranquility in Difficulty – Areej Shaikh,
UCI Undergrad
- 42..... **Nine to Five** – Christian J. Andrade Herrera,
UCI PhD Student
Digital Jungle – Annabel Wang, UCI Undergrad
- 43..... **Delightful Surprise** – Celina Yang, MD/PhD Student
ABC Building Blocks – Zohal Noori, UCI Undergrad
Flaw of the Artist – Patrick McShea, UCI PhD Student





NAVIGATING CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

Stuart Alan Green, MD

Belmont Shore, Long Beach, CA

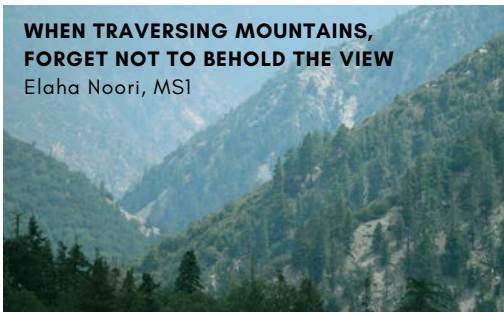
AN INDIVIDUAL PATH

Jeannie Mai
UCI Undergraduate

From the day our first breaths are drawn,
And our eyes open to the vast beyond,
An internal capsule—an amalgamation of both old and new,
Dons a new perspective into the world to be led askew.
Under the embrace of the youthful dawn,
A curious mind does fawn,
Over the wondrous world of supposed bliss and bounty,
But with time, reality starts to draw a fine boundary.
As the day progresses,
The self regresses,
And with it, the fruition of comparisons,
Of the home to your kin to your possessions.
Beneath the weight of newfound expectations,
Littered unrest between you and your destinations.
Traverse the path that's been dictated,
With nary a clear direction indicated.
Unspoken and unforeseen,
The hands of society mold you to be something you've
never been.
A race to nowhere,
Entangled seemingly in an endless nightmare,
Blindly stroking against the currents,
Slowly diminishing is your self-assurance.
Down what's been deemed the correct charted course,
Where constant work and competition is endorsed.
Amidst chaos and turmoil,
A single breath of fresh air allows you to uncoil.
With a clear mind comes an epiphany,
To each their own an individuality,
As the ruffled feathers of a bird keeps warmth,
As for camouflage a hare's coat does transform,
So too does a role each person possesses,
The better suited and the more it expresses
The finite skills and traits one holds
Allows for one to break thresholds.
So embrace the unknown and plow your own path,
Let your efforts come to fruition—will it be a prize or an
aftermath?

WHEN TRAVERSING MOUNTAINS, FORGET NOT TO BEHOLD THE VIEW

Elaha Noori, MS1



HILL OF HOPE

Matthew John Sanford

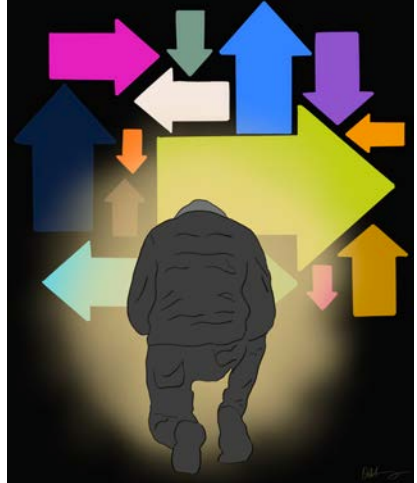
Co-written with Peter Dolbee, artist name is Rainbow Of Tara. This song was inspired by a hill in Carbon Canyon (Brea/China) called the Hill Of Hope which was difficult for us to climb in our youth, and the song equates that to life struggle as well.



Please scan the
QR code to access
the full song

ONE DIRECTION

Olamide Sonuga, MS3



TWO WOLVES

Zoe Adams, MS1

The online world is a siren song, luring even the strongest of will away from their desired destinations and into the inky depths. This poem is for those who falter

There are two wolves...

I laugh

The blue glow shifts yellow as it turns to o'clock

My sign to sleep, perchance to dream

Instead I choose to let the world dream for me

Two wolves. It's Wednesday!

Everybody clap your hands

Clap clap clap clap clap clap clap

My favorite rectangle becomes blue once more

At last I sleep, unthinking, empty

BLOSSOMING VITALITY

Hannah Choi
UCI Undergraduate

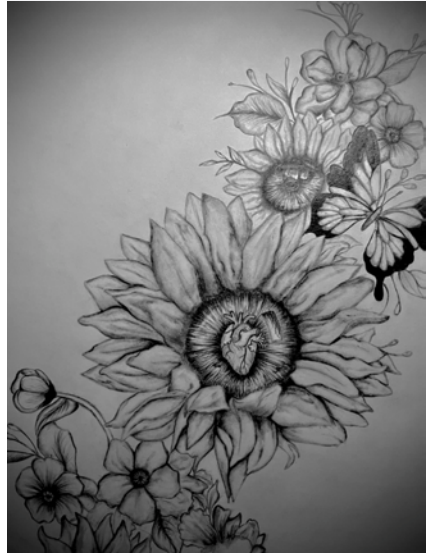
This piece aims to capture the essence of perseverance as a flower blooms, defiantly, against the harsh backdrop of the urban environment. The blossom navigates its way amongst the rigid confines of the pavement symbolizing the power of life to find a path despite seemingly inhospitable conditions, a key element of the human spirit. It is with vitality and resilience that one is able to navigate through life's adversaries and challenges.



