



SCOPE

Southern Illinois University School of Medicine
Volume 31 2024

On the cover:

Mr. and Mrs.

Acrylic on Canvas

1st Place Art

Morgan Suhre

Student, Class of 2024

SCOPE

Scope is the literary arts magazine of Southern Illinois University School of Medicine. This publication showcases the depth of talent within our campus community as we seek to enrich our lives through creativity. SIU School of Medicine encourages our patients, employees and learners to pursue wellness of the body and soul, and we are proud to provide an outlet for some of those pursuits here.

2024

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Editor's Note

Thank you for opening the 31st edition of Scope, the literary arts journal of SIU School of Medicine. By doing this, you have become a part of something larger than yourself. The contributions of our students, physicians, staff and community members will evoke emotions of awe, grief, nostalgia and perhaps even some joy. More so, they will help translate experiences, instill values and shape the identity of our community and culture. Their talents showcase the humanity that weaves us all together.

As a contributor to Scope, my involvement has allowed me to reclaim my identity as a writer, grow my emotional intelligence, and improve my use of language to connect with people and patients. As a reader of Scope, I am also more connected with myself and others when I read and observe what those around me choose to share. Our contributors' work has taught me to see beauty in the bittersweet and gratitude in the unexpected.

This was a special year, in part due to the extraordinary quantity and quality of submissions. The Scope Editorial Staff chose to expand our print edition to celebrate and highlight more talented individuals in our community. As you discover the surprises inside, please reflect on your life and experiences. Consider sharing your unique talents in a future issue.

I hope you enjoy this new edition as I have. It has truly been a privilege to serve as Scope editor during my time in medical school.

Emma Johns

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Orange Crush
Acrylic and Oil Pastel
Jake Schmid
Student, Class of 2026

Courageously You

1st Place Prose

Kanicia Green

Student, Class of 2024

For anyone other than a medical student, July is fun. Summer time means family barbecues, nice weather, and pool parties. However, for me, entering my final year of med school, July meant 12 hour days in the library preparing for boards, chasing down my letter writers like Usain Bolt, hiding from the Chase Banking App after the damage of away rotations, and daily panic attacks because my NBME practice scores just won't budge. I was days away from taking the most important exam of my life and as if things could not get worse, here comes an email from Cherie. Just kidding Cherie. The email read "It's time to schedule senior pictures. Picture day is in two weeks."

Sigh. I reluctantly looked at the nest that spawned atop my head as I'd regrettably neglected self care in the thick of dedicated study time. What was I going to do with my hair on picture day? The Temperature was nearly 100 degrees. I had two tiresome sub-internships lined up back-to-back. Exams were coming. The government just announced that aliens are real. There's a submarine trapped at the bottom of the ocean. I don't have time to worry about my hair right now! Then, as soon as my downward spiral of anxiety came, it left. Wait, I know the cure for this: braids. Box braids are low maintenance and perfect for this heat. I'll look good and feel good too. Plus, I can use the time I would have spent styling my hair to focus on the things that really need my attention. I smiled knowing I had the perfect solution.

Right before I hit the 'Confirm Appointment' button on my favorite hair stylist's booking website, I stopped dead in my tracks. I remembered my senior picture would be sent to residency programs. This picture would be the first thing program directors saw before considering my application for review. What story would my senior picture tell? What assumptions would they make about me and my braids? Would I kill my chances of an interview before I could even plead my case? Would they trust me to remain professional? I became extremely aware of my Blackness and how others viewed it. This made me uncomfortable, nauseous, and utterly defeated. Could my hair get in between me and something I had worked my entire life to obtain?

I was stuck. So, I did what I always do as a first generation medical student; I looked at my mentors. I thumbed through my contact list of Black and Brown physicians, realizing I could not recall a single Black doctor with braids. Sure, there were some with natural hair and fros, but never braids. I moved to Google. My search history included “Are braids still unprofessional in 2023”, “Black girl with braids in residency”, “professional headshot with braids”, “OBGYN with braids”. After being unsatisfied with my results, I then asked virtually everyone I knew: “Would you feel safe in the care of a physician with box braids”? I was met with mixed replies. The most common response was yes, they’d feel safe but warned not to wear the braids for pictures as it may limit my opportunities. But one piece of advice struck me the hardest. It came from a girlfriend that told me a residency program unaccepting of my hairstyle did not deserve to have me on their team. So, I took a leap of faith. I wore the braids. And to be honest, I loved the result. I thought my senior picture told a story of confidence, professionalism, and authenticity.

Weeks after senior pictures, I was once again met at the crossroads of Be Yourself Blvd and Just Play The Part Avenue. I’m in the OR at an acting internship at a program far away from home preparing for the patient’s entrance with the nurses, residents, and attending physicians. Music is playing overhead and a beat that’s all too familiar begins to play from a Pandora mix. The song is Monster by Kanye West featuring none other than Onika Maraj. Great. This is without a doubt, a set-up. The program directors themselves had to have sat in a dark room at a big table asking the question, ‘how can we ruin Kanicia’s day today’. They had to have known that there is absolutely no way in hell my Black behind is not going to rap every syllable to Nicki Minaj’s verse to utter perfection. My first full sentence as a baby was practically “This one is for the boys with the booming system, top down, A/C with the cooling system”. So, without missing a beat, “Pull up in the monster, automobile gangsta. With a bad girl that came from Sri Lanka. Yeah, I’m in that Tonka, color of Willy Wonka. You could be the king, but watch the queen conquer.” I was met with a couple of side eyes, blatant disregard, and awkward smirks. As uncomfortable as it may have seemed, I felt at ease.

Finding my professional identity while navigating unfamiliar spaces is getting smoother with each attempt. I’ve begun to realize that refusing to embrace who I truly am undermines all of my work to this point. I cannot pretend to be someone I am not, just to pacify those uncomfortable with diversity. I could not truly be that passionate about creating representation,

as I claim to be, if I chose not to be authentically me. I can still provide compassionate, professional patient care while also being true to myself. So in the famous words of Lee Ann Womack, “if you get the choice to sit it out or dance, I hope you dance”. Or better yet, in the infamous lyrics of Crime Mob, “knuck if you buck”. Whether it be the braids in your hair, the music you bump on the way to rotations, the Jordan shoes you wear with your scrubs, be courageously you every step of the way. Take up every inch of space possible, because you’ve earned it. Differences in culture are beautiful. Be Black as hell unapologetically in your white coat.



Flightless

Digital Photograph

Mackenzie Sanner

Staff, Medical Library

a field guide to the plants of our childhood

1st Place Poetry

Mackenzie Peck

Staff, Neurology

I. *Prunus serotina*

we spent our summers in that tree,
our memories etched into its bark;
and those branches saw it all—
laughter and sadness,
friendship and young love.

when we learned that it succumbed to the carpenter ants,
we cried for a whole week.

II. *Asclepias syriaca*

it was a stray weed that had escaped
the watchful eye of our mother.
unattended during the weeks when life
was too busy for weeding the garden,
it reached for the sunlight
and grew strong and tall.
it was a weed that blocked the view of the lilies.

until we discovered a young fellow in striped clothing,
munching happily on its leaves.

