Wild Onions

The 2021 editorial team presents Wild Onions “Vision” with the distinct honor of providing a platform for our community to express the shared challenges and triumphs emblematic of an extraordinary year. Our contributors truly represent how our collective vision has changed as our world has changed. This issue marks the artistic interpretation of a year of reckoning. Together we experienced the global pandemic in our world-class healthcare system and our everyday lives. Contributions highlight a collection of work that mirrors our necessity to confront inequality, civil unrest, discrimination, disease, and sorrow. Likewise, creative expression in our pages strikes a balance of growing toward acceptance, recognizing beauty, and cultivating hope for our future.

The beauty of Wild Onions is its capacity to create a vibrant, creative, and expressive community year after year. The Department of Humanities at the Pennsylvania State University College of Medicine publishes Wild Onions annually. This edition features work by individuals affiliated with Penn State Health Milton S. Hershey Medical Center, including patients, students, faculty, physicians, residents, nurses, staff, volunteers, and family and community members. Wild Onions encourages creative writing and artistic work that seeks to describe and understand the experiences of health, illness, and treatment, especially caregiving and receiving care.

Selection Process:

Each year, we are fortunate to receive hundreds of high-quality submissions of original creative writing, photography, and artwork. All entries are reviewed by medical student editors, and a subset is selected for inclusion in the publication. Particularly stellar pieces are identified and sent on to the corresponding art, creative writing, photography, and theme judges for review and selection.

This year we are offering awards—one each in creative writing, photography, and art—for the following categories:

- Students and Residents
- Healthcare Providers and Faculty
- Patients
- Community, Family Members, and Staff

Additionally, we are awarding three prizes, one for each genre, recognizing work that best exemplifies the theme, “Vision.”

Submissions are due by January 15 of each calendar year and can be sent via email to:
wildonions@pennstatehealth.psu.edu

Visit our website to download a copy of Wild Onions at http://sites.psu.edu/wildonions

Wild Onions

The wild onion is a common garden-variety weed, a hardy plant that grows almost anywhere and tends to spring up in unexpected places throughout the woods, fields, and roadides. It blossoms into an unusual purple flower. The underground bulb, if tasted, yields a pungent, spicy flavor. The wild onion symbolizes the commonplace, yet surprising, beauty living and growing around us all the time. An uncultivated spice, it unexpectedly thrives and—if we take time to notice—enhances life.

From the top, left to right: Swea Joshi, Bridget Rafferty, Kevin Chang, Marsia Riley, Janelle Welkie, Elias Harlins, Haley Hartman, Swathi Mettela, Allison Ching, Benjamin Watt, Gianna Daffilio, Hanel W. Eberly, Kyle Mautzler, Pallavi Kulikarni, Sweta Joshi, Krista Hartmann, Zachary High, Swati Joshi, Marissa Riley, Pallavi Kulikarni, MII, Andrea Lin, MSIII, Kyle Mautzler, MSI, Swathi Mettela, MSI, Jonathan Pham, MSI, Hanel W. Eberly, MSI, Krista Hartmann, MSI, Jonathan Pham, MSI, Pallavi Kulikarni, MSI, Swathi Mettela, MSI, Jonathan Pham, MSI, Hanel W. Eberly, MSI.
ART: Devon Stuart, MA, CMI
Devon is an award-winning Certified Medical Illustrator with fourteen years of experience creating visual communications content for science and medicine. Through her company, Devon Medical Art, LLC, she creates illustrations and 3D animations that help medical professionals to share their research and patients to understand their care. She earned a Master of Arts in Medical and Biological Illustration from Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. Devon lives in Hershey, Pa., with her husband, two children, and their dog.

CREATIVE WRITING: Heather Hamilton, PhD
Heather Hamilton is the author of Here is a Clearing (Poetry Society of America, 2019). The recipient of an Academy of American Poets prize, she teaches English and creative writing at Penn State Harrisburg.

PHOTOGRAPHY: Danilo Hess, AAS and Stacey Cunningham, BFA
From an early age, Filipino-American Danilo Hess was perfecting his eye in photography through different fine art mediums such as photorealism and painting. While in college he discovered his passion for the darkroom and moved to New York City to pursue a degree in photography at the Fashion Institute of Technology. Pittsburgh native Stacey Cunningham studied photography and fine art at the Carnegie Mellon pre-college academy and earned a BFA from Parsons School of Design in New York City, where she continues to pursue her dream working as a stylist. Stacey met Danilo while working with a shared client–her keen sense of color and texture was the perfect complement to his beautifully composed, cinematic quality photos. They are based in New York City with their rescue chihuahua, Chai, and are often found traveling the globe, collaborating on photo shoots, editorials, and other creative projects.

THEME: Ophelia Chambliss, MA
Ophelia M. Chambliss, a fine artist from York, Pa., participates in solo and group exhibitions as well as distinguished juried shows throughout the country. Her large-scale and permanent art installations can be experienced throughout Pennsylvania. Realistic cubism pervades her signature painting style where she favors a color palette of rich jewel tones. Each piece fits a theme or the subject matter. She paints with both oil and acrylic. Ophelia holds a Bachelor’s degree in communication from Penn State University and combines her visual communication with verbal and written communication to tell the story behind her work. She earned a Masters of Arts degree in communication from Penn State University with an emphasis on critical media discourse analysis.

What does “Vision” mean to you?
Welcome to the 2021 edition of Wild Onions! Each issue of Wild Onions has a theme. I have the honor of introducing this year’s theme: “Vision.”
Vision has different meanings depending on context. As individuals, we have a measurable vision corresponding to the clarity or sharpness of what we see compared to a standard. For example, a person with 20/20 vision can see what an average individual can see on the eye chart when standing 20 feet away. As employees of Penn State Health and Penn State College of Medicine, we share an aspirational vision to be a world leader in the transformation of health care and in the enhancement of health for people everywhere. Vision also can refer to an idea or picture in your imagination. When I think about Wild Onions, my vision is of a collective work that enriches lives through creativity in writing, art, and photography.

What does “Vision” mean to you? We posed this question to the Penn State Health and Penn State College of Medicine communities and were overwhelmed by the response. As you will see in this year’s edition of Wild Onions, we work among highly talented individuals with a remarkable ability to create and inspire.

I want to thank all of the contributors for their willingness to share their gifts with us. Creative works—both written and visual—are deeply personal and it takes courage to open oneself up to others. An incredible team of faculty, students, and staff are responsible for creating the 2021 edition of Wild Onions. Thank you to Kevin Chiang and Bridget Rafferty, co-senior editors; Editor-in-Chief Dr. Bernice Hausman; and Deborah Tomazin and Kerry Royer, managing editors. It is clear that Wild Onions is a labor of love for those responsible for its publication.

We hope you enjoy this very special edition of Wild Onions!
Warm Regards,

David Quillen, MD
2021 Guest Editor

What does “Vision” mean to you?
David Quillen, MD
George and Barbara Blankenship Professor
Chair, Department of Ophthalmology
2021 Guest Editor, Wild Onions
Welcome to “Vision,” the 2021 Edition of Wild Onions!

What a year it has been for all of us. When we selected this year’s theme and embarked on the journey for this year’s publication in the summer of 2020, we had a limited view of what lay ahead. Now, with the benefit of hindsight, we see that this was an incredible year of creativity and ingenuity on the part of our contributors.

We initially worried about receiving enough submissions given the unpredictability and all of the change we faced over the past year, and yet you all responded with vigor, helping to produce what we feel is one of the most unique and powerful editions of Wild Onions to date! The selection process this year was especially difficult because we had so many incredible pieces from which to choose. We thank every one of our artists, photographers, and writers for their time, creativity, and willingness to share their vulnerability with the Wild Onions community. Their vision has provided us all with a glimpse into life from a multitude of angles, transforming this year’s edition into a collectively beautiful publication rich in emotion and experience. We hope you are as touched by this year’s pieces as our staff was. Now, as we approach summer 2021, we again wonder what the upcoming year will hold. We are grateful to have been able to work with such a diverse and enthusiastic student team, the largest that Wild Onions has ever seen! As editors, we rest assured that the publication is in great hands, both with a committed staff of underclass students waiting to take the reins and the most unique and powerful editions of Wild Onions to date! The selection process this year was especially difficult because we had so many incredible pieces from which to choose. We thank every one of our artists, photographers, and writers for their time, creativity, and willingness to share their vulnerability with the Wild Onions community. Their vision has provided us all with a glimpse into life from a multitude of angles, transforming this year’s edition into a collectively beautiful publication rich in emotion and experience. We hope you are as touched by this year’s pieces as our staff was. Now, as we approach summer 2021, we again wonder what the upcoming year will hold. We are grateful to have been able to work with such a diverse and enthusiastic student team, the largest that Wild Onions has ever seen! As editors, we rest assured that the publication is in great hands, both with a committed staff of underclass students waiting to take the reins and with a community eager to share their work.

Thank you for this opportunity to serve as senior student editors in this year like no other.

Sincerely,

Kevin and Bridget

Our 2021 Senior Student Co-Editors

Kevin Chiang, MSIV

Kevin grew up in the suburbs of North Potomac, Md. He earned undergraduate degrees in both Mathematics and Physiology & Neurobiology at the University of Maryland, College Park, where he was part of the Gemstone Honors Program. After spending a year working as a medical scribe in multiple emergency departments, he began medical school at Penn State in Hershey, where he is enrolled in the M/Ed program. In his free time, he enjoys CrossFit, outdoor activities, music, exploring restaurants, and spending time with friends. Kevin is excited to begin a Pediatrics residency at UPMC Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh and hopes to combine his love of pediatrics and medical education into a career as a program director of a residency program in the future.