NOT JUST A FLOWER

Samantha Bolotsky
UCI Undergraduate

Created with the hope of motivating people to see the inner beauty in things as they navigate through their daily lives.



TOGETHER ABOVE

Trina Nguyen
UCI Undergraduate

The crisp air of the cloud line fills my lungs, and as I look to those who share this sight with me, I've never felt more certain that my path is true.



SERENITY'S LOOKOUT

Zohal Noori
UCI Undergraduate



DIALOGUE

Christopher Sahagian, MS4



THOUGH THEY SLAY ME

Dee Statum

UCI Undergraduate

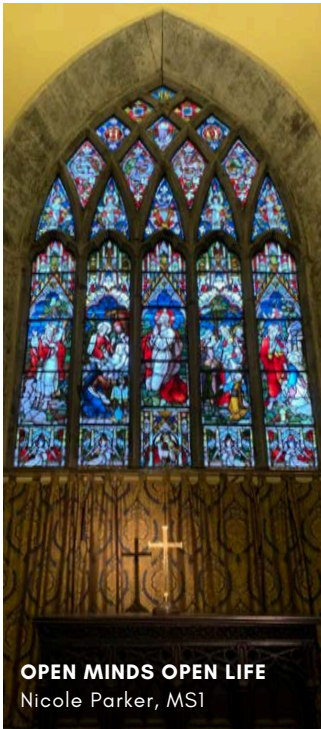
We may not no the time
We may not know the hour
We are often forgetful
And neglect Your mighty power

We may lay in sickness
Despair is often our storyteller
It's hard to keep on fighting
Our situation may look like it's forever

I'm slain, tormented, and abused
By people, things, and places
But one thing I can always depend on
Are Your consistent daily graces

So yes, though You may slay me
With the things that come from this world
But my belief in You the creator
Can never waver nor whirl

So yes, I take the advice from Job
And make it my own and keep it within
"Though they may slay me
Yet will I trust in Him."

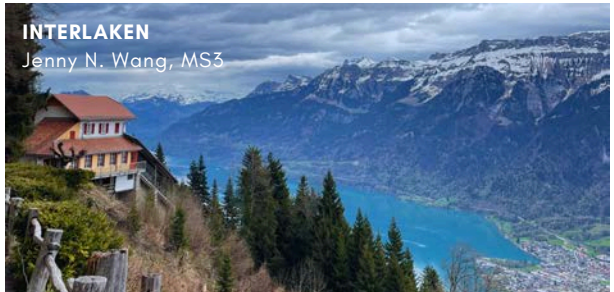


OPEN MINDS OPEN LIFE

Nicole Parker, MS1

INTERLAKEN

Jenny N. Wang, MS3



LIMBO

Catherine Diamond, MD

Pull up, take a number, and navigate
a yellow line on the linoleum
Join the immobile motorists, slumped
in plastic chairs clamped to the floor, wait
The loudspeaker calls, next to window three
I move to the booth, documents in hand,
registration, identification
and a litany of title, plates, fees
Stalled, I might as well walk or levitate
Now a vision: I cruise the boulevard,
radio on, sins hidden in the trunk,
the keys to the kingdom on the dashboard
Not checking the rear view, gas pedal sunk,
I accelerate through the pearly gates!

CHASING DAYBREAK

Jenny N. Wang, MS3

Taken towards the end of a 15 hour flight, streaks of a new day can be seen. After a long, cold, restless, and dark night, hope shines through.



POST TENEBRAS LUX

Elaha Noori, MS1

Light after Darkness

FINDING THE LIGHT

Michael Gabriel Crisostomo Villora

UCI BSN Student

My composition delves into the universal struggle of discovering light amid darkness. My melody initially begins with a somber tone on a minor chord, resonating with the challenges we face in maintaining optimism during bleak times. To depict glimmers of hope, I introduce major chords, accentuated by crescendos that symbolize the emergence of positivity. At the end, we expect the melody to end on a sorrowful and sad minor chord; instead, the final chord resounds with majesty, embodying the ultimate discovery of light and optimism. Therefore, the final chord with its joyful brass and powerful percussion is a major chord, and it is a resonant reflection of the navigational journey we all undertake in our lives.



Please scan the QR code to access full music score & audio



SOURCE OF TRANQUILITY IN DIFFICULTY

Areej Shaikh

UCI Undergraduate

I created this mosque in my ceramics class to represent my love for my religion and demonstrate its significance in my life in providing me solace during challenging times. A mosque is a prayer place for Muslims, where they perform the five daily obligatory prayers. Taking a pause from work five times a day to pray gives me a refreshing break from the outside world and helps me reconnect with myself. In times when I feel exhausted and stressed from my school and other responsibilities, going to the mosque helps me alleviate my stress as I am able to rejuvenate myself in a quiet and comforting place. Thus, this ceramic mosque symbolizes my coping mechanism to navigate through life's complexities to a better and more peaceful future.



