

MEDICAL MUSE

*A semiannual 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 are welcomed (literary or visual), letters, and 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
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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. 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

What Do We Teach?

Aroop Mangalik, MD, Internal Medicine

We teach what we know
We teach all the latest
We know it's the best
Because we're the best
We are swayed by the fads
We went with the bugs
We changed to the immune
Then came collagen
Soon it was the gene
Now we focus on apo-ptosis (some say apop-tosis)
We say we teach the basics
But there is a change in the basics
Whose basics?
What basics?

We paid attention to the patient
We worked with an observation
We talked about the theory
We worked on the theory
But we made sure
That we said
Would help the fellow in the bed

We talk of statistics
We consider .05 a success
We feel so happy
We've done such good
DNA was new when I was a kid
I wore jeans when I was young
We now have a gene for all we do
Designer genes are on sale
On sale for cancer, on sale for behavior
If you don't know the locus
You are surely out of focus
We do the latest

But the latest keeps changing
The basics keep changing
The teaching keeps changing
But the patient
She's not changing
The pain is not changing
Death is not changing

The students are impressed
The press is impressed
For the students in clinics
The latest has shadowed the basics
What's with the DNA, they think
The tachycardia, the fever
What does that mean?
They ask
Is it the receptor or is it the gene?
The basics, the basics
What are the basics?
Whose basics?



Tractor, Whaler Bay, Deception Island, S. Shetland Islands

Jim Perrings

Four Feet Shorter

by Carol M. Spizman

Student, Occupational Therapy

I spent the day in a wheelchair. From getting up in the morning until going to bed at night, I stayed in the wheelchair, except to go to the bathroom. Although this was just a class assignment meant to make us more sensitive to the experience of full-time wheelchair users, I was nonetheless very motivated by the challenge of staying in that chair unless it was unavoidable that I get out. When it was necessary to get out of the chair, I tried to stand, supported mostly by my arms, without taking actual steps. I chose to mimic those persons I had seen when I worked at a Rehab Hospital who had enough functioning in their lower extremities to stand and pivot. I know (and the Occupational Therapy instructor had drilled it into us) that this was in no way what their experience was like on a day-to-day basis: I would be able to get out of the chair at the end of the day and walk away. I tried not to accept help from others if possible to get through heavy doorways, up hills, etc. but, even for just the one day, I had to give up my pride and accept help.

The Physical World

In general, I was surprised to find things more accessible than I imagined. Starting with my home, a post-war 2-bedroom, 1 bathroom “shoe box”, I was able to get through my bedroom door, maneuver through hallways and pop over thresholds. Without a ramp out front however, I did require the help of my roommate to get down the 7-inch concrete front porch step. I was unable to get the chair into the bathroom but, because the toilet is right near the door, I was able to lock the brakes right in the doorway and perform a stand-pivot transfer to the toilet. Seated there, I was able to perform my grooming routine without too much discomfort, albeit without a mirror. Luckily, I am not too vain in my appearance but, over time, this could get messy. In the kitchen, I never attempted to make a meal more complicated than cereal, so I never had to reach or bend too much to retrieve items in my kitchen. In general, though tasks were effortful and awkward, I was able to access nearly everything I needed in my home.

My roommate gave me a ride to school, where I had less difficulty than I thought in pushing up inclines, going through doors and using public restrooms. At first, I really enjoyed the physicality of the challenge. I

thought, “This will be a good workout for my arms”.

The only thing that was really awkward at school was the height of the drinking fountain and I wore more water than I drank. If I had to rely on that as my only water source, my clothes would be constantly damp and I would dehydrate. I filled a water bottle for use during my classes. The university campus is not reputed to be comparable to a “real world” experience for wheelchair users. There are wide hallways, electronic doorways, elevators and bathrooms with extra-large stalls for wheelchair users. Despite this, I did have trouble getting through the two sets of doors leading to the bathroom. Although the public phone was a stretch, it was not impossible to make a phone call. Carrying things on my lap was probably more ergonomically healthy for my body than dragging my 50 pound book bag around on one shoulder as I normally do.

