

VERITAS

Spring 2013 Volume 25



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cover photo by Alexander Loeb

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Veritas is the UVA School of Medicine's literary and visual arts publication. Veritas has been student edited since 2000 and published annually since 1994. We print poetry, prose, essays, photography, illustrations and more, all submitted by UVA medical students.

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IF ONLY THEY KNEW - Axel Cooper

Who are we to think that we're any more alive than the stars?

Who spend their days burning, exploding, screaming their innermost selves to one another across the

mute emptiness of day to day void

Livers of a continuous present

Residents of an oceanic nothingness with the bigness to hold then, now, and forevermore
face to face to

face in an unyielding embrace

Dancers of a billion years' dance

Runners of an eternal race

Giving birth with their final act of death

Legions of celestial mothers patrolling heavenly haunts

And we, spectral sparks cast carelessly from the surface of our tumbling ember

Have the audacity to name them.

Spring - Christopher Aluezos

Spring! What,
with such running rivulets!
I can think of no better time,
to strip my epaulets.

Ribs exposed,
like mountainous ridges.
With no certainty I follow tracks,
crossing rivers, bridges.

In Spring, and only then,
do I feel ahead.
My early Renaissance -- trees still bare,
crab grass, my billowy bed.
Your face, touches of wan,
your hair pulled tight.
Like a newborn, scant lanugo,
penitential, beryllous, white!

Winter or Spring,
my questions still fail to distinguish.
What's the use? My only answer:
Spring forever, my only wish.



Joceline Vu



Bess Yeh

A Text From My Father - Tom Albert

'Maybe honey would be good with it,'
he says, about my tea. My throat aches
from days of cold and cough,
and the hot tea is a blessing
as it falls.

And he is right, about the honey.
And he is sweet to say it too,
all the way from Boston
in the way a father says such things,
always slightly concerned
with how I am sleeping, and
if I am exercising, and if it is warmer
in Virginia, than it is in Massachusetts
(it is), and if the attendings in clinic
are being nice to me, and if
I am still seeing 'what's her name'
from Alabama, with the accent,
and if I am sleeping.

The questions are the same.
And the answers are too.
There is a rhythm to it, a *faint music*,
as Hass might have said,
pittering and pattering back and forth
like the tennis balls we've volleyed
so many times before,
this love, familiar
and familial, that has no regard
for reason
and doesn't want it.



Bess Yeh

The Consultation - Yi Wang

Observe
this queen in her tower:
as far removed from these shores

as Rapunzel, twiddling her thumbs.
Rapunzel, who waits for a prince, any prince
to carry her from walls
slick as egg-yolk,
away from the endless parade of TV-dinners,
from episodes of *The Price is Right*.

This queen,
her uterus is a brimming teapot
spilling malignancy.
Spilling snails, dark as knives,
to fill the crevices of her body.

“I am so sad, so alone”

She sits in her tower and cries and cries.
She considers rope, fast-moving cars, fistfuls of pills,
a pulse of oxycodone
to flood her,
to quiet the flames licking at her ankles
and to end the waiting

“I am so sad, so alone”

All I could offer
was to turn the TV back on,
The Price is Right drowning out the sound
of my marrow humming, screaming.

Dissecting - Jonathan Coker

I cannot hold your hand
Your strong and lively hand
I held your very heart in mine
And too your soul, I held your mind
Your ink, your flesh, your sunken chest
I held your gaze, you held your breath

I knew you as no one else
As intimate as rape
Digits in every crevice
Drape upon your face
Push, then pull, prod, reflect
Lay prone, lay still, keep on, keep wet

But I cannot hold your hand

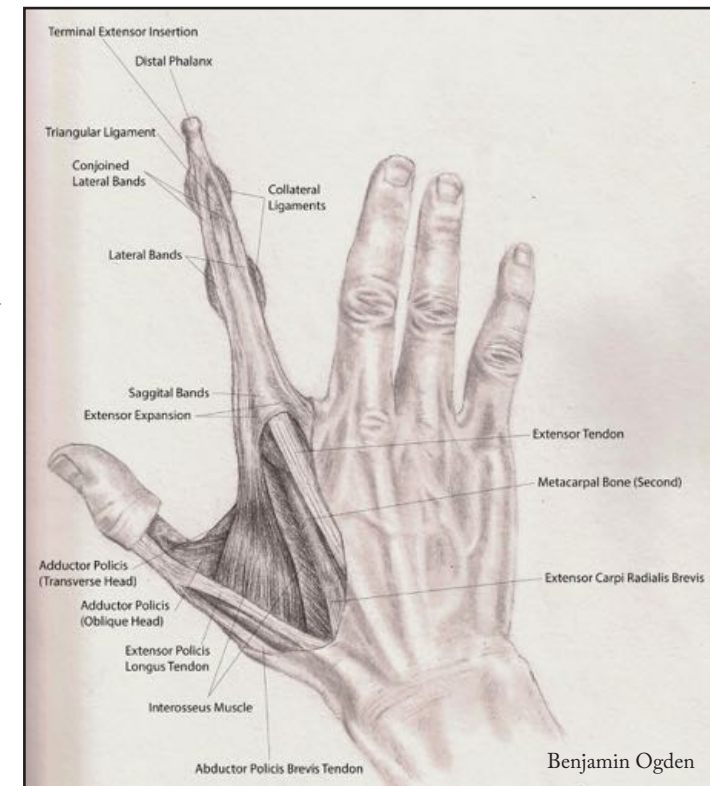
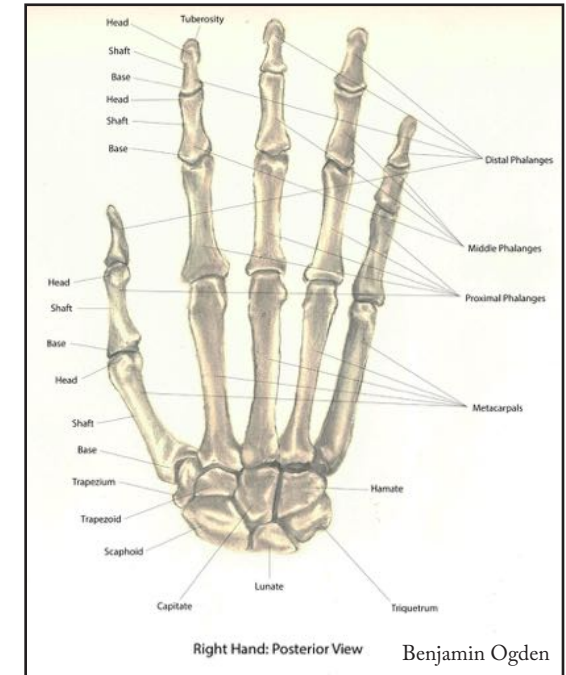
I'm sorry

