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From the Editors:
(S) One, two: buckle my shoe.
(L) Three, four: kick the door.
(C) Five, six: pick up sticks.
(C) Seven, eight: close the gate.

We hope you enjoy!
One Pill, Two Pill, Red Pill, Blue Pill

One Pill, Two Pill,
Red Pill, Blue Pill.

Some pills are black,
And some pills are blue.
Some scripts are old,
And other ones new.

Some pills are dark,
And some pills are light.
Some effects good,
And others not right.

So many meds?
Which are for what?
Which in the mouth?
And which up the butt?

I need some assistance,
Doc, can’t you help?
I’m really confused,
I just want to yelp!

** ** ** ** ** ** **

It’s easy, don’t worry,
I’ll show you the way.
Just listen carefully,
And don’t go astray.
Take the red pills in morning,
And the blue pills at night,
Take the green pills for headaches,
Take the orange pills for sight.

Take the white pills for skin,
Take the pink pills for heart,
Drink the syrup for throat,
Use the brown ones to fart.

That’s it, that’s all,
It’s as easy as that,
If you need more help,
Just call and we’ll chat.

“Hello, Doctor’s Answering Service”.

Hey Doc, What’s up?
It’s me on the phone!
These meds are so costly,
I might need a loan!

Don’t call me on Monday’s,
It’s then I have off,
Don’t call me on Tuesday’s,
It’s then I play golf.
Don’t call me on Wednesday,  
It’s then, I’ve half days,  
Don’t call me on Thursdays,  
For catch-up’s a craze.

Don’t call me on Friday’s,  
The weekend is here,  
And Saturday, Sunday,  
Well, I’m drinkin’ beer.

So, hear what I’m sayin’,  
And don’t phone at all,  
You pay me to heal you,  
Not answer your call.

** ** ** ** ** ** **

I’m sorry good doctor,  
I won’t phone again.  
I needn’t your help,  
Not now and not then.

I’ll find a new healer,  
A something-else-path,  
He’ll see my whole person,  
He’ll treat me first class.

~Jon Black
The Stalls in the French Market

The stalls in the French market are not organized by genre; the layout is speckled with meat, produce, cheese, bread, and wine stalls. I can’t avoid the meat sections as I often do in a grocery store, but walk past them multiple times. The array produces interesting odor combinations. Some are pleasing; the scent of fresh pears and strong cheese. The tasting of red wine while I stand near the spice shop, full of cinnamon. Others, however: a bucket of runoff water below the iced fish mingling with raw chicken. Hot spitted hen infusing the salad greens. The cigarette smoke in my hair from the punk kid near the coffee stall.

I purchase two carrots for 23 cents. The first carrot is smaller and sweet; I gnaw on this while I take in the nearby meat stall. First a row of skinned hares, their eyes bulging and cartoonish. Some still have bits of fur near the paws. The eyes are so unreal, clear white with shiny black pits, and the skin so plastic, that I think of a scene in Watership Down when the rabbits are bulldozed into the warren and suffocate. I wonder how these met their fate. They are red, not blue. They didn’t suffocate. Next, domestic birds of every kind: chicken, turkey, game hen. In France ‘they’ leave the feet on, I am told, in order to assess the age of the poultry. Some of the feet are black and some are yellow (pleasingly, one with one black and one yellow), all with clean talons and smooth, waxy cuticles. At another stall the feet are twisted and stuffed into the abdominal cavity so I can’t see the toes. The game hens still have feathery heads and dead eyes, a pow-wow of naked Indians in headdress. Next, pigeons. If ever I am homeless, I will make my own economy out of the pigeons of Europe. The birds are stupid and supplicant; I will lure them with stale breadcrumbs, skin them, and bring them to market.

While I peruse the sweet meats the man asks me if I need any. I look up from my carrot as if to indicate, “Do I, here with my carrot, look like I want sweet meats?” He looks away. The woman next to me orders three pig’s feet in aspic and smiles at me. “It’s a good carrot,” I say, taking another bite. I can see the pig’s feet sliding around in the white wax paper bag as she walks away. A calf head in the corner stall looks like marzipan, white and waxy.

The second carrot is bitter. If I’d picked that one first I wouldn’t have eaten the second, would have missed its sweetness. My grandpa taught me many years ago never to plant tomatoes next to carrots because a gas released from the fruit causes the carrot to go bitter (He didn’t know the chemistry; he simply knew not to plant them together). The sweetest carrots were from his garden. Even the bitter carrot masks the scent of fresh meat if I open my palate to mimic tasting wine.
The mollusks chatter *guh guh guh* as they fall on the ice into O’Keefe patterns. Oysters whistle an unusual dipthong with *t-th t-th t-th*; the smaller bivalves *pth pth*. There are even tiny clams with translucent purple shells. These look like pistachios; I imagine they will be devoured similarly amid light conversation, the sort of food that leaves one with salty fingers and empty gut.

~Lisa Cannon
~Photo Ravi DeSilva
Subway ride

The sound of metal rubbing against metal on the subway is unique; it’s one of those noises that is hard to put into words. It’s not like the clanging you hear when you have too many dishes in your sink and your favorite coffee mug hits the frying pan. It’s not like the crash, bang, boom, or any other pop-up that appeared during the fight scenes in the 1980s Batman TV show I loved to watch. No, the sound of the rusty metal wheels of the graffiti-covered subway car against the tracks is a high pitched screeching that startles tourists who hear it for the first time, their heads jerking around in fear. After taking the subway everyday for the last seven years, it doesn’t even wake me up anymore. I can usually get on my train, fall asleep, and wake up exactly one stop before my destination like clockwork.

Homeless people on the train are like the sound of metal against metal: at first they startle you and then, after a while, you ignore them too. It was like that today when I first saw them getting on the car. It was a woman with her two children. I tried ignoring them at first because I had my own troubles to deal with. Lately my days have left me feeling exhausted, angry, and resigned all at once. Maybe it was just too much stress or too many expectations. Regardless of whatever my life had too much or too little of, for the past three years I’ve hated it.

My self-pitying thoughts were interrupted when the woman said in a bellowing voice, “Excuse me, fine ladies and gentlemen of the A train, my name is Ella Jenkins and I am homeless.” Her voice was hoarse, making it sound like she had done this already several times today and she was too loud to ignore. She continued, “I was a working single mom and now I am homeless with my three-year-old and five-year-old. I need your help today. Me and my children are hungry. We have no food. Do any of you know what its like to be so hungry that you would eat anything?”

She wore a giant black bubble jacket that was about three sizes too big for her, making her frail body look even thinner. The once jet black jacket was covered with stains and had little holes in it, letting the triple stuffed goose feathers pop out one at a time. Her hands were worn and her hair was unkempt. Her kids were not in much better shape. The older one stood behind her mother and held onto the metal pole with one hand and her little sister with the other. I could tell just by looking into her eyes that she had grown up too fast. At a time when most kids
her age were playing with Barbies, combing their fine plastic blonde hair in their pretty dresses, and getting ready for imaginary tea parties, this five-year-old girl was standing in front of me as a testament to her mother’s need for money. She had a broken pink butterfly clip with one wing on one of her pigtails. The other pigtail was coming loose in a green rubber band with black marks on it, making it look like she picked it up off the floor after people stepped on it, to keep the broken butterfly with one wing company after the other butterfly that had both its wings flew away – after all, what butterfly would want to stay on her head.

