

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 on the back inside cover.



On the cover:
"Ghost Ranch,"
by Robert C. Schenck Jr.



Photos by morguefile.com



morguefile.com image

Thin

Light on the Susquehanna,
cold, concise. The sycamores
are close, the houses closer. Tudors,
just like the Germans built when they first arrived
seduced by the promise of open space.

Two hundred years later
a prison anchors the small town.
Razor wire curls along the fence
in terraced rows, glinting in the spotlights.
Pizzerias and auto parts stores
for the guards to visit after work.

The river flowed east,
the houses west
stretching the land 'till it was thin
and hollow enough for hope to resettle
its fallow slopes.
A sunrise. A squint. An opening.
A light on the Susquehanna,
cold, concise.

- Jeffrey DeBellis



morguefile.com image

Inner 'scape

Earthbound, over asphalt
I drive alone across this Indian land.
Through glass, thin-streaked with rusty dust,
Sun heats the inner car.

At the bottom of a hairpin curve
Level with a man-made lake
A KEEP OUT sign on a barricade
Blocks my view of emerald water.

Up the other side of the hairpin
I drive to the top of the mesa.
I park and walk to the overlook
Through swaying grasses, yucca,
And the scent of sage.
The dirt is dry, hot, and red;
The malpais, black and cold.

We who follow asphalt paths
To gaze at the dusty haze
Surrounding Cabazon Peak
Are buffeted by the wind,
Bound by a chain-link fence,
And warned NOT to venture forth.

I want to lose my earthbound soul,
Let it rise untethered against the force of wind
Float above this emerald jewel of man-made lake
Soar past black lava cliffs
And fly skyward toward,
But not too near, the sun.

-Sheila Wood Foard



After the Triumph of the Revolution: Conflicting Observations

By Pamela DeVoe

Eight-year-old Hector walked confidently to the front of the large crowd, which included his whole middle school, teachers, principal and a dozen or so adult American visitors.

The students had assembled on the long front veranda and all along the stairs leading down to the street. The visitors arrived by air-conditioned bus. The Victorian-styled building, from the early decades of the 20th century, flaunted open doors and windows to the breezes and waving greenery surrounding the school.

The sixth, seventh and eighth graders wore uniforms of matching gold skirts or trousers with white short-sleeved shirts. Girls favored knee socks and colorful hair ornaments, and lots of long, dark pony tails.

In the center of the veranda, the school principal welcomed the visitors in Spanish and described how happy the children were to have us visit.

Then it was Hector's turn to welcome the group. Although of relatively small stature, he stood tall, and spoke with a confidence that both surprised and charmed the visitors.

Singly and in small groups, children emerged from the crowd and positioned themselves to entertain the visitors. There was well-rehearsed singing, recitation, dance and musical accompaniment. The young entertainers were remarkable for the consistency of confidence, engagement and pride they portrayed.

Admittedly, the young students were entertaining foreign visitors, and the school being toured would have been chosen particularly as an outstanding example to showcase. Yet it seems unlikely that the adolescents had been persuaded to manifest a countenance of confidence in place, knowing they are loved and cherished by their families and community.

As the American visitors walked inside for the school tour, the students had assembled inside on the stairs and stairwells, clapping their hands and smiling as we walked through. The level of appreciation was hard to grasp until our translator explained that the children were thanking us for coming to their country despite a decades-long embargo declared by our country on theirs. So, by visiting them, we were defying the embargo!

There is little doubt that the Cuban people suffer from political, social, environmental and economic hardship. The communist dictatorship remains jealous of its power, and because of secrecy and strong-arm policies regarding public speech or any actions perceived as challenging the government's hold on power, citizens remain highly cautious.

The Americans approached a low-slung, white concrete building that housed the community center for neighborhood elders. The small trees, tropical foliage and

grass in the front yard were contained with a low chain-link fence.

Dressed to the nines, a group of about 30 men and women relaxed together on various pale-colored folding chairs, couches and benches. Some were married couples, all were longtime friends. Painted walls, floral wallpaper with plastic and real flowers and indoor greenery showcased simple but comfortable rooms filled with talking and laughter, and eagerness to share life stories with the visitors.

"Don't say 'Castro,' or 'Mr. Castro,'" one woman said, "we say 'Fidel' – he's always just Fidel to us. He did everything for us, we have health care, we have houses, whatever we need."

This sentiment was confirmed by those sitting near the woman. The elders all received pensions, another benefit from the Cuban government. It was a lively and free-flowing discussion of the center's activities, with frequent references to Fidel and the revolution of 1959 as explanation for how it was all possible. Several men and women proudly sang for us, and everyone was full of smiles, hugs and well wishes.

Between the young students and elderly pensioners are the parents and working adults. Because education has been free in Cuba since the revolution, there are many professionally trained workers: physicians, nurses, public health and clinic personnel, teachers, scientists and technicians, civil servants, taxi-drivers, restaurateurs, hoteliers, shopkeepers, artists—the gamut.

Many work as professionals, but there are also the physicians and scientists who become taxi-drivers, teachers who open small tourist shops, families who open a home



Photos courtesy of author



restaurant (paladar). Some workers, who for various reasons did not pursue education and training, remain unskilled. In addition to low wages (government-controlled pay is abysmally low), the limited breadth and depth of the Cuban economy cannot provide consistent employment for all working-age people, so by necessity many are skilled at creative re-purposing of materials and bartering.

The many well-maintained vintage cars of Havana exemplify this determination to persevere against a five-decade-long blockade that denies delivery of materials to the island (except for limited medicine and canned goods).

Nearly all families have absent relatives who left the island for Europe (especially Spain), the United States, Central America or South America. Young people are the ones most likely to successfully relocate—some professionally trained—but all without economic hope or hope for political freedom.

