

2024

Wild Onions

Moments of Silence





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 roadsides. It blossoms into an unusual purple flower.

The underground bulb yields a pungent, spicy flavor and scent. The wild onion symbolizes the commonplace, yet paradoxically 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.

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Wild Onions

Each spring, we release this journal and share a collection of photography, art, and creative writing during a time of renewal as the trees begin to bud and the first of the spring wildflowers push through the fertile soil. *Wild Onions* holds the distinct honor and responsibility of documenting our struggles and triumphs throughout its pages, providing a platform for members of our healthcare community to express and interpret the impact of this time on our day-to-day existence. These pages are devoted to sharing creative writing and artistic work that seeks to describe and understand the experiences of health, illness, and treatment, especially caregiving and receiving care. The beauty of *Wild Onions* is its capacity to create a vibrant and expressive community of artists year after year. 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.

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, and photography judges for review and selection. This year, we chose awards—one each in creative writing, photography, and art—for the following categories:

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

New in 2024 is a Biological Imaging Competition featuring digital life sciences images from our biomedical colleagues.

Submissions are due by January 15 of each calendar year and can be submitted online at: sites.psu.edu/wildonions/submitting or emailed to wildonions@pennstatehealth.psu.edu.

Visit our website to download a PDF copy of *Wild Onions* at sites.psu.edu/wildonions or view our online version at: sites.psu.edu/wildonionsonline

Our Judges



ART: Seamus Carmichael

Seamus Carmichael is a visual artist and traditional singer from County Derry, Northern Ireland. He graduated in 1978 from the College of Art in Belfast and was Northern Ireland's Rome Scholar in 1981-1982, completing a series of linoleum prints illustrating the work of Irish Poet Padraic Fiacc. Marriage brought him to Philadelphia in 1984, and after a few years on Long Island, he and his family relocated to Central PA. With his experience in graphic design and 3D print, he was employed by the Penn State College of Medicine Harrell Health Sciences library, creating displays and digital designs and teaching 3D print classes. He served for many years on the board of the Lebanon Valley Council on the Arts and promoted Community Arts through the Lebanon First Friday Art Walk. In recent years, he has combined his art and design skills with his interest in folk music and Irish Literature to put together albums of Celtic Music and songs relating to James Joyce's "Ulysses." Following his retirement from Penn State in January 2024, he relocated to Moon Township near Pittsburgh, PA, where he plans to continue creating art and music.



CREATIVE WRITING: Eliana V. Hempel, MD

Dr. Hempel is an Associate Professor in the Department of Medicine. She serves as the interim chief of the Division of General Internal Medicine and the director of the primary care track and 3+3 IM-APPs programs within the Internal Medicine Residency Program. She has had the pleasure of serving as a facilitator for several Alumni Physician and Student Writers Group workshops offered through the Penn State College of Medicine, Department of Humanities. Dr. Hempel strongly espouses the value of narrative medicine as a tool for self-reflection, processing, wellness, and connection.



PHOTOGRAPHY: David Goldenberg, MD, FACS

Dr. Goldenberg is a Head and Neck Surgical Oncologist. He was educated at the Ben Gurion University in Israel. He completed a residency in Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery at Rambam Medical Center in Haifa, Israel, and then went on to do a three-year fellowship in Head and Neck Surgery and Oncology at the Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. He then came to Penn State Milton S. Hershey Medical Center and has been here for 18 years.

Currently, he serves as Professor and Chair of the Department of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery at the Penn State Milton S. Hershey Medical Center as well as Vice President, Otolaryngology—Head and Neck Surgery Services. His clinical practice includes head and neck cancers, thyroid cancer, and parathyroid disease. In addition, Dr. Goldenberg actively teaches medical students, residents, and fellows and is a Penn State College of Medicine Distinguished Educator.

Outside of medicine, Dr. Goldenberg is an avid photographer who has worked in multiple photographic mediums such as high dynamic range, infrared, lowlight, landscape, macro, and bird photography.

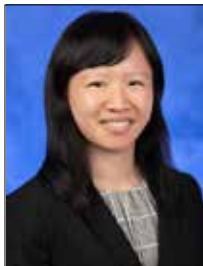
Welcome from the Senior Student Co-editors

We would like to extend a warm welcome to the 2024 edition of *Wild Onions*! To say that it has been an honor serving in the role of senior co-editors this year feels like a major understatement. Finding peace within the chaos, appreciating that quiet can be healing even in moments of inner turmoil, and experiencing overwhelming moments that leave one speechless are universally known sentiments that inspired this year's edition. "Moments of Silence" was the theme chosen for 2024 to inspire submissions surrounding the times throughout our lives when the absence of sound speaks louder than its presence. The thoughts transferred onto these pages as words, brush strokes, or images produced by beams of light exemplify the dynamic range of what a simple word, *silence*, can mean. For some, it embodied a sense of losing oneself or a loved one. For others, it was a moment to enjoy the simple pleasures life has to offer or to use the power of listening to heal often.

Just as moments of silence can harbor different purposes for us, even in a single day, this issue wishes to highlight the ever-transforming nature those times embody. It begins on a more somber note, using silent moments to process negative happenings. It later transitions into pieces that highlight the fluctuation that reflective moments in life can possess. Lastly, the pages end with a positive outlook, outlining the beauty within the still.

This year's edition would not be possible without our community members undertaking a journey of their own to find what *moments of silence* mean to them. As you embark on your own journey whilst reading, we invite you to reflect and maybe even reinvent what these times mean for you. We hope you immerse yourself in the breathtaking heights and doleful nadirs within these pages. Perhaps embrace a moment of silence and take it all in.

Allison Ching and Pallavi Kulkarni



Allison Ching, MSIV

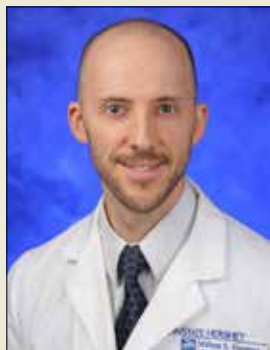
Allison grew up in Downingtown, PA, and has been passionate about the arts from a young age, participating in school orchestras, musicals, and literary programs. She graduated with her undergraduate degree from Penn State University in State College, PA. While attending medical school, she pursued an interest in the humanities and arts in medicine through research related to music in the hospital and participation in several music and literary student organizations, in addition to *Wild Onions*. In her free time, she enjoys reading, playing board games, and watching Japanese anime. She will go on to train as a family medicine resident at Lehigh Valley Hospital in Allentown, PA.



Pallavi Kulkarni, MSIV

Pallavi grew up in Newark, DE, and attended the University of Delaware where she earned her bachelor's degree. Her interest in the biological basis of behavior led her to major in neuroscience, while growing up in a multilingual household inspired her to minor in French. She has always been an enthusiast of the arts, even acting as an editor for her undergraduate school's fashion magazine. Her involvement with *Wild Onions* has taught her and inspired her to become not just more patient-centered but also person-centered. Outside of medicine, she enjoys writing poetry, baking cookies, and going on long walks with a good podcast. Pallavi is thrilled to embark on her journey of becoming an otolaryngologist-head and neck surgeon at Penn State Health.

Welcome to the 2024 Edition of *Wild Onions*!



Timothy D. Riley, MD

Guest Editor

It is with great pleasure and anticipation that I introduce to you our latest edition of *Wild Onions*, a publication committed to providing our community with space to share our experiences through the arts. This year, *Wild Onions* focuses on the profound theme of “Moments of Silence.”

Silence goes far beyond the absence of sound. It encompasses the unspoken words, the unacknowledged emotions, and the overlooked stories that permeate the spaces between us. It is in the exploration of these spaces that the true power of silence is revealed—the power to heal, to connect, and to transform. Our hope is that through providing a safe space for expression, our community can begin to unravel the layers of silence, embracing its beauty while acknowledging its risks.

Mindfulness, being present in the moment as it is without judgment, can blossom in silence. Through intentional connection with our mind and heart, the truth of our emotions and experiences can be known more intimately. This knowing can form the foundation for artistic expression. Through poetry, visual art, and prose, *Wild Onions* serves as a canvas for the diverse voices within our community to express their truth. By doing so, we hope to create a space for introspection and connection, where the community can come together to share, learn, and grow.

Acknowledging the potential harm of silence is also a crucial aspect of our exploration. It is a recognition of the shadows that silence can cast—the isolation, the marginalization, and the suppression of voices that deserve to be heard. As we delve into this theme, we are committed to shedding light on these darker corners, acknowledging the hurt that silence can perpetuate. Through the vulnerability of artistic expression, we aim to challenge these silences, fostering an environment where dialogue can flourish and understanding can grow.

I am grateful to the many students, faculty, staff, and patients who have contributed artistic submissions from both the Hershey and University Park campuses. The sharing of your voices is what makes this publication such a powerful representation of our community’s commitment to the arts. Thank you to our Co-Editors Allison Ching and Pallavi Kulkarni, Editor-in-Chief Daniel George, Managing Editor Deb Tomazin, and many student editors from both the Hershey and University Park campuses, whose unwavering commitments have made this publication possible year after year.

This issue of *Wild Onions* will feature a wide array of artistic contributions, each offering a unique perspective. We invite you to embark on this journey with us, to explore the profound beauty and potential harm of silence, and to celebrate the role of the arts in forging connections that transcend words. Let us come together as a community, breaking the silence that separates us and celebrating the power of artistic expression to build bridges and foster connection.

Warm regards,

Timothy D. Riley, MD

Associate Professor, Associate Vice Chair for Wellness
Department of Family and Community Medicine

Flower Arrangements in the Sunroom

© **Gianna Dafflisio** | *Class of 2025*

I sat beside the windows
so that the sun might excite my skin.
And as my nose filled with sweet lilac,
my gaze stuck

past the dirty glass panes
to the once familiar road,
and I felt each car as it drove by
filled
with purpose
and with people
 on their way
 to fulfill meaningful duties
 at meaningful places.

While I sat inside an empty house on a Tuesday.

For Joseph Merrick

© **Thomas McGarrity, MD**
Retired, Department of Medicine
Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology

You invited me in.
I was excited to join.

We show all the interesting cases Friday morning
For the medical students and doctors in training
A dermatology jamboree
I, a premedical student ravaged by chemo
Violaceous pustules cobbled
My face, my head, trunk and legs
Oral ulcers puffed my cheeks
Studded my lips
My hair like a drunken watchman fell.

Each assigned a stool in an empty classroom.
Please stand. Remove your shirts.
White-coated students like maggots
Swarmed, probed, sampled, pressed, and tugged.
The bow-tied, mustachioed professor
A dandy astride a shiny carousel
Pontificating at each station.

A London circus barker
Exhibiting the elephant man
Both of us ill and breathless
He, by compressing tumors
Me, from contempt.

You invited me in.
I was excited to join.



Tranquil Orchid

© **Xuexin Zhang, PhD**
Penn State Health Heart and Vascular Institute



Balance

© **Evan Goldman, PhD** | *Human Structure*

Judge's Choice • Creative Writing Students and Residents Category

The Lunch Rush © Amber Carr | Class of 2027

Sherry enters the hospital cafeteria and adjusts her glasses, surveying the choices. Salads, soup, pizza, some kind of rice bowl? Paninis and—

A small bump to her shoulder startles her as people pass, and she realizes she is still standing in the middle of the entrance. She attempts to step to the side, but at 81 she is not a fast woman. She looks ahead now to see she is blocking the end of the salad line. She moves again, then again, pushed slowly around the room by the headstrong flow of lunch rush traffic. She squints at a backlit menu, but she is too far away to really read it. Her stomach growls impatiently, urging her to make a choice.

Sherry abandons the menu and shuffles around to the next counter. What time did the doctor say their meeting was? She really ought to get back to Henry's room. With renewed decisiveness, she grabs a hamburger and fries from the counter. She turns around a few times, searching for the exit. Finally, she follows the flow of customers out toward the registers. She chooses the shortest line, and soon she sets her items in front of the cashier and reaches for her purse. She fumbles with the clasp on her wallet and begins to count her cash, now becoming acutely aware of the line forming behind her. It seems that several people in the other lines have already purchased their food and moved on by the time she collects her change and walks out into the dining area.

Sherry scans the room, searching for an empty seat. People continue to bustle past her, joining tables of their friends and colleagues or else heading straight out, food in hand. She spots an empty table in the middle of the room and moves toward it, but a mother and her two kids occupy it before she can reach it. Finally, she settles into a seat in the far corner and puts her food on the table. Conversations buzz all around her as she begins to unwrap the hamburger from its foil packaging. She lifts the bun, only to discover that there are no condiments on it. She is sure there must be a way to get some, but going on another search does not feel worth it at this point.

"I don't even like hamburgers," Sherry says quietly to herself. She swipes tears away from her eyes with frail fingers, and then begins to slowly eat her lunch.

Judge's Comments: *I find that in healthcare, we often dismiss the idea of stopping to smell the roses, citing that this is not a luxury we can afford. In a time when productivity, throughput, and efficiency are highly valued and our days are cluttered with meetings, messages, and myriad other seemingly important tasks, this heart-breaking piece reminds me of the importance of slowing down and really seeing what is happening around me.*

A Giant Playing Small

© Dwayne Morris | Office of Medical Education

And I pray this too shall pass
As my faith is greatly tried
There is nowhere to run to
And I no longer wish to hide
I've stumbled upon a crossroad
With a clear dividing line
Where surrender must become one with
The healing of my mind
I once thought I ran full circle
But that didn't make me wise

I simply drug my past into the present
Which told my future lies
Now shrinking in the shadows
Hides a giant playing small
Defeated by his memories
Of once standing strong and tall
As bright as the sun by day
A shining star at night
Oh how I miss that ten year old boy
Not yet corrupted by this life

What's This About Mary?

© Mary Arguelles | Patient

I tried to tell my mother on many occasions that I had been diagnosed with breast cancer. For some reason, the news never took. She would look at me with a blank stare, and then ask my sisters or my brother or even a friend for an explanation. "Now what's this about Mary?"