NINE TO FIVE

Christian J. Andrade Herrera
UCI PhD Student

Your nine-to-five is over
You had a salad for lunch
You drive to work
at 7 in the morning
avoiding the morning traffic
eating breakfast in the parking lot
And you wait out the traffic
by sitting in your car
Until five fifty-five
Going forty-five
in the residential area
The speed limit is thirty
You never use the
right lane anymore
Then it hits you
And you just want to move faster
You haven't left this small town
You grew up and got your job
Change the pace and never go back
This town has the same old streets
You feel so insignificant
Overwhelmed with
existential dread
You're too old to be young
Too young to be old
You want to see something new
The song you like
comes on the radio
You make a turn
and head for the highway
And you push the gas pedal
And turn the volume to the max
You are going eighty in a fifty-five
You pass the cars in a blur
Like you are traveling
at the speed of light

But you can't leave
Life holds you back
Family, Friends, Money,
Uncertainty turns into fear
The song is over
Slow down
You made a turn
to exit the highway again
The speed limit is thirty- five;
you are going twenty
Will this be the rest of your life
Driving home until you retire?
Working your nine-to-five
You don't want to go home
You park your car
and do it all over again
Things are changing
Things have changed
You didn't let
the fear hold you back
You pull into the driveway,
the driveway you left years ago
Replaced by a new one
You're not working
that nine-to-five
You are still driving fast
And the songs play on blast
Old habits are hard to break
But you no longer feel like a fake
How long will pursuing
a Ph.D. take?
Your day is full of
classes and research
And emails and homework

And suddenly, you are happier
than you have ever been
Trying to be
a change in the world
Life can not hold you back
Family, Friends, Money,
It's never been too late
And it will never be too early
Move as you please,
your own rate
Where are we going to be
five or ten years from now?
You're too old to be young
Too young to be old
This is your journey
You slow down
You are still filled
with wanderlust
You can do anything
This is your journey
You speed up
And you can move
as fast as you like
Regardless of where you go
Where do you end up
You can always go back
You can always
find your way home
No GPS needed
You stopped feeling
insignificant
And you are cruising
Life is truly amusing
You look back and smile

DIGITAL JUNGLE

Annabel Wang
UCI Undergraduate

*Like navigating through a
dense jungle, pursuing
worthwhile goals requires
traversing through
sometimes unclear territory
and encountering harsh
obstacles. But throughout
the journey, telltale signs of
growth abound.*



DELIGHTFUL SURPRISE

Celina Yang
MD/PhD Student

I took this photograph with my phone in December while driving my visiting parents to experience Newport Beach for the first time. Although it was pouring rain while driving, the rain miraculously stopped upon our arrival. After stepping out of the car, I saw this unexpected, picturesque scene. Life, with its seemingly intricate and uncertain paths, can feel challenging to navigate, but it is not without moments of sheer beauty and delightful surprises, providing a glimpse of serenity amid life's unpredictable journey.



FLAW OF THE ARTIST

Patrick McShea
UCI PhD Student

The intention of the artist rarely equates to the final product and likewise, my existence is flawed. I have yet to be afforded a clear reasoning for some of my flaws, which puzzles me with obstacles, thought to originate from a place of dopamine deficits and defective neurons. This lack of receptor communication reflected in my rigid structure. These obstacles felt like an endless loss, but quantitatively, if these deficits were surmounting, I was drowning in their debris, left with a hollow, dilapidated neural network. To wash away this waste from my homemade electrical circuit board, I lean on those who care most, who have hope for myself in the absence of my own. So when asked what I turn to as a beacon that guides my action, I reflect closely on those who have afforded me an opportunity to have hope, and therefore equally to have love and feel loved. And likewise to the hope and love that has been brought upon me, I aspire that despite my deficits, I will continue to navigate my future days with open arms, guiding those who have also guided me, as well as my beloved artist, to a place of peace; pax optima rerum.

ABC BUILDING BLOCKS

Zohal Noori
UCI Undergraduate

From teaching our playmates that “sharing is caring,”
to running around as superheroes, feeling daring,
From counting one, two, three on a swing,
to using your bed sheets as a robe of a king.

From hearing cheers in a race, chanting your name,
to pretending to see yourself in the Hall of Fame.
We once lived a thousand lives as children having fun,
and now some of us have a rather loose hold on just one.

So why did some of us ever stop playing?
Perhaps the truth lies in that one saying,
to let the toddler walk, even if they'll fall,
since we cannot stop our inner child when they bawl.

Losing our creativity to fit in has served us no good,
when we're all meant to shine like children should.
So we must never let go of our imagination,
in order to build the greatest of creations.

And to never lose our child-like spark,
or else our goals and dreams will lie in the dark.
As we grow, our younger version never leaves us,
and our teenage-self may even tease us.