Many dedicated professionals stay in Cuba and remain passionate about their work and country. Cubans who can access the growing tourist enterprises fare better than those in government industries. In fact, a noticeable discrepancy already exists between tourism and government pay rates.

Some expatriates do return to Cuba. For them, family and the island quality of life finally have greater impact than hard-won economic security abroad.

Life in Cuba is challenging and changing. For more than 50 years it was an isolated island where people together shared the difficulties of daily life. Now, visitors as well as material goods are more common. Only time will reveal how to reconcile the open gentleness and friendliness of the people with the closely policed social and economic life of Cuba? ♦



morguefile.com image

Mansplain

He needed a man-splanation. So I got my friend,
my colleague, my father, my husband.
At the car dealership, at the tire shop, at the grocery
store, in the hospital, at work... anywhere
my voice doesn't carry, is too high, is too shrill.
At the bedside I might've said the same thing, but he
needed a man-splanation.
Get Larry, get Jack, get Dan... please speak my words
so that I might be heard.

– Jennifer K. Phillips, MD



morguefile.com image

A Wake

By John C. Russell, MD

She looked upon the stranger in the coffin. He was vaguely familiar—a friend, perhaps?
Certainly not her spouse of 53 years.

The guests start to file in, to pay their respects. When you die in your mid-eighties, and you were by nature very private, the number of personal friends that come to such events is small. Most are of a similar age. But, to paraphrase Yogi Berra, “If you don’t go to their wake, they won’t come to yours”. So the sense of obligation is high, even when such events are, by nature, painful and too close to home.

They line up to view the open casket, and then pay their respects to the family. She doesn’t know who they are,

or why they are here, but she can tell by the halting speech of their condolences that they are very sad. The maternal instinct kicks in.

“There, there, don’t be sad. It will be OK”, she says, taking their hands in hers and gently smiling.

“Isn’t it amazing how brave she is?” they softly say to one another, as they move slowly toward the exit. We hear, but mercifully, she doesn’t. The irony is staggering, but we can only smile.

Dementia robs its victims of much, but at times spares them from even greater sadness. ♦

Dreams

I had a dream about you last night.
The water and sky blue corn blue like your favorite chips.
Lake Powell where we flipped off rocks and took long cool dips.
Your eyes were clear you felt so near.
Not a bad day in sight for twelve days we would be here.
I had a dream about you last night.
Not so good, your usual self.
Wrapped in a blanket begging for help.
A bad day for you a great day for me.
The answer went from no to yes.
You said it best, don't live in the no live in the yes.
I made you tea with spun honey from your bees.
The ones you loved so much.
The ones that soothed your broken knees.
I had a dream about you last night.
My white coat bright white and so close in sight, your laugh
like light.
You led me here.
My first job at the bench because you built the houses of the
giants I feared.
I wish you were here.
I had a dream about you last night.
A patient here a patient there, then you. I wasn't prepared.
I looked at the clock.
It can't be today.
Today is the day you said we would be on our way.
Out of the dark and into the sky.
That sky from the lake.
Now I wait and wait and wait.
I had a dream about you last night.
You never took that pill.
You know the one that pill?
That one pill that turned into liquid and made your veins and
heart so ill?
I fixed your cracked back with no pills.
I didn't dream about you last night.
I turned on the light and I knew that was it.
That feeling I would always get before you would do the things
you'd regret.
Finally you rest in peace.
No blame. No sky. Your pain has ceased.
I dried my eyes after the news.
The news I knew before it was news.
I'll see you wherever you are one day soon.
I won't dream about you tonight.
Goodnight.

– Michaela Granados

Dreams II

Has a dream ever come true for you?
The kind of dream where you are doing what you most want to do.
That in which you are being just so you.
I have heard that dreams are just dreams, silly in fact.
You should not waste your time thinking you can do just that.
Save your dreams for your sleep.
When you are awake do not let them creep, through into the world
 where you are meant to not do the things that you do when you
 are asleep.
She said to not listen, to let my dreams glisten.
To see them, to feel them, to touch them, to dream them even in the
 light of the day.
All the time they say over again that my dream is a dream.
How could I do that awake?
You are not like them; you are tan like the beans that you should
 go make.
No one like you can do what you say you do in those dreams, they
 are just fake.
I make them mad.
I tell them I am sad that they have not dreamt the way that I have.
With her voice in my head I open my eyes.
I repeat what she says over again.
I rise from the bed.
I go to the place from inside my head where I am the one from
 my dream.
I walk towards her, I see her, I touch her, I feel her.
She dons the white coat.
She has learned all of the things that are meant to help those who are
 out and afloat between the stark walls of the place she was told she
 could never be outside of her dreams.
But this place is familiar.
How could it be that today I am standing exactly where I dreamed
 I would be?
Less than halfway asleep the dream keeps its shape.
She was right; it is still all here while I am mostly awake.
I see it, I feel it, I touch it, I dream it throughout the day and all
 through the night.
It stays clear and bright despite how they try to shake me and turn
 on the lights while I am trying to dream.
They will not wake me up.

– Michaela Granados



Photo courtesy of author

The Trip to Helper

By Paddy Whelan

As I fell asleep in the car, little did I know that we would soon be out of control and there would be screaming. I had wanted to visit the mountains during my summer break, and I thought it was the least I could do after our first year together out East. I had met Amanda in Baltimore, and she was enamored with my cowboy boots and Western experience. She wore a University of Oklahoma sweatshirt and I teased her about Barry Switzer, her being a Boomer Sooner, and I loved her joy of living. I was just being friendly and making conversation. I happened to bump into her another time and she couldn't be shaken until we fell in love in the worst way.