Bridget Rafferty, MFA, MSIV

Bridget hails from the beautiful hills of Grampian, Pa., where she grew up on the land that was her great-grandfather’s farm. She earned undergraduate degrees in Biology and Graphic Design from Gannon University and Mercyhurst College in Erie, Pa., then completed a Master of Fine Arts in Medical and Biological Illustration at the University of Michigan. She worked as a freelance designer/illustrator and fine arts teacher in the Seattle area for 12 years before returning to Pennsylvania for medical school. Bridget will complete her intern year in Pediatrics at Geisinger Medical Center in Danville, Pa., and then head to Milwaukee, Wis., in 2022 for Diagnostic Radiology training at the Medical College of Wisconsin.

Countdown

© Estelle Green, MSIV

It’s now been 10 months since our world was taken over. Then on Thanksgiving, 9 households got together. He 8 and laughed without thinking of others. Made the long drive home after 7 hours. 6 PM I get the call I wish not to remember – it only took 3 days for gran to be taken over I wanted to yell and point fingers, but what 4? It’s now reached 3 family members – no more, I implore. I’m trying hard for I know it’s wrong of me 2 resent. The people who went to this 1 superspreader event.

The Voyage

© Rachel Wemhoff, MD

Resident, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology

The sky knows nothing of a virus that slipped stealthily into the seams of humanity. Shearing through the fabric of normalcy, striking down socialization. While the threads of communication were stretched thin and made artificial. Through cables, screens, pings to telephone towers. Until the distance between us was palpable. The sun will not remember the days no one dared to go outside. Masks obscured the smiles of strangers. Until no one bothered to smile at all. Averted eyes as if one look could be contagious. Spring and summer will flow unhindered. The vessel of humanity drifting perilously on its current. But we will never forget. How the world held its breath. Some in isolation. Others in virtual classrooms, hospital beds, negative pressure rooms. Donning surgical-grade respirators. Or cotton handkerchiefs. We all danced in the masquerade together. There are moments that cannot be contaminated by a virus. Carrying a new life into being. Or holding one as it fades. Keeping a weary soul from drowning. Or letting one set sail in dignity. Despite the ignorance of sun and sky. We have seen it all transpire and persisted. Time will never stop flowing in its singular direction. But we bear witness from the bow. The river littered with confusion, heartbreak, challenges, fear. But also glowing with courage, leadership, selflessness, resolve. And beneath it all the undertow that has always carried us along. Hope.
Seeing Faces
© Lauren Dennis, MS

It was neurology clinic where I was confronted with a patient who had a face which didn’t match what I had imagined for her to have. The blueprint for the face I expected evolved from the pages of electronic records which revealed actions that suggested narcotic addiction: “Left AMA when refused opioid treatment.” “Pain level reported 10/10 while patient was eating lunch.” “Third ER visit this month.” Having never encountered a patient with their face set on a specific medication, I was afraid. Afraid to be swirled into pity for what I anticipated to be an exaggerated history. Afraid to be confronted with hostility or demands to which I had no acceptable response. Afraid to waste my compassion on lies.

I walked into the room with determination to not get played. I had the memory of her records ingrained in my mind and my eyes fixed on finding an inaccuracy in her story. After a series of questions, I stepped out to present to my preceptor to which he responded, “Did you ask her to describe her pain?”

No. No, I hadn’t. It was a question so simple and so common that its absence demonstrated more than its presence would have. It disclosed that the trajectory of my questioning was towards proof of fault rather than understanding. When we went back to conduct a physical exam together my preceptor pointed out her asymmetrical facial droop. She still had bilateral motor function, so this observation confused me. “Bell’s palsy?” I questioned. He responded, “No, sometimes when someone has severe trigeminal neuralgia, they can have a facial droop purely out of painful exhaustion within the nerves.” In a moment my vision cleared, and I saw the objective proof of pain in the face that only moments ago had sat before me. In my effort to not be blind to her schemes, I became blind to her. Yes, she may have real drug addiction. “Left AMA when refused opioid treatment.” “Pain level reported 10/10 while patient was eating lunch.” “Third ER visit this month.”

I imagine a peach at the base of Carrie’s skull. There are two tumors; one small, but one the size of a peach. In my effort to not be blind to her schemes, I became blind to her. Yes, she may have real drug addiction. “Left AMA when refused opioid treatment.” “Pain level reported 10/10 while patient was eating lunch.” “Third ER visit this month.” In my effort to not be blind to her schemes, I became blind to her. Yes, she may have real drug addiction.

D to D
© Marian Wolbers, Patient

Two months to the day
Deaths to Death
(That’s what her husband said).

In the beginning
(According to her older sister)
I was afraid.

There are two tumors; one small, but one the size of a peach.
I imagined a peach.

At the base of Carrie’s skull
Hiding beneath waves of soft brown hair:
In the back
Somewhere
Pink and fleshy
Extending tentacles
Blasting beyond
The flesh of fruit
Wrapping, trapping;
Digging, destroying
Nerves that told Carrie
How to
Speak
Remember names
Drive to the airport
Without getting lost.
More a sea creature
Than a peach.
She would have turned 63
Yesterday.

Going back …

That first day when I heard the bad news
Giant gentle rainbows appeared
All week, it seemed,
On roads I drove on
From studio to home and elsewhere.
I stopped to take
Pictures with my phone,
Through the car’s windshield
Sometimes pulling over by the sides of roads,
Recording those damn rainbows.
They were everywhere
At home across the lawn
Even a double rainbow
(One of those days)
Stretching clear across the cornfields.
I stopped to take pictures

I will always have blind spots and weakness.
Omniscience is not a prize that is on the table to be won.
Compassion requires love and love requires trust.
Fundamentally, to trust means you must accept
some level of vulnerability.
C.S. Lewis wrote that if we reject vulnerability in our efforts to keep our love safe,
“It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable.”
Some people believe that to trust you must keep
your eyes half shut. I am beginning to believe the opposite.
Maybe trust is most fully experienced when
moving forward with eyes fully open, acknowledging
the broken as well as the believing for the beauty I missed seeing the whole view of my patient because
I had constructed a narrative that I would not allow
her to break. It was pride and fear that blinded me,
but it was vulnerability and compassion that helped me see.

“Perfect love casts out fear.” (1 John 4:18, Holy Bible)
The Goodbye

© Sage Gee, MSII

She said, goodbye.
Curves turn into straight lines;
Perfection walks the edges of the shapes;
Inspirations find their way out through an endless maze.
She said, goodbye.
Out of all the boys you fell in love with,
you only remember the most handsome one,
and the dog you kept together, Charlie.
She said, goodbye.
You searched for orderliness in the mass of chaos,
The sole concrete visuals you can hold on to,
Colorful stripes are like bandages,
wrapping that slit where memories slip away.
She said, goodbye.
I don’t know which hand to use, you said.
E, you are left-handed and so am I.
The world taught you to use your right hand,
because it’s right. Because you were different.
I put the brush in your left hand, just the way you are.
She said, goodbye.
She never said goodbye.
You are just leaving little pieces of yourself in every corner
of the world.
Your warm smiles when I tell you how beautifully you draw,
Your paintings hanging on the wall,
The ski trails in Denver’s winter,
The name tags you proudly wrote yourself.
You left a piece in my heart, too.
Sometimes when I lift my head from the book piles,
I think of you.

This poem is inspired by a dear friend of mine with Alzheimer’s Disease.
She was a wonderful painter and we shared so much good time during
my time in the Opening Minds with Art program.”

Maasai Journey

© Nathan Cannon, MSI

Judge’s Choice for Best Photograph
in the Staff, Family, and Community Category

Hope/Looking Up

© Regan Graham, CAP Department of Anesthesiology & Perioperative Medicine

Judge’s Comments:
A dynamic piece. The photographer’s perspective draws the viewer’s eye into the piece and really captures the feeling of lying in crisp autumn leaves, looking up.
An Open Letter to My Wife

* Anthony Sedun
Son of Yvonne Sedun, RN, Pain Clinic, Retired

The deer climb the steep hill in the forest and emerge daily toward late afternoon and dusk, crossing almost casually the field downhill from our house.

Zach and I assembled the kids’ playset months ago in the cool dusk, as the stars burned brightly above and the deer gathered in the field to forage and watch.

Powder-coated steel, hex bolts, foot caps, button head screws, and swing bars. No more manuals; just memory and drive to finish amidst the dark.

You know these things, though—at least, you did.

But the days are like our kids, ever a-whir, with enough kinetic commotion, crests and troughs, epiphanies and crises to command the fullest attention of patron saints and mothers all the same.

At a time when many question nearly everything, I question not; I question less. At least, not like they do.

It takes an oak of will to keep scrutiny from souring into cynicism, to stay the harvest of the black cherry tree.

More than questions these days, I hold hope close. Rooted in faith for what has been and what yet will be, my hope is like my father years ago, sitting in front of the coal stove in the dark basement, tending the fire there with the deft, gloved hand of a physician. Watching. Acting.

In small movements, to sustain the life therein.

