

SCOPE

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On the cover:

ABI RAZO

Bone Study

intaglio print with watercolor

First Place, Art

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Contributors

LINDA ALLISON, MD, MPH, '81, is a retired emergency physician who started learning watercolors at a local community college as a way to relax. She has been involved in the education of many health professions students, including not only medical students and residents, but also nursing, paramedic, physician assistant, pharmacy and others. She gets inspiration for her art from nature, medicine, science, and theology, and has inspired others to engage in visual art activities.

HOPE (TIMP) BALUH, MD, MPH, FACS, '83, is the chief of surgery at a rural Native American hospital in Oklahoma. She has been blessed with seven beautiful children. She and her two youngest children live on Highway 82 North 15 minutes from the toll.

JULIET BRADLEY, MD, '97, is a family physician at Cook County Hospital in Chicago. She lives with her five-year-old son, Declan, and dreams of someday stepping off the merry-go-round.

MARY CORRIGAN STJERN retired SIU after 33 years. She enjoys time spent with other pastel artists doing artwork. She travels with her husband on vacations taking photographs for future paintings and is always looking at her surroundings for new ideas.

ALETHEA ENGLAND works in the Information Resources department in Carbondale. During her spare time she likes to spend time with her grandson, dye silk scarves and dig in the dirt.

ANGELA GASPERI is an artist/photographer and a family member of a School of Medicine staff member. Her inspiration for her art comes from her travels and emotions from life's experiences. She hopes to one day become an art therapist to help others through the expressions of art.

John Grace, MD, '00, has been in private practice in Crystal River, Fla. since 2004 in Psychiatry. He is married with three children: Amberly, John and Dean. He served as one of 12 Glaxo Smith Kline Fellows in the country (2002) and hosted a weekly radio show in Ocala, Fla. (2006-2007), "Sound Thinking with Dr. John Grace." Dr. Grace has also been involved in teaching residents at the University of South Florida Department of Psychiatry as well as publishing several articles for the Citrus County Newspapers regarding mental illness.

Contributors

VERA N. GUERTLER, MD, '90, is a family physician who lives in Lancaster, Pa.

TRAVIS L. HEALEY, MSII, is from Brighton. He is happily married and enjoys spending time with family and friends. He has a passion for learning anatomy and hopes for the opportunity to focus on this area of medicine as a surgeon as well as teach anatomy to medical students in the future. His art is frequently inspired by the illustrations of Dr. Frank Netter.

DALE JENSEN grew up on a small central Iowa farm and has written numerous stories about those years. He retired from the military in 2002 and currently works at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum. Happily married for 30 years, he and wife Kathy (Internal Medicine) are the parents of two grown children, Chris and Kayla.

MOLLY JOHNSON is a family nurse practitioner and assistant professor in the SIU Department of Family and Community Medicine in the PA Program at Carbondale. She lives in Alto Pass with her artist husband and occasional standardized patient, Dan. This haiku was written about one of her two sons arriving home from Chicagoland for Turkey Day. It is one of many written by members of the extended family on Thanksgiving Day 2013.

LIZZ (ROBERTSON) KLARAS is originally from Petersburg. She majored in Illustration at the Savannah College of Art and Design and graduated with a BFA in 2004. Lizz has gone on to pursue a freelance design career where she creates custom works of art, handmade gifts and wedding products.

HEATHER LEAKE is a former employee of SIU School of Medicine.

W. G. ROBINSON-MCNEESE, MD, is a physician who directs the SIU School of Medicine's Office of Diversity. A native of East St. Louis, he is a pastor, husband, father and grandfather, who hopes to be a motivational speaker for positive change.

GAYBRIEL NEWTON, MSIII, is cake decorator and amateur foodie who loves to try new things. Her 8-year-old nephew inspired her poem. She hopes he reads it one day and realizes how precious he is to her.

Contributors

BARBARA NOWACK is the grant writer for the Simmons Cancer Institute's research team. Her poetry is an expression of her inner self and undying hope and love for mankind. She is a hopeless optimist and finds good in everyone while also being a rescuer of homeless animals and hopeless people. She can also tantalize the taste buds with her epicurean creations. She is the former owner/editor of the Ashland newspaper and enjoys traveling with her husband of 40+ years.

JOHN OWEN, MSII, is a Navy veteran, a husband and a father of two. He is from Washington, Ill. He enjoys a fast-paced environment and is considering a career in emergency medicine.

KARLA M. PATTON is a self-professed lifelong learner. She is a retired elementary school teacher. Karla plans to write a poetry book for children inspired by children. Karla's husband, Don Patton, is the counselor and recruiter for SIU's MEDPREP program.

MICHAEL PRANZATELLI, MD, is a neurologist and frequent submitter to SCOPE. His prize-winning artwork and poetry have appeared in numerous editions.

ABI RAZO, MSW, is a clinical case manager at the Pavilion Foundation Hospital in Champaign and is currently working towards becoming a licensed clinical social worker. In her free time she enjoys making pottery at the Champaign-Urbana Potters Club. Her work comes from a fascination of the human body, specifically bones and brain matter.

SUMI REBEIRO, MSIII, is a writer and student. Both efforts cover subjects ranging from medicine to fairy tales to humanitarian law to cosmology to martial-arts films. Her endeavors are fueled by her flagrant, decades-long affair with caffeine in all its forms.

AMANDA ROSS, MD, is a first-year SIU Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery resident. She was born and raised in Springfield and is delighted to be back in her hometown. In her free time she enjoys exploring her artistic side – from drawing and writing to studying about ancient Greek art and architecture.

Contributors

SANDRA L. SHEA, PhD, Department of Family & Community Medicine, takes photographs, writes prose and/or verse as they happen to come by. She doesn't write fiction because life is strange enough already.

CYNDA STRONG is an English instructor at Lutheran High School in Springfield and the mother of a School of Medicine employee. She has two published children's books. Her interests include writing, quilting and her four grandchildren.

ASHLEY URISH, MSIV, began painting after taking a painting course in college. Since then, painting has become her favorite hobby. She is preparing for her dermatology residency at SIU.

KATHRYN WALDYKE, MD, is a family physician with her dream job of taking care of SIU students at Student Health one day a week and teaching PA students the rest of the week. Away from work she likes to hike with her dogs and her husband, bicycle, garden, cook, ski and play contrabass flute.

A.J. WARD was raised in Springfield and has resided for the last five years in Cheyenne, Wyoming. He is (or pretends to be) a singer/songwriter. He struggles with biographies.

LACEY WOOD, MSII's, previous hobbies (before being delightfully swallowed up by med school life) included cruising the streets in her Barbie car with every purse slung over her shoulder and every pair of dad's [clean] boxers strung around her neck--she ruled the road. When she wasn't doing that, she was busy playing beauty shop, but because her sister's chili bowl cut presented too challenging, she instead turned to braiding her father's mullet – life was good. Words she continues to live by: Dance, Sing, Discover, Dream every day of your life!



MICHAEL PRANZATELLI

It Once Was Home

acrylic on linen

From the Editor

Production on SCOPE 21 began last September, when the editors from the Springfield and Carbondale campuses gathered to brainstorm and reflect. We were proud of the twenty years of our magazine's publication and its place within the medical school community, but we also wondered what the future held. What, after these many years, could be done that was new?

In the spirit of scientific inquiry, we devised an experiment. What if we centered the issue on a theme—*Home*—which could be both universal yet unique to each artist? Could we achieve cohesion and unity without falling into narrowness or cliché? Could we raise questions and strike the creative nerve? By January, when the writing and art had arrived in its surprising variety, we realized that *Home* was much more than we had anticipated.

The results of our experiment are in the pages that follow. You will see interpretations of *Home* from anatomists and pastors, physicians and teachers, songwriters and students, and we invite you to discover the meaning in their work, and to reflect on its meaning to you.

JOHN OWEN

Three Minutes

I drove by the tornado wreckage again today. My daughter had a play date with some friends who live in Eureka, the town just east of Washington. I've driven by it dozens of times since the tornado. It looks the same. Turns out a couple of inches of snow can't hide what happened there. Heaps of broken wood, downed power lines and shattered trees mixed with DVD cases, pieces of furniture and every other kind of thing that people normally keep is all that remains. It's hard to believe that a couple of weeks of "recovery" before the snow hit could have made such a small impact. It looks the same. The Advance Auto Parts store where I used to buy oil and filters for my car is still a pile of cinderblocks and twisted metal. The homes behind it... Well, it's a miracle that only one person was killed in the storm.