When Amanda, or as I called her, "AW," called to tell me she wanted to visit the West in the summer, I suggested traveling with me to a wedding in Utah. We would take a road trip through Colorado, Utah and Wyoming. Looking back, I am not sure that any Eastern friend of mine would be able to survive the trip, and Amanda barely did.

She announced days later on a long-distance phone call that she had purchased her ticket and was flying into Aspen. AW was an energetic gal who loved peanut M&M'S® and grew up in the suburbs of Boston and moved to Norman, Oklahoma, during high school. She loved the East and West equally. We both viewed the East from a Western perspective, and we talked about both cultures, finding the positives of each region. I personally found the East to be harsher than the West, but only because of the people. There was little trust and understanding seen in the upper middle class Baltimore native, but if treated with a little kindness, that native was sure to open up. Amanda had lived out West only for a couple of years, and I would learn that she was not really accustomed to rural life. This trip exposed her to the harsh reality of the West where I called home and the Western people who can survive the rugged mountains.

I picked up Amanda at the Aspen airport on a beautiful June afternoon. We drove on Highway 82 away

from mountain resort shops, toward my family's isolated home miles downriver from any streetlight, paved road, or convenience. Unfortunately, my parents immediately disliked the lovely girl. For no apparent reason, other than they weren't pleased with their own marriage, my parents did little to endear themselves to this happy young lady. And this girl was happy. She loved the sunshine and travel and was excited to see my home and eager for the trip. I had taken several days off of work and after her brief introduction to my family, I didn't delay our departure for the wedding in Utah, especially when my father kept referring to her as "shorty" behind her back.

I was accustomed to my father's bullying. He had called me "Mary" for years, as he thought it would make me tougher, and indeed it did. Dad's anger was one of the reasons I had left home to go to school out East. I quickly remembered that Amanda's parents were kind, loving people and she had never been exposed to that type of behavior. I felt the need to protect her from my own experiences. "Your parents don't like me," Amanda said. "No, that isn't true," I assured her. I hadn't lied to her in the past, but knew this one was necessary. Not only did my parents dislike her, but each of my sisters made her visit unpleasant. Amanda's happy nature and love of life was just the opposite of how my family felt about themselves. She knew I wasn't planning to marry her and I made sure she understood that. I guess that may be why she came out to see me in the West. Perhaps she hoped that by meeting my friends and family, I would have a change of heart. I had to protect her and the best thing to do, I thought, was to get her away on our road trip, and away from my family.

Our road trip headed directly west past Grand Junction on I-70 and into the coal country of Utah. Our destinations were the mining towns of Carbonville County, named Helper and Price, which lead to the desert. We were going to attend the wedding of my high school friend, Terry. Terry was a proud coal-miner—and I was an even prouder friend—who moved back to Utah after the death of his younger brother. I hadn't seen the family since starting medical school, and I looked forward to seeing the groom, Terry or "T", his bride, Candy, and the entire Bugbee family. I had grown up with the Bugbees in Colorado and they had loved me like their own son and I had loved them like family. It felt like old times when I pulled up to their singlewide trailer in Helper, Utah.

Upon seeing their trailer, the contrast reminded me of Thanksgiving the previous fall, spent with Amanda's family north of Boston. Amanda's relatives asked if my Colorado home had an "outdoor privy". Hesitantly, I assured them that we of course had running water and

indoor plumbing. I didn't provide details of this plumbing being nonexistent ten years prior or that we actually called the privy an outhouse. It was still operational, and in reality, still functional.

It was my turn now to show this Eastern girl around the West. I gently warned her about the rustic nature of the place and people. After the reception she received at my home, I wanted to make sure Amanda was welcomed into the coal-mining world of the Bugbee family. I brought my camping gear for our road trip and was surprised when the matriarch of the family handed me a key to the Riverside Motel and then proudly declared they had paid for two nights. The family invited us in and we sat with Terry's parents, Colleen and Chuck, whom I loved dearly and they loved me. They smoked and talked and I could see Amanda's eyes water and she began to cough. Colleen asked, "Are you ok, honey?" My girl nodded but eventually went outside briefly to get some air. The Bugbees wanted to hear about the East, my parents, my family, and my schooling. "How is chiropractic school in Boston?" Chuck asked, and I explained it was great but was located in Maryland. It was fun to catch up, but there was only one topic of discussion: me. My girlfriend sat right next to me but I could see she was alone.

We checked into the motel room, cleaned up, and then visited with the bride and groom in their home across the way on Railroad Avenue. I really didn't know the bride but her mother, Tammy, knew my youngest sister, and she cornered me alone in the kitchen and whispered, "Paddy, you will know—is this marriage going to be OK?" Her daughter, Candy, was a very attractive girl and recently widowed from her husband. Tammy believed her daughter was probably marrying a bit too soon and a bit too below her status. Several years later, Candy would become an addict on the streets in Denver, but of course no one knew that then, and my only feeling was surprise as the bride and groom had already been partying in anticipation of their life together. Sadly, the groom felt responsible for the death of Candy's husband, Rex. Rex and Terry were best friends and lived and worked together in Colorado as miners years before Rex and Candy married. One winter morning, Terry had been incapacitated due to a hangover and asked Rex to work in his place. That day, the mine collapsed. Rex was killed, and Terry inherited guilt and a future bride, the newly minted widow Candy. The contrast was obvious; Candy's beauty compared to T's roughness was stunning to the family of the bride. I had known Terry's heart and kindness as a teen and he was now equally wonderful as an adult, but that didn't matter to Candy's mother. "Terry is a great guy and will be a great husband," I reassured the

tearful mother in the kitchen that day. I gave Tammy a hug and she began to sob.