It is said that the earliest human burials occurred 100,000 years ago. Red ochre-stained bones, a wild boar mandible held fast to the arms of the dead, and seashells a-strewn in the caves of Qafzeh.

In the next millennium or more, what will be left of this? The black cherry, alone among the oaks and Eastern hemlocks in the backyard, will have fallen down the slope toward the run in a fraction of the future years. How many generations of deer will walk the same paths from the forest’s edge across the field by then?

Yet, our lives—Quixotic, at times, delightful, in turns—along with the life of everything that lives and that breathes, will have mattered, even in the quiet turns of history’s hands—hands that serve the Mover of rocks, the Maker of men, the Mystery of life held at times so close that the newborn cannot see its mother’s face.

May you know now what you have always known: the gift is all around us, emerging almost casually from the forest’s edge, ambling toward a field as the fiery coals of each day’s last light fall through the grates with gravity and grace.
Racism in Athletics

Debarati Bhanja, MSI

When I was 13 years old, one of my club team coaches told me that he didn’t think I would be a good athlete because I was Indian. In front of my teammates, he would consistently call me racist nicknames, including “Durka Durka” and “Camel Jockey.” While his comments evoked laughter among my teammates, for me, more detrimentally, they sowed seeds of self-doubt in my athletic capabilities.

I was a young girl, the daughter of immigrants, trying to navigate my Indian heritage and American upbringing as well as these inaccurate, hurtful racial stereotypes. Passively, I laughed along with the mockery, but internally, I was determined to prove my coach, and my own doubts, wrong. I kept my head down, worked diligently, and reminded myself to focus on my passion for the sport. Over time, my love for athletics conquered any self-doubt or discrimination I faced. With each year, I found new coaches who ignored any Asian stereotypes, who saw my drive, dedication and spirit, and who saw me as a great athlete.

Upon reflection, I truly believe this experience built the resilience that has followed me throughout athletics. I try to take on every hard workout and tough track race with the confidence I spent years building. However, this experience has also clouded my perspectives. I am disheartened that a part of my drive to succeed is to prove myself athletically to anyone who judges me based on my race and ethnicity.

I try to reconcile this with the hope that my athletic journey will pave paths for other Indian and minority athletes in my community to succeed. I hope their journeys won’t be defined by the desire to prove others wrong, but for pure love of a sport. I regret not outwardly defending myself back then, but I am proud to have overcome this challenge because both my Indian identity and involvement in athletics play such integral roles in how I define myself. Above all, I am proud to belong to a diverse and successful group of Asian, South-Asian, and Indian athletes.

The Misty-Eyed Mother

Gianna Dafflisio, MSI

Misty-eyed mother
Empty sling across her chest
Final questions answered
All concerns have been addressed
A nod of benediction
From her face of fear undressed
And with that nod we turn
And put our backs to her distress
I step inside the OR
Her emotions in my chest
I see her heart splayed out
Yet gently placed in a headrest
As soon as they scrub in
My mind forgets what she expressed
My first glimpse at a scalpel
As it bites into real flesh
I revel in each moment
That my greedy eyes possess
The skull removed and then repaired
The surgeons at their best
The color red anoints their hands
Each future suture blessed
Time yields to this anointment
And relinquishes its test
And then the tools go silent
And emotion breaks arrest
A nod of benediction
From her face of glee undressed
Final questions answered
All her gratitude expressed
Misty-eyed mother
Child resting on her breast

A Closer Look

Susan Landis, CRNA
Department of Anesthesiology, Retired

Scene
Ted Weaver, Patient

Searching for Eternal Sunshine

Raz Abdulquadir, MSI

Hope
Zhuolin Wang, PhD
Family, Zhexi Ma, Department of Medicine
12-Year-Old Interpreter
© Zachary Jensen, MSIII

I can do this.
Papá looks to me for an explanation.
The doctor asks if I understand.
This time is different, though.
Mamá sleeps in the sterile bed.
How can I possibly repeat what the doctor just told me?
I tell Papá.
I should have said less.
Papá weeps.
What have I done?
The doctor needs no interpreter for his next words.
I can’t do this.

The Nurse’s Life
© Barbara Antolino-Smith, RN, BSN
Retired, Department of Pediatrics

We push emotions back so far, they sometimes disappear.
We hide in places no one knows.
The caves where our hearts are hidden,
are impossible to see.
The private world of nurse’s haunts
so very few understand.
The private world of nurse’s haunts
so very few understand.
It is littered with the shattered scars
of lives and dreams destroyed.
We cry alone, we dream alone,
We chase a hope unreal.
Our hearts reveal an aching pain,
Wishes we can never fulfill.
Nurses hold the worst of life
in the palms of aching hands.
We push on through,
we do our best, we sometimes have a plan.
Faith and hope are tools we use
to turn the tide we face.
Love and respect forge our path
and compassion leads us to grace.

“What I Saw”
© Elias Harkins, MSIII

The attending hands me a piece of paper, a printout from the EKG machine. They ask, “What do you see here?”
I stumble through. “Heart rate is, um, 50. It looks regular. Axes and everything look normal. I think that’s a pathological Q wave, but I’m not sure. The STs look a bit lowered, too.” We are both quiet for a moment; our patient has had a heart attack.
The attending then directs me to the patient’s laboratory values, asking “Okay, what do you see on his labs?”
I pause again, taking glances to see if I am including too much detail, or not enough. “The troponin is high, but it has been trending down. I’m also seeing a high BNP, so maybe that’s something we should look into. Maybe an echocardiogram could help?” I had just questioned my way into a viable plan.
The attending responds, “That is a good idea, and if you look at his newest note, you’ll see that he just had one today.” They are kind enough to walk me through. The patient has wall motion changes and low ejection fraction; his heart has been beating for 50+ years but this last insult was too much.
The attending asks, “How about you go see the patient, you can let me know what you two talk about during rounds.”
I walk downstairs. I know more about the patient’s heart than about the actual patient, but I prepare to talk. I see him, lying down in a cool-colored room kept even colder. We begin the routine of introductions and gathering information. I have grown more comfortable in this role, more confident in my ability to remember the steps. We eventually move into the physical exam, even more like a dance in the rhythmic breaths and deep pauses to listen.
I improvise for a few moments during transitions and ask, “So, what do you do for work?”
He responds, brighter, “Oh, I actually work at the place right down the road, but during the summer, I live like a farmer again!”
I ask, also brighter, “That is really interesting, what types of animals do you have on your farm?”
He says, “Oh, just some chickens, I can’t really handle cows like I used to. But mostly I just like spending time out there with my grandkids.”
“Oh, how many grandkids do you have?”
“Four, we used to meet up all the time, before COVID and all.”
I pause. COVID-19 comes up with every patient, and the story is always the same: a lush, vibrant “before” with an unspoken “after.”
I then say back, “Well, I’m very glad you are staying safe! That can be really hard to do!”
We finish the routine, and I head back to my attending to give my report, preparing and editing my presentation along the way.
“Today, I saw Mr X, a man with heart failure.”
“Today, I saw Mr X, an older man with a history of a heart attack leading to heart failure.”
I finally settle, confident.
“Today I saw Mr X, a farmer who loves when he can visit with his grandkids in the summer.”

Afraid of the Headlines
© Kate Levenberg, MSIII
Fragments
* Pallavi Kulkarni, MSI

We are all fragmented
Just like a mosaic we fit
To create an image that reflects colors
On days blessed with a beaming sun
Just like stained glass
The fragile nature remains the same
It breaks upon impact
Reparations make us whole again
Without stress, we cannot shatter
And will never become
The beauty that lies before the world
In this era of uniformity

So Many Things
* Barbara Sedun (Age 10)
  Granddaughter of Yvonne Sedun, RN
  Pain Clinic, Retired

So many things
we take for
granted. So many
things we just don’t
know. So many
things in this new home
that we do not know
So many things
to explore … to and
fro.

In Shards
* Jessica Matincheck, (Age 15)
  Daughter of Lynn Matincheck
  Office of the Vice Dean for Faculty and
  Administrative Affairs

Twisted vines
Crep, dying
Up the lonely house
Black-eyed windows
Curtainless
Flatly face the world
Defying all
To look inside
Her emptiness.
Sagging porch slants,
Slides & splinters
Dried wood cracks a warning, says
“STAY BACK”
“No Welcome here.”
Heavy door
Ancient bolts
Layered thick with brown disuse
And rust
Guard the inner sanctuary
Old-barred prison
Dark-walled asylum
Life’s storm shelter.
Inside,
The carpet trodden old & dark
With fear
Lights extinguished
Candles gutted
Burned to stumps
And not replaced.
And down the hollow hallway
Lined with doorways framed
In tattered dreams
Lie rooms now home of
Grey-winged moths
Spider webs
The smell of mice
And dust.
... And in the corner
Remote, removed
Far, far corner
Distant corner
Hiding corner
Lost in shadows
A darker shadow crouches.
I chose your name even before you were a thought,
Teenage girls together, envisioning what they would be when they grew up.
I wanted the big house, beautiful wedding, and children, especially a little girl.
I wanted to have that bond with my daughter that I never experienced as a child.
I wanted her to grow up envisioning what she would be when she grew up.

When I held you for the first time I knew my visions and dreams would come true.
I could not put you down, I told you stories, and sang to you all the time.
I was there for all your milestones, I taught you all you needed to know.
I wanted the big house, beautiful wedding, and children, especially a little girl.
I wanted to have that bond with my daughter that I never experienced as a child.