I cannot hold your hand

I learned from what I did to you
Trust, I won't forget
What brought the two of us together
What was your final gift

And as your fingers
Even now
Lay flat against my table
I'd hold them tight,
Look in your eyes,
If I only I was able

But I cannot hold your hand





Still Here - Dan Luftig

When the fire dies down,
 You're still here.
 When the lightning dies down,
 They're still here.
 When the flood dies down,
 It's still here.
 And when the darkness lights up,
 I'm still here.

Thomas Ball

Headed Home - Elle Sowa

I see her tears streaming down,
 I read her red eyes.

"What's wrong?"
 "He's - gone," she responds.

Henry, an eight-year-old boy,
 in weeks, he will be headed home
 and leave the rehab hospital.

Cough-

Spray-

Cough-

Splatter-

Cough-

Stream of red

pooling on the linoleum.

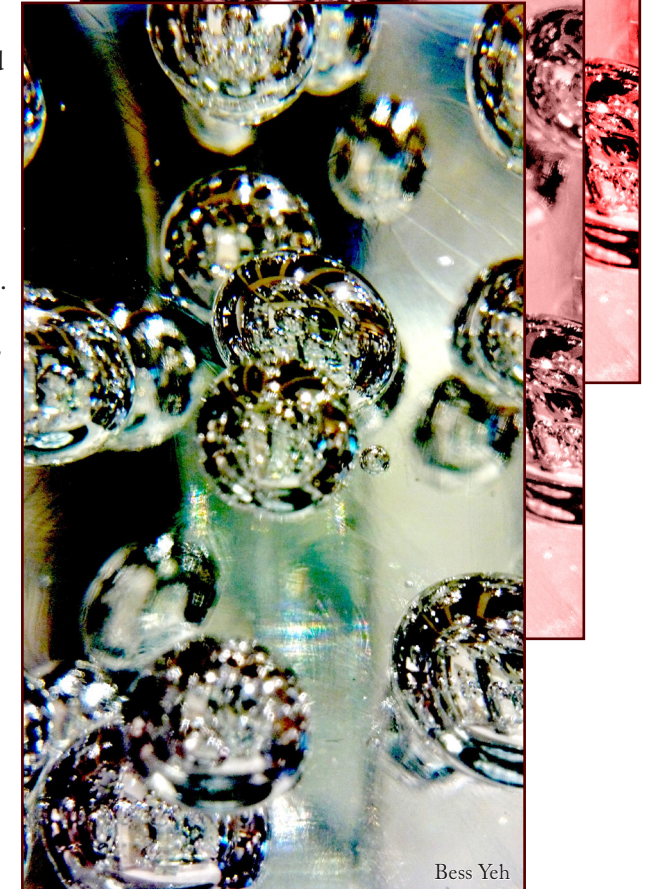
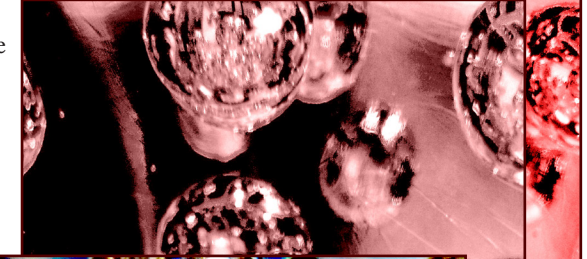
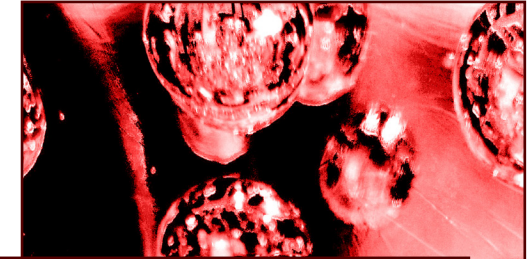
Pale, pulseless,
 sweaty sheen of his face,
 limbs limp,
 lying still in a stream of red.

Frantic footsteps, sprinting,

"Call a code!"

I rarely weep.
 Weddings, sad stories-
 when have I wept at those?

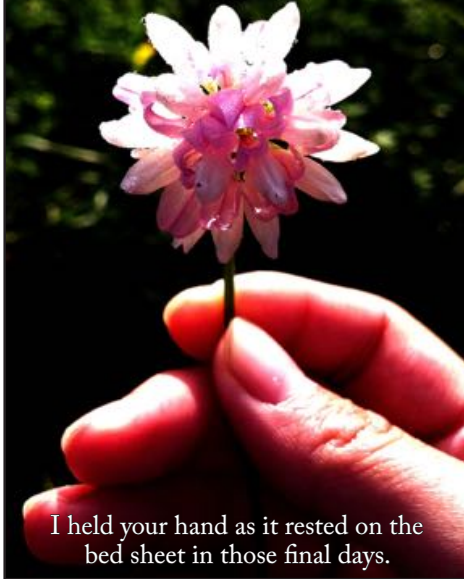
But as I headed home,
 I cried.