That's when I decided to take the bull by the horns or, perhaps more appropriately, the phony breast by its bogus nipple, and place the matter into our own hands. Seated before her at the Kings Daughters Home where she had recently come to live, I fished out my prosthetic left breast from its pocket within my bra and said, "Hold out your hands." She readily complied, whereupon I placed the hefty ersatz breast onto her open palms.

"What on earth?"

"I had my left breast removed," I told her. "Because of cancer."

She then turned her attention from the alien entity in her hands to gaze into my face and eyes. There followed a silence that tolled like a bell.

She closed her eyes then, and I watched her as she moved her fingertips along the braille of the breast. I placed my hands on top of hers and closed my eyes as well. The softness beneath our hands made me think of a baby's behind. I wondered how many diapers she had changed by the time I came along. I was her fourth and unexpected child. Had she grown tired of the task by baby number four, or had she become an expert, able to dust and dab retreating baby cheeks in one fell swoop?

She flipped the breast over then, and we simultaneously opened our eyes to view its shimmering underside, still without a word between us. Flipped over, it looked like a jellyfish, washed up on the Jersey shore. I thought about all our summertime trips to the seashore when I was a kid. My mother cooked and cleaned and carted kids to the beach while I ran footloose and fancy free in the sand, on the boardwalk, and across the wrap around porches of St Charles Place.

She flipped the breast over one more time so that it was right side up again in our hands. Together we poked our index fingers into the soft foam. We smiled at each other then, reading each other's minds as we thought about Nanny's sugar cake dough, the rising up and the punching down. How soft it was underneath the heel of our hands. My grandmother kneaded it. My mother kneaded it. I kneaded it. There was a knack to the kneading.

I finally relieved her of the breast, lifted my shirt up, and slipped the form back into its pocket where it could finally quiet down. We held each other's hands then and said no more.



Untitled Abstract

© Noel Ballentine, MD
Department of Medicine



Moment of Rest

© Malgorzata Sudol
Department of Medicine, Clinical Sciences



Killing Time

© Himani Devabhaktuni | Class of 2025

Scarce Resource

© Taylor Goss | Class of 2026

Rationing can be defined as
*“the allocation of a good under conditions of scarcity
which necessarily implies that
some who want and could benefit
by that good will not receive it”*

Silence seems to be quite scarce these days—
In my head,
*did you lock the door?
my everyone will die one day
how do you define love?
all my friends hate me*
In our house,
*an air purifier to block out the thoughts
the same tv show on repeat to distract me
fake fireplace sounds in an attempt for calm
if I talk about it enough, maybe I'll finally move on*
And in the world,
*cars crash and people honk, trying to get to work on time
gunshots are heard downtown, again
politicians fight in a never-ending volume contest
a fire alarm sounds, and no one moves*
There never seems to be enough silence,
Yet when we are allocated some,
We always seem to fill it.

Delirium

© Rachel Casas, MD
Department of Medicine

My thoughts swim
in a fog of memory,
a timeless suspension
of drifting desires.
Lap after lap until
slowly, a show
of troubled, peering faces
beckon me outside
my walls. And wait.
Frantically searching
the spherical fortress
of my misfiring mind:
Who are these faces?
What do they seek?
Eyes widen, and
gasping
I grasp the surface,
remembering
when time and purpose
obeyed my command.
They slip away.
And I sink
again
to silent stillness.

Walk

© Weaver Goldman
Family of Employee



a little confession

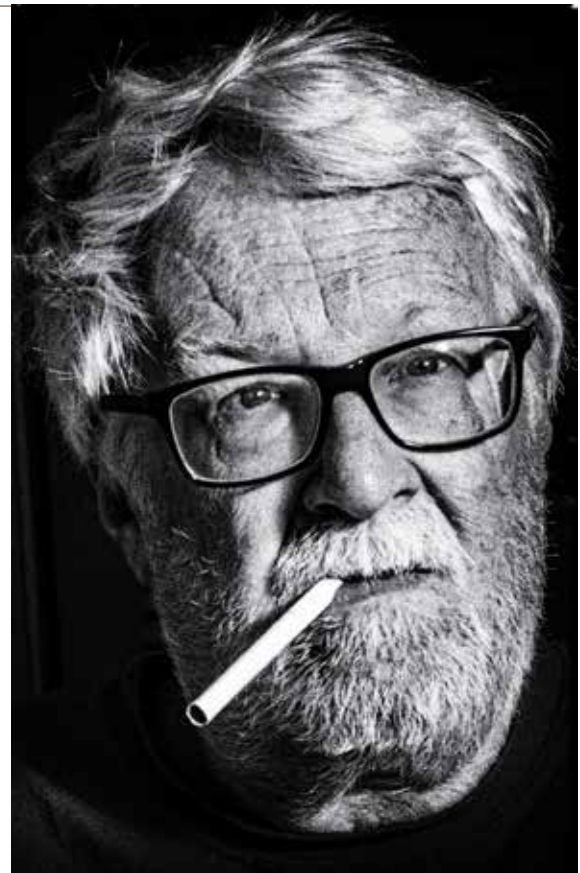
© Anna Serrichio | *Class of 2025*

Sometimes, I miss the psych ward.
To clarify, I don't miss being sick.
I don't miss the chaos, the anguish, the despair,
I don't miss the noise
I miss the quiet ...
in my head.

Sometimes, the world is too loud, complicated.
Demands and expectations I can't meet.
I don't want to hear all the voices,
I don't want to hear them tell me
I'd be better off ...
if I was dead.

Sometimes, I miss the community, understanding.
The shared experience of being human.
I don't want to live in a deafening world,
I don't want everyone talking
and yet no one listens ...
to a single word.

Sometimes, the world gets me too scared.
It drowns my words out, and nobody hears.
I miss the safety, I miss the routine,
I miss the reassurance of knowing
my cries for help ...
will be heard.



Noir Tough Guy

© D. Scott Calhoun, MEd | *Family of Employee*

Woodies – “Spring Is In the Air” © Ted Weaver | *Patient*



Borderlands

© Vera Guertler, MD

*Formerly PSH Community Medical Group,
Lancaster*

Everyone is tired of the beggar from Kyiv
—Anatoly Antonov, Russian Ambassador

Over trampled wheat
under a pale blue sky,
I wander near the border,
no longer mother, doctor, daughter.

Perhaps, I am now part
of the grain
combed by winds
on the fields of Ukraine
dotted with crimson snow?

Or the metal grey river
pulsing between gunshot
ricocheting in a canyon
of skeletal trees?

Maybe I'm the volunteer
offering direction
to those resting
beside roads riddled
with leaves and needles?

Or am I the thread
shorn from frayed
fabric hoping to
weave between slits
of lit windows
on a moonless night?

A beggar from a country
of shriveled wheat
and smoke-choked skies.

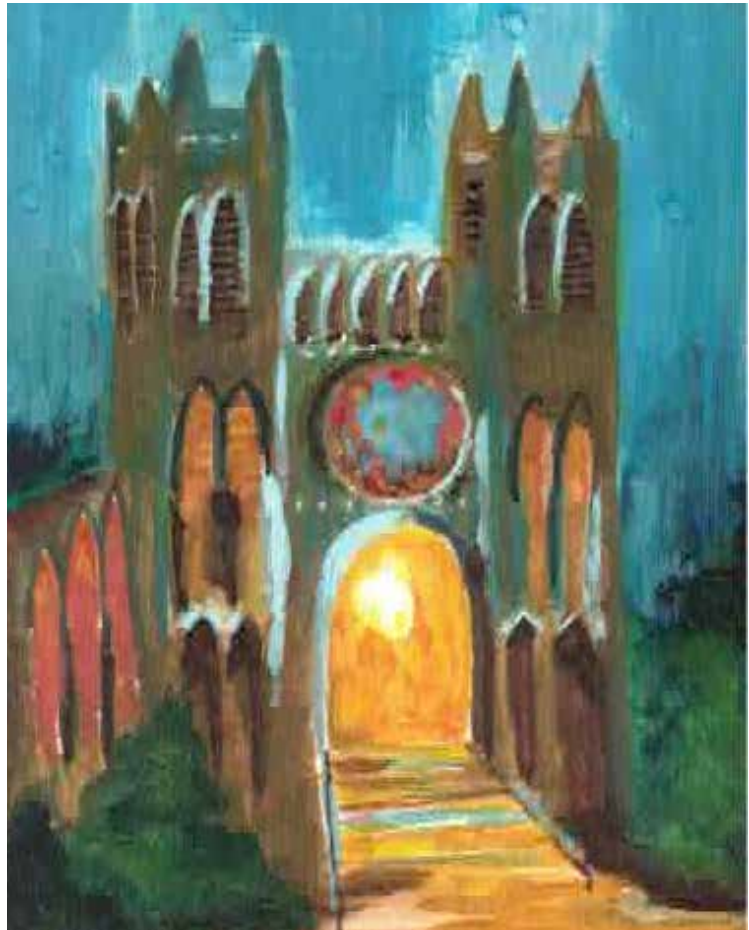
Maybe I'm already home
treading between fresh
graves. Thankful for
candles and those
who light them.

I, too, burn
with love
for the broken world.



Dog Sledding

© Devin DePamphilis | *Family of Employee*



Midnight

© Pritika Singh | *Class of 2025*

Judge's Choice • Art
Patients Category

End of Shift © Chet Davis



Judge's Comments:

“End of Shift” is a messy triumph. The figure’s gesture is somewhere between a survivor’s smile and an expression of satisfied exhaustion. In the slashing brushwork and arbitrary colors, we have hints that she might have survived a rough night in the ER or perhaps a muddy construction project.

Grandmother Dressing Her Hair in the Morning

© Judy Schaefer, RN

*Member of The Doctors Kienle Center
for Humanistic Medicine*

Right hand up and over, then the left
Sweep and comb and smooth
Then twist and turn
into the nape of her neck

Secure with five black pins
and then two tortoise shell combs
Press above each ear.
No strands fall

Fascinated with such expertise
and economy of motion
as only a five year old can know,
I watch in awe

I unscramble my daydream
And back to the conversation at hand
Hair and loss, wraps and scarves
and this patient in front of me

Surely, not I

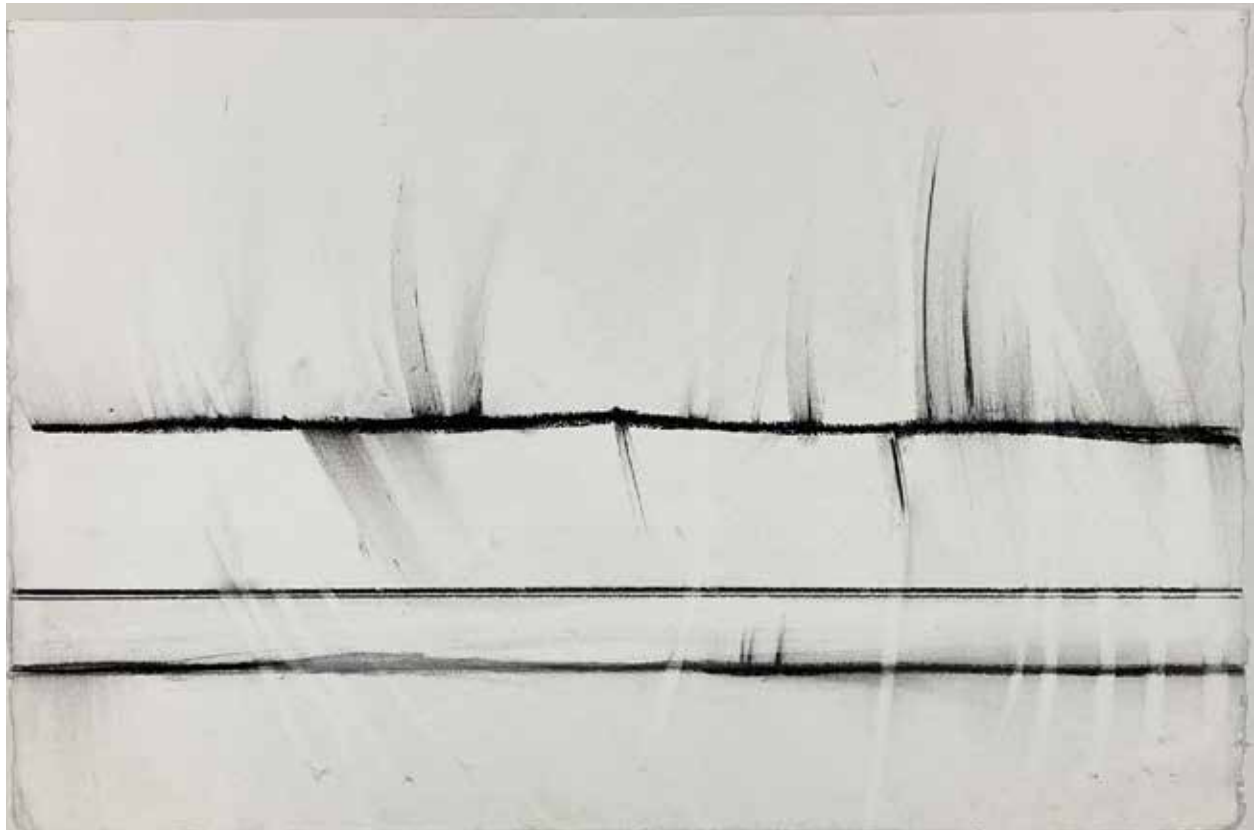
© Makayla Lagerman, MD

*Clinical Resident
Department of Family and Community Medicine*

Hardened
Callous
Cold
Surely, not I.
Bitter
Burnt out
Sold
Surely, not I.
Jaded
In doubt
Bold
Surely, not I.
So when the
Words come
Out my
Mouth,
Surely, not I?

Breaks in Silence

© Laura Patton | *Pediatrics Support Services*



Under the Rubble

© Abdul-Jawad Majeed | Class of 2026

This poem is dedicated to my family and friends who have died in the bombing of Gaza in 2023-2024.

