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Plexus

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Plexus 2021: *Emergence*

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PLEXUS



Editor's Note

PLEXUS is a student-organized publication that showcases creative work by medical students, physicians, faculty, and others in the UCI medical community. Through the universal language of art, the journal aspires to connect those who seek to heal and to be healed. We hope that PLEXUS will always be a creative and welcoming space in which we can all reflect and share our experiences in medicine and in life.

This year, more than ever, we hope that PLEXUS can provide solace to those who contribute to and view its pages. The unprecedented challenges of the last year have brought us incredible hardships and sorrow, but also inspired newfound strength and profound kindness. In this year's 22nd edition of PLEXUS, we embrace and celebrate all of this as part of the process of *Emergence*.

In this issue, we highlight the past year as a time of new things coming into being – whether good or bad – and to hold hope for the possibility of change for the better. *Emergence* is a process of coming to view and bringing things to light as well as the philosophy that greater things may arise which are unexpected and far better than any of the parts we see.

We are incredibly grateful to our amazing community for their support in sustaining PLEXUS. This year we are lucky to have a wonderful team of MSI associate editors led by Celina Yang: Riya Bansal, Aaron Frank, Kathleen Powers, and Kelsey Roman. We would like to give special thanks to our faculty advisors Dr. Johanna Shapiro, Dr. Tan Nguyen and Dr. Frank Meyskens. This journal would not have been possible without their continuous support and guidance.

We hope you enjoy PLEXUS 2021: *Emergence*.

Ashley Hope (MS2) & Kenneth Schmitt (MS2)
Editors in Chief

Congratulations to the winners of the 2021 medical student competition!

Visual

Breaking Wave by Tammy Tran (MS3)

Bloom/Plume/Bloom by Qingxing Liang (MS2)

Written

Dragonfly in Amber by Bethlehem Tesfaye (MS1)

A Little Soda for Thought by Anna Cardall (MS3)

Performance

Emergence (Darkness) by Alex Richardson (MS3)

On My Way remix by Harrison Lam (MS2)

EMERGENCE

please click on the image to access musical piece
Emergence (Darkness)
By: Alex Richardson (MS3)

New Territory Within a New Territory

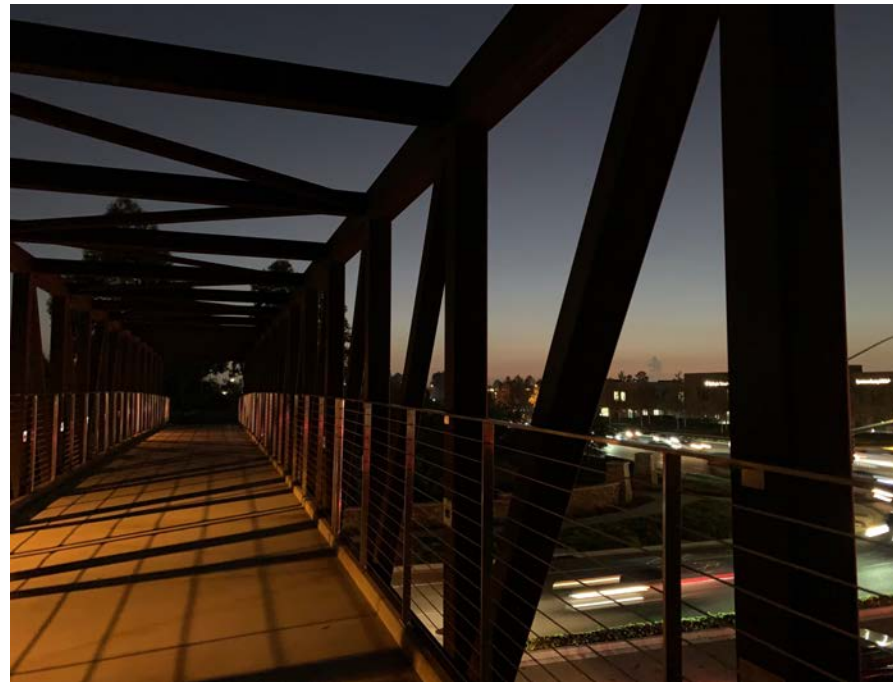
By: Melinda Lem (MS3)

I speed walk quietly around the floor, looking for the yellow gown and gloves for an isolation room, not trying to look like it is my first day. A nurse, seeing that I was lost, walks me to the front of the patient room, where the gown and gloves are neatly placed in a cart in front of the door. I realize that my patient only speaks Spanish. Where is the translator iPad? Do I have to gown it too? After my logistical delays, I walk in with the iPad, fully gowned with only my eyes visible. Despite many practice patient sessions, I completely draw a blank.

How infectious was his condition? Do I sit down or am I supposed to avoid touching anything in the room? Should I plan to write down everything or do I not touch my pen just in case it gets exposed? Do I touch his hand or shoulder to show empathy? Does he want to be touched or will that be perceived as an invasion of privacy and potential infection of COVID? Between the translator not hearing what I'm saying through the layers of fabric and plastic and the delay of translated responses, my cheerful and empathetic tone is literally lost in translation. All the while, the patient looks clearly bored or annoyed, staring out the window. He avoids my gaze entirely. My enthusiastic smile remains veiled behind my mask and shield. Maybe I'll try raising my eyebrows more. How about waving? I'll try bending down. I am rapidly running out of questions to ask and forms of empathy to express, unable to turn to the facial expressions and subtle gestures that I had so often relied on in the past. He continues to stare out the window. Maybe tomorrow I'll connect with him. Exasperated, I turn to leave. As I begin removing my gloves, almost without thinking, I ask him how he felt about his upcoming surgery—I asked him if he was scared. He nodded.

For the first time, he met my gaze.

The Journey
By: Kenneth Schmitt (MS2)



Crossroads
By: Olivia Tsai (MS4)



FRESH

By: Tan Nguyen (M.D., faculty)

Butter lettuce with dew drops still on them FRESH
A happy, appreciative, uncomplicated patient FRESH
A usually tired and quiet intern now smiling, FRESH

Wrapping up the Friday afternoon at six thirty p.m. should feel stale and withered
Yet somehow the intern's sparkles make this tree trunk sprout again.