Bess Yeh

TRANSITIONS-Rebecca Donald

A reflection on the transition from life to death as well as my personal transition from serving as a hospital chaplain to becoming a medical doctor



Bess Yeh

I held your hand as it rested on the bed sheet in those final days.

Over the beeping of the machines you told me about your family. As you spoke of your daughter your eyes radiated pure joy and pride.

I glanced over at the windowsill where pictures drawn by your grandchildren and cards sent by family and friends brightened the otherwise sterile hospital room.

It was in that room where you welcomed me into your life. In that room, during your final days, you allowed me to be a part of your life.

I learned all about your children, your beloved husband who cared for you for so many years before his passing, and your wonderful grandchildren who brought so much joy to your life. We talked about your illness and what it

would be like to die. You didn't fear death, exactly, but it did make you sad to think of leaving your family behind.

For several days we sat together, sometimes talking and sometimes not.

As your strength waned in those final days I often found myself drawn to your room. I would enter quietly, sit down in a chair next to your bed, gently take your hand, and sit with you in silence as you took peaceful breaths.

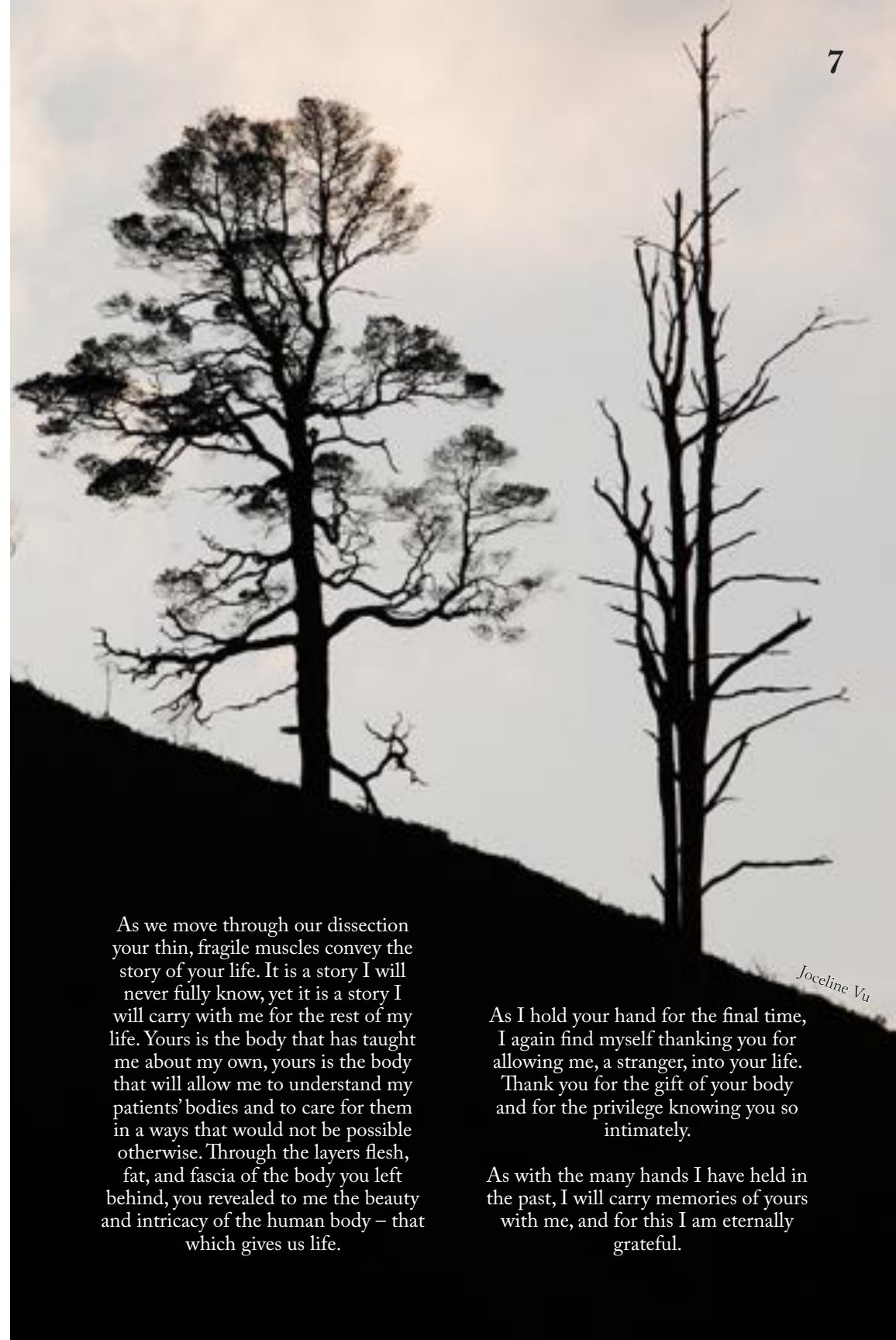
In that room you welcomed me, a stranger, into your life. You allowed me to get to know you, to hold your hand, to listen to you express your joys and fears, and to be present with you as you took your final breath.

Thank you for the privilege of letting me know you, for welcoming into your life at such a sacred time, and for allowing me to hold your hand as you departed this world in peace.