It's quiet here, under the rubble.
The collapsed cement walls cover my ears,
While sand and debris fill the cracks and block the air.
As my grave is packed, there's not much left that I can hear,
Except my mosque's imam, making a muffled call to prayer.

Under the rubble,
I've lost my wife and daughter,
And subsequently all my fears.

Under the rubble,
My death is not much farther,
So, no point in shedding tears.

Under the rubble,
I can't hear rockets shatter windows or picture frames,
or people shouting for help or calling names.
My one remaining neighbor is left struggling to dig a lane,
under the rubble of my home,
to find my remains.



Fire Escapes – Lancaster, PA

© Caroline Triscik, MA, LPC | Patient

Silence the Jingle

© Cynthia Iberg, RN | Retired

It is the day after Christmas
and over all the earth,
trash barrels are filled
with the leftover mirth.

The many, fancy, plastic gifts
which laid beneath the tree,
are now a stream of waste
flowing down to join the sea.

Garbage cans are filled
with last year's Christmas toys,
for now it is only new stuff
that thrills the girls and boys.

The forest weeps for loss of pine,
electric bills are in the mail,
box store owners count the cash,
that came from all the sales.

How did this day
of a special person's birth,
become just a time
of behavior destroying earth?

Sleeping Among Stars

© Jacob Snyder | Family of Employee



The Shifting Sands of Time

© William B. Fritz, Jr. | Patient

The silent waves between us
Have etched eternal lines
Upon the borders of our lives—
The shifting sands of time

I'll cry the tears between us
They'll fall in silver lines
Upon the visions in our hearts—
The shifting sands of time

So new the love between us
So old—the ancient lines
Upon the silent waters—
And shifting sands of time

Neighbors

© Barbara Junker | Patient

A mountain of black Hefty bags
knotted with red ties like ribbons
and a walker crowned it
awaited the early Tuesday morning collection.
Obese bags, a secondary, dark, grave marker
to everyone strolling or riding by
that an inhabitant in this house had passed, too.
A widow in her eighties had succumbed
to a metastasis and a neighbor
achieved the longest residency
in their community, those bags a nuance of epitaph.

With yawning trunks, one car then the other
belonging to her daughters were loaded tenderly
useful items and memorabilia
the unneeded, the nonrecyclable
their adjudged value discarded, auctioned, or
donated.

Only three or four summers ago
the neighbor watched this great-grandmother
mowing her yard and later they sat
chatting beneath her awning
as the sun slipped, cooling the day.

Her home is emptied, touching mortal ransack
where her family had gathered
holidays, birthdays, visits, food and laughter
vehicles parked everywhere; doors slammed.
The daughters' cars have finished
Hefty bags seized leaving flattened grass.
Her grandson cuts the lawn
for the Realtor.



Stark Difference

© Shivani Mattikalli | Class of 2025

After the Goodbyes

© Mary Mager | Family of Patient





Dance With Me

© Zhuolin Wang, PhD
Family of Employee

That Voice

© Kathrine Rineer | *Penn State Cancer Institute*

Hum, thump, thump.

The beautiful desert scenery blended into the steady pulse of the road.

The colorful rocks were dull in contrast to her voice.

As we drove home from chemo, she bathed me in a constant stream of chatter.

Her medicine-induced liveliness affirmed her resilient presence inside her failing body.

One vibrant story bled into the next, encouraged by my small, throaty acknowledgements.

Her words poured over me like a beloved, warm-summer rain that wouldn't last long.

Intently, I listened to that voice.

The voice that helped me with the words when I couldn't read them.

The voice that taught me with a knowing sternness when I needed it.

The voice that fed my holiday spirit every time she sang White Christmas.

The voice that cheered for me and assured me she was proud of me.

The voice that hugged me through the phone after my worst days.

The voice that welcomed me every time I needed to hear it.

I basked in that voice for hours.

Until it slowed and faded into exhausted silence against her pillow.

Silence

© Gurwant Kaur, MD | *Department of Medicine, Division of Nephrology*

It's an early Sunday morning during winter. As usual, I wake up before dawn to enjoy a few moments of silence. I sit up in bed and thank the universe for providing me with a comfortable and safe home. As I peer outside through the window, it is still dark and quiet. I walk downstairs to the kitchen and sip my tea in silence. I drive my car on the quiet roads in the morning fog. The turn signal in the car is the only sound I hear, breaking the silence. I park my car in an almost empty parking lot and I start to walk the long path to my office, crossing a patch of grass, dotted with dew drops. My footsteps fall silently. I enter the hospital through a side door, thinking and planning for the day ahead. The sound of my feet on the polished and reflective floor is my only companion in the silent long hallways leading to my office.

I open the office door and place my purse and lunch bag on the office shelf. I turn the computer on and log into the electronic medical record system. The printer breaks the silence as I give the command to print the long list of patients for rounds. As I am starting my day, my mom calls and says that he wants to talk to me on the phone. I say, "Hello Dad. How are you today?" I wait for a few seconds for his response before I realize that his silence is going to be my new normal, as he has been unable to talk after his stroke. It has been two and a half months and I am still hoping to hear his voice. Before he had his stroke, my father used to greet me when I would arrive home at the end of a busy day by saying, "Hello, my 'doctor daughter.' Welcome home!" Now when I go home, I am greeted by sheer silence. The living room sits quietly upon my arrival and there is no one to welcome me home in the enthusiastic way that he did. His routine had been to come to my room every night to wish me, "Goodnight beti [daughter]." Now I go to sleep after observing a few moments of silence, remembering his former presence in my room. He used to turn up the television volume so loud that I often asked him to turn it down. Now, it has been several months since the TV has been hanging in complete silence on the wall.

After I finish my patient rounds, I go to visit my father in his hospital room. He is sitting quietly in his chair after his nurse had lifted him out of his bed with the help of a Hoyer lift. He is looking outside through the window when I arrive. He waves when he sees me enter the room. I sit next to him on another chair and start to talk to him. He responds in the only way he can now, by waving his right hand. After spending an hour with my father, I get up to leave his room. I turn to him and say, "Goodnight Dad." As usual, I wait for his smile and a verbal response, in his loud and energetic voice, the same one he used at home, before his stroke. However, this time it was only silence that I received, with his hand waving silently in the air. I smile and look back, then exit the room. I take the elevator downstairs, walk to the parking lot, and drive home. I finish my house chores and sleep in silence, as it is again dark when I look outside through the window.

For the Birds

© John Garman, MD

Clinical Resident, Department of Psychiatry



Silent Screaming of a Breaking Heart

© **Krista Klinger**

Department of Ophthalmology

A heart screaming in deafening silence,
Shattering into a million pieces in wistful defiance.
Knowing a lifetime of love is coming to an end,
The love of a mother, the love of a friend.

Silence After the Dance

© **Theodore Miller** | *Class of 2026*

Silence soon broke screams as weakened limbs
collapsed on the stairs. Surroundings of the
skylight gems lost their luster to the sirens,
with only the pools of tears capturing the light.
Saviors shoved my small, trembling hands
calling “Mom” aside, yet voicemail left only a
broken son’s heart and sick sister’s body on that
perfect Starry Night floor.

Silence since settled the sister into her first
coma, the first of many quiet moments where
the slumbering sickness of diabetes would steal
the solace of silence from my family.

Shhhh.

© **Lisa Spencer, MEd, BSRT(T), BHCN**

Penn State Health St. Joseph Cancer Center

Shhhh.

Life can be so hard.

I just need quiet solitude—

To process, to adjust,

To learn and to mourn.

Your words, though softly spoken,

Are frightening and too loud—

They resonate in my mind,

Creating echoes of doom

That were never imagined even in my nightmares.

Take back those words so that I can pretend

that they were never said.

Let me have the peaceful moments that I used to have.

My soul cries for the quiet that I had as a child.

Shalom, meaning peace—

Shhh.



Silent Screaming of a Breaking Heart

© **Krista Klinger** | *Department of Ophthalmology*

Taiaroa Head, Dunedin, New Zealand

© **Camille Moeckel** | *Class of 2026*



Barbara

© Erin White, BA, CPhT, CNA | *Medical Intermediate Care Unit*

You weren't the first, nor will you be the last, but to this day, you still haunt me
Your smell lingers in my brain and appears when I have to bathe the newly deceased
Chlorhexidine mixed with Cancer
Rotted purple and yellow skin
Your screams as we turned to clean you up
Your shitty husband who was proudly sporting his new soon-to-be wife in front of you while you died
before us. (Karma's a Bitch, Brother)
But you were fine with it as you knew about it long ago
You knew what she would end up with in the end
You wrestled with leaving this world
And you clung to what life was left of you
You weren't at peace
Your grief-stricken children were the most mature in the room and accepted your life's end
Your family finally left after hovering over you for hours
Finally—a moment of calmness and tranquility
Your Attending came in well after the duty day and sat quietly at your bedside for some time.
Quiet for a few minutes, he watched your vitals on the monitor as you breathed slowly
He then talked to you while you hung on and persisted
Moments passed—then he was quiet
He held your hand and said, "God be with you."
He paused and left your room
Minutes later, you passed and that was the calmest that you looked
No family would return to see you as they said their final goodbyes
The nurse and I silently cleaned you for the last time
No more screams of pain as we turned you
Prepared you for the morgue
Chlorhexidine and cancer—burned in my brain
To this day you still haunt me

Celestial Majesty

© Xuexin Zhang, PhD
Penn State Heart and Vascular Institute



Judge's Choice • Art
Faculty and Healthcare Providers Category

Bad End to a Rotten Day

© Michael J. Green, MD | Departments of Medicine and Humanities



Judge's Comments:

"Bad End to a Rotten Day" is a complete expressive statement. The text tells a deeply personal story. The artist shows us his own worried face in expressionistic brushstrokes and watercolor washes completing the emotional self-portrait.

A moment of silence for the life I could have lived.

© Taylor Goss | Class of 2026

For the 6 am Pilates classes before work.
For the big kid job with the great coworkers.
For the 401k I cashed out for moving expenses.
For the monthly massage membership.
For the Summer Fridays clocking out early.
For the promotions and raises.

A moment of silence for the night before every exam.
For the rib rattling tears over would've, could've, should've.
For the free therapist that didn't quite work for me.
For the nights I said no to my new friends and my old ones.
For the oh-so-close-to relationship-ending fights.
For the bed I couldn't sleep in alone.
For the days I questioned it all.

A moment of silence for the years to come.
For the six more months that feel like years.
For the mornings I'd rather be anywhere but lab.
For the evaluations that feel like an attack.
For the first time I watch someone die from this side.
For the way my dad taught me to hold back tears.
For the moments I will miss.

There are moments where the silence is almost too loud.

Essential Break

© Chet Davis | Patient



Rhythms of Sisyphus

© **Jake MacDonald** | *Class of 2024*

Groggy blinking, hot shower.
Snowy towel, harsh coffee.
Cool metal key slips in the ignition,
wheels bump along a worn path.
My tired eyes reflect a muted glare.
Rooms. Names. Ages.
Notes. Labs. Scribbles.
A chorus of clicks and mumbles,
It's easier to go along with
Mundane Tuesday's siren song.
Standing at the threshold,
Self-talk. Deep breath.
Brightening eyes, plaster smile.
"How are you feeling today?"
You've been better, I know that.
Plans unchanged, hope wavers.
Options exhausted, treading water.
"We'll be by later to talk things through together."
Next on the list.
Cycle through.
Déjà vu, nothing new.
Boulder at the base again.
First, do no harm.
Aching arms, pushing on
Up that hill, hoping still.

Moon Poem

© **Melissa Greene**
Penn State Cancer Institute's CARE Center

Moon of smiles,
moon of wisdom,
knowing that
in all time
there has never been a moment
as important as now.
Moon, in the rise and fall
of day and night,
hung against the backdrop of
the human heart,
you wait,
in balance with the breeze.



Storm

© **Charlotte Chambers**
Family of Employee (Age 12)

Silence Moon

© **YuAn Du** | *Family of Employee (Age 12)*



Judge's Choice • Creative Writing

Faculty and Healthcare Providers Category

The Unbaked Chocolate Cake © Christy Lucas, MD | Alumna, Class of 2020

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees and prepare two 9-inch cake pans by buttering and lightly flouring.

“She’s broken her hip,” too busy to call;
Twenty-four hours later, a stroke after Fall.
Thinking, my cat with nine lives: invincible.
Calling at last, greeted by aphasia: reprehensible.
Hemiparetic in the ICU, reality came into view.
As they spoke over, beside, never *with* you,
Failing to see my brave, frustrated patient,
For your Broca’s was broken and thoughts too latent.

2. Prepare two 9-inch cake pans by buttering and lightly flouring. Add 2 c. flour, 2 c. sugar, ¾ c. unsweetened cocoa powder, 2 t baking powder, 1 ½ t baking soda, 1 t salt, and 1 ½ t espresso powder to a large bowl. Whisk to combine.

Holding hands, “Be patient with yourself,” I said,
Placing pictures of our family ’round your bed.
“Love you” escaped your drooped lip, firing every neuron,
Stopping my tracts: she’ll be ok—she’s not gone.
“When you get better, I’ll bake you a chocolate cake,
Writing ‘Kay’ in pink to decorate.”
As your diabetic eyes glimmered in reply,
I leaned over and said my goodbye.

3. Add 2 c. milk, ½ c. vegetable oil, 2 large eggs, and 2 t vanilla extract to flour mixture and mix together on medium speed until well combined. Reduce speed and carefully add 1 c. boiling water to the cake batter until well combined.

I held onto hope, trying to look ahead,
But at my next visit, you barely moved in bed.
Speech improving, but pride evermore bruised.
Incontinence and immobility: a contrast to life you once knew.
Though your brain slowly healed after stroke,
It was now the heart that broke.
Greeting you now with aphasia, not knowing how to fix it.
You felt broken beyond repair, and there I sat, keen to exit.