As her mother made her way around the subway train asking for money, most of the passengers totally ignored her. When she reached out her hand in front of me it was so dirty and calloused that I dropped all the money I had from my pocket into it from six inches above; I wouldn’t have any need for it soon. I held my breath against the pungent odor until she had passed. As engrossed as I was in these new passengers, who perhaps had a life worse than mine, I was eager for them to leave so I could resume ruminating over my pitiful life, instead of theirs.

As the mother continued to walk through the rest of the subway car, the three-year-old stopped and stared up at me. Her half torn orange shirt was covered in stains, just like her mom, and her shoes did not match. Her face was covered with a layer of dirt that was hard to make out against her dark complexion. There were, however, some clear areas across her face, which were in a pattern that could only be explained by tears welling up in her eyes until the point when they rolled out and made their way down her cheeks, some into her mouth and some down her chin. No butterflies even made it into her hair; it just sprang out in every direction as she stood there.

Having reached the end of the car, the woman came back, grabbed the child’s arm and then led both children towards the door. The train was going to stop soon. As they stood by the door, the three-year-old continued to stare back at me. The train made its familiar screeching sound as its rusty metal wheels rubbed against the rat-infested metal tracks once again. Right before her mother whisked her out of the doors, the three-year-old flashed me a smile. They exited the subway car just as suddenly as they entered it. Her smile was lost to me among the sea of different passengers inundating the subway car, pushing and fighting for a space to stand or sit on their way to work.
I was also on my way to work, or rather the culmination of the work that I had been debating about completing for some time now. I finally settled the debate yesterday and wrote a well-crafted note detailing my reasons, citing things such as pressure, stress, expectations, and disappointment. I got off at the next stop, Fourteenth Street, a station known for being deserted, even during rush hour. I figured this would decrease the chance of anyone realizing what I was about to do and attempting to stop me. As I stood there with my eyes fixated on the tracks, waiting for the next train to come, thinking about how I was about to alter the familiar sound of metal against metal by adding an unexpected element, the thought of the little girl entered my mind. I might not have been able to see the child’s smile any longer, but it was permanently ingrained into my memory. The fact that a smile was able to surface on her face – despite the hunger, despite the cold, despite the dirt, despite no invitations to tea parties, and despite the lack of butterflies in her hair, made me feel that all those reasons I had carefully written out yesterday night were so irrelevant right now. As the train approached, I only added the crumpled note to the train tracks, not altering the familiar, and now comforting, screeching sound.

~Ajay Kuriyan
~Photo Ravi DeSilva
The Man By The Birthing Suite Door

Awaits the birth of his third, no—fourth child, as he counts them out on his fingers, plus his step-daughter, that makes five. The way he shifts his weight from foot to foot, he looks young, maybe 28. I’d asked him if it was his first. He tells me

how “wasted” he’ll get tonight, and in the silence that follows the pace of his anxious march quickens, his feet waging the ever-present war between right and left, dexter et sinister, as he readies himself to lower a shoulder and burst through the swinging door should anything with the Caesarean go wrong. He’s a medic, he says, trained for both trauma and combat, and there’s nothing in there that he hasn’t seen before. He’s even worn the scattered confetti of his closest friend, victim of a Kosovo landmine.

The steady drumming of his feet stops there and he shrugs, propping himself on his right foot and craning his neck above the birthing suite window. Soon a nurse will pull a blanket from the warmer in the hall, the sort of sign he’s waiting for and he will pump his fists in the air in triumph, celebrating the success of his sperm, but for now all I can do is wonder if he always knows where his left foot is going to land and wait for the march to resume.

~Gregg Chesney
BREAD ON HIS HEAD

The Child

The child took the huge piece of bread, which measured like a box one foot cubed and thrust it, or, rather, found it thrust, upon his head so that he could open his eyes and see the inside of the bread and nothing of the outside for, he was inside it.

And then, what to do now?

Should he, he asked aloud, eat his way through it and thus take each matter, each issue and chew it, digest it and leave it resolved in his stomach? Perhaps it might prove nutritious, and perhaps he might gain, but surely it would take time, and he wondered.

Or should he, if need be, violently shake his head out, leaving the bread tattered and torn at his feet, so that perhaps he could trample it, cover it with dust and hope the birds would not trace it. But that might leave him dizzy and disoriented, and so, was it worth it? How ought he to go about this dilemma, he wondered, and so, determined that it would be no difficult task alone, he sat down, sat and thought, and thought…

how to go about this now?

~Imran Rafi Ahmed Abdullah Punekar
Poppy Seeds

7:17AM 46°F
I stopped at
the new coffeeshop

I ordered a medium coffee;
black. the polite girl at the counter,
Cindy—says the embossed nameplate—
informs me that a medium
is a small. I change my order
to an “extra” and add an everything bagel;
toasted

four steps onto the pavement
the bell hung on the door hinge
knocks against the glass
while I pause in contemplation
of my breakfast

7:26AM 45°F
back to the counter
I politely bring attention to the error
“I requested a bagel with everything,
but where is the solution
to world hunger? and the multinational
disarmament? and the corporate
responsibility? and universal
health care? and also the poppy seeds?”

after a sigh
the summoned assistant manager
hands me a napkin
and a complimentary
package of cream cheese

~Mark McAllister
Ms. R.

When I first met Ms. R., she was lying on a hospital bed in the Emergency Room at Strong Memorial. She first struck me as a quirky middle-aged woman, thin with flowing long blond hair, a hippy in the 1960s who still harbored a good deal of distrust for the establishment, both medical and sociopolitical. As we got to know each other, it became clearer that she was sick—not just UTI and gas sick, but Sick—and though she wouldn’t admit it, she was scared... scared because of her pain, scared because of the mass in her abdomen that made her appear pregnant, if only on the left side, and scared because she was in the hospital. Yet as we got to know one another and I collected a “thorough history,” she seemed happy to be heard. It seemed that she, an erstwhile substitute teacher, activist, and self-described “street poet,” was unaccustomed to being listened to.

Ms. R. had no health insurance, lived by herself in a small apartment, and was estranged from all family, including her only child, a daughter. Either by necessity, uninsured as she was, or by ideology, she had not seen a doctor since 2000, preferring to treat herself with dietary interventions and herbs, as with the three-week “juice fast” that preceded her admission to the hospital. The wild yam, bee pollen, kelp, lecithin, and multivitamins she took daily kept her healthy. Though she smoked cannabis in the 1960s, she denied any recent drug use, again preferring to keep her body free of toxins. Yet she could not give up her pack per day cigarette habit, regardless of its effect on her body. Though her mother had died in her thirties from breast cancer, and an aunt had died of liver cancer (leading me to suspect that her gynecological cancer of unknown etiology could be genetic in nature), her belief in the power of natural healing and her financial situation had kept her from seeking medical advice, even when she began to have bloody vaginal discharge six years after going through menopause; even when she felt the mass in her belly.

Was Ms. R.’s quirkiness really some sort of psychological pathology? Was she delusional, as her discharge summary reported? The psychiatrists who saw her decided it was “adjustment disorder with mixed emotional syndromes and psychiatric disorder not otherwise specified.” Though she “felt that her mass was secondary to parasites or bad humors within her body”, they said that she maintained mental capacity. But implicit in their labeling her admittedly non-mainstream thinking about health as “delusional” was a skepticism that she was able to make “the right” decisions for herself. In reading this, I pictured her performing her poetry on South Avenue, ignored by
the passers-by careful to avoid eye contact with the “crazy” woman.