Bloom/Plume/Bloom (photoset)
By: Qingxing Liang (MS2)



A Moment of Clarity
By: Celina Yang (MS1)

Medical Record

By: Olivia Tsai (MS4)

82 year old female

No, no.

82 year old lady

Something missing...

82 year old cancer patient

Not quite.

How do I describe you?

Why do you look so plain on paper?

Because you are not.

Where do I document

The stories you told me about past adventures?

The fact that you like peonies over roses?

The glimmer in your eye when we mention your grandchildren?

The fleeting smile when I told you a joke?

The strength that has helped you conquer obstacle after obstacle?

The bravery that has accompanied you through the OR and chemotherapy?

Not in the history and physical.

Not quite the social history we look for.

Certainly not review of systems.

No room in this structured template.

But they have been etched

In this medical record:

The one wearing a short white coat

Looking you in the eye

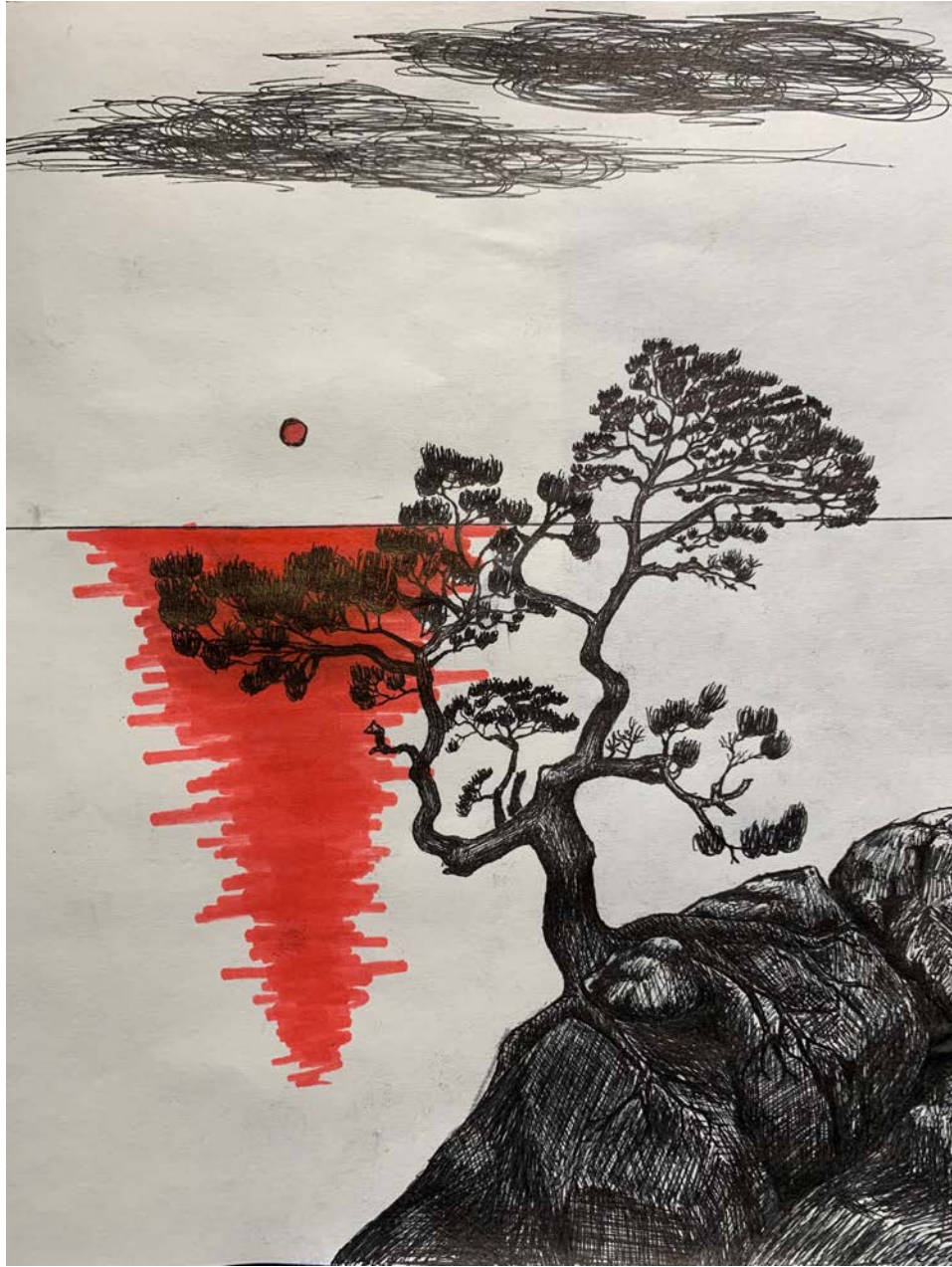
With a stethoscope around her neck.



Portrait of Dr. Mary Sakaguchi Oda (1920-2013), Japanese-American Family Physician

By: Clay Thibodeaux (MS4)

My great-aunt, Dr. Mary Oda, was a 2nd-year medical student in 1941 when she was forcibly relocated to Manzanar internment camp. Living behind barbed wire fence, she faced personal loss and degradation, yet never abandoned her dream of becoming a physician. After resuming and eventually graduating from medical school post-WWII, Dr. Oda dedicated her career to serving immigrant communities of the San Fernando Valley.



Resilience: The Lone Pine
By: Nischal Acharya (MS1)

Library Card
By: Brian Hanst (MS2)

Bleeding time is much less graphic than real bleeding, but it still instills fright. I wonder sometimes how much time there truly is. Who notices that it's gone when we steal it? I wonder how much of my mother's time I stole from her when I was getting on her nerves. The counterpoint of course is that her time was and is a gift.

Love is a gift, like time. Neither are technically scarce but sometimes the rations don't sit as nicely as they should. What is missing on any given day is not always quenched by a phone call. Cooped up in a box with a kitchen still feels like being cooped up, after all. I wish I could open the hatch a bit but can't right now. In the pit of my guts the stones of misused time sit, mocking me because they can still obstruct my piece of mind.