4. Distribute cake batter evenly between the two prepared cake pans.

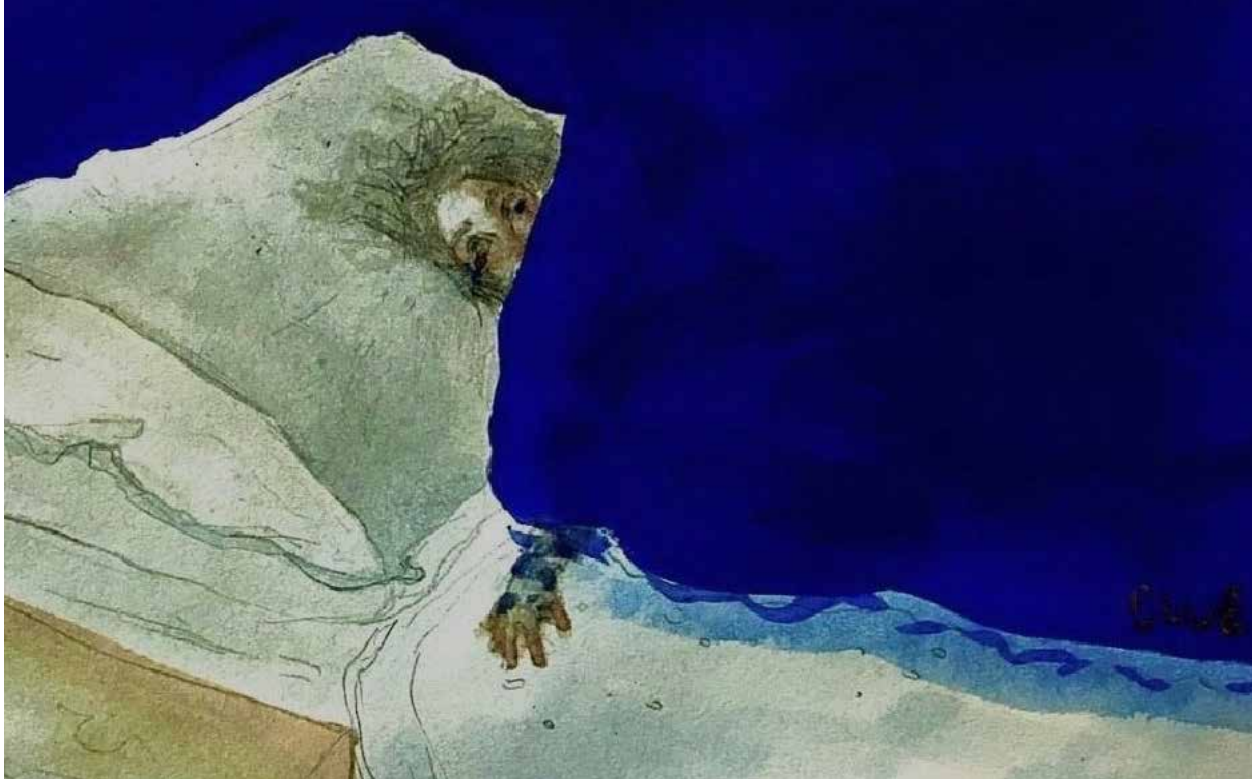
I wish you knew that you were perfectly imperfect that day,
And no matter what, I would have loved you any way.
But staying was not a choice that I could make.
So now it remains forever—the unbaked chocolate cake.

Judge's Comments:

This poignant piece serves as a reminder that grieving isn't limited to death. Rather, there is a special kind of mourning that comes with the loss of what once was, even as we try to appreciate what is.

Judge's Choice • Art
Students and Residents Category

My Big Blue Bed © Himani Devabhaktuni | Class of 2025



Judge's Comments:

“My Big Blue Bed” is another piece of expressionistic drawing and composition. The tiny head and hand of the figure pinned under the oppressive weight of the blue covers, and the sensitive drawing of the bed and pillow, and especially the hand, emphasize the character's inner struggles.



Crab Hunting in the Moonlight

© Kelly Chambers, CRNA
Department of Anesthesiology and Perioperative Medicine



What I Didn't Say

© Caroline Eisele | *Class of 2024*

"How's medical school?"

Yesterday at 3 pm,
The mother screamed.
She never wanted the gun in the house.

Blood drained inside and out.
No time to dig for access,
They drilled right into bone.

The neurosurgeon gently wiped,
to clean the exit hole.
While I held her head.

13 years old.

Today at 5 am,
I got out of bed.
And went back.

"Great!"

Physician Guilt

© Neyha Cherin, DO
Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation

"You have pneumonia."

Disbelief.

Told: "You cannot go to work."

"I have to!" I cough.

I puff my inhaler, in bed
while the world goes on outside.

"Where's Mommy?"

"Shhh. She's sleeping, Honey."

Baby cries.

Computer dings. Another email waiting.

"Re: Staffing concerns."

I am so sorry.

Exhausted, I roll over and close the lid.

One Gets the Sparkler ...

© Kelly Chambers, CRNA
Department of Anesthesiology and Perioperative Medicine

Silence of the ICU

© Morgan Hevel-Wagner | *Virtual Care*

My shoes squeak against the freshly mopped linoleum floor.
The rhythmic beeping of machines sounds like fire alarms in a black void.
The heavy sobs of a wife as her husband's last breath echoes into the hallway.
My mother's room, illuminated by iridescent LEDs, glows from the corner.
Her IV pump sings an aria of completion.
The smell of antiseptic is strong as another vial is filled.
The snapping of butterfly wings clicks into place.
A white silk tape zips as it is torn from a roll.
The chair, cold and plastic-like, sticks to my calves.
A warm sheen purrs through the vents, creating a layer of sweat at my hairline.
The sound of plastic bags being shook out and pagers beeping are almost hypnotizing.
Whispers escape the lips of nurses, respecting an untold rule of silence.
My mother's hand is warm, but unmoving against my grasp.
Today the sun cleared the foggy morning.
The mist of uncertainty begins to recess as a cardinal lands outside my mother's window.
The red bird unknowingly looks toward me, towards my mother.
I smile as the winged creature hops impatiently.
As I think of our past loved ones showing their presence.
Giving my mother, my family, and myself strength and patience during this deafening silence.
If only my mother would respond to my touch, my tears, and my words.
Her response is written in computer scripts and data.
A computer that cannot repeat her laugh or smile, but could keep her alive.
I begin to trace small circles into my mother's palm, trying to memorize the lines in her skin.
As the sun streaks into her room, the warmth caresses our skin.
Her hand tightens around mine.
My mother's voice breaks all silence.

Prewitt Ridge Campground

© Veronica Harrington | *Class of 2024*



A Moment of Silence

© Anna Serrichio | Class of 2025

When I walked over to the window to open the blinds, I noticed a line of carefully placed colorful greeting cards along the windowsill. At the end, where the window met the wall, there was a teddy bear holding a rose.

“Hey there, my name is Anna, and I’m a speech pathologist,” I said one morning, after walking into a new patient’s room. “Today we’re going to be doing your speech and swallow evaluation.”

I pointed to the teddy bear and turned to my patient, who was in a wheelchair beside the bed.

“He is adorable. Who gave it to you?”

“Oh,” he said, smiling. “My wife.”

“That’s so sweet,” I replied. “What’s her name?” I asked, as I pulled up a chair and sat down.

“Oh, um ...” he started. “Hmm.”

I fumbled around the many pockets of my scrubs, trying to find a pen.

“Uh ...” he continued.

As we get older, we might expect to lose some hair, or some early childhood memories, or the ability to ride on a rollercoaster and not feel dizzy afterwards. We don’t expect to lose access to our words—especially the ones that are the most important to us. Yet, this is the reality of many people with left

hemisphere stroke or brain injury.

Our words allow us to express ourselves, acquire new information, and connect with others. But some words mean more to us than others. If you had to choose one word that you would never want to forget, what word would you choose? If you were asked to think of a word that represented something or someone you loved the most, which word would it be?

I looked up and saw my patient’s smile was gone. Frustrated, he shook his head, staring into the distance. “No,” he said, letting his head fall into his hands, just as the room fell silent.

Isn’t it interesting how we say that? The room *fell* silent. Like when the temperatures drop in November, or when pellets of rain slam onto car windshields in the middle of a thunderstorm. Not ‘rose’ like fluffy brioche bread baking in the oven, or the sun in the morning. Silence falls.

I waited a few more seconds. Sometimes if you let the silence be, the word comes on its own.

My patient looked up, visibly distressed.

Still, nothing.

Do you remember the last time you wanted to say something but couldn’t remember the word for it?

Continued on next page

Doing the Dew © Wilson Po, MD | Department of Anesthesiology



That tip-of-tongue state, where you know there is a word for exactly what you're thinking of, but you just can't remember it?

Now imagine that it wasn't something that happened every once in a long time, as it usually does. Imagine it happening every day.

Now imagine that it wasn't something that happened only with words you don't use very much. Imagine it happening with words you use all the time. Words you know very well because you have used them your whole life.

Imagine it happening with that one word that means the most to you. Imagine it happening with the one word you would never want to forget.

"It's okay," I whispered, eventually, gently taking his hand in mine. "I know that you know."

I know that you know. It's something I say a lot to my patients with aphasia. Then I explain that aphasia affects the connections between words and the meanings they represent. Aphasia does not affect intelligence.

"I know that the words are here," I said, pointing to my head. "The problem is getting them here," I explained, pointing to my mouth.

My patient sighed, softening, and looked towards the teddy bear. How difficult it must have been to

quietly accept the idea that he did not have access to the word he wanted, at least not at this very moment.

When we have illnesses that affect the brain, we tend to think that it's our fault, that our symptoms somehow reflect a weakness of character or a flaw in personality.

In the case of aphasia, silence is simply a symptom of a disorder.

During this silence, someone's brain is trying to find new ways to circumvent the pathways that were affected by a stroke or injury. It is working hard to find the words.

This silence does not reflect an absence of something, like when a conversation comes to its natural ending, or when your voice trails off in a moment of hesitancy or embarrassment.

As a speech pathologist, silence is what helps you provide an initial assessment of the parts of the brain that are trying to find alternative routes from a word's meaning to its form. It marks the beginning of the healing process in which you and the patient think of ways to help them (re)learn how to communicate better.

In the meantime, you listen closely.

For this silence may be vast, but it's never empty.

Monarch © Ted Weaver | Patient



Judge's Choice • Creative Writing
Staff, Family, and Community Members Category

The Prognosis © Ananya Das | Department of Orthopaedics and Rehabilitation

They sit in silence
holding hands,
touching,
eyes conveying
their own special
message.
The prognosis is in,
it's a glioma.
The silence
speaks volumes.
The coming days
will not
be the same.
Whatever comes
this moment
of silence
is reassuring.
In sickness
In health
In silence.

Judge's Comments:

As we help our patients navigate their illnesses, we often feel compelled to jump into next steps, to come up with a plan, to do something. Yet, perhaps the way we can provide the most support is by creating space for stillness, and by sharing in the silence.

Underground Hummelstown

© Eileen Hennrikus, MD | Department of Medicine



Biggest Fear?

© Clara Wruck | Class of 2025

To a 9-year-old,
it seems like an innocent question
something you could ask in passing
while eating ice cream or on a play date
a question not loaded with expectation
but with curiosity
to learn how other humans
experience this world.

To a child,
there is no such thing as a bad question
or a wrong answer
and so it makes sense
that one could say “the dark”
while another
could live with very different fears
fears like disease, hunger, or war.

As a child, I too remember asking this question.
Recently, I’ve noticed
I don’t ask this question anymore
nor do people ask it of me.

On rotation, a pediatric cancer patient, Lucas, brought me back to this question.
Medically, he is near the end of the road.
A road with no path, no stop signs, no traffic lights.

Initially, he was “fine” when asked.
His primary communication method: shoulder shrugs.
But it wasn’t long before I learned of his dog Jasper
and his best friend Leo
and how his mom makes the absolute best macaroni and cheese.

Later, his biggest fear:
no more hugs or forehead kisses; no more friends, piggyback rides or nighttime reading.
Just, no more.

I feel tears sliding down, saturating my surgical mask.
I recognize there is no templated answer for this.
There’s nothing to read on his history nor anything to write in his note.
Yet somehow this feels essential.

With a frog in my throat,
I say: I have no idea what lies before you
But I want you to know that life on earth will not be the same without you.
Those who have loved you will carry you with them through every life adventure
And you will never ever be forgotten.

And so, it took meeting Lucas, a child, for me to understand
Why we, as adults, don’t talk about biggest fears.
Because it’s not the dark anymore,
there is no switch to flip,
there is no one right answer or one right feeling.
Crying, screaming, laughing, and smiling are all
Powerful
Beautiful
Human.

And so, we must learn to hold the hands of our patients even though we cannot truly walk in their shoes.
Even when it is heart-wrenching just to put on the socks.



Unruffled

© Susan Landis, CRNA
Retired, Department of Anesthesiology
and Perioperative Medicine

The Best Cancer

© Kathleen Palmer and Thomas McGarrity, MD

Patient and Physician, Department of Medicine, Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology

I power around the track, the 440 and the 880. With each rhythmic stride my heart and arms pump in synchrony. On Friday nights I fly across the dance floor to the Bee Gees' "Staying Alive." Just shy of 16, my heart falls in love for the first time. We steal kisses in his green Gremlin. Then comes the itching—unending night and day. My skin is colonized by unseen chiggers, puzzling my family doctor and dermatologist. I swallow fistfuls of antihistamines and Xanax sprinkles on vanilla ice cream. My family doctor and dermatologist wonder if it's in my head. Until an enlarging lymph node rises above my right clavicle. Hodgkin's Lymphoma.

I am going to die! I see the dread in my mother's tear-filled eyes and my dad's clenched jaw. "Hodgkin's is the best cancer to have. You're not going to die," the Oncologist almost gleefully exclaims. I give him my best insolent, "Are you out of your flipping mind?" stare. "There's a best cancer?" "Do I get a membership card?" Embarrassed by my anger, I slip into a cocoon of silence.