Out at the Frontier

After school, determined to have a more realistic experience, I went to the Frontier with some friends for lunch. Although the automatic doors made access easy, this was where my comfort ended. The counter was too high to be able to comfortably interact with the counterperson, especially in handling money and change. Then there was the challenge of keeping a tray of hot drinks on my lap while negotiating through the crowded restaurant with its uneven flooring. It was tricky to reach up for my silverware and to pour cream for my coffee at the tall self-service stations—all the while trying to stay out of people’s way. Once I was able to move a chair from the table and wheel into that spot, I was able to eat my lunch in relative peace.

The Bus

Taking the bus was something I had wanted to try from the moment I heard about the assignment. I became gradually more frustrated and nervous while waiting on Central Avenue in front of the Frontier. Over 45 minutes passed as three buses went by which were not wheelchair accessible. When the bus finally came, it was crowded. After the hydraulic lift raised me to entry level, I inadvertently ran over a few toes on my way to find my spot. I saw the toes but could do nothing to stop my progress over them, as someone else was

“driving” and there really was no room. Several people had to get up so the driver could flip their seat up out of the way of the wheelchair area. After this delay, the ride was uneventful. I got off the bus and wheeled several blocks along rough sidewalks and driveways with broken pavement. In one case, I had to go far out of my way to find a passage through a pebbly parking lot that was suitably free of pot holes.

Other People’s Reactions

Most people were very kind and helpful. At first, to my critical eye, the bulk of people moving around campus seemed to ignore me in stereotypical able-bodied bias. After a while, however, I realized that they ignore everybody. I had been concerned that I would run into someone I knew and alarm them unnecessarily before I could explain the assignment. This actually did happen a few times but no one showed extreme distress. They demonstrated concern and asked, “What happened?” My lunch friend noticed that many people seemed to smile at me. After they said that, I suddenly realized that many, many people had smiled at me that day, though I hadn’t made that connection. I just assumed that they knew me from somewhere and were being pleasant in that Albuquerque-friendly way. In fact, there had been people who seemed to “beam” at me, as if deeply moved, inspired and proud. I felt like something of a celebrity that day. Even on the bus, those whose toes I ran over were cheerful and supportive about it. When I mumbled “Darn this chair!” in embarrassment, they seemed to empathize as if they also struggled with poor quality equipment in their lives. From those whose seating was displaced on my behalf, I heard no complaint. In fact those very people helped me become disentangled from my safety belts so that I could get off the bus.

My Reactions

Despite my plan not to rely upon the kindness of others, I did impose upon my roommate and friends for rides, all of which involved them patiently folding and lifting the wheelchair into their trunk while I sat comfortably in the passenger seat. On the bus, I was necessarily dependant upon the driver to help me and felt like a baby as he strapped me in. With some discomfort I noticed myself adapting quickly to a helpless role; it was just easier to let people help me. There was a cer-

tain level of stress that was fear-related all day because I never knew what the next experience was going to bring. I experienced the most fear while waiting for the bus since that was the greatest unknown. Every normal, daily task took extra planning and effort. By the end of the day, it had a cumulative fatiguing effect.

Despite the bus’ delay, I felt a powerful and humbling sense of gratitude for the public transportation service and for the A.D.A which compels such agencies to be fair and equitable in offering services. There was also a certain feeling of guilt around imposing on others. Whether I was asking people to move out of my way in the restaurant or causing inconvenience and delay on the bus, I felt ashamed to be taking up people’s extra energy. It required extra effort and a sense of humor to keep my sense of pride and dignity intact. Although there is a lot to be said for adaptability and attitude, I can’t help but wonder what the damage would be over time to my ego with what -for one day- was a mild and subtle struggle.

Additionally, I felt stress just from being unable to move and stand out of the wheelchair! Ordinarily relatively sedentary, I would not have classified myself as a person who needs to move herself physically in order to stay sane. I didn’t realize how much I fidget in class to maintain my interest until I couldn’t do it anymore. Playing with the chair quickly lost its novelty and it was especially painful that I was unable to tip the chair back and balance on the back legs - as my classmates will tell you is my favorite habit. I tried to keep in mind too that I was able to shift my weight in the chair, wiggle my feet, and do all sorts of things that would be very difficult for a “real” wheelchair user.