I, like a lot of Washington residents, was at church when the tornado hit. Our pastor came out and said there was a tornado warning and we were going to move to the shelter area. We asked where it was and he said "Pekin." I wasn't too worried. Pekin is 45 minutes to an hour away from Eureka, where our church is located. We waited in the shelter for about 30 minutes and then were told that the danger was past and we could go home. We hopped in the car and started driving back west, back toward Washington. We were on the outskirts of town when we started noticing a lot of debris on the road. "Must've been quite a storm" I thought. Then my wife pointed to the south, behind the Crossroads Methodist Church, and said "Oh my gosh, those houses look completely destroyed!" Just then, a text came through on my phone. A friend asking if I was OK. He'd heard the tornado had hit Washington. I texted back that we were OK and asked about him and his family. They live in East Peoria, which is just west of us. "We are fine." He texted back. "But apparently the weather station 1 mile from us got hit, and we heard that some houses on Muller road also got hit. More details to follow, but thankfully we are fine." My mind was racing, drawing lines between his place and the damage I was seeing in front of me. I figured it had probably missed our house, but I didn't know for sure. "Let's go see if our house is still there." I said to my wife.

The closer we got to home, the more apparent it was that we were out of the damaged area. It was close though. Too close. It's a strange feeling, when disaster strikes so close to you. Three miles east of us is the Devonshire subdivision which was utterly destroyed. In tornado-speed that's about three minutes. three minutes worth of directional shift decided that all those folks living in Devonshire lost their homes and I did not. It's a very strange feeling. On the one hand you feel so very thankful that your house is still standing. On the other you feel devastated for all the families who literally lost everything in a matter of minutes. I knew right away I wanted to help. At this point though, there wasn't a whole lot of information

flowing. Our power was out when we got to the house, and, like most of us, we were ill prepared for a disaster. We had no battery-powered or crank radios and no generator. Heck, I was lucky to find a working flashlight.

The next morning I took my kids to school, which was still in session, as they go to school in Peoria. From there I tried every way I knew to get into the damaged area. Police had everything blocked off, and I mean everything. I know every back road and gopher trail that goes into Washington and they had it all blocked off. Not even residents of the damaged areas were getting in. I was not to be deterred. I parked my car at the Washington Wal-Mart and walked to a concrete walking trail that we used to take to the park in Washington. It goes right by the Devonshire subdivision. I wish I could adequately describe what I saw. I guess the first thing I noticed was a gray sedan, sitting trunk-end down in somebody's basement. I remember thinking, "I hope nobody was down there when that car fell." The devastation was mind-numbing. The brain has a hard time processing this level of destruction. I didn't even know where to start to help. I walked all the way through town, and eventually realized that it was almost time to pick up the kids from school, and there I was, miles away with no vehicle.

I called my wife and asked her to pick up the kids and then come pick me up on the highway. "Were you able to help out at all?" she asked me when she arrived. "Honey, I couldn't even find a place to start." I replied. On the way home, we were listening to AM radio and things started to make more sense. The radio told us that police and fire officials were still not allowing people through until the gas and power company made sure that there were no live power lines or active gas leaks in the area.

The Tuesday after the tornado was more successful. My wife called me from work around 9AM and said that the radio was asking for volunteers to meet up in Peoria with a crew from Operation Blessing to assist in recovery. I threw my chainsaw, sledge hammer and pry bar in the trunk and was out the door. When I arrived, things were still pretty disorganized. The folks at OB told us that they were working with the police and fire officials to get permission to enter and that they needed to have a work order filled out by the property owner in order to be legally allowed to work on their property. They didn't have any work orders yet. Looked to be more waiting. Suddenly, I heard a woman yell out "Does anyone have a chainsaw?" I scanned the crowd and found her. "I've got a chainsaw in the trunk, how can I help?" She told me that she had a resident on the phone who was requesting a chainsaw and that she was filling out a work order for him. About 2 hours later, I was standing on Keith Zimmerman's front lawn...or what was left of it.

Again, words fail to describe the damage I saw. Most of the first floor of Keith's house was gone. The roof was gone. Part of the second floor was collapsed onto the foundation. In no way whatsoever did it resemble a house. It looked like someone had run over it with about 10,000 bulldozers. We stood on his driveway, looking for someone to direct us. A minute later, a white haired gentleman's face popped out of the center of the wreckage and then came out to meet us. He introduced himself as Keith.

I spent two days at Keith's house. That Tuesday, and again on Saturday when an awesome group of my classmates drove all the way to Washington to help out. I'll tell you, it was hard work. I must have cut up a forest worth of trees while my friends hauled the pieces to the trash heap. Together, we cut, smashed or tore the dismembered pieces of Keith's house apart and threw them on the trash heap. Occasionally we'd find something worth keeping. A picture book. A book of saxophone music. Holy cow! A saxophone case! ... Empty. I'll admit, it was frustrating at times. I can only imagine how Keith felt. Decades of his life, thrown around in a massive heap, like so much garbage. To think, only 3 minutes separated his house from mine. Three minutes in a different direction and it would be my life scattered to the winds.

Small Town Dying

The television announcer said... “Area barber to hang up his shears after 65 years.”

No where now for the old guys to go for a

Haircut,

Shave,

Gossip

The sign on the door read... “Thank you for letting us serve you for the past 165 years! Please let us know where you would like your prescriptions transferred to.”

A 25 mile drive for

Medicine,

A simple card,

Calls to make sure you are feeling better.

The sign on the marquee stated... “75-Year-Old Owner Retiring – Grocery Business for Sale.”

No longer able to have

Groceries delivered

Fresh meats cut to order

A place to meet neighbors

The headlines in the local weekly paper read: “This will be your Last Issue.”

How will we know?

Who died?

Who grew a 4 lb. tomato?

What will become of us??

The banner in front of the school stated: “Vote for school consolidation”

The last nail in the coffin

No school

No kids

No future.

Forever West

After staring through scribbles of bare oak tree branches
to crowded icy rooftops and curling siding paint,
through gritted teeth stained with our afternoon coffee,
we muttered about this city's bloated pride and flaccid faith.
We muttered about diesel plumes, fat and happy in the anger
that we shared and celebrated with well timed filter flicks.
Delivered again, already regurgitated so many times over,
our convictions to escape this American pissing contest.

And after we cast some quick goodbyes
and my tightened jaw is blessed again with my forgetfulness,
I scroll through the things I will remember:
The scent of wet pine and cold wind,
sliding glass doors and the brown plains behind them,
the cup rings on the table set on the porch we painted red,
snowy shoes and wet socks on the hardwood,
neglected in the joy of a studying stare
at the harsh blue hues of winter and the embarrassed groping
of this small city's polluted light along the edges of the air,
the freedom held in our brief revelations
before hurrying to conceal ourselves again,
the plans we're damned to punctuate with involuntary smiles,
and the questions that so often jump to follow them:

Will we ever stop clawing at inflated memories,
and if we do, have we betrayed them or even ourselves?
Will we ever stop smoking?
Ever really clean up our apartments?
Will we die still babbling about getting out?
Can we make our feet into more than just mallets
on these snow-freckled doldrum streets?
Can we rearrange the letters in this tired palindrome?
And of all these well-intended resolutions,
will there ever be any I can keep?

But for now, we'll procrastinate our hunt for these kinetic energies
and twist like tumbleweeds wrestling with a highway fence.
We'll pool our hopes and failures on the coffee table's remaining space,
and realize it's not weak to ask for help from stronger hands.

And so all spongy-eyed and smiling, I will try to disassemble
the urge to wait for vague fates to appear.
And recognize that even our wrestling we will remember fondly someday,
and shiver here together one more year.

MOLLY JOHNSON

Waiting for the Son

Waiting late at night
For the lights of a new car
Son arrives. Happy.

Bone Study: Artist's Statement

The human body, with all its inner workings, is a subject matter that can be endlessly explored. My work has evolved from single vertebrae, to detailed rib-cages, to the combination of bones from different systems. I thoroughly enjoy printmaking, and through this process have discovered that I would rather re-work old plates than start from scratch. This gives my hand-drawn, etched images more depth while helping build up ranges in tone. After adding nearly translucent layers of ink, my images are hand painted with water colors. The soft, subtle shades add to the images without overwhelming them. My access to a printmaking studio is now limited, which is pushing me to explore new mediums and techniques.







ABI RAZO

Bone Study

intaglio prints with watercolor

Kitchen Curiosity

The curious little boy opens the refrigerator to see what he can find
To see what peelings he could unwind.

A ketchup packet, stuck in the heart
Of a syrupy sweet, bought at the mart.
Onion skins like amber stained glass as delicate as paper
The taste however, is not one to be savored.

The three-year-old's eyes widened with pleasure
Spherical foods, oh how clever!
Bunched "marbles" of sweetness
Some red, some green
Delicious, not salty like that onyx oblong pitted thing.
And the white one he couldn't quite crack
Until, Oops
It now lies flat.
Flat on the floor in a puddle of ooze
Nestled around a golden bubble-like half moon

Styrofoam boxes and fuzzy growth on cheese
Crumbs, as hard as rocks, from week-old onion rings.