I undergo a volley of blood work, x-rays, bone marrow aspirates, exploratory laparotomy and splenectomy in quick succession. My mom drives me to my daily radiation therapy sessions. A four-hour trek of trepidation, agitation, anger, nausea, and hair loss. The radiation specialist casually explains, "You might lose your teeth and might never be able to have children."

"Like some boy will want to do it with a toothless bag of bones?" I stare out the window, the silent upstate New York winter landscape as cold and barren as my uterus. My mom's tears overflow, staining her cheeks. A puff of pot eases my nausea and soothes my brain.

After completion of radiation a routine chest x-ray shows a lung nodule. Apparently, my mantel shield was too large. Each week I pick up my chemo drugs at the local K-Mart pharmacy. No blue light specials for me! I sit alone in my oncologist's chemo closet, IV in place. I stare up at the drop ceiling, clutching my baby-shit yellow plastic basin, chewing wads of gum to ward off the rising metallic taste in my mouth. Without fail, I vomit. I never tell my mom.

I start off college with two additional weeks of "spot radiation" to my neck. But then I am declared cancer-free. I throw off the bridle of cancer. The good life, grace granted from the "best cancer." There are parties. I graduate with my BSN and head off to Philadelphia. There I meet another boy. Early on we have serious conversations with full disclosures. We marry. A son, then a daughter. I lose my anger and find solace in my Catholic faith.

But not forever. With time I realize there is no escaping the sequela of therapy. My various body parts have variable expiration dates. I lose organs that don't work, are not needed, or become a source of pain. An enlarging thyroid goiter, inconclusive biopsy, and a subtotal thyroidectomy. I suffer from chronic painful menstrual periods. "Maybe endometriosis" I have a total abdominal hysterectomy, bilateral oophorectomy and lysis of adhesions.

I develop night terrors. In my dream I am walking uphill in a field, breathless. A bank of menacing clouds stacks up, obscuring the remaining light. An evil sorcerer stalks me, inhales deeply, sucking out all my air. I bolt upright in bed, gasping for breath, drowning in my own secretions. Paroxysmal nocturnal dyspnea. My aortic and mitral valves are replaced by prostheses. Chronic anticoagulation. A year later my tricuspid valve fails and is replaced. Post-op day one I "brady down." I awaken, my ICU nurse kneeling over me like an angel, breathless from performing CPR. I buy a pacemaker in the middle of the night.

The next year's screening mammogram showed a right breast lesion, adenocarcinoma. I opt for bilateral mastectomies. Postoperatively my breasts are replaced by painful mounds of hematomas, thanks to my intolerance to bridge anticoagulation which plagues me to this day. At 50, I undergo a screening colonoscopy. My bowel brims with precancerous polyps. At upper endoscopy polyps are also found in my stomach and duodenum. Lacking any known germline mutations, I am diagnosed with "Therapy-associated polyposis," a rare newly described syndrome. After an array

Continued on next page

of consultations, I am deemed too high-risk for colectomy. Yearly I receive inhouse colonoscopy to remove any large or abnormal looking polyps. I am cared for by the modern healthcare system of rotating hospitalists and intern residents so that every face is new. PT/INR “too low,” “too high,” “purgative bowel preps.” Despite the best of intentions, after every colonoscopy my rectum drips blood, like a rusty faucet that can’t be tightened.

Throughout, my faith has held me together through my worst days. It does not extinguish my doubts, but saves me from drowning in my tears. This temporary life of sickness and health, birth and death, darkness and light. I talk to Jesus. Most of the time these are silent “thank you for getting me through today” prayers. But we disagree a lot. “Faith, hope, and love abide, those three, but the greatest of these is love!”¹ I beg to differ. I need all three, in equal measures. Not too infrequently Jesus and I get into it, a drag it through the mud 2:00 a.m. Irish bar screaming match. I accuse him of not having another Job to torture. And days when Jesus is too busy I get sad, really sad. I beg, “speak to me.” “Speak!”

I know there is no respite from the best cancer. The number of pills swallowed, the procedures performed, the IVs inserted and blown. There is no magic escalator out of here. My faith knits my wounds, a soothing balm for my scars. Today is a good day. Silent I sit in my back garden, nestled in fleece. I am rekindled by today’s radiant sun. Bright yellow daffodils stand strong in the crisp early spring air. A symbol of resilience and rebirth. “Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulations, be constant in prayer.”² I am more than my scars. I listen to the competing clanging of my mechanical heart valves. A Psalm to survivorship.

Authorship: This narrative developed from a series of conversations between Kathleen Palmer and her Gastroenterologist, Thomas McGarrity. Both authors contributed equally. Dr. McGarrity is also a survivor of childhood cancer.

References:

Bible “Standard English Version”

1 1 Cor: 13:2 | 2 Matt 27:45 | 3 Romans 12:12

Light ©Weaver Goldman | *Family of Employee*



A Unique Gift

© **Melissa Huffman Bittinger, MA**

CTSI - Project ECHO

When my father first told my younger sister and me that he planned to donate his body to medical science, I responded with all of the emotional maturity of my 13 years on the planet, “Eewww, why?”

My father asked us to take some time to think about it. I suspect it was his way of making sure the news was delivered early enough so that we had plenty of time to get used to the idea. Neither he nor we brought it up again for many years.

When I became an adult and began to think about the options of either cremation or burial, I found I enjoyed neither the idea of my remains being underground nor of being set afire. Once my father became elderly and unwell, he asked me to be sure his wishes were followed, so I did some real research into what steps I’d need to take when the time came.

Though I made the promise, I still wasn’t very comfortable with the idea. I pictured my beloved father lying on a steel gurney surrounded by young medical students poking fun at his old and sagging body, using his remains as a kind of playground, and making jokes to alleviate their own discomfort. I knew nothing about cadavers and what happened to those donated to medical science.

I cringed at the thought of students chopping up the hands that had held mine and making fun at the aged body of the man who lovingly taught me how to ride a bike and who built huge snow forts for my sister and me. I didn’t want them cavalierly slicing open the arms that held me when I had a nightmare or mended my broken toys. I couldn’t get those thoughts out of my head once he passed away, and I knew his remains had been taken away. The funeral home that transported his body gave us his clothing and the watch he always had to have on. Those were the only remains we had left.

I began to wonder in earnest why he’d chosen this path. I knew he was not comfortable with public spectacles of any kind and would have hated a funeral service. As I remembered him and the difficult life he’d had, I began to understand. He was born in 1931, the beginning of the Depression. He worked on his family’s farm and was known for his ability to fix things. He dreamed of becoming an engineer: to build things, create things that would be useful to others. He was one of six children, and his family was suffering from the shortages caused by the Depression just like most families. My father worked hard, both on the family farm and in a variety of jobs, saving as much as he could for college. He managed to go to college for one

Continued on the next page

Silence in the Forest!

© **Heidi Piper** | *Department of Comparative Medicine*



year and then his father told him that his family needed him on the farm. His dream was over.

My father's mind was sharp and his nature curious. He would have been a wonderful engineer. Although he never complained about his unfulfilled dream and continued to build and fix things for others, his focus on education was unwavering. Learning by doing was his preferred method, one that he himself had been forced to use. And, indeed, there are things that cannot be fully learned only from a textbook.

I think donating his body to medical science was his way of ensuring that he would be useful even after death. I think he liked the idea of allowing medical students to use what he had to give for a hands-on education, one they would use to help countless other people.

These thoughts brought me some comfort, but for two years, I was haunted by images of how human cadavers were actually treated by students. I assumed these images would torment me for the rest of my life.

I had no idea there was a ceremony held each year for the families of those who donated their bodies to medical science. Two years after my

father's donation, and in the midst of the COVID pandemic, my family received a letter letting us know that that year's ceremony had to be cancelled due to the pandemic. In its place, we received a booklet. The medical students who had learned from my father's remains wrote thank you letters, notes, poems, and explanations of what his donation had meant to them. I read every word through tears.

I sat in silence, holding the book and letting the words I'd just read sink deep inside. The students vividly described their deep appreciation of being able to practice their skills on actual human remains. Their words of gratitude and respect meant the world to me, my mother, and sister. They described my father as a gift to them, to their future patients. In that quiet time, pondering their words, I finally understood.

Because of my father's hard work, I was able to go to college and graduate school. I too understood the value of education and of using whatever gifts you have in the service of others. I filled out a pre-registration form at the Humanity Gifts Registry site the next week.

I get it now, Dad.

Morning in Tuscany

©J. Spence Reid, MD | *Department of Orthopaedics and Rehabilitation*



Journey

© Veronica Clark | Department of Pediatrics

Something strikes a memory of yesterday
A picture
The carefree look on my face
Closed eyes
Smile
The sun feels warm
Content
Before all this happened
No idea what was to come
It's all different now
Afraid
Worried
The sun feels cold
Learning to enjoy again
Without worry
Find that carefree look on my face
Where is it
Closed eyes
Warm sun
Breathing slowly
I'm finding it
The journey of a cancer survivor

The Stronger Hand

© Dwayne Morris
Department of Medical Education

Spring came
Just in time
A long, cold winter
Tried to own me
I admit
I gave it the upper hand
By letting on
I was lonely
When I don't find
My joy in the Lord
My desperate search
Ends so sadly
I'm left with less
Than when I started
Robbed of peace
I need so badly
Winter's quick
To come again
Let me build now
Toward Christmas season
My gift to all
Seen on my face
The stronger hand
Is Jesus



Wading

© Himani Devabhaktuni | Class of 2025

Serenity Rocks

© Devin DePamphilis | Family of Employee



Cue the Quiet

© Marian Wolbers, MA | *Patient*

The waiting room is getting fuller,
ever busier.

No one talks till
names are called and
one by one,
humans rise from chairs.
Summoned. Ready.

Guided by a sweep of hand-gestures,
and warm-voiced nurses, and
nurse assistants; each leaves
their silent aura behind,
Invisible, in a now-empty chair.
Soon replaced by a new body in need.

Looking up, watching, I see
a pony-tailed teen lean forward,
cough sharply into her mask,
both hands covering her face,
willing visibly to quell the growling sounds,
the wheeze that overpowers,
as her dad stares up dully
with tired eyes
at a TV on the wall.
Crackling cough,
lurching chest...both

subside at last.

Chestnut hair askew now, ponytail tilting sideways,
eyelids shut,
suspended in time, she lets
her hands fall to her chest.
She elbows her dad gently; he pats her knee.
“There there.”

Baby with jet-black hair sticking out like
a punk-rocker
Enters the waiting room blanketed, cocooned,
by her mom.
Only the crazy hair shows, softly spikey as a new
cactus top.

The dad whispers to his daughter,
“Like you. A long, long time ago.”
He chuckles; she struggles hard not to laugh
fighting the cough.

And just like that,
A nurse: Her name! She’s next.

Dad grabs their coats and they follow...
The young girl sneaks one last look back,
At the baby she was.

Mouthing a prayer in her mind:
Get well soon, little one

Alone

© Lillie Simmons | *Family of Employee*



Doors

© Aidan Hintze | Class of 2025

Doors ...

They open. They close.

They welcome. They reject.

The beauty of a door is that it can be used to invite others into our life and space. It is for that very purpose that doors are sacred. But when the doors are closed, when they are shut, and seal the world away, the sacred transforms. What was once an offering of peace and salutation becomes a shroud of mystery.

This realization came as I quietly sat for eight hours in the room of a patient who was slowly dying of an aggressive cancer. After months of uncompromising metastasis and failed chemotherapy, she was left broken—stripped of cognizance and life. Every few minutes, as she rose to retch, I saw how her paper-thin skin delicately hung over her bony frame. Across the bed sat her weary and emotionally drained husband who, with absolute courage and compassion, watched over his beloved wife both day and night. Sleeping for maybe an hour or two at a time, his eyes sunk deep as he leaned over her bed. He held his exhausted face in his hands, hoping that his dying wife be released from her pain. Whenever she rose, he caressed her hand and whispered this cry to his wife, “It is okay. It is okay. You can go see Jesus.” To which his wife would respond by laying back down only to rise again a few minutes later, needing to be told the same things again as the medications left her bereft of memory.

In the corner, I tried to conceal myself behind the patient’s emaciated form—attempting to give her husband some sense of privacy and dignity. Sitting in the quietness of the dark, lacking all forms of distraction, my mind became hyperalert to my thoughts and my surroundings. I wanted to prepare myself. What would I do if she passed? I was only here to help. Do I call a code or do I simply cover her back up and brush her hair in an attempt to keep her presentable? How do I comfort a grieving husband and when do I alert the other employees without disturbing the patients next door?

Just outside this room’s open doors, staff giggled, families embraced their recovered relatives, and custodians hurriedly cleaned the halls. “What are they doing?” I thought to myself. “Don’t they know this woman is dying and deserves peace?” I wondered about her husband. What did he think

as he verbally prayed amid the laughter of others?

The day ended, I shook the hand of the husband, and left—praying to my God that the patient would be released from her pain and that her husband would find peace and consolation. Each day after, I inquired of the patient’s status. Each day, I was surprised and saddened that she continued to do the same. Days turned into a week. A week where she had not eaten and had only had a few sips of water. Finally, one day, she did die. I felt relieved. The patient was finally able to overcome her broken body and her husband would finally leave the hospital to attempt to sleep in his own bed. I think of them often—attempting to gain insight into my own life.

Now, as I walk down the street, I look at each door. I wonder, what could be happening inside? When doors are shut, anything could be happening behind them. Is a family celebrating a birthday or is a young father clenching his chest, praying for a miracle as he takes his last breath? Each door holds a unique world behind it. Each door marks the boundary between my life and another’s.

It has been said that you can assume any person you see is having a major life struggle and you will be right 90% of the time. Am I to live my life in fear—scared of doing something that would harm another either by my action or lack thereof? Do I open a door? Do I close a door? Do I knock? Do I continue to walk past it?

I suppose that I will go on living my life, and trying to help where I can. Except now, I will remember that my best day also might be someone’s worst day. I do not always need to bear the weight of other’s burdens, but I do need to respect them. Doors need not always be opened. There are times for privacy and silence. But occasionally, there are also times to venture through the door.