I hold your hand again, this time on a cold steel table rather than a bed. The warmth has gone out of your hands now, yet your painted fingernails remind me of the life that was once inside your now cold body.

As I clean your nude body and watch the dirty water drain, I think about all the times in your life that you likely bathed others. With a loving touch you washed the dirt off of your children and grandchildren, and in his final years you washed the body of your beloved husband. Now I am the one to wash you, the first of many privileged acts that you will allow me to perform on your body.

I find myself grasping your hand. Again you are welcoming me into your life, allowing me to observe and touch you in the most intimate of ways.



Joceline Vu

As we move through our dissection your thin, fragile muscles convey the story of your life. It is a story I will never fully know, yet it is a story I will carry with me for the rest of my life. Yours is the body that has taught me about my own, yours is the body that will allow me to understand my patients' bodies and to care for them in a ways that would not be possible otherwise. Through the layers flesh, fat, and fascia of the body you left behind, you revealed to me the beauty and intricacy of the human body – that which gives us life.

As I hold your hand for the final time, I again find myself thanking you for allowing me, a stranger, into your life. Thank you for the gift of your body and for the privilege knowing you so intimately.

As with the many hands I have held in the past, I will carry memories of yours with me, and for this I am eternally grateful.

The Hand Sanitizer Hierarchy

- Thomas Ratchford

After enough time, I recognize, yes—
The Hand Sanitizer Hierarchy.
Purell gel's the best, on without a trace;
and its foam's not bad, leaves a residue
that I ignore, laugh off, or bitch about.
But the worst, a curse in a god-damned can,
is the pressurized foam. I bemoan it,
how it haunts my hands—me—that
beastly grease,
tainting everything with unwanted slime
until I make time to rinse it away.
But that's not for now, it comes later on.
Whoosh-whoosh, swish-rub-swish.
Whoosh-whoosh, swish-rub-swish.
It is a pleasure to see all of you,
our satisfied patients, our successes,
imagined figures from our pre-med dreams:
the afro'd tyke here for his dire heart op
who was, (gulp), not supposed to survive it.
But you greeted us smiling, 'do intact.
As did you, kid, riding home a toy truck
the shade of your feverish spots before
we had introduced the magic potions.
But enough of this blithe reminiscing.
Whoosh-whoosh, swish-rub-swish.
Whoosh-whoosh, swish-rub-swish.

In I go again, trudging through routine.
No, ma'am, you don't need antibiotics,
and sorry the ER trip costs five grand.
Have a popsicle. Sweeten the bill much?
Sir, I'm sorry you're here too, don't leave—
even though your life's still on hold and we ...
still...don't know why your body is bleeding.
We'll figure it out in a day or two,
after spending your life savings...at least
you won't die. Is that a consolation?
I'm tired; enough of this banality.



The Medical Team - Christine Lu

Whoosh-whoosh, swish-rub-swish. Pfft-
pfft, swish-rub-swish.
In you go, you cheery shit, modern-day
Lady Macbeth, using our foam, walking
in to your girlfriend and her weeks-old son
who was ninety degrees on arrival.
Because as you know, and yes, so do we,
you shook him, hard, until he was quiet.
Currently, his body is here. Waiting.
To be called dead. Then maybe to give life
to sick babies who could use his organs.

Which is the only decency from this...
if vicarious life's better than none...
Though it doesn't matter. The state takes him.
For an autopsy. To put you away.
So this kid was robbed twice, which makes
me sick.
To waste his last shreds of life on you.
At least he was too young to realize
the dual tragedy of his life and death.
Pfft-pfft, swish-rub-swish. Pfft-pfft, swish-
rub-swish.
I'd better find a sink to wash this off.

Untitled - Helena Frischtak

"We are not supposed to live forever,"
I hear.