T and Candy really seemed happy, and the day was beautiful and clear, and was perfect for a wedding. The side yard had been cleaned up, mowed, and arranged with chairs and a small altar. Family and friends gathered and the minister arrived along with the bride and groom. Amanda and I sat in the back and visited with relatives who remembered me as a teen and chatted about old times and funny stories when we all lived in Colorado. One of Terry's brothers, Stewart—recently released from prison—came up to me and snarled, "You don't look so tough anymore." I jumped a bit, remembering how tough Stew was and quickly reassured him, "I was never that tough," and almost in the same breath said, "I really miss Rodney"—his younger brother who had drowned a few years back in the Roaring Fork River. Stewart remembered his brother, our childhood friendship, and then suddenly forgot about his anger and we united along our mutual love for Rodney. Stewart terrified Amanda as she had never met an ex-con and indeed he was a scary character, but I had gently reassured her all was OK. I also realized, later, that she had never attended a wedding where the guest list included a sorry-appearing felon. I waved to Candy's mom when she caught my eye, and then she took out a handkerchief, dabbing her eyes. She stared at Candy maybe wishing her daughter could switch places with the girl from back East.

The wedding began and T and Candy made their way through the vows, but without a reason the wedding abruptly stopped. The bride and groom stepped off the stage, following the preacher who slowly closed the bible under his right arm. I wondered if Candy's mom's secret prayer for a different groom had come true and the wedding was called off. Amanda asked in a low whisper, "What is happening?" as if this were some odd Western tradition and I whispered back, "I have no clue." But it really had a simple explanation: the noontime train came through a little earlier than expected, and a loud lumbering cry of the coal train passed by in behind the altar. After the train and its roar passed, the bride, groom and preacher walked back to their places and resumed their vows; the couple was promptly married, and Terry was told he could kiss his bride. The kiss was not refined or puritan, and the newly minted ex-con, Stewart, standing away from the congregation, rebuffed his brother, "The preacher said kiss her, not eat her." Both Candy's mom and Amanda sat in disbelief while everyone else laughed. The reception was simple and we drank and danced, enjoying the summer evening in mining country with my childhood friends and family.

The next morning, we stopped by the parent's trailer to say thank you and good-bye when we were invited to breakfast. I tried to beg off the invitation, as I knew it could be tough on my girl, who was slightly hung over with a headache. When Colleen served the fried eggs, bacon, and toast, the grease was the sign of the Bugbees' love for me and I enjoyed the meal. Amanda barely touched her breakfast, and I didn't expect the Bugbee response when Amanda said she would just like some milk and that she was not hungry. Colleen almost chuckled as she said in a raspy voice, "Here you go," and milk was served. The vessel for the milk was shaped like a woman's breast, a ceramic cup more for humor than drinking. It was meant to be emptied like an infant would be breastfed. Amanda was stunned and I whispered, "You don't need to drink it." But amazingly she did as the cup was designed. They didn't like her any more than my own family. But I thought she had done the best she could, especially when offered a crazy carnival-style "titty cup".

We drove my borrowed '72 Chevy Vega from Helper and by late evening we camped on a remote pass overlooking Wyoming. There was no shower, but I made a nice meal and it didn't rain that night even though we were protected by my Northface® tent. I considered to sleep under the canopy of the stars, but I wanted to protect Amanda and avoid her being awakened, even on the off chance of a downpour. I awoke to the early dawn but fell back asleep thinking about the wedding, the train and the kiss, then was quickly jolted by screams. I immediately thought one thing: Amanda had seen a bear. I quickly pulled her into the tent, jumped outside and came face to face with a mama cow leading a large herd of cattle. I reassured the cow everything was alright and motioned to Amanda the same.

We drove into Wyoming that morning and I looked for my fourth sister and her boyfriend, Moose, my last chance to get some acceptance for my Eastern visitor. We stopped at the home of a welder I knew from Colorado who was working on the natural gas rigs in the area, and we listened to his stories. But the drainage of his sinus by using a syringe and long needle just above his left eye made Amanda turn the color of the aspirate, and I was worried.

The trip was getting worse, and I realized the reception by my sister and her boyfriend would be no different. We met them in a local bar that evening and I was happy to see the pleasure in Amanda's face as we inspected a chipmunk diorama display of a local Western bar scene from the late 1800's. The whiskey drinkin', gun fightin' chipmunks made me smile at the silly pleasure the common Westerner

enjoys on an evening on the town. Even Amanda smiled and brightened up a bit after her cold welcome from my remaining sister. We stayed the night in Moose's teepee that he had built for the summer while working for the forest service. Sadly, he nor my sister had any interest in Amanda and they quickly wished us a safe journey back to Colorado as they went off to work.

I was accustomed to driving vehicles that were makeshift, slow and unreliable. I had driven in storms through canyons and along treacherous ledges in the high country and I also knew families who had been killed with one mistake in judgment in severe weather conditions. Amanda had not. She had lived on the edge of the West in suburbia for the past two years, and although she certainly loved cowboy imagery, she hadn't seen the risks one knows living in the rural West. She wanted to drive and I was tired, so I stopped and we switched places. She took over the wheel of the 1972 four cylinder, standard transmission Chevrolet Vega. My father had paid \$600 for the car and he graciously loaned it to me. I knew Amanda was a good driver in the city with an automatic transmission, and I had enjoyed being chauffeured around her hometown in Oklahoma. Amanda's skills were about to be tested on a rugged, curving, steep road that descended into the Flaming Gorge.