If my experience with my patient taught me anything, it is this: that I should leave my door open more often as I hope to share in my good days to help elevate people out of their bad days. Isn’t that true love? Bearing one another’s burdens that they may be light? Comforting those that need comfort? Standing by those in need of support? Let us leave our doors open in love, to those who most feel like closing themselves off. Maybe in the process we will discover it was us that needed someone to come in all along.

Judge's Choice • Art
Staff, Family, and Community Members Category

Sleeping In © Cameron Barber | Family of Employee (Age 18)



Judge's Comments:

"Sleeping In" is a lovely combination of pattern and color. The foreshortened figures of the sleeping children are balanced in an abstract arrangement of pastel-patterned shapes. The faces are brought into focus by the rough rhythmic brushwork, which creates the impression of their hair. It reminds me of a Mary Cassatt print.

If A Tree Falls

© Charlotte Chambers

Family of Employee (Age 12)

If a tree falls in the forest,
But no one is around,
Does it really make a sound?

If you say your soul's desire,
To the whispering winds,
But no one is around,
Does it really make a sound?

If you whisper your emotion,
To the calm babbling brook,
But no one is around,
Does it really make a sound?

If you speak the love you feel,
To the gentle raindrops' melody,
But no one is around,
Does it really make a sound?

If you sing your hope for the future,
In tune with the bird's song,
But no one is around,
Does it really make a sound?

If you shout your joy,
To the sun's blinding rays,
But no one is around,
Does it really make a sound?

If you state your yearning to be heard,
To the cold silent night
But no one is around,
Does it really make a sound?

If you listen, if you hear,
Someone else's sound,
Voices join together,
You really do make a sound.



Calm After Storm

© Gary Gasowski, MD | Alumnus, Class of 1972

Halcyon Moment

© Gary Gasowski, MD
Alumnus, Class of 1972



Man

© **Lisa Dupler** | *Department of Environmental Health and Safety*

For years I've tried to understand,
the life, and the death, of modern man.
The wrinkles which evolve upon one's face,
the roads and lines marking our pleasures and our mistakes.
Even from those deeper trails,
we somehow manage to prevail.

And do we know...
Roads less traveled offer more spice,
than the super highway, slick as ice.
Still it seems, there are lessons to be learned,
chores to be done, credits to be earned.

And when we are through here...
Do we leave our life with no regrets,
satisfied that we could have lived longer without that last cigarette?
Or do we hang in limbo somewhere in the light,
just waiting, waiting, to become an angel in flight?
To descend down from the heavenly clouds,
to offer comfort and love and sing praise aloud.
Or could it be final is truly the end?
No wings, no God, no way to mend ...



A Man's Best Friend

© **Kasia Skocik, MA**
Department of Behavioral Health

Sunrise Davao Philippines

© **William Hennrikus, MD**
Department of Orthopaedics and Rehabilitation



The Hero

© Allison Ching | Class of 2024

In a far distant land where people are found,
with sky and water and light and ground,
with every breath and each blink of an eye,
all things remained as at last passing-by.

And the people existed, unaffected and pleased,
for all that was was as it should be
until a great terror came upon their land,
bringing panic and chaos as only fear can.

For light began to fade from the sky,
there and then going and tricking the eye
and casting a shadow so vast and so deep,
it lulled the youngest of children to sleep

before coming again to cast its glow
upon strange things on the ground below,
rising on up from beneath the soft earth,
of varying size and color and girth.

Some were green and thin as a blade;
some had soft bulbs of every fair shade;
some had long fingers with twists and bends
and ever more green adorning their ends

that lightened to shades of orange and red,
yellow and brown that tumbled on heads
as the warmth in the air faded away
and the sky above bled from blue to gray.

“A hero!” they cried, “A hero we need!
To defeat the evil behind these foul deeds!”
For as the world strayed from its set ways,
the people noticed they too were no longer the same—

the meek became bold and paraded their worth,
the kind became bitter from their hidden hurts,
the calm became angry and the hard became soft,
and the comfort of knowing each other was lost.

Thus a hero was called on to save the world,
to turn things back to how they once were.
The hero set out to search far and wide,
seeking the beings they’d named “Change” and “Time.”

The hero left only to never return,
not a sign or word again seen or heard.
Did the hero find them and was lost in the fray,
or stop and ponder, and at last walk away?

Did the hero learn to accept time’s flow
or forever fear the dreaded unknown?
Did the hero leave us this blessing or curse?
To age, and change, for better or worse.



Among the Giants

© Oana Bollt
*Office of the Vice Dean of Research and
Graduate Studies*

Peace on Earth

© Macie Zimmerman | Patient





The Silence of Solitude, Dance Coast, Antarctica

© Timothy Johnson, MD

Department of Surgery, Division of Plastic Surgery

Painting Blues

© Ananya Das

Department of Orthopaedics and Rehabilitation

This is not the right color for the sky.
There should be more of cobalt and less
of aquamarine at the time the birds
fly home to their nests.
See it now with the streaks of
sapphire and azure etched across its
glorious expanse, a blue more clear and pure.
I raised my tired brush as I painted
the horizon all over again
but the sky now looked bathed in
lapis lazuli, deep and luxuriant.
Should there be more of the turquoise
and less of the Prussian blue?
I looked up to see the sky grow purple,
the all encompassing black of the night
spreading its pervading fingers to
make the world grow dark.
As my brush fell silent
I waited, perhaps in vain,
to capture the color of the
upcoming new day.

We Went to the Bookstore

© Judy Schaefer, RN

*Member of The Doctors Kienle Center for
Humanistic Medicine*

I browsed at a distance but watched.
She was choosing a book.
They said a few days, weeks, left?
I wondered what she would choose.
Her hand passed over a thin volume.
Slowly as if her palm was reading it.
There was no humor in this.
Irony but no humor.
The book was my gift.
Rather rude of me, when one thinks of it.
Would she get to the last page?
Maybe read it backwards?
This might have been a rude gift
but it was what she asked for.
She opens it now, settled in the garden.
The ancient oak dapples her cheeks.
She turns each page mincingly.
She sips her book—and reads her tea.



Sunset on Canon Beach

© J. Spence Reid, MD | *Department of Orthopaedics and Rehabilitation*

Utter Peace

© Hope Pesner | *Patient*

For as long
As I remember
I tried to be strong
My struggles an ember

Burning
Through time
The chaos churning
In my mind

Never quite fading
The challenges I face
Always cascading
And I give chase

I want connection
Something solid and real
More than reflection
I want to feel

Alive in my soul
Living with passion
Completely whole
But full of compassion

Fighting the tourneys
To get somewhere
Sharing the journey
With all who care

Not letting go
Of the vision I see
And finally I know
Just to be me.

Diverse and complex
What I'm trying to do
Constant checks
That I'm being true.

To the beliefs
I hold so tight
Don't give me grief
When I seek what's right.

I must try
To quell the voices
The ones that lie
And deny my choices.

I still grieve
For what could have been
But I'm relieved
That I've risen from the din

The constant noise
The litter
That tries to destroy
And leave me bitter

I seek quiet
Utter calm
Deflect the riots
A lifetime balm

My mind chilled
All the fighting ceased
And finally
Utter peace.

Counterweight

© Christine Quimby, MA | Department of Medicine

Uncluttered, quiet, spaces can be good
For relaxing,
Hearing ourselves think, and
Working in peace ...
But just like open space,
The lack of sound doesn't mean there is harmony.
Sometimes we need the unfiltered noise
Of life
To appreciate the improvisational music being made around us,
And to feel our own melodies burst forth.



The Art of Eye Contact

© Megan Ingraham | Friend of Employee (Age 17)

One glance has the intent of a hundred words
None of them are ever spoken
A form of communication that only two can have
Words that are only seen and never heard
They say that eyes are the windows to the soul
That if you look closely, you can learn so much about a person
I believe that things don't have to be said to be understood
That silence and only thoughts portrayed through the eyes can be more than enough
Eye contact is an art
It is an expression of the deepest thoughts
A stare can hold more than a paragraph of words
A glance can shift the whole atmosphere of a room
The art of eye contact
It's intricate, it's intimate
It's a conversation never spoken
It's words only shared through a small meeting of glances
So much can be said without being spoken
So much can be shared and so much can be broken
Eye contact is the words in the silence
The art of words hidden in the quiet

Gibbs Gardens

© Oana Bollt
Office of the Vice Dean of Research
and Graduate Studies

Birds and Animals

© Chaitanya Tiwari
Family of Employee (Age 7)



A Rubber Band

© Taylor Keckler | *Department of Public Health Sciences*

I am learning that growing up really means letting go.
How getting older is just continuing to wake up each day,
and come to terms with the way time will always be like a rubber band
that we try to pull on, tug on to slow down—
because it's all moving too fast—just like they said it would. Because I need a minute after the shaking stops
to remember it won't always feel this way
without them here.

How being old really means being afraid
of the quiet, because silence likes to greet me in the evenings as I'm bent over the sink, soap running to the
drain,
and silence like a thief stealing peace,
slips old memories behind my closed eyelids.

A forbidden treehouse in a long-forgotten neighborhood.

A cloudy day when I received bad news
and an old friend held space for me
before I even knew how to call it that.

I used to beg for time to stop, to let me feel
in the moment properly so that I'm not always looking back, waiting to be turned to salt.

But now I know that time, like a rubber band,
will always snap back into action, will continue to keep
the world turning

even on days we ask it not to. And now, I know that this too, is a gift. Because, it is the rhythm of the world
turning

that always draws us back. It may take months, or years
but we will always find a way to live in it again.

And if we are not—time is kind enough to slow down for us in the moments that count.

Time allows us to have a silent space, where there is no eternal ticking of a clock, only feeling.

Certain moments where it seems the world was made just so that we could be born.

To hold their hand, to hear what we waited to hear for years.

It's these moments time looks back at us, reaches behind itself to wrap around a mother in a bed, hits the
pause on the beeping of the machines in the hospital room,

Stalls the nurses in other patients rooms—

And gives a mother an endless silence so that she can tell her daughter,

“Kiss whoever you want. It all really does go so fast.”

Sometimes, time waits just long enough

For us to use our last minutes to tell each other what we should have been saying every day.

To whisper what we try to tell each other silently,

What is never too late to hear—

“I'm sorry. And I love you. I always have.”

And before we know that time

has given us a silent moment, this moment that will become a memory we return to,

The clock turns its head, snapped back into its infinite race, and continues its ticking.

Silence: Stories Untold

© Sai Kurapati | Class of 2026

We ask: What? How? When? Where? And Why?
Awaiting answers, hearing the patient's sigh.

Words may falter, but silence speaks clear,
Echoing fears, and hopes held dear.

In quiet whispers of unspoken pain,
Much to decipher, whispers like gentle rain.

The silence echoes stories, untold,
A timeless moment, waiting to unfold.

The power of listening, for lost and found,
Healing begins, in silence, unbound.

Not just in data, but in the unsaid,
Lies so much power, so listen and be led.

One Day: My Experience as an Emergency Department Volunteer

© Andreas M. Wingert | Department of Emergency Medicine

As an emergency department volunteer,
I try to comfort patients filled with pain and fear.
I see and hear them feeling bleak,
and wish to give them the help they seek.

I think about the anxious faces I see,
and ponder how I could make them feel more free.
Whether it be broken bones, a high fever, or scalding burns,
I do all I can to address their concerns.

Every family member looks uncertain,
hoping their loved one's pain doesn't worsen.
Parents worry about their child's condition,
hoping for a successful prescription.

I bring to patients a heart that will listen, blankets, water and food,
but I wish there was more I could do to improve their mood.
I see the stress on each patient's face
that I wish I had the ability to erase.

As I watch the quality care the medical professionals provide,
I see patients finally feeling satisfied.
Oh, how I look up to the medical staff today,
and hope to be one of them one day.

Moments of Silence Before the World Goes Dark

© Lori Ann Lockard | Patient Financial Services



Refreshing Paradise

© Louise Sedun
Family of Retired Employee (Age 7)



At Sleep At Last

© Gabriella Schilling
Family of Employee (Age 12)



Bamboo

© Eric Messner, PhD, FNP-BC | Department of Nursing Administration

Bright morning sunlight cascades through wide windows with shades thrown open
reflects off the straight, stark IV poles starting to surround the liter
Blinding light bounces off sterile white walls
adds to the mounting cacophony as frightened voices bark out commands
Deafening silence begins to seep into the vacant void when the chaos is transported down the hall

Once home, I pass through the moon gate
Fine thin leaves of chartreuse and jade
on tall straight stalks of yellow and green and black
sway to and fro in the gentle breeze
and shimmer in the late afternoon sunlight

They cast a dappled shadow on the ground before me
their deep and thick grove protects me from the sun and wind
The simple beauty whispers as they shimmer and sway
worries fade, they continue their gentle refrain



Peaceful Serenity © Paul Schultz | Family of Employee

Quiet Before the Storm

© Mike Koser | Patient

I've been in the hospital now for about three months. All the doctors, but especially the nurses, have been taking wonderful care of me while I'm recovering from multiple stem cell transplants, and gradually getting my body to the point where I can be safely discharged. Based on the steadily improving blood counts I expect I will be back home soon. Before I go, I must recount, with some humor, a daily, early morning routine that I've endured, perhaps enjoyed, during my stay. It goes like this:

The room is dimly lit, and I am wide awake. What time is it? It's 4am. What woke me at this early hour? It is so quiet right now, except for a low hum in the hall outside. Oh, I love this quiet; but why am I not asleep? It was a long and tiring day yesterday. I should be deep in my dozing!

I know why. It's about to start all over again—check blood pressure sitting, then standing, then sitting again (I'm barely awake!). First round of daily meds. Change the IV. Draw more blood for the lab. Possibly an early visit by one of the doctors. The door opens and the pleasant nurse is nearby. "I'm sorry Mr. Koser, but you know why I'm here."

The daily storm begins!