When you started school you were so confident and made friends easily.
Your studies came so easily to you and you excelled in school.
They also became close to me, because you were close to them.
I was so excited for semi-formals and proms and boyfriends, I couldn’t wait.
College was so hard for the both of us, being away from each other since we were so close.
College also was an eye-opener for the both of us, since we were so close.

After graduation you moved back home, you were more confident, sometimes too confident.
I knew we were heading in the right direction toward our dreams.
You helped me through a lot in my life, you were my savior.
I realized now that I depended on you too much, but you were always there for me.

You will always be my little girl and you will always be here for me and I love you.
You will always be my savior and you will always be beautiful to me and I love you.

I chose your name even before you were a thought and now I know why, you were a vision.
I LOVE YOU!
Limecello Delivery, April 2020

* Nancy Adams, EdD, MLIS
  Harrell Health Sciences Library and Department of Medical Education

The bottle: the focus
The grass: the field
What a weird ritual this is, you said
Glove, wipe, place, retreat;
Advance, retrieve, retreat again
Maintaining our distance
Disconnected connection
Eyes open, unseeing
Constant presence of absence
The bottle: the focus
The grass: the field

This poem was written shortly after April 3, 2020, when a friend delivered homemade limecello to me. The entire masked and socially distanced exchange was completely focused on the physical entity of the bottle itself and the dance of transferring the object from one to another, and when he left, it was as if he had never been there at all.

Thinking

* Barbara Sedun, (Age 10)
  Granddaughter of Yvonne Sedun, RN
  Pain Clinic, Retired

Thinking in a new world, thinking
Mask? Online? Still
Thinking … A whole new way to think of things, a whole new way to see things through,
Thinking … To see what could happen this year.

Dancing in the Moonlight

* Gary Gasowski, MD
  Penn State College of Medicine Alumnus, 1972

Play

* Anthony Sedun
  Son of Yvonne Sedun, RN, Pain Clinic, Retired

Motherhood

* Eliana Hempel, MD
  Department of Medicine

My breasts are heavy, engorged, throbbing.
My heart races frantically.
My incision aches.
It is as though my body, like my mind, is desperate to save the life it created.
Unwilling to accept reality.
The devastated resignation on my husband’s face,
The weight of the world evident in the sag of his shoulders.
The way he squeezes my hand so tightly it hurts.
We ask if she will die tonight.
There is tension between disbelief and acceptance.
Emotions roll, wrestling for power over me.
Grief. For all that has been and all that was to be.
Anger. Flaring white hot and dying down just as quickly.
Guilt. For all I’d done and all I should have done.
Shame. Unable to do what millennia of women have done.
Emptiness. A hollowness that presses upon me making me question how I will go on.
Fear of the despair I know is to come.
What does it mean to be a mother?
Is it the changing of diapers?
Is it the cutting of grapes into half-moons?
Is it the finishing of dioramas in the dark of night?
Is it the bandaging of scraped knees while brushing away giant tears?
Is it the cheering at the sidelines of a game?
Is it the dancing at her wedding?
Is it the teaching, guiding, molding?
Is it the worrying—more intense than imaginable?
Can it be something else?
Can it be a promise to prevent suffering?
Can it be a willingness to let go even as letting go kills a part of you?
Can it be a vow to honour her memory with good?
Can it be a promise to stand up for others like her?
Can it be a commitment to give voice to others like me?
Can it be comforting a small, sweet, perfect gift as it slips away?
Can it be the unfillable hole that is left behind?
Can it be just as much pain as it is joy?
I say yes.
This, too, is motherhood.
I, too, am a mother.
My grandmother’s voice scratches through the phone line, all the way from Dalian running past the sleeping roosters and between the dust-cloaked streets of rural China to cradle me the same way I cradle the landline, dreaming of a way back home. She tells me that I’ll learn English and make friends soon, that yes, she misses me, too, that the tree in our courtyard is finally thick with plump, crimson blooms - she wishes I could see it but she knows I’ll make her proud in the beautiful, new country.

My grandmother’s voice cracks over the receiver and I realize that sometime between asking how tall I’d grown and wishing me a happy 18th birthday, the woman who split my hair into pigtails every day for six years had started crying. My tears match hers and guilt coats my mouth, relentless, cloying, as I lie that she’ll see me again, soon. I know the closest she’ll get to seeing me are glossy photographs folded carefully into cream envelopes and released with a stamp and a prayer. That night, I dream of glowing winter festivals with wind sharp enough to sculpt satisfaction, spirals of speared, sugared haw berries on street carts, and the new moon gap between grandma’s two front teeth as she smiles back at me.

My grandmother and I videochat for the first time. We beam at each other, ignoring her shaking hands, her fading eyesight, the halting video quality, enveloped in the pleasure of seeing each other. No words are needed, no flat, still pictures. Only smiles that stretch 6,800 miles with ease a wealth of pride an exhale of finally.
I am stuck between two languages
With a hand full of syllables
And twisted tongue.
I was eloquent when nine,
Before flying over the Atlantic,
Before seeing colors of skin
Lighter and darker than my own
In degrees I did not know existed.

I keep my writing
To the left of the page,
Afraid of spilling into parts I do not yet know;
Afraid of spaces the way my father is afraid
Of gaps in his memory; he tells us stories to fill
The years he feels he has not lived.

My past is a haze of rushed
Moments, of bricks being thrown at worshippers
On my side of the wall as they prostrated, of boys
Dodging cars to catch loose kites, of guns
Claiming victory upon the rooftops of wealthy men
As women in makeshift tents huddle over their young.
What goes up comes down in raging fury.

In dreams, I am running from lions in
The streets of Pittsburgh, then holding
A dead, homeless man outside my apartment
In West Haven, as a child, a younger me, sobs, “grandpa.”

Other times, my table lamp is the sun bending
Towards a lawn of dead things in Lahore
Where an old woman spills ram’s blood
On the earth surrounding a wilted mango tree,
Pleading, live.

In love, I am awkward
The way I was on the first day of school
In America, equipped with one phrase,
“Is this pig meat?”,
“What’s your name? “Is this pig meat?”

In loving, I am honest, between two lines
Of a page, where I can write a spring time
Of my beloved walking through orchards of my childhood,
Playing a game of hide-and-seek among trees
That told a history of my family better
Than my elders: “Your great-grandfather planted
these Jamun berry trees and ate them with sea salt
when they were in season until all his shirts were red with stains.”

They say Jamun berries stain the way blood stains
And to tell the difference, one must wait
until one’s clothes are dry; mothers
tell their children that far away, at the border,
the war is only a great big feast (of Jamun berries)
and their fathers
were brought home, asleep.

In America, my father sought Jamun berries
But settled for a mint and tomato garden
My brother mowed over several springs ago.

Often, sitting together, we forget how long
It has been since that night my mother counted
All her china and wrapped it newspapers, saying:
“We cannot go to another country without plates.”

Judge’s Comments: This poem does such an arresting job of bringing this speaker’s two worlds to life and exposing the sharp contrasts between the two. The longing is as palpable as it is enduring.

Through Our Vision, We Create the Future
© Eiman Khesroh, MBBS, MPH, DrPH Candidate, Public Health Sciences

Judge’s Comments: The dynamism created by the perspective of the architectural elements draws your eye to the subject, but what stands out is the cinematic quality of this photo—how the subject is caught in the middle of movement.
Vision 20:20
© Aria Ghahramani, MSIII

Equal parts excited and nervous. Safe here with these books, but
Round the corner: riots, revolvers … ‘rona. And uptown
Reactive politicians treat my kids like they did the virus: ignored until it's a problem to them. But the
Light shining through their eyes reminds me … these young warriors
Accommodate to much more. Eyes wide open. Watching. Waiting.

Perspective of Time
© Duncan McDermond, MSIV

Forest Edge
© Judy Schaefer, RN
Member, The Doctors Kienle Center for Humanistic Medicine

We lived on the edge of the forest in those days
A place for imagination and hammocks of bent tree limbs
swinging between Egyptian mummies and Huckleberry Finn
We could practice words such as trellis and ennui
Surgery and medicine, the difference between Saturday and Sunday,
and come to rest on words such as skyscraper and suspension bridge
And more cutting and real than sunshine,
we found arrowheads just below the crumbling farm crust of earth,
touched their fading sharpness and examined their strokes of artistry
We stood up and looked around, as if
the cutter was still there; the sculptor still present as we held artifacts
that could define a future in the forest

January 20, 2021
© Haorui Sun, BS, MSI

My mother used to call me her little dreamer,
partly because I slept 12 hours a night,
and even pillow mapping sweet souvenirs on my cheek for oh-so-mortal mornings;
mostly because I said I was going to be a writer-doctor-astronaut-ballerina-lawyer-artist
who spent half the year navigating Italy and the other half frolicking the moon.
But today, when you asked me where I'll wake up in 10 years,
I stumbled over my words like they were my first pair of soled shoes greeting the ground.
Today, I would choose the road to a home with enough windows to keep my orchids alive and our children
abloom,
a kitchen wide enough to slow dance in without clipping the garlic-stained cutting board,
and a bed soft enough to always dip us closer,
even when we're mad at each other.
I would choose the road to you.
The Many Lives of Thumbs

* Drew Mullins, MSII

Touching thumbs, slowly circling, give rise to focused thought.
Rapid circles bear witness to idle apprehension, providing no release in tension.
Thumb tips tapping wearily, awaiting news impatiently, pausing periodically.
A playful war of dancing thumbs, battling boredom, the victor, is the only one, having any fun.
A brave inch moved to rest upon, another thumb, eagerly waiting for a response.

