

MEDICAL MUSE

*A literary journal devoted to the inquiries, experiences, and meditations of the
University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center community*



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MEDICAL MUSE

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Submissions may be literary or visual, and may include letters to the editor. Participation from all members of the UNM Health Sciences Center community.

Electronic submissions may be sent via e-mail attachment to: medicalmuse@salud.unm.edu

Please include name and contact information.

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We are pleased to bring you this edition of the Medical Muse. This semiannual arts journal is meant to provide a creative outlet for members of the greater Health Sciences Center community: patients, practitioners, students, residents, faculty, staff, and families. In this business of the scrutiny of bodies and minds, it can be all too easy to neglect an examination of our own lives. This journal is a forum for the expression of meditation, narrative, hurting and celebration – all the ways in which we make sense of what we see and do.

It is our hope that in these pages you will encounter a range of experience from the outrageous to the sublime. What we have in common binds and steadies us, yet there is much to be learned from the unfamiliar.

We see the purpose of the Muse as a way of encouraging members of the Health Sciences community to express their creativity, and we encourage all to submit. Occasionally, subject matter may be controversial. It is never our intent to offend, however we wish to explore the full-range of experiences reflected in our submissions.

Unfortunately, due to space constraints we cannot publish every work that is submitted in the print copy. We wish it to be known that our worst fear is that in selecting submissions we are discouraging the same creativity we wish to foster. We therefore sincerely thank all those who have submitted in the past and ask that you continue submitting. Without your creativity and courage to share the Muse would not exist.

- The Editorial Board

Contributors for this issue:

Jonathan Bolton, MD	Veronica H. Garcia	Jasmine Nanez	Robert C. Schenck, Jr.
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Gary Dutra	Steve Mitchell	John K. Scariano	Stephen Wood, PhD



Rosalyn Nguyen



Sonja Lynn

The Windows to My Soul

Eyes looking to what this diagnosis may hold
 Ah, the eyes of my fear about to be told
Eyes twinkling with relief of what the scan could not detect
 Ah, the eyes of hope only my God can predict
Eyes drowning in endless tears of pain
 Ah, the eyes of my body slowly being slain
Eyes opened with clarity and light
 Ah, the eyes that cancer has given my soul.....new sight

- Josephine Burguete-Vincioni

Conversations behind my mouth

I am a thief

he asked
and my quiet answers exploded
20 pounds in 2 months
gone
why
(BECAUSE
because you just wanted to be hugged
like the other kids
not duck vodka bottles
because you wanted quiet
so you made the vodka bottles
your friends
so familiar
it made sense
so
you tore holes in your veins
but viruses dove in
and inked malignant tattoos
into the yellow walls of your liver)

my science is very precise
very cold
I showed you the pockmarks
right there on your scan
there
on your liver
you scratched them

with your trembling fingertip
and mouthed 'O'
like a setting sun
I give answers that steal dreams
and shake the eyes in your head

and mine

I have pursued this medicine like a lover
she sates my wonder
and burdens me with knowledge
when I walked into your room
bent low
I knew my name
the name your eyes called me
thief

one who blinks tears
but enters your room
who sits at the foot of your bed
and smooths the wrinkles from
the silent sheets at your feet
hear this...
I won't leave you
in the storm
in the night

- Chris Camarata

Braids and Bows and Medical Foes

by Joyce Phillips, MD

When I first met her she was turned sideways in the bed. Relaxed and engrossed in her handheld video game, she paid no attention when I introduced myself to her parents and verified her identity. She was my five year old patient scheduled for replacement of her external ventricular drain. Other than the small tube emerging from the left side of her head, she appeared like any other little girl. Her long brown hair was combed to the side, with a small area shaved where the tube exited. She was cloaked in her favorite pink fuzzy blanket, although she said purple was really her color of preference. I took her pre-operative history and performed a brief physical to understand her health problems and design a suitable anesthetic.

She had been born with spina bifida at the low thoracic level. Her legs were twisted and bent. She still wore a diaper. The ventricular-peritoneal shunt had been placed shortly after birth to alleviate the fluid blockage in her head. It had functioned well until about a week before when an infection had been identified. This required the removal of the shunt and the drain to be replaced. The drain now needed to be exchanged to further clear the infection. As we sat in the holding area together, the neurosurgical resident rushed in and said, "I need you to sign the consent, we're going to take out this drain and put another one in on the other side." The mother looked startled. "No, no," she said, "that is not what we discussed. They said that the tube would go back in the same place."

The resident was indifferent. "I'll talk to my attending and let you know." As I stayed with the family, they expressed their concern that what was happening was not what they had expected. It was the weekend, and the surgery was to be performed by an attending physician they did not know. In a short while, the resident returned and relayed the attending's message that it would be fine to replace the tube on the same side. I asked if the attending was coming to speak with the family and the resident said he was told to proceed. The consent was signed, hugs and kisses were exchanged, and we proceeded to the operating room.

The child and I made small talk as we headed down the hall to the operating room. What was her favorite thing to eat? What videos was she going to watch after the surgery? We talked about the equipment in the operating room; she was curious about everything but not

fearful. Quickly she was off to sleep, intubated, and ready for surgery. As we positioned the patient, the neurosurgical attending walked into the room. Without speaking, he picked up the hair clippers and began shaving the child's head from the base of the skull forward. Long strands of lovely brown hair fell to the floor.

I asked "What are you doing? I don't believe anyone told the family or the patient that her head would be shaved." His reply was, "Well, we're doing neurosurgery and it's only hair. It'll grow back." I told him I did not feel comfortable with the change in procedure, but the hair came off all the same. I then thought about how the family would be informed.

The surgery was performed without difficulty or complication. At the end of the operation, it was

apparent that there were still clumps of unshaved hair on the head. It was decided that the head should be completely shaved to at least make it look uniform. The fourth year medical student was instructed to complete the job. With a heavy heart, he picked up the clippers and did what he was told.

After the patient was settled comfortably in the recovery room, I went to bring her parents to the bed-

side. "Did the surgeons talk to you after the surgery?" I asked. "No," her mother replied. "

I continued: "Everything went well, and she is resting comfortably... but I need to tell you something. They had to shave her head, and I'm not sure you were expecting that." The mother raised her voice, crying, "Why? Why did they have to do that?" The older sister started sobbing. The father stared angrily ahead and did not speak. "I believe they felt it was best for the surgery, I responded. "I'm sorry."

When we arrived at the child's bedside, she was still dozing, covered in her pink blanket. The family stared at her bald head and shook their own. The sister asked, "Why did they do it, Mama?"

Shortly thereafter, the child began to stir in the bed. She opened her eyes to see her family. She did not report any pain or discomfort. Her family broke the news that she lost her hair and she began to whimper. Her mother told her how beautiful she was and that her hair would grow back ~ and in the meantime, they could get her any wig she wanted. With that, the child perked up, beaming. "Can I have a Hannah Montana wig?" □



Laura Hall



Sonja Lynn



Rosalyn Nguyen



Josephine Vinci

The Ghost of Chris LeDoux

By Robert C. Schenck, Jr.

*10-4 buddy come on back, A horse trailer on a Cadillac
Yeah, we're talkin' to the cowboy in the Coupe De Ville
Chug-a-luggin' up one side, Slidin' down the other
I'm a lover of the other side of the hill*

- Cadillac Cowboy, Chris LeDoux, Bare
back champ and Songwriter

Growing up in Colorado surrounded by ranches and rodeos, I always enjoyed western life and the beauty of the cowboy. When I moved to Baltimore for medical school, I used the cowboy in me to sell myself. Folks out east treated me differently, actually better than others, because of my western approach to life. When I was twenty, I flew from Denver to Baltimore and stood in the airport with a single trunk holding all my belongings, wondering how I was supposed to get to my apartment in a town where I had no friends or relatives. I felt alone but calm, as I knew I had been in many worse situations in the mountains.

At age twelve, I had been lost in the Rockies while looking for a Christmas tree; my snowshoes kept me alive as

I watched the flat gray winter sky turn dark. Baltimore had different circumstances, but I knew that if I could find the truck eight years ago after getting lost in the mountains, I could easily find an apartment in Maryland.

The previous spring, during my first visit to Baltimore, proved to me how different my life out west had been compared to the lives of my classmates. I was excited to make the visit and interview for medical school. My oldest sister had taken me shopping in Boulder and I thought I looked pretty sharp in a new gingham shirt and brown necktie that matched my suit from high school. However, upon arrival to the admissions office, I was stunned by a group of well dressed men and women in suits made from a fabric I had never seen before: pinstripes. I quickly realized I would be viewed as a hick and suspected my chances for acceptance were slim with my western brown corduroy suit with leather points at the lapels and sleeves. I figured then that my suit was best worn at the Stock Show and Rodeo in Denver and maybe not for an interview at this medical school. Candidates spoke down to me, informing me that my grades were easy to get at a state university and could not

be compared to theirs earned in the Ivy League. I listened quietly and wondered how on earth I ever thought I would be a fit here. But the two psychiatrists who interviewed me thought differently and I received my acceptance letter a month later.

My first year away had been relatively easy; life there was so different from anything I had ever seen or done. Baltimore was recovering from the 1970s riots and was busy all hours of the day. People were different from those in the west. They often spoke in ways that first appeared to be complimentary, but minutes later were remarkably hurtful. My professors were concerned whether I could perform to their standards. I learned that if you hesitated or took time to listen, you could easily be considered a dunce. Being the first to speak appeared to be the cultural premise for success. Surprisingly, my slower approach and quicker smile began to resonate with many.

I went back home after my first year and welcomed the chance to work with my hands and enjoy the quiet western nights with no streetlights. One evening while sitting alone on our front porch with a view of the mountains, I read the local papers. The Valley Journal and Glenwood Post gave us news of our valley, a contrast with the harsh crime of Baltimore. During medical school orientation we had been advised of the tragic murder of a medical student who had been robbed because he refused to give up his wallet. The student was shot and killed on the spot. I had never heard of murder in that fashion back home, except possibly in the wilderness where an animal will attack an innocent person for simply being in the wrong place, like crossing between a mother bear and her cubs. I realized that living in Baltimore was, in some ways, like living in bear country. The paper had a story of a burglary at the local fish hatchery where an entire fish filled channel had been released into the nearby Crystal River. The fishing that summer had been excellent since the crime and no one was more pleased than Dilbert Hillen, who bragged famously of his fishing abilities and catches. Unfortunately, he also took responsibility for the improvement in fishing conditions and found himself behind bars. I couldn't understand why this was considered a felony as the fish were regularly released anyway. But Dilbert summed it up best when asked about his motivation for the crime, "The fishing was just no darn good." I believe that was the one crime that summer in the Roaring Fork Valley.

That fall, I decided to drive my pickup back east to school. I wanted to haul my western comfort items that some would find silly, like my hackamore to hang on the wall, my bed and a chest of drawers. My father agreed to

give up an old truck and even paid for a tune-up. My trip would take me through the Oklahoma panhandle en route to pick up a friend and give her a ride to Maryland.

The night before I left, I said my goodbyes, watched one last sunset, enjoyed the deep black night, and drove out early the next morning. The drive to Pueblo was spectacular watching the sunrise over Independence Pass. I followed the Arkansas River as it wound through the Colorado plains and made great time crossing into the Oklahoma panhandle by noon. I saw a vista of grasslands split by a two-lane highway that cut through the Great Plains of the west. I drove about an hour when my engine started to cough and I rolled to a slow stop at the top of a hill that overlooked the immense prairies as my vehicle died. Looking under the hood I saw nothing out of place. I needed help, but there were few cars driving on this section of the Oklahoma panhandle roadway on that August afternoon in 1979. Worse, there were no cars in sight. I began walking to a small town and garage that I had passed a few miles back and still feel the hot dry wind desiccating the plains grass. I knocked on the trailer door next to a small auto repair shop and asked for help. The woman of the trailer nervously responded, "My husband won't be back 'til Sunday. He is bass fishing this weekend. I am sorry I can't help you." I wondered why the local Oklahoman wasn't as friendly as a Coloradoan, as I had also been passed by two cars that sped up when the drivers saw my hitchhiking thumb. I realized I better wait at my truck and walked back to get ready to spend the night on the prairie. Walking along the road I saw a sign which advised, "Don't pick up hitchhikers, they may be escaped convicts." I finally understood why no one was friendly.