Danaus plexippus, symbiosis in action.

it became the centerpiece of Mom's summer garden.

III. *Populus deltoides*

bud caps adhered to our bare feet,
the sticky resin staining our skin.
later that spring, we danced in the grass,
delighted by the gentle snowfall
during the heat of the day.

IV. *Viola sororia*

at the end of the driveway,
beneath the flowering crabapple
and the towering old silver maple,
we plucked our state flower
from its marshy home.
on the kitchen table, Dixie cups overflowed
with bouquets of purple.

V. *Acer saccharinum*

to us, spring was the promise
of warmth in the air and
the yellow-green of newly emerged leaves
on the tree at the end of the driveway.
we swore that tree could predict the weather;
thunderstorms came, always, with a flash of silver—
the undersides of quivering leaves, warning us
to take shelter from the violence
that came with tornado season.

VI. *Morus alba*

an opportunistic fencerow resident;
we picked berries until our hands were stained purple,
the taste of midsummer on our tongues.

VII. *Trifolium repens*

Grandpa taught us how to love
nature's mistakes;
the genetic mutations that resulted
in one leaflet too many.
we considered ourselves
the luckiest people on earth
when we found the patch in the backyard
that produced mistake after mistake,
and we could feel Grandpa there with us
in the summer breeze.

VIII. *Gleditsia triacanthos*

when the days grew shorter and colder,
we peeled seeds from fallen pods
and added them to our inedible concoctions:
grass stew and mud pie,
field corn chili and dandelion cake;
oh, to be seven years old once more.

IX. *Salix alba 'tristis'*

she stood like a sentinel
in the field behind our house,
a constant fixture of our childhood days.
imposing and graceful all at once,
she kept watch over us through the years.

we went back several years ago,
to reminisce on days past.
like an old friend,
she welcomed us back home.



Scrub In, Scrub Out

Charcoal

Morgan Suhre

Student, Class of 2024

Burden of Safety

2nd Place Prose

Jenna Ribbing

Student, Class of 2026

It doesn't happen as often anymore, but it does still happen. Dead of night, my brain fizzling to life, the tip-tapping of insidious thoughts meant to rouse me from my slumber and impel me on a methodical pilgrimage to each door and window to ensure they are locked and undisturbed. Sometimes, I've peered out into the gloom at odd, ungodly hours and seen things I wouldn't have otherwise — a family of deer steeped in sickle moonlight, an armadillo digging in the remnants of the garden, and once a rather brave 2:00 AM jogger clad in reflective Nikes. It was a man, of course.

I envy that kind of freedom.

When I first moved into the small, third story Brooklyn loft at the top of a beautiful, Bed-Stuy brownstone, I inspected my bedroom window. It was big enough to wiggle through, in a pinch. I fiddled with the screen — how easy was it to remove? How much noise would I make if I had to quickly tear it off? I'd lay in bed, studying the insane popcorn patterns on the ceiling, comforted by the knowledge that I had an emergency exit of sorts.

A full-sized fire extinguisher propped my loft door open. I remember picking it up at the store, cold against my palms, a satisfying weight. I thought — I could swing this at someone, if I had to. I thought — I could probably smash this into someone's face, or knee, or crotch. I thought — yeah, that would probably really, really hurt. Every morning, while the coffee brewed or the toaster toasted, I leaned at my kitchenette counter and stared at the blood-hued thing, considering, and not once was I ever imagining a fire.

It was scarcely a month later when I was forced to sneak off the subway a stop early to prevent a guy from following me home. I emerged from the depths beneath Fulton as if the ground had spat me right out, the backs of my fingers kissing that late autumn wind and digging into the straps of my backpack — squeezing, squeezing, squeezing. It was bitter enough I would have rathered they be in my pockets.

I know now that adrenaline makes fists of me.

The brownstone was shrouded in shadow, my breath billowing in front of my face as I ascended the steps two at a time. Once inside — door locked, back leaning against it while it made music of the knobs of my spine — I found little solace. My landlords, who supposedly inhabited the lower two levels, were never there, opting instead to primarily stay at their Manhattan apartment. In the stark fidelity of daylight, it was peaceful, a sanctuary. But in the hollow duplicity of darkness...ghostly, vulnerable. I felt as if the whole city knew I was alone.

Later, I tested my pepper spray again in the sink. I'd never had to use it on a person before. I'd come close, a few times. Once, on a run, a truck with three men followed me onto the deserted side streets of my hometown, their arms hanging out open windows and features leering as they pulled up along me, trying to elicit a reaction. I was 16. Needless to say, they hadn't seen 16 in a few decades. Another time, on another run, a long string of workers on Bowery in Chinatown catcalled and rudely gestured, crowding uncomfortably close as I was forced to cram past them due to construction closures on the sidewalk. They knew I had nowhere else to go. I never ran down Bowery again. And yet another time — not a run, alas — a man screaming obscenities and threats yanked my passenger door open, irate and entirely undone that I had accidentally pulled up in front of his garage. If his kind, elderly neighbor had not immediately sprung forth from her yard to defuse him, I'm not sure what would have happened. I got the impression she'd done her fair share of defusing before, though.

The thing is, there are a set of rules all women inevitably learn, almost exclusively from first hand experience. I prided myself on being a good student. I learned the rules, and I learned them well. It is our job to keep ourselves protected, to keep ourselves from being kidnapped, from being murdered, from being raped. We are responsible for what happens to us, and if we let our guards down, it is our fault and we only have ourselves to blame.

We alone shoulder the burden of our safety.

About two weeks after my near-miss on the C train, something knocked my Cheerios box from atop my fridge. I can picture myself squinting from the threshold of my room, hand still on the upturned light switch, trying to make sense of what my eyes were telling me was happening — two plump, monstrous rats gaped up at me, cheeks and paws full of the same cereal that littered the linoleum around them, caught in the act. I laughed, mostly at the universe, causing the thieves to scatter and disappear into the places

that solely rats can disappear to.

I cleaned up the mess, as I was want to do, and tried to ignore the heaviness of dread that pulsated throughout the walls of my chest — a sense of downhill trajectory, a breed of badness that only the discovery of intruders could beget. In the morning, the catastrophizing had dissipated and fizzled into lukewarm coals. I'm being silly, I reasoned, as I carefully assembled a humane rodent trap with the help of a bucket and broom handle, I'm being silly, silly, sillysillysillysillysilly...

Turns out, I should have listened to myself.

I'll never know if I woke up on my own, or if it was something he did that woke me up. What I do know is that it was 4:03 AM. I sighed, relieved at the prospect of two more hours of sleep, convinced the rats were at it again, and turned over onto my side. As soon as I settled, I heard it.

A resounding crash, vibrating along the floorboards.

I sat up, frozen, breath trapped within my lungs, listening, listening, listening...

At first, nothing, and I held out hope that maybe it came from outside on the street, that maybe my mysterious landlords decided to take an impromptu Brooklyn rendezvous and were stumbling home drunk, that maybe I'd imagined it in the first place.

Another crash, unmistakable. Someone was inside. Someone was downstairs. Someone was just underneath me, on the second floor.