All in all, I was encouraged by the helpfulness of the community around me. I was pleasantly surprised that I was able to maneuver the chair physically through most environments I encountered – although I really only stayed in the University area – an exceptionally wheelchair-friendly environment. The enduring memory I have is that of the mixture of feelings I had while on the bus. I was embarrassed and ashamed, but also grateful and amazed at people’s kindness. The most striking experience of the day was the subtle and insidious fatiguing and humbling effect on my spirit. At the end of the day, I transferred from the chair to my little bed exhausted and impressed. □



George Grove

Delivery

canyons in the landscape of cloud
silent and white beneath the plane's aluminum wing
echoing the tiny rivulets in the drying sands
of an acequia after flood,
the branches of a windswept tree

air and water

water and earth

earth and air

and the delicately spreading vessels
in the placenta of a newly born child
stretched across a gloved hand
to check that nothing has let fall
the web of becoming in these borderlands.

– Rhoshel Lenroot MD

Child and Adolescent Psychiatry/Research Fellow



Sculpture: Martina Rosenberg

THE CUP

My breast is a cup
passed by the high priests.
Something is wrong,
something unhealthy, even unholy there.
They scry with their machines,
palpate and probe,
speak in voices low with concern.
Ask formal questions of me
about my diet, my family history,
and when did I first notice the change
and was there any pain?

I want to laugh but don't.
I show respect.
What woman is without pain?
Whose body has no hurt?

I appreciate them,
busy priests and priestesses
of gynecology, pathology, surgery, radiology.
With my consent,
their students come into the room,
eager to learn.
I remember being one of them.

I think but I do not say
that this breast is tired.
So many lovers and children were there,
come for passion and for milk.
And this breast more than the other
so weary and ashamed of pleasure.

I wonder but I do not ask
what kind of blouse to wear
the day that I return for them
to cut the breast away.

– Dale Harris

phantom limb

in your new body,
i will be the absence
of this body.

a ghost in the works.
behind the wail of sirens,
pause between flash & thunder,
a shadow that completes your space.

as you move
in your new body,
under a moon
that tugs you awake,
between the sirens & the storms,
breathe.

i will be the feeling
of your dream,
the tiny space
between your heartbeats.

i will be minute
i will be vast
my absence will define you,
my loss keep you whole.

– Maureen Kober APRN
Psychiatric Consult Liason

The Box

A short story by Sharon Master

It is a cold winter's evening not unlike the many others that have preceded it. The world, as I know it is enveloped in a thick blanket of icy snow. Jack Frost has certainly done his job well. There is a crisp breeze naging at my ears and my nose. I slump forward as I scurry along home, my arms burdened with shopping bags. It will be a white Christmas. Just like the ones I used to know, as the song goes. The trees that line the sidewalk, glisten, sparkle, as rays from a street lamp bounce off them.

Strains of 'Silent Night' accost me from afar. Silent night indeed!

More like dead. The only sounds I hear are the crunching of the snow under my heavy boots and the rapid pounding of my weary heart.

There is not a single living thing in sight. Every animal has gone into hibernation, something I should have done long ago. Did I say all? As I turn the corner, I see a couple of tramps trying desperately to keep warm by a makeshift fire. Their shabby coats are stained with previous meals from the soup kitchen. They look at me in

resentment and despair and one of them mutters a barely audible obscenity. I try not to look at them as I walk on by. The number of homeless people has been increasing by steady gallops. Not surprising, with the prices soaring sky-high. Like an eagle on a bright summer's day. A thick heavy gloom grips the city, tight in its clutches. Not as heavy, though, as the gloom that tugs, yanks at my heart. I have long given up being amazed at the hopelessness of my life and of the situation that the world around me is in. I silently, half-heartedly, hum a few bars from 'The Twelve Days of Christmas' — one of my favorites. A feeble, maybe desperate attempt to bring some long forgotten cheer into my life. It is after all Christmas Eve.