I wish that was not the case. But regardless I keep going to sleep and waking up, so my library card hasn't been scratched off the list yet. If it's going to keep getting renewed, might as well keep reading.



Golfing at Sunset
By: Joseph Conovaloff (MS4)

Joshua Tree
By: Christopher Boldt (MS2)



The Sun Emerges From Behind The Moon
By: Steven B. Leven (M.D., faculty)



Fight-or-Flight

By: Alex Wang (MS4)

It's 3 AM, I'm slowly drifting to sleep
Before suddenly my phone begins to beep
My resident calls me over to sit as her neighbor
And assist with a nulliparous mother in stage 2 of labor

I count out loud during each contraction
And encourage the patient to push with decisive action
The delivery period is expected to be lengthy
So my resident leaves to ensure the other patients are safe and healthy

15, 30, 45 minutes tick on down
Soon the baby's head begins to crown
The nurse urgently pages for the physician
All the while, the baby's head moves forward in position

Only a medical student and one nurse in sight
The adrenaline kicks in, fight-or-flight
I quickly gown up and place my gloves on
As the patient continues to scream "Come On!"

Countless days of studying
Hours of practicing delivering
Training turns into reality
Time to deliver the baby free

With a final push and surge
The crying baby has swiftly emerged
Seconds later the team arrives
Celebrating the delivery of new life



Surviving Flower
By: Joseph Conovaloff (MS4)



Reflection
By: Seraphim Telep (MS2)



Sunlight in a Sunset
By: Christine Panganiban (Allergy and Immunology Fellow)



Bucolic Sunset
By: Priyanka Sharma (MS4)

Possibility of Hope
By: Alex Marlow (MS4)

Mom's sick
The cancer's back
Medical student mode engaged
Need answers, information
Ask questions
Symptoms? Labs? Imaging? Plan?
Not looking good

Mom's sick
Need numbers
5-year survival rate
30%
Not looking good

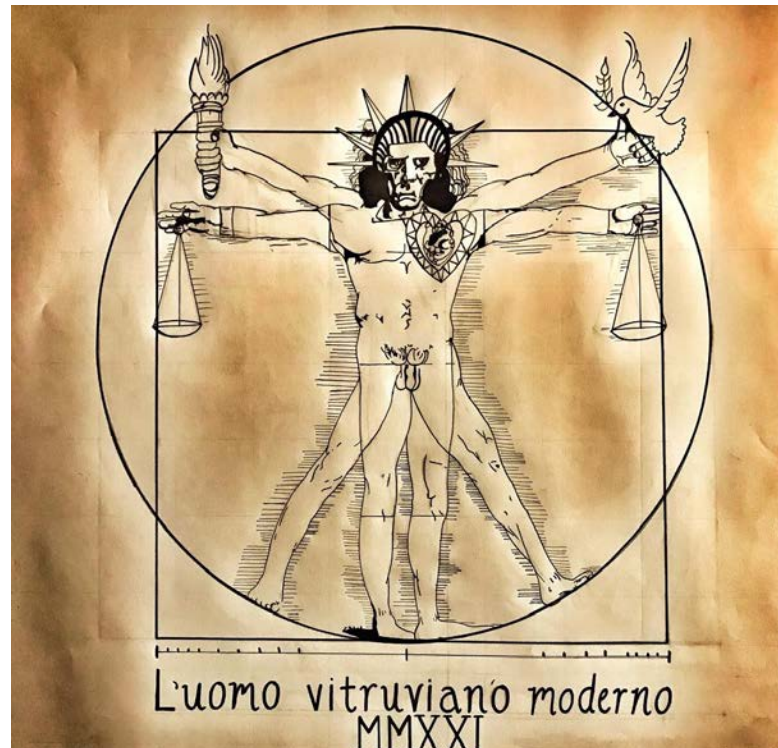
Mom's sick
She wants Thanksgiving dinner
But...COVID
Medical student mode engaged
Quarantine, meet outside
Masks on, No food
She says she has no fear
But I do

Mom's sick
Can't help it
I plan for the worst
Is this how patients' families feel?
They always seem optimistic

But I train to know
Know all possibilities
How do I know the possibility of hope?
Mom's sick
Medical school did not prepare me for this

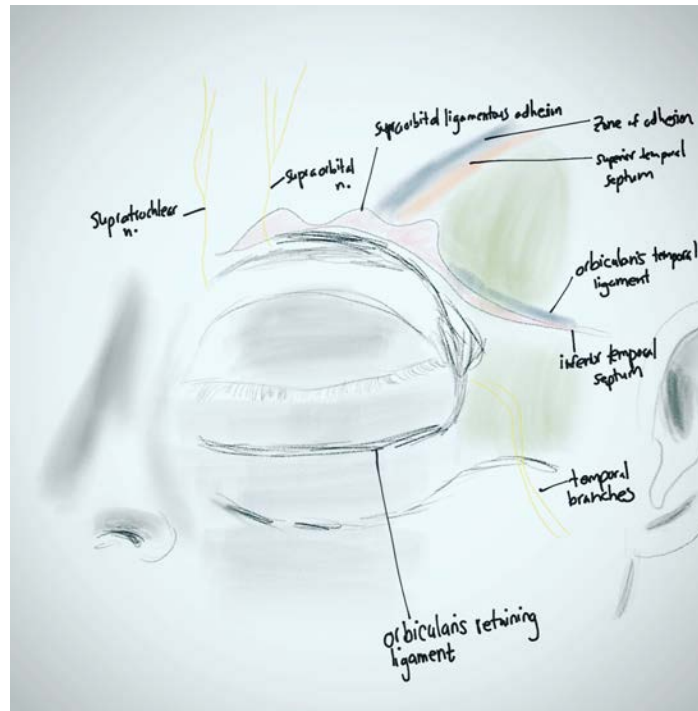
Anatomy Reflections
By: Riya Bansal (MS1)