I fell asleep, something I knew I shouldn't do sitting shotgun but couldn't prevent. As an old-fashioned front seat passenger on a stage coach, riding in the shotgun position holds the responsibility of keeping the driver from falling asleep. But I was tired and began dreaming of the chipmunk city when I was awakened again to Amanda's high-pitched voice. This time it wasn't a harmless mama cow, an over the top kiss, "titty cup", or ex-convict. We were driving over 70 miles per hour along a two-lane highway with the deep Flaming Gorge to our left. "The gas pedal is stuck," she cried and added, "we are going to die." And she was right, I realized the distinct possibility of dying if we went over the edge, a 500-foot drop down to the Green River. I quickly reached under the gas pedal and proved to myself that it really was stuck. We were gaining speed and getting closer to dying, so I grabbed the wheel and calmly said, "When I tell you to, you are going to push the clutch and the brake and push them to the floor as hard as you can." I saw an angle to the gravel shoulder with enough room to stop, and then yelled, "Now!" I grabbed the wheel and directed it in a safe line off the road and then I heard the loud engine whine as it was released from the gears. I didn't have time to explain the risk of my maneuver as I knew shutting off the engine would lock the steering column, and once done, my calculated steering direction

could not be changed. In an explosive cloud of gravel and dust, we fishtailed to a stop at a safe distance from the edge of the gorge, and we were alive. My defeated girlfriend limped out of the car to the passenger side and sobbed in my arms, and the dust turned to mud from her tears. I whispered, "I am so sorry." She nodded and we both understood that the trip and our relationship were over. I handled her carefully the rest of the way home, avoiding my family. I took her to the Aspen airport and gently put her on her flight home. She thanked me for the great trip. I hugged her one last time.

Months later, I saw her with friends back in Baltimore at school. She was dressed in a button down shirt and wore Bass Weejun penny loafers. We didn't talk about the trip that summer and I panged at the thought of the harsh country that just does not welcome strangers. ♦

Untitled

I stumble up the stairs, lost
in the counting until handrail
ends and the hall yawns
in front of me. Memory

spills into the sunshine flooding
the floor, uncollectible
but in the shimmer as my eyes
blink through brightness. If there
were ripples forming here,
in this ocean of who I was
before landing, would death
still feel like home?

Would their reflections welcome
me in its wake?

– Benjamin Bormann

stargirlboy

“let’s go mommy”
tender green life
speaks her truth
with shaved head and red cape
as a look and a poison word
go down hard as you think they would
“not too far”.

“what’s too far mommy?”
calm explanation
her head up high
not to look to the light
to look the world in its eye
and like a doubter incognito posing as a real advocate
there’s no intake to buffer me
no keyboard to focus on pitch
no warning before the switch
& i thought
how can too far be where you are?

so i pause for courage to change
a vision of her in princess gowns
first time twirling
pointe shoes
lipstick mascara et rouge
bisous bisous
so i’m no better.

“mommy”
“yes love”
“sometimes i’m a boy”
“sometimes i’m a girl”
here i am, my love
i have been waiting to meet you

“like two spirits”
i whisper
forgive my smile and tears
i will shield your name
field their questions
make any life you wear
safe
renegade
stargirl, starboy
fiery beacon
i will be waiting to see you
shine
like how the moon has always meant
& i have no need for stars to also dance
just one bird to learn how to sing
so:
sweet yellow canary
You have a song
don’t refuse to sing it
(stargirlboy sings)

¿what have I done that
You wouldn’t have
to live without limits?

i to live liberated ?

sweet yellow canary –
I can hear Your song
I can hear You sing
Unafraid.