As I read the sign, I heard a roaring in the distance that grew louder with each dejected step. I stopped and turned back to the west, shading my eyes from the glare of the setting sun. A car was coming towards me going over 100 miles an hour, with something strange hanging out the driver's window. I stepped away from the road and raised my thumb out of hope. The Oldsmobile Toronado whizzed by and to my relief, screeched to a halt. I ran and came up alongside the purplish gray car with a lone cowboy at the wheel. He had one blazing white crew socked foot sticking out the driver's window. "It keeps me cooler," he said, when he saw me gaze at his extended left leg hanging out the driver's window. In the back seat were the matching cowboy boot and a Coors beer case filled with three black and white spotted puppies. "I'm ridin' rodeo in Fort Smith tomorrow and these pups are a gift for my boys back home." He smiled, reached over and shook my hand and told me to hop in. He asked where I was heading and I told him I had

broken down after just paying ninety-six dollars for a tune up. "Can you help me get my truck back on the road?" I asked. In a slow western drawl, something I had come to miss in Baltimore, he said, "I know a little something about vehicles." And with that humble comment, I knew my problems were solved.

He peered down at the engine and snickered, "Your mountain boys forgot to tighten down the bolt on the alternator. We need to re-set your timing," he said. I sat in the front seat ready to turn the key when he gave the word, but I mistook his humming as a go ahead. I hit the starter and he jumped away grimacing in pain and shaking his hand. For a second I thought he would just leave, but instead he said, "Hit it only when I tell you, that shock had quite a bite." He got the engine started and made some adjustments. "I am tightening the alternator like we do on the plains, not the mountains," he crowed, slamming the hood as his exclamation point. "You should take a slightly different route and follow me to Enid," he said. "We'll make up lost time, if you can keep up with me." It was a fast ride. He occasionally slowed down to let me catch up as my truck shimmied if it went over 100. During a stop, he teased that we didn't have enough time to tighten every bolt on the truck so he would drive slower. The cowboy pulled into a Hardee's as we had to part ways. After all he had done, never mind my shocking him, I wanted to buy him dinner but he would have none of it. "I want to help you in becoming a doctor. Maybe someday you'll help a broke up cowboy like me." We sat and talked about the rodeo in Fort Smith, his wife and kids. He was very proud of his wife, who managed everything while he was away and made every dollar he earned, count. I guessed that he was older than me by a few years, but he had a maturity that seemed decades ahead. He asked questions about his broken elbow, rolling up his sleeve to show me his scars. I couldn't offer much, explaining that I had just started medical school, but I listened to his story, realizing how little I knew about medicine. It grew late and it was time to say goodbye. I shook his hand and his grip was as strong as anyone I had ever met. I wished him luck in tomorrow's ride and a safe journey.

The skies lit up with lightning that night. I thought of my great luck of breaking down and meeting a real cowboy. Now, when I try to remember his name and face, everything comes up blank. I kick myself that I forgot to look at his belt buckle to at least know his best win on the rodeo circuit. It seems that was the night I said goodbye to my real west. Unintentionally, I became an easterner, slowly shedding my resemblance to that rodeo rider who came to my

rescue. I have always wondered what Chris LeDoux was doing on that dry August night when I stopped being a cowboy. I bet he was good with vehicles. □

(1987 words, 3rd Place, 2011 annual Southwestwriters contest, southwestwriters.org)



Jonathan Terry, DO

Deep In the Brain

He slowly walks in with the use of a cane
His hands dancing as if a clarinet was playing.
His voice soft, his gait festinating
He has tried all the medications, none were abating.

He asks for our help to cure him of this disease
This disease that progresses, Michael J Fox agrees.
What agony, what frustration must this man feel
The former boxing champion must withdraw and kneel.

Neurosurgery, a Field of Wonder
Fraught with Trial and Error and Ponder
For many years have the healers attempted
The assassination of the Parkinsonian Temptation.

The screws are placed in, in accordance with the Line
Helmet is placed, the battle will begin in due Time.
Analyzing the trails, understanding the unique paths
This is half the battle, know all the tracts.

The headpiece is placed, all 3 axes are aligned
They are all in order, to direct one straight line
It is like a missile launched from the US
To hit another country, precise without bliss.

The swords are pulled out and the soldiers march forward
Destined to their target, a target that has caused so much discomfort.
As they advance forward, different sounds can be heard
They are looking to hear the beat, the beat of the Kurd.

They are at Target, the sounds so unique
They devour the enemy, the patient critiques.
He raises his arm, no movement is noticed
He sheds a tear, "I will never forget this moment"

The battle was won, but there are many more to fight
The precise planning determined this man's plight.
Battles are fought, none are plain
Especially with Neurosurgery, Deep in the Brain.

- Paul Kaloostian

The Orphanage

By John Phillips

I wasn't prepared for this. Everything. Even the smell is foreign. And it's all bad. The sweetish putrid odor drifting over from the animal stalls as we walk between buildings (snorting and grunting unseen pigs, cows and sheep). Walking into the orphanage there's the stench of mold and disinfectant as the invariable teenager mops the hallway floor, stiffly dressed in worn out gray cloths, black shoes without laces sneaking a furtive glance (? a grin) then eyes to the floor—that smell of old forgotten corridors in this broken down building. Sun filtering in through dusty windows, old faded pictures on classroom walls, it's looking back through time—the musty smell of yesterday.

Passing along the corridors and into the “higher functioning” room, like a wave washing over me it hits, a different smell—the urine and feces and left over gruel and sweaty clothes without warning, whoosh, I feel like vomiting. Take a few breaths, slowly, steady, swallow and I'm ok. The kids begin to crowd around...

Back into the corridor again, walking through the musty faded smells of long ago happy to be out of the “self feeding” room away from their faces crowded around me, reaching around my feet smiling and holding my hand “how do you say goodbye” “dosvidaniya” “No, how do you say goodbye....” Back into the corridor passing old (old? How old is despair?) squat Russian women with hair in shawls and darkened teeth, into the next room, the “lying down” room. There the odor kicks me in the groin, I feel like passing out. It's damp mattresses and old milk and disinfectant and urine and windows that won't open in the fading light of the day. It's the quiet large eyes staring at us as we walk in. Fifteen, twenty children lying in rows of two (partnered for life) some oblivious to us—oblivious to most of the world just a skinny tangled mass of bones sticking up at peculiar angles from the cot—some children forever locked in themselves in a world only they know—but most children staring. Immobile except their eyes, they follow us like the eyes of an owl follow a mouse far below its perch, ready to spread its wings and swoop down, except these children have no wings.

The eyes follow us in silence. Some more alive than others, I walk down between the rows of cots and try not to stare, as they stare at me. And then as though on cue the smiles start. The quiet murmurs of Russian. A blond boy with bright blue eyes reaches up to me. So what can I do, I hold his hand. Jabbering Russian he says I am beautiful and he likes looking at me. Embarrassed I make a joke. But his world is his cot—his legs long ago useless, an extension of

the cot holding him, enveloping his legs like a vine on the trunk of a tree that dreams of flight but can't even if the vine wasn't holding it down—his world is his cot-mate, non-verbal and unseeing, he breaths and eats when fed and is incontinent of bowel and bladder and occasionally groans; his closest personal confidante is largely a void. His world is his caretakers - thick stout Russian peasant women feeding and changing and caring for him and his 20 other room-mates with machine-like efficiency. How long since he gazed on a man, held a smile, hoped for a hug? Years? The vines crawling up his trunk grow stronger...

On another day in the quiet of the morning I hear birds chirping. Cold clear day begins with snow still on the ground (at least the mud is frozen too). I look through windows that are frozen sheets of ice, dancing geometric shapes that will melt as the sun rises higher in the morning. High above the compound stretches a rusty brown chimney constantly coughing black smoke into the cold blue sky. The smoke is always there, I'm told they heat with a coal furnace here and assume that's it, but why is Wiesel's *Die Nacht* coming to mind? The ever-burning furnaces of the night? The children, abandoned here long ago waiting. Waiting for someone to come pack me up and take me with you. Waiting for the world to enlarge beyond the walls of this farming/orphanage compound. This room fading in the afternoon light. This urine soaked cot, like the 25 others crammed into this room, waiting to die. The chimney with smoke, *Die Nacht*, no need for gas chambers, time will kill them off.

Back in the orphanage, triaging as we march down the row of cots, who to save? Who am I kidding. Mengele at the train station... It's a strange silence here, a quiet drone in the background, like the hum of our refrigerator back home, you don't notice it until it stops. But its Sergay, severely delayed and lying among the others, he hums a constant tone, who knows what goes on in his head? And occasionally a constant squeak, squeak; steady as a metronome, it goes on for 10 to 15 minutes then stops a bit before starting again. Again, I think of back home. The gentle flap, flap of our family mobile as it rotates above the heating vent when the heat goes on? The dripping of a faucet not entirely turned off by one of my children? It's Slava, too many chromosomes and not enough stimulation, he rocks back and forth on his squeaky mattress. It's always the same. I've been in this room at least twice a day for the past week: the drone, the squeak, the quiet.



Sonja Lynn

So we march through. Me with my doctor's bag (nothing else is familiar, it's my teddy bear, my transitional object), Amy with a chart she writes in, Miriam in front and Heidi trailing behind. This room is all priority 3. The worst, even with intervention not much can be done. Except maybe save a life. I've never seen starvation before, enlarged bloated tympanic bellies on ribs protruding torsos and tangled mass of bones and joints, the pale color of death. But really, who am I kidding, feeling like the *voyageur* that I am, gawking, useless, do I dare really make a difference in someone's life? What fiber makes up my soul?

Later, outside, walking in the cold of an early morning, determined to photograph some of the street before too many people are out. Always self-conscious, even without my camera. Impossible to not stick out. Tentative, tall and angular, jeans and sneakers and blue hooded winter coat. Nothing like the stout Russians, rugged looking people who have fought off armies of invaders for millennia. Dressed in somber blacks and grays, with worn muddy leather shoes and those brown furry Russian hats, my gaze is avoided.

Just starting the day. Middle-aged man with a cigarette and an aluminum pail, he trudges along the frozen muddy path in front of a row of houses to the neighborhood well. Throws the wooden door open and pulls up a bucket of water. I can hear him muttering from across the

street as I try not to stare. And the old peasant woman, round and hunched over, shall, layers of rags, she emerges from her quilt just as I am about to snatch a picture. Embarrassed I hid my camera and she nods to me. It is cold. Both of us breathing out puffs of cold fog.

And walking further down the lane. A muddy pothole laden street lined on either side by a row of trees and trash, then the erratic row of houses. Houses that go on for several miles to the edge of town. Houses like none I've ever seen; cute, like gingerbread homes with baby blue shutters and deep green sideboards and white trim, or bright yellow sideboards and lime green trim with many small windows behind shutters of faded red. Some with ornate wrought iron above the gate, or eaves. Many heavy with the years, sagging like an overstuffed couch into the muddy earth...

Always on my walks the gold teeth. As usual trying to get a picture of someone, anyone, smiling with all those gold incisors. But no, always too proud. "I'm not photogenic." Or "come back when I have my Easter cloths on." Others just with rotting dark bits of teeth in place, how can they live with themselves I wonder, much less kiss someone with teeth like that? But as I finish an afternoon walk down the road out of town, I pass one of the orphanage workers, young and colored blond hair with her girlfriends, calling to some boys across the muddy black road. Her teeth not

unlike the road, potholes and dark, more pressing needs to satisfy. And as the boys grin and begin to step across muddy puddles, I notice their dark gray coats, dirty hands, and dark teeth. After all, the girls are not calling to me...

Slowly, peacefully, quietly. I can remember the quiet of the afternoon in Buturlinovka's orphanage. Nothing but the sound of breathing. Of 25 children breathing in the waning hours of the day. No murmurs of hope, no cry of joy at Daddy's home! Or Mommy's in the kitchen! Life here has no meaning. This room for disabled children. For those born too soon or from wombs poisoned with alcohol or whose infant brains were racked by infection, or jaundice, or those conceived in a moment of passion, or violence. All abandoned. An unfair start in life and now condemned to this room. Twenty-five children with twisted legs and vacant eyes, staring. But not all. Some look on with longing. Some with desperately big eyes, intense and searching for something. Reaching out to be touched. Some know. Desperate for affection. Desperate for the essence of humanness. Desperate for the love of a mother, a father, a past or a future. Who were these mothers, these fathers?