I determinedly approach the place I call home, the brownstone where I live. Not so much a home but a hideout where I seclude myself from the world's miseries. And mine. I must get out of the cold. Soon. As I reach my apartment I notice a big box outside my front door. Another wrong delivery, probably. There have

been so many of them lately. But no, I see my name, Samantha Mannering, in big, bold letters on the mailing label. For me all right. I am quite perplexed, maybe confused. Who? What? Myriad questions muddle their way across my brain. I kick the box in as I enter into the living room. I relieve my weary arms off the week's groceries and hasten to brew myself a much-needed pot of tea. Having thus warmed myself sufficiently I decide to

tackle the box. It is about one cubic foot big, exquisitely wrapped in a red and plaid paper. There is a thick green ribbon with golden edges around it and a big green bow in the center. No return address. No mail stamp. Hand delivery perhaps. A big note on the top warns 'Do not open until Christmas'. Well. Easier said than done I suppose. Nevertheless, I place it under my minuscule Christmas tree. Another feeble, wasted attempt at bringing some cheer into my life. I think back, nostalgically, to my childhood Christmases. Of spending the day at grandmother's decorating the enormous Christmas tree, of carol singing, of Christmas

cake, and, of course, presents. All this is changed. Ever since my parents' death in a freak car accident, three years ago, I have been alone. Totally alone. Loneliness has wrapped herself around me with icy cold arms. Has become a rather permanent though unwelcome guest in my life. I have been thrown, like a dirty dishrag, into a turmoil of grief and misery, with no hope of recovery.

I look back at the box, with mildly increased curiosity. My friends, the few that I have, and I exchanged gifts a week ago. An ex-boyfriend maybe? My outstanding ability at maintaining relationships has certainly destined me to a life of spinsterhood. My last boyfriend did suggest that I not be so pessimistic about life. I probably scared him and the others off with my fears of impending doom. But that's another story anyway. Right now, I just cannot stand the pain and the agony anymore. I nudge the box gingerly, trying to discover its contents. I remember as a kid I would shake each gift with unabated excitement, before impatiently ripping



George Grove

the paper off. Hoping that Santa Claus had answered my long, never-ending Christmas list. He almost always did. I don't believe in Santa Claus now. No, not anymore. And there is nothing left to hope for. Not a thing. I give the box an unenthusiastic shake for old times sake. No rattle. Just silence. Like the silence creeping stealthily around me. And loneliness.

I switch on the TV as I prepare dinner. My eyes are constantly drawn, pulled toward the box. I am utterly confounded as to its origins. The voices of the newsmen drift toward me from the television. So many dead here, that many dead there. It is sickening. The globe is consumed with hatred. Racism and religious bigotry run rife. The Indo-Pak conflict, the Chechnya situation, the Arab-Israel wars, gang-wars. Wars everywhere. Not to mention terrorism, gay bashing, muggings, and the occasional psychopath. People hurting, killing, maiming each other. Dismembered bodies of men, women, even children strewn aimlessly across fields. Neo-nazis. Rapists. The list is endless. My job, defense attorney for the Public Prosecutor's office does not make any of this easier. Each passing year sees a greater number of criminals swarming in. Like ants at a picnic table. And I have to defend them. All in the name of justice. Justice indeed. Even the judicial system is collapsing. Crumbling around us like a dilapidated house infested with corruption, bribery, greed. Pandora sure did open a can of worms when her curiosity got the better of her and she lifted the lid off that box. Releasing all the evils onto humankind. Leaving nothing. Not even hope. Only stagnation, decay, and utter ruin. Humankind is slowly and systematically wiping itself out. To extinction. Along with every living thing on this miserable planet. Holes in the ozone, depleting rain forests... We don't need any rare planetary alignment or other major natural catastrophe to destroy the world. No we can do it all by ourselves!! Nothing can save us from extinction. Maybe this will be the last Christmas ever. Definitely.