I can't recall how I unplugged my device, got out of bed, or turned on the kitchenette light. But I know I must have, because the next palpable moment came as I stood backlit at the top of the long stairwell, the fire extinguisher at my feet as it propped the loft door open. My silhouette ratcheted across the dusty wood and the well-worn pattern of a Turkish runner, my right hand white knuckling my cell phone. Over the pounding roar of blood in my ears, I could clearly make out movement on the other side of the closed second story living room door, barely ten steps below from where I was perched, poised, and directly between me and the easiest escape route. My focus darted further down the hallway, at the still visibly locked front entrance, calculating.

Whoever was in the brownstone was obviously a burglar. They might not even know I'm here. I could hide, call 911, and wait it out. But if he had already reached the second floor living room, his next stop would logically be the third floor. My options for hiding places in the loft were scant to none. He'd find me, no doubt. And if he found me...

My bedroom window was an option. I could make a go for it right now, rip off the screen as I'd practiced, army crawl my way to freedom. But then I'd be stuck on the balcony roof, forced to wait it out once more in the hopes whoever it was didn't come after me and leave me no other choice but to jump and break my ankle on the cobblestone courtyard.

No. Those options wouldn't work.

I had to run.

I was good at running.

I flew down the stairs, a wild thing, with a speed I'd never met nor have yet to meet again. I didn't hesitate in the slightest at the front door, using my momentum instead to shove it open, practically smashing my hand between my hip and the biting steel as my numb digits violently unlatched the bolt. I stumbled over the brick steps leading to the sidewalk, missing more of them than not, my bare feet scraping on loose gravel and chunky salt, my skin dead to the sharp, unforgiving cold of December.

I didn't stop or look back once, not until I was half a block away and bathed in the yellow cone of a street lamp, an emergency dispatcher calmly speaking in my ear, asking for the address, asking if I was safe, asking where he was, asking, asking, askinggaskingaskingaskingasking...

From a distance, a towering, dark figure materialized from the jaws of the brownstone. He paused, head turning in my direction, and I knew he could see me, all of me. Then in a blink, he mounted a bike he'd evidently left leaning against the front gate, and disappeared into an endless sea of the reddest black.

They never caught him.

The police later discovered that he had gotten in through a grate inside the front porch. He had painstakingly stripped out the concrete sealant around the rebar, creating just a large enough opening for him to drop down into the wet, dank cellar. From there, he had made his way upstairs to the first floor, then the second floor, and then... well, I suppose we can merely guess.

He would have had to spend hours in order to create that big of a hole. Possibly over the course of multiple visits.

I was still barefoot, shivering in my pajamas — not so much from the snow but from residual fight — as I listened, dazed, to the officer's explanation. How many nights the past few days, the past few weeks, had he been there, beneath my feet, beneath my bed, scratching, scratching, scratching his way inside? How long had he been working? Waiting? Watching?

Everyone was gone by 4:50 and I found myself back in a sleepless bed by 5:00 like nothing had even happened. I counted my teeth right to left, and top to bottom, over and over again for an hour, and then I was up at my alarm at 6:00, at the gym by 7:00, on the A train by 8:00, and finally striding confidently into work by 8:45. What else was there to do? What else was for it, but to continue on?

That evening, I returned to the loft carried on the legs of a stranger. I knew the man had never actually stepped foot there, had been unable to make it that far, but he seemed to have staked claim to it regardless, to have taken it for his own and tainted it via pure malintent. I felt sick — no amount of locks, pepper spray, fire extinguishers, or environmental awareness could have prevented this.

The thing is, the number one rule among that ubiquitous set of rules all women inevitably learn, almost exclusively from first hand experience, is this: none of it guarantees you will be saved.

The weight of that can at times seem utterly unbearable.

Especially those occasional nights, awakened, my mind of the past, propelling me to meticulously check every arguable port of entry. Once, around 3:00 AM, I saw a neighbor flick on her driveway light, and do exactly the same. Her gaze hooked mine as it swept across our cul de sac, searching for potential threats. We smiled in recognition, relieved and perhaps a tad embarrassed, and gently exchanged awkward waves.

It's easier, sometimes, when something so heavy can be shared.



Winter Trees

Digital Photograph

Ian Pollock

Staff, Facilities Management

Jennifer

Third Place Prose

Susan Nagele, MD

Alumna, Class of 1981

At age 11 Jennifer was the brightest student in her class. Her mother, Rosemunda, was one of the first friends I made in the big town of Torit Sudan upon arriving in October 1991. Their tukul, a conical mud hut with a tightly thatched roof, sat near the market in town. I needed a friend and some help learning Juba Arabic, the local market language. We met at church and I latched on to this family as a source of comfort and conversation.

A couple of younger brothers scampered about the homestead with big, impious grins. Rosemunda was the second wife of Commander Africa in the Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army. Due to the demands of war and other wives, I never saw him. She was left to manage the family and their simple, clean and well swept compound.

Jennifer attended the girls' school run by the Missionary Sisters of Mary Mother of the Church from Uganda. The school had moved fifteen miles out of town to a little village called Imatong to avoid bombings from Sudanese government planes. Thus, I rarely saw Jennifer. I visited Rosemunda frequently and never left her place without a glass of cool fruit juice to lubricate the esophagus. She was ever attentive to me and the need for adequate hydration under the blazing, dry season sun. Actually, she was just a kind, caring woman.

At Christmas, school closed and Jennifer came home. She was frightfully thin and Rosemunda asked me to examine her. The spleen in a normal person is not palpable. Hers filled the abdomen and reached all the way to her umbilicus. Having had two months of language training and an occasional evening medical clinic outside the room where I stayed, I was still in the throes of 'orientation'. However, I had heard of a disease called kala azar that could produce such a big spleen. It was caused by a parasite that was carried by a sand fly. The flies lived in huge termite mounds that pierced the scrubby bush and cast a cool shadow to give shepherds some respite. While the boys sought refuge from the sun, the sand flies found a body to feast on and thereby transmit the little worm. This disease ran rampant in Upper Nile, a northern state hundreds of miles away. But it had also been found in Kapoeta, a town 130 miles east of Torit. Jennifer

and the family had lived there for some time before coming to Torit. Only boys were shepherds. She hadn't sat under many termite mounds but I wondered if, somehow, she had been infected. I referred her to the local Sudanese doctor at Torit District hospital with a long, detailed letter asking if she could have kala azar. He said no and gave her a course of chloroquine injections for malaria.

After Christmas, I went to Nairobi Kenya for some meetings. Towards the end of January, I was told Jennifer was in the Aga Khan hospital in Nairobi. Rosemunda had told Bishop Taban that Jennifer was getting sicker. He found the money and the means to send her to one of the best referral hospitals in the Kenyan capital city. By the time I located her in the pediatric ward, she had seen an expert consultant who had diagnosed kala azar and begun the painful daily injections of a heavy metal compound, stibogluconate, into her small stringy muscles. She could complete the 30 total doses at home. I was asked to take her back to Sudan with me on the plane I had booked. I agreed.