Faded sunlight through dusky windows, forgotten children waiting to die. There are no electric lights in these rooms, no artificial rays of hope. It's another world, really, another planet. No one is leaving. No one. A caregiver standing over the room of children, standing with despair looking off into nowhere, faded scarf covering thick red-brown hair, she sighs the afternoon into evening into eternity. And looking over this pond of life, barely visible, barely audible, this pond of children who in my neighborhood (in my home, why not?) would be yelling and giggling and dreaming of tomorrow, looking over this pond of life I see my own children. I see my Marisa, quiet and proud and loving beyond her years, her drawings destined to change how I see color. And I see Michael. My son who with a smirk or a subtle grin can imitate the sea of human emotion. And I see the horrific human tragedy of this room. There will be no Mozart out of here, no Whitman, no Marisa or Michael. It is only the slow murmur of breathing, of quiet Russian whispers, that brings the day to a close into night. □



Sonja Lynm

James Jones - Creative Reflections

The following is a series of reflective writing pieces done by the 2011-2012 PrEP students:

Tiffany Cericola, Gary Dutra, Mercedes Gonzales, Rebekah McCann, Jasmine Nanez, Marissa Tafoya, and Keena Trujillo based upon a Problem Based Learning case, James Jones, by Stephen Wood, PhD.

James Jones is a 67-year-old man who had been hitchhiking from San Diego to visit a friend in Denver for Christmas. He was found at 3 am, unconscious on a street corner, in Durango, CO by some college students. One of them called 911 and James was taken by ambulance to the local hospital. The ER nurse who examined James observed an unconscious male who was very thin, pale, and unkempt. His skin felt hot and he was sweating profusely. His breath smelled strongly of beer. His pupils were dilated and reactive to light. His pulse and respirations were rapid. An intern placed an arterial catheter and took a blood sample for arterial blood gases and a toxicology screen. The arterial catheter was connected to a pressure transducer. Electrodes were placed for measurement of ECG. A blood sample was drawn for a toxicology screen (drugs of abuse panel and prescription drugs panel).

Rebekah

It started when I came back- images of lost limbs, blood, tears; the images of war. I couldn't get them out of my head. My only saving grace was the great H-the one thing that kept me sane while the Viet Cong was shooting at me. It kept me from going off the deep end. The more the images consumed me, the more I used, the more distant I became. No one could help me, not even if they tried. It was easier being far away, tucked in my blanket of security. Nothing could compare to the feeling I got when I stuck that needle in my arm. Nothing.

I've been homeless now longer than I was ever housed. It's better this way. My family doesn't care, and if they did, I wouldn't try to fix it. I like being free, living wherever I want to, hanging with whom I want to, staying out late with no one to answer to. I am free. Even though I am free from the constraints of society, I see the way they look at me. They look at me with disgust. I think to myself, "I risked my life, so you could be here today, you asshole. Don't look at me that way." They tell me to get a job, stop asking for handouts, and to take a shower. They turn their nose up at me. Rarely will I get someone to humor me with a smile. Even with all this, I am content. I have my friends

that I can count on, until one of them overdoses, or goes into treatment. Oh well, it's a revolving door out here. One bites the dust; another one gets kick out of their house, or fails rehab to join me out on the streets. That may sound harsh, but that is just the way it is.

Lately, I've been bored with just using the tar. It really doesn't make me feel as comforted as before. My friend showed me how to speed-ball and ever since I can't get enough. After the coke wears off from injecting it, I will smoke a rock to keep the edge off. This is one of the best things that has ever happened to me.

Gary

D

On the 9th of November 03:13 we went in route code 3 for a 911 dispatch to a 67 y/o male unconscious, unresponsive.

C/C

Unconscious / unresponsive, tachycardic pulse, rapid respirations.

H

Pt found by college students on the corner of E. 2nd Ave and E. 8th St in downtown Durango CO. On scene time of arrival 03:17 and pt. 03:18. Allegedly bystanders stated that James had been traveling from San Diego to Denver to visit a friend he served with in Vietnam. There was a small crowd around James and reportedly he had been seen dealing crack in some of the bathrooms of the downtown bars. All information appeared to be hearsay and pt never regained consciousness, thus no additional information was available. An unilled prescription for prozak was found in pt's wallet along with \$ 735, a photo, VA ID card, and 8 small baggies of an unknown crystalline substance.

A

Upon primary assessment, pt was found to have a rapid and regular pulse, airway was clear respirations present. Pt LOC: Unresponsive to loud verbal or painful

stimuli. There is no noted trauma to head trunk or extremities. On scene BGL found to be 123, pt then loaded in ambulance and a secondary assessment subsequently performed in route.

R

A primary and a secondary assessment was performed. See vitals as listed. Pt was placed on the cardiac monitor at 03:25 and a 12 lead was performed and displayed SVT w/ ST abnormality. An IV was initiated at 03:22 in the L. forearm 18 ga. NS TKO A/S 1/1. At 03:20 NRB was placed on pt at 15 LPM, gag reflex assessed and found to be (-). A 26 ga. nasal cannula was placed in the L. nare with no response or resistance at 03:21. BGL assessed and found to be 138. Pt given Narcan 0.4mg IM at 03:19 with no response. At 03:26 0.8mg in 2ml narcan given SIVP with no response, and again at 03:31 with no response. Pt continually reassessed and monitored.

T

Pt was transported to Mercy Regional Medical Center code 3 lights and sirens, initiated at 03:20 and arrival 03:32. Radio report given en route with directions to arrive in resus. Care of pt. was transferred to RN Fancy Pants and pt. belongings left with attending tech.

E

On scene with DPD and DFD. There were no notable exceptions to this call.

Marissa

Here I am in blackness again. But this time it doesn't feel good. Bad batch perhaps. Why can't I open my eyes? There's chatter around me but I make out any of it. Am I asleep? I guess I could be dead but it's so dark. I'd imagined there'd be more out there. I did my time so why am I stuck here. The noise is changing. There's beeping now all around me that won't stop and I feel someone touching me. Why are they taking my stuff? I paid for it, it's mine! Please let me move, please let me wake up, or just make it all stop I don't care just not like this, I can't live like this. After everything I have been through, it's so unfair. I want to see my wife, by beautiful angel. Only death is likely to grant me that, so please stop touching me and let me go. I remember how I got here. It wasn't an accident, it was pain and now all that has quieted is control over my body. I just wanted to feel warm and strong like I was as a young boy, the way I was when she found me. Why is somebody pricking me? If it's

another junkie I'll kill him the moment I'm up. But it feels different from drugs I think. What's wrong, why does my heart feel weird, why is it so loud? That doesn't sound right, it's getting faster and I can't move still. I'm getting closer to her I can feel it. This must be where I end, I can't be scared, I must go in peace, and when I leave I will have found peace for the first time since I lost her. She'll be waiting.

Jasmine

Charts, charts and more charts! At least it's a minute to sit down. Graveyard is always killer on my feet. I need new shoes. It's time to do my rounds. 3 am emergencies are either drunks or domestics. Tonight's been calm, though.

Here comes the ambulance. Looks bad. Let's see what we have here: older male, unconscious and possibly homeless. Oh man, he's very than. Looks like my uncle Ken. Wow, he's burning up. It's not a fever. I hope he wasn't outside. Who found him and where? College students? Outside? Do we have an ID? Mr. James Jones what were you doing outside? Tonight is one of the coldest nights so far!

His pupils are dilated... drugs? Still reactive to light: good sign. Probably the only good sign so far. His pulse and respirations are very rapid. Here comes the intern. Arterial catheter, good job. These kids are coming along well. ECG—also a good idea.

Mr. Jones, stay with us. He smells of alcohol; probably trying to survive without losing it. What's in his wallet? Damn, that's a lot of cash. Looks like a military photo, was he in the service? He could be a vet. They get swept under the rug too often. Yup, VA ID and a prescription for Prozac.

What's in his backpack? Uh oh. I need to show the intern the small baggies. What kind of tattoo is this? Looks military related. Dr. Foster would know. Special forces? I hate to see these guys so damaged. We do this to them.

His vitals are bad. I look to the intern. He just got the lab tests. He's acidotic. ECK. Hyperkalemia. Does the intern see this? I think he does.

A chest x-ray shows Mr. Jones might have pulmonary edema. This isn't going to end well...



Jonathan Terry, DO

Mercedes

Hey lady, be careful with that! That picture is the only one I have left of me and Brian. Yeah, you're looking at it now. The ladies couldn't resist him. Hell, no one could. It was his smile. Yup, he's the second from the right; always smiling. We were in hell and he was still smiling. That's me, the miserable son of a bitch on the far right. I had everything right there and I still wasn't satisfied, still wasn't smiling. You can't tell from the picture but I was happy there, everything made sense and I still had everyone I loved but I wasn't smart enough to know it. Brian was though, he knew what was important. We had each other and that was everything. He died less than a month after that picture was taken. That's why you need to get your damn hands off of it! It probably doesn't matter though, what, with this team I'm sure to be on my way to see him. The doctor looks like he is twelve, that's fantastic.

What are these guys talking about? Alcohol? Poly-substance drug abuse? Why do doctors always use those kinds of words? It probably makes them feel good about themselves. You know what would make you feel good? Try a speedball. Yeah, if you could help me out with the ratios it would really help me out doc. Then I wouldn't keep ending up in here with that lady trying to figure out what my tattoo is. Special Forces lady, come get some! Yeah he knows, pansy-ass, he was probably drinking lattes waiting to

patch up those of us who actually saw action. That's why we started using dope in the first place. It was like candy over there, Brian never touched it and he died anyway. I always told him we was going to die out there anyway he might as well enjoy what he could. That's funny, I came back and he died sober.

Yeah, honey that's a prescription for Prozac; we got a Nobel Prize candidate here. That was the biggest joke ever. I asked for help and that's what they gave me. Prozac, that's the last time I go to the VA hospital for help. That's why I came out here, to take a break, see if I could find something better. I was coming to see Shorty, that's him on the other end; the one standing on the right. He is the only one who answers my calls anymore. He said I could come out to see him for Christmas. Doubt I'll make it now. I hope someone calls him to tell him I'm not coming. I don't want to lose the one friend I got left.

I don't know who looks worse, me or the doc, he's sweating more than me now! What are you guys doing to me! I look worse than when I came in! Why am I shaking like that! What is happening? Don't think I won't remember this when I wake up; I'm going to make sure every single one of you...

Brian? Is that really you man?

Tiffany

4 Minutes Too Late

The sick realization hits me like a ton of bricks, causing
guilt ridden bile to rise up and menacingly tickle the back
of my throat.

I killed a man today.

I took someone's father, brother, son.

I realize the mistake as I stare at the clock on the wall,
forcing myself to acknowledge and voice the time of
death.

I try to feign composure, but my trembling voice and hands
give me away.

My heart is pounding, I feel as if all in the room can hear it.
It is a stark contrast to the lifeless form on the gurney, a
guilty reminder that I am here and he is not.

He is gone and I did it. I killed a man today.

I am numb. If I let any more feeling in, I know I will
collapse.

I would drown pathetically in a sea of my own guilt and
sorrow.

I start rationalizing.

He was a drug addict. It is his fault. He should have never
had cocaine in his system.

It was his fault. Not mine.

How could it be mine? It can't be mine.

Tsk Tsk I can hear my professor saying as he marks my
answer wrong on the exam.

This time the stakes are much higher. It is not an F, a slap
on the wrist, a "study harder". He is dead.

I should have known better. It was a rookie mistake.

A mistake that cost a man his life, the most valuable thing a
human possesses.

Contraindication, epinephrine, metaprolol, beta,
unopposed alpha.

It is coming back to be now.

Four minutes too late.

He is dead, and I killed him.

It is most definitely my fault.

Keena

Mr. Unknown

I fought in the war, yes I did.

I fought in the war, special forces as a young kid.

I fought for my country, the good'ol US of A.
I fought for my life, hoping to come home to find a wife.

I fought for my benefits, which I earned.
I fought the depression at every turn.

I fought the progression with aggression, until I gave in.
I fought the urge to unfold the tin, relaxing once I let it in.