Because of her unconventional view of the world, someone wearing a white coat had likely judged her similarly in the past, creating a vicious circle that made her even less trusting of purveyors of biomedicine, less likely to get help when something serious was clearly wrong.

But now the pain was too great, the blood too heavy, the anemia making her too weak, and she sought help. Test upon test led to an answer that didn’t change—GYN cancer, unknown origin, we’ll keep looking. Her kidneys worsened over the coming week, the tumor blocking their outlet, not improving even when tubes were placed to help them drain urine. It became clear to the house staff that despite their best efforts, she was succumbing to her disease, alone in a hospital that she, for whatever reason, had avoided for much of the last decade. Though more and more interventions were being planned, a young doctor gave her a final gift, in the form of a choice about what to do next. Ms. R., frightened but finally in control and feeling respected, died peacefully on August 5, 2006, in the care of Hospice.

~Zachary Borus
~Photo Deepak Sobti
Bridge Between Time

As I sit here and write, and as you read, a bridge is made between times. Though I could be anyone I want, depending on what I tell you. Depending on the curve and infinite shape of black ink on paper. Pirate. 1700. Does this ring a bell? Do those shapes bring me into focus? Green. Tinkerbell. Fairy dust. It could be. Perhaps I am not a mythical animation. (High probability I am not). What about a nomadic man from the mountains of Kurdistan? A bread maker. A sheep hearder. I like to watch grass blow in breezes. I like to lie on my back watching the wind through trees. But maybe, I am just alone, a scientist with his butterflies.

As my pen moves along this browning paper, I make you think of color. Black on white creating green and red. Not smell though. Heat or sound? Of all the senses, the bridge being built between this time and that of yours, is made this way.

Like the pen I hold. Built of metal with one red feather added for decoration. I can go on: my desk made of wood. On which is a jar of ink, a letter, a glass of wine and a half eaten pear. A plant struggling to live is in the right corner. Dusty. It should be watered soon, the leaves are dry. I remember when they were green and leathery. Now you do too.

And now you have seen my table. Part of it, above the floor. You can’t feel the pear. Nor smell the grapes in the wine. But you see clearly. What I want you to see. I didn’t mention what is in my drawer or, to the left of the pear. But I can tell you, if you like.

~Sara Bozorg
Old Kitchen

My fingers glide over dents in the wooden table
The rickety chair creaks under my weight.
Glitter, embedded in the table from past Easter egg decorations,
    glitters in the afternoon light.
A dark circular scar mars the powder blue countertop
A reminder of when my brother melted a plastic bowl on the gas stove.
My fingers jiggle the loose knobs on the stove as I warm water for tea.
Inside the cupboards are chipped plates and glasses
Concrete examples of my childhood clumsiness
The once white curtains are now the color of pearls
    And the wallpaper is slowly trying to free itself from the wall.
Our fridge grumbles when the temperature increases
While the door on our oven clings on for dear life.
I can now reach the chocolates hidden on the top shelf
Without climbing on to the counter.
Miles away from the kitchen,
I can smell onions frying in olive oil on the stove
And can feel the bright blue and white tiles, cool under my bare feet
The same tiles I spun around on as a child, trying to make myself dizzy.

~Annabelle de St.Maurice
On a better day the train, chugging southbound along the coastline, would afford one a seductive view of the Irish Sea. I want to see the sheep herdsman moving his flock along the gravel road with a thin willow, his motion the sway of a blind man on familiar ground. Long shadows ambling over shamrock meadows. When I look out the window I see only the grey water against a grey sky. A small town. Wet sheets on clotheslines flapping against cement houses. Sparrows hunkered onto power lines, bristling at the sleet. A little boy throwing stones at the tide. His mother. Somewhere. (Wondering where he is?)

The town, appropriately, Greystone. The conductor; “Last stop!!” (And, little girl, where’s your mother?) The sign outside the depot points left and says Public Toilets. I follow it and find no toilets, only three signs stating To Let; they play tricks with my eyes. The rain becomes unfriendly. My umbrella thrice ousted. I give up and march around wet. My new coat smells now like wet wool. I smell as I imagine a stall full of bleating sheep, awaiting shearing. Or: mutton, because meat smells animal, especially greasy meat. I would fit in with the flock I cannot find.

I find a cafe. Q3. I sit for three hours and write postcards. (I wrote one to you, did you get it?) Each time I look up the young waiter across the room looks down. This becomes a game. I drink a glass of shiraz alone. On a fine day I would mosy along the seashore with an empty mind and full spirit. “How do I get to the water?” He wipes the watermarks from a glass, “The harbor, this way. The beach, this way.” “Which one is prettier?” He picks up another glass, “Neither in this weather, love.”

The Beach. Waves. Crashy-crash. Back on the train, a man sings quietly in my carriage. He isn’t the peddler who will pass with a paper cup seeking change; he sings for himself. Northbound. Another train passes southbound. I get a sense of force when trains pass like that. How hard they would hit each other if they were on the same tracks— it makes sense why people don’t survive those things. Off the train. The station smells strongly of urine. To Let, I wonder.

I don’t know how to get back to my house. I find the bus as I remember— 46A— and locate a route list but the post has been pulled off and vandalized with Eire is Dead and !Konk. I guess the direction. I tell the driver, “I think I got on at Kill Lane, please tell me when to get off.” Later, “Kill Lane.” There is a grocer’s. I walk into the store. “I don’t know how to get back home, but I think I’m staying around here.” “Do you have it written down?” This is the customer ahead of me, a prune of a woman. “Yes.” I hand her
a note with my address. The clerk makes a crack about her buying wine and putting it in her purse, and an uncomfortable exchange of passive threats occurs. She turns to me, again sugar-sweet. “Here, love, follow me. Here, I’m walking that way.” Walking, “are you Italian, love?” “No.” (Italian!) We walk around the corner. “I’m here. This is my house.” “Oh.” “No, I’ll show you. (pointing) See that white house… past that. You take the left immediately. Walk past the new houses until you get to the old houses. That’s where you live.” My shoes are wet. The leather becomes sharp. My heel bleeds and later scabs over.

~Lisa Cannon
~Photo Jon Black
Concentrate

My window looks out on a small grove of trees whose leaves glitter in the wind when the sun ducks behind their shade. They are newly orange. I watched them fade from mosaics of green-yellow into their ripened phase: mere factories of chlorophyll, dissolved in the shortening days. Dissolved.

I’m startled by the nurse crumpling the package of my IV bag. It sounds like dried leaves, but it is only salt water to be dripped into a crumpling body. She smiles. Her name is Jill, and she is pretty. I think of telling her about the leaves; the chlorophyll stacked like pennies; membrane-bound proteins breaking down in the night, how my proteins are opposite: forming, reshaping, but I say the leaves are pretty and will scatter like the disks of green within them are scattering now. She smiles again. It will all be done soon.