Illusion

* Mary Lou Osevala, RN

Not happening here, at least we thought.
We embrace diversity, number one . . . on top!
It’s true, our rich team has many colors in check.
Is it hypocritical then, of the leaders on deck?
Ignored in the hallway though on the same team.
Dismissive glances to ideas, but then . . . it’s their theme.
Raised eyebrows, short retorts, snubbed all the same.
Black lives are not alone with humiliation and pain.

Locked On

* Zhuolin Wang, PhD, Family, Zhexi Ma, Department of Medicine

It’s real, the hierarchy and at times, fed from the top.
You’re not as valuable to me . . . you’re really not.
Your massive education taught you little of respect.
Just remember your place, that’s what you expect.
Is it fear of being usurped, self-esteem so brittle?
You can’t teach down to lift up, better to belittle.
The culture is changing for the better at last.
Nothing good comes easily and certainly not fast.
Image isn’t everything. Kindness doesn’t cost.
But as nurses we know that because we’re trusted the most.

A Colorful Stranger

* Rucha Borkhetaria, MSI

Cardinal in a Tree

* Sophie Cochran (Age 9) Patient

Everywhere’s Worse at Night

* Dwayne Morris, Office of Medical Education

There’s news on twenty channels.
And even if I wait.
HBO has a love story on.
From 1948.
Long before my time.
When love seemed good and kind.
I’d like to say I see it today.
But true love is so hard to find.
And everything’s worse at night.
The heart aches just that little bit more.
No one knows this like a man.
Once loved and adored.
Dream after dream of her.
Awake and she’s not there.
Two little children sleeping like they don’t own a care.
Little do they know.
They now come from a broken home.
And though I teach them we have each other.
They can sense this man is so all alone.

Deep Healing

* Sejal J. Shah, MD, PGY-1, Department of Surgery

These wounds are deep.
They do not heal with just one sleep.
As painful as the memory of the infliction.
More painful is the knowledge of the conviction.
That drove the blade dividing layers of skin.
to only find that we are all the same within.
The hopes and dreams that inspired us
will only continue to drive us.
to mend the tarnished tapestry.
that symbolizes the values of our country.
These scars run oh so deep.
We must not forget them as we sleep.

Photon-Frequency

* Kushagra Kumar, MSI

Don’t Shoot for the moon.
Armstrong’s footsteps, why bother?
Find your own space rock.
I admit that I am guilty
And maybe so are you
Distorted Vision
I too often wear these "glasses"
And they sure distort my view
Often it’s the captured moments
That I look so far into
And I wonder to myself
Why can’t I be more like you?
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Evergreen
* Jeffrey Feehrer, Patient

On an unforgettable afternoon our son got off the elementary school bus carefully balancing a polystyrene coffee cup. In it was a sprig three inches tall and as thick as a piece of wire coat hanger.

“A pine tree.”

“Uh huh.” Its four puny needles identified that. “What kind?” I asked. “There are different species, um, different types like spruce, hemlock, fir ... spelled with an i.”

Sufficient.

“Can you plant it?” I tablespooned a relative hole but was silently doubtful. Our soil is rock and clay; crabgrass and dandelions flourish, a pretty green when mowed but mocking recidivistic.

We watered it and I made small perforations in the hostile earth at its frail base adding nutrients. It survived, progeny and pine growing rapidly.

Not long till we could stand and hang extra Christmas balls and twine blinking lights to be topped with a star. Augmenting, conifers retain their colorful plumage through winter. They don’t shed or die. Perennials like youth and love should be.

Seemingly next Yule dad needed a stepladder, later a precarious extension ladder, then so quickly when Santa became a myth it had grown out of reach and decorations.

One summer the pine began diverging, forking into two equal but individual trees conjoined only at their trunk. With prophetic symbolism, each division taking a new direction. The point of the branching away was at our son’s eye-level, that summery day right after school ended. Everything’s blossoms and fragrances and sweet, new life.

The parted trunk has grown up with him, matching his stature, a kind of palmistry. I can still put my arms around both of them, however.

But aged 36 years we noticed recently that the lowest needles have paled and are falling. A sad shedding, their bared branches snapping off dryly and easily to twigs crunched underfoot like bones. It’s spreading. We can see through it, shade diminishing, the years passed and confusing as time does to that dream day we planted it.

The son has gone to his wife, daughter, and jobs—the warm and complete homelife.

Now his tree is assimilating mine.
Judge’s Choice for Best Themed Creative Writing 2021

Pentimenti in an Empty House
* Judy Schaefer, RN
  Member, The Doctors Kienle Center for Humanistic Medicine

House is clean, packed up, carried out.
All wrapped, taped, secured, fresh paint.
The truck, containing evidence of who we are,
accelerates with gusts of fume from our curb,
pointing north with two drivers for the night.
The sky turns ashen as we back out
on the heavily sealed driveway.
Our car lights stride the windows
casting shadows on walls in vacant rooms,
releasing flames onto storm door glass.
Ahead of us, now four states out,
bridges to cross, unknown rivers.
Amazing tunnels. Mountains and rolling hills.
Knowing now, we could have turned back.

Judge’s Comments:

I relished reading this piece because the words invoked images with each line. These images brought up thoughts of change from that which once was. The word pentimenti as used in art is the representation of an underlying image in a painting, especially one that has become visible. Just like the rooms of this empty house, which will reveal new colors on the once sunbathed walls, and floors where furniture once sat, and paintings once hung. These protected spots will reveal a transparency of their original existence.

Judge’s Choice for Best Themed Photograph 2021

Bye Bye COVID-19
* Devin DePamphilis
  Son of Sharon DePamphilis, MBA
  Management Reporting and Decision Support

I appreciated the playfulness of the piece as well as the component of scale. The large balloon glove hand appears to be waving goodbye to that which cannot be seen but has plagued us for more than a year. While the scale of the glove is powerful, equally strong is the tiny figure that is holding it all together by a string. I can also imagine the bad air of the COVID-19 virus contained in the balloon that, once released, could float away and a return to some level of normal. I also imagine the child at the end of the string jumping for joy as it floats away and gets smaller and smaller, reversing the scale of what we see.
Mind’s Eye
© Ananya Das
Department of Orthopaedics and Rehabilitation

Sitting out in the backyard with Grandpa
Or on the porch sometimes, when I was young
We would play I spy with my little eye.
I would say after the rains, “I see the rainbow!”
And he would nod his head,
dark glasses and all firmly in place
He would look up and say, “It’s beautiful, isn’t it?”
And we would watch together in wonder,
the vibrant rainbow bridging the sky,
or the glorious sunset in orange and gold,
sometimes the purple pink azaleas with the bees.
We would talk about how pretty they were.
Later as the evening melted into the night,
Grandpa would collect his white cane
and walk me home down the road.
I never knew Grandpa couldn’t see, not then.
Later as I knew I asked
How did you know how they looked?
How did you describe them for me?
Why didn’t you say you couldn’t see?
He smiled as he took his dark glasses off,
laughter crinkling his sightless eyes,
“You don’t need vision to see beauty,
the mind’s eye is all you need for that!”

Winter
© Drew Mullins, MSII

Silvery mist saps your soul
Surrounds you in eternal snow
The wondrous wind throws you forth
Guiding your unsteady course
Vision lacking blurred and bright
Only instincts give you sight
Just before you give up hope
A distant light, the smell of smoke
Familiar voices welcome you in
Mesmerizing winter’s end
Stew is served from pewter pots
And then is chewed and slurped and slopped
Belly full and all tucked in
Warm sheets slide against your skin
Your tired mind fades away
To visions of a warm spring day

Midnight
© Mary Mager, Family of Patient

The Psychopomp
© Pratiti Roy, MSIII

On the day they gave out the paraphernalia,
you were late
(as you often are).
The good stuff had already been taken.
Gone the winged sandals,
the boats,
the scale and its feather,
the dark wings,
only a stethoscope and a starched white coat left.
The stethoscope is a perfunctory thing that hangs
around your neck.
The white coat hangs on a hool in your office
because it makes the patients skittish,
the whites of their eyes flashing,
like fallen horses who see their riders pull out the rifle.
Never mind that their demise is not in your hands.
To a dying patient who knows no better
the words “palliative care” and “hospice” are final as a gunshot
or the wide arc of a scythe.
“They’re giving up on me.”
Always a statement, never a question, but you answer it anyway:
“No, we’re not.”

Restless
© Janette Guzowski
St. Joseph Family and Community Medicine
Residency Program

Friend where have you gone today?
Smoke from your chimney yesterday
Made me think that you would stay.
Where light once shone I searched for you.
Somber windows spoke no clue.
No embers glowed from darkened hearth.
No footsteps sprung from dampened earth.
Southern breezes called your name
Restless soul no heart can tame.
Damaged pride replays the frame.
If your path leads back again
I’ll search for you in summer’s rain
Call out your name to wood and plain
Rekindle fire with crackling grain.