She had been discharged from the hospital and taken to the Diocese of Torit house in Nairobi, way across town from where I was staying. The day before we were scheduled to fly out, I got a call from her caretaker saying she had a fever. I rushed through the traffic, picked her up, took her to the Aga Khan hospital, paid for the laboratory I knew the pediatrician would need and told them to send it to him. The results returned suggesting a viral illness. He reassured me in his office, after examining her, that she probably had something like measles. He saw no problem for her to travel the next day. Once again, I was the new doc on the block with little experience. I thanked him for squeezing her into to his busy schedule and followed orders.

The next morning, we got ourselves to the hangar at Wilson Airport just as the first rays of light were peeking over the distant hills. Our transport was a cargo plane that gave us a free lift alongside boxes of supplies and bags of food that had been paid for by a nongovernmental organization. They reserved 60kg, roughly 130 pounds, for our combined weight, strapped us in properly and took off to the north east. Jennifer was feverish, weak and breathing rapidly. I wasn't at all convinced we were doing the right thing. It was a small, double engine plane that bounced erratically as the heat of the day generated waves of turbulence. By midday we looked down at the dusty, bumpy dirt air strip in Torit and my jittery, nauseous stomach stimulated my salivary glands. I concentrated all my attention on my young patient hoping that her fluctuating consciousness was temporary.

As always, the welcoming crowd for such a flight was excitedly waiting under nearby trees. At the sound of the releasing latch, each pair of hands worked rapidly to disgorge every item and send the plane on its way before the Sudanese government knew where we were. This flight had not been given permission by the Sudanese government to land in Torit which was controlled by the SPLA. It could be targeted with bombing by Sudanese government military aircraft if given enough time for them to fly quickly from the capital city of Juba, 90 miles away. Rosemunda snatched up her daughter and immediately took Jennifer home.

The family was ecstatic to be together again. Rosemunda listened carefully to details of the illness. The daily, painful intramuscular injections reassured her that kala azar could be treated and Jennifer would recover. I visited the home each day, making sure that the medication was being given properly. I knew we were treating the right problem but was not at all convinced of the outcome. On the third day my heart sank.

I entered the dark, clean, well swept tukul to find Jennifer lying on her side on a reed mat breathing heavily. In the night she had begun to pass loose, bloody stools. There was no doubt in my mind she had DIC, disseminated intravascular coagulation. When an overwhelming infection causes widespread inflammation, the clotting system can begin to bind up platelets by stimulating blood clot formation throughout the blood vessels. When platelets are consumed and sequestered in these clots, bleeding results. The treatment is to manage the sepsis that caused the inflammation and support the patient in an intensive care unit and replace lost clotting factors. My mind knew what would happen but my heart couldn't consider the possibility.

I told Rosemunda that Jennifer needed to go to the hospital for I.V. treatment with powerful antibiotics. I gave her the best drugs I had from an Italian donation recently received. I found a vehicle to take her to the hospital, such as it was, along with a detailed letter describing the condition and prescribing how the medications were to be administered. Deep down I prayed for a miracle.

The next morning, I attended a very early Mass in the church where Bishop Taban was presiding. Afterwards, as I walked away from the church, he called out to me. I turned around to see him walking towards me. As we met in the early morning twilight, he put his hand on my forearm and said, "Kafara." My eyes glanced from his hand to his penetrating eyes, looking straight into my own. He repeated the same word. Kafara means 'sorry' in Arabic. He was telling me that Jennifer was dead.

I jerked my arm away from his hand and shouted, “No!” He sternly asked, “Where is your faith?” I stammered with my throat choking up and tears flooding my eyes.

“It’s OK for adults like you and me to die. It’s not OK for young girls like Jennifer,” I shouted at him. My rage surprised him. He grabbed my arm again and pulled me towards him, wrapping his other arm around my shoulders and locking our heads together in pulsating sobs. She was bright, intelligent, young and innocent. The war had forced her to move from the safety of her village to a town with infected sand flies that had somehow managed to disgorge their parasites into her blood stream. When she finally got the chance to go to school, it was in a remote village with no health care worker who could figure out why she was sick. The first doctor to see her was me and I wasn’t sure of the diagnosis. The second doctor missed the diagnosis. The third doctor sent her back to Sudan not realizing how sick she was. And then she died. We all failed her.

Commander Africa slaughtered a white bull on the day of Jennifer’s funeral and Rosemunda wore a thin, black nylon dress every day for the next year.

Over the course of the next five years, I would treat hundreds of young boys and older men who had walked hundreds of miles from Upper Nile to the Diocese of Torit, escaping the ever-encroaching war front. Jennifer was the lone female. They were my teachers. She had been sick for over a year before the diagnosis was made. That was just too long. If we had kept her in Nairobi, perhaps she would have died anyway. At least her family was able to see her alive for a short time before her death. This single thought consoles me when I question whether I should have refused to take her back to Sudan.

Jennifer died, in part, because of war. Her passing testifies to the inaccuracy of any estimate of its casualties.



In the Depths

Acrylic on Canvas

2nd Place Art

Divinity Rhodes

Student, Class of 2027

Two Boys

3rd Place Poetry

Jenna Ribbing

Student, Class of 2026

Two boys go for a car ride.

(This is a love story. No one else knows it yet. No one thinks it's a love story.)
No one believes in a love story until someone dies.

But the boys believe. They saw one another, and got in the car.

The boy behind the wheel is tempered as steel.

He will lie while staring straight in the eye and tell the truth while staring down.

The boy in the passenger seat has sunflowers.

He will only ever tell the truth, even if it destroys him.

Each boy understands these things about the other boy.

Their minds eat the pavement faster than the wheels.

It's a race to see who breaks the silence.

The passenger will always win.

"I'm sorry I got blood on your favorite shirt."

He studies the other boy...he feels like he's on the wrong side of a door.

The driver has a death grip.

He wishes it was literal. He will never admit to anything.

He doesn't feel any kind of door...only the knocking of an ending in his skull.

The passenger offers him a flower.

The driver slams on the breaks.

Two boys stand on the side of the road.

(This is a love story. Remember, this is a love story.)

The boy no longer behind the wheel shakes like someone is stepping on his grave.

He looks at the boy no longer in the passenger seat and thinks unspeakably breakable.

“Will you ever forgive me for the things I can’t become?”

The sunflowers drop to the dirt.
They wordlessly count the seconds.
Their hearts consign to darkness.

Two boys get back in the car.
(This is a love story. Let them prove it.)

Fifteen miles later, the boy back in the passenger seat whispers,
“Don’t ask me to be less than I am.”
The boy back behind the wheel turns the car around.