My eyes wander back to the box. I wonder what last unspeakable evil lurks in this warm, pleasantly wrapped exterior. Maybe I should learn from Pandora's mistake and not open the box at all. Well, anyway, I can wait till tomorrow to decide. I still am quite bewildered by it. Why has it come to me? Why now? And from where? Yes, from where!!! I guess I'll find out tomorrow when I open it. Or maybe not. I quickly gulp the rest of my dinner down as waves of exhaustion overpower me. It has been a long day. Despite the exhaustion my sleep is restless and intermittent. I dream that I am an eagle perched precariously on a mountain looking aghast at

the world below. The ground is barren, desolate, and covered in red. Red, from the blood of humankind.

I wake up early on Christmas morning and ready myself slowly, leisurely. Suddenly I remember the box. The bewilderment of the day before, now along with curiosity, slithers its way back into my pores. I approach it cautiously, apprehensively. With nervous, trembling fingers I carefully remove the ribbon and peel the paper off. The paper covers a brown cardboard box, with no markings, neatly taped on all sides. I gently ease the tape off one side and lift the flaps. My heart pounds a little faster. Minute icicles stab at my neck and back.

Inside the box is a chest of red-painted wood and brass bands. It has a domed top. The paint is old, but unchipped. The brass is dark and tarnished. It resembles an old treasure chest. The kind you hear of in pirate stories. On the front a finely etched brass plaque claims "The Hope Chest." The chest is not locked so I open it, hesitatingly. The inner lining is faded red. Inside, a gold card with red lettering announces "There is always HOPE." And in finer script beneath it "Peace on Earth and Goodwill to all Men – Merry Christmas." Then it hits me. With an enormous bang. Hope was the one thing Pandora had saved. Preserved exclusively for humanity. For posterity.

I never did find out where the box came from. And now I don't care. □

Selective Memory

Deciding how and when to plant

Optimizing light and dark cycles

Cultivating the soil of my soul

For the better part of a lifetime

To reap rewards here and there

Sailing, detailing what was done where

Why am I suffering from selective memory

Now, at these ornate pearl gates?

– Joshua Lloyd

Viagra samples, 2/14

Another flash of inner stillness as I scribble the sample-room log,
label & bag vitamin V,
for another regular guy,
a 53 year-old Albuquerque everyman,
who's still somebody special.

I am the Viagra vendor, a solitary ex-househusband,
logging, packaging & dispensing this drug-symbol
(my imaginary amulet),
keeping a dream of "The Young & The Moist" alive,
perhaps for both of us.

One of the Viagra dreams shows 21st century regular guys,
off-duty stalwarts with precisely trimmed stubble,
sipping micro-brewed artisanal ales,
while an ageless-but-young woman
with a coltish long-legged yet infinitely curvaceous nubility
fleetingly meets eyes with the dreamer,
as she poses perfectly, half-in-profile,
alluringly
just out of reach.

Another Viagra dream has iconic Latino romanticos,
guapos, con voces machos y resonantes,
hermanos de los hombres ideales de las telenovelas,
and the same ageless nubile woman is there
with her hermanas y amigas,
all strikingly Latina-ized.
They move here & there, brushing subtly against us,
gazing up expectantly, a heavy hint in her eyes and stance
of a secret she'll whisper to us,
just off camera,
a secret about black-lace eroticism,
just off camera,
just out of reach.

The Viagra dreams are squashed by Valentine display ads,
Seasonal media mock-ups for discount true mementos,
Valentine intimacy in screamin' deals at WalMart,
Valentine video actors,
in perfect simulations
of touch and deep devotion.

I pull myself away from the Viagra dream,
push away the Valentine media blitz
to be awake in the here & now, today
wondering if the dream is a pornographic fib,
that blinds me, deafens me from knowing
the gift of easy conversation,
the gift of a friend hearing my story,
the gift of gentleness about a mistake,
the gift of patience as I hear an older patient's history,
the transcendence of humane connection.

– Ricardo Ortega MD

August

In the unshaven nights of August
When the desert wind touches
The eyes and nose with
Pine and Oregano

The scene before my eyes
is clouded by emotions of
A past day, a past hour
When there was no rule

And you and I danced
In fields of cactus
And posed for Bosch
Like Nymphs and Satyrs

In the Garden of Earthly delights
So much so that even the
Great painter who inspired
The heavens with his

Depictions of wantoness
Blushed when he stumbled on
Our form in the sand
Under the shadow of
An aged cholla.