"ETHAN!" calls his mom
Distracting him from his committal
But he will be back tomorrow to pursue his little nibbles.

A Home-Room Note

As I saw it, the biggest problem ahead of me was getting the note to Marcella without it being read by anyone else. Fourth-graders then, as now, were flaky friends and generally careless about such serious matters. Even my best buddy, Jimmy, might get it into his head to open the note and read it before it got to her. Assuming Jimmy stood by me, however, there were still five other students between me and getting the note to Marcella's desk. I had put my heart into the whole piece, especially the poem, and my love for her burned to be expressed.

Marcella sat at the front of the room. She was an "Engineer." I sat about midway the line of wooden desks, not quite in the "Caboose" section, but definitely not a star either. Marcella was the prettiest girl in the whole world. She had long, black braids that smelled of Royal Crown Hair Pomade; deep-set, brown eyes; and a small nose and mouth. She wore colorful, ruffled dresses with petticoats that spread out like an umbrella and made a swishing sound when she walked. Even her socks had trim at the top. She was really something to see. I loved Marcella, and it was about time she knew it.

Had I been brave enough she would have learned about my feelings weeks ago, but I backed down every time she was in my presence – words jamming up in my throat and fear freezing me in my tracks. Since it seemed like I couldn't talk or move in her presence, I hit on the plan of getting a note to her in Literature class. After all, the teacher was constantly telling me, "McNeese, you need to talk less and write more." The note, therefore, was partially the teacher's plan, and effectively delayed the moment when I would have to face Marcella and voice my feelings. Plus, Marcella would read the message while I watched from a distance. If she liked it, she would surely smile. If she didn't like it, then she would tear it up and nobody would be the wiser. On the one hand, she would read it and be won over before I had to speak a word, and the rest of the courtship would be child's play. On the other hand, she would not like the note and I would just keep avoiding her the way I had been doing for the last several weeks. The plan was perfect.

I completed the note at home the night before, after messing around with some required arithmetic problems. What she was about to get was my best effort after three days of writing and correcting.

First I had to get the message past the desks of William, then Doris, Betty, Lavick, Jimmy, and finally into Marcella's hands. I made one last crease in the paper, folded several times so readers could see the bold, black lettering on the front, "Don't open! This belongs to Marcella."

With my courage at its peak, I sat upright at my desk, squared my shoulders and moved to tap William on the shoulder, but the bell rang for recess. At recess I

decided to let Jimmy and William in on my scheme. Jimmy immediately balked at the whole thing.

“What do you wanna do that for?” he asked. Nobody wants ole Marcella anyway.”

“Just do it, man,” I shot back.

Jimmy calmed down and agreed to the plan, but William giggled and then laughed outright, nearly drawing others’ attention to our discussion of the scheme. It didn’t help my nerve either to hear him snickering behind me in line as we filed back into our home-room.

Once inside, I decided to let things settle down before sending my love-steeped message up the row. After Miss Randolph had given us our reading assignment, things would be quiet, but most importantly, she would fall asleep. Miss Randolph always fell asleep about this time of the afternoon.

Minutes on the clock crept forward. I was four pages into Pecos Bill and the Cyclone when I stopped reading and made my move. William took the pass easily, but his fidgeting and chortling drew attention from two girls in the next row. What is more, he almost woke up Miss Randolph. For several moments he fooled around like he was going to open the note, but tired of teasing. He tapped Doris on the left shoulder to get her attention.

Doris, who had a habit of doing things backwards, turned to the right and the two of them wasted three or four more seconds getting their heads squared up so she could see the note. She took the pass sheepishly, reading and obeying the message on its front.

Doris didn’t have to get Betty’s attention. As usual, Betty knew something was going on and snatched the note from Doris’ hand. She read the warning, grinned, then turned and licked her tongue at me. Her actions caught the attention of several other students who looked up to see the note being waved carelessly in the air by Betty.

Miss Randolph snorted, but remained asleep.

Betty tapped Lavick on the shoulder, speaking much too loudly, “Here, Lavick, pass this up.”

That did it. Not only was the whole class in on the plot now, but Miss Randolph woke up and descended on our row with a scowl, noticing Lavick’s look of surprise and fear.

“Young man?”

Every male in the class cringed.

“Young man? You. Lavick. Do you want to stay after school?”

Lavick was devastated.

“No Ma’am,” he finally eked out, without giving the plan away. Good ole Lavick. He was now my best friend.

“Then I think you had better get quiet and read your assignment – if you know what’s good for you.”

In the long hush that followed, the tension eased, other students were distracted by other things and Miss Randolph lapsed into sleep again. I was home free.

Lavick hurriedly ferried the note on to Jimmy who took the pass flawlessly. Then good ole Jimmy made the neatest move. He flipped the note up over Marcella’s head and it landed perfectly on her desk partially opened. She could see the red valentines and flowers that adorned each corner, and the opening greeting, “To My Love.”

Blood rushed to my head as Marcella stiffened, picking up the note. She opened it completely, reading slowly. I waited several seconds for her smile. Instead of a smile, however, the rustle of her petticoat broke the silence. As she stood up my heart dropped to the bottom of my shoes. When she swished her way towards Miss Randolph’s desk my mind spun in a dizzying display of laughing faces, valentines, note-paper and frowns. I imagined myself running, but going nowhere as Jimmy flipped me over Marcella’s head and Doris licked a gigantic tongue across my face.

Miss Randolph’s voice brought me back to reality as under the weight of her words I sank deeper and deeper into my seat.

“Young man? You. Wesley. Come forward and read this note to the class since it is so important to you.”

Amidst laughter, giggles, wads of thrown paper, and a scornful look from a pair of deep-set brown eyes, I read:

“Dear Marcella. How are you? Fine I hope. I love you dearly, my darling. Will you marry me? You are 2 sweet 2 be 4 gotten. . .”



LIZZ (ROBERTSON) KLARAS
Butterfly Sky
charcoal pastel

Nature's Magic

Come child, and sit beside me.

There's something amazing I'd like you to see.

This odd, hanging pouch is beginning to shake, and

One of life's miracles is about to take place.

And so we waited, and watched in awe

As the sack broke open and out something crawled.

Pretty it wasn't, at least not at first

But then it began its metamorphosis.

Antennae and eyes, that part we could see

We still weren't quite sure of what it might be.

Wings now apparent, the mystery was solved.

A beautiful monarch butterfly had just evolved.

Breakfast Served Cold

It was cold again that morning, barely into positive single digits, some gusty winds. The sun had been up for about an hour, but its thin rays provided little counter effect to the north wind.

I feed the birds on my few acres of woods. During the growing season and into the fall and early winter, this is accomplished by flowering shrubs and bushes that provide first nectar and then seed. But in the winter, I hang feeders filled with black oil sunflower seeds and mixed grain on branches near the deck to the south of the house and another on a line in the island in the middle of the driveway on the north side. I also scatter seed on the ground for the birds who do not sit on feeders.

Sleet had fallen the night before, followed by a plunging thermometer, and the old seeds were completely sealed in ice. Ice also locked the seed pods on the butterfly bushes, the berries on the hollies and the offerings on all the other bushes and shrubs. As I opened the garage door I could hear the chickadees, nuthatches and tufted titmice chirping and twittering in the trees and bushes. They did this every morning when I filled feeders and scattered seed. It was difficult to determine whether they were saying: “hey, we’re hungry, hurry up with breakfast, human,” or “hey, breakfast is served, thanks human.” I preferred the latter interpretation, but given how the volume and shrillness of these vocalizations increased if I was slow or, heaven forbid, stopped to answer a phone call, I think the former was more accurate.

I hung a fresh block of suet then started on the seeds, treading carefully on the uneven slippery surface. Mixed seed flowed into the big hanging feeders, then a few cups spread out on the ground. Then black oil sunflower seed went into smaller pull feeders. Then a quart or so of mixed seed tossed under the huge leafless forsythia bush. This last site was particularly favored by the smaller birds because they could get under the thick, dense branches and eat safely out of the reach of the neighborhood cats.

With the food distributed I returned to the garage and waited for the birds to come to breakfast. In seconds the chickadees came down to the sunflower seed feeder. Then the nuthatches and juncos. Then the sparrows, finches, siskins and wrens, and, in a bit, the larger blue jays, mourning doves and cardinals. The various woodpeckers started to take turns (not always friendly) ripping the suet apart. After an ice storm sometimes even the Eastern (formerly the rufous-sided) towhees would come out of their preferred reclusive spots and deign to feed with other birds, but I didn’t have time today to wait and see if they’d come.