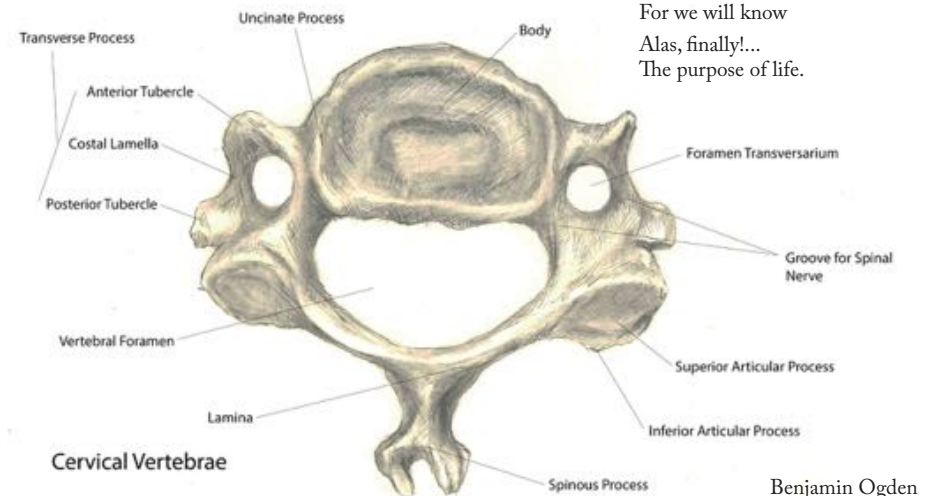
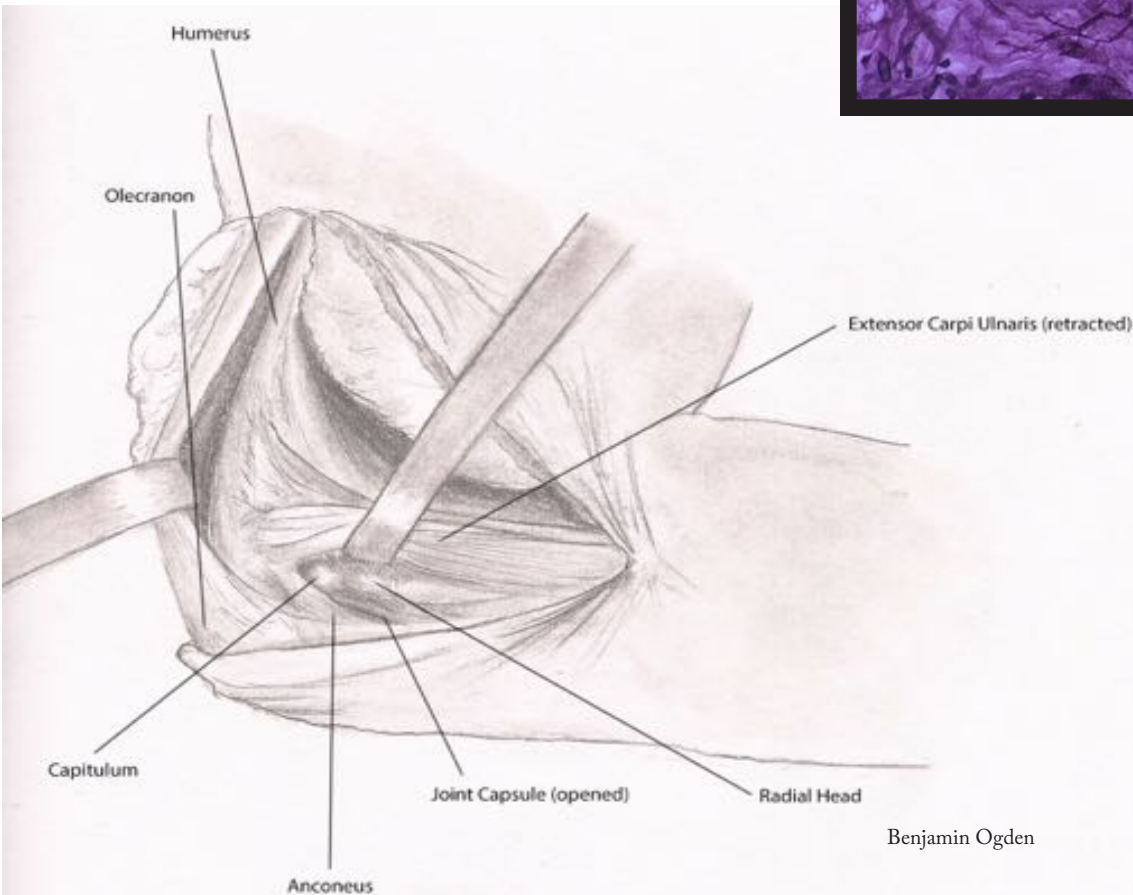
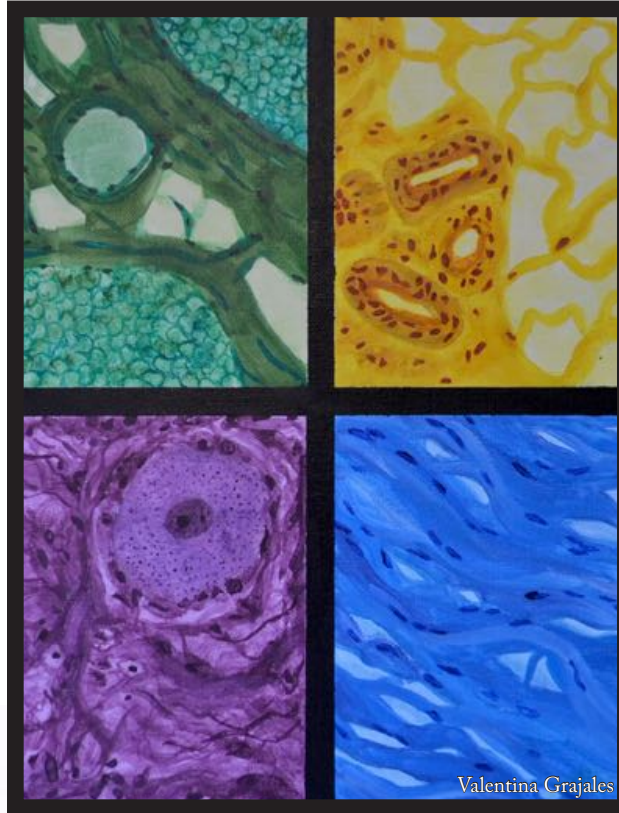
"It is okay to fall sick
Okay to suffer
And okay to die.
We are but mortals,
We are not God."

They argue:
Fear not death,
For it is natural,
And necessary
For the overarching cycle of life
(the recycling of energy)

They are upset:
Physicians keep pushing:
Developing vaccines,
Slowing old age,
Making the ugly attractive
(should not everyone find a mate and
reproduce?)
They are changing the course
That nature has in store for us

And physicists?
Physicists are unveiling the laws of the universe
From Copernicus to Newton
to Einstein to Greene
From the Theory of Special Relativity
"Time is but a dimension!"
To String Theory
"...and there are thirteen of them!"

But,
What if this is all a game?
What if we are not defying nature,
What if the point of it all is-precisely-
To solve the puzzle
That nature - or God, however you
call it - set forth?
If we keep pushing
Maybe we will understand
That question which burdens us all
That undying thought in any intelligent mind
That wants to know, quite simply:
Why are we here?