Moors in Portugal

Giclée

Peter Somers, PhD, MD

Alumni, Class of 2000

the price of success
2nd Place Poetry
Ireland Smith
Student, Class of 2026

as gentle as a gardenia,
flushed cheekbones, long lashes,
flowing, soft curves
smooth, long legs to be caressed,
hair naturally falling in rivulets
open arms, welcoming heart
dancing, baking, reading novels
all sensual and caring nature

as sharp as a steel scalpel
empowering lines of merlot lipstick
wrapped in scrubs, hidden under business attire
ending in padded shoes, enduring pain all day
pulled tightly back in a bun—professional
with an intelligent mind, helping to save lives
using hands that suture, intubate, resuscitate
seen as “bossy,” “demanding,” and “cold”

two halves held in suspension, frayed at the ends
constantly fighting for dominance—one suffocating the other
days, years pass until the lost one is rediscovered
welcome her. embrace her. love her.
the threads of womanhood wrapped around your wrists
remember: you can be both at once.
all femininity and grace, strength and power





Water, Earth, Fire Woman

Giclée

Maren Somers, 1984-2010

Community Member

Through the Scope

Alexia Helmer

Staff, Marketing, Communications and Engagement

i've peeked
through the scope
of time

searching
all of its
spaces

wondering

experiencing

learning

existing

flowing through
my phases

i've found myself
within each
season

a little truer
than the last
while

wandering

feeling

living

healing

creating poetry
from my past



Glorious
Digital Photograph
3rd Place Art
Lynne Ling
Staff, Pharmacology

Haiku to Weaning

Alicia Ludden Schlatter
Community Member

Saggy, empty breasts
My body, again, my own
I wish it weren't so



Take a Walk

Digital Photograph

Amanda Mulch, MD

Alumna, Class of 2003

Faculty, Student Affairs - Carbondale



Iggy
Digital Art
Thomas Hingle
Community Member

Things That Make Me Happy

Emma Johns

Student, Class of 2024

Red cheeks from cold wind, and the smell of campfire in hair.
Placing bets with my dad and the thrill of completing his dare.

Coffee and baked bread, and crunchy leaves in the autumn.
Cousins proudly showing me the dance that I taught them.

Pink grapefruits with sugar, burgers with a mysterious special sauce
And who could forget the donuts each Friday brought in by my boss.

Strange words that need hyphens like honky-tonk or roly-poly
And also burritos and margs and tons of guacamole.

Hugs from small mothers, crow's feet and thunderous laughs
The feeling of girlhood when I'm invited for an evening of crafts.

I love my brother's old jeep, how it stalls but then catches.
When the ship captain in movies bellows, "Batten down the hatches!"

Baseball games and nachos and a crisp Mountain Dew
Having people to miss and people that miss you.

I like the crash of the sea, and the trickle of a stream.
The sunset at home, cryptic crosswords and a good dream.

Getting postcards from friends in places unseen by my eye.
Also, ice cream and brownies and whipped cream, at the same time.

A kettle of soup and butter melting on hot bread,
When a squeeze of the hand means more than can be said.

I like the slosh of beer from a too hefty "cheers!"
And of course, telling a story that captivates all of my peers.

Colorful rainboots in puddles, taking photos and nature.
My book collection, seafood and the blue of a glacier.

I think happiness can be a funny fleeting feeling;
But appreciating the details can make life quite appealing.

Heads or Tails

Reem Khader
Student, Class of 2025

I am a fraud
I have been born into this life, a fraud
When life flipped the coin,
I serendipitously said “heads”
And so, it was “heads”
While another girl,
Same age, same color, same hair, same blood
Ended with “tails”
I smell candles burning on a calm Sunday afternoon,
While she smells smoke and charred bodies coming from her carpet
bombed neighborhood.
We are the same. Same age. Same color. Same hair. Same blood.
But for whatever unknown reason,
Because I decided to say heads,
I never have to take cover in fear that my time may be coming
I never have to wonder if my brothers or my father are the ones being
taken next
My everyday thoughts are not consumed by survival, or lack thereof.
We are the same,
But she is “barbaric”
While I am “civilized”
Although I have touched Palestinian olive trees,
I have never had to navigate through missile-struck lands like she has,
I am so sorry to the girl who looks just like me,
Because I said “heads”
And I always wonder what life would be like,
If I decided to say “tails”



God's Painting

Digital Photograph

Chris Reavis

Staff, Education & Curriculum

of humanism

Emily Moushon
Student, Class of 2024

a carefully dissected cadaver
once whole and human; now just organs, muscles, and tissue
Reminder of landmarks to navigate an exam
Reminder for those who notice the still-painted nails

a patient unconscious on the OR table
skin parting with ease, welcoming the crusader into battle
Reminder of a system once at peace, now disrupted by invading disease
Reminder that your elbow rest will endure the casualties of war tomorrow

a 6-year-old sedated in the trauma bay
his sister was driving; she didn't see the truck
Reminder that all survived, time to save the next patient
Reminder that she'll live with her mistake and with the boy in perpetual 1st grade

a disheveled man, lying still in his cot in the psychiatric ward
bursting out in tears about his lost companionships with JFK and Abe Lincoln
Reminder that emotions are always real, even if the belief is not
Reminder to ponder the question: "red pill or blue pill?"

a premature infant resting in an incubator
genetic defects unseen by the doctors; not even his cry is normal
Reminder that a mother can make terrible choices while carrying a child
Reminder that palliative care knows no age

an elderly woman awakening from an eye surgery
she begins crying, "The colors are so bright!"
Reminder that a 20-minute operation can change a life
Reminder that medicine is much more than numbness or tragedy

a man who lost his fingers and his ability to farm
marveling at a newly constructed thumb beginning to move
Reminder that our hands can recreate meaning in another's hand
Reminder of the humanism that makes it all worth it

A young student, scrambling to hold on to every bit of knowledge
Carefully noting characteristics of a doctor she wants to become
reminded that each patient she encounters provides a lesson
reminded that each life touched becomes her greatest meaning

From Behind the White Coat

Bridget McClain
Student, Class of 2024

Heels click. Cameras snap.
You're draped in blinding white.
You recite the Hippocratic oath,
Medicine is within your sight.

Your dad's eyes swell with tears,
His proud heart in his throat,
Your skin tightens around an untiring smile.
Finally, the view from behind the white coat.

Crushing chest pain? Cold sweats?
Easy, you can master this.
Bloodless incisions, explore a cadaver
Naivety masks the possibility of a near miss.

Flooding endorphins begin to dry up.
Drowning in books, you're barely afloat.
With eyes barely willing to stay open,
You stare ahead from behind the white coat.

Feet rush, panic rises.
Chaos calls for a crash cart,
A dying boy lays in front of you.
You get in line to resuscitate a heart.

Hands layered; fingers intertwined
You're up next, remember your notes.
Heel of your palm pressed into the sternum,
Is this the view from behind the white coat?

RT whispers, "It's harder than it looks."
Breathless, you glance up to agree.
Behind her, you see his parents
Pained, desperate to hear a heartbeat.

Purple and blue on innocent skin,
Strong compressions have bruised him.
The Ambu bag gives its last breath
Fully lit, the room suddenly dims.