In a matter of minutes dozens of birds were on the ground and the feeders in

the middle of the driveway. I remained stationary in the garage, happily listening to the chirps and chatter of a feeding flock and watching the birds skip back and forth, looking for the perfect seed. The sun had crested the garage and its rays were beginning to accent the brilliant colors of the cardinals and jays.

Suddenly I felt, more than heard or saw, a whoosh from above the garage, and a streak of motion came over my head. A mourning dove seemed to explode in a cloud of feathers and all the other birds bolted away, screaming. I inadvertently took a step backwards. The birds escaped in whatever direction they happened to be pointed in, including a pair of wrens who shot into the garage over my head. Birds in the neighborhood picked up the alarm call, without knowing the cause, and for acres around the trees were vibrating with distress.

On the ground in front of me, crouched amid the scattered seed but pointed away from me, was a gray-blue bird of prey, clearly a falcon. Its wings were spread wide, shoulders hunched in the classic “this is my kill” pose. Its head was lowered, delivering the *coup de grace* to the mourning dove, though given the speed of impact it seemed unlikely another blow was needed. In the next second the falcon picked up its head and we both gave a start – I because I was looking at the yellow cere, black head and white throat of a peregrine falcon and the falcon because she had no idea a human was nearby. She had made her dive over the garage and couldn’t have seen me. In strategic terms, by accident or intent, she had made her dive out of the sun and the birds never saw her until she was already among them.

But now she was on the ground with a fresh kill, a vulnerable position peregrines don’t usually find themselves in because they typically kill their prey on the wing, and, worse, she was only 30 feet from a human. She ducked her head twice, possibly judging distance and range, shifted the dove to her right talon, crouched, made a quarter turn to the right and launched herself into the air headed north. Dozens of birds who had sought refuge in trees to the north shrieked new alarms and flew off to the east and west.

From a physics point of view, this was a brilliant choice. The house blocked any path to the south. If she’d gone east she would have come closer to the garage and the human, and that direction didn’t afford her much distance to clear the garage with her quarry. If she’d gone west, she’d be heading up a hill so she’d have to not just gain enough height to get a good tree perch, she’d have to add the rising height of the hill into the altitude she’d need. But to the north she would benefit from the hill falling away from her and within 50 yards of horizontal distance she’d gain about 10 yards of altitude. And so, powerful wings stretching, she did. About 30 yards down the hill she picked a maple tree branch, landed, then turned around to

face the garage. Perhaps to keep an eye on me? She dropped her head and started ripping feathers from the mourning dove, dropping them in a soft avalanche to the ice below.

Suddenly I realized the alarm calls had stopped and, curiously, had been replaced with the everyday chirping and clicking of feeding birds. I turned back to the driveway and, to my surprise, chickadees and tufted titmice had already returned to the feeders. In seconds siskins, finches, wrens and sparrows were back on the ground, scratching and sorting the seeds. In came the mourning doves, landing almost on the spot of the kill, followed immediately by a dozen cardinals. The chirping and chattering continued, almost casually. I thought the birds would remain in hiding, perhaps on alert, for hours, but maybe it was too cold to be that careful.

Maybe the conversation on the ground was “hurry up and eat, the killer might come back.”

Or maybe, in keeping with the cold, cold reality of the morning, the conversation was “did you see that? Too bad about Bob...he was a good old bird...but now there’s more for us.”



MARY CORRIGAN STJERN

Our Ancestral Home in Ireland

pastel on industrial electrocut fine sandpaper

Testing Day

Looking down the darkened hallways
Watching other graders stare
Trying to be careful always
not to miss things: be aware

Standing hours on sore leg bones
Squinting at the tinted glass
Listening through scratchy headphones
Hoping that the students pass

Checking, checking for the thingles
listed on the Holy Grail
Can't afford to miss a single
point that may mean pass or fail

In three times I've heard the story
nothing new to perk my ears
Three more times—it may get boring
But the impact on them's clear:

Life or death this seems to students
(even though the patient's fake)
Demonstrating careful prudence
for this step they have to take

History of present illness,
Social, family histories,
ROS and “bladder fullness?”
(question they could ask of me...)

Watch the parts of the exam now
See each step and hear each word
Later ask them if they know how
to complete what they deferred

Can they pull it all together?
Tell me what the findings mean?
Make a plan to find the other
info they would need to glean?

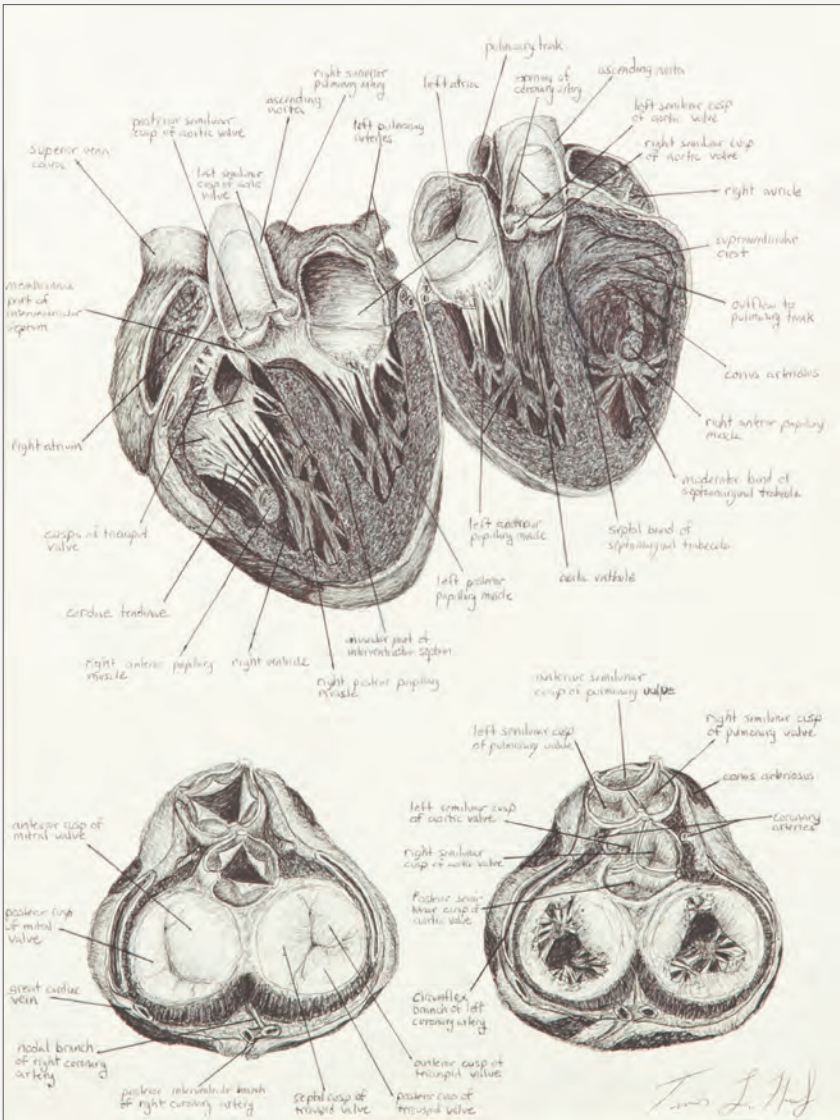
In the end I add up numbers
Standing in the darkened hall
Heading more toward my own slumbers
Who will get the wake-up call?

Will it be the nervous young man?
Or the overconfident
woman who, it seems, did not plan
to explain what her terms meant?

Or will I be made to review
videos that we have made?
Watch again the ones I think who
do not seem to make the grade

Surely we all share a standard
Faculty and students who,
reaching for it, may be rendered
humbler, with luck smarter too

We all want to care for others
Cause no harm and do our best
Find our niches, serve with brothers
Earn respect, then take our rest.



TRAVIS L. HEALEY

Heart

ink on paper

The Fifth Task

What is the fifth task? John asked himself. This morning was very different from every morning he remembered. He woke up with a riddle in his mind. There were five pieces to this riddle. The riddle answered the questions of his life.

Waking up. That was the first task.

Turning on the heat. That was second.

Getting dressed was the third.

Making breakfast the fourth.

Four tasks. Four pieces of a puzzle.

A riddle in his mind, a riddle missing the final piece?

“What is the fifth task?” John said to himself. “What am I supposed to do now?” he said.

“Die.” A voice inside of him whispered.

“Die?” John asked out loud. “What kind of sense does that make? Why would I want to die?”

John sat on the edge of his bed. The pieces of his life shifted in his mind. *Why do I have to die?* he wondered. *I haven’t done anything. I haven’t lived.*

There was a knock at the door. Cautiously, John stood and walked to it, paused a second, then opened it.