For is not that the point of science?
We strive to understand, ever more:
The microscopic particles that compose us
The microscopic bugs that attack us
The world we live in, and why it is so
The water, the winds, the oil down below
And the universe
And what lies "out there"
And what our role - our significance, really - is, in the grand scheme of things

And in the path of discovery,
We solve lives
Motivated by our fear of death,
Undeniably
(our eternal, irrational, overwhelming fear of death)
but also
By our hope—
Subconscious perhaps—
That maybe all this knowledge
Will one day answer our existential qualms
(...those very ones that set us apart from every other being)

So I propose:
Maybe we are *supposed* to culture stem cells
Supposed to vaccinate
And halt infectious diseases that once wiped out half the population
Supposed to prevent aging
Supposed to test on monkeys, on mice, and on fruit flies
Supposed to accelerate particles beneath Switzerland
Supposed to step on other planets,
And try to figure out the math that holds this universe together
Supposed to pollute,
And then dispollute
Supposed to wage war, heal casualties, and -eventually— declare peace

And one day, perhaps
We will solve the riddle
the challenge
That Nature has posited.
On that day,
We will be at peace
For we will know
Alas, finally!...
The purpose of life.



To Be a Cavalier - Alyssa Jenkins

Eight years ago I first set foot upon
this academic village in the hills.
Though young I eagerly took on
the life and learning found in Charlottesville.

As time passed by I grew in wit and heart
beneath the great and celebrated dome.
I studied hard to hone my skills and art
in a place once foreign now like home.

I've come to cherish this historic town
so rife with hopeful dreams and lessons learned,
but now it's time to don the cap and gown
a symbol of the honors we have earned.

Once more I'll walk down Jefferson's great lawn
with heavy heart but memories that live on.

Battle for Home - Jason Hogan

At a young age I was drafted and told to fight communism abroad
...Some place named Vietnam.
Thick trees covered the ghostly enemy we fought
so they sprayed our ally Agent Orange throughout.
Higher ranks told us not to worry,
even as my clothes were seared and my eyes burned sorely.



Jennifer Sohn

I survived that hell for one postponed.
Another battle in the land of democracy I fought for, My Home.
Free health checks at the VA filled me with fright
That I might be the next victim of our old ally.
But nothing... Just a pat on the back. Nods of empty reassurance.

So I buried those fears deep with all my might.
And did the only thing I knew in life - fought the wrong & Protected the right.
Twenty years as a sheriff. Plus five at my daughter's school.
A gun at my side and the remnants of our friend, Agent Death,
Ever coursing through my veins.

Christmas came, as it does every year.
Except this time it came with a weakness - It soon fulfilled every fear.
First went the left side, Three weeks later my speech.
Ten weeks later, I lay trapped in my body,
Miles from the place that I was prepared to die for, My Home.

Two blinks for a yes. One blink for a no.
How does a tear fit into this new language and show
All that I want, all that I need, all that I feel within this former ally, my body.
The tumor engulfing my brainstem continues to grow
As does the medical parade - A pat on the back. Nods of empty reassurance.

A hole in my neck now allows me to breathe -
Roughly the size of the bullets that made my comrades cry out and bleed.

The secretions restrict any hope of escape,
Too sick to die in a place all humans should wish to pass, Their Home.
No helicopter comes for this wounded soldier. Merely a transfer. Three East.

Notes on Perspective - Erin Ebaugh

M.M.'s story is not an uncommon one—she is an aging lady in good health but unfortunately with progressively declining cognitive abilities. To those around her, the “mild cognitive impairment” is looking more like Alzheimer's every day. Meanwhile, she has no idea what everyone is making such a big fuss over.

After watching my own grandmother's decline in the last few years of her life with Alzheimer's, this patient reminds me very much of my grandmother's early days during which, if you didn't know better, she seems pretty “with it.” But, in the subtleties, you can catch glimpses of the cognitive deficits if you look hard enough. The fact that she's sure it is September, but doesn't often volunteer knowing the date because she is used to being corrected. That she is sure she's taking all of her medications as scheduled, but they all run out at different times. That she doesn't understand why she isn't allowed to drive, even though she has recently failed a formal driving evaluation with an occupational therapist.

In the end I find that managing the patient with a slew of chronic medical problems (whether they happen to be 30 or 98 years old) turns out to be much easier than managing the patient discussed in this case, because despite complicated polypharmacy issues in the patient with many medical problems, caring for a patient is comparatively straightforward when they have insight into their condition and are able to participate in that care. In the patient with dementia however, because of the lack of insight, even the smallest day-to-day activities can escalate into huge problems, whether it be about driving, eating meals, taking medications, or whatever else the patient does during their day.

So although we can never truly understand what the patient with dementia is going through, consider these notes on perspective and try to walk in a patient with dementia's shoes for the day. In your future patient interviews, don't focus on the MMSE points your patient is losing, but the *independence* he or she is losing, and it may help you understand the frustration and confusion coming out in the interview. Even if we can't fully understand what the patient is going through, we certainly can *try* to understand, and who knows—we may help the patient better understand what's going on in the process.



September 19th, 2012

Dear diary,

I had another appointment at some sort of doc's office today, and just like always the doc kept asking questions I don't understand. No one trusts me to take my medicine anymore, not the doc, not the nurses that live near me, and not even my daughter. I fill my pillbox every day all by myself, but they think I don't do it right I suppose. The doc also asked if I have been incontinent "again"... I think they always ask me this, but it doesn't make sense. Maybe other people have problems with that, but I find it insulting that they keep accusing me. I've never had problems with that before; I'm not that old! All I have wrong with me is silly hemorrhoids and dry skin, and at my age I'd say I could be doing a lot worse.