Oh, I'm Just Fine, Today

© Linda Amos | Patient

"I can't quite make out the word—
The print is too fine for my old eyes."
She said to the young lass
So slim, so lovely, so young.
"I can't quite find the right color
For the blouse I want to wear."
She said to the young man,
So handsome, so tall, so young.
"I can't quite carry all of that load
To my car just up the street."
She said to the young boy
So strong, so bold, so young.
"I can't quite make it to the bus"
As she paused to enjoy the bench.
She said to the young girl
So fresh, so smooth, so young.
"I can't quite make it through the day
without someone's help any more"
She said admitting to herself
That youth is definitely wasted on the young!



Snowy Pines

© Kimberly Perkins, RN, CCRC
Clinical Trials Office

Serene Samoyeds

© Cameron Barber
Family of Employee (Age 18)

The Silence of Sound

© Marcia Riegler | Patient

I long for the sounds that silence my world.
The wind blowing thru the pines
A babbling brook
A kitten purring on my lap
A gentle rain
Crickets on a warm summer's night
And waves lapping upon the shore.
They silence my mind,
calm my being,
And quiet my soul.



Screenshot of Serenity

© Ephraim Triscik

Patient (Age 15)

Snow falls but it's only temporary
Every book needs returned to the library
And nothing truly stays at home

In time, we'll dive into the roses
Keep the scents of our past under our noses
And nothing will be alone

This world is a mountain in Alaska
Would you hop on my boat if I asked you
And maybe we would want to stay on board

Maybe we'd journey to Hawaii
These waters keep us from crying
I'm no longer feeling so sore

So can I take a screenshot of this silence
Screenshot of the peace I've finally found
Screenshot of the first time I smiled
A slideshow and I'll turn on the sound
A screenshot of this tranquil moment
Make me cry in joy when I finally see
Screenshots of all these wonderful memories
Screenshot of this serenity

I could let this all pass me by
Or I could pause and just take time
Make me a photobook, I sure know why
Cause I wanna see my life, before it flashes before my eyes

Snow falls but it's only temporary
So please let me take a screenshot
A screenshot of serenity

On the Porch Where We Live

© Linda Amos | *Patient*

We are porch people.
We were blessed to have enough common sense
To purchase this old rattle trap of a house
With good bones and lots of shuttered windows
Because it came with a wrap-around porch.

Comfort is my biggest brag—
Since when my house is clean
Enough to my satisfaction
I withdraw to the porch
To sip lemonade and dream

The relaxed feeling of the outdoors
Continues to lull me out-of-doors.
No matter what the weather.
That is what sweaters and throws
Are for snuggling under
On the swing on misting days.

This is also where I entertain my guests
Sitting on antique wicker settees
Or perched on the arms of chairs
With pillows of printed flower chintz.
Bright days, or drab and sunless ones too.
It is where we sit and chew the fat
As we watch the world go by!

A Silent Drop

© Nicole Seacord | *Patient*



Gone Fishing

© **Richard Joel, PT, MHA**
Family of Employee

Standing in a creek,
the current rushing by me,
streams of consciousness, coursing through my weary mind,
as soft sunlight ... falls ... ever so gently ... upon my head.

Despite the heaviness of my rubber waders,
I am one with the water ...
It' rhythm ... becoming my rhythm,
my heart,
"b-e-a-t-i-n-g"
with the beat of wavelets splashing upon polished rocks.

I cast my line to where a placid pool stands ...
shaded by the overhanging foliage,
green trees and blue sky reflected on its mirrored surface.
I can see water spiders performing their little dance,
as if ballerinas on a stage ...

My fly lands ...
and exactly where I planned,
making the smallest of ripples in the still water.
The only sound,
a near inaudible "plop!"

The unrelenting clatter of chat rooms, blogs and social networks ... a
million miles away ...

I hear nothing but the occasional songbird, and the brisk beating of
dragonfly wings.

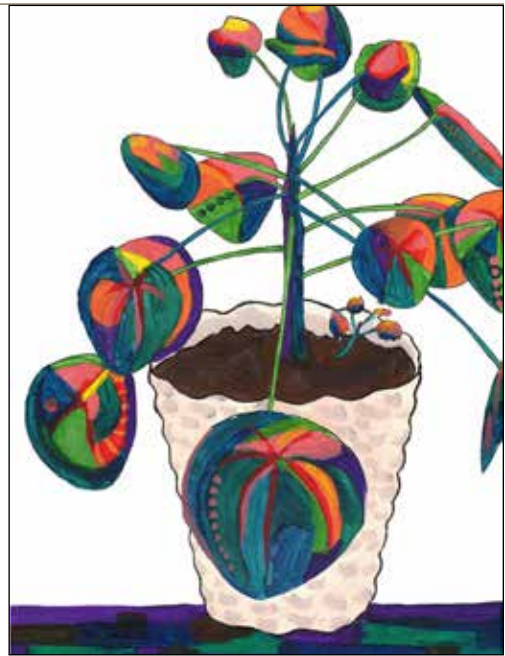
I've traded in my i-Phone
for a rod and reel,
My laptop,
for a creel bag ...

The only "Cloud" in my world,
is that soft fluffy one... hovering just above me.
My current reality is not "virtual,"
but "actual!"

I stand in a creek,
the current rushing by me,
And the silence of this peaceful setting,
makes me smile

Tranquility

© **Susan Landis, CRNA**
*Retired, Department of Anesthesiology and
Perioperative Medicine*



Pilea Studies 1

© **Harmony Zimmerman** | *Class of 2026*



Judge's Choice • Creative Writing

Patients Category

Hymn In A-flat Minor © Barbara Junker

Among the mourners
and those paying their respects
at the funeral, a baby squalled.
Some in attendance thought
who would bring an infant
to such a sad, silent procedure?
What irreverence, what ignorance, what
thoughtlessness.
But one woman heard the child's cries
as a song celebrating the person passed
had entered into eternal peace
and this young voice sang
that a new life was here.

Judge's Comments:

What a beautiful reflection on the circle of life. Even as man-made convention and cultural norms purportedly provide structure and "rules," with the lusty cry of an innocent baby, nature reminds us how interconnected we all are. Time, and life itself, marches on.

Home and Hearth

© David Carnish, MA, MDiv, BCC
Pastoral Services

Silence
Our true home
We were born of wordless whispers
Listen to the murmur of things
Hear the wordless words among the cacophony and polyphony of all beings
The cricket's legs rubbing together
The meercat's peering eyes
The descending brown leaf
The gentle breeze
The kisses of lovers in the broad daylight
The way that ants don't worry about acquiring knowledge
Or the way in which the sea corresponds to the phases of the moon
The last breath before death
The taste of honey
Or the way in which your clothes wrap you
Silence
Wordless processes that hold the world
The grass that is an angel to a barefoot
The way that mudpuddles enjoy a child
Vibrations
A tinnitus of sheer humility
As the bee buzzes about
Creasing aimless rambling
Sitting like the silverback fully exposed as the rain becomes our body
The path away from a precipice
The heart meditations of the small
Their secret is silence.



A Moment's Rest

© Arrienne Butic | Class of 2026

In a Moment

© Lisa Dupler

Department of Environmental Health and Safety

Most see beauty in objects; I see beauty in words.
Most sing their favorite lyrics; I feel the song of the birds.
Precious are the things that touch our hearts, invisible to the naked eye.
Like feeling a cool sensation, as a breeze out of nowhere, goes by.

Could it be an angel? Or a loved one who passed away?
Someone so special to you, someone you wished could have stayed.

These moments come to us, yet so many are blind.
These moments are fleeting, and all one of a kind.

So many experiences missed by most.
So many unfelt messages sent by a host.

Familiar scents, treasured letters, signs from heaven, which need to be revealed.
Most have yet to learn to embrace them, so their private messages go unsealed.

Most enjoy the language spoken; I find magic in the written verse.
Words create a window display of which can be rehearsed.

Words can be left behind, when our time here is through.
Words can still express the love that was once shared by you.

I see beauty in words and maybe someday others may too.
Magic hides on a page between letters scattered by few.



Birch Trees in Fall

© Sophia Cochran

Family of Employee (Age 12)

Spiritual Awakening

© Lynne McGovern | *Family of Patient*



Centrifugally Silent

© Amber Kulaga, BA | *Patient*

Thoughts jumbled and swirled.
Centrifugally faster, louder.
Carving a trench along a border.
Borderline, if you will.
And I fall in,
deafening silence.
Dissociated.
The jumbled swirl continues,
but I just watch
curling in on myself for protection.
My dog's nails tip-tap
across the wooden floor.
And I'm back. Deafness suspended.
A different kind of silence
lifts me from my well-lit darkness—
familiarity.
Where my brain quiets
with the metronome of her tail,
and I suspect I remember the way.
My borderline silence,
rarely ever calm
and never actually quiet.
But in the hum,
above the trench,
the gentle carrying on of life,
that silence grows into peace.

Silent Winter

© Ananya Das

Department of Orthopaedics and Rehabilitation

Leaves turn golden brown
and slowly drift away
leaving ungainly limbs behind.
The pristine white snow
covers all the good green intentions.
Ice encircles the branches
in clear glass cases.
Vulnerable creatures scuttle inside
the hollows in the ground,
chilled to the bone by the winds.
Firefly larvae hibernate,
waiting to glow in spring.
Endless long, dark nights
follow frigid crisp days.
Silence reigns.

Judge's Choice • Photography
Patients Category

After the Storm © Marcia Riegle



Judge's Comments:

The photographer has chosen a beautiful composition that guides the eye from the snow-coated treetops down to the stone farmhouse. One can almost hear the total silence and serenity of this winter scene and imagine the warmth of the home to which we must retreat when Mother Nature unleashes heavy snow.

If I Ever Got the Chance

© Evelyn Darden | Class of 2024

If I ever got the chance to take a breath and
let the world just pass me by
I'd find a park with a million trees
Taking a seat underneath the largest oak
To watch the seasons flow into the river we call years
I'd sit among its shaded roots and watch everyone
stroll along the path
Listening to the chirping of newly hatched birds
Chattering squirrels running past
I'd sit among the fresh blooms
Shrouded in their vibrant purples, pinks and yellows
Breathing in the sweet bouquet of all
Springs delicious scents
I'd let life fill my soul
Marveling over the miracle of life
As baby bunnies dare one hop closer
To nibble on the sweetest petals
Of the freshly bloomed clovers
If I ever got the chance to take a timeout from the
everyday
I'd watch from the shade of that lovely oak
The tranquil days of spring merge to
The glorious lively ones of summer
I'd take a seat by the gurgling river
To feed ducks from the palm of my hands
As screeching laughter flows through the air
Marvelous colors of kites flying high
Adding the look of painted glass to the sky
I'd bask in the heat of summer rays
Listening to the melody of ice cream trucks
promising sweet treats
Children running around
With sticky hands and faces
I'd open my heart to those calm warm nights
As foxes roam and owls hoot
The stars twinkling above so bright
Reminding me all we are
Is a tiny speck amongst all the light
If I ever got the chance to observe from the sidelines
I'd sit on a bench across from that stream
And watch the leaves turn red and orange
Leaving behind the brilliant greens

I'd watch as things slowed down
But life remained as beautiful as ever
As birds still sing and squirrels still scamper
Preparing for the long cold days of winter
I'd smile at all the passing people
Steaming cups of coffee in their hands
Heads down bustling wherever they need to go
Unaware of the beauty surrounding them
I'd stand by as the park would fill
With flashes of cameras and smiling faces
Capturing images that will later be doctored
Leaving the blemishes of life behind
Replacing them with fiction
If I ever got the chance to have time stand still so
I could process for a minute
I'd let my mind go blank as snow falls
Leaving the world covered by its fluffy brilliance
I'd don my puffy coat and go for a stroll
Along the empty paths
Missing all the signs of life
That had filled it in the past
I'd be stuck with the anxieties and pesky blues
That trail me everywhere I go
Wishing my mind was as blank and pristine
As the untouched blanket of snow
But the chances to take a moment
Are few and far between
How I yearn to be in the here and now
To enjoy all the things that often go unseen

Where Do We Go?

© Ephraim Triscik | Patient (Age 15)

Where do we go when we go to sleep?
Where do we float to, when we fly to our dreams?
Are there silky pastures with velvety sheets?
Is it a heaven where we enter into peace?

Maybe there's a train and it goes to the moon
Planes to the stars, we're reaching so soon
Rivers and trees and hot air balloons
The sky is a lovely, cool midnight blue

They make potions for a royal throne
They all are together, no one alone
Visions and pies linger like a perfume's smoke
It's tranquil, nostalgic, like I've always known

I can't wait to come back home
This, I've never seen, I've always known
This must be heaven, a silent jubilee
Perfectly wrapped with a bow tied so clean
The creatures all talk without having to speak

Knit in a sweater, in coconut air
Seahorses race with Goldilocks's bears
Every cloud, every detail, every small stray hair
Feels like silver and gold, the most wonderful pair

Music, it rings in jingle bells
My heart, it is ice cream, it starts to melt
The clouds and the sun all live, and in joy, they swell
I passed all the feathers, the porcelain, lightly felt

A cottage
And a light breezy fog
A palace
With kittens and dogs
A dream
You just have to knock
You won't wanna leave
When you hear the alarm clock

But I'll be back tomorrow night
Where we'll all join together in a single limelight
This next dawn may be dark, or it may be bright
But I'll tell you it all, in this dream I go to each night

Quiet Morning with "Luna"

© Jennifer Goumas | Department of Neurosurgery



Scavengers

© Robert Ganse | Information Services



NEXUS

© **Kushagra Kumar** | *Class of 2024*

The soft din of a distant fall
Leaps into low cresting waves swirling with rushing laps, unseen
I am rooted here, steam cresting past my nose and enveloping my view
I know that I remain
Untouched
By the beauty of her wind
The chirp of a rustling conifers masks
The shivering creaking of a distant songbird
And I know that I am here, among the clouds
Within eternal stardust, masking the deep heavens far below
That I am alive
One with her
The dripping rock face with its fungal frenzy
Coated in the light drizzle of a sweet ambrosia
Touches the face of an agitated, crusted branch
Reaching with its spindly digits to grasp, blindly, at the formless fog
From which blossoming green stars burst petals into moist air
The low sky above melts uniformly into my view, far and near
And seals in the borders of my little Eden
The hard unbroken abyss below sprouts
Milky forms that stretch through unmoving time
The eternal remnants of my unbroken globe
The smell of cinnamon spice graces the edge of my taste
And lingers just a few precious moments longer
Here I am rooted: wordless, thoughtless
Shapeless
Once touched by the beauty of my cold universe's kiss
And as fitfully I dissolve back into the sharp swirling vapors
My toes melting back into dust
I know that I am finally
One with her

The Question

© **Fiona Chambers**

Family of Employee (Age 9)

She asked me a question
I had the answer
But it ran out of my mouth and bounced to the floor
Disappearing in the distance
Even after the day passed
The question still lingered with me
I woke up one day and realized I wanted to find the answer
And when I find it
I will not let it run away again

Judge's Choice • Photography
Faculty and Healthcare Providers Category

Soundless © Evan Goldman, PhD | *Human Structure*



Judge's Comments:

This photograph arrests the eye with its luminous, vivid purple hue. The angular amber body of the small insect contrasts nicely with the ovular beads of dew forming along the violet petal. The photographer has captured a sublime moment in nature—a scene that could exist for all of us should we take the time to look closely and observe with mindful attention.