– John Brandt
19Dec03

BEES

after a Stereotactic Mammography procedure

Bitter bees swarm deep inside my breast,
a hive they colonized years ago.
I see them glow gold on the x-ray screen.
My other breast was their home too,
now cut away, gone to cancer.
I lay still over an hour, draped, belly down,
my breast dangling through a hole
in the radiologist's table.

It swings only slightly as he pokes, probes,
takes more pictures, probes.
Finally the bees are captured by his darning needle,
patched to the lab.

It is a five day wait for the pathology report.
He leaves a tiny metal chip before he closes,
to mark the way back.
I am tagged like wildlife, I joke.
That night my breast is a tender question
on my husband's lips.

– Dale Harris



Jim Perrings

The Benediction

by Sylvia Davis

Elizabeth and Frank's reputation preceded them. As a hospice nurse making home visits, I walked into new situations with some frequency, but for few of them had so much talk circulated beforehand. I had heard the tales of Frank's odd social mannerisms and the difficulty of working with him about Elizabeth's care. I had heard the tales of Elizabeth's speech impediment and her intense need to talk. All of the initial visits by other nurses had been followed by grumbles of frustration as the attempts to problem solve had been thwarted along with the need to end the visit in a timely fashion in order to visit other scheduled patients sometime before nightfall. As I walked up the brick walkway for my initial visit, I was apprehensive about what awaited me and whether the assignment of primary nurse would fall to me. Frank answered the door, glowering. He led me through a room that looked like an annex of the kitchen. It was easily a third filled with boxes. These were his bargains, he explained — boxes and boxes, mostly of food. OK, I could sort of understand, though this was evidence of a very strong feeling on the subject of saving a nickel. I filed that away in my mental file, and over time had ample opportunity to understand that this kind of rigidity was vintage Frank. He led me through the kitchen, which was clean and tidy, eventually evidence of their eating take-out food despite his bargains. Then he led me into the living room. My first impression was overwhelming. The room was entirely filled, except for a narrow pathway that circled the room and allowed access to a couch and some chairs. There was furniture in every space but the pathway. The walls were covered with pictures and decorations. The curtains were closed, though the room was not dark. And in the midst of all this clutter, there stood Elizabeth, a tiny, slim woman with softly curled gray hair and a crooked smile. She was wearing an odd conglomeration of clothes, topped with a sweater that was buttoned up

starting with the wrong hole. Despite all this, she had a certain warmth and dignity, and I felt drawn to her. We sat down in that rabbit warren of a room and began a conversation that quietly stretched out over the next weeks until I welcomed my assignment as their primary nurse, a privilege for which no one else fought. Frank's role in our conversations?



George Grove

He was always present, occasionally getting on his soapbox to expound fervent opinions and occasionally inserting negative comments, neither of which slowed her at all. Yes, she was difficult to understand and I had to listen carefully. She had had facial surgery that had resulted in a cut nerve, causing a facial droop that distorted her speech. Yes, she had a need to tell the story of her life and getting away was hard. I began making them my last visit of the day so I didn't feel the pressure of needing to visit other patients on time. Yes, trying to problem solve the needs of her care with Frank was difficult. Time after time, I inwardly rolled my eyes, sighed, and worked once more to summon the patience I needed. He had his own idea of

how things should be done and ignored any other suggestion. His care of Elizabeth was tender in its own way but often fell short of what she needed, especially at the end. But she didn't want to be anywhere else and did not appear distressed by what he did; they had been married a long time. She simply wanted to be heard before she passed out of this life. Frank and I went back and forth on many issues over the months, but the real visit each time began when Elizabeth and I sat down and talked. She had a sweetness, a delight in life, and a love of her friends and of her travel all over the world. She had no bitterness about the time she was in now. We laughed and I listened. But as the months passed, she began to deteriorate more rapidly. One day I came and she was in bed for the first time, and there she remained until she died. More of my care became physical care, and despite grumbling from Frank, I brought in