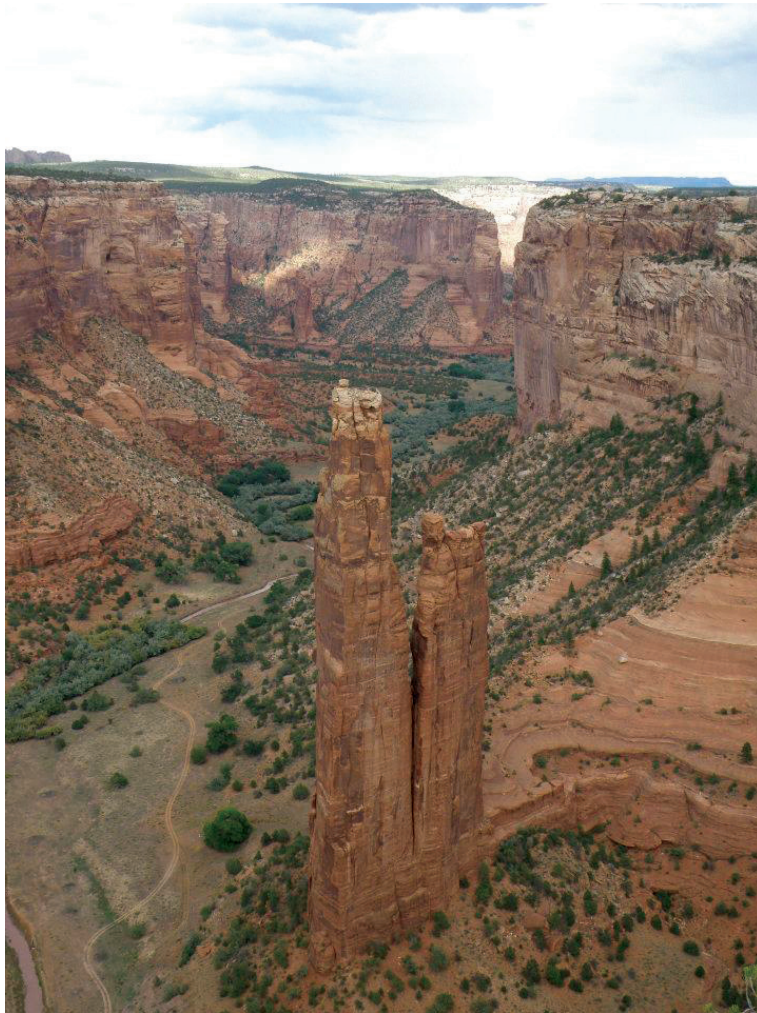
– Katherine Elwell



Photos by Lynn Lessard



Photos by Christina Hoff



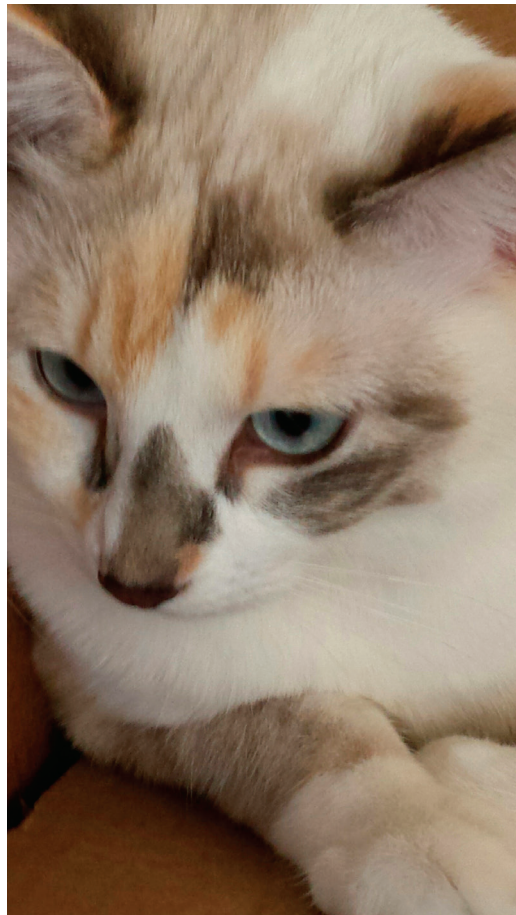
Christina Hoff



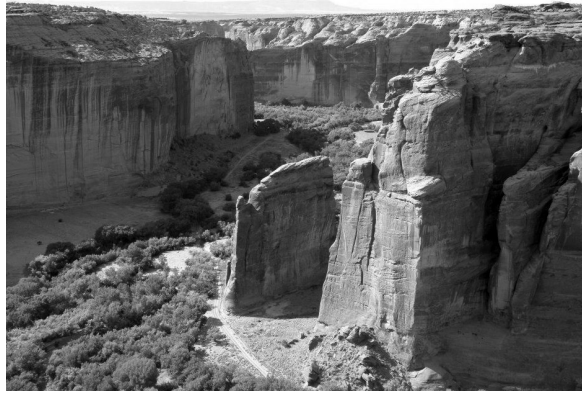
Lynn Lessard



Robert C. Schenck Jr.



Lynn Lessard



Christina Hoff

The Middle Mile

Coffee. Iced. No, hot.

The desert sun sits straight ahead in the westbound lane
making it almost impossible to see.

The pine forests of the Arkansas drainage
have long disappeared into sand and pumpjacks
that nod mechanically like tired woodpeckers.

This is the part
of the country where one needs to be careful
not to let their gas gauge get
too low. Too many crosses,
too few stations.

Across this stretch of sagebrush the ocotillo beckon.
Santa Rosa and sleep. A Diné woman
at a tattered card table with fresh slices of watermelon
and a shaker of salt.

Two-thousand, six-hundred, and sixty-two.
That's how many miles there are between
Baltimore and Bakersfield, but
the mile markers start over in every state.
Back to zero. And again.
And again.
And again.

The sun is lower now.
Dust rises behind my heels and
converges in a smoky cloud, the light cutting through
in soft shafts. I turn the key and
the check engine light blinks on, but it starts,
just the same.

– Jeffrey DeBellis



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Kind Patients Make Compassionate Doctors Compassionate Patients Make Kind Doctors

by Michelle Bardack

When I teach medical students and residents, I focus on helping students see the value of developing therapeutic relationships with their patients. I try to impress upon them that the way to form such relationships is through simple acts of kindness, and that these small moments can often facilitate healing in ways more profound than anything we learn from textbooks.

I had a recent experience that surprised even me, however. It showed me that the healing power of kindness can be multidirectional in the doctor-patient-student triad.

I had developed a very close bond to Constance, a 92-year-old woman, who described herself as a “70-year-old 90-year-old...”

Over the years, and in spite of the differences in our backgrounds, we had numerous philo-sophical discussions about life, people and politics. Constance was an African American who faced racist treatment almost daily. She had worked most of her life, was widowed early, and independently raised her sons, all of whom are productive members of society.

Constance had experienced many incidents of bigotry and racism, but the injustices she’d faced were not her focus. She preferred to share stories of her visits with family and friends across the United States, and her interactions with people from other cultures. She told her tales with honesty and made astute observations about the human condition, providing examples of how the roots of what all humans want and need are the same. She told me that, even at her advanced age, she made time to volunteer at the local food bank. She was grateful for the services she had received from the food bank and wanted to extend help to others.

After our visits, I often felt that I learned more from her than I returned in the form of medical care. I was amazed that despite the hardships she had endured, she remained humble and kind.

Constance never forgot to send me a holiday card, even though over the years her hand-writing had become extremely shaky. She always included a few words to show her appreciation of our clinic and my care. Her message was clearly genuine, and receiving this card meant much to me.

When Constance came to the clinic, for me it was not the ordinary, sometimes stressful experience of treating a patient; I felt the pleasure of being visited by a friend. Everyone in my office looked forward to seeing her. The social worker, the nurse case manager, the community health worker—even the radiology tech—would drop in, for no other reason than to see her warm smile.

I came to realize that what Constance offered was a moment of peace during a hectic clinic day. People felt relief from just being around her.