Forgive me, dear sir
Forgive me for
Not being able to look into your eyes
And knowing their color
As I use mine to observe your hues
Forgive me for
Not knowing your name
Or to whom your heart belongs
Before it was ours
Forgive me for
Pushing the scalpel deeper
Into skin that you spent years thickening
Pulling all my weight against your ribs
Cracking open that which kept you protected
Forgive me for
Crinkling my face
As the sharp smell fills my nose
A small sacrifice for us
A large sacrifice from you
Forgive me for
Leaving to go home
And wash off the day
And continue on
Without even knowing your name



L'uomo vitruviano moderno
MMXXI

(above) L'uomo vitruviano moderno MMXXI
By: Rhonda Reeves (staff)
(below) Plastic Surgery is a Passion and an Art
By: Pauline Joy F. Santos (PGY4, Department of Plastic Surgery)



Prometheus' Body
By: Frederik Heath (MS1)

How cheap it is to transgress the moral fabric of your skin.
In da Vinci's time the price was a life.
But while our face has changed since the dawning of
liberalism,
We're just as ruled by our morality,
Our religion,
Our faith.
Still we fear the truth that lies just beneath our skin,
But not you.
Were you always so courageous in your transgressions?
Unperturbed by whispers of heresy.
Of abomination?
Were you a martyr to knowledge in both life and death?
I doubt it.
Probing morality, and doubting our righteousness is a
dangerous endeavor,
And you lived a long life.
You did escape in death though,
Which is more than most achieve.
But who am I to judge your teleology?
I should only give thanks,
And hope someday to share your courage,
so that our children may live longer,
and with hope,
better.
And so it is that we feast our minds on your liver,
So we may learn the forbidden truths you lay bare.
After all,
Isn't that why you've gifted us yourself,
As protection,
to save us from ourselves?



(top) Educated
By: Riya Bansal (MS1)
(bottom) Excited Brain Cells
By: Manlin Shao (staff)

How's School Going?
By: Helena Stevenson (MSr)

How's school going?
How's school going? They ask me.
Do they want the long answer?
Or the short answer? I ask myself

Short answer...

It's great! Tough, but great!

A small smile under my mask

Maybe they won't know I'm lying to them

And to myself...

Long answer...

It's not what I expected

I'm isolated

I'm lonely

I've made incredible friends

I have an amazing support system

I'm so happy to be here

Yet I'm still wondering if I'm cut out for this

I know I belong here

...everyone says so

I'm finally learning how to be a doctor

While navigating a global pandemic

Is anyone else feeling doubt?

Or is it just me?

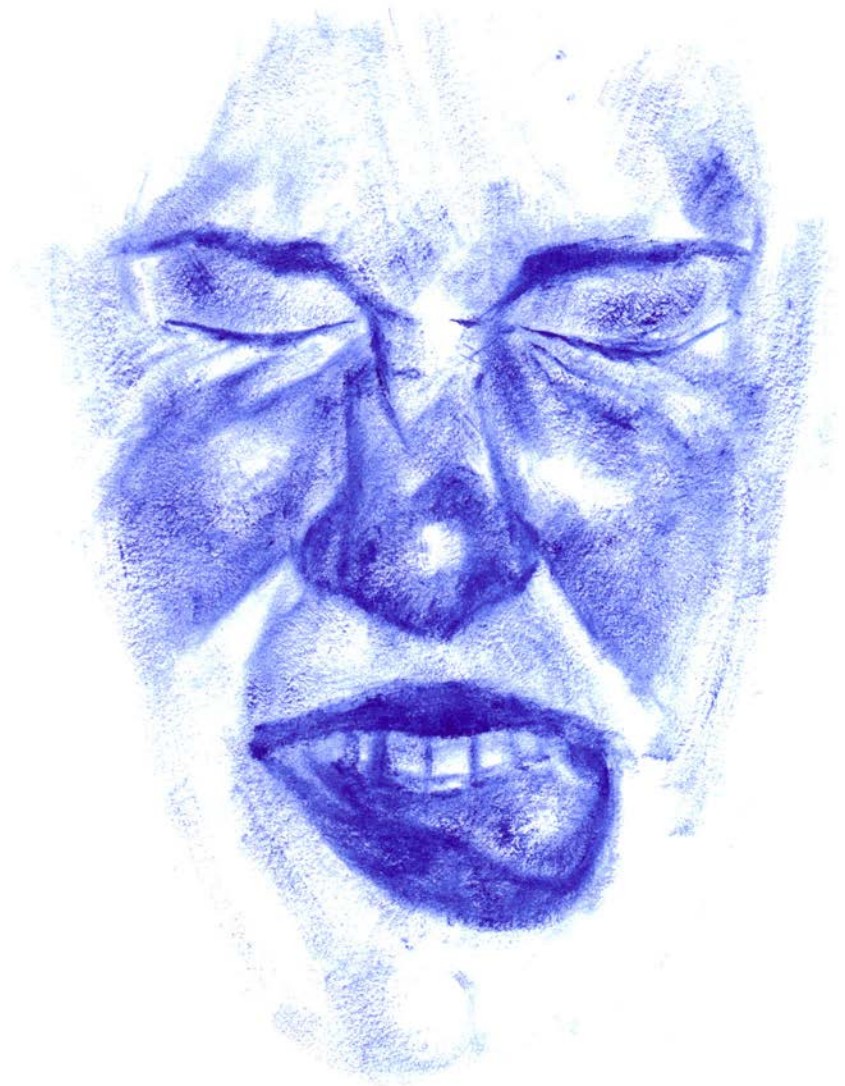
I've had some amazingly fun times

I truly wouldn't want to be anywhere else

(they don't want to hear all that) I say to myself

So instead I say to them "Really good, I'm enjoying it!"

Sour
By: Micah Belzberg (PGY1, preliminary)



Self-portrait Study
By: Micah Belzberg (PGY1, preliminary)



Untitled
By: Kelsey Roman (MS1)

Photo Title
By:

Dragonfly in Amber

By: Bethlehem Tesfaye (MS1)

You thought your glances were enough to feed my soul
And I took them willingly starved
Like eating steaming food before it's had time to cool
I found truth in the burn and reality marred

You knew what little would keep me around
And I came to it like a beacon
Ignoring every sign or sound
Of trouble, of fear, of reason

So I wrote you onto the page
To make sense to me what was hidden:
Your patterns, your actions, your intricate cage.
Until I wrote you into oblivion.