Desert Reflection

© **David Simmons, DMin, BCC**
Pastoral Services

Preclinic Solitude

© **Diane Thiboutot, MD**
Department of Dermatology



Sit In It

© **John Messmer, MD**
Department of Family and Community Medicine

Sit in your stuff.
Shhhhhh...
Just sit.
Silence.

Consider the garbage in your mind.
Ask yourself WTF?
Why do I keep it
Festering in my brain?
Put it at the curb for
Trash collection day.
Make way for happy.
In the silence of healing
You are heard.

Dedicated to Michael Hayes, PhD

Next

© **Tony Oliveri** | *Patient*

Walking in the woods
following days of rain
does remind me that
Life abounds here.

Trees dripping gently,
releasing dampness
layered from Crown
to the Forest Floor.

In some low-lying spaces
a dankness seems to hover
rising like Ghost Flowers—
feeding lichen and moss.

Even in Winter's sleep
water encourages growth
as the land awaits the heavy
and quiet dark of deep snow.

Such immersion is rare for me,
each living moment is uniquely,
yet universally, tuned into Itself,
allowing and creating what's next.

Judge's Choice • Photography
Students and Residents Category

The Calm After the Storm © Hannah Heselton | Class of 2027



Judge's Comments:

Nature is in perpetual motion, and this photograph asks us to pause and consider the beautiful transience of life. A storm has just passed, its thunderous tumult receding into the distance. Now, the sun peaks through, illuminating a lovely gallery of sunflowers bobbing in the wind, stronger for surviving the storm and gathering its blessings. The road curving into the distance symbolizes the viewer's own path ahead, reminding us that "This too shall pass."

Judge's Choice • Photography

Staff, Family, and Community Members Category

Urban Reflection © David Simmons, DMin, BCC | Department of Pastoral Services



Judge's Comments:

This black and white photograph presents a compelling portrait of an older woman in the seemingly mundane flow of life. The unique perspective achieved by the tilted camera angle encourages us to gaze up at the elder, almost with a certain reverence. Her wizened face and matronly clothing are nicely contrasted with the modern vegan restaurant and other trappings of contemporary life.

Equipollent Nineteen

© **John Garman, MD**

Clinical Resident, Department of Psychiatry

The most that could be said
was said
by saying nothing
and giving everything
All of me
to her.

She accepted
waded in
then swam in my silence
She came to life
and gave me everything
in return.



Moonlight Sanctuary: Silence of the Night

© **Dani D'Amico** | *Class of 2025*

Capturing the Moment of a Moment

© **Brian Angus** | *Family of Employee*



Illuminating the Unseen:

Celebrating the Art and Science of Biological Imaging

Han Chen, MD, PhD

Administrative Director of Multiscale Imaging Section of Biomedical Core Facilities

On behalf of the Biological Imaging Competition Committee

In the intricate dance of science and art, few disciplines glide across the floor as elegantly as biological imaging. It is here, at the nexus of observation and innovation, that we find the true essence of exploration. The Biological Imaging Competition, a collaboration between Penn State College of Medicine, Department of Humanities and Research Facilities, is a testament to this harmonious interplay. It is with immense pleasure and profound respect that we introduce this competition, which showcases the best in light and electron microscopy along with other cutting-edge imaging technologies.

Biological imaging is more than just a method for observing the previously unseen; it is a way to understand the very fabric of life. From the intricate networks of cellular processes to the delicate balances within ecosystems, imaging technologies allow us to visualize and appreciate the complexity of biological systems. The competition highlights the significance of these tools, not just for their scientific contributions, but for their ability to inspire awe and wonder.

The entries we received for this year's competition span a wide array of subjects and techniques. Light microscopy, with its ability to paint the living world in vibrant colors and textures, sits alongside electron microscopy's detailed landscapes of the ultrastructural world. Each image tells a story—a visual narrative of life at different scales and from various perspectives. These images are not just scientific data; they are works of art that remind us of the beauty that exists in exploration and discovery.

We owe a debt of gratitude to those who submitted their work to the competition. Your contributions illuminate the unseen, bringing to light the intricate details of our world that often go unnoticed. Your images bridge the gap between the scientific community and the public, making the abstract tangible and the complex understandable. You have not only advanced your fields of study but have also enriched our collective appreciation for the natural world.

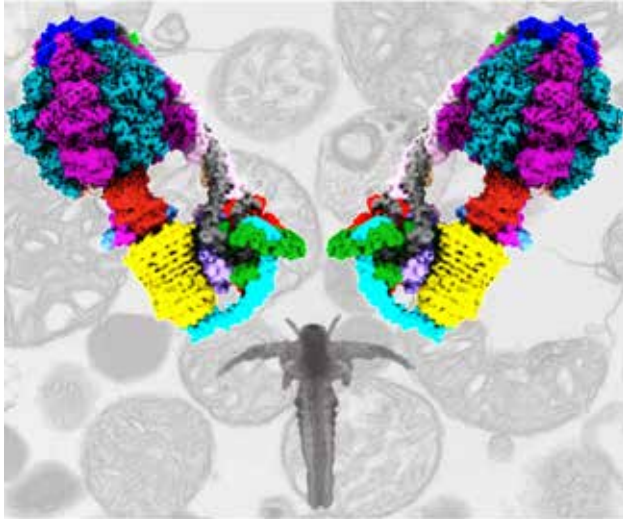
Our thanks also extend to the editors of *Wild Onions* and the Department of Humanities for their unwavering support and dedication to this competition. Your efforts to foster a space where science meets art, where inquiry meets imagination, are invaluable. This publication not only serves as a platform for showcasing the remarkable talents of our scientific community but also plays a crucial role in inspiring the next generation of scientists, artists, and dreamers.

The Biological Imaging Competition is more than just an event; it is a celebration of the curiosity that drives us to explore, the technology that enables us to see, and the creativity that compels us to share. It is a reminder that in the quest to understand life, we often discover beauty, and in the pursuit of beauty, we deepen our understanding of life.

To all who have contributed, supported, and participated in this endeavor, we extend our heartfelt thanks. Your vision, in every sense of the word, helps us all to see the world anew. Let us continue to look closely, imagine boldly, and explore the vast, unseen landscapes that lie waiting to be discovered.

We acknowledge the contributions and significance of biological imaging in both scientific and artistic realms, offering gratitude to those who make such competitions possible and meaningful.

Biological Imaging Competition



First Place:

First Cryo-Electron Microscopy

Creator: Amrendra Kumar

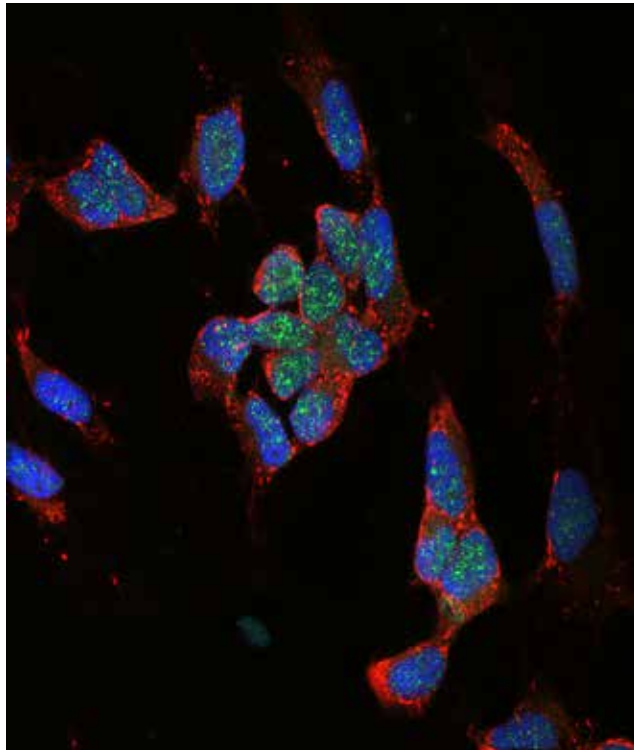
Co-creators: Juliana da Fonseca Rezende e Mello;
Yangyu Wu

Presented here is the very first cryo-Electron Microscopy (cryo-EM) structure of mitochondrial ATP synthase from *Artemia franciscana* at 3 Å resolution. The images of highly purified ATP synthase were acquired on Titan Krios G3i (Thermo Fisher Scientific) in the Cryo-EM core at Penn State College of Medicine (RRID: SCR_021178). The built atomic model was achieved using a combination of genome annotation sequencing, artificial intelligence structure prediction and cryo-EM approaches. Different colors represent the different subunits of ATP synthase. The

background image represents the isolated mitochondria from *A. franciscana* which was acquired by the Transmission Electron Microscope at Penn State College of Medicine.

Scientific Impact:

Unlike mammalian organisms the embryos of *Artemia franciscana* brine shrimp can survive prolonged anoxic conditions and tolerate mitochondrial calcium overload without undergoing cell death. Given the undoubted role of mitochondrial ATP synthase in cell death, we investigated the structural differences between brine shrimp and mammalian ATP synthases using single-particle cryo-EM. The comparative structural analysis allowed us to determine the inactivation mechanism of the apoptotic cell death channel located within the ATP synthase. This discovery would enable the design of peptides or small drug molecules to treat degenerative diseases of heart and brain.



Second Place:

Visualization of stress granules and TDP-43 in response to osmotic stress

Creators: Yash Kulkarni

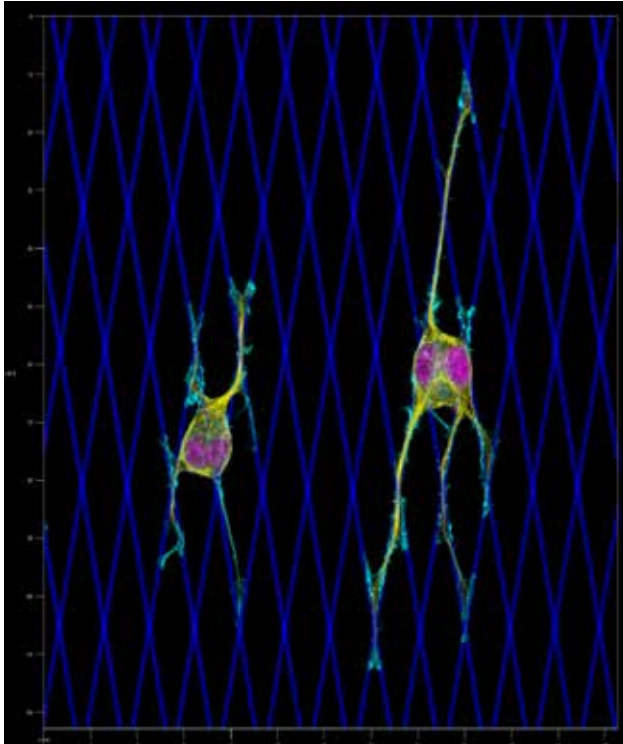
Depicted here are SH-SY5Y cells subjected to osmotic stress. Under these conditions distinct RNA stress granules can be seen in red around the nucleus (blue). In addition, within the cell nuclei TDP-43 puncta can be observed in green. The image provides insights into the cellular response to osmotic stress and localization of TDP-43.

Instrument used: Leica SP-8 Confocal microscope in Cellular and Molecular Physiology Department (RRID:SCR_018169)

Scientific Impact:

This stress paradigm mimics nuclear TDP-43 pathology observed in Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS). This experimental approach is used to test novel small molecules with neuroprotective potential that could be developed into therapeutics for ALS and related neurodegenerative disorders.

Biological Imaging Competition



Third Place:

Dynein-Powered Cell Locomotion

Creators: Yerbol Tagay

Co-creators: Dr. Erdem D. Tabdanov

Human breast adenocarcinoma MDA-MB-231 cells demonstrate metastatic-like adhesion, spreading, and migration on the biomimetic collagen matrix. The picture shows non-canonical breast cancer cells' locomotion mechanism based on the motricity of the dynein motors that generate and transmit the mechanical forces between F-actin and microtubule cytoskeletons. Dynein-powered cell locomotion facilitates cell motility in the absence of the conventional myosin-driven cell migration.

Scientific Impact:

Metastasis is a major cause of mortality in cancer patients and remains a challenging clinical and fundamental issue. Conventionally, metastatic invasion has been attributed to actomyosin-driven cell motility. However, the observed locomotion of cancer cells often does not correspond to the measured actomyosin forces. In this study, we elucidate an alternative

mechanism of metastatic locomotion driven by dynein-generated forces acting via a non-stretchable microtubule network. Our findings reveal the principal significance of the complementary contractile system of dynein motors and microtubules in metastasis and expand our knowledge of cell locomotion mechanisms. These findings may point towards a novel clinical strategy for targeting metastasis.

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