I fought for a way to keep the calm, a way to live through
my everyday psalm.

I fought for a way to un-live the pain, hitchhiking to closest
of my family domain.

I fought for a way to stay warm, battling the upcoming
perfect storm.

I fought for the breath that eluded me through life,
hoping to find a knife to cut through all my strife. □



Andrea Schaffhuizen, PublicDomainPictures.net

24601

by Jonathan Terry, DO

He had tried to drown himself in the bathtub. “I’ve lived long enough,” the old man told me. “I’ve had a good life, and now I want to die.” We sat alone in silence in that small exam room. After all, who was I to argue with him? It didn’t matter. I was the on-call psychiatrist, and the ER needed their room for the next decrepit, suicidal veteran.

“Sir, I don’t disagree with your feelings, but I’m required to admit you to the hospital to keep you safe.” If I could admit him fast, then I might be able to get a few hours of sleep before morning.

The man’s booming laughter broke my thoughts.

“Young man, there’s no such thing as safety.”

I stood silently with my clipboard, not sure of how to respond. I looked at this frail, yet ostensive and lively man, who had come to the hospital wanting to die. An arm’s length from my pager, laughter again rocked through his barrel-chested, supine form in the obligatory injury-proof linens given to all the psychiatric patients.

The accent in his voice picked up with a strength for which I wasn’t ready. He started babbling about secret CIA missions. Violent interrogations of the Schutzstaffel. A wife who was thirty years his junior, and the book

he had written to account it all. He said he was famous, published, successful, and had a family that loved him.

“There, you see, I’ve had a good life. Now, please let me die.”

Suicidal and delusional. Huh. Maybe admission wasn’t such a bad idea after all.

“Doctor, I’ve told you enough of my story, now tell me yours. What do you think of this old, fersh-toonkeneh af tsores? This must be hard work. Ad mean v’esrim shanah, do you know what that means?”

“No, sir, I don’t. Would it be ok if I listen to your heart and lungs before we admit you?”

Without argument, the man rolled back the red psychiatric tunic with the government logo as I lifted my stethoscope.

That was when I saw the faded tattoo on his left forearm. The letter A and five numbers.

In the time that followed, I would learn that everything the man told me was true. As a teenager sixty-seven years ago, this man had fought to live, an involuntary prisoner. Tonight, this survivor, who had survived against all odds, was a prisoner again. This time, he was fighting to die. □

Pull the Plug

Sanchez his name, a rough and tumble man
A farmer, A husband, An everyday gentleman.
Worked his whole life, provided for his family
Lived each day with a smile, every minute merrily.

Afflicted with these tumors, vascular in nature
All over his brain and spinal cord, not a fear or a quiver.
Woke up one day with weakness, couldn't stand for long
The one in his brainstem, this was the one that was strong.

He placed his life in our hands
The blue collar worker, had so many fans.
He was ready to go, the operating room awaits
Wheeled away this man, what will be his fate?

This lesion was tough, it did not want to go
Stuck to the brainstem at every angle, oh no!
No plane whatsoever, no angle of approach
Took it all out, pray he doesn't croak.

He was not moving his arms or his legs post op
The ventilator delivering his breaths, a belly flop.
Wide awake, his brain very bright
Left debilitated, how much can he fight?

He fought for one month, he was a true champ
Decided that was it, not the way he wanted to live.
After thinking with his family, He wanted us to Pull the Plug
What a man, what a life, he passed away with love.

- Paul Kaloostian



Sonja Lynn



Rosalyn Nguyen



Rosalyn Nguyen



Jonathan Terry, DO



Rosalyn Nguyen



Alan Vincioni



Sonja Lynn



Jonathan Terry, DO



Sonja Lynn



Sonja Lynn



Rosalyn Nguyen



Sonja Dewing

The Divorcee

“Bitter isn’t the
exact word she’d use”
to describe it,
she begins to tell
the clerk at Hollister.

“Wiser and more free,”
Is the parting mantra that
belongs to the
well-practiced smile.

She pulls into her driveway,
Sports car tires running over
tangled weeds in the crevices,
The Divorcee blunders into that
dark niche
of smoky carpet and dog fur.

Sure, maybe, it would
be nice to have someone
to help with the bags, but
none of those young guys
step up for any more
than what they come for.

She thinks aloud to
the empty room, at least
sometimes they’re
honest.

“Not bothered” by the
interaction, she gets on
the phone, with dried-out salivation
to share today’s vital lessons
with her protégé.

- Jonathan Terry, DO



Jonathan Terry, DO

Smiling

Profound self-loathing, despair, and loneliness
in a crowded happy world.

A weighty tumor-like black mass in my chest
called pain and fear

Wrapped up in a dark tarry little ball made up
of the sad affliction of depression

Suffocating, even as I smile my fake smile and
laugh my fake laugh and carry on my fake existence

An elixir found

A new life with genuine laughter and a
sincere smile

Though slightly battered and bruised,

I am healed now

I am saved.

- Veronica H. Garcia

Student Volunteering: Learning More Than Medicine

by Jeanne Ruff

Twice a year, a group of medical volunteers makes the thirty-plus hour journey from the United States to a small community in rural Kenya—Oyugis (O-U-geez). The group is with a not-for profit, non-affiliated organization called Project Helping Hands, which arranges similar trips in many countries. Judith Harris, faculty of the UNM College of Nursing, is a regular volunteer with this organization, and in October of 2011 she brought eight nursing students with her on the mission to Africa.

Our group was composed of twenty-four doctors, nurses, physical therapists, and students from around the US. We opened a temporary clinic in a partially constructed building amidst the cottages and small farms of rural Africa. Our only supplies were those we brought with us in our extra suitcases. Roughly 2,400 patients were seen in six and a half days of clinic. I know that I can speak for all of the students in expressing our gratitude to Judith and the College of Nursing for providing us with this incredible opportunity. These are some of our experiences.

A Day With the Dentist

The dentist comes and lays his tools
upon a paper drape
a wooden chair, some plastic gloves
and trash held up with tape.

The local dentist will donate his time, and he needs two assistants. We set up on the second floor of the unfinished building. The crumbling stairs have no railing, and the floor is sandy cement. A kitchen table is borrowed from a family who lives nearby. We find a surgical drape stuffed in one of the supply suitcases, spread it over the table, and lay out our supplies. Gloves, masks, dental pliers, needles, vials of Lidocaine, disinfectant, gauze. We cannot be truly sterile, but we try. Sharps? That plastic water bottle will do. We have only supplies and time to do extractions, no cleanings, fillings, or other care. Many times teeth are too dirty to clean with a toothbrush and paste, but the people have no money to go to the district hospital to have it done professionally. Unfortunately this often means that the painful tooth cannot be pulled, because the risk of infection is too great.

When a tooth can be pulled it is a simple shot of Lidocaine or Novocain, five minutes, and a firm and gentle hand to steady the head against the wall. We are careful, oh so careful—because AIDS is everywhere. Now the dentist grasps the tooth by the root with his tool, twists, and pulls. Spit the blood into the plastic bag of dirt on the floor. First you, then you.

Patient Stories

We will say that I am forty. I have a pain in my chest and back, it started yesterday. Do you think it could be from carrying heavy loads on my head? Pressing pain, I was walking, made me nauseous. Of course I was sweating, I was walking. Yes, I stopped walking, and yes the pain was better then. Yes, it has come again. Heart rate 84 and regular, blood pressure 118/80. Serious pain, a warning. A lucky thing to come today. Aspirin 81mg. You must go to the district hospital. How did you come to the clinic today? Walking, of course. Too late in the day to get there today. They close at 4pm. You must go tomorrow first thing, and please take this note. “Please consider our patient for a cardiac work-up related to the S&S of unstable angina she presented with today.” Please go to the hospital as soon as you can. If you feel the pain again sit down and call for help right away. Goodbye, thank you. Asante.

A small boy hovers in the doorway, cautiously watching. He came to the clinic by himself. “Come sit by me, and tell me how I can help you today.” He brought himself here because his ear hurt so badly. Otitis media, stoic, quiet, in pain. Antibiotics, ibuprofen, and vitamins with iron. You must take these pills, and get it right. Two of these three times a day, these for pain and take them like this. And only one of these each day. It’s a lot to remember, can you say it back? Yes, it is easy. I am ten.

Age? Fourteen. And what would you like to be seen for today? Stomachache. Ok, please wait here. The doctor will see you now, please have a seat. I see your stomach is quite distended. It started growing only two months ago?! You have laboratory results from the hospital? Let’s look at the results. Dx: Acute Abdominal Lymphoma. Can you help us? We have been to every hospital in the area, but everyone says she needs cytotoxic drugs, go home. Please, how can you help us? In the US she would be in

emergency surgery as we speak, an acute abdomen like that. What can we do? We don't know. Please take this pain medication for her for now. We will see what we can do. Please come back on Monday.

The young girl is back, the one with the lymphoma. She is worse today, much weaker. Quick, bring something for her to lay on while we wait for John. He is the Kenyan doctor and will know what can be arranged. Some lab coats and bubble wrap will do I guess, we have nothing softer. John! You are here! What are her options? There must be something we can do! It does not look good. She may be able to get treatment in Nairobi, but they are probably too crowded. The choice is to go home with family or to the hospital in Eldoret. We don't know if they can help. It is far, past Kisumu. Bus. Hours. We will try, if you can help. We can help, if you will call. Please call us when you get there, and tell us what they say. We may be able to help pay for treatment if it is not too late. Goodbye, and best of luck. Our thoughts are with you. I wish we could give you more than our prayers.

My baby has two tongues. My baby was born two weeks ago. Several days ago he grew a second tongue, and now he cannot nurse. Laugh little baby, and let me see your tongue. How strange! Do you know what this is? The poor thing is dehydrated. Laugh little baby. A ranula! This is not so bad. A swollen salivary gland, and a fairly easy fix. A simple surgery will solve this problem. It can be performed at the district hospital, and we can provide the money. A happy day. The baby will live!

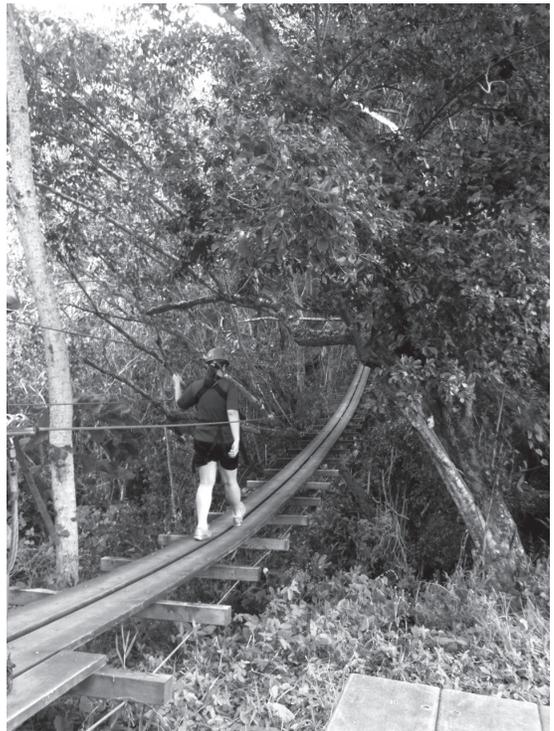
School In Rural Kenya

The school on the hill looks out over the whole countryside. The tin roofs of houses speckle the patchwork fields, and in the distance are the hazy shadows of the mountains near Lake Victoria. The children walk to school in the morning, and some always accompany us as we march the three miles to the clinic each day. Each school has a different color uniform. The girls wear dresses with collars, and the boys wear shorts and sweater vests.