Judgment
By: Frederik Heath (MS1)

It never strays far
The simple certainty that tempts your admonition.
There is no space for doubt, or nuance.
All is polarized,
Segregated,
Black or white.

You make it so
With every furrowed brow,
Every pointed finger,
And you know what side you're on.

You've felt the outrage,
The hurt and the fury.
Lying awake,
You've wondered about the hows and the whys,
On this blood-soaked ground.

But you're no victim,
You have no fear.
You seek the fight,
The thrill,
Of justice won.

Be that as it may,
I beg you,
Before you cast that first stone,
Look me in the eye
And tell me that intent doesn't matter.
Show me why
your feelings matter more.
Explain to me how
You can weigh my worth
So quickly,
And find me wanting.
Do I deserve less
than the courtesy of your doubt?



(top) Mamba Mentality by Labiba Syeed (Biological Sciences Major)

(bottom left) Plain of the Six Glaciers by Shelby Kunz (MS2)

(bottom right) Mountain by Jessica Wang (MS2)



Sarcoma

By: Paula Yvette Mendoza (MS3)

Good morning,
Let's look at your neck
Here we are,
Probing at it again

It's not EBV
Or CMV
One, two, three...
Cats!
I know what this could be
Bartonella!
Negative
Unfortunately

We try antibiotics
You're looking alright
How's school?
It's all online?!
That's the part about COVID you really seem to like
Because even at the hospital
you can't fall behind

You do your homework,
You play your games,
You smile all the time,
Any of us say your name

I wish it wasn't true
That this could've just been infectious
You were only twelve
Your name starts with an S
But I wish your diagnosis didn't
Sarcoma



My Grandson My Passion by Tan Nguyen (M.D., faculty)



Dance As If No One Is Watching by Tan Nguyen (M.D., faculty)

Little One

By: Paula Yvette Mendoza (MS3)

You're limping in,
You're sweet and small
And next to you,
She's standing tall
She answers for you
She says you fall
But the bruises on you
Don't make sense
at all

I'm sorry this happened
But here we are
We ask all the questions,
We want to know why
But nothing about what happened,
Would make any of this right.

I hope you're safe
I hope you're alright
I'm glad we met
This was both of our fight

Emerging During The Pandemic
By: Johanna Shapiro (PhD, faculty)

During the past seven months of quarantine during the coronavirus pandemic, I go virtually nowhere other than to visit my doctors and my dentist. My only walking is around our neighborhood. At the end of the street (which is long and meandering), there is a dead-end that provides a vista of hills and a vast, uncluttered sky. When I reach this point, I've taken to raising my arms wide and uttering the following prayer: "Protect Your servants. Help Your people. Save Your world." (Since, over the course of history, the Lord's servants have been a motley crew, I clarify that, at this point in time, I am referring to the essential workers and frontline doctors and nurses battling COVID-19). I say this 3 times, each time separated by a respectful pause (which is inevitably met with silence - but it might be a Divine Silence, which could be full of answers - who knows what anything really means these days?) Then I turn around and go home.

Usually I am able to indulge this practice in complete isolation because, although there are houses nearby, their inhabitants never emerge. Today, however, a middle-aged guy materialized, apropos of getting into his car. He stood gawking at me like I was a crazy woman (how he got that idea I have no idea). He seemed to want to just drive away, but was probably worried I might attack his house - or more likely, curse it. Anyway, he shouted out, "What are you doing there?" I replied, "Praying." It took him a moment to process this - no church in sight (not even a synagogue!), no choir, no prayer books, and as far as either of us could tell, no God. In any event, after a quizzical inbreath, he nodded and said graciously, "Oh well then, that's all right. Go right ahead." I waved in a friendly manner, finished my final round of supplications, and walked home. Prayer never felt so neighborly (or maybe neighborliness never felt so prayerful. Who knows what anything really means these days?).



Home in a Horror
By: Melinda Lem (MS3)

Dating in #COVIDMedSchool

By: Lindsay K. Yuen (MS1)

I got so lonely during COVID med school that I decided to try online dating. It truly is a dismal thing, to scroll through numerous profiles of single men in a wide age range (23-45, do not judge me). Profile after profile of the same guy petting the same elephant in Bali. Or in the same board shorts standing on the same boat (or even worse, at a pool party) with his "boys", all of whom also look exactly the same. Or holding up the same fish (this one, I never understood). It was like a sad stack of applications for a low-budget version of The Bachelorette. (Does that make me the bachelorette? I hope not. Whoever the bachelorette is, she would not find love here.)

- Fluent in sarcasm.
- Quotes too much from The Office.
- Knows the best place in town for tacos and margs.
- Love language is physical touch.
- Not my child #uncletime
- Looking for someone to go on spontaneous adventures with!

That last one, in particular, killed me. What first year medical student has time for adventures? What is spontaneity? We don't know her. In fact, we just had to look up whether we spelled her name right because we really. Don't. Know. Anything. About her. (For the record, we did NOT spell her name right, and I could have sworn there was another "a" in there somewhere.)

What was more dismal still, however, was what would be pointed out to me by some of these near-strangers.

"What do you like to do in your free time?" First of all, what free time? Second of all, what can anyone do in their free time? It is COVID, and we have professionalism to keep in mind. But I remember a time when this question didn't bring quite so much anxiety about coming across as boring. I remember a time when I had plans most weekdays, whether that was happy hour with friends, dance classes, art classes, volunteering, karaoke, or any of the plethora of activities that one can do when not faced with the threat of getting infected or, even worse, infecting everyone else. The worst part was when a couple (yes, more than one) assumed that I don't like dancing, or even that I hate dancing. Dancing used to be the highlight of my week and was by far my favorite "hobby" (a word I still disdain for reasons I cannot explain, but must use because it appropriately conveys my very sub-amateur skill level). The fact that these men who were actually trying to get to know me thought that I hate dancing made me consider how far I have strayed from the things that bring me joy.