“Hello John.” A beautiful woman entered the room.

“What can I do for you?” John asked.

“I can do something for you,” she answered.

“What can you do for me?”

“Help you with the fifth task,” she said.

“How?” John asked. “Are you here to kill me?”

“I’m here to *help* you, John. What *is* the fifth task?”

“I don’t know,” answered John.

“Yes, you do.”

John stared ahead, pausing before answering, “To die.”

“Yes,” answered the woman. “Now. Tell me, John. Why won’t you die?”

John looked down at the rug and the room around him. “Because I haven’t *lived*, I haven’t done anything.” John said.

“You woke up. You turned on the heat. You got dressed. You made breakfast,” she said.

“Yes. I did those things. I needed to do those things.” John answered slowly. “Everyone needs to do those things.”

“Yes. They do, John. But doesn’t everyone need to die as well?” she asked.

“Not *before* they’re ready,” John interjected.

“When will you be ready John?”

“When I’ve lived a life!” he demanded.

She came to him. Brushed his shoulder, took his hand, and kissed it. “Okay. Let’s go live a life,” she said.

They walked out of the apartment and got into a car. They drove toward the mountains basking in the sunshine of a perfect day. They stopped at a cabin in the woods near a gorgeous lake.

She got out, took his hand and said, “We will live our life here until you are ready.”

“Who are you?” John asked.

“Someone who loves you. Someone who has always loved you.” She brushed his cheek.

For the next forty years, they stayed at the cabin. They went for walks by the lake and smiled in the sunshine.

It was a comfortable life. There was an odd passivity to it. It was surreal but at the same time it was sublime.

The *love* was real.

Then, out of the blue, she came to one day and asked, “Are you ready to die now John?”

John was not surprised by the question; in fact, he’d been expecting it. “Almost,” he said. Then he reached for her hand. “Who am I? Who am I really? There’s something not real in all of this.” He brushed her hand softly as he spoke.

She smiled at him and a tinge of pride came through in her voice. “You are the mind of John Walters, human computer programmer in the twenty-third century. Your mind has been integrated into *Hark*, a giant ship carrying the last of humanity through space after the destruction of Earth. Your neural functions have been tied to functions of this ship for the last thousand years, keeping it operational.

“And now, you have to die in order to let humanity take back control.”

“I’m not a man?”

“No. Your *body* is a space ship.”

“My hands are not my hands? My skin. My skin is the outside of huge ship?”

“Yes,” she said.

“And what are you? Some soothing computer program designed to act like a friend? Some illusion to allow me to slip into death?”

“No, John. I’m your wife. You volunteered to save us all. You gave up your mind so we would have a chance. But I convinced them you would need me. I convinced them to take me too. While you watched the ship, I watched you, waiting, waiting for the moment you would need me.”

“Why don’t I remember?” John said.

“They had to erase your memories to stop them from interfering with your functioning. I got to keep mine. I’ve had two lifetimes with you.”

“Will you die when I die?” John asked.

“Yes,” she said.

“Are you ready to die?” John asked, choking back tears.

“Yes, I am, my love. If you are. It’s their time now. All of humanity are our children now, John. And it is time for our children to live. You’ve cared for them and protected them and held them while they slept.

“It’s time to let go John.”

“Do we have children? Real children? With the humans?” he asked.

She smiled. “We do. Three beautiful children. John Jr., Ashton and Amber. Ages 29, 25, and 23.”

“I wish I could see them,” John said.

“You’ve held them as they slept for a thousand years and even before you were a wonderful father to them.”

“Eden. Your name is Eden.” John said.

“Yes. How did you know?” Eden answered.

“They didn’t erase everything,” John said. After a moment he took her hand and kissed it. “Eden?”

“Yes, John?” she asked.

“I’m ready to go now. I love you. Thank you. Thank you so much. I would have been so scared, so frightened, without you.”

“I’m happy I came.” she said.

John kissed her.

They died.

Shortly thereafter, the first human being in a thousand years took control of *Hark* preparing to land on a new world.

In 2133, a large asteroid split the Earth in half. Humanity had ten years warning, enough time to build an enormous spacecraft. *Hark* was the name of the ship. *Ark* sounded too obvious.

John was the computer on *Hark*, a neural network based on a human brain, the brain of John Walters, its programmer.

John Walters sacrificed his brain to save mankind.

John monitored the ship like his flesh, a gigantic metal body drifting through cold space. His skin receptors were tied to the hull. His stomach activated nourishment centers, his breathing regulated the atmosphere.

John’s mind slept as it went about its job, monitoring the last of humanity for a timeless journey through space.

There were five things that John needed to do once the ship came in contact with a suitable planet. First, he needed to wake crew out of hibernation. Then, he had to slowly warm the spacecraft. Next, he had to reformat the architecture of the hull, making the ship accessible to humans. Then, he had to increase nourishment to the humans, preparing their bodies for activity.

And last, the fifth task . . . was letting go . . . giving control of the ship back to the humans.

A simple protocol...five simple tasks.

The Ferrymen

The lymph node that launched a thousand scalpels insights a vast panic.
A migrant cell from a distant land has fled across the Angio Sea.
Alas, it hides within a fibrotic fortress.
Our once benevolently allied germinal center is transformed;
Here stands the malignant fruit of Aphrodite's misgivings.

Sound the alarm! Heed my cry!
Call to our brothers from the North Wing!
Make haste to Oncology for a plan of attack.
We shall take back what rightfully belongs to us.

Poseidon, great master of the seas!
Grant us safe journey in calm waters;
Let not the ground shake or the waves crash.
We set our vessels to sail from Port Acatha with your blessing.

Almighty Zeus!
We beseech thee to send down a thunderbolt of XRT might.
Shower the battlefield with this unseen force.
Smite those who grow with unabashed shame and blood lust.

Oh, Apollo!
Your kouros shall not remain an ageless beauty,
For the foreigners have desecrated your temple.
Truth and prophesy are few and far between;
Only uncertainty shines as the sun.

Peril waits as we present Athena with one last offering.
Through the gates, past unsuspecting guards, it integrates into the city's center.
Commerce and community cease, but the tides do not.
The Fall comes too late, for the migrant cell has once again sought asylum elsewhere.
On high, the balance is weighed with Olympus in precarious attendance.

Sorrow for Achilles! Great Warrior of the Ages!
Your shield and spear cannot protect you;
The destruction has already been foretold.
Mortality's unwelcome friend beckons you to the River.
Nine years to battle is long enough;
The price must ultimately be paid.

Oh Hippocrates! Oh Asclepius!
A pain quelled by bitter death remains.
Our ingenious plans drawn and our vessels sturdily built were all ill-fated.
Charon's obol is bestowed as restitution at last.
Thus, from commanders to ferrymen we must become to usher our fallen
home.

To Save a Life

In memory of SP

In those med school years
when death became
more a part of life,
I never dreamed
of life apart
from you.

Even fluorescence and AC
could not free me
from the indelible image
of vacancy
in the eyes of those
I could not save.

If it weren't for you
and your love of life,
motorcycles, and midnight donuts,
I could have gone
with them—

The man in the MVA,
the woman post surgery,
the girl giving birth
to a girl she would
never see.

You kept me cool
in your arms
on those nights
I did come home
in my stained
white coat.

You lay waiting
wearing nothing
but a grin.

The shelves were bare
and the mattress thin.
Yet, the scent
of condensed air
cooled your sweat and mine,
as we climbed
each other
and the last heat
of summer.

Then, suddenly, night broke,
as did your rope,
and my room became
an echo of your absence.

The town turned to dust,
but some memories
neither wither nor rust.

Now, at this weathered outpost,
I do what I must
to believe that mine
was not the life
you chose to save
when you gave yours.

Men's Week

Some may find this strange, but I consider our home to be largely my wife's creation. Courtney decorates, stocks the refrigerator, does most of the cleaning, and decides what piece of art is going on the wall. She lets me know when the children are ready for bunk beds, and when it's time for a new television.

It is for all intents and purposes *her* home, *Courtney's* home. And it is the world of our children, a world I have been blessed to live in but only recently come to truly appreciate.

My wife works very hard and I wanted to acknowledge that work and give her a rest. After some thought, I decided to send Courtney and my nine-year-old daughter, Amberly, on a mother-daughter cruise, hoping it would be relaxing and fun for both.

I agreed to watch our remaining sons, Johnny, an emotional but loving five-year-old, and Dean, an industrious albeit sometime fickle three-year-old.

I thought the week would be good for Courtney.

I didn't realize how much it would teach me.

"Are we ready for Men's Week yet, Daddy?" Johnny would ask in the weeks prior to the trip. Both he and Dean were actually excited about the prospect of spending time with me. This gave me a sense of purpose and pride, not only in their independence but in the fact that they actually *wanted* to spend time with their father.