The tree leaves claw on their branched arms waiting for their weight to—a breeze. Dried leaves spatter the grass. I curl my hands making the tendons pop out like the veins of leaves. They stay this way, reddened with pale protuberances along the knuckles. It’s strange. If I make a fist this way—quickly—it stays, knocking back and forth a bit. Did they call it clonus? Was that the foot thing? They probably ought to clone us all. I think if I had a clone, he’d be able to go to my house and live exactly as I had. I swallow. He could do all these things. My hand finally relaxes.

I wonder why I’m here.

When they said there was nothing to be done, I asked my son to take me out back and shoot me like a lame cow. Daddy, he said, like he was five years old. It would be better, I said. Better than spending your college money on something useless. He sighed. Maybe freezing to death, I offered. Then it wouldn’t be your fault. You can leave me out by the ice fishing shack. He looked up at me and said, It’s summer. The doctor’s office walls were covered with light blue wallpaper, spotted with
identical snowflakes. The overhead light caught on my son’s brow and shadowed his eyes. He looked tired. So regular fishing then, I said. The lake was calm and we rowed the boat out past the vacationer’s piers to the reeds in shallow muck. I caught a lot of seaweeds—indescribable aggregates dragged by my hook into the boat. I don’t know what’s wrong with me. Just that it will all be done.

The girl hands me the plastic urinal. She’s pretty, and I’m not sure I want her watching. I check her nametag. Jill, I say. I’ll leave, you know I always do. Yes, I agree. My hand shakes so I wedge it between my legs. They are stiff. They shake, too. When I feel my warm pee on my penis, I stop and shakily put the lid on. I think I’m done anyway. I shiver and look at the dry leaves blowing on the sidewalk. They circle and catch on the chain linked fence. An iced leaf lies on my windowsill. It is brown and rotten. Rotten from the ice. It will be done.

Man, it’s cold out there. It is hard to move my head. Oh, I say. The voice moves in front of me. A boy. A man. I know him. He takes off his coat. Coins fall onto the floor. How’s it going, Dad? Good, I say. He is my dad. No. Cool, he says. Fishing, I say. You want to go fishing? The lake isn’t frozen yet, Dad. It has always been winter. He is my son. Well, maybe we can go fishing sometime if you want. I point at the floor. Pennies, Dad. Staff can sweep it up. They lay together, some on top of the others. He worked for pennies. He is my son. He made his bed; he mowed the lawn. He bought worms and leeches with his coins. He was a better fisherman than me. He was smaller, but the fish were bigger. He looks like I did. A frozen me. I would pick up the pennies. They will be moved and something different will come. Maybe nothing. They are not stuck. I’m not afraid, I say. I’ll just ask Jill and the doctor about fishing, ok Dad? It will be.


~Photo Colin Bauer
Journal excerpt from my elective experience at Columbus Public Health – 10/6/2006

This afternoon I went out with the Healthy Homes program to do an asthma education home visit. We went to see a woman who came to this country from Barbados with her husband and four children. She and all four of the children have asthma, and a previous assessment of the home had determined there were multiple environmental triggers which could be contributing to the asthma. Before leaving the health department, we packed up as many supplies for this family as our car could fit, including a HEPA filter vacuum, a dehumidifier, bed and pillow covers, rubbermaid containers for storing clothes and food, and many natural cleaning supplies which are non-allergenic. I was overwhelmed with how much support this program can give to people who may not have the means to help themselves.

When we got to the house, we could tell it wasn’t in the best condition and upon entering found it to be infested with roaches. Now I’m not one to jump on a chair when a mouse runs past, but bugs are the one thing that really creeps me out. I think part of the problem today was that I didn’t know the house had roaches beforehand, so I wasn’t able to mentally prepare myself. I have to admit it was pretty uncomfortable sitting there for almost 2 ½ hours during this visit, but I really tried my hardest to be compassionate and attentive to the woman we were visiting. While listening to her story, I could feel my discomfort beginning to ease. My heart just went out to her as I learned of her struggles with the roaches and her children being sick so often. It was difficult to imagine living in a house like this every day, especially for so many young children. We did the best we could to help by educating her about the allergens in her home, and offering practical advice about cleaning and attacking the roach problem.

Although this was probably the most challenging experience I have had yet at Columbus Public Health, I was ultimately glad that we didn’t just end up at a nice, clean house in the suburbs. I think we can easily lose sight of our broader community as we become so comfortable in our own daily surroundings that we forget the conditions in which some people live. I was glad to be taken out of my comfort zone and meet someone who truly needed and appreciated our help.
Overall, the visit turned out to be a very fulfilling experience. It also really hit home for me about the importance of public health, and how much of an interest I am starting to develop in this field. While driving back from the visit, I thought about the fact that I could be a pediatrician someday and have this woman’s children come to my office with their asthma. I could prescribe them all the asthma medications in the world, but if they are going back to this allergenic home environment, they’re not likely to get better if no one addresses those issues too. This experience has taught me that public health involves the most basic and fundamental level of prevention, and it is vital in helping to improve health in any community.
Waking to Sunshine

Sometimes I
like it when
sunshine
gets caught in
my eyelashes,
I have to wipe
my eyes,
golden honey
dripping.
I look at it,
bright and thick,
squish it in
between my fingers
and let my
sunshine syrup
run,
so slowly,
in long smooth
globules
to the warming
ground.

~Joshua Brown
Jacob:

Memories of Illness and Childhood

It snowed that day in November, surprisingly early, even for Buffalo, certainly not a day for a funeral. Nevertheless, my Aunt Ruth buried her husband of 45 years. In the after hours the remaining family homesat and talked. A quiet cast; There were conversations in hushed tones, punctuated by occasional bursts of laughter, a stark contrast to the storm that rattled the windows.

My cousins and I crowded into my aunt’s bedroom, lying all over the floor like discarded clothing. Aunt Ruth had laryngitis, her voice faded in and out like an old transistor. Its tenuous sounds hurt, resonating the solitude and uncertainty of facing life without Eddie. She finally decided to whisper.

The kinfolk came near and far to say good-bye, most of them hometown people all the way from Birmingham, Alabama. Young faces from childhood now gray and black. The stories unraveled continuously followed by the inevitable questions “Remember the last time we saw Huss Name?” The inevitable reply “Was I still in Birmingham…what year?”

My mother and aunt skipped through remembrances of being young laughing brown girls riding the trolley. Wistfully I think of where they sat on public transportation back then, but I know that it is inconsequential to their memories.

Suddenly they paused in silence and glanced away through the years. The grandfather clock chimed the hour. Aunt Ruth whispered hesitating, “Sarah, do you remember Jacob?” The ensuing silence sparked the great divide, a chasm, carefully distant unwelcoming the approaching memory. My mother nodded her head sadly. The question was an abstract formless phantom. We looked up startled and confused, sensing the question “Who was Jacob?” was the footbridge connecting the past. “He was our brother,” they said quietly. “Sarah took care of him”, my aunt said. Then the memory stretched to its full height, its presence filled the room, extending into what was. Holding hands we were hesitant crossing over. “There were eleven of us, and Mama was pregnant again”, my mother said flatly. Again the room was silent. The wind howled…

*
Despite the fullness of my mother’s dress, I could see that she was pregnant again. There were already eleven children; this would mean another child for us to care for. I turned away, went outside and exhaled my anger, allowing it to melt in the hot Alabama air. How long? How much time? A child’s time is an effervescent anxious squirming thing marking in staccato increments while helplessly bumping into reality stretching and yawning lazily toward completion.