But it is wise to further embrace,
our childlike curiosity, using crayons to trace.
Who told us we have to stay close to the ground,
when the sky's the limit and has no bound?

As we grow up, the same magic from our sands, clays, and blocks
are used to heal patients, apply chemistry, and build boardwalks.
Although our toys look different now and so do the lines on our face,
we always find our way back to who we once were, no matter the case.

To the princesses and superheroes we were when freeplaying,
keep imagining and dreaming, even when our hair starts graying.
The greatest people of today,
are those who never ended playtime nor let their inner child go away.

45.....**Our World of Blues** – Britney Weng, MS1

46.....**“Just Google It”: Navigating Depression Through Search Engines** – Leonora Naser-Saravia
Smooth Sailing After Anatomy – Sana Shah, MS1
Who Wins? – Samantha Bolotsky, UCI Undergrad

47..... **adrift/From Ashes** – Andrew Cuyekeng, MS4
Growth – Sunia Khan, MS2
Golden Light – Chalat Rajaram, MD

48.....**Lines Written on a Summer’s Day by the Coast**
– Elaha Noori, MS1
Lithium, Soon To Go – Britney Weng, MS1
The Mirror – Chalat Rajaram, MD
Erosion – Nicole Parker, MS1

49..... **Reborn** – Jenny N. Wang, MS3
Pillars – Celina Yang, MD/PhD Student
Touch – Clifford Danza, MS2
Taro Tea – Sania Luna, MS2





Navigating MENTAL HEALTH

OUR WORLD OF BLUES

Britney Weng, MS1

Perito Moreno Glacier, Argentina

"JUST GOOGLE IT": NAVIGATING DEPRESSION THROUGH SEARCH ENGINES

Leonora Naser-Saravia

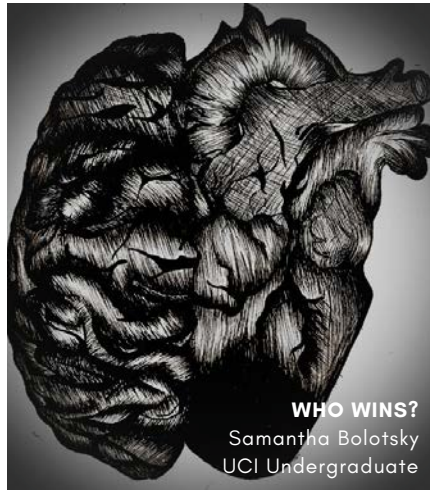
Navigation is a constant process. We continuously re-orient ourselves as we go through life, and for me this has looked like re-orienting after a depression diagnosis. Every day I learn more about myself and find small ways to heal in a world that does not make it easy. My support systems have helped ground me (a kind of navigation all its own), and I wanted to take a playful approach to something otherwise so grim. By using Google search entries, I tried to explore my journey to getting care, and illustrate the ebb and flow of healing.

Why am I so tired all the time	What to expect in first therapy session	How to tell if I'm improving with depression
Do I cry too much	How to tell if my therapist is a good fit	Mood tracking apps free
Sleep deprivation	What if my therapist isn't a good fit	CBT journal apps free
What to do to sleep better	Teletherapy v in-person therapy	-Interlude-
How to not cry so much	-Crying interlude-	Upcoming concerts LA
Symptoms of depression	Self care v community care	Best Thai food LA
How long for it to count as depression	Signs of good support systems	Free or cheap museums LA
Adjustment disorder	Fun things to do in LA	Getty center parking
Adjustment disorder with depressed mood	Happy lamps cheap	Calm beaches near me
At home screening for depression	Blackout curtains renter friendly	Green spaces near me
PHQ9	Vitamin D supplements	NDRI side effects
PHQ9 results interpretation	Do I need doctor approval to take supplements	NDRI side effects long term
-Crying interlude-	How to connect with a psychiatrist	-Crying interlude-
How to find a therapist	-Crying interlude-	Feeling stuck in therapy
Insurance for therapy	Depression support groups free	Opening up old wounds in therapy
HMO v PPO	How to tell Mexican parents I have depression	Can my therapist drop me
Explanation of benefits for behavioral health	How to tell my partner I have depression	Who said progress isn't linear
Insurance terms easy	Does reading about depression make it worse	Inspirational quotes
-Crying interlude-	Books about depression	Cat videos
Self care	Fiction books about depression	-Interlude-
Easy self care	Is a Barnes and Noble membership worth it	And so it goes...
Self care tips on a budget	Local bookstores LA	
Parks near me	-Interlude-	
Walkable neighborhoods LA		
-Crying interlude-		

SMOOTH SAILING AFTER ANATOMY

Sana Shah, MS1

MS1s rarely get time to spend so much time together. After anatomy ended, 50 of us headed to Balboa Island to go on duffy boats and enjoy the friendships we made along the way.



WHO WINS?