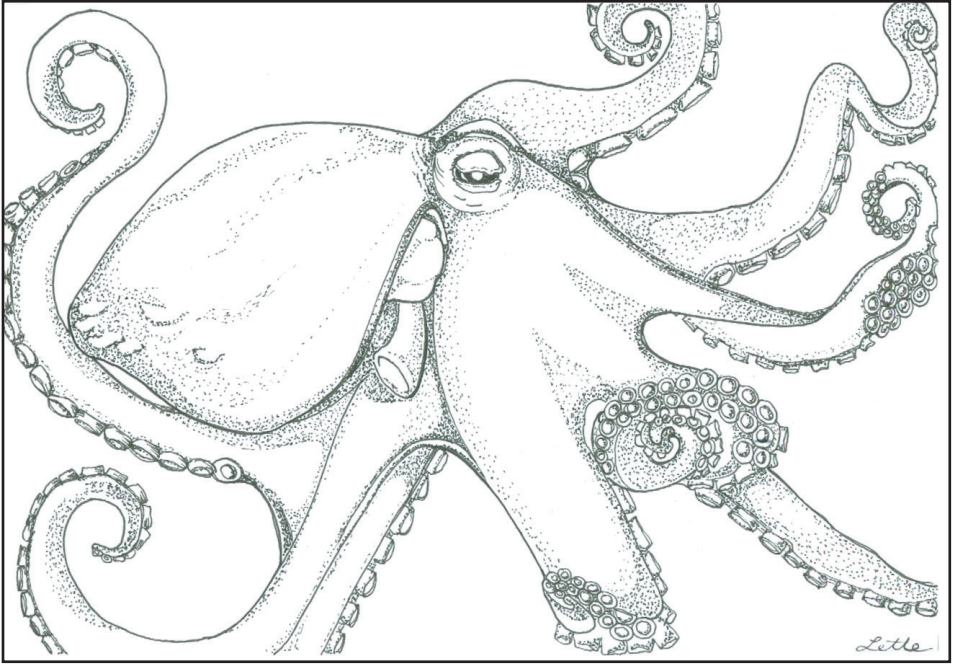
You suggest Q8 vitals during rounds,
And as you present the plan you wrote,
His mother treads by, bearing her grief
Oh, this is the view from behind the white coat.

Tailored pants, polyester sweaters
Outpatient clinic awaits you next.
Stiff in the corner, you observe.
You remind yourself to brush up on your text.

Medication checks, routine visits,
Ask questions, then write a note.
Melting into cream-colored walls,
A different view from behind the white coat.

In stained white, you wander home
You recall, "first, do no harm"
You always think of the bruised boy
Who died under your arms.

Student doctor, medical student
Your memory no longer simply rote
Your short hemline trails behind you,
You've found yourself behind the white coat.



Ophelia

Ink

Colette Sanner

Community Member

Don't Sleep

Amelia Frank, MD
Alumna, Class of 2013
Faculty, FCM/DME

I drive to work, weaving through morning traffic, absently eating handfuls of cereal, grateful my children are not in the car because I am so tired.

It isn't just that I wake up every few minutes to check if he is breathing, not only that. He cycles between being the noisiest sleeper, moans and snorts, fast and slow breaths, farts and grunts, and being the quietest softest sleeper in the world, his exhalations barely brushing the receptors on the skin of the finger I hold under his nose.

As you know, according to us, the scientists who do things like make recommendations -- the medical societies and expert consensus -- the safest place for your baby to sleep is on his back, on a flat surface, in his own sleep area.

Anything else could increase the risk for SIDS.

But he won't sleep on his back, on a flat surface, in his own sleep area. His little legs wave in the air like sunflowers bobbing in a breeze, his arms alternating between dramatic reaches and tight curls that wake him up.

Well, he'll outgrow that. Just give it a few months.

What do I do in the meantime, I wonder idly as I watch his eyes flicker under his tiny eyelids and eyelashes growing in, both miracles.

Are you having trouble getting your baby to sleep? Me too, friends. But this mom-fluencer can attest that THIS swaddle is the ONLY swaddle you will EVER NEED! Peep my stories and check the aff-link in my bio for more!

I swim in swaddles, sleep sacks, bassinets, all reported to be the ONLY one I will EVER NEED and yet – he weaves and bobs and wiggles and moans and the hours of the night drip drip by, slow and dark and lonely, seeming unreal.

I don't know why this recommendation is so hard to follow. Maybe you just need to sleep train your baby. I mean, you will have to go back to work, after all, and then what will you do!

Oh my GOSH, you guys, I couldn't POSSIBLY IMAGINE sleep training my little one! I mean, you do what works for you, but I held my baby for every nap and I could never sleep train. I mean, it was SO UNNATURAL to have her cry! And she was way too little to learn how to sleep on her own anyway. No, I chose to be NATURAL and co-slept. And then when she was two, we moved her to the sweetest Montessori floor bed, aff-linked in my bio!

We don't recommend co-sleeping – but if you fail, if you are a failure, if you can't manage to have your baby sleep the way we know is the safest – well then we guess there are some ways that make co-sleeping safer. You must have no blankets, no pillows, the mattress must be firm enough to be uncomfortable – you must curl around your baby –

I bearily, happily, pull him toward me, grateful for the safe chance for sleep. He nests in my arms, his little body limp with pleasure that I share. We hold each other and I rest my cheek on his head –

No. Wait. You can't co-sleep like THAT. That is too dangerous. Look at how you are curled around him – what if he suffocates? What if the pocket of air between your body and his doesn't get enough circulation and carbon dioxide builds up?

But is that likely, I wonder a bit desperately as I drift in and out of unconsciousness, my hand stroking the tiny hairs on his head –

Doesn't matter if it is likely. It is possible! What kind of monster would take that chance?

I sigh and push him further down. He, sleeping, protests, but then recognizes the warmth of my breast and snuggles in again. I sleep but wake in agony, my muscles screaming against their forced immobility. After all, if I am co-sleeping, I am not supposed to move from the curled position until – how old? He is a year?

I mean, ladies, don't get me wrong, it is hard to not move in your sleep for at least a year. But isn't that discomfort the price you pay to have the BEST, MOST NATURAL sleep your baby can have? Speaking of price!...

Frankly, we are disgusted, horrified, incensed, that you fell asleep in your recliner with your baby while he nursed. We hope that you would never be so reckless to do that on purpose! No matter that you have made that as safe as possible. You have limited overheating and have crafted a flat sleeping surface for him so that he can snuggle against

you but you can move? You have put your ingenuity to work, hastened by your growing, prodigious need for sleep, creating a space where he cannot possibly fall from or tuck into without a damn act from God. Doesn't matter. What if?

But, I consider, tears welling in my eyes, is there any evidence that what I am doing is not safe? I understand the risks, but what about the accommodations I have made? Don't they count for something? Have we done any actual research?

Research is meaningless in the face of the risk you are knowingly taking. I have heard about stories from other mom-fluencers!

But, I ask as I shift my softly snuggling baby further away from me, my heart and tired, tired bones protesting as I see his belly shift and curl, his arms starting to flail to find me – but anecdotes are just anecdotes, right?

Wrong. We have models as well as anecdotes. We know we are right – the choices you are making –

Being forced to make because I don't have any other --

I mean, you COULD always hire a night nurse if you are SO BAD AT GETTING YOUR BABY TO SLEEP WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU. A night nurse is an option. Sure, you didn't plan for it ahead of time, so any decent night nurse has already been hired and SURE it is crazy expensive – but HONESTLY, those sound like YOU problems. Or why don't you just PURCHASE the BUNDLE I have created that will tell you nothing you haven't already heard but WILL come with a cute planner to write down the hours you spend trying to get your baby to sleep. Look at the sweet ducky icon in the corner. That is my brand – check it out in my bio!