At the beginning of each visit, Constance always looked me directly in the eye and asked how I was. I had previously shared with her the status of my mother's poor health, and she often lamented that, "It is no fun growing old." My mother's vanity was preventing her from agreeing to use a walker. Constance loved using her own bright red, four-wheeled walker and, at her urging, I took a picture of her using it to show my obstinate mother. That picture, more than the repeated cajoling of her daughters, convinced my mother to use a walker and enabled her to continue to ambulate independently.

Recently, Constance had an episode of diarrhea and abdominal discomfort that she attributed to eating at a restaurant. Her blood work and physical exam were reassuring, but knowing that she lived alone, I checked on her frequently. She became more ill and returned to the clinic. I asked a medical student to see Constance and, as expected, my medical student had a lovely time working with this humble patient who showed incredible kindness and generosity, even though she was clearly unwell during the interview.

As the medical student presented her findings, I could tell from her face that she was concerned and something was gravely wrong. I felt a sinking feeling as I opened the exam room door and Constance looked up at me with an awareness that she too knew something was wrong. With her approval, we tucked her into the gurney and sent her by ambulance to my hospital's busy ER. Unfortunately, it was soon discovered that she had a large pancreatic mass and diffuse metastatic disease.

The next day, my medical student and I visited with Constance. The once feisty and active nonagenarian, who only a short time ago had moved around easily with her bright red four-wheeled walker, was now fatigued, sallow and dwarfed in a hospital bed with crumpled white blankets.

However, she remained her usual kind and social self, even though she was a bit overwhelmed by the events of the last 24 hours. She understood that the oncology team was concerned that, at her advanced age, chemotherapy was

more life-threatening than life-saving. She understood she had received a terminal diagnosis.

I was leaving the room when my terminally ill 92-year-old patient shouted, "Come back Dr. Bardack, please come back!"

As I ran back in, Constance continued, "I'm terribly sorry. With all the excitement and commotion in the clinic yesterday and the ambulance coming, I forgot to ask you, how is your mother?" ♦

The Primates

Enter into the research machine
As it will endure
As long as there is green
To fund the regime

We can claim animal research is a necessity
And any suffering is an acceptable tradeoff
As smoldering ambition fuels the fire,
Of self-perpetuating scientific achievement desire

Studies of primate social deprivation
Should stun the nation
And have us pondering
Who will bring science to salvation?

But human social deprivation
Is already ever present
In our incarceration nation
For those with no station

Can we not study our human condition?
Across the real institutions that create them
And satisfy our ambitions
Develop a more moral tradition
And avoid the road to perdition

– Mark Holdsworth

Inspired and enlightened by John Gluck, for his guidance, support and insight, and for his excellent book on primate research, "Voracious Science and Vulnerable Animals, A Primate Scientist's Ethical Journey."

B is Like A

by Liz Lawrence, Amy Robinson, Martina Rosenberg, Gary Smith, and Teresa Vigil

Several UNM School of Medicine faculty participated in the February 2017 annual meeting of the Western Group on Educational Affairs (WGEA) in Utah. Audrey Shafer, MD, professor of Anesthesiology, Perioperative and Pain Medicine at Stanford University School of Medicine, director of the Stanford Medicine & the Muse Program, and the co-founder of Pegasus Physician Writers, gave the opening plenary talk about the valuable role of the humanities, creativity and reflection in medicine.

Dr. Shafer challenged each of us to complete a reflective exercise in which we made a list of nouns (group A), a list of moments or acts as a person (group B), and then wrote for three minutes with the prompt, “B is like A.”

The UNM participants were astonished by the range and depth of emotion this simple exercise produced, and we decided to share some of our unedited writings with you (in alphabetical order).

.....

A: Coffee beans

B: Seeing old classmates

Seeing old classmates is like a coffee bean. So much potential, but can't access it without a grinder, hot water, and effort. There is the jolt at first taste, and then there is recognition and comfort. How I would love a good cup of coffee with warm milk, cuddled up by a fire on an old couch. There is comfort in old friends too, but their first glance and judgement can be scalding and bitter. How to get past that first taste to find the comfort and to savor the experience.

– Liz Lawrence, MD

.....

A: Mountain

B: Ashtanga yoga class

Ashtanga yoga class is like a mountain. You start with the first step. But the climb is longer than you expect. Sometimes it is steep and difficult. Other times, a plateau and without challenge. Maybe even a little downhill. But mainly uphill and sometimes with no end in sight. Like when I hiked in the Himalayas. I almost never made it to the top, except twice, when I went up to the top of the Thorong La pass. Once up and back down. The second time up and over. Other times up and back down, too far to hike on a day trip.

– Amy Robinson, MD



Photos by morguefile.com

For Those of Us Left Living

For those of us left living
there are logistics.
There is tin and there is lint
and there is a square of butter
that slides across dry toast
long after the sun has risen.

For those of us left living
there is a refrigerator that hums
and a child who does not.
There are questions without answers,
dancers without bodies,
and tears that will not dry.

For those of us left living
there are commutes.
There are speed squares
and there are spreadsheets
with rows and columns
and drop-down menus.

For those of us left living
there is timbre.
There is a gas pedal
that touches the floor
and a brake pedal that waits
to do the same.

For those of us left living
there is burdock and
there are baskets passed
on Sunday mornings
where small children put their nickels
and their quarters and their faith.

For those of us left living
there is saltwater and there is blood.
There are men with eyes
the color of limestone
and calluses thick
as truck tires.



For those of us left living
there are wings made of wax.
There is refuse and there is redemption and
there is recklessness and
there is a city
that will not stop.

For those of us left living
there are confidence intervals.
There are bell curves and
there are bus fares and
there is a package
that will be shipped back unopened.