We were children of poverty; our lives woefully comprised of duties and demands. Wild abandon and carefree days were elusive delicious dreams, wrapped together with longings of Saturday matinees and baseball games.

The rhythms of our lives were textures of tempos. The syncopation of hands and feet in Sunday worship talking to Jesus. The everyday slow drag blues struggling to earn a living, and the pulse and rhythm of swing flying fast, just like our money disappeared. “Lack” was the whispered refrain.

My mother and I worked silently in the kitchen, guardians over percolating pots. It was a Special Sunday, a flurry of activity for a church dignitary. I would glance at her occasionally, hoping she would meet my eyes, spontaneously come over to me and wrap me in her arms. We would have this wonderful mother-daughter encounter that would give me temporary entrance into the adult world. While there, I could ask matter-of-factly without fear of rebuke why she allowed the babies to come year after year. But before we left this glorious realm we would hug through our tears, so grateful that we could share the moment.

I could already hear the booming baritone voice of the guest. A visiting Minister who would no doubt eat too much and then stay the night. For despite the fact that our house was already bulging at the seams, Papa never refused to accommodate an out-of-town guest. The parameters of dinner discussion: the wages of sin, the gospel of salvation, the ways of white folk and the segregated south of 1938.

Ruth, Sister and I speculated who would take care of the new baby. Jacob was born in November of 1938... we called him “bébé.” After he was weaned he was unceremoniously dropped in my lap.

My fond memories of childhood, compete with images of hardship, disease and death. What is an eleven-year old child’s understanding of illness and death? Maybe it is the consequence of an infraction, cheating, lying, stealing, disrespect: a moral failing mixed generously with a liberal dose of Pentecostal teaching and a copious amount of
fear. Where was Death? Was it hiding, curled quietly in a dark closet waiting for that one unfortunate victim? Was it an opportunist; a vicious stealth-like predator that stole away when unsuspecting eyes turned elsewhere? I didn’t understand why people got so sick that they died. Each time death stole away with a child, I watched cautiously feeling like a benign sentry guarding myself brandishing a stick against a colossus.

My brother Jacob’s life was over before his second birthday. On Sunday he was laughing and playing and dead by Tuesday night of diphtheria. Sister sat up all night with him, holding him in her arms so that he could breathe. He was gone so suddenly that my mind retreated into a hiding place where the voices of others seem to float unhindered. I only caught select phrases. The elders were frightened because they didn’t know what diphtheria was or how it was transmitted. They started speaking in the language of old wives tales and down-home concoctions. The words swirled in my mind, like an eddy of confusion. I heard them say that if you gargled with your own urine, you would not get the disease. So I made secret trips to the outhouse in an effort to save my own life.

Papa was a coal miner. When he arrived home and learned how sick Bébé was, he gathered him in his arms and took him to the hospital disappearing into the treatment room leaving me in the hallway alone. Sorrowful words drifted from the room...“the poor little thing...what do we do”? Papa came out and walked over to me. I tearfully asked “Does Bébé have to stay in the hospital, Papa”? He looked at me and touched my shoulder. “Bébé is gone, Sarah he died as soon as they laid him on the table”. I cried gulping, racking sobs. Papa never shed a tear. Mama was away in Yantley helping Grandma Heddy. When she returned the next day and found her baby dead, she ran down the street screaming like a banshee. The neighbors ran out trying to restrain her.

The Health Department rudely placed a huge quarantined sign on our house and property making us the pariahs of the neighborhood. We were not permitted to leave for six weeks.

The grief over Bébé’s death was a festering wound; it was an oozing runny pain with thorns of regret and guilt that jabbed and scratched me day and night. Death was cruel and irrational, for it would steal away with more of my siblings who succumbed to other communicable diseases.

At age eighteen I knew that I would enter into public service in some capacity. When I stood explaining to my parents how I could help them
much better as a college graduate I remembered Bébé. As I stood before a scholarship committee in New York City trying to get money for nursing school in 1950, I remembered my brother Samuel found dead at twelve after a lengthy illness. As I rode the preemie ambulance through Manhattan in 1955 I saw Larry dying of tubercular meningitis. Walking city streets, entering dark hallways, climbing dirty stairs to see a sick child I remembered the phone call about Phoebe dying at fifteen of scrofula. When I received my BS from Columbia University in 1961, I remembered a visit home to nurse my mother, sick with tuberculosis, recalling her unsuccessful struggle to reach her 50th birthday.

My commitment to Public Health, first as a nurse, then as an educator, was inflamed by my determination to reach out to poor communities to teach and to provide health care to those with little or no access.

In total my father buried his wife and five of his children. At the gravesite he never shed a tear. He had said good-bye too often.

What haunted me for years was the memory of one day in particular after Bébé was born. We were passing by Mother Reece’s house. As she saw us, “The Johnson Tribe,” she came out on her porch and said, “Who all is glad about Jacob, raise your hand”. We looked at her smiling from her porch and greeted her politely but none of us raised our hand. How often I wondered would things have been different if I had just raised my hand?

Dedicated to my mother

Dr. Sarah Johnson Boyd

In Memory of all the rose buds...

~Karen Culley
Haiku Number 8

tarnished teakettles hold
the bitter memories of
what sugar sweetens

~ Mark McAllister
~Photo Ravi DeSilva
I arrive at the hospital at 6AM for my 7:30AM procedure time. My father drops us off at the entrance. As directed, we follow the colored ceiling tags to the Green elevators, take one to the basement, and then follow the kites to the surgical center. I’m impressed by the fact that they bothered to have cute kites painted on the hallway walls, but then I realize that it was done with a distinct purpose: to ease the nerves of the incoming patients. That would be me. With this realization, I begin to get anxious. Well, not actually begin because I am slightly already. So I should say my anxiety mounts.

We finally reach a hallway where we see a line of people. Though it is not marked, I am pretty sure it is patient reception so we get in line. Soon after, an elderly gentleman walks up behind me and asks if this is surgical check-in. I tell him I believe so. He gets in line with his gaggle of family members surrounding him. I wonder what he is in for. In front of me is a female about my age with her boyfriend, little sister and mother. I find it curious that these patients have so many people with them. Only my mom is with me, but I almost would have been flying solo. I realize I’m glad that my parents and little sister offered to drive the 700 miles to stay with me during and after my surgery. I thought that I didn’t care one way or the other, but I do after all.

We get to the front of the line. The receptionist asks me: name, birth date, procedure, which knee, insurance info. Now go with this nurse, she says. The firing of questions seemed a little cold considering my rising anxiety, but I figure she has many more patients to check-in so I try to let it slip from my mind.

The nurse brings me to a hospital bed. Then she asks: name, birth date, procedure, which knee. Now could I remove all of my shoes, clothes, glasses, and piercings? I now realize that I had neglected to remove all of my jewelry. Whoops, glad they caught it now. Yet, I don’t see how it could have made a difference. It’s not like it’s anywhere near my knee or that I’ll be getting an MRI. But, I comply. Non-compliant patient, not me. I’m in the business, after all.