What frustrates me most is that I'm not allowed to drive, because the docs and my daughter say it's not safe. Well let me tell you, I have been driving for longer than any of those people have been alive, so who are they to tell me what's safe and what's not?! I am sure they have my best interest at heart, but sometimes it feels as though they are all against me. They don't know what it's like to have your independence taken away... after a lifetime of taking care of yourself, to all of a sudden need others to take you places, get your groceries for you, pick up your medicine. It makes everything so much more difficult, and yet it seems that the more times I bring up wanting to drive again, the less they trust me to take care of myself. It's like they think I am crazy or something. In any case, I have an appointment again in three months. Maybe I will be able to convince them then.

After the doctor's appointment, the rest of the day was actually rather pleasant. Lunch was very tasty and the vegetables weren't overcooked today. Someone came to play the piano for a bit in the afternoon. Dinner was ok but I didn't care for the pie much afterward. It was unseasonably cold for September. Another day has come and gone.

Until next time, M.M.

11/29/12 - Progress note for pt M.M.

S: M.M. is an 81yo F w/Afib, mild cognitive impairment, HTN, UC, hypothyroidism, and incontinence (urinary and fecal) who presents today for routine f/u. Pt states memory has not been declining, her only trouble is sometimes misplacing diary she keeps appointments in. Pt claims to take meds regularly from pillbox she fills herself. Pt does not have insight as to why she no longer drives, and continues to perseverate on this issue. Pt alleges she has not been incontinent, but nursing staff at facility report otherwise. Pt admits hemorrhoids occasionally bleed but are usually w/o sx's so pt does not desire tx. Pt has persistent problem of dry skin; uses lotion once a day w/no observable benefit. Pt is not interested in further discussion of this issue. Pt has good appetite and good energy throughout the day. She exercises w/a trainer doing strengthening exercises. Pt sleeps well at night.

O: HR 75, BP 118/72, Temp 36.3, RR 16, SpO2 98% RA, Weight 158.8lbs.

Gen- well-developed, well-nourished F, pleasant and cooperative on exam

Head/neck- NCAT, neck supple w/no LAD

CV- RRR, nS1S2, with no murmurs/rubs/gallops

Resp- CTAB, no wheezes/rhonchi/rales

Abd- NABS all 4 quadrants, no rebound/guarding

Skin- dry and flaky over entire surface of arms, no concerning lesions

Neuro- CNII-XII grossly intact; alert to person and place only; pt declined MMSE ("I don't have time for this nonsense!")

Psych- appropriate mood and affect

A: M.M. is an 81yo F presenting for f/u on multiple medical issues, overall doing well.

P: Afib- will check INR today.

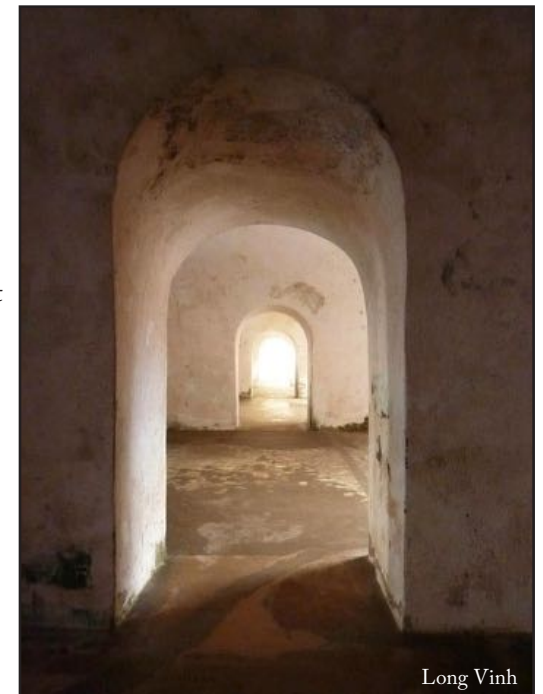
Cognitive impairment- pt has been instructed to bring meds w/her for each visit to monitor which ones she has been regularly taking. Pt has previously been evaluated for driving by OT, and have reminded pt once again of this. Pt verbalizes understanding.

HTN- well-controlled, continue current regimen.

Hemorrhoids & dry skin- will defer tx as these issues do not bother pt.

Health maintenance- will check thyroid function studies and lipids.

(Diary entry and fictional progress note by Erin Ebaugh. Narrative on page 20.)