other members of the hospice team to help with her care. Pain control became more of an issue, and she was less often fully alert. Our conversations became shorter and less vivacious. One day when I arrived I found that, to her horror, she had urinated in her bed. I understood that she had reached a point where she was sufficiently distressed about her physical state that she was ready to leave life and that, even with assistance, she would not be with us much longer. I changed her bed and clothes, and we talked quietly. She looked at me silently for a few moments, then she reached up, took my face between her hands, and then placed one hand on the top of my bent head gently. I could say nothing. It was so special a moment I barely breathed. I had already understood that, with Elizabeth, I had been given that most precious of gifts: The ability to be useful to another simply by being who I was. It was not only my technical skills, though those were most certainly needed to ease her physical problems. It was the human connection that sometimes comes when the combination of souls is right. It is a gift that runs both ways when it occurs, and it does not occur often. With this benediction, Elizabeth acknowledged this gift, and we both knew it was likely for the last time. Only a few days later, she died. When I went to visit Frank in the week after her death, I very much appreciated the gratitude that he awkwardly expressed, surely a rarity for him and the clearest expression of his caring for Elizabeth, and I even felt a fondness for his odd ways. But it is Elizabeth who reminds me that life offers gifts at every stage, and it is Elizabeth who granted me a moment that keeps her warmly in my heart still, more than a decade later. □

Essence

As clouds paint their anger
Like a pot of salted water
As it dries and leaves
just a hint of its existence
Just its bitter flavor.

Increasingly I am disillusioned
by the singleminded antiquated
Notions of those who can make
make a difference.

– John Brandt
09Sep03

FOUR BRAVE MEN

For all of the dead in Iraq

missiles flew, blood spewed
soldiers died and those others
the children with mothers and fathers
they died bleeding at home in hospitals
on streets on the thirsty desert sand.

others died too
no blood was spilled
four brave soldiers in a steel box
drivers on their backs infrared TV screens
steel elephants nose to tail
darkness
sand
an unfamiliar bridge.
four marines on their way to spill blood
maybe even their own
slipped into watery hell
upside down
turret in the mud no escape no one noticed
the air ran out
slowly.

120-mm never fired
heavy uranium shells
never spit hot metal
into flesh.

posthumous medals
flag-draped coffins
grieving families
four men are heroes
they will never kill.

– Terry Mulcahy

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feeling of my hands

Hands
These hands
These woman's hands

Hands no longer clean
The memory of activity
Residue of love
Acquired after hours and years
Of productivity
Ephemeral and transient
Unrecognized not nonexistent
Performances
Unnoticed if performed then unremembered if adequate

Hands these hands
These
Woman's hands

Manual labor knows them
Relying on movement with purpose
To free the creative spirit
My hands
Introduce me to the world
Allowing comfort in action
Spontaneity
Energy
Care

These hands have beheld
A transformation of the most dramatic kind

I recall childhood innocent hands
Tiny, smooth, angel like
Small rounded hands
Untouched by the
Angularity of work
Performed for others
I saw my hands grow larger
The fingers slowly
Elongating through the process
Of reaching outward
Measured performances
Minute, but emergent

This activity, begun so long ago,
In which my spirit
(Enclosed within that small body)
Sought growth and emancipation
Through those innumerable
Gifts of self
Made possible by the unquenchable thirst to create
A thirst experienced in
And realized through
The activity and production of my hands

Hands
These hands
These woman's hands

These hands experience
The fresh life sustaining qualities
Of water
A hundred times each day
Semen from the God of Creation
Washing, refreshing
Dew that brings forth existence
And nourishes it with life-sustaining flow
Over these used hands
Settling upon them
Calm newness
And a freshness of feeling
Allowing for the energetic pursuit
Of another love performance

No more than Lady MacBeth
Shall I rinse away
The residue of activity
The reality of my existence
Expansion of my personality
My deeds linger

Oh, what genius
Lies inherent within
God's greatest gift to women —
Our hands.