Gazing Away
© Michele Morrissey
Departments of Dermatology and Ophthalmology

Winter
© Drew Mullins, MSII

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Rekindle fire with crackling grain.
“Gentlemen,
Not having had many diseases, after growing old and finding many that are applicable to humans or the human body, I find, growing up I should say, that whether it is vulnerability to poison ivy, an organism in barbers shears or close contact with a carrier, after a check up when I was told there was much going around, I found out of the parts irritated, a large percentage of my body is cleared up. There is only a little left. Thank you.”
Letter from Emergency Department patient, circa 1985

Record gone, there are only questions. Primarily who typed this prose poem onto a blue, pre-made folding letter, dropped in the mail to no person in particular, to gentlemen in a city emergency department? A place offering the possibility of relief in bright lights and strangers, rescuing more from life than to life. Not comparable, for example, to a place of worship, though weekend mornings can work for both, and both promise healing. Worship, of course, also tries for uplifting, shedding the body to inhabit the spirit, free from what is going around. Emergency departments are all about what is going around. What can be cleared up, not acquired. Subtracted, not added. But in the end, if the person is still there, and the means of communication still at hand, there is an opportunity to give thanks. Including some gentlemen to this author who likely never considered himself a writer of poems.

Golden Beauty from Above
© Malgorzata Sudol
Department of Medicine

The Blind
© Benjamin Watt, MSIII
When the sun sets, The window becomes a mirror, So I lower the blind, And switch on the lamp, That I may see yet not be seen.
When Mercury fades, And I climb to center-view, Argus stirs and blinks, A hundred other invisible people Light lamps under baskets.
When the day ends, And the world doubles in reflection, Then I close my lids, Trailing illusion for blindness, Perceiving but no longer seeing.

Behind the Mask
© Muhammed Rahim, MSIII
Behind the mask there is a person A person who yearns to hug his grandparents A person who misses handshakes and smiles A person who only sees two eyes instead of a whole face A person who wonders what is behind the masks of others A person who reminisces about the days before this all started A person who dreams about returning to his old life A person who envisions a world safe and unmasked A person who hopes this will all be over soon A person who understands that for now, he must stay behind the mask

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© Muhammed Rahim, MSIII
Behind the mask there is a person A person who yearns to hug his grandparents A person who misses handshakes and smiles A person who only sees two eyes instead of a whole face A person who wonders what is behind the masks of others A person who reminisces about the days before this all started A person who dreams about returning to his old life A person who envisions a world safe and unmasked A person who hopes this will all be over soon A person who understands that for now, he must stay behind the mask
The Bench
* Rev. Kelsey O'Brien, M.Div.,
Pastoral Service

An elderly man is dying in the Special Pathogens ICU.

Breathe, I say to myself as I hang up the phone. Try to just breathe.

Dr. X greets me at the front entrance. I think he is trying to smile, but with our masks I'm not sure. He tells me that the man's wife and daughter were called an hour ago. They live an hour and a half away, and are currently sitting outside waiting to talk to us.

I follow Dr. X through the glass doors into the spring evening, the sound of voices and vehicles filling our ears. There they are. A tiny white-haired woman perched on the bench. A younger woman stands crying, her homemade mask already soaked through.

Dr. X leads the conversation: he is dying right now.

There is nothing we can do except keep him comfortable. I'm so sorry, but per policy only one person is allowed. They will have to decide.

Both women are crying now, their eyes bloodshot and their story: married fifty-six years. They met as children and grew up together. He served in the military. They had one daughter. They couldn't have more. He had a good heart. His parents were very religious. He was not. He had been sick for a while before they rushed him to the ED. He loved watching Daughter dance. All his family had died off over the past couple of years. His memory had faded. He was getting hard to understand. He hadn't been eating. But he still knew who she was. He always knew who she was. We went to Hawaii on our 50th anniversary. Chaplain, I am so sorry, but per policy only one person is allowed. We went to a funeral for another patient. He gape...
A Love Poem
© James Thomas, Patient

I wake with my arms around you
And I know
That heaven exists
Your warm embrace, your lovely lips,
And I know
That angels live.
Then the dawn breaks and I am alone
And I know
That you are just a dream.

August 3rd, 2019
© Makayla Lagerman, MS1

I had no reason to own black
Until 22
No reason for knowing the smell of formaldehyde,
Leftover casseroles reheat,
the Catholic Church on the corner of Coal Street.
No reason to worry with each surprise ring from a parent–
“Just checking in,”
Or not–
Who insists I call when I’m free
Because I’m the busy one,
The one busy living.
But at 22,
I snip the tags off a black dress collecting dust in the
back corner of a closet.
At 22, I learn death
When it taps on our shoulders and I am gullible
even enough to turn around.
I look back and find he’s gone.
In that moment, I learn death–
Death, but not dying.
Widow maker, but not the making of a widow.
That part comes next.
It is slower, more surprising.
Maybe harder.
At 23, I give Meme a call
She does not cry this time.
We learn dying and we unlearn it
Minute by minute.
So I meet this sunlight today, shake its hand.
We take them together. Golden.

Flexibility
© Regan Graham, CAP
Department of Anesthesiology & Perioperative Medicine

Triplopia (photo left and poem below)
© Chandat Phan, MSII

Thought I was seeing double,
Then my vision was cleared.
Realized it was really triple,
With two like a mirror.
A full figure in the center,
That I thought was better,
Cause you could see the whole body,
But then again—it was foggy.
Two portraits crisp but small,
And a hazy one that was tall.
But you put them as one fixture,
And you get a complete picture.
Take one. Take two. Take three …
How many lenses do we need?
Till we may say we really see?

An Empty Street
© Rucha Borkhetaria, MS2

Survivor
© Jillian Mendez
Patient
The Ghost Map
* Barbara Antolino-Smith, RN, BSN
Retired, Department of Pediatrics

Gettysburg, Reedsville, New Bloomfield, Waynesboro.
Harrisburg, Quarryville, Lebanon, State College and Huntingdon.
Many, many others. Too numerous to mention.
Villages, towns, hamlets, cities.
Scattered visions of faces lost.
Scattered memories of events held close.
Found amid the ghosts of the past.

Others visit villages, towns, hamlets, and cities
with joyful countenances of anticipated fun, family visits and merry reunions.
My reunion is as a sober visitor
to the remembrance of patients lost in a fog of death.
I love these country roads and towns.
I love these Pennsylvania harbors.
I anticipate my visits with a mixture of joy and sorrow.
A little guy who walked the streets of New Bloomfield.
A fun-loving teen kicking those soccer balls in Waynesboro.
The thick braids of a smiling girl loved and cherished
in the hills of Lancaster.
The frightened face of a teen surrounded by the largesse of his family in Harrisburg.
Cashtown apple orchards comforting the pain of a mother's son
as she chases a vision of his kindness and strength.

How does the heart let go?
When will the memory fade?
When will these villages, towns, hamlets and cities become
only places on the map again?
Speeding past on the highway, when will I lose the pain?
Slowly rounding the country curves, when will their memory fade?

This odd association of mine cannot be resolved.
The villages, towns, hamlets and cities are linked to
a very real joy in knowing they existed for a time on this earth.
That together we shared what few might understand.
The best of ourselves. The most loving parts of ourselves.
Spots on the map real and true and impossible to erase.
Kids and teens real and true and impossible to erase.
Letting go and holding on, a lifelong reality.

My Hero-My Dad, the Essential Worker
* Vanessa Vides, MSIV

It’s 4:45 a.m., the alarm snooze button seems a monumental distance away
Everyone else has been ordered to stay at home
Partaking in quarantine is not an option here
For if I do, who will take my passengers into the city?
What passengers you ask?
The other essential workers—nurses, doctors, etc.
They have lives to save in NYC
I need to do my part by helping them to do their part
I have an honesty though, I do also need the money
I need to pay the rent, feed my wife and
I need to send my daughter her monthly $100
I’m not all that altruistic—I cannot afford to stay home
It’s 4:45 AM, the alarm snooze button cannot be pressed today
I am so cold and hot all at once
Why does everything hurt?
What is happening?
It’s March, I never get sick in the Spring
Oh no—it can’t be, can it?
I am going to call my daughter, she will know what to do
COVID-19? A test? Stay home?
My bus is a big bus, I don’t understand
There were only nurses and doctors on the bus last week, no one else
They all sat so far away
I have COVID-19?
Can I go from this?
But I have to work, I need the money
I have to quarantine for two weeks?
What am I going to do?

A Separate Pain
* Justine Shultz, MA, Public Health Sciences

the brass in my ears
weighs heavy
i’ve been pushing their limits
for four days now
it’s something else
to focus on
a separate pain

Invisible Wings
* Arunangshu Das, PhD
Department of Biochemistry & Molecular Biology

Quarantine
* Marcia Riegle, Patient
So many ways
to lose a Lover—
from carelessness,
through betrayal,
or growing pains,
or Death’s final touch.
So many ways
to lose a Lover.

Some say to move on,
to get over it all,
that it’s no big thing,
it was meant to be,
just buck up and
look on the bright side,
endings are beginnings
after all is said and done.

Deep emotions
don’t play that game,
they are ingrained,
like DNA messages
fluttering along nerves
with tricky barbs
and breezy smiles
lying in wait.

It ain’t over ‘til
it’s over—the song says,
but honestly,
it goes on and on and on
long after it’s over
no matter who or
what’s the cause
of the painful endings.