Samantha Bolotsky
UCI Undergraduate

adrift/FROM ASHES
Andrew Cuyegkeng, MS4

i drift endlessly
on the midnight sea
the stars gleam beneath me
for a brief moment, i am almost happy
i am almost free

i soar weightlessly
skylines at my fingertips
purples and reds steal my breath
but before I know it
gravity pulls me back down

i fear silence
a lone candle flickers
i fixate on the light
and I am envious
wishing mine shined just as bright

these past years have been cruel
where is the light outside this tunnel?
why is the grass over there no longer green?
when did apathy creep into my bones
cursing me with numbness?

//

All this time, unbeknownst to me
An invisible rope has been tugging me to safety
Your suffering, your pain, your anguish -
Lighthouses in the dark
Have been guiding me through life's labyrinth

Maybe I'm selfish, but
Your struggles have forged new purpose
Your pain has faded my scars
Your anguish has made me feel again

Saving you from death's grasp
Has saved me in more ways than one

You have been my catalyst
You have been my saving grace
You are my flame
That helps me burn so bright
Brighter than any phoenix

From ashes
I rise renewed
Shedding my skin
Feeling fresh air enter my lungs
From ashes
I have survived
From ashes
I am finally alive

GROWTH
Sunia Khan, MS2

When I am feeling self-critical and comparing myself to others, I try to remind myself that everyone navigates through different obstacles and grows on their own timeline.



GOLDEN LIGHT
Chalat Rajaram, MD
originally published in
Firefly racing with the dolphins

The howling Santa Ana winds,
The wild swaying of many a tall tree.
Golden color of leaves through the blinds,
Shining as brightly within, happy, free.

Amidst the thrashing of branch, tree.
The mind and thoughts run wild,
The rays of the sun shine steady,
Show the way, calm the mind like a guide.

The golden light within, shining
At all times, from birth to death, beyond.
In deep sleep, in waking and dreaming,
Do go back in, envision a stronger bond.

The mystery of this life, meaning,
The same for them, you and me.
The deep trust to keep forming,
The golden light shining so brightly.

**LINES WRITTEN ON A SUMMER'S DAY
BY THE COAST**
Elaha Noori, MS1

there it is!
that familiar symphony of sorrow,
to which you and I have danced many a time before.
today it plays as the birds chirp their sunrise song,
and it interweaves notes with the lullaby of the tides.
the sun seems to only shine brighter upon its arrival,
the trees flutter their leaves in humble greeting,
and the night—God, the night!
with its cobalt sky spotted with stars
glows all the brighter as the tune reaches a crescendo.
how can it be that the world continues with its allure,
while the high fever of despair afflicts you?
further tightening the knots in your chest,
its reach as high as the mountains, as vast as the sea.
it seems not fair for all else to have escaped its grasp.
have you considered, however,
perhaps it an act of courage for the birds, the tides,
the sun
to continue their worldly duties despite their own
circumstance?
and perhaps you do not realize you have carried on
all those times, and you do now still.
you are no less than the others in the universe,
expertly crafted in your own beauty and intrigue.
the vastness of life does not exclude you
nor does it take from you,
so allow yourself to be a part of the world relentlessly
while you are still in it.
allow yourself the mercy of mortality,
with all its pangs of agony.
introduce yourself to the sunshine,
thank the birds and tides for their song,
meet the gaze of the stars as they shine upon you.
so if the earth upon its axis still turns,
and birds flock high in the sky,
then you and I too shall remain steadfast
amidst our heart's softest cries.

LITHIUM, SOON TO GO

Britney Weng, MS1
Salar de Talar, Chile



THE MIRROR

Chalat Rajaram, MD

originally published in *Firefly racing with the dolphins*

Do always trust the mirror,
It shows you the way you are.
It needs cleaning to reflect better,
The bigger it is, one able to see far.
Look within, and the screen is bright.
Keep it clean, even better clarity.
When all is quiet, or not, always the light.
To see oneself, deeply, and happy.
The one in waking, dream and sleep;
The one ever present and shining.
Why then do we still suffer, weep?
Not trust in this bright glowing.
The mirror that poets have used,
To describe Consciousness within.
The truth we have oft missed,
While led in ways we did not mean.



EROSION

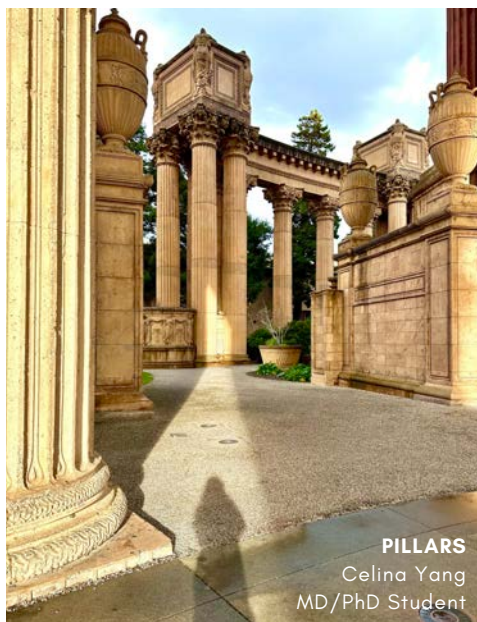
Nicole Parker, MS1



REBORN

Jenny N. Wang, MS3

Archaeologists breathe new life into these broken terracotta warriors. Similarly, fragments of oneself can be put back together after hitting rock bottom.