"You'll do great! You're going to kill it!" No offense, my dude, but your sentiments are under-informed and ring incredibly hollow. But this one struck me because I realized that I avoid talking to my family and friends about these things for this very reason. I hate being asked how I am doing because I have no idea how to tell



The Look of Love
By: Kenneth Schmitt (MS2)



Putting The Light Back In Your Heart
By: Daniel Azzam (MS4)



Locks of Love
By: Joseph Conovaloff (MS4)

the people that love me that I have been struggling. I can't stand being told that they believe in me and that they are sure that everything is going to be fine, because they have no idea what they're talking about. It's not their fault, they just have no idea what "the rigors of medical school" actually means. I didn't even fully understand, and I signed up for this. I did my due diligence. Thousands of clinical hours spent shadowing and scribing. Far too many hours spent in the cesspool that is SDN (RIP to the many dreams killed there), reading about the experiences of medical students. Conversations with friends in medical school in which they were brutally honest and often tried to dissuade me from going this path. After all that, I still did not know what this would entail, so how can I expect my family to understand? So I avoid talking to them. How can I face the shame and fear of not being able to meet the expectations set by their encouragement? COVID may have forced isolation (don't even get me started on trying to build a community here while trying to socially distance), but being in med school pushed me even further from those who matter most.

The worst thus far has been, "You think negatively about things, don't you?" This was coming off of a particularly rough week, and I had barely begun being a little more honest with this dude about how I was really doing. I felt myself crawl a little back into my protective shell of extroversion. But it did make me ask myself... How did I become the person who found herself wanting to cry, but who was unable to identify a reason for sadness? Or the person who stayed in bed for three days and pushed away all human contact because she couldn't find the motivation to get up? Or the person who lost full days, but has no idea where they went because while she didn't get anything done, she also didn't do anything fun or relaxing? How did I become this person who would be considered negative?

Is it the COVID? Or is it the med school? Perhaps it is both, #COVIDMedSchool. Either way, I never did figure out how to tell him that I don't, in fact, view things negatively. That historically, it's been quite the opposite. That I've been described as someone who brings positivity to things, who is peppy and bubbly (sometimes to an annoying fault), who loves her life, and who has too many interests to actually do them all. I never did figure out how to tell him that no, it's not that I view things negatively; it's that I am living a negative experience, and that I hope to find a reason to be positive again soon.

It took dating during COVID med school to see the ways in which I had slowly become disconnected from myself, and from the people and things I love. And if the first step to fixing a problem is to recognize it, then I have to admit that this awful process hasn't been a complete waste of time. Dating may be dismal, but even if the bachelorette does not find love here, hopefully she will find her way back to herself.

The title was inspired by going on a date to the beach, and the dude offering to take a *plandid* photo of me to tag #COVIDbeach.

"Get it? Because you're wearing a mask? That's what makes it COVID beach!" said he, as I stared at him blankly.



Two different conversations, One medical student

By: Ruchi Desai (MS3)

Can we see him?

Family visitation is unfortunately not allowed

He sounded confused this morning

Elderly patients often develop delirium

Can you do anything for his confusion?

We recommend that family call him and talk to him as much as possible

He doesn't understand...he struggles with holding his phone up

If family could facetime or zoom with him, it would help

Can we please visit him?

I'm sorry, COVID restrictions are in place

(left) Returning Home
By: Melinda Lem (MS3)

My husband and his grandmother used to go to Rocky Mountain National Park together very often when he was a kid. He used to spend his summers in Colorado with them. However, he had not been back in 10 years. When his grandmother passed away last year, he felt that he needed to go back for closure. When he went this year, it was a sense of coming home to Colorado.

(right) Monastery on the Riverbed
By: Mehron Dillon (MS2)

Let it Snow

By Katherine Colcord (PhD student)

You flew off the motorbike,
landed hard on the pavement,
black and white flashes of your children
behind your eyes.

When I first saw you,
you were curled, clutched-tight, angular
in the hospital bed,
moaning softly.

I tried to pry your joints loose,
to stand you up,
but they remained fixed
and when I placed you upright
you stood on tiptoe, knees flexed,
like a fetus not ready to unfurl
and enter the world.
Your moan rose to a shriek.

We casted your arms and legs,
pulled each limb taut,
then wrapped the gauze,
forcefully coaxing your joints into positions resembling neutral.
Your moan became loud and sustained.

Later, I tried to stand you up again.
Frankenstein, stiff armed and legged.
Your moan turned to words.
My kids, my kids, where are my kids?

One step, two steps,
a teetering pencil-legged crash landing
into a soft chair.
A loud groan.

We walked
a bit more each day,
day after day.
Where are my kids?
Where are my kids?
I need to get home.
How do I get out of here?

Sometimes your voice crescendoed into screams
that made administrators leave their offices
to check on us.



Week after week,
until fir trees and shining red ornaments
filled the rehab halls.

You clutched a small pillow in your hand,
arm outstretched and casted,
and shouted the words printed on it
over and over as we walked.
Let it snow,
Let it snow,
Let it snow.

In the new year, the casts came off.
We walked together,
your limbs still stiff and outstretched.
I really need to see my kids,
softer now.

One day,
still crisp outside,
but stuffy
under fluorescent hospital lights,
I kept an eye on you
from the hall unnoticed,
writing notes.

A doctor knocked on your open door,
entered, pressed a stethoscope to your chest,
then asked,
Can you walk?

You hesitated, uncertain,
I need that girl,
Where is that girl?

I smiled to myself
with the indignation
of a mother
and peeked into your room.
Why don't you show him?

You got up slowly,
still stiff, but now it was the stiffness of a long car ride.
One step, two steps,
across the room
to my side.
You smiled
and put your hand on my shoulder.

(top) Untitled by Shelby Kunz (MS2)

(middle) Grateful Desert by Alex Marlow (MS4)

(bottom) Sea Turtle Emerges From The Ocean To Lay Its Eggs by Steven B. Leven (M.D., faculty)

This is (not) the interpreter speaking

By: Mark Slader (MS3)

“She says she loves you because you treat her as if you were her son,” her daughter said on the phone as they both cried. Then I started crying too. She was being discharged the next day, and this was our goodbye. She had been my patient for the last seven days, but her impact will last my career.