For those of us left living
there is spackle and there is truth.
There are silences as heavy
as cast iron and citronella
to keep the mosquitoes
at bay.

For those of us left living
there is fire and there is fiction.
There are wooden chairs to
be brought inside
when raindrops fall
onto summer dresses.

For those of us left living
there are bottles
with shallow bottoms.
There is gas station coffee
and oil changes every three
to five thousand miles.

For those of us left living
there is Syracuse.
There is Rochester and Buffalo,
Hamilton and London.
There is a man in uniform at the border
with nothing to protect but fear.

For those of us left living
there are slipknots
and brain clots
and for every reason to stop,
there are two more
to continue.

For those of us left living
there are hearts that break
because it is the only thing
that keeps them beating.

– Jeffrey DeBellis

The Unscripted Question

A week of responses to questions on being human

Compiled by Dave Stromberg, Elizabeth Nicholas, Samantha Sanchez, Erik Arellano, Stephanie McGirt, Patrick Boyne, Fay Hernandez, Rosemary Rodriguez and others on the Family Medicine Inpatient service.

I live on Jesus and Veggies.



I like art... especially drawing women.



Koda is my favorite cat. He is all black and devious.



I enjoy playing endless runner video games.



I live life to the fullest... sometimes I play pool.



Voy a la iglesia, salimos a comer, a veces voy al parque.



I live for my five-month-old son. I want him to have a dad when he grows up.



I really like to be outside and to do carpenter work. I can make just about anything.



I like to ride my mountain bike in the neighborhood.



There's a Greek quote, "I hope you live to be 100." I wouldn't wish that on anyone.



I made it to 45 in a wheelchair. Most people with my condition don't make it this far.



Like the Cowboys, Ellen, nightly news and my grandson.



"Praise to God who has blessed us in the heavenly realm with endless blessing." – Ephesians 1:3



Puro chisme



"Do not go gentle into that good night. Old age should burn and rage in the close of day. Rage, rage against the dying of the light." – Dylan Thomas



Yes... I'm weak. I've always been weak I've never lifted weights or anything.



Enjoy being with my two daughters.



I like to tidy up my garden. Last year I had so many tomato plants and there were tomatoes rolling around everywhere.



I have a baby crying for me at home.

Who's this baby? My Chihuahua

What's his name? Baby



I grew up Catholic and spent the rest of my life trying to go to Hell.



I have an old pet, Schnauzer... and I like to garden.





Anamnesis

By Janae Gonzales

I stepped inside the sunlit room. She was sitting on the bench in the shaded corner. He sat in a wheelchair by the patient exam table, staring at his feet. She made eye contact while his eyes remained fixed on the Velcro of his shoes. Unsure of my role in the neurology clinic, I feebly introduced myself as a medical student.

There he was. I spent the last hour immersed in his chart that read like a meticulous biography: international professional, fluent in 5 languages, lived in 13 countries, married for 47 years, raised 3 successful children, awards, recognition, etc.

Each recount funneled to the same unsettling conclusion: dementia. Every note emphasizing the tragic loss to humanity that plaque chose to deposit in this extraordinary brain.

I was prepared with my list of questions, my goal aimed at excluding unlikely reversible causes and ensuring the safety of my patient and his caregiver. She broke eye contact as she revealed the worsening changes in his personality and behavior.

A man whose brain once carried an encyclopedia of knowledge now struggled to hold onto this morning's events. A man that navigated through any foreign city after glimpsing at a map could no longer find his way home during an evening walk. A gentle man who had never raised his voice had now sporadically raised fists. This man was not her husband.

I searched for a way to offer reassurance or even comfort. I felt ill-equipped, given the lack of treatment options and my lack of life experience. In her eyes, I was just a kid and could not possibly relate to her daily loss of a life-

long partner while she still has to care for his physical body. The situation was bleak.

I realized that I had not yet addressed my patient. He finally looked up at me with gray eyes that matched his temperament. I asked him what he thought about my conversation with his wife. He shrugged his shoulders and began to look back down in defeat. In attempt to change course in conjunction with my curiosity and love for travel, I asked for the name of his favorite country.

His posture changed, demonstrating his acceptance of the challenge as he began searching his atrophied brain. His wife also perked up in anticipation of his response. "Belgium," he started. Instantaneously her eyes shut tight and she shook her head, allowing the disappointment to pour across her face since his back was to her.

He quickly realized that wasn't correct and tried again: "New Zealand." Again she shook her head, but patiently awaited his next attempt. "No, no, that isn't right," he told himself. He wrinkled his forehead, revealing the anguish in his eyes as he pleaded with his brain to allow him another peek into the past. "It's Spain."

Her eyes glossed with moisture and her face beamed with youth. She looked at him like I imagine she did on their wedding day, her smile growing wider as she walked toward him and touched his shoulder.

"Spain," he repeated, his confidence radiating warmth. He looked up at her and together they were blissfully forgetful of their current state. There was her husband.

I decided to leave them in this moment and told them I would return with my supervising physician. She reached for my hand and said, "Thank you." ♦



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Clean

This is where it ends,
in a nondescript hotel room
on the side of the highway
though neither of us knows it yet.

It's the last summer
that you'll be clean
and the last
that I'll be naïve.

This is the last place
anyone would expect to find us,
where the hemlocks
yield to hardware stores
and the swimming pool
has been drained for years.

See, the thing about the bottom,
is that it's never made of rock,
a solid thing that holds your feet in place.
No, it's soft and it's beckoning
like air blowing across an empty bottle
after everyone has left or gone to bed.

You'll go too,
back to the Midwest,
the places you thought you got away from.
I'll keep driving south, to where
the ocean breeze blows the ghosts away.

– Jeffrey DeBellis



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