PILLARS

Celina Yang
MD/PhD Student

TARO TEA

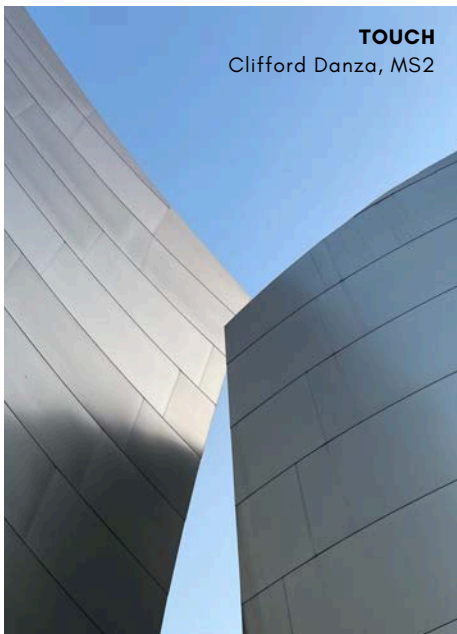
Sania Luna, MS2

They tell me they have grown accustomed to
the taste of rejection,
taking it like a ritual of bitter coffee.

I listen and pray for cool taro tea.
I invite the world to bring sweetness.
I pour a glass and share.

TOUCH

Clifford Danza, MS2



- 51..... **Lone Survivor** – Jenny N. Wang, MS3
- 52..... **Navigating The Mekong Delta** – Stuart Alan Green, MD
Navigating Luanda Bay – Stuart Alan Green, MD
Final Casting – Stuart Alan Green, MD
Navigating the Li River with Fishing Cormorant
– Stuart Alan Green, MD
Navigating the Grand Canal – Stuart Alan Green, MD
- 53..... **Glimpses of India** – Thuy-Linh Tran, MS2
Infinite Horizon – Huan Nguyen, MS2
Are We There Yet? – Christopher Sahagian, MS4
Salt Flats – Tori Nguyen, MS3
- 54..... **Home Is Where The Heart Is** – Sunia Khan, MS2
Reflections on the Sea – Caroline Gee, MS1
Mirror, Mirror on the Earth – Jenny N. Wang, MS3
Salt or Snow? – Britney Weng, MS1
Moments– Nicole Parker, MS1
- 55..... **Trail** – Clifford Danza, MS2
Shadows Light the Way – Nicole Parker, MS1
Even Flowers Grow in Exile – Sana Shah, MS1
Archway – Britney Weng, MS1
Weave Through Traffic – Christopher Sahagian, MS4
Wagon – Clifford Danza, MS2



LONE SURVIVOR

Jenny N. Wang, MS3

Zhangjiajie National Forest, Hunan, China



**NAVIGATING THE
MEKONG DELTA**

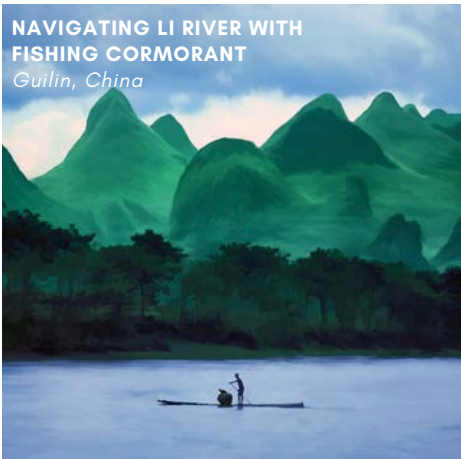


**NAVIGATING
LUANDA BAY**
Angola

Stuart Alan Green, MD
Orthopaedic Surgery



FINAL CASTING
*Irrawaddy River
Mandalay, Myanmar (Burma)*



**NAVIGATING LI RIVER WITH
FISHING CORMORANT**
Guilin, China



NAVIGATING THE GRAND CANAL
Venice, Italy

GLIMPSES OF INDIA

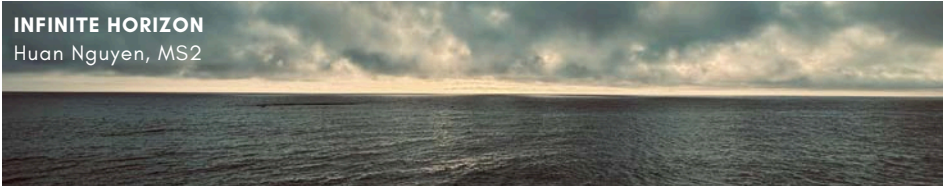
Thuy-Linh Tran, MS2

This watercolor piece is a collage of moments during my global health trip to Rajkot, India in December 2023. Traveling with other UCI students, I was welcomed by the medical college in Rajkot and invited to learn how patients navigated a health care system different from the US and how effective care is coordinated for millions of people. While navigating the differences in culture and protocols between the US and India, I came to understand similarities in the quality of care provided and formed lasting friendships. Thousands of miles away, we are both guided by the same principles of empathy and compassion in our care for others.