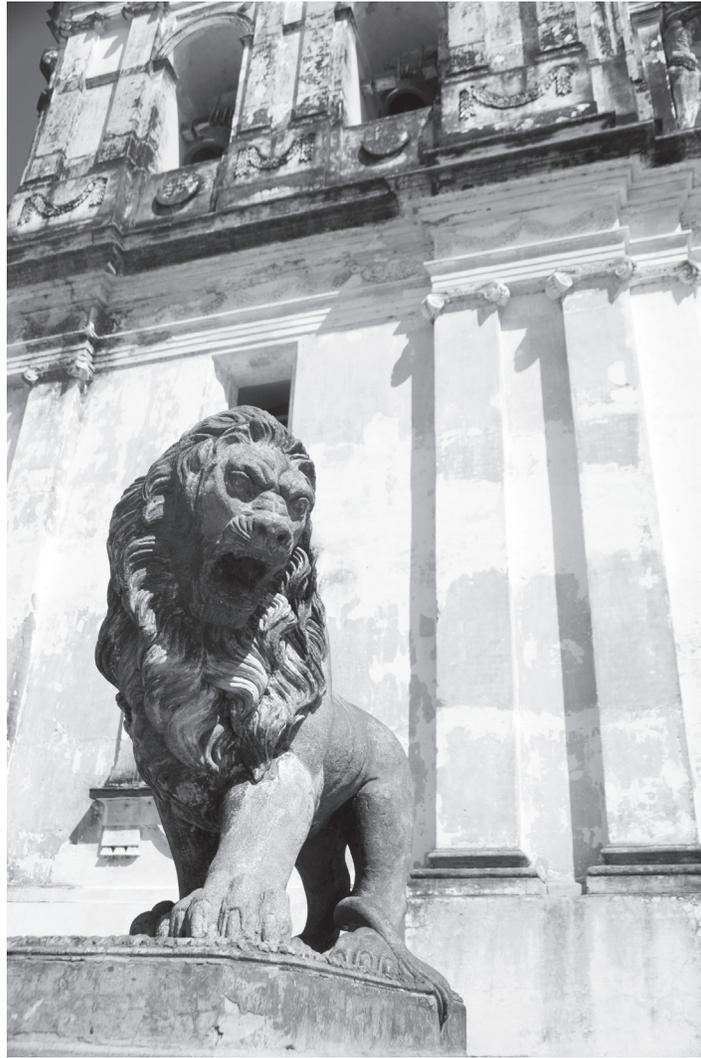
The school building, like most of the houses, is a small structure made of mud and topped with tin. There are many windows, which is good because they provide the only light. The floor is packed dirt, and the blackboards are painted directly on the plastered walls. Desks are roughly made and consist of only a thin board for two or three to sit on, and a slightly thicker board placed above on which to write. The children's handwriting is good as they grasp broken pens and formally write name and age.

"Hello, children, my name is Jeanne and this is Kathy. We have been working in the clinic down the hill, and we would like to listen to your heart and lungs, look in your ears, and we will try to answer any questions you have about your health or your body. Please form a line here."

"Hello, will you tell me your name? How have you been feeling the last few days?" "Well, I feel happy." □



Jonathan Terry, DO



Robert Lerich, Dreamstime.com

León Nicaragua: 1992 A Tomar: Victoria o Toño? Facilitating the near homicide of el capitán de Los Sandinistas

by John K. Scariano

The end of June 1992, we're landing at Augusto César Sandino Airport in Managua after a bird's eye view of rows and rows of yellow school buses idling in the brilliant sunshine, circling around the capital surrounded by the profuse emerald vines of the powerfully green Nicaraguan countryside, Lake Managua and Momotombo. Flying from Houston with donated fare and six crates of medical laboratory supplies from the University of New Mexico and other hospitals in Albuquerque, I was charged with delivering it all to the medical campus of UNI, the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua, in León. It's so hot inside the terminal of A.C. Sandino, weather I never realized existed except on the planet Venus, that I feel suddenly lightheaded and dangerously close to keeling over. An ener-

getic young customs official, in a bleached and carefully ironed shirt picks through the array of mysterious, unlabeled white chemicals zipped into baggies with a curious and somewhat bothered smile on her face.

"Es buena coca," I say, dazed.

"De veras?" she smiles fully showing off her beautiful white teeth, most likely imagining I am just another in a long line of garden-variety foreigners on a pilgrimage to her country for one political or religious cause. She sniffs one anyway, just to make sure. An analytical balance was upended by the baggage handler at Albuquerque's Sunport who managed to topple all of my boxes, all of its hundred counterweights were spilled, wonderful. Ningunos problemas with the mysterious white powders but the customs official

thought a spectrophotometer and especially the accessory compressor might be a bomb. But then I remember that the Spanish word for pump and bomb are both 'bomba.' "Si, una bomba!"

Margarita, a UNI Microbiologist and her burly young chauffer José help pack the boxes in the back of a UNI Toyota pickup. Soon we are driving with the windows down, I am straddling the gear-shift in the middle with my feet almost meeting Margarita's, bouncing over the thousands of potholes, craters really, of Managua. Ay, pobre Managua. I had temporarily forgotten how indisputably impoverished some parts of Latin America are, but despite the fact that many people in the barrio adjoining the airport appear to be living in little-reinforced cardboard boxes, there's a subtle cheerfulness, a rainbow of sunny pastels facing the street, a grin and greeting from a stranger, tiendas in the open air overflowing with their colorful merchandise. On almost every corner a boom box plays the ubiquitous, bouncy, electric guitar melodies of the Caribbean that everyone listens to, the eternal soundtrack of Central America that's got to have originated in West African popular music, keeping spirits from crashing in the shanty. Airplanes can transport you from the sterile and affluent glop of South Texas to the earthier realities of the Latin American tropics almost instantaneously it seems, compressing the enormous intervening psychological, physical and chronological distances into the infinitesimal.

After the last stoplight turns green, we're speeding northwest on the León highway, part of the Pan-American system, inside and east of the volcanic arc of the Pacific coast. Reaching the summit of the first big hill, the engine straining in its peculiar Japanese way, the view behind is of the spectacular stratovolcano Momotombo, its perfectly symmetrical blue cone rising 4,126 feet above the steely waters and verdant jungles of Lake Managua and thrusting upwards into the gathering silver of thunder clouds. Since this is such a breathtaking vista of Central America, the beauty of it too terribly powerful to savor all at once, I ask them to stop the truck so I can try to capture some of this light on a photograph. I've forgotten how much color and depth lives in the tropics, and how differently, how much more comfortably time passes in the lesser latitudes. In each little crossroad through a landscape of cultivated plots, jungle and sugarcane, a handful of men, women and children wait patiently by the side of the highway for pickup trucks to stop and take them for a ride to Managua or León and north-westward. Such is the cooperation and generosity of strangers in less paranoid parts of the world, whoever needs a ride usually gets a free one. But after darkness falls, Margarita warns me, travel isn't as easy, nor is it safe.

Having clocked considerable experience in unhappier parts of Latin America, I wasn't sure quite what to expect in a culinary way, so I had prepared myself for meager meals of beans, rice and tortillas just in case for the upcoming weeks. I had eaten like a wild animal in Houston, anticipating likely famine before returning. If I had known anything about the surprising Nicaraguan cuisine and how many outstanding little restaurants there were, I would have skipped out on Houston. As soon as we arrived within the city limits, Margarita and José took me to a seafood restaurant where the custom is to choose a meal that is swimming in a 75-gallon aquarium. The smallest cabrilla I could find was eighteen inches long and must have weighed at least ten pounds. No way, I thought, could I eat the entire bass, since Margarita and José both had one of their own, but the patrona brought it out expertly-seasoned, crispy and to my surprise I was able to eat all of it, head to tail. The white flakes of fresh fish were delectable and served alongside an imaginative salad and a couple of cold Victorias. I was very impressed and my hosts were relieved that I wasn't a fussy eater like my other countrymen previously introduced. After dinner we drive to the hostel at the south end of town, across from one of the oldest seventeenth century cathedrals in the village, Margarita promising to get me to UNI early in the coming mornings.

It's so oppressively sweltering inside my little cinder block and cement floor room, I have to keep the electric fan on full speed six inches away from my head, otherwise I'll simply dehydrate and die. The shower-head, nothing more than a lukewarm spigot, offers only temporary relief. Two cucharachas are crawling around on the bare cement floor, and there's no hot water, but a sane person would never want it in this kind of climate.

Before getting in bed I let the spigot cool me one more time. By the light of a bare bulb dangling from the ceiling, I skim a brief and disturbing biographical sketch of Augusto N.C. Sandino, authored by a refreshingly candid local. Apparently, Augusto Nicolás Calderón Sandino, during his short lifetime of making trouble for landed Nicaraguans and the United States Marine Corps who came to their rescue, honestly believed he was the incarnation of God on earth, and his wife; the Virgin Mary. The César was his idea, rejecting the middle names he was given, typical of the alarming narcissism that would mark his very brief adulthood. Trying to find something to admire about one of Nicaragua's revered heroes, after reading this timeline I gave up on Sandino, concluding he was a total lunatic, a gun-craving violent freak with a predilection for bizarre and fanatic notions. Rubén Darío has much more to offer as a Nicaraguan national hero in my opinion.

I spent most of my time fixing or trying to repair older laboratory instruments all over town and installed a new Hitachi spectrophotometer donated by the government of Japan in León's hospital laboratory (that incidentally made the instruments I brought down look like utter refuse to these poor Nicas). My Clinical Chemistry lectures, in imperfect Spanish, were fairly useless and redundant to these bright and talented caregivers. Contrary to the estimation of my North American patrons, it wasn't expertise or savvy the Nicaraguan physicians or laboratorians I encountered were lacking. What was missing: most of the expensive stuff it requires to take care of sick people. After finishing on Friday afternoon in a neighborhood clinic with a small lab, looking forward to a cold Victoria, I noticed a girl ten or eleven years old, pulling up her skirt, squatting to defecate on a newspaper spread on the crowded waiting room floor. All of this in front of everyone else, so that her hookworms or amoebas, whatever was ailing her could be diagnosed. How humiliated she must have felt. But at least she was getting adequate medical care and the treatments for these diseases were working down here. The good doctors of León were making the equivalent income of around two hundred U.S. dollars per month at that time and if they wanted to practice medicine they were living with kin to make ends meet. Keep that in mind the next time you notice a copy of "Self" or "Fortune" magazine in the grocery check-out line.

The more interesting episode I need to confess, however, reveals the author of this account as a traveling fool and illustrates how simple, stochastic and seemingly disjointed slices of serendipity on a simple visit to a foreign land can make chaos theory take on an entirely new and stunning poignancy in real-time and space. Before I unravel the details of how my presence simply very nearly facilitated an outright fratricide, allow me a little more embellishment if you will my kind reader, to set the proper milieu in place for that yarn.

It's already boiling hot, before the sun rises and right before the roosters start screeching their bloody heads off, the deafening tropical aviary is already cheeping, tweeting and twittering, peeping and chattering in an earsplitting cacophony while you're still sweating on the cot. And then the roosters come in to it, the roosters to herald the dawn of hell.

Early morning is cloying under the tropic of cancer, it's relatively cooler and the energy of the street weaves in and out of the rich invisible steam of local black coffee sweetened with several spoonfuls of local cane sugar. And the score is perpetual, loud enough, the perfectly chosen theme music that everyone listens to all day on la radio, the rollicking and bittersweet tropical melodies that would

make even the most cynical killjoy want to dance his way to work. Most everyone in the city seems to be in the street at this hour, the abuelas carrying their load back from the market, the young mothers showing off their newly-born, unemployed young men and boys congregating in large circles, women and young girls walking a straight line with jugs of water, or baskets of rice and fruits from the market balanced on the tops of their heads. Jade and crimson-colored parrots getting a ride on the shoulders of a young boy. The store owners sweeping trash down the street before the onslaught of the midday sun, pedestrians walking on their way to work and always the soundtrack, high notes on the electric guitar, background music to a fine piece of what could be cinema. The street sweeps you into its ebb and you become part of the splendid morning tide.

León is a fine and proper colonial, red tile-roofed Spanish city, abounding with seventeenth century stone cathedrals, broad palmed avenues, the profuse scarlet inflorescence of malinche, a renown and splendid cultural center located in a sprawling verdant hacienda. The Nicaraguan people are intensely passionate about baseball and everyone watches the Atlanta Braves in their open living rooms. If I had only known I would have brought some baseballs.

Although I have been here only two weeks, I have already found several excellent restaurants scattered around the town. For example: Caña Brava, a few kilometers taxi ride out in the sugarcane fields, where the local Lion's Club puts on Saturday night dances with live music and a river flowing with the national drink and other favorite Nicaraguan pastime: Flor de Caña. Rum. Ron. Everybody dances. If you're standing alone, you will be invited to sit and share a bottle of F. de C. and even if you're a little introverted or shy you'll make new friends and they'll ask you to get up and dance with them. The Caña Brava's pièce de résistance is a memorable pepper steak served with a fresh salad, fried potatoes and sweetened fried bananas on the side. The Nicaraguan cuisine reminds me of France, with an emphasis on sauces. Muy, muy sabroso.