The nurse says she and my mom will wait outside the pulled curtain while I undress and suit up in a hospital-issued gown. You know the kind, with an open back that would expose you to the world if anyone was standing behind you. I change, and they withdraw the curtain to re-enter my little space adjacent to all the other patients in their little spaces. A claustrophobic person would surely freak out. I didn’t think I was one, but I’m starting to feel more on edge. I lie on the bed, and the nurse takes my vitals. My blood pressure and pulse are a little higher
than normal, but I expected that. The nurse explains to me about the IV line she is inserting for my anesthesia. It’s a large size needle, and I wince from the sting of its entry. She leaves as her job is done.

My mother small-talks with me. I’m surprisingly relieved as she does this. I am well aware that she is trying to distract me from the concerns of my impending surgery, but it works, well, sort of. Someone new enters my space. I’m not quite sure her position as she does not introduce herself. I receive the same questions: name, birth date, procedure, which knee. She hands me a marker and tells me to mark the knee with an X. This seems over the top to me. How could my doctor not know which knee to operate on! Then, I recall hearing incredulous medical mishaps in which doctors operate on the wrong limb. Hence I comply, removing my covers and marking an X. She leaves.

I stare at my knee to be operated on with its X. X marks the spot. Now everyone knows that my left knee is the one going under the knife. I’m freezing without my covers; my feet are like ice. I cover back up to conserve warmth.

An orderly enters the room to take me to pre-op. She begins moving my bed past all the other patients being prepared for surgery. I look at them, and they look at me. We all have same dismal expression: is this really happening to me? And before I know it, all of their faces are gone.

The orderly pushes me down the hall, turns, now down another. On top of feeling almost naked in only the hospital gown, my vision is all blurry because I’m not wearing my glasses any longer so I can’t tell where we are going. I pull up my covers a little higher. I feel like I am being pushed forever. I begin to think, I don’t really need this surgery. I can still leave if I want. I keep these thoughts to myself. After what seems like eternity, we arrive at pre-op. Did we take an elevator to a new floor? Where part of the hospital are we in? I’m not quite sure.

I’m parked in a pre-op bay. I’m asked my favorite questions yet again: name, birth date, procedure, which knee. But now a new one is added: can I see the X? I remove my blankets to prove that, yes, my left knee is marked by an X. X marks the spot, after all. I feel tears begin to well up, as if they weren’t already. Previously, I was just doing a better job about keeping my emotions under control. I thought I was sure that I wanted to go through with this, but I’m slowly changing my mind. I think, I’m a medical student. I’m in the medical system. I can handle this. But somehow, the tears start flowing. Slow at first, then faster.

Now I’m really thinking I should walk. I want to just get up and leave.
My mom finds a box of tissues and begins telling me about her surgery. She explains how she wanted to get up and leave (she read my mind!), but her doctor pushed her, gently but forcefully, back down on her hospital bed, explaining that it was a necessity for her. I had forgotten that my mom had surgery five years ago. And hers was Gyn so if she stuck with it, I guess I can handle Ortho. But the tears keep coming.

Do I hear the voice of one of my classmates? I swear it sounds just like this one female. What would she be doing here? I don’t want anyone I know to see me like this. Am I hallucinating? I can’t see without my glasses, and there are so many people in scrubs walking past, congregating at the nearby station. I could have sworn I heard her voice.

I’m approached by someone new, a man this time. He introduces himself, though I can’t understand him well through his accent. Apparently, he’s my anesthesiologist. He explains something about my meds that he is going to start, and I just nod, having no idea what he’s saying. Is it his accent or is it my delirium that is the cause of my incomprehension? I’m not quite sure. Maybe the meds he is giving me will stop the tears. I really hope so. He doesn’t seem to have noticed them. I don’t know if that makes me feel relieved, as though he is one medical professional talking to another, or bothered, as I am clearly a patient in distress.

Finally, a familiar face! My orthopedic doctor approaches my bed. Unlike everyone else in scrubs, he is in a dress shirt and tie, which makes him stand out even more. Now I’m really embarrassed about the crying! Why can’t I make the tears stop? My doctor is also a professor of mine; will he think less of me for not keeping my emotions in check? I am thankful when he acknowledges my nervousness and uneasiness. I talk to him through the tears, and he comforts me. His encouraging words surprise me. Compassionate is not the first word that comes to mind when you think of Ortho. I remember how highly my roommate had praised him. She worked with him when she rotated through her Ortho clerkship and said of all the docs, she was glad that he was the one performing my surgery. I, too, was glad that he was my doctor, counseling me through this, as tears continued to roll down my cheeks. He also asks to see the X. X marks the spot. Now he’ll know which knee for sure.

The anesthesiologist mumbles something about how the meds will soon take effect. My doctor says that he is going to go finish prepping for the surgery. He gives my leg a reassuring pat before heading off. I think, now I know what it’s like to be lying in the hospital bed rather than standing next to it. And then I’m rendered unconscious.

~Mercedes Szpunar
My Landlord

From the top of the hill,
Don’t tell me I can’t barbeque in the backyard!

I watched him paw the car into drive.
Don’t walk into the house without knocking!

It started out moving at a snail’s pace,
Don’t threaten me!

And accelerated to a roll,
Don’t threaten my girlfriend either!

Before pinning my landlord,
Don’t wake me up on Saturday morning!

Up against the wall.
Don’t tell my friends they can’t park in the driveway!

You had this coming, you know.
Clearly, your dog agreed.

~jonathan black
It Could Have Been Like This

Over the tall mountains of a dry country, and down into one of its many valleys, is a city full of commotion. The roads are windy and people cross the streets in dozens. A Bazaar, encompassing the length of five city blocks, is at the center. Fruit stands. Shoe shiners. Rug weavers. And a man selling oil for cars, all within ten steps of each other.

One shop keeper stands on a crate behind his fruit. His hands wave above the crowd, reaching through heat and words for money held out. He watches as a woman in black chador brushes a hand over ripening fruit. She cries out: Four for the cherries! And is cut short by another, slightly older woman: How much for apples? The shop keeper hands a box of peaches and a melon to a waiting man and begins to rearrange the apples, all the while looking closely at those who stop to touch, pinch and examine his fruit. Six for the cherries and three for the apples, he yells.

The bazaar is full. Woman in black shawls, in manteaus and pink scarves, in teetering heels, all squish and bump and wrestle for spots. A thick haze of mosquitoes invites shoppers into various shaded entrances. Fish for sale. Armless, hoofless goats. The sounds of morning and the scent of flesh on display.

One woman is done for the day, shuffling along, she uses her teeth to keep hold of her chador. Hands occupied by bags bulging with potatoes and onions, cilantro and dried flowers. A child in sandals scurries along side, weaving in and out, hoping over cracks, and keeping steady his basket of eggs and rice. Across the street, a man tucks the body of a feathery, headless chicken under his arm. His butcher waits, wet knife limp in hand, speckled red skin dripping with sweat. His muscles twitch as the freshly dead chicken gives an unexpected kick. Feathers ruffle. A free hand searches pockets for money due.

On streets running perpendicular, the sounds are quieter. Cars inch their way against the current of shoppers exiting for home. An old yellow Peugeot is cursed by a woman who is forced to squeeze against a wall, she pulls closer her bag of rice and wrapped greens. The Peugeot’s yellow paint is thin, chipping, and, in regions, reveals hints of the original red. One headlight is cracked and the other oddly shines. It reflects the morning light, steaming, like the one good eye that is left to wander.