Oh, you mention those cradles in Tajikistan where they strap the babies to them for years, the wooden Moses baskets wrapped in long swathes of linen and cotton, so that the household can function? You bring up the cradleboards of various indigenous cultures that mothers wear to allow them to continue moving? Yes, those are interesting anthropological oddities, but not something you can do here, in this enlightened age – you can't strap your baby to your chest or his bassinet or weight his sleep sack to help him not wiggle himself awake. Or, if you do, you have to get one of those outrageously expensive bassinets that allows for that and is only safe for the first few months. Sorry if you don't have the money – we don't recommend those crutches anyway, we turn our noses up at them...

I try again, again, again, to put him down. He cries. I stuff ear plugs in, try to ride out my rising panic as I see his face screw up against the cold and the fear and the loneliness, his arms seeking me.

I pick him up. He quiets, an occasional gasp as he finishes his sobs. I convince myself to put him down again. I pick him up. His warm body is limp in gratitude of being held and comforted and fed.

The house is quiet at 3 am except for our moonlit perambulations. Walking to stay awake only helps so much – because eventually I am too tired to stand.

I try reading a book but wake up with my baby softly sleeping and the knowledge I can't remember what happened in the last five pages.

I try listening to podcasts, but quickly abandon that idea, the voices of the speakers too trained in the NPR-style to keep me awake, regardless of how interesting the topic.

I try watching TV. That gives me a few extra nights. But eventually I start waking up partway through episodes that I haven't seen before, waking to the credits of movies I definitely didn't watch...

I start to hallucinate – maybe that is the wrong word? Maybe it is that I start to have trouble discerning waking from dreamland. I repeatedly ask my husband if I have told him something he says I have already done three times. I look at pictures on my phone I don't remember taking, from yesterday. I find the end of the internet.

I survive on naps when someone else can hold the baby – I almost instantly start dreaming. I start to look forward to my toddler's bedtime because it is an excuse to get twenty minutes of sleep next to him in the dark until his little cool hand pats my face gently and tells me I was snoring and keeping him awake.

I don't know what to tell you. The science says we are right and you should just figure it out. Just figure it out, on limited sleep, it isn't that hard. Why would you need support when no one else does?

I mean, all of the things I have sold to you SHOULD have worked. If they didn't – well, like, user error, right? I'm no scientist. Speaking of SCIENCE, I found the BEST cream you can use to improve your under-eye bags from not sleeping because you have a baby! Aff-linked in my bio, friends!

Look, this isn't hard I tell myself, shaking my head to clear the cobwebs.

Just: don't sleep.

Resist the temptation to identify with one of those golden retrievers you see on social media, the ones laying down, exhausted, slow blinking in seeming ecstasy in their whelping boxes while eleven puppies root around their nipples and curl against them, softly grunting –

Resist the temptation to sleep like a mother grizzly reclined in a sun-drenched meadow of clover and wildflowers, her arms wrapped around her nursing cubs –

Resist the temptation to sleep like a great ape, a gorilla or bonobo, maybe, who, at the end of the day, swings her baby into their nest and stares adoringly into their sweet large eyes, softly stroking their baby's head and back while the two of them drift off –

Don't sleep like all of the other animals in the kingdom, don't sleep like all of your millennia of ancestors –

Don't sleep

Don't sleep

Don't sleep



Ocean Storm
Digital Photograph
Nancy Henry, DVM
Faculty, Anatomy

What I Fear Is the Silence

Melanie Barnard, MD
Faculty, General Surgery

The beeping of monitors.
The whispers of nurses.
The solemn tones of doctors.
The noise of the NICU comes in waves but the constant is its presence.
It hinders sleep but each awakening is welcomed dearly.

What I fear isn't noise.
I don't fear the bustling of activity.
I don't fear the stress of discussion.
I don't fear the interruptions for measurements or medications.
I wait anxiously instead for each speech and movement.

I no longer can wish for the quiet peaceful days.
Quiet and aloneness to rest and recover.
For what I fear is the stillness.
The lack of need for more to do.
And the certainty that comes when the actions and words have ceased.

So, the monitors keep beeping.
The nurses speak in whispers.
The doctors shake their heads and give plans in calm, solemn tones.
I cherish each noise, my heart beating with it.

And in each pause... I feel myself freeze over.

In each break... I feel my heart break with it.

For what I fear is not the noise, because the noise means life, means hope.

What I fear is the Silence.

My Voice

Oluwaseun Adeleke

Staff, OEDI

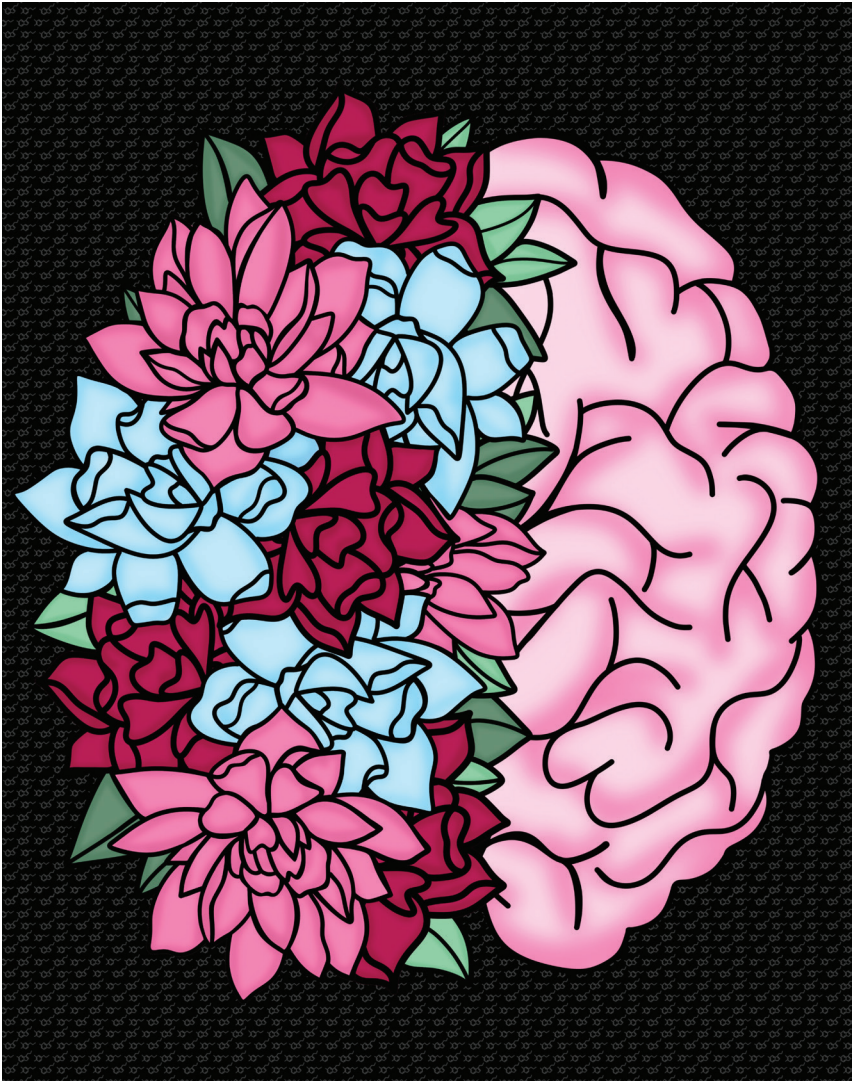
“Growing through the years in a culture, rich and strong,
I saw, in many ways, the power of my tongue.
Yet ever so subtly I perceived ‘the voice,’
Teaching me to keep it low, and never make a noise.