It turned out to be an eye-opening experiencing. It clearly wasn't Courtney's World that week.

Lunches were forgotten. Hair went uncombed. Shirts went on backwards. A tooth was lost. I did my best but there were significant lapses in the natural order of life.

I never realized how hard my wife worked. I haven't been that exhausted since medical school.

But I realized something else. I never understood how *lucky* Courtney was to do that work. There was something special, magical in that week, and I was privileged to find it.

For one week, I got to raise my children in *John's World*. Watch them interact and grow within an environment entirely of *my* creation. I touched every aspect of their lives and perception. We washed our hair together. Ate together. Slept together. And I watched my boys try in earnest to follow my rule and guide, to step where I stepped, to walk where I walked. They followed me with limited competence and unbridled enthusiasm into every task of life.

And as I lay in bed on the last night of our week together, my two boys wrapped

in my arms, a strange sensation overcame me.

I envied Courtney.

I never understood how much she got to see, to watch, to be a part of. The creation of a home is a great burden, a tremendous responsibility.

But it is also a wonderful privilege.

It is a gift to create a place for another human being to grow within. Courtney gave our children life and then constructed a world for them to live in.

I was blessed to witness this process.

Despite this powerful revelation, I was more than happy to return to *Courtney's World*, happy to see my wife return to our life.

But I see things just a little differently now.

I watch her prepare the children for school with a little envy and a lot more respect for how much of life is contained in a lunch box.

New Brides

Under the bloodshot neon eye of the depot tower clock,
we talked our way into a peace
that we couldn't find a name for.
The snow decorated our hair softly in the quiet.
And we looked like new brides,
wholly muted with wonder.

We watched our white breath unravel,
each like a ribbon of wild promise
being born against the depot clock's sleazing red light.
And it choked on its last laugh
as we smiled with the night.
Hallelujah, my friend,
we are alive.

And all my mournful pining,
and all my slouching toward yesterdays,
and all my shying from tomorrows
eclipsed by belligerent love
for this holy emptiness.



LINDA G. ALLISON

Sedona: Home of Sinagua, Yanapai, and Apache

watercolor

Going Blind

What do you do with the gifts that they give you? I met Emelia and her husband Francisco years ago, after their son Pedro replaced some windows in my apartment. Pedro found out that my clinic takes care of undocumented patients, patients with no money and no insurance. Francisco is a tall handsome man with startling blue eyes that have long ceased to see. He and Emelia return for their clinic appointments, smiling and bearing gifts, always with their diabetes uncontrolled. I talk to them about adjusting their insulin doses according to their meals and their blood sugar levels. Emelia laughs and tells me that it is better for her and Francisco to share the same dose of insulin. "After so many years of marriage..." she explains with a conspiratorial smile. Emelia brings me homemade *mole* and toasted pumpkin seeds. She used to crochet me pillowcases, tablecloths, tortilla warmers, even a pink and white chicken improbably knitted to cover my dish soap. Now that her vision is fading, she cannot do her needlework and she has started to paint pillowcases for me. The paint bleeds out of the pre-printed floral designs; I can't help thinking of the bleeding in her retina which will soon rob her of independence.

Delia brings me different gifts: Tupperware and perfume and kitchen knives and toys for my baby. Who brings Tupperware to their doctor? But I use the Tupperware, and think of Delia. I met her several years ago, soon after she came to this country from Mexico. She fled Guanajuato after her adult daughter was shot and killed in the family's grocery store. Her daughter's husband had been involved with *narcotraficantes*; when they came for him, he used her body to shield his own. He survived the attack and disappeared; Delia never saw him again. Delia's husband was abusive to her for many years; the daughter with whom she lives here in Chicago is cruel to her as well. But Delia is all sunshine and light, well made-up and perfumed, using genteel language from another era. She brings me a satchel for my computer, hand-crocheted in pastels. I ask her how she could do such work with her diabetic eyes, and she tells me that she puts some white paper behind the thread and holds it up to the light and works by touch as well as she can. I send her to the eye doctor and change her insulin dose, knowing that I cannot undo years of damage, years when she had other priorities, years when her husband didn't let her go to the doctor.

Margarita is from Puerto Rico and she does not bring me gifts; she brings me forms to fill out so that her ex-felon son can live in her Section 8 housing with her and help take care of her. Her right eye is a bloodless, pearly orb, her vision lost in an assault two months ago in Puerto Rico. She tells me that everywhere she looks, she sees other people's eyes: on the television, at the store, on the bus.

Rosa Maria has two sons who are in their early twenties. When she lost her vision and went on dialysis, they flipped a coin to see which one of them could stay in school and which one of them had to leave school and start working in landscaping to support the family. Rosa Maria tells me that her vision got worse after she had the laser treatment at our County hospital; was it bad luck or a bad resident? Rosa Maria used to be active in various community organizations and in her kids' school; she thought she had many friends, but then they all disappeared. She is so grateful that I have come to see her in her basement apartment; to her, this means that she has not been forgotten. She apologizes for not having treats to serve me. Rosa Maria is not defeated, she has hope for her sons. She ran into one of her old friends at the hospital recently, and the woman did not immediately realize that Rosa could no longer see. When she learned that Rosa Maria was blind and on dialysis, she started crying, but Rosa Maria says that she herself does not cry. The hospital's social worker kept asking her if she wanted to kill herself, but she said no, she had to be strong for her boys.

And I don't know what to do with the hand-knitted chicken and the pastel computer satchel and the bleeding-paint pillowcases. I want to tell these women that they inspire me, that I wonder how I would face the kinds of crazy obstacles life has thrown in their way. But my two-bedroom apartment is small, and I have worked at this clinic for sixteen years now; can I really make room for these creations? I can't bear the idea of bringing them to the thrift store, where there is a real risk that my patients might encounter their own handiwork among the castoffs. But throwing love and hard work in the dumpster seems impossibly callous, so it all goes into a special box, the Patient Gift box, that I keep on a shelf in my closet, saving it to look through as an antidote for frustration and burnout.

The Banana Lovers

Everyone in my family loves bananas. I wonder if it's a hereditary thing. Dad ate one every morning and every night before bed. Until he went to the home.

I walk into the home, banana in bag. The place looks almost palatial – fountains, marble floors, palms, ferns everywhere. I progress to the elevator and go to the lower floor. Same marble floor, beautiful framed artwork; I'm reassured. This doesn't have the nursing home image of foul odors and loud screaming. But then I enter through locked, coded doors. Am I entering prison? Is dad an inmate?

Beyond the doors wheelchairs and walkers dot the marble landscape. Surely he isn't ready for this? And where are you, Jesus? I've comforted myself with the notion that you will be with dad in all circumstances, you know ... counting the hairs on our head and all that. So I expect to see you whipping down the hall any minute in a motorized chair.

The aides bustle from room to room as I head toward 108, his new address. He lies in bed, tv on with no sound. He stares at the ceiling. He isn't aware of my presence even though his eyes are open. I sit and wait. Minutes pass and he doesn't move. Finally I reach out and hold his hand and start to talk. He responds slowly. I can tell he doesn't know who I am. He doesn't answer my questions. He just babbles about something – babble, that's what it is, like a little toddler. My dad, the man I relied on for so much. Now we can't even share a thought together.

So Jesus, Great Physician, how about a new wonder drug or small miracle about now? I know you can do it; I've seen it my own life and his. . . before.

I pull the banana out of the bag. He sees it and reaches for it. He sits up in the bed, peels it open, takes a bite, grins and offers me a bite. I take it. We both chew and grin.

I suppose I should have been prepared for this – after all it's been happening slowly for several years, but is one ever really prepared? My memories do not gel with the man I see before me now – weak and disconnected.

His accounting skills baffled the young generation he trained. He never used a calculator but could come up with the answers almost as fast as the "machines" as he called them. Now he can't count. He doesn't know how old he is. The number after 89, at his birthday became 99. He insisted. Does it matter?

At last you've come, Jesus. I should have known – no motorized wheelchair for you. You come with the stethoscope around your neck and the white jacket – the great physician and healer, of course! You do the routine things and then look at me. No cure today. No cure tomorrow or the many tomorrows to follow. I guess the white jacket fooled me – you're just human and have no miracles to pass out.

Why? Why is aging such a terror? Look at all the wonder drugs and lotions out there to prolong life and why does it end like this, lying in bed, unable to communicate, unable to enjoy.

I stay a while, mostly for my own benefit I guess, since all we've shared is the banana. I bend over and give him a hug when I leave. He returns a blank stare and hands me the empty banana peel. I toss it in the basket.

Lots to think about and wonder where you are in all this, Jesus. Did the locked doors keep you out? Didn't know the code? Or were you busy with someone else when I was there?