— P. H. DeVoe



Bath time, wife and children of Aliya April 2003, by Robert Glew, PhD & Dorothy Vanderjagt, PhD

Out

No propriety. The johnny-shirt tied loose
as the slab underneath slides out and light
hits unadjusted eyes. Thirty minutes is
a long time to search for blight, nests of
cerebellar locusts, the exact site of pestilence,
and then to see vast, white emptiness outside.
The machine sits and technicians, nametags attached,
guide non-initiates-plebes who've seized,
gone blind, or otherwise lost their sense-
from the room. I'm exposed, in partial clothes,
and barefoot identity's more than the loss
of health but also less-the business
of symptoms and diagnosis, but also shivers
to keep warm and ask the question: *what's next?*

– Dr. Neilson

What is a Piropo?

by Roberto Jurado

Pi-ro-po \pi-'ro-po\n. pl-pos

1. An amorous compliment 2: A flirtatious remark.

There are some words that simply cannot be exactly defined, except within the Spanish language, “piropo” is one of those. A “piropo” is “a flirtatious or poetic compliment to a woman”. In Latin America these expressions of admiration, when well constructed are not only traditional but even an art form. The more clever the piropo the more it is appreciated by its intended recipient.

Known throughout Latin America, piropos are especially prevalent and practiced in Argentina’s capital city of Buenos Aires. Considered one of the most elegant cities in the world, its women are acknowledged as some of the most charming and beautiful in Latin America. A piropo is an expression of gratitude for that beauty.

Piropo combines the Greek words for fire (pur) with eyes (oops) and while poorly constructed piropos can be obvious and callow (“don’t get too close to me, I don’t have fire insurance”) creative piropos are subtle with refined machismo that arrive quietly like an anonymous gift.

Some examples of a Piropo:

“If beauty were a sin, you’ll never be forgiven.”

“I’m now sure there is a heaven because I’ve seen an angel.”

“You move like the Bolshoi Ballet”

“I must be asleep to dream of such beauty.”

“Where you go, flowers must spring up.”

“So many curves, and me without brakes.”

Piropos are good fun, and only thought and practice make them perfect and more appreciated.

El poema.

Un día va a amanecer,
Saldrá el sol.
Por fin,
Lo puedo ver.

Se abrirán los ojos
Y el corazón.
¡Adiós, la noche,
Bienvenidos, el sol!

Un día va a ser feliz,
Podré reírme y soñar despierta,
Vivir abierta
Y sin miedo
De que mi alma se había muerto.

Regresará la lucha por la vida,
La fe en que merezco ser querida,
Amada, adorada, bella.
Y ella volverá, mi gran estrella.

– Marianna I. Borkovskaya, MS’06
18 de septiembre, 2001



Descanso, Taos, NM

Jim Perrings

To the Children in the Cemetery

They must have been lovely children
Now long dead
Who played across the lawn
And sang the sweet-sad songs
Of childhood that they never
Quite understood.

What became of them — of
Their reckless-dances as they darted
Through tree-shadows,
Restless moths, their day in the sun
Long gone now.

– Author

On this day

On this day, this day of
September fifth.
A hint of Autumn is in
The air.
Like the musky smell of
Leather from a well used hat.

I go to honour a friend
A friend taken in his prime.
I look to the west and
I cannot see him.
I look to the east
And I cannot see him.

After today I will
No longer look but,
I will know he is there.
There in our selves
In our hopes and dreams.

On this day, the sky softens
As seasons change.
As if bowing to Odin
I drop to a knee to
remember how the earth smelled
On this day.

05Sep03

In Memoriam

– John Brandt

"Gian Galeazzo musing over a glass of wine"

I felt a heartbeat
As the sword crashed
A thrust a parry and
I triumphed yet again
Only to lose in the end.

In those days, a time
Twenty generations earlier
When Ice made human's hearts
Hard like their potato fields in
January.

I sacrificed the flower
Of humanity on the banks
Of that blue river
Just so I could see your
Eyes once more.

Twenty thousand soldiers
Drank the blood of battle
But their wounds were but
Scratches compared to my
Longing for you.

Reflections on the battle of Nicopolis September 25, 1396

05Mar04

– John Brandt



Paradise Bay, Antarctica

*Jim Perrings, Analyst II
Office of the Medical Investigator*