INFINITE HORIZON

Huan Nguyen, MS2



ARE WE THERE YET?

Christopher Sahagian, MS4

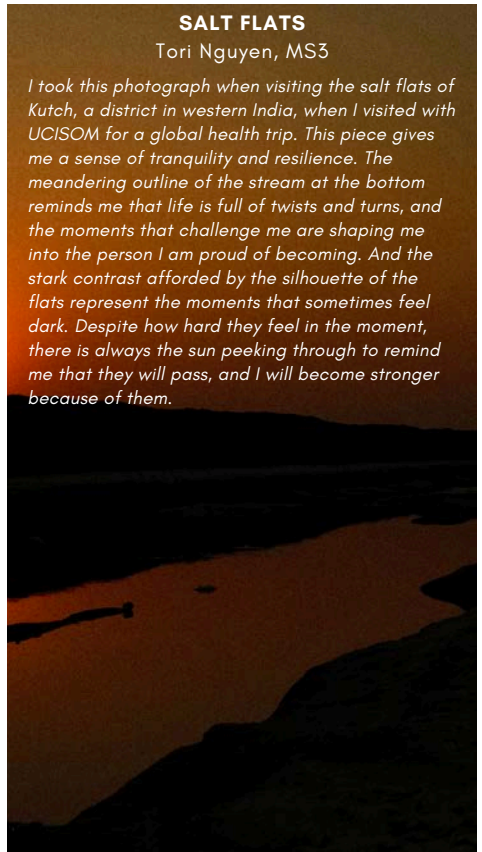
Taken during a clinical volunteering trip abroad, an experience I often reminisce as I trek through the mountains of medical school. This photograph honors the priceless guidance senior physicians provide their trainees, and highlights the window through which imaging allows us to map the meandering rivers that flow through our patients.



SALT FLATS

Tori Nguyen, MS3

I took this photograph when visiting the salt flats of Kutch, a district in western India, when I visited with UCISOM for a global health trip. This piece gives me a sense of tranquility and resilience. The meandering outline of the stream at the bottom reminds me that life is full of twists and turns, and the moments that challenge me are shaping me into the person I am proud of becoming. And the stark contrast afforded by the silhouette of the flats represent the moments that sometimes feel dark. Despite how hard they feel in the moment, there is always the sun peeking through to remind me that they will pass, and I will become stronger because of them.



HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

Sunia Khan, MS2

I took a photo of this mural on a pre-med Flying Samaritans clinic trip to Colonia Margarita Moran (CMM), Mexico. Memories made with the CMM community, fellow peers, and healthcare providers at these clinic trips have been beacons of light throughout medical school to remind me to always serve others with kindness.



REFLECTIONS ON THE SEA

Caroline Gee, MS1

A Walk Alone in Cinque Terre



MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE EARTH

Jenny N. Wang, MS3

Florence, Italy



SALT OR SNOW?

Britney Weñg, MS1

Valley of the Moon, Chile



MOMENTS

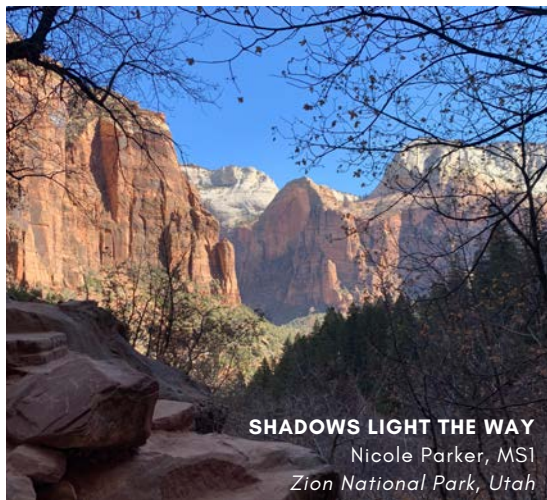
Nicole Parker, MS1

Humblebaek, Denmark

TRAIL

Clifford Danza, MS2

Which way?