The Peugeot stops by the fruit stand. The frame rocks slightly as the man inside shifts his weight. Windows are closed and the man squints to see thru the dust fogged glass of the passenger seat.
The women at the stand still scream out their prices. Bangles tumble down arms, hands slip, and wisps of hair escape, as more bodies crowd around to examine the fruit. A young boy, tangled behind the curves of his mother’s chador, peaks out. Taking advantage of the commotion above him, he reaches a thin arm out towards the basket of figs. He hesitates, midway, taking time to be certain no one has seen. The man in the Peugeot catches his gaze, stalling the boys yearning movement. His hand withdraws.

The shop keeper howls, his face turning red: Woman! Your son is stealing from me! He makes an attempt to grab at the folds into which the boy has disappeared. The mother takes a quick step back. The shop keeper quivers and wobbles on his wooden crate, struggling to keep balance.

Inside the yellow Peugeot, the heavy set man returns attention to his work. He makes an effort to adjust the rear view mirror. Sweat accumulates and rolls down the sides of his thick neck. His breath is laborious and with every inhalation the old leather car seats crackle. The sounds of bazaar life recede. All he hears is the rhythmic: Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock. His own heart, counting down minutes to a certain death. His hands shake slightly as he adjusts the heavy black belt – strapped beneath his shirt. Pinching at his skin.

He closes his eyes to pray. He thinks of those he loves. He thinks of his son. He prays for courage. And to his relief, strength – in the form of a flushing red anger – returns.

One more look in the mirror and he opens the door. Slowly, letting the heat of the interior escape into the morning. The car shudders as he slips out – leaving behind the rusting metal frame, and thinning yellow paint, that had momentarily housed him.

~Sara Bozorg
~Photo jonathan black
The Innocence of Childhood

The innocence of childhood, passions pure and unbroken
Stolen by the bleakness of suffering
Joy, distant and neglected in the fire of pain
Palpable is the future, forlorn dreams relinquish
Helpless to the reaches of an imperceptible demon
Inexorable agony breaks a restless heart
Hatred for this enemy within
Hatred for the self
Merciless pursuit, deceitful means
Devastation thrives with incessant gnawing
Loneliness abounds with the transients of each moment
Precious static pictures a surrogate for company
An escape from eternal razing
Courage and bravery wither
Dissolved is the corpse, thin is the skin
Hope for life to pass ever faster
Life is too much
Blind remorse, only prayer will help
Mortal recollection, reborn from the despair of torn faith
Rage is exchanged
Humanity shines on as the seconds fly
With death, her soul is free from perpetual burden
Through the end is peace desired

~Adam Doyle
Simaa

I opened the door to the insistent pounding and found James standing there, flushed with excitement and slightly out of breath. “Somboma,” he exclaimed, “you come quickly!”

“What is it James?” I asked, concerned that something bad might have happened while I’d been away for the weekend.

“Simaa. Simaa has come. You must come see! You must meet Simaa!” He was so excited he was jumping from one foot to the next.

“Who’s Simaa? What are you talking about, James?” I had no idea who or what he was referring to. Had I misunderstood him? Or was Simaa a relative, an important elder come to the village for a visit? I thought quickly of what I knew of James’ family, but no one by the name of Simaa came to mind. Whoever he or she was, though, this was apparently pretty important. “Alright James, I’ll go with you.” I slipped on my charlie-waddies, the cheap flip-flops fashioned from cut up car tires, stepped onto my veranda, and pulled the door shut behind me. James was already a dozen yards away, still beckoning impatiently.

As I caught up with him and we hurried through the hot, brown landscape, I looked at the boy beside me. No one really knew how old he was, least of all James himself. He had no birth certificate, no birthday. He had no idea what year he was born, let alone the actual date. Not that it mattered. Birthdays play very little role in a society with no drinking age, no voting age, no driving test, no age of legal adulthood. My best guess was that he was about 2 or 4, although his proficiency in English would suggest that he was older. On this particular day he was wearing his bright blue shirt with the gold diamonds, his favorite, and one of only about three or four shirts I had ever known him to possess in the year since I’d met him. In fact, that blue shirt was one of my best guideposts for distinguishing him from all the other school boys when I had first arrived in the village and was overwhelmed by all the new faces. In the beginning, one face blended into another, and the best way to differentiate between people was to recognize their most oft-worn article of clothing. Of course, during the school day, this was a good deal more difficult as all the students wore their identical brown and yellow uniforms. But outside of school, I could always count on James to wear his blue shirt, or Patience her maroon skirt, or Francis his Notre Dame baseball cap.

“James, where are we going?” I asked him. We were not heading in the direction of James’ house, which seemed to negate my
theory that we were going to visit an elderly family member.

“We have to see Simaa!” he repeated and wouldn’t say anything more other than to remind me to hurry. Exasperated, I gave up asking questions, and simply followed him along the narrow, sandy path through the brush.

After several minutes, we came out into a clearing where a huge crowd of villagers had gathered. They had formed a large, loosely organized circle with clusters of people standing all along the edges. Half a dozen men crouched on logs and stumps to the left of me, beating out a powerful rhythm on their drums. Beyond them, a group of women danced and wailed, clapping their hands to the sounds of the drums and kicking up a cloud of dust with their bare pounding feet. All around, children chased each other, calling out, laughing, shrieking in mock terror. It was a scene of utter pandemonium, and it took several moments for me to get my bearings. Slowly, I realized that every single person I knew from the village was present, and many more besides. Whatever was happening, this was obviously a tremendous event. And then, through a parting in the crowd, I saw what had drawn this chaotic gathering.

In the center of the circle I saw a man. But this was no ordinary man. His head was covered by a carved, wooden mask, the face of which was at least two feet in diameter. The mask was carved into a grotesque and evil-looking farce of a face. The eyes and mouth, huge in size, were charcoal black and frightful in the depth and darkness they harnessed. Masses of roped and tangled hair spilled from the top of the mask and danced wildly with the movements of his head. His body was covered in a few pieces of animal skin, cow perhaps, or goat. He danced erratically within the circle, leaping and clapping and shrieking. Every time he approached a group of people, the adults would back pedal nervously away while the children ran screaming for safety behind mothers or nearby tree trunks.

As he stomped and twirled his way around the circle, James tugged on my hand. “Somboma,” he said, “please, but you cannot look Simaa in the eye.”

“Why not James?” I asked, utterly at a loss for how to explain the bizarre phenomenon unfolding before my eyes. I had seen many odd and interesting things during my time in Ghana, but there was nothing that could compete with this.

“The Simaa, he is somehow not so fine-oh. If you look Simaa in the eye, he will work the bad juju on you and you will die.”
As he spoke these words, Simaa apparently noticed me for the first time. Despite James’ warning, I was too curious not to look at him. Our eyes met, and I could feel his glare burning all the way through me. Part of me wanted to drop my gaze, but I was mesmerized and couldn’t tear my eyes away. Angered by my audacity, he suddenly charged in my direction. Letting out a yelp, James grabbed me by the arm and hauled me back into a crowd of onlookers. Losing interest, Simaa changed directions and pursued a trio of teenagers who had begun to edge too close. For several minutes this continued. Courageous youths would inch close to Simaa while he wasn’t looking, and then run shrieking for safety as soon as Simaa turned on them. The atmosphere was a unique mix of festivity and fear. They didn’t really believe that they could die just by looking Simaa in the eye, and yet they didn’t want to actually test their luck by doing so.