From my team’s perspective, her hospital needs were rudimentary medical management. It was so easy, a surgeon could do it. So easy, they entrusted me to do it. I touched up my differential diagnosis for a stable GI bleed, I read her chart three times over, and went to talk to her. We spoke different languages and I knew I would need to use an interpreter service for our interactions.

In our preclinical years, we are taught to use interpreters as if we are not using them. Make eye contact, listen to the patient speak, and be as thorough and empathic as you would be otherwise. In our clinical years, we often observe the opposite practice. Some providers are brief and looking towards the door when using an interpreter service. Medicine is busy and our training is stressful. Unfortunately, I can understand how those habits develop; it is easy to disassociate when using an interpreter, and I am certainly guilty of this myself. But in these interactions, we are often meeting someone at their most vulnerable moment. It is a privilege and responsibility to be present in these moments.

We covered the OPQRST basics and I asked her some questions about her family. She shared she was from Ethiopia and we talked at length about Ethiopian food and culture. We bonded.

During our subsequent interactions, she would often reach her hand out for mine when talking about something more sensitive. I would take her hand as I waited for clarification from the interpreter. She was scared. And as if being in a foreign hospital was not isolating enough, COVID restrictions prevented her from having any visitors. I tried to involve her daughters via Facetime whenever possible, but it did not seem to be enough. While her GI bleed seemed “rudimentary,” her reality felt tragic.

I could not help but feel inadequate at that moment because I did not think there was anything else I could do. As I was preparing to leave the room, a weight lifted off my shoulders when she grabbed my hand and said, “I love you.”

I Bloom
By: Sam Du (MS3)





Marks Left Behind
By: Shravan Thaploo (MS1) & Celina Yang (MS1)

Why do we leave marks where we go? Each little quote, vignette, drawing, and signature on that wall is someone's little legacy. A proof of their unique existence in that space. But those marks aren't solitary—they interact and play with each other, bypassing the divides of age, sex, race, and even time. All these marks are contributions to an emergent whole, a sort of collective consciousness.

Inflection
By: Olivia Tsai (MS4)

In that moment
The dialogue stopped
The monologue ended
And the narrative began.

No longer referred to
In first person
Not even second
From now on only third.

Gone is the comma,
The semicolon,
The hyphen –
Summed up by a period.

No longer a who
Sometimes a why
Quite visibly how
Declared as a when.

Long past the prologue
Flown past the chapters
No more flipping back
Enter the epilogue.



Grand Piano
By: Joseph Conovaloff (MS4)

A Little Soda for Thought
By: Anna Cardall (MS3)

He wouldn't stop asking for 7-Up. Sitting in a hospital bed, a face shield, mask and gown apart, all he wanted was a bottle of 7-Up. And we couldn't give it him. As we tried to explain he couldn't eat anything he rolled his eyes, "You're trying to kill me, aren't you?" No matter the phrasing, rephrasing and re-rephrasing he wouldn't budge.

"A little 7-Up won't hurt nobody." His roommate chimed in from the other side of the curtain, laughing and agreeing that surely one 7-Up couldn't make a difference. He couldn't be that sick. But he was that sick.

Three weeks of constipation, two months of blood in his stool and what felt like a year of exhaustion and breathlessness. This man had persisted, alone, in his home through it all. It took two days of intractable vomiting for his neighbor to finally intervene. I wondered if he was in denial; he knew the severity of his condition but refused to accept it. He arrived at the emergency room frustrated and I confused, unsure why a team of doctors and me, a medical student, were so concerned over his lack of number two. He just wanted to rest in peace. But his belly, hard as a rock filled with fluid and bowel, made it clear there was a lot more going on than minor constipation. But he didn't want to hear it.

It took a day of scans, physical exams and procedures to get the final diagnosis: Stage IV Colon Adenocarcinoma with metastasis to the liver, lungs and abdominal cavity. Terminal prognosis. He had tumors throughout his belly, so much so that when we drained all that fluid, you could see them, irregular and lumpy, poking through his skin. And still he asked for 7-Up, unfazed by the appearance of his own body. When asked if we could update a family member, he shook his head. When asked if he wanted any life-sustaining interventions, he shook his head. "When God calls me home, I'll be ready to go." Not the words of a man in denial. He wanted to be alone for his final days. Although not entirely, with his 3 roommates, countless nurses and doctors and the never-ending parade of blood tests, scopes and questions.

I left the hospital Monday night, sure I would come back to an empty bed Tuesday morning. He had been in overwhelming pain that afternoon and had refused all pain medications. His bowels had perforated after surgery and oncology had decided he was too sick to operate on or treat. We knew it would be a matter of hours, but when I arrived at his room Tuesday morning, he lay there, breathing heavily but very much alive. He answered every one of my questions the same.



Light in the Desert Sky
By: Pauline Joy Santos (PGY4, Department of Plastic Surgery)



Something
By: Alex Marlow (MS4)

“How are you feeling this morning?” “I’m doing just fine.”

“Are you in any pain?” “I’m doing just fine.”

“Are you feeling short of breath?” “I’m doing just fine.”

“Can I get you anything?” “I’m doing just fine.”

He nodded along with me as we discussed comfort care, pain management and palliative measures. Finally, in one last attempt to start conversation, I asked: “Are you sure there’s nothing I can get you?”

A brief pause.

“Maybe a 7-Up.”

I smiled from under my mask and got him a 7-Up. I’ll never know if he got to drink any of it. The next thing I remember is presenting his case on rounds, my attending agreeing with our plan and then a phone call to our workroom. My fellow medical student picked up the phone, hung up, and relayed the message. On 11:15 Tuesday morning, 5 floors below my team discussing our plan of care, comfortable in our chairs, he died. He spent his last moments as alone as he could be, surrounded by people in a hospital during a pandemic.

I had never lost a patient. Of course, in medicine you understand that death is a part of life. It’s the natural next step for us all and having cared for terminally ill cancer patients on hospice, I knew it was an impending fate for many. But walking down those four flights of stairs with my resident to declare this man dead, it felt like every rational thing I’d learned or convinced myself of was wrong. I wouldn’t say I felt sad; this man was ready to die. Although his life could have been longer had he come to the hospital months earlier, he had accepted his fate, as had I. He wanted to feel death, without pain medications and without his family. As I felt for his absent pulse, listened for his silent breath sounds and waited to hear a heartbeat that never came, I appreciated the strength this man had displayed at the end of his life.