Long Vinh

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Solomon Dawson



Alexander Loeb

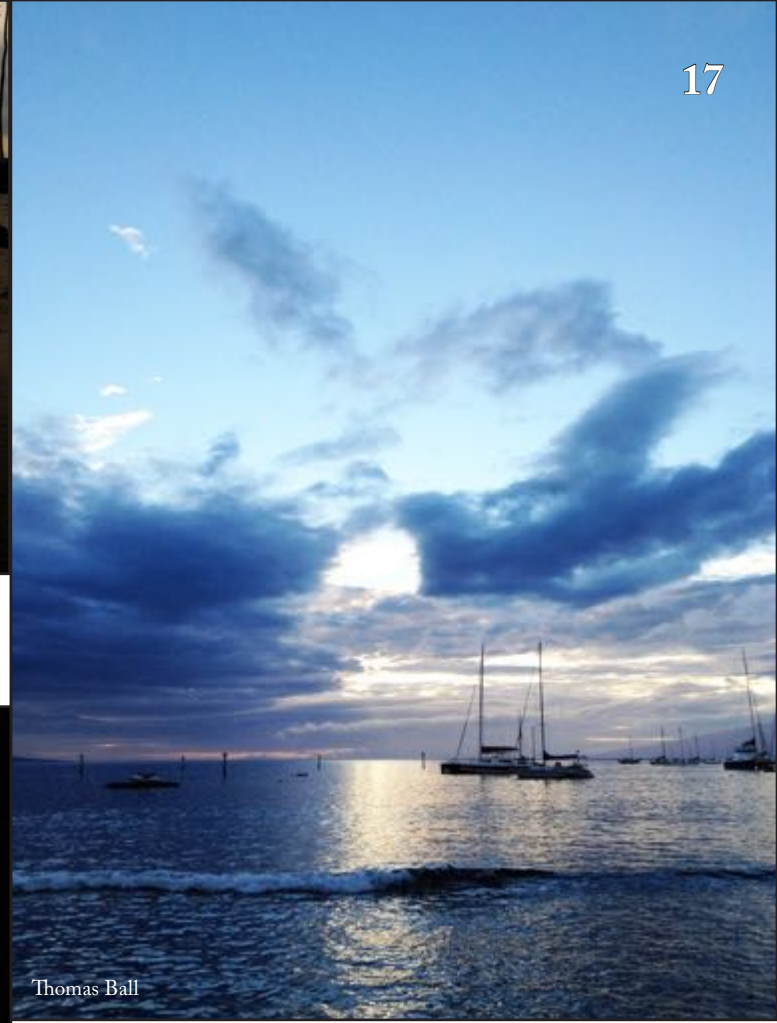


Jennifer Sohn

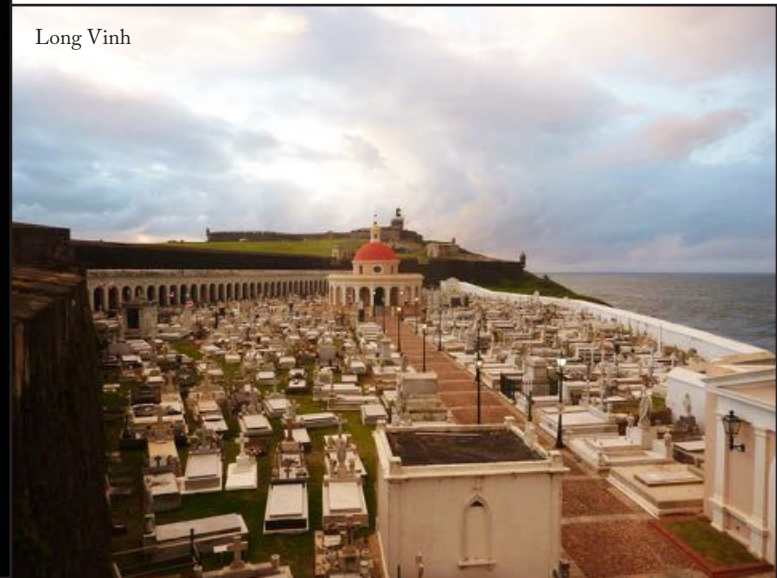


Joceline Vu

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Thomas Ball



Long Vinh

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Armando Huaranga



Alexander Loeb

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Bess Yeh



Dani Carroll

Fifty-five Word Stories on Origami Cranes

Seeing a Doctor Cry for the First Time - Bess Yeh

He verbally tore
into the nurses.
A badly burnt boy lay
unconscious,
completely exposed
to the elements.
Raw wounds had converted, now needing once-avoidable surgery.
In elevator, he continued to vent frustration with words,
ebbed to silent tears of agony.
Afterwards, I heard from other residents
he had a son
at home
around that age.

-Bess Yeh

First Surgery Weekend Call - Bess Yeh

Zooming through unfamiliar patients' charts,
For one, did a
double-take--
vitals:
blood-colored
serial troponins:
at inhumane levels
Denying medical instinct,
clinging to innocence's belief in life's tenacity,
Nothing prepared me.
Foreboding absence
of beeping, blinking lights,
Shocking shape
of supine anthropoid ghost
I've seen only on TV.
This time, it's not just a
cheap mannequin.

Meeting the Cadaver - Bess Yeh

First experience of a dead body was shockingly
not shocking.
Intimidated by dark predictions
of unexpected
fear we should feel,
Watched as
zipper revealed
wizen feet,
deflated penis,
surgically-marred abdomen,
wrinkly face sporting a gaudy metal tag earring.
Nothing.
His stiff arm,
rudely I prodded.
I felt ashamed by
my apathy
toward this elderly gentleman.

Firsts - Bess Yeh

My first amputation.
A schizophrenic, completely unnerved by the loss, anticipating recovery.
A wooden peg, like a pirate, he eagerly shared. Maybe a parrot. When?
Soon, I assured, as I gently tucked the blankets back around his tender stump.
As an afterthought, he added, I love you; can I marry you?
My first marriage proposal.

1000 Origami Cranes + 55-word stories

I've always loved the legend of the 1000 origami cranes. According to the legend, if one folds 1000 cranes in one year, it will bring eternal good luck. Because of the legend, the origami crane became a sign of happiness, fortune, prosperity, and longevity. These cranes are placed or hung in homes, and are also given as gifts to newly wedded couples, newborn babies, or the ill. This legend was popularized during WWII by Sadako Sasasaki. She had leukemia from the radiation caused by the atomic bombing. Her wish was to live, which she tried to achieve by folding 1000 cranes. She only reached 644 when her arms became too weak. She soon passed away but her classmates finished the remaining 356 in memory of her.

I folded cranes which represented memories and stories during my four years in medical school. I made each crane unique by using various types or sizes of paper to depict how each memory has special meaning for me. On several of the cranes, I recorded some memories in the form of 55-word stories. My wish in folding these cranes is to become a better person and doctor.

-Bess Yeh