I have also been frequenting a cantina in town operated by Ramón, a psychologist who treats women who are victims of domestic violence and substance-abusing prostitutes during the day, and manages his restaurant at night to make ends meet. He's the bartender, cook, dishwasher and waiter and has a surprising and varied menu. His best dishes are sides, for example: a pea salad; which I realize sounds banal but is undeniably delicious and uniquely spiced. Every evening, dark and menacing storm clouds roll in low from the western sea as if on schedule, they explode in bright flashes of lightning, deafening and earth-shattering blasts of thunder followed by a hard, driving rain. Then,

also apparently on cue, the electricity in town regularly goes out. Ramón lights votive-style candles inside the cantina and then it's a perfect little world in there, the rain coming down in huge drops, extinguishing the fever of the day, a breeze cooling the perspiration flowing down the temples of your head and a licensed psychologist unstoppering an unlimited supply of ice-cold Victorias. Ramón apologizes profusely for and curses the loss of power, but I assure him that it's no problem in my mind and certainly not his fault, not all Norteamericanos have to have constant electricity after all. I am enjoying the attenuated tropical twilight, beer, candles and interesting conversation with his patrons that tests the limits of my Spanish. There is scant evidence here of the fast-food hustle-bustle, the lack of time to enjoy a simple meal stressed-out lifestyle that is probably responsible for at least five hundred thousand gringos buying the farm every day.

Even beer has considerable political significance in Nicaragua as Ramón explains. The only brand that tastes good is brewed by the state owned *cerveceria* that bottles Victorias. The Sandinistas make an alternative, *Toño*, that is more expensive but is paradoxically unpalatable. So if you genuinely support the Sandinista cause, and my sympathies were with them, you blow the extra change and hold your nose while introducing the unnatural, the concentrated cat urine, *Toño*, into your system. If you want a good-tasting beer, however; you pay around fifty cents, temporarily forsaking your better political conscience and gustily imbibe the Victory of the *gobierno*. There's something of a political parable to this but I'm not sure exactly what it is. The wayward traveler soon drinks caseloads of Victorias in Nicaragua.

Saturday night at *Caña Brava*, drinking *Flor de Caña*, listening and dancing to the band, I meet Norma and her brother *Efrén*. They saw me lurking after the American volunteer I met drove her friends back to town, and invited me to sit with them and drink their rum. I quickly learned that Norma is a pharmacist who was trained in Miami, a slender, graceful woman with a contented look on her pretty face, in colorful and fruity earrings of a very tropical nature, who looks much younger than the 50 years she claims she is. *Efrén* is an attorney, and these siblings were on the wrong side of the conflict when the Sandinistas took control of the country, so they took refuge in south Florida until things cooled down a tad. Lawyers in Spanish speaking countries call themselves "*licenciados*" but *Efrén* complained that he was more "*silenciado*" than *licenciado* these days. They invite me over for dinner Sunday to their apartment in the front of *Farmacia Norma*, where they share a snug verandah overflowing with tropical birds and potted,

lush vegetation. I had deserved the severe sunburn I guess from being at the beach in *Poneloya* without sunscreen for just an hour on the day before, but Norma was kind enough to find me a couple of large aspirin tablets from her store, washed down with what else but copious *Flor de Caña* on the rocks with *CocaCcola*, explaining as if she were teaching a section of *Pharmacology 210L*, that it was better to down them with some rum since alcohol had the effect of knocking the drug off of its binding proteins in plasma, thereby increasing its effective delivery (distribution I should properly note) to the tissues.

Through the night we snacked on *hors d'oeuvres* that Norma's produced in her kitchen, conversing with their friends and neighbors who appeared and disappeared by whim. Women came calling at her door from the nearby hospital cradling feverish, lethargic infants in their arms, pleading for penicillin that they hadn't the money to pay for. Without hesitation Norma went into the recess of the pharmacy, returned with the prescription antibiotic and told them not to worry about the cash for now. They could come later on in the week, she told them, when their child was feeling better and clean her kitchen, or do some work in the store or apartment in exchange for the medicine. I grew to admire Norma and *Efrén* that night, not only for taking the chance of inviting a total stranger into their house and providing such hospitality, but so much more for not turning these poor women away into the night with their sick children. Despite the poverty and political mess here, there was a way to make it all work for everyone it seemed. This was how the meager get by in Nicaragua, there seemed to be a more relaxed sense of give and take and not everything went strictly by the cruel book as it does here in the States. It was beyond my wildest imagination that mothers like these with a sick child could beg for drugs in *Walgreens* and expect the same kind of generosity, patience and toleration. Come back and sweep my floor when you're feeling better and we'll call it even? Can you imagine? Or routinely stopping to pick up strangers on the highway without hesitation?

Since I was full of the good-natured altruism of Nicaragua during my last few days there, I let my guard down and placed a kind of blind trust in almost all of the good people of *León*. Precisely at that vulnerable and ominous moment I was introduced to *el capitán de Los Sandinistas*. We were outside in the courtyard patio of the hostel, sitting on lawn chairs, chatting with *Pilar* from Spain, the pretty and shy young Cuban girls (or maybe they just didn't like Norteamericanos?) and a woman from France who was boarding at the hostel and volunteering to work in the country. *Luis, el capitán*, a fully bearded, articulate, and at

that moment quite sober young man, was a friend of Pilar. When he learned I was in town for professional reasons he told me that he had spent a year in Poland and Russia training in economics.

“The people of Poland and the Soviet Union were so kind and generous to me that I feel I must return the favor to *estranjeros* visiting our country,” he stated, more than once, as a matter of fact he continuously reminded me every twenty minutes or so into the evening of this observation. He then conveyed a long narrative with all of us listening intently, interspersed with florid Italianate gestures, about how he was a captain in the local Sandinista brigade during the revolution, how he had played a role in liberating León from the Somocistas, hiding out and sleeping in the hills above town and coordinating an assault with pistols and AK-47s on the local militia when the time was opportune. Luis disclosed that years before, during the epoch of the Somoza regime, he was incarcerated and tortured in a prison in León that was now converted into a museum.

“Where is the museum?” I asked him, curious about visiting it, but not knowing fully what I was about to get into.

“I will show you, come with me and I’ll take you on a tour,” he replied. Since I had a few hours to kill before attending a dance to which I was invited that the Medical School was putting on that night, I thought it might be an interesting walk. Not being accustomed to wandering off with strangers on such short notice in a foreign land however, I asked Pilar if he was legitimate, and if there were any issues I had to fear by going off alone with him. Certainly I had not an inkling then that he could transmogrify into such a dark, drunken and psychotic beast later into the night, which he certainly did do.

“Absolutely not, he’s my good friend,” she assured me, guilelessly. So Luis and I were soon off in a taxi with my Minolta.

The prison was a dour, rectangular, concrete foundation set on a hill on the distant northwest edge of town that was largely destroyed by bombs and rocket-propelled grenades. There were a few walls left standing and you could put your finger into the bullet holes, although I couldn’t make out exactly what the original architectural plan had been. Lilies and irises were planted as well as a plaque that demarcated the historic significance and remembrance of the unfortunate ones who had lost their lives there, with the usual Sandinista rhetoric regarding oppression, liberation and self-congratulation. Luis imparted a dramatic rendering of his experience being electrocuted, water-boarded and psychologically abused during the time he was held in a cell that he ruefully pointed out. I was impressed, got some

good shots of Luis and the prison, so I felt I should do him a favor for having shown me the grisly memorial with such an interesting narration. I suggested having something to eat before I had to head off to the UNI party. Back in the center of town, we stopped inside a taverna where I had met a friendly bartender who implored me every day I saw her to bring her New Mexico turquoise the next time I visited. He ordered a whiskey on the rocks and I asked for a Victoria. Then I received a sudden invective from the capitán about how unhealthy beer is, “*es mal para la boca*,” bad for the mouth, he kept insisting, downing his whiskey swiftly, before it had time to cool off, and asking for another. “*Huisqui mejor.*”

“Whatever,” I thought to myself, a little perturbed by how quickly a little alcohol had slurred his speech and by the unexpected diatribe on beer. Maybe a little food might slow down the absorption of the venom, “*ah ah mesero, por favor...*”

Luis ordered three more whiskeys before I could get a filete and papas inside of him. With his mouth stuffed full of meat and potatoes he began a loud dissertation about economics in the former Soviet Union and Poland. I was wondering how I could tactfully and quickly ditch him. And he kept repeating how bloody good the Poles and Russians were to him.

“Where is the UNI fiesta taking place tonight Juan?” he asked with a bit of an annoyed look on his face. I was always taught that in medicine as in about anything else just as risky (flying an airplane for example), one initial minor lapse often leads to larger and more significant mistakes, snowballing the error irreversibly beyond one’s control. If this is true, my first boo-boo was to buy him so many Huisquis. The second was to reveal the location of the party. After I paid the bill and we were walking to the door, Luis kept hugging me, trying not to fall down, telling me I was his hermano, “*My brother, my brother...*,” he kept insisting, obviously inebriated. At this time he was almost too drunk to stand independently or to go anywhere but home so I tried to get him into a taxi. The third and fatal error was having the ticket to the fiesta sticking up a little from inside my shirt pocket. We walked along the sidewalk towards a waiting cab, but with the last deft movement he could muster, the capitán steadied himself, hunkered down into a widened stance and in a blink of an eye grabbed the ticket out of my pocket. Just as quickly, he sprinted up the street and was beyond my visual field before I could realize the gravity of what had just happened. “*Oh for joy,*” I said to myself. “*Shit, mierda, caca!*” What had I done? How could I be so stupid? Caught so unaware? Pilar!

I tried composing a few sentences beforehand in my

unfinished Spanish as I hustled up the avenues to catch up with him but eventually realized that I could not summon enough vocabulary to attempt to explain in full detail what had just happened, "Shit, mierda, caca!"

By the time I sped to the hall where the dance was being held, he was already there, inside the patio! Double shit, shit on rye! I tried to quickly explain in my half-baked Spanish to Margarita's husband Felix who was manning the entrance, what had happened and how the very obviously drunken capitán inside stole my ticket. But Felix just shook his head, not believing I could have hooked up with such a joker, a loser, the most obnoxious and drunk degenerate in a town of over one hundred and fifty thousand people.

"He's in there propositioning every woman that walks by."

"That's not cool." I say.

"No it's not cool," Felix replies curtly, "he's already started a fight."

Oh great. What had I done? Felix lets me in to the foyer and although I try to ignore Luis who is out in the courtyard, the bastard spots me almost immediately as I am trying to sneak around to his flank and then I'm trapped between him and a long table of canapés. He tries to hug me.

"My bro-ther, my bro-ther..." he cries, slobbering and spitting and, God forgive me, now taking swigs directly from a 750 mL bottle of Flor de Caña. I was thinking of making a speech to all the pretty and professional young people who were trying their best not to notice the spectacle of the flummoxed idiot gringo and his drunken ass of a friend who was trying so hard (and succeeding) in wreaking terror on the gathering.

"Be cool," I tell him "you're making a pendejo out of yourself." He fixes me with his glassy bloodshot eyes, growing irritated. He's going to fix my wagon now, I just know it. I push him back and walk away but he just follows me along wherever I try to go, bawling "mi hermano, mi hermano," grabbing me from behind. Hector, a young UNI physician in whose care I left a hand-held blood sugar monitor, recognizes me and becomes puzzled as he notices that Luis has his entire weight balanced against my shoulder. Hector flashes me a "what in the hell?" look and asks me if I need any help. His girlfriend is mortified. "Where did you find him?" he asks.

"I was introduced at the hostel. He took me to see a museum."

"And..."

"I made the mistake of buying him a few drinks and he stole the boleto right out of my pocket."

"Oh no!" says Hector, "he's really pissed everyone off and he's asked all the women to screw!"

"I'm so sorry!" I insisted, that was all I could think of to say. This was all my fault. What had I done? Hector's girlfriend tugs him away to dance and gives me a last pathetic glance. I am left with capitán Luis alone, again.