He went out for smokes.
She wanted a girls night out.
If only I had picked up the phone.
I could have/should have been there.
So many weird changes ...
and then she was gone.
Did something better catch her eye?
... alone again, naturally.

If we are living,
we are also changing.
What we thought was
forever, well, it wasn’t.
Where do we go from here?
Why do we go from here?
There is a Life to be Lived!
We choose how we’ll do it.

© Anthony Oliveri, Patient

Past Reflection
* Allison Chang, MSIII
Life Is Full of Drizzly Days

© Sigmund David, Patient

“I do not mind getting my pants wet,” my son said, As he slid down the slide. It was damp—the first day of Autumn. “Higher and higher,” he urged on the tire swing. I did as he commanded. Little boys (as well as little girls) are not to be dismayed. By not perfect conditions. Life is full of them. I can get too comfortable in my house. With an overcast sky, crisp outside. the couch is too inviting. it has not stopped raining. Someone though, has forgotten to tell my son. He has reminded me again. Life is full of drizzly days. And the unexpected:
The bald eagle I had never seen before. Heading for Hawk Rock. The magnificent sunset that caught me by surprise. In a place I did not expect to be. For my mind and body are tired. The ruby-throated hummingbird That invaded my backyard in the rain. Yes, life is full of drizzly days. And four-year-old boys who teach their fathers. What they have lost in the quest for wisdom.

Turbulence

© Susannah Gal, PhD, Patient

34 years
10 too long, you say
I didn’t see that
Coming

Fasten your seat belts as we will be experiencing some turbulence

Hindsight shows some signs
Silence
Ignorance was not my friend

We’ll have a smooth ride once we’re out of these clouds

I look for the eventual sunshine above the clouds
Luck to have friends whose ears I can bend
Eventually, in a new place
Until then

We’ll be facing some more turbulence before then

Am I Still Here?

© Milton Ehrlich
Family of Medical Student Applicant

I feel the shape of my face that is more familiar than the one I see in the mirror. I feel the scar on my lip that prevented me from sustaining high C on my Selmer trumpet. My useless ears can’t hear much, and my eyes keep closing shut to avoid seeing the terrible news—my vanishing voice now depends on pointing with homemade sign. I’m a crusty old cocoon, a silhouette of my former self who always planned to one day climb up Mount Kilimanjaro. Now I can’t even clamber over the rocks on Bash Bish Falls.
From Eye to Eye
* Jeremy Kudrna, MS, MD
  Clinical Resident/Fellow
  Department of Ophthalmology

lancet and laser
lenses and light
no wonder eye surgery
induces such fright
precise, still labor
fine, our might
that’s ophthalmology
the focus your sight
relax dear neighbor,
thy cheeks a resting height,
from eye to eye
a new waking site
lie back like a stargazer
under a sparkled night,
for this dazzling rite
music with color
will be marvels to cite
relish all merrily,
sweet slumber’s delight
relax and savor,
as we take peaceful flight.

Baka’s House (Potres)
* Sofija Chroneos BFA, MA
  Family of Dr. Zissis C. Chroneos and
  Dr. Zvjezdana Chroneos
  Departments of Pediatrics and Medicine

Judge’s Choice for Best Art
Created by a Patient

Grid Plane: “What do you see? Just lines, forming a grid?”
* Angela Sedun, MFA

Artist’s Statement:
Inspired by Mutually Orthogonal Latin Squares (think: Soduku), this print (1 of 1) was the foundation for other experimentations to represent these squares in three dimensions instead of two.

Why? Because when I look beyond the surface of things, I begin to see dimensions.

Vision encompasses much more than sight: so much so, it is called insight. Seeing into things, perceiving, receiving, transmitting, projecting. Something as simple as lines and planes and basic geometry can be a gateway as complex as the heavens. And as such are our lives.


But that wasn’t really true after all. Walking the line of 2020 day-to-day, there was a lot more experienced: greater appreciation for relationships (even ones that didn’t stand out before), unexpectedly missing what had been previously tedious or onerous work, gratitude for being incessantly with immediate family, relief to be outdoors more frequently, indebtedness to healthcare workers who valiantly carried on, awareness of generations of pain and suffering because of the color of one’s skin, appreciation for the creativity and ingenuity of educators who did their best to engage students and provide some semblance of balance, surprise and delight at being recognized by an old friend in the grocery store while masked, consolation in mutual sentiments shared with friends, knowledge that we’re all headed in one direction—and thereby humility. Maybe a little patience, too.

Everyone has a story, an experience, a need or a want. Am I willing to gaze and see the extent, the expanse of the person before me? It is possible to recognize even four dimensions when I thought there were only two.

So, the cliché, “don’t judge a book by its cover,” still holds true; in the case of Grid Plane, don’t judge the plane by its bisected points, the simplicity of its color, the basic construction of its design, the mundane materials of paper and ink, but by the space around it.

The real details are between the lines.

Judge’s Comments:
This piece made me think to look for joy and hope in ordinary life, beyond the mundane, beyond the surface.
A Skeleton’s Ghazal
© Ellie Cameron

Alone in the winter and cold to the bone.
A deceptive promise of gold to the bone.
The strain on the heart will take its toll someday.
Body frail, prematurely old to the bone.
Stones dropped to the floor of a porcelain lake.
Sickness, it grows and breeds like mold to the bone.
Left by disciples, Olympus has fallen.
A home, now a despot abode to the bone.
Falsely conveyed by cigarette aesthetics.
A story in a woeful ode to the bone.
Control was a phantasm that faded so fast.
Now I’ve run down the bloodstained road to the bone.

A beautiful composition of a caught moment in nature. The texture and the depth of field balance the contrasting purples and orange of the bird’s breast.

A Skeleton’s Ghazal goes right to the avatar of our mortality and stares directly at it without flinching. In the process, it shows us the beauty and fragility of what powers us.
My New Year’s Resolution
© Dixie Miller, MSI

For all my life,
The new year meant a new start.
But more often than not
These brand new plans fell apart.
Becoming someone “better”
Often takes more than a list on paper.
It requires drive and action
And as time wears on my motivations taper.
I aim for a rebirth,
From caterpillar to butterfly.
But I’ve begun to wonder,
If maybe it’s the reverse I should try.
After so many attempts,
I have matured and bloomed.
But with each change,
My own identity seems doomed.
My mind is sharp
My achievements admirable and plenty.
And yet I find
My reflection’s smile now seems empty.
This year,
I resolve not to become all shiny and new
I simply want to be
The me that my younger self once knew.
A young girl,
Big heart, kind words, thoughtful eyes.
Even as a caterpillar
Her only limit was the sky.

NeuroVision: What Our Patients See
© Joseph Malone, MD
Clinical Resident & Fellow
Department of Neurology

One of the advantages and pleasures of being a neurologist is that our specialty organ, the brain, can be accessed simply by talking to our patients. Another important organ in neurology, the eye, has the special designation of being the only organ wherein we can see parts of the central nervous system. Vision changes are common chief complaints in the neurology office, and some of these changes can be striking, able to evoke wonder and fear.

Visual hallucinations have been known for centuries, and it was a pioneering publication in 1760 by the Swiss philosopher, Charles Bonnet, who described the vivid hallucinations of his grandfather after he suffered blindness from cataracts. The disorder that bears his name, Charles Bonnet syndrome, is seen in patients with severe visual impairment, wherein the vision centers in our brain tend to compensate with often elaborate visual hallucinations. Some patients report seeing flamboyantly costumed people dancing or little people like the Lilliputians from Gulliver’s Travels. There is additionally an Alice in Wonderland syndrome, where patients will see items in their view become larger, smaller, or distorted, as if living inside Lewis Carroll’s timeless classic. Finally, certain epilepsy disorders can produce potent visual changes. For example, there are seizures where certain memories flash before the patient’s eyes. These so-called “experiential seizures” can be bittersweet, with some memories bringing a sense of nostalgia while others remind them of past heartaches. With these examples I encourage you to remember, the next time you read a fairytale by the Brothers Grimm or peer inside the wacky mind of Dr. Seuss, that there are people out there who are actually living in their own works of fiction.
Cycles of Terror, Death, Innovation, and Hope
* Olga Prokunina, MSII

I can see in my mind’s eye, a time when faces went uncovered, smiles and expression were commonplace, and people could still see each other.
In my mind’s eye, the world remains unmasked, air around them, without fear or apprehension, and distance is of no concern.
In my mind’s eye, we only wash our hands to stay clean, gloves and disinfectants are reserved for the surgical suite, and life does not look like a hospital.
In my mind’s eye, children can still hug their grandparents and lovers embrace, family and friends congregate in close quarters, and teachers teach in a classroom.
In my mind’s eye, I can see a future when COVID-19 will be nothing more than a memory, and all of us will be free, to be ourselves, once again.

In My Mind’s Eye
* Richard Cary Joel, PT, MHA
Family, Maria T. Joel
Department of Microbiology

I can see in my mind’s eye, a time when faces went uncovered, where smiles and expression were commonplace, and people could still see each other.
In my mind’s eye, the world remains unmasked, one inhales the air around them, without fear nor apprehension, and distance is of no concern.
In my mind’s eye, we only wash our hands to stay clean, gloves and disinfectants are reserved for the surgical suite, and life does not look like a hospital.
In my mind’s eye, children can still hug their grandparents and lovers embrace, family and friends congregate in close quarters, and teachers teach in a classroom.
In my mind’s eye, I can see a future when COVID-19 will be nothing more than a memory, and all of us will be free, to be ourselves, once again.