SHADOWS LIGHT THE WAY

Nicole Parker, MS1

Zion National Park, Utah

ARCHWAY

Britney Weng, MS1

Perito Moreno Glacier, Argentina



EVEN FLOWERS GROW IN EXILE

Sana Shah, MS1

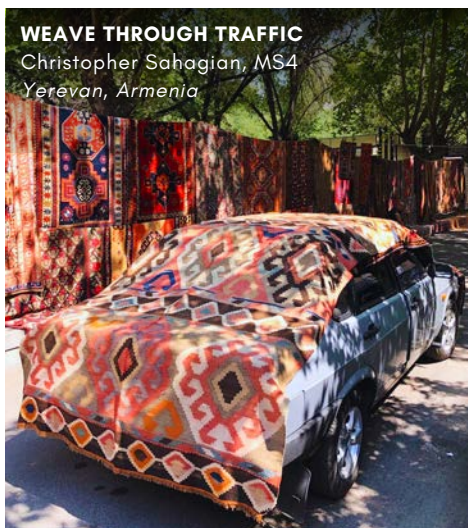
Mexico City



WEAVE THROUGH TRAFFIC

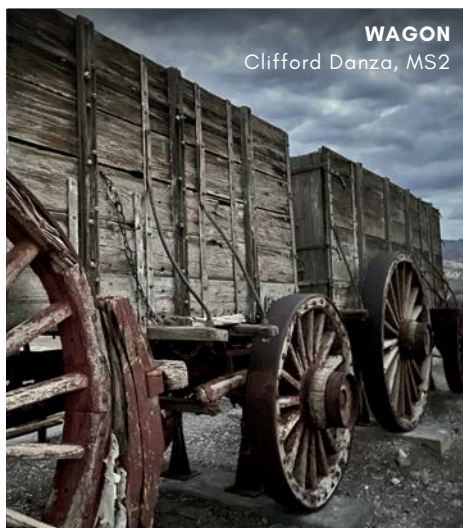
Christopher Sahagian, MS4

Yerevan, Armenia



WAGON

Clifford Danza, MS2



INDEX

- A. Ja'Nea James — 34
Alison Lawrence — 8
Allegra P. Koch — 4
Andrew Cuyegkeng — 47
Annabel Wang — 42
Areej Shaikh — 3, 41
Ashley Hope — 13
Audrey Goodman — 12
Avery Robinson-Phelps — 26
Baotran Vo, MD — 2, 18
Britney Weng — covers, 10, 28, 45, 48, 54, 55
Caitlyn Sing — 32
Caroline Gee — 9, 54
Caroline Given — 9
Catherine Diamond — 40
Celina Yang — 23, 43, 49
Chalat Rajaram — 26, 47, 48
Chloe Katherine Pascal — 18
Christian J. Andrade Herrera — 35, 42
Christian Makar — 5
Christopher Sahagian — 5, 20, 33, 40, 53, 55
Cindy Flores — 12
Claire Marie Godenzi — 2
Clifford Danza — 7, 12, 26, 27, 29, 49, 55
Cynthia Haq — 14
Danely Segoviano — 29
Dee Statum — 40
Edward Fowler — 28
Eileen Thereasa Span — 22
Elaha Noori — 2, 5, 38, 41, 48
Elaine Chiao — 11
Emma Boyles — 4
Fola Adesina — 2
Frank L Meyskens — 21
Gabriella Miotto, MD — 10, 18, 20
Hannah Choi — 39
Huan Nguyen — 25, 53
Isabela Carmela Gopez Tan — 27
Jaclyn G. Heilman, MD — 27
Jeannie Mai — 38
Jenny N. Wang — 9, 23, 31, 34, 40, 41, 49, 51, 54
Jenny Ventura — 33
Jessica Martin — 34
Joanne Mendoza — 29
Johanna Shapiro — 9, 15, 33
Kellie Cho — 1
Kristen Fong — 3
Leonora Naser-Saravia — 46
Luigi Gonzales — 19
Maria Angela D. Magpantay — 3
Matthew John Sanford — 38
Michael Gabriel Crisostomo Villora — 41
Nancy Dang — 20
Nicole Parker — 4, 9, 10, 21, 23, 40, 48, 54, 55
Olamide Sonuga — 38
Patrick McShea — 43
Pranathi Rao — 5, 8
Saloni Shah — 3
Samantha Bolotsky — 39, 46
Sana Shah — 18, 46, 55
Sania Luna — 49
Sarah Hoenicke Flores — 19
Sarah O'Dell — 17
Shari Atilano — 29
Shirin Salehi — 32
Shivali Baveja — 2
Stuart Alan Green, MD — 21, 29, 32, 37, 52
Sunia Khan — 2, 19, 47, 54
Surina Khurana — 4
Thuy-Linh Tran — 53
Tori Nguyen — 53
Trina Nguyen — 39
Zoe Adams — 38
Zohal Noori — 39, 43

THANK YOU

Dear Readers,

We hope you enjoyed reading through this year's edition of PLEXUS as much as we were delighted to create it!

This year we received record number of submissions— a testament to the community's keen interest in engaging with medical humanities in a meaningful way. We are so pleased that NAVIGATE resonated with you all, and hope this edition's curated pieces will serve as a beacon of inspiration and clarity as you embark on your own voyages.

— PLEXUS 2024 Editorial Team

We want to hear from you!

Do you have comments, suggestions, reflections, artist highlights, or ideas for the future of PLEXUS? Use the QR code below to share your thoughts!



PUBLISHED WORKS WERE CONTRIBUTED BY UCI SCHOOL OF MEDICINE STUDENTS, PHYSICIANS, FACULTY, STAFF, ALUMNI, PATIENTS, AND COMMUNITY.

© 2024 PLEXUS

WONDER

Britney Weng, MS1
Torres Del Paine, Chile

NOTES

NOTES