"May bro-ther," he blurts out loudly, barely able to form the words. "The people of Poland showed me such hospitality that I will return the favor to an extranjero visiting our nation," he kept repeating. Jesus Christ, how did the Poles ever put up with him?

"I know, I know, se sabe. You've mentioned that several times now, you're very drunk and you're embarrassing me and everyone else here, please stop hitting on all the women and leave me alone!"

"But I am friends with the Dean of the Medical School, mi amigo, may fren. And you are may bro-ther..."

"You need to go home now...please leave!"

"But I am not going to go home. I do not want to leave!" And oh God, there he goes, over to the Dean standing in the courtyard flirting with a bevy of gorgeous señoritas. We'll just call him Oscar, Dean of UNI Medical School, eyeballs me with utter confusion and contempt after the lasses surrounding him are quickly dispersed, like pigeons, by the excessively inebriated capitán. I am such a sorry monkey, a very sorry little monkey. Luis insults the Dean. Big, angry men surround them. They're getting heated, infrared, creased into an argument. I feel like I am going to vomit. Better find the band, forget about this and dance, as if I haven't brought this fiesta to a very traumatic and strange juncture. I find Hector and his friend and try dancing to the cumbia, but it's no good, I can't feel good about this since I've ruined the night for everyone and, although they are trying to be graceful about it, they know so.

Suddenly, I am approached by a very large, muscular bald man in a black suit and tie, who looks like one of my Sicilian relatives. He walks from the courtyard in a big hurry and with his voice perched high in anger and his eyebrows furled into knots of lumpy, rounded flesh he comes thundering right into my face and tells me that Luis has just asked his wife to screw.

"Eso ojete esta molestando mi esposa!" he shouts right into my face.

"I'm sorry, lo siento!" I admit, too anemic for the circumstance.

"I am going to murder that son of a bitch!" he screams. The bald man then huffs his way back into the courtyard, sweating nails.

"Oh great," I think. This party is a train-wreck, a total catastrophe, but now someone has to die, he is actually going to get murdered, and this is all...my fault! Nothing to do but to wait for the inevitable acute yelling, insults, fists

and knuckles pounding on groaning flesh, kicks, *el golpeando hasta la madre!* Luis is getting the thrashing of his entire career, so severely, by large, strong men who are overpowering him. The bald barge and associates are giving him a licking, I wonder if Luis might be more comfortable back in the prison he just showed me? The band stops playing. And after a little while of silence *el capitán de Los Sandinistas* comes staggering in, limping up to me with his nose and lips bleeding, grabbing me in a death-grip. He spits a bicuspid to the floor, trailed in slow motion by a bloody string of mucous. The next thing I know, the good doctors of León are working frenetically to pry him loose, bending his fingers back, beating him on his head and shoulders with folding-chairs and kicking him down to the floor. Three of them swiftly surround me and provide safe passage into the street. "Come on, let's go, you need to get away from this asshole," says Jorge, a doctor I met at the hospital a few days ago.

"I was introduced at the hostel," I say, "and I made the mistake of buying him a few drinks. He stole the boleto right out of my pocket..."

Jorge laughs "There are too many creeps like him around, you have to be careful in this town, there's a lot of mental illness here. You will sleep over at my house, you'll be safe there for the night."

Glad to have gotten out of there, I thanked them and apologized profusely especially since they were leaving the party early. *El capitán de Los Sandinistas* was probably being macheted into hunks of oozing flesh inside the dance hall. What had I done? What had I freaking done? They were so nice to have made the special effort of inviting me, and look what had happened "I am so, so sorry!"

Jorge gets paged. He had performed a tubal-ligation on a young woman earlier in the day and she had just spiked a fever in the hospital. So we stopped in to see her on the way home so he could prescribe an antibiotic and collect blood cultures. We then walked another mile or so to his house where he made up his brother's bed with clean sheets.

"Where will he sleep?" I ask.

"When he gets off of work, he can go over to his girlfriend's house and stay the night there."

"Thank you so much, thank you for wrestling me away from that bastard..."

The roosters from the gates of hell soon are crowing in the sweltering dawn. After I walk back to the hostel the excited manager lets out a shriek when he sees me, explaining he waited up all night, worrying and wondering why I hadn't come home.

"You should have called us on the telephone! I

didn't sleep all night!" What a jerk I am. I had no idea how well I was being cared for. There's such a whole different ethic down here.

Later in the morning, Margarita and Felix come in the UNI Toyota pickup with their two dark and beautiful little girls in the back, we're going to drive to the beach for a picnic. I keep apologizing to them for the night before, feeling like a worm, a snake, and worse, a total idiot.

"No te preocupes, así es Nicaragua," Don't worry, such is Nicaragua, Felix sighs, or otherwise translated, welcome to Nicaragua.

"But you should have socked him one, right in the smacker."

"As a visitor and representative of the United States and the University of New Mexico School of Medicine, I don't make it a habit to sock anyone in any foreign country!" I reply.

"You should have just socked him hard!" Felix insists. Margarita shakes her head and laughs.

Turns out they permitted *el capitán* to stay at the party for the duration of the night and didn't throw him out after all was said and done and all had eventually resumed a good time I heard from Margarita and Felix. They left Luis dozing comfortably and peacefully on a sofa curiously enough, sans tooth, after the bleeding was stemmed and the fibrin strands were cross-linked and tugged tight, and that was the last they saw of him for the moment. *Así es Nicaragua.*

Most all of the medical equipment I brought down ended up being sold on the black market so I heard later on in the fall, thanks to the Dean of their medical school. I sent New Mexico turquoise to the gold-toothed bartender and also to Norma, with my friend Jim, a UNM Microbiologist who went on a trip to León in March of 1993. He told me that Norma had died of a ruptured cerebral aneurysm the day before he was able to get her jewelry to the pharmacy. Thirteen years later, I still hear from Efrén, he still calls me every Christmas, he still misses his sister. □



Alan Vinci



Josephine Vinci



Sonja Lynn



Jonathan Terry, DO



Sonja Lynn

Expendable

Under blue feathers
she flies only forward
for to reconsider
would be to land

In a now unfamiliar place,
weathered by its age
of a false and projected
permanence.

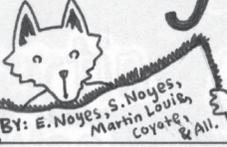
The valleys below push
plumes of smoke;
Obscuring her compass,
Away is the only way out.

How much lighter
the wings feel,
how bright is that
uncertain place ahead...

One can almost believe
the napalm below
didn't fall from these
cindered and fragile wings.

- Jonathan Terry, DO

The BLANKET Story...



BY: E. Noyes, S. Noyes, Martin Louis, Coyote & All.

"YOU REMEMBER THE STORY OF THE FIRST WINTER DANCE, DON'T YOU? WHEN WE GAVE UP THE POLE AND THE REST OF THE ANIMALS TOOK OFF THEIR SKINS AND THEN WE GAVE THEM AWAY. THE BIRDS GAVE THEIR FEATHERS AND ANIMALS GAVE THEIR SKINS. THAT IS WHY WE GIVE BLANKETS NOW. SO GET UP AND DANCE GAMBLERS BECAUSE WE'RE GAMBLING THAT WE'LL BE HERE NEXT YEAR."
 -papa.com. with Stephen Noyes 12-28-08

moddy*, tell me the blanket story from before I was born again

* combination of mommy and daddy that I used for my hero, Stephen Noyes, artist, center of my childhood universe, and stay at home dad. Moddy.

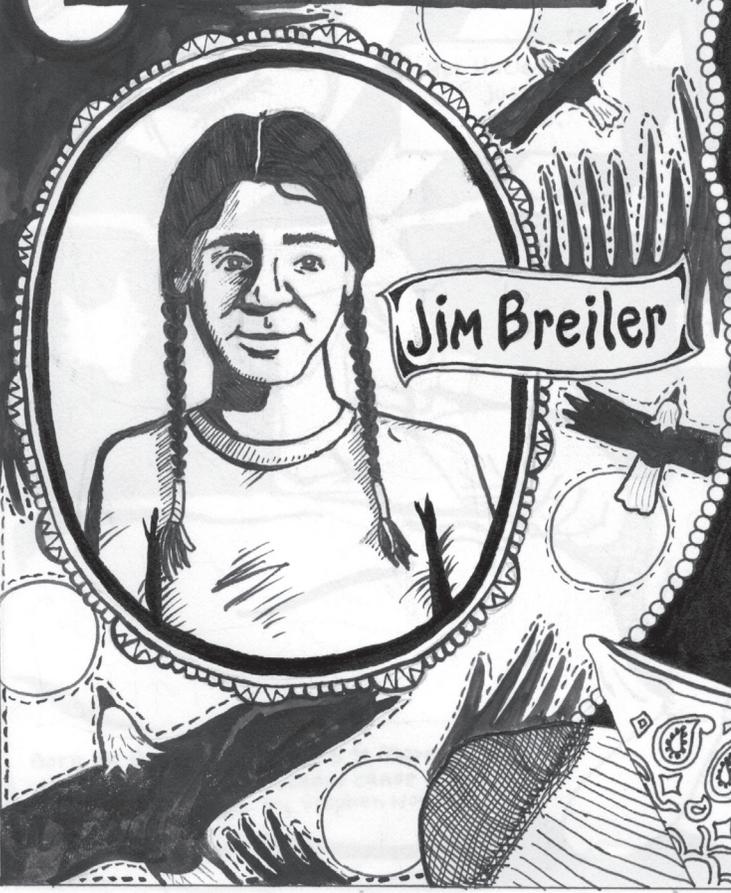


It was a winter dance in 1983



I WENT DOWN TO THE WINTER DANCE WITH MY PARDNER JIM BREILER.

The dancers dance to the songs of the singer at the pole. The song and dance are from the spirit helper, the **sumix**, of the singer. The dances are held every winter to wind the world back up again. It's renewal, honoring everything that helped us get through the year, honoring each other.



Jim Breiler

CAME THE END OF THE DANCE AND THEY WERE GIVING STUFF AWAY, YOU KNOW.

PEOPLE GAVE ME, YOU KNOW, ALL THE **USUAL THINGS***, SOME BEADWORK AND SOME HANDKERCHIEFS.

*other usual things include socks, hats, fabric, blessed Indian Head nickels, necklaces, change, dollars, even stuffed animals and toys on "Kids Night", but always blankets. We're getting there.



At the first winter dance coyote had put up the pole and the animals gave away their skins, so it isn't that far off that we give blankets away now. Layers of blankets on singers backs or piles of blankets in the dance hall. Uncle Martin was getting around good then and he was giving out blankets. After helping Uncle Martin throughout the year Stephen wouldn't have been surprised to receive a nice big blanket. Maybe even a pendelton and a few jokes about who he'd share it with.

Martin
was
an
old
coyote.



WHAT'S THIS FOR?



I THOUGHT, "WHAT'S HE DOING GIVIN' ME A BABY BLANKET?" YOUR MOM AND I GOT TOGETHER AFTER THAT AND ABOUT A YEAR LATER YOU WERE BORN. I WAS ALREADY 39 YEARS OLD, BUT HE PUT ME ON NOTICE THAT I WAS GOING TO BE A

DADDY*

* or MODDY

But Uncle Martin just smiled.



The Beginning



Born on October 24th 1985 to Maren & Stephen, shown here in a small cedar canoe dug-out by Stephen Noyes.

e. noyes '09

Emma Noyes

My First Time

by Steve Mitchell

The room was lighter than before. The shades had been pulled back on the windows and the morning sun shone in on the white floor tile immersing everything in a brilliant glare.

"Hello Dr. Mitchell," she said. "And how are you this morning?"

"You aren't supposed to call me that, Mrs. Gonzales," I replied. "You know I'm not a doctor yet."

"Well, you are to me. And I told you to call me Rita," she scolded. Mrs. Gonzales, Rita, was sitting in the chair beside the bed, and greeted me with that same familiar smile that I had seen every day since she was admitted. It was a mother's smile; warm, inviting, caring. More concerned about how my day was going than was hers.

She had been on the 5th floor since the last time our team had been on call. I first saw her in the emergency room three days ago. She came in with a chief complaint of "shortness of breath" and "fatigue".

"Ugh - another God-damn fatigue patient," my resident had said at the time. "Every damn patient in this place has fatigue."