As a 24-year-old medical student, death wasn’t something I contemplated often until I began my third year. This is the year in medical education that we enter the clinical setting after years of didactics. We go from the top of our game, finely tuned study connoisseurs, to doe-eyed amateurs, sprinting just to keep up with the residents and attendings. But beyond the constantly humbling experience of never knowing the right answer, we also start to witness the beauty and tragedy of inpatient medicine. Over my eight weeks of internal medicine, I cared for a metastatic cancer patient whose sole purpose was to make it to her spring wedding, a middle-aged man who’d been through multiple rounds of brain surgeries after an accident when he was 26, and a mother whose daughter reminded me every day that this was not how her mother acted before she had gotten this infection. Although these patients may not be with us physically, I carry their lives and their stories with me, informing the care I continue to give.

This man was no different. Today, I passed a vending machine at the hospital, one week from the day he passed. I stood there just three floors above his room and a bottle of soda caught my eye. A bottle of 7-Up. I smiled, punching B23 and bending over to grab my purchase. As I took my first sip, I remembered his laugh as he tried to convince us to break protocol to give him his 7-Up, and I remember his desperation as he asked for another mere hours before he passed. I smiled to myself, hearing, “A little 7-up won’t hurt nobody.”



The Hope In Us
By: Deon Tran (MEPN)
Drowning, she finds peace. In peace, she find hope.

A Caution.
Melinda Lem, MS3

What used to be the careful listening of childhood trauma became the rush for alcohol withdrawal symptoms and the most recent CIWA score.
What used to be asking about grandchildren and hobbies became asking about 24 hour I&Os, pain, and getting out of bed.
What used to be an hour of time with a patient became 30 minutes. Then 15. Then the desire for it to take 5.
What used to be an empathic presence became an automatic set of questions in a preset worksheet format.
What used to take 3 hours on a detailed life story became a discharge note and a stranger hours later.
What used to be fresh excitement and novelty became a standard routine and a hope to leaving early.
What used to be the best part of medicine became the part I at times dreaded.
What used to be humanity became the slow bleeding thereof.
What used to be a “that won’t happen to me” became a caution.



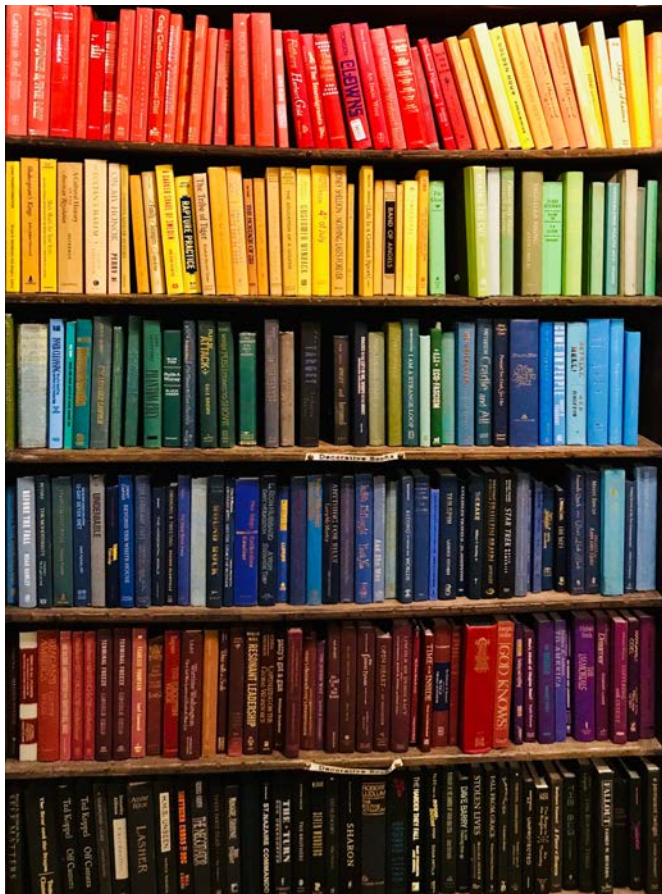
Sailing the Aegean Sea
By: Daniel Azzam (MS4)

Greek Myth: Children were being sacrificed to a Minotaur. King Aegeas's son sought to slaughter the creature. He would hoist black sails if he failed, white sails if succeeded. Despite succeeding, he forgot to raise white sails. Believing his son died, Aegeas jumped to his death into The Aegean Sea.



please click on the images to access musical pieces
(above) On My Way remix by Harrison Lam (MS2)
(below) For Andrew by Matthew Sanford (staff)





Parents in the Dark
By: Alexander Himstead (MS3)

A dark room with so many blinking lights
People dressed up like Grey's Anatomy
Machines that make strange noises through the nights
My back aches from the bed they've given me.

I wait for news from the medical team
To provide me with clarity and hope
I pray that things aren't as bad as they seem
My child in such pain; how can I cope?

How many times have I told the same tale?
How many more pokes, prods, and MRIs?
What would happen if the doctors did fail?
This will not be the day my baby dies.

All tests are negative, the doctors say
So now we have to send you on your way.



(top left) Imagining Equality by Justine Maher (MS4)
(bottom left) City of Lanterns by Harrison Lam (MS2)
Hoi An, Vietnam – As individuals, our unique colors serve as a source of light for others in the midst of darkness. Through our collective diversity, however, we emerge as more than the sum of our parts and meaningfully change the environments that we live in.
(bottom right) Lungs by Zachary Engfer (PhD student)



(left)
Breaking Wave by Tammy Tran (MS3)
Emergence happens at a breakthrough, a breakpoint, or, in this image, a breaking wave. As the wave breaks, a galaxy emerges from within.
(top right)
The Eiffel Tower by Joseph Conovaloff (MS4)
(bottom right)
Half Dome by Austin Franklin (MS2)



(back cover)
Egg
By: Sam Vesuna