At the Shore
* Debarati Bhanja, MSII
I will greet you at the shore, ebb and flow, but through my murky waters, you’ll never see, the mysteries at the depths that lie below, but I will greet you at the shore, ebb and flow: I will greet you at the shore, day and night, at high noon, myself, I will hide from your sight, but as the light disappears, you will see me right, and I will greet you at the shore, day and night. I will greet you at the shore, toes in the sand, together we will sway, hand in hand, at the depths you have seen, swim if you can, but I will greet you at the shore as who I am.

Twilight
* Amber Kulaga, BA, Patient
Out on the street I meet serendipitous twilight. So rare of late it feels stolen, not mine. I’ve gotten used to driving home with the darkness. Calm and calming. The fading blue glow catches images not seen in months. I might be going anywhere, or any time.

Ocean Eyes
* Tauhid Zaman, MD
PGY-I, Department of Psychiatry

Red Sand Beach
* Ryan Higgins, MSII

Cycles of influenza, plague, yellow fever, polio, HIV, Ebola, Zika, coronaviruses
Cycles of terror, death, innovation, and hope
“Trial by fire, this too shall pass,” she whispers to herself.

Handmade cloak and mask by Olga Prokunina
The Thought
* Kelly Chambers, CRNA
Department of Anesthesiology and Perioperative Medicine

The assault on my epidermis Sparked action in my neurons Igniting a bundle of thought The thought seeped through capillaries Traveled through veins Finding a path to my heart Pumping to my extremities Finding truth in fingers and toes Validation and back to my heart

The thought, sought To find its way out Trekking the route to my lungs Floating on carbon dioxide Traversing vocal cords Traveling expanding routes Past tongue, chattering teeth and lips Dear surgeon It is too cold in this operating room

Light for the Soul
* Oana Bolb, Department of Surgery

Masked
* Michelle Le, MSII

I can see you but I can’t see you there’s something missing but I know it’s there I can see you but I can’t see you a smile is hiding behind what you wear I can see you and you look to me your eyes try to share the feelings inside I can’t see you but I can hear you your voice speaks louder than your eyes I can’t see you but I can feel you no smile is hiding I judged too soon I can’t see you I can’t see you a masked face before me in the same room

Freshly Painted Purple
* Makayla Lagerman, MS1

Who was the last one to hold these hands— With nails freshly painted purple— that knew her name? Her favorite kind of birthday cake? The funny way her feet turned out as she walked? Who helped her pick out this magenta, Never thinking of it as a color that complements The simple manila toe tag

Now, I will be the last to hold her hand, the purple polish still unchipped. I do not know her name, The song that played for her first dance, Whether she ordered a burger medium rare or without pickles, The first address she could memorize, Or the dreams she once held dear

It is not lost on me that this heart I know so intimately. I do not know nearly at all. I do not know who last held these hands, nails freshly painted purple. I wonder if a memory of her danced into their mind today. I do not know what tragedies or commercials or sweet promises made her pull her hands to her chest, or how her laugh rang out and for which kind of jokes. I do not know if she had regrets Do most of us? And yet I know with full certainty that in life, she chose death to be a gift, And so perhaps, beyond just the sight of it, I know her heart after all.

Lichtenstein
* Andrea Lin, MSII

Bloomsday, June 16, 2020
* Seamus Carmichael, BA, H.Dip.Ed.
Harrel Health Sciences Library
Chimera

*David Carnish, M.Div., MA, BCC
Pastoral Services

Fields of flowers
Geese flying by
Honking song
Going South
Green turns to orange
Orange browns
The trees let loose
And there’s a Fall
a fall
A hearing
A sighting
That’s death
A heirophany,
I stood over the abyss
I offered my body
Tired, warm, worn
More wrinkled
This is the cold lot
This is my life
How did I get so loved?

Disentangling

*Susannah Gal, PhD, Patient

Unraveling lives
like a tangled ball of yarn
Disengaging two strands
undoing the knots that have formed between them.
It took time and patience.
I was able to do it
and now the two yarns are separated.
Like two people–no longer tethered by their vows.
Us

Beholder’s Eye

*Nicole Seacord, Patient

Judge’s Choice for Art
in the Faculty and Healthcare Providers Category

*Noel H. Ballentine, MD
Department of Medicine

Untitled Abstract IV

Judge’s Comment:
I was drawn to this abstract piece of art for its beautiful design and color. I lingered to think about the interplay between the main face and the secondary face.
My mother cut open the paper bag and presented it flat on the kitchen counter. Her tongue tipped from her lips in concentration as she measured and marked two inches from the top and bottom of the bag. Gold glittered nails creased two folds with surgical precision. She raised my physical science textbook and nestled it in the brown cocoon. All 6th grade textbooks must be covered by Friday. Deft thumbs, cracked at the corner near the nail, coaxed the covers into the new sleeves. She wrote the word “science” in neat bold letters across the cover. My mother took a deep breath, ran her hands, creased like crepe paper, across the coarse paper cover then tucked the gem into my book bag.

The clerk told me, “I'm sorry we are out of plastic bags with the virus, we only have paper.” He could only see my eyes with my mask, but he could tell I wasn’t happy. I was tired and sure the bottom of this glorified lunch bag was going to give out. “Okay,” I told him. I paid and a pit rose in my stomach as I watched him bag. I envisioned walking to my car and the gallon busting through the bottom of the bag, smashing to the ground, and milk gurgling from the cracked plastic, lost to the blacktop. My oranges, zesty, bright as the sun rolled from reach, now bruised and smashed. Myself, a stone in my gut, deserted, everyone else 6 feet away. I heard a voice, “Miss, your change.” I made my way to the car holding my breath. The bags held. I tucked them in the trunk.

When dressing, pearls are the last thing that you put on and the first thing that you take off. They are delicate and special, easily damaged and should be kept in their own jewelry pouch. I do not have a pearl pouch. I have a brown paper sandwich bag. The bag is for our masks, it lets them breathe. In the morning I pluck my mask from said bag. The bag, once crisp with clean lines and right angles now resembles an iron-only dress shirt dredged from the bottom of a laundry bag. Soon, all you see are my eyes.

I ate an orange for lunch; the flesh was shriveled, resigned. I carry the stone in my gut constantly now; days have turned to weeks, to months. It’s like breathing underwater. We bump elbows, no hugs or handshakes. My last patient’s name is Alice. I meet her. Her hands are folded on her lap; her skin is crepe paper, like a party streamer for a celebration I haven’t been to in months. Before I can introduce myself she grabs my hands in hers. I hold my breath. Cups them like a prayer and says, “Some days are twos and some days are tens, honey this won't last forever.” I can feel my face grow hot. My eyes well but my tears hold. The stone in my gut shifts. I exhale.

Stones are for sinking. Pearls are born of irritation and strife. This alchemy of pain is more than a stone. I breathe. I carefully print my name across the top of a fresh paper bag and nest my mask inside. I fold the top about two inches with surgical precision. I held. Today I tuck hope inside myself.

Judge’s Comment:
Using a humble, tactile object as a constant to link disparate experiences, this piece shows the surprising strength both of this material and the people who handle it. It captures perfectly the mundane and extraordinary aspects of life during this pandemic.
I walked outside, the harsh wind whistling past my ears. How will things ever be the same? Days, months, years, spent battling. And for what? It seems as if it was all for naught. I suppose it just wasn’t meant to be; yet, the same thought still rings through my head. How will things ever be the same? What could I do and what could I give to return to how things used to be? To escape the ever-present change in life that never seems to stop. Some things never change, they say. Why can’t this be one of those things? How will things ever be the same? Just a little while ago, everything seemed to be so calm, so clear. But now it feels cloudy, as if my vision has been ripped away from me. I try to take a walk to clear my mind and to escape this everlasting haze before me. To get away from the cold blankness that fills my horizon. But I can’t focus on anything else apart from what I’ve just heard. Just one thought continues to plague my mind. How will things ever be the same? As my feet pound against the hard surface below, this thought just can’t escape the depths of the sea within my head. Just days ago, the air was flowing with anticipation. Excitement hung in the breeze, swirling in every direction, engulfing those around it. And like a wave at high tide, you rose, swallowing everything away with you as you sank back into the ocean. My toes stood in the sand, desperately gripping the endless grains beneath them. Until they could no longer. I looked down and there was nothing. Just as there was everything a few moments ago, now there is nothing. Save for one thought flowing through my brain. How will things ever be the same? How will I ever be the same?
When you left,
Not ever to return,
Stillness chained me down,
Not a word was said,
Nor a grunt of pain heard.
When you left,
My heart suspended in midair,
Swaying like a late fruit
To be battered in storms,
And torn apart by beasts.
When you left,
Abandoning your dreams,
For us, to catch them like
Butterflies in the clouds,
Injured, when touched.
When you left,
The sun blinded my eyes,
No picture that I could see,
Only iron-colored pain,
To paint my fading memories.
When you left,
Swallowed by jaws of your absence,
I took in my first breath.
Until then, I only knew to cry,
Or to hope, endlessly.
When you left,
You were alone and crushed,
Curtailed in the white sheets,
Your suffering body,
Hiding from evil spirits.
When you left,
My own presence
Reduced to remembrances;
My faith, as a forgotten bird,
Soared to the desert of sorrows.
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