Our initial lab work showed a little bit of anemia. No big deal. "Iron supplements and get her to her primary-care physician, who should have dealt with this in the first place," my resident told me angrily. To her credit, she had been awake for over 36 hours straight, as had I.

We were about to discharge Mrs. Gonzales from the ER that night, when our attending physician stopped us in the hallway. "Anyone notice the rales in her right lower lung lobe? Or did you guys just skip the physical entirely??" His voice was deep and booming, and was filled with a tone that I can only describe as "urgent calmness." My resident and I both froze in our tracks. Our attending was a huge man. He towered over both of us. To this day, I am not sure whether his height was entirely due to his stature or my respect for him, but one way or another, I was small.

"I thought I heard something when I listened," I stammered. "But I wasn't sure."

He approached me slowly and deliberately, and looked down at me over his glasses. "Wrong answer," he said. That was the third "wrong answer" I had received that day. I was small.

The chest x-ray quickly confirmed fluid in the lungs and Mrs. Gonzales was admitted to the medicine ward that night.

At the time, all I was worried about was me. My resident was pissed off, our attending was not exactly happy

that we missed the lung exam, and I wanted a good grade in this rotation. Not a good start to my first day on the Internal Medicine ward. I was small.

The next morning we did rounds at 6:00 AM. I stopped in on Mrs. Gonzales, asked how she was, and awkwardly explained to her how we were trying to schedule a CT scan, but we were having difficulty finding a place for her in the schedule. By the end of the day, the clerical errors regarding scheduling could not be resolved, and I had to tell her that we had to keep her overnight in the hospital once again. She took the news very sweetly, only expressing concern about missing her children.

"You remember I told you about my kids last night," she said. "I miss them when I can't be with them. It is hard now that summer is here. The kids need their family. My mother can take care of them for a bit, but she is getting on, and I really need to get back to the ranch."

I was very uncomfortable with the UNMH bureaucratic screw-ups. This wasn't my fault, but I had to deal with it. "I understand your situation, Mrs. Gonzales, and I greatly apologize; but we need to find out what is going on before we can let you leave. We don't think it is anything serious. We just need to be sure."

"I understand Dr. Mitchell," she said. "You are just doing your job. And please call me Rita."

Her husband was a different story. He was a tough, lean, leathery man. Not particularly big, but he had a quiet strength of presence that was both overwhelming and subtle at the same time. When I first met him, he was in the ER waiting room, and I told him that we would need to admit his wife. He peered at me from underneath his tan cowboy hat and reached out his hand to shake mine. "Take care of her doc. You see to it." As I shook his hand, I noted how strong and callused it was. I asked myself whether his words were meant as a request or an order. For safety sake, I took it as an order. Mr. Gonzales was not quite as sweet as his wife, but he was a man of clarity and purpose. And I was small.

Two more days elapsed - two days of stalling and asking for patience. Two more days of apologizing for stupid clerical errors that were not our fault. All they wanted to do was go home.

So there I was on the third day of her hospital admission. I was in the residents' room looking up at my attending. He put his enormous hand on my shoulder and asked, "Are you ready to do this." The weight of his hand and his question were almost more than I could bear.



Sonja Lynn

“I don’t know,” I replied.

“You’re ready,” he said, and pulled me outside. We walked down the hospital hallway and into Room 516. Her room was so bright. So much brighter than it had been in the last few days. Mrs. Gonzales was sitting and smiling in her chair as I knew she would be, and her husband was leaning against the wall beside her. The sunlight gleamed from the tiles and virtually blinded me. All I could see were their silhouettes, and her motherly smile.

“Rita,” I said. “I need to tell you some very bad news.” I paused to push back the tears and clear the frog in my throat. “This is going to be hard for you to hear, so I want you to be ready for some difficult news.” My words were prepared and practiced. We were trained to say it this way, but I didn’t want to.

“You have cancer,” I said.

“What?”

“You have cancer. It is causing the fluid to accumulate in your lungs.”

“Oh,” she replied, and looked up at her husband.

“I know this is hard to hear. We didn’t expect it.”

“How long? How bad?” she asked in a whispered voice.

I held my breath and closed my eyes. I focused on what I had practiced. “I don’t have a definitive answer, but this kind of cancer is aggressive. We are scheduling a consultation with an oncologist this afternoon. They will be able to tell you more.”

“How long?” she repeated. “What do you think, Dr. Mitchell?”

“We think months, maybe a year, but you can never give up hope.”

So there it was. I did it. I made the speech. Strangely, a feeling of calmness and relief came over me. I actually did it. I was so proud of myself. Then he collapsed. Mr. Gonzales, the tough, wiry cowboy, fell to the floor, his head landing in his wife’s lap. Through his choking sobs, I could hear only three words over and over again: “Not enough time! Not enough time!”

Mrs. Gonzales put her arm around his head and gently tried to comfort him. “It will be okay John,” she said. “You will be okay. You have to be okay for the kids now.” She reached out her other hand and took mine. “Thank you Dr. Mitchell.” She never cried, and never wavered. She just comforted her husband, and gave me that motherly smile – more concerned about everyone around her than about the devastating news she had just received.

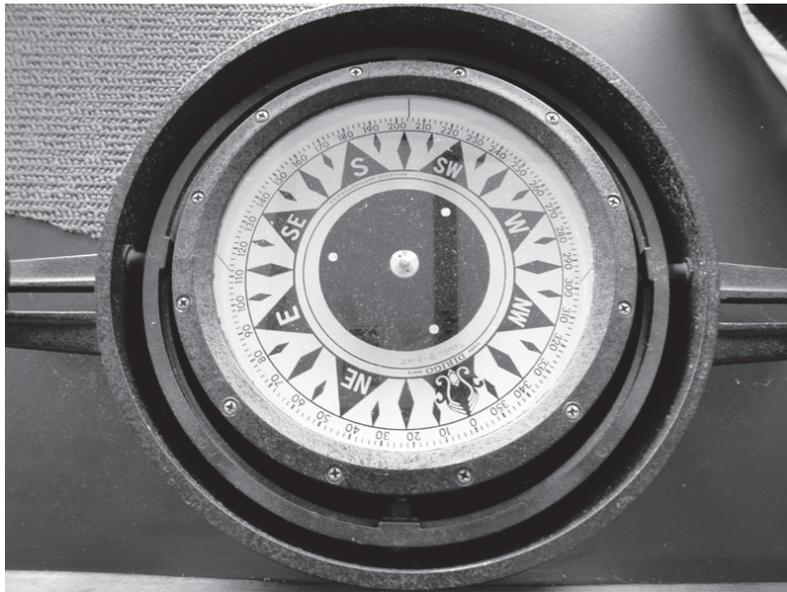
As we walked back to the residents’ room, my attending once again put his enormous hand on my shoulder and asked me if I was going to be okay.

I don’t know how, but I managed to hold things together just long enough to respond to his question.

“I don’t know,” I whispered. “I don’t think so.”

“Right answer,” he said with a knowing smile. He walked away and I went into the residents’ room and cried. I don’t know whatever happened to Mrs. Gonzales and her family. But I never stopped crying for her, and I pray to God that I never will.

We are all small. □



Sonja Lynn



Rosalyn Nguyen



Cristina Vallejo

Hesitation

by Jennifer Downing

Hesitation. No, more accurately every bodily sense screaming, demanding, that I run away. Away from the room full of family, away from the teen-aged patient, far away from the dismal, pathetic truth. Robotically, placing one foot in front of the other, shuffling behind the physician, the senior resident, the hospice team and the patient's nurse closing out our group, I enter the room. Immediately, their expectant eyes fall upon me and a sense of fear floods the room. The physician finds a comfortable seat at the end of the patient's bed, as I take my place directly behind him. He begins to explain the clinical course up to this point, the failed attempts at cure, the setbacks and the transient victories. He explains the most recent imaging and labs, indicating a very poor prognosis. As he describes the chronologic process, I am witness to the emotions playing across the face of my patient. Perhaps the only active witness to his inner state.

Anger. Justifiable, righteous anger captured in the body of an evenly breathing, seemingly calm, young man. I so badly want to interrupt the conference, scream to him: It's alright: be angry, furious, sickened by the injustice of your situation! Be obstinate! Refuse to let go! Hold onto that fight. As I run through all I want to tell him, the conversation turns to the future, to the importance of hospice in the coming weeks. My patient pulls his pillow over his

face, seemingly blocking out the room, the truth, the pain and disappointment. Still, his breathing is even, no indication of the tumult just beneath his porcelain veneer. All I can muster is to commiserate: I would want to hide and shove it all away too!

Then, his father, stoic to this point, asks if there is any hope. Plainly, the physician replies "No." The air is sucked from the room as it begins to spin, my stomach churns threatening to empty its contents onto the bed. Tears flow freely from the family now, from my face and my patient emerges from his make-shift retreat, tear-filled eyes meeting my gaze. In that instant, I am broken in some irreparable place. The misconceived place, where children are promised a healthy full life. The place where cancer can wait to take over until children have voted, had a beer and rented a car for a road trip. Seen a greater part of the world than the poor snapshot they were dealt at birth. At this point, I so badly want to accelerate all of these milestones for him. To sneak in a voting ballot, an ice cold beer and the keys to a supped up sports car. But our interaction will not end in this kind of exchange; instead it is with a gentle embrace, squeeze of his hand, many tears and the promise of continued prayers. Then he walked out of the hospital and into the certainty of meeting death in the coming weeks. □

The Teacher of Dreams

The teacher of dreams wore a cloak of red
silver sphere necklace as chain mail
to keep the spirits in the ether,
Don't come closer.

That distance between us and the
Archetypes is the safest order
in this realm.

She lifts one trembling hand, sweeping
inky raven hair and transparent cranial mandible
Hush.
They can hear you the whispers are too loud.

Those with the deepest spirituality
deep, dream-like primes
extend in all dimensions
Archetypal presence stretched between
Earth and Divine.

Hush, for these beings live such short lives.
So when you go searching
in seedy, unconscious labrynth,
Don't look too hard.
Don't try to understand.

For though these souls enmesh the weave of
this world, in your red blood and this sanguine cloak,
Their sacrifice is not your secret to tell.

- Jonathan Terry, DO



Jonathan Terry, DO

Masquerade

Fat Tuesday on Bourbon Street
She leans over the railing
Briefly contemplating what
it might be like if she just let go

The crowd below snaking
between the French columns
crawling out of shutters
the friction of shoulders and
disconnected parts

Cells collide and apoptose
slick with the beads
that float in warm places
and stench of fermenting swamp

Every woman here,
once someone's daughter
tonight indulging
in the play's fated script

All of them vampires, she realizes
suddenly scared that all that is below
is to become
Immortal.

- Jonathan Terry, DO

Local Wisdom

What is the most memorable thing you have heard or read about medicine, pharmacy, nursing or research? What did a supervisor once tell you that you have remembered ever since? What words of advice would you like to pass on to the next generation—about surviving professional school, about your specialty, about teaching, about understanding your patients, working with peers, keeping balance in your life? Do you have any pearls or golden sayings—about diseases, diagnosis, decision making, drugs, duties?

Sayings could come from anybody in any kind of work. Here are some examples of the sort of thing we are looking for:

- “A lot depends on how one says what one says.” (H. Kohut, psychiatrist)
- “Don’t just do something, stand there!” (Unknown)
- “The actual problem to be solved is not what to teach, but how to teach.”
(Charles Eliot, president of Harvard, 1869)
- “The best way to get pupils to do something is to get them to want to do it. Try to make the other person happy about doing something you suggest.”
(Harvey Penick, golf teacher)
- “I am sure of very little, and I shouldn’t be surprised if those things were wrong.”
(Clarence Darrow, lawyer)
- “You have to help the resident not to go dead.” (Elvin Semrad, psychiatrist)
- “Please do not understand me too quickly.” (Andre Gide, writer)

We would like to put together a collection of words of wisdom from our doctors, nurses, pharmacists, researchers, administrators to give to the incoming classes at each of UNM’s three professional schools. We will also put the submissions on the HSC Office of Professionalism website.

Please send your sayings to this email (jwbolton@salud.unm.edu).

Thank you.

Jonathan Bolton, MD
Director, HSC Office of Professionalism



Rosalyn Nguyen