I thought I had it all figured out, as knowledge and degrees I gained,
Venturing to distant lands, where majestic landscapes reigned.
Now, it’s time for my voice to rise, in lands where speech is free.
But alas, they don’t grasp my words; louder must my voice be.

‘I love your voice,’ I’m often told, but asked to repeat my say,
In a world brimming with voices, why speak if unheard in the fray?
So, in pain I chose once more to hide,
Keeping the melody of my words inside.

Yet, surrounded by colleagues and mentors, unyielding in their gaze,
‘Speak again, we’re listening,’ they’d insist amidst life’s maze.
Gradually, from depths concealed,
My voice emerged, its strength revealed.

Living through every evolving phase,
We carve out spaces in myriad ways,
For voices once silent, through ours, to resound,
In our tapestry of differences, our unity is found.
‘Our diversity is indeed our strength,’ we proudly avow,
Lending our voices, in a powerful chorus, now.”



Joy in Bloom

Digital Art

Maddie Stacey

Student, Class of 2026

Hymn to Morning

Sumi Rebeiro, MD
Faculty, Psychiatry

With aching neck and gritty eyes I rise into darkness, from dreams of empowering princes with a kiss and seeking out physic with wades through rivers on my morning walk to work, into the close hot dark of my room and the wide cool dark beyond its windows, shut against nightnoise.

Sunlight is later, is not morning, is not those first warm sips of dark black coffee under a lamp which is just the wrong shade of yellow to be real, is not sitting before a computer and forcing the settling gears of my brain, late whirring to produce constantly-beautiful flights of fancy, visions which enchant even when prosaic or terrifying, to mesh and produce words rather than images.

I am wrung with tiredness from those dreams even when rested; they elude my fingers as they always have, the merest brush of their butterfly wings lending the slight glittering touch of fairy dust visible on some happy phrase from my pen.

The sun comes late but welcome through the window, touching the side of my face, my back, gleaming in welcome when I turn round; the liquid joy of summer, light the pale yellow of electrum, a world bathed in blended gold and silver inviting my touch.

I do not often sing hymns of praise to wakefulness; I long too often for sleep; but this, this sense of presence and the privilege of being alive and able to think, and the luck of being awake to savor it, deserves a hymn.

The speech of the conscious, too, is tongued with a fire beyond the language of slumber: Lit by the warmth of singing, unsleeping stars, and cradled by the closest.



Winter Lake Sundown
Print from Original Pastel Painting
Mary Corrigan Stjern
Community Member



Dancing Root

**Digital Photograph
Riya Britenstine
Staff, Surgery**

Rural Route

Taylor Hill, PhD
Faculty, MEDPREP

Snuck along for a ride one autumn day
in my dad's package delivery truck

We bebopped along bumpy country roads
and stopped for lunch at a local café

Nearing the end of his longer-than-nine-
to-five workday, he pulled over and paused —

Idyll landscape for miles and endless miles
Golden hour light, a lifetime later

I will never forget he smiled and said:
“can you believe that this is my office?”

Four Fun Facts About the Solar System

Kanicia Green
Student, Class of 2024

Grandpa has always had this odd fascination with the stars and the sky. I was merely a few weeks old when he walked into an open field to hold me up, arms extended, to the moon. Although a laughable spectacle for those watching, reminding them of a scene from *The Lion King*, Grandpa found it necessary. I can also recall the first time Grandpa called me smart. As a first grader I told him that I learned in science class that clouds were made of rain. He beamed with pride, smiling with his handsome, gapped smile, "That's my smart girl." From then on, he'd talk to me about different planets, galaxies, constellations, and astronauts. He even gifted me my very own telescope as a high school graduation gift.

The sun is one big ball of fire. Born and raised in the segregated South, Grandpa was no stranger to the horrors of racism and inequity. He grew up a thirty-minute drive from where 14-year-old Emmett Till was lynched for allegedly whistling at a white woman. Grandpa was conditioned from a young age to be aware of his skin and how the world viewed it as an inherent threat. Incredibly, Grandpa was one of five elementary schoolers integrated into an all-white school in the 1960s. Torment, harassment, and violence were commonplace in his youth. The 'N word' became his identity before he could even spell it.

Stars are assembled far before we ever see them. Despite the odds stacked against him, Grandpa was determined to make a better life for himself and subsequent future generations. He took his education seriously. He studied accounting briefly at a Historically Black College which he was unable to complete due to finances and family obligations. Shortly after, during the Great Migration of the 1970s, Grandpa moved his wife and two children from Charleston, Mississippi to Springfield, Illinois in search of better economic and equitable opportunity. He worked odd jobs until he landed at Pepsi as a delivery truck driver. Grandpa prides himself on never taking a day off during his 30-year tenure until retirement at 65 years old. He's known around town as 'The Pepsi Man', always hardworking and friendly to everyone he meets.

Footprints left on the Moon won't disappear as there is no wind. Grandpa's life lessons were permanently ingrained in my mind and soul. One of my core childhood memories is sitting next to him on the couch. He'd tell me about Black history in the same way other grandparents might read 'The Princess and the Frog'. He'd tell me about the Doll Test of the 40s, which exposed implicit bias against Black skin and how these biases began in formative years. He'd talk about the Tuskegee Syphilis experiment which was one of the many instances that led the Black community to distrust medical professionals. I also remember Grandpa being hellbent on ensuring I grew up playing with Black Barbie dolls. At a young age, this was trivial for me. With hindsight, Grandpa was providing me with the confidence and knowledge to see my Black skin in a white coat.

Only 5% of the universe is visible from Earth. Decades after Grandpa held newborn-me to the heavens, he explained why he needed to do so. He was inspired by the movie *Roots*, in which Kunta Kinte held his daughter Kizzy to the sky in the African tradition to speak purpose into her life. My Grandpa, his resilience and discipline, his life lessons, and his exploratory nature remind me of what medicine means to me. Medicine is hard work and persistence. Medicine is faith mixed with science. Medicine is making a conscious effort to be knowledgeable about and addressing the past while ensuring the next generation is equipped for the better. Medicine is also having the wisdom to look up at the infinite possibilities and wonders of the future. Becoming a medical doctor is to make the life-long promise to never stop exploring.

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Office of Medical Humanities:
913 N Rutledge St.
PO Box 19603
Springfield, IL 62794
217-545-4261
scope@siumed.edu



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