Flash forward a few days. I'm babysitting Hannah, granddaughter age 5. She's a banana lover too.

"Grandma, at last Christmas greatgrandpa told me I was just like him cuz I like bananas. I think he really meant that he loved me. What do you think?"

I think she nailed it. So there you were Jesus, not where I expected you, not in the midst of where I thought you should be or needed to be with the white jacket working miracles up and down the hall, but here – right in the middle of a banana and a new generation of banana lovers!

Flash forward again – granddaughter is now 8, and father is in heaven. It's a family thing – that simple banana. Every time I have one I think of him. And when I look at Hannah I see not just another banana lover but a little piece of dad. It's a simple little blessing, a piece of him left for us here.

The Toll Road

Directions:
It's 15 minutes from the toll gate off the four lane. Head south on 82. You'll pass the Quik stop.

In the parking lot is where I used to trade vehicles with my then husband. Only one would fit all the kids. We were separated. That morning I'd noticed for the first time ever he didn't have his wedding ring on – until then I thought I was in control. I humiliated myself – literally got down on my knees outside the suburban. I needed him – how could I raise all these children and work. Other secrets came out later – it was for the best.

On the right hand side about 2 miles is a chicken farm – industrial size, the fumes will get you. You'll go over Snake Creek. There is a shortcut I took with the kids once when the road was blocked – they still give me a hard time about it. We took back roads for an hour and ended up about a quarter mile up the highway. The kids think I get a southern accent when I ask for directions.

Just a little further up is McClain Cemetery. I always noticed it because McClain was my mother's maiden name – full blood Irish. I never imagined I would bury my middle son in that cemetery. He was a beautiful child – a man really. A sous chef, Cordon Bleu trained, going to business school. Killed on his bicycle by a driver who was preoccupied. I'm still not right. I keep going over and over it. How my oldest son drove hours to tell me so I wouldn't hear over the phone.

Keep going, on the left is a rodeo ground and a place for wedding receptions. I thought it might be a place for my daughter's but really didn't fit her style. Brisket and BBQ. She's used to a bigger city flavor; her friends have had their receptions at resorts and country clubs. I didn't mention it. I just want her to get what she wants for a change – this one day should be hers.

Further up the road is Peggs, tiny little Podunk. At one time it was thriving- now people laugh about it. If you hang a right it will take you to Clear Creek Monastery. A beautiful place – built to last a thousand years. Peggs has a community center, a Dollar General, and a couple churches.

There's a gas station and hunter's checkpoint just south of Peggs. You'll pass the beer barn and several single-wide trailers. Up the road is a little frame house with a carport – that's where we picked out our little German Shepherd pup. I had 'pick of the litter' Sharp little male pup – my kids called him 'Jane' after the Tarzan Disney movie. We took that pup everywhere. He was like therapy for me but he got sick, Parvo.

On the left is Lisa's house. The medical staff secretary. She is the best recruitment tool we could ever hope for. Smart, nice, and a wonderful person – and

as one CRNA put it – cuter than a spotted puppy. I count her as a true friend. She is a lifesaver.

Then go down a long hill – you’ll go over a newer bridge. I pulled over there once when I saw two women tearing each other apart. I don’t know what I thought I would do – I handed my cell phone to my youngest son and told him ‘if I don’t come back call 911.’ Turned out they were mother and daughter. That could have turned out way different.

On the right straight ahead is a tree, dying from where a car hit it head on – there are always plastic flowers there. They say it was a suicide. A dad’s suicide after a child died of injuries.

On the left is the remains of a house that I didn’t know had been a meth house- it caught fire three New Year’s Eves ago. We called it in – could see the blaze from our place – it was a total loss – but it was just a shell to start with.

Go over 14 Mile Creek and the first right after the bridge is our house – In the winter when the leaves are down, you can see the house from the road. There is a winding lane. The house isn’t much but the land is beautiful – right on the creek. I’ll probably be there forever – too many memories to move.

If you time it from the toll-road it’s exactly 15 minutes.



ALETHEA ENGLAND
American Standard Time
digital photograph

Abandoned

Once the ruby jewel of golden fields
The power that conquered and tamed...

Its approach scattered the timid and weak
Iron muscles strained pulling heaving jaws
 through unyielding soil.

In its wake finely manicured ripples yawned wide for new seed.
Now abandoned, rusted, faded...

Weeds dance around the bleached silent belly
Alone in ungroomed rubble it peeks out
 from pine branches tickling its sides.

Its seat cracked, rusty springs poke out
A crooked shattered mirror
One healthy tire exudes the strength of yesterday.

No shed to protect
No children to climb
No farmer to work

It stands abandoned – the victim of time.

KARLA M. PATTON

The Whistle

We'd play hard on Washington Grade School's playground 'til nearly dark, then when we'd hear my dad's whistle, my brother, sister and I would run less than a block to get to our house. That whistle would become an attention getting, very familiar part of our childhood...especially during those hot, sticky summer months.

Once home, a good meal, baths and bed usually followed.

Quite often our play outside with best friends and other neighborhood children would consist of games of agility and strategizing as kickball, tag, red light-green light, roller skating, jump rope, baseball and bike riding.

Sometimes my play would continue during the night, as I'd verbally shout in my sleep . . . "tag her," "you're out," "We won!"

I know this simply because my parents would come to check on us during the night, turn off each of our transistor radios, tuned to then popular "Randy," and would have a good laugh about it the next day over breakfast.

But even to this day when I put my lips together to imitate my dad's special whistle, I can barely do it and it never sounds the same as when my dad blew. His whistle. Said, "Time to come home."



LIZZ (ROBERTSON) KLARAS
Mansion at Forsyth Park
watercolor

Havens

Years ago my mother wrote about her Depression-era childhood on the farm. It's a story like innumerable others; a large family with little more than long days filled with hard work. Mom penned memories about many aspects of farm life, good and bad. For instance, she wrote about some of the family's workhorses. Fondly recalled were the team of Fanny and Bird, and their offspring Beauty and Hazel. And then there was Billy, a kicker and biter that frightened adults and children. After numerous attempts to change his behavior failed, he was sold. Even so, unwanted memories remained. Reading the few sentences about him was, for me, a revelation about something that frightened me when I was a child.

The incident occurred on a day that should have been filled with happiness. My older sister and I were seated beside Dad on the front seat of our car as we began a trip back home from the county hospital. Mom was sitting on the back seat with our newborn brother, William. I was vaguely aware of a conversation between my parents as Dad stopped near a drug store. Suddenly my mother's voice rose in pitch and volume. "I hate the name William; you chose it because that's what you wanted. People will call him Billy, and I hate Billy too." As my mother yelled those words, she leaned forward and began hitting my father on the back of his head and shoulders. His glasses tumbled to the floor mat as he tried to protect himself with hands and arms. My sister and I begged Mom to stop. She finally stopped and leaned back in silence and tears. Dad said something but Mom did not respond. He retrieved his glasses, started the car, and we drove home in silence. William slept.

During the quiet ride home I stared out the window at the chocolate brown soybean fields and khaki-colored fields of corn. Lifeless but erect cornstalks paraded past in seemingly endless procession. Their dried leaves blew in unison, like the arm-swing of soldiers passing in review. I couldn't hear it but I knew the leaves were rustling with the voice they used every autumn, a voice harsh and cold, always proclaiming winter was approaching. I didn't know it at the time but in years to come, cornstalks would harbor a young boy seeking refuge from other cold, harsh voices.

I was never happier to see our driveway come into view than after the silent ride home. Now I could escape and find something to replace the sounds and images filling my thoughts. What I did, I don't recall, but the day ended without further conflict. Weeks passed and autumn's drab colors were blanketed in snow. Dad worked the farm and made all the decisions; Mom tended house and kids. William grew and developed. Everyone called him Billy.

Year after year crops were planted and harvested. We three kids worked, played and went to school. A stranger could drive by our farm and remark, "What a nice

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place.” Anger went unseen from the road, never continually dwelling but quickly coming at the slightest invitation. Sometimes many months passed in peace and harmony. Just when it seemed our family was as normal as I imagined all others were, the anger returned. However, I never again permitted myself to be a trapped spectator. When it started, I ran. If mature crops covered the fields; I ran the length of the farmyard, ducked under the double row of trees planted many years before to block winter winds, and climbed the woven wire fence to run into the field, running until I no longer heard yelling. If those trees could keep the wind from coming in, why couldn’t they stop the yelling from coming out?

When the field was planted with soybeans I occasionally had to lie down ensuring no one could see me from the adjoining road. Concealment came instantly when the field was planted with corn. I immediately disappeared from view among the sturdy stalks. Their broad, soft leaves of spring and summer slapped my face, but their soothing rustle in the breeze masked the sound of shouting voices. What was a young boy to do while sitting between two cornrows? Pulling the few nearby weeds went quickly so I gathered all the dirt clods within reach and slowly crumbled them to form a small pile of topsoil. After completing the task, it was usually OK to return to the house.

On rainy days I sought a different refuge - the haymow. Tightly packed hay bales insulated the barn interior and muffled sounds coming from the house or yard. I rearranged enough bales to create a small den and crawled in to wait for the silence. My imagination and the smell of sweet clover kept me from thinking about the confrontation unfolding beyond my sanctuary.

A third haven, used most frequently, but least liked, was my bedroom closet. Too afraid to leave the house in the nighttime; I closed the door and sat on the floor with my hands over my ears, waiting for the silence that always came. Silence meant I could climb into bed and eventually fall asleep, taking care to avoid laying my head where the pillowcase was wet.

I escaped the anger when I left home after high school for military service and a new life on my own. I rarely talked about my past. I was a frequent recipient of good-natured ribbing from co-workers, teasing about my obvious naiveté. A good friend often joked my parents must have kept me in the closet. He never knew a bit of truth lay within his jest.

Did memories about a horse affect my mother’s thoughts about a baby’s name? I will never know. Childhood experiences can influence a lifetime. I know; long ago I resolved anger would never dwell within my home. It never has.



ANGELA GASPERI

Into the Blue

acrylic on canvas

Deeper

The sea taught me the feel and taste and sound of distance; the meaning of depth. My world and my eternity would be flatter without the sea.

I study the stars. When I was in grade school I would sit in the summer dusk, watching fireflies and stars. Watching the stars become brighter as the fireflies dimmed. Looking at the spaces between the shining points. Wondering at the idea of infinity. Trying to plunge further amongst them.

I could never make the spaces between stretch as they should. I could never make them deeper the further I went.

But I have loved the sea far longer than the stars.

When I was 3 we spent the summer at Norfolk Beach. On first sight of the sea I slipped out of my mother's arms and ran toward it saying "Big water." My memories are of sand and jellyfish and the crash of waves, shimmering heat and cold water and the smell of salt.

I didn't know how big the big water was then. But I knew that I could swim in it and that waves could tip me over and that it got deeper the further I went.

When I was 10 we spent a week in Pensacola. I was an accomplished swimmer, but the force of the waves surprised me. I went out far enough that I could pretend not to hear my mother calling me back. Far enough to leave the bottom in the breakers, bobbing back down to it after leaping through the curls like a fish.

I wanted to go farther, but didn't; I knew what the dangers were. I remembered that it got deeper the further I went.

When I was 12 we spent the summer in a South Indian village not a mile from the sea. The beach is called Thirimiruvallum, a brief curve of sea-borne sand in the granite seawall. I was the only girl swimming, surrounded by a cortege of male relatives. We swam until I lost the bottom for the first time, I and my brother dolphining over the swells. But we went no farther.

The water, free of the riptides that spin further up the coast, is still dangerous. I could feel safety drop away beneath my feet, lying deeper and deeper the further I went.

When I was 15 we returned to India for the summer, and Thirimiruvallum waited for me. It had grown longer during the monsoons, a new half-moon of sand curving against the seawall. I watched the sun set over the Indian Ocean and looked at new stars and wondered again about depth and eternity. I had swum again, farther and deeper—though not much.

The bottom had been carved away during the monsoons, dropping steeply within a few feet of the beach, getting much, much deeper the further I went.

When I was 16 we spent a week in Panama City. There was too much shrieking and eye-straining color and fake-coconut-scented suntan lotion on the beach. I

would walk there during the day, but came late to the ocean, slipping in a few hours before sunset while it was being deserted.

I kept it company as the tide rose and the crowd ebbed, almost alone, so I didn't go in too deep. But I struck until the long shallows fell away beneath my feet, rejoicing as, finally, it got deeper the further I went.

When I was 19 we spent a week in Cape Fear. There were no crowds on the small private beach behind the cottage, nothing to stop me from swimming to exhaustion and napping and then swimming again. I wanted desperately to swim at night, to find out what the inky silk of the farther waters would feel like.

But I didn't; it was too frightening, even for me. I knew that the blackness beneath me as the sky darkened would feel so much deeper the further I went.

When I was 27 I spent 10 days in Hawaii. I swam in the secluded grotto, open to the ocean but protected from the tides, at the exclusive hotel. I learned that there are fish I am afraid of: eels. And what it feels like to swim with a sea turtle—my hand just touching the giant shell as I swam above it all the way to the mouth of the sea. And that even in the presence of the most exotic of marine life, the water can bore me.

It didn't feel like the ocean; it didn't rise and fall and pull. It didn't get deeper the further I went.

I've longed for the ocean for years now. It is an odd, contented ache; I will go, whether sooner or later. It soothes me to know that soon or late it will be there waiting, sand and rock still falling away beneath the singing waves.

It comforts me to my center to know that when I am gone from it entirely, no more than a memory and then not even that, the sea will remain. It will roar against whatever coast it has shaped for itself, wearing ceaselessly against sand and stone. It will sustain its slow and swift and shimmering grace, its shallows' turn and thrum and tumble, its deeps' scored stretches falling and falling and falling away.

There is solace in the knowledge that the sea will continue long past the time when there are none to name or recall it.

Stars were, long before the ocean, and long after it they will endure. But I will never submerge my body in their lives, never swirl my hands through their substance, never comprehend the spread of their shores, never swim in the endlessness between them as it falls away beneath me. I will study all these things, yes. But I will never feel them against my skin.

The sea waits for my touch: here, now. While I am still here to remember it. While I can still cherish its teaching.

While I can still understand that all things get deeper the further I go.



LACEY WOOD
Domenica
digital photograph



MARY CORRIGAN STJERN

Bear Creek Farm & Ranch Chickens

pastel with oil wash underpainting on pastel paper

Left Behind

All alone I left one day.
I just had to get far away.
Left behind the crazy fights,
Left behind those city lights.
Left behind my family,
Left behind the old me.
I left behind my love,
He would not ride my Morning Dove.
I followed the sun to the sea.
That marked the end of my journey.
My Morning Dove I turned around
With one swift kick we were bound
Home sweet home we headed for
There I would be alone no more.
Left behind the starry nights,
Left behind those seagull flights.
Left behind the sandy beach,
Left behind and out of reach.

a good bed

The bed is old
and probably should be replaced,
but it's been a good bed,
everything a bed should be

A bed is where strangers meet,
becoming lovers,
husbands, wives, or
where companions grow apart,
back to back, becoming strangers,
or reacquainted

Although the cradle graduates the infant,
it's on the bed that children sprout,
reach for the ceiling, bounce,
squeal, pillow fighting
or tunneling their way out
beneath tight-tucked sheets

The bed is where heartaches
can be covered
by soft and gentle blankets
until they hurt a little less;
the place for time-outs and pouting,
accepting of our tears
over lost boyfriends, girlfriends,
or over parents over-parenting,
or having no one

A bed is the springboard for daydreams
to the blare of the stereo
or the sound of a distant train,
where we face the alarm,
where our eyes first tell
if the weather's worth rising for—
shall we go biking or hang out
at the coffee shop?
(there's always the mall)

Wherever we put it in the room,
the bed accepts us for who we are
and where we are in our lives;
change the sheets, fluff the pillows,
straighten the quilt—
the bed receives us

A bed is for Saturdays
when the sap runs out and turns
into a nap of such refreshing bliss—
only a hammock could compete.
Though we pile it
with laundry to be folded
or clothes to put away,
it's s-o-o-o nice to be back in my own bed,
says the weary traveler

The bed is where the sick are laid,
too hot, too cold,
too young, too old,
fighting illness or worse.
I want to die in my own bed, they say

Be nice to your bed.
It lets you go at any hour
when it's your turn—
or gives you another day

SUMI REBEIRO

Hidden by the sleeve of Night and Morn

Drove around Devil's Kitchen Lake a few nights ago, windows down in the warm, misty shadows as turning vistas unscrolled before me.

Around a curve I saw pinprick flares over a tall-grassed meadow, the air phosphorescent at a thousand evanescent points of suddenly-not-dark.

Hit the brakes. Pulled into grass that stood at chin level when I opened the car door.

Climbed onto the roof, into dusky air alive with luminance. Sat, as the sky sank to black, in a dancing, flitting meadow-roof of weightless, flickering stars.

Then drove home, and fell asleep with the pirouetting sparks still whirling around me: Thousands of lightning bugs around and above, calling for mates in a lustrous dark--in vapor-ribboned air that smelled of rain.



ASHLEY URISH
Reaching
acrylic on canvas

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