And then, all of a sudden, the situation changed entirely. There was no signal that I could detect, no communication of a plan, but all the villagers seemed to know in the same instant exactly what they needed to do. With a possessed increase in the beating of the drums and a wild roar by all involved, the entire village began chasing Simaa out of the clearing and down the road. As I stood, watching everyone disappear into the distance, James said, “It is all fine now. The Simaa, he will not come for one year’s time more.”

“James, what just happened here?”

As we began to walk back toward my house, the sun dipping toward the horizon before us, setting the sand and brush aglow with its fiery orange hue, James tried to explain to me the complex traditions and beliefs associated with the annual coming of the Simaa. “The Simaa, he is a powerful spirit that is somehow good small and somehow bad small. His juju, it is strong-oh. Every year he comes to heal sick people. And also, you know, he will gather the souls of all died since his last coming. In this, he is good paa. But to healthy people he is not so fine-oh. He will put the evil eye on the healthy people and you will die. If you look him in the eye, you will die. Every year for two days, he comes to Sombo. And for those two days, you have to be careful plenty. You can not pass at night for he will be roaming. But after two days, his work, it is finished, and we must chase him away until next year.”

I glanced sideways at my deeply Catholic friend as he spoke and wondered just how much he believed of what he had just said. But before I could ask him anymore about it, we were back on my veranda and he was saying goodnight. And as I unlocked my door and
and walked into my house, I thought about my time in Ghana. I had become accustomed to the hot weather, had learned the language, had acquired a taste for the food, and had gotten used to riding in the beds of pickup trucks with chickens in my lap and goats at my feet. I didn’t mind washing my clothes by hand, living without running water or electricity, or collecting rainwater in buckets in the middle of the night during rainy season. I knew how to barter in the market, bow before tribal chiefs, and make a dozen different meals from only four ingredients. I knew how many cows I was worth as a wife, and that to arrive someplace two hours late would be considered early. But I realized that day, that there were some things about Ghana that would always surprise me.

~Sarah Philipp
~Photo jonathan black
A Tomb I Thought I Knew

I glanced today at a tomb I thought I knew,
I left my post to see;
the closer I got, the farther it seemed.
I tried to climb the wall
in search of a lonely breeze,
yet I fell and looked aloft
to see my name chocked and caked with dust
on a tomb I often see.
I reached out to touch myself
and peel away the olive moss
only to find it was merely someone else.
Someone else, maybe just like me;
a man who laughed with his children
and loved the flame-colored leaves
falling silently in an autumn sun.
It was a tomb I thought I knew.

~Joshua Brown
Renege

The window

No, he said. Then renèged. Somewhat, was his reply now, Naturally. As much, he may have meant, or tried to convey, or was seen to say, as is inescapable. He smiled.

It was not likely to happen. Instead, he found himself standing on the end of a week, its dulled end he watched sink slowly beneath his feet, having shifted him slightly and brought him to where the next, appearing now a brilliant silver, would surface before its own end become so dull and disfigured so as to be unrecognizable. Was this the game? Being moved from a dark square to a light, by some unfathomable, unreliable force?, now diagonally, now straight, and then?. How amusing, he reasoned, it must seem to someone foreign to this world, someone a stranger to him and his surroundings. He smiled, let loose a chuckle. For some time he saw that chuckle, leaving his mouth, repeatedly: playing, rewinding, playing. He could see his own eyes shifting from the leather surfaces of his shoes to the delicate, tumbling, carpet which flowed beneath our feet.

He looked up, still smiling, amused, but he was no longer there. Standing, now, 20 feet behind, and half as many to the side, he directed the entire scene, observed details not visible to his eyes: the clenched fist secreted behind the small of his back, his shadow stretching from his heels, the small cat which glided silently behind him. He made a motion to the velvet, elaborate curtains in the window, and they fluttered, obeying gracefully, adhering to every fold and crease he imposed. He had but to move his fingers ever so slightly, and the heavy cloth responded. He wanted light, and so the curtains split and brilliant sunlight came in, brightening the room to the point that its walls seemed whiter than possible, considering they’d been painted a light shade of gray. Now the window, closed before, came open at his beckoning. He paused, concentrating, and then, suddenly, a kingfisher flashed by the window, to be seen, colorful, wonderfully picturesque, in the dynamic frame of the billowing curtain as it lifted, just in time, to reveal for one sliver of a second, that most refreshing scene. Sounds from outside he ordered to enter, first a train -- its regular chugging reaching them from a distance; the neighing of the horse which now stood outside; then the melodies of birds, from near and afar, a rising lark singing of his breathtaking view, a newly returned nightingale of the beauties of the South. A warm breeze blew into the room, causing random flutterings of paper and bringing with it the sweet smell of
fresh life. He breathed in its sublime redolence, unable to imagine anything more enlivening.

The door slammed behind him, the sound of the heavy wood followed by the click of the knob echoed in his ears, startling him. The door was shut by the wind that had invaded the room, and in return, killed it. The curtain fell, now limp, and the sound of the birds faded.

He closed his eyes and turned from the scene. The room seemed to grow dark, everything stood still. The only indication of life in the room was the incessant beat of the clock in one corner. He listened to it, ticking away the seconds, telling him how much less time he owned as he lost it. Rushing him, he felt. So he resumed,

and found himself cast, cast not away, but back: standing once more on that plush carpet facing what, he thought he knew, but why, he’d yet to determine. Then there was the clock, why did it need to be so bloody loud, he wondered, and frowned with the thought, a frown not decipherable even to himself as he stood behind and to the left of, well, himself, and seeing it as such, he mused on how enigmatic it must seem, and took that as some source of distorted pride.

(unfinished)

The wind arose because the door was open at the same time the window was; in this way, the door gave birth to the wind. The wind later causes the door to close, the closed door now kills the wind which it once gave rise to. Or, perhaps, the wind, in closing the door, kills itself through some sinisterly ironic folly, due in part, no doubt to what might be termed the wind’s natural arrogance and illusion of freedom.

“Cast”, as he was wont to say “cast not away, but back” and sometimes “…so many times”

~Imran Rafi Ahmed Abdullah Punekar
Serenade

Blue beguiling eyes
of a hurricane. Your storm
around me, with clouds of lips
and thighs and skin—
and friction. But you are bitter
wind, blowing through, buckling
knees and freezing tongues and leaving
me without the words to say
what I’m thinking. Never

never stop looking at me
that way.

~Gregg Chesney
~Photo jonathan black
Promise Me

In the fall of 1978 while stationed at the First Marine Corps District Headquarters in Garden City, Long Island, I was sent to the U.S. Public Health Service Hospital in Staten Island for a medical procedure along with a fellow Marine.

That morning Mike accompanied by his wife Cheryl and I awaited the keys of the designated government vehicle that would take us there with an air of expectancy, humorously hoping somehow that the car grew a radio overnight...wishful thinking since none of them had radios. There was a sign where the radio should be that read, “If you must have music try singing” thankfully this was not a long trip.

Cheryl and I decided to pass the time talking. She was a perky good-natured girl from West Virginia. The dipping and twisting of her accent while she unraveled the purpose of the visit made me smile. “Mike and I have decided no more children...we have two boys and that’s enough...besides I had trouble with both pregnancies...and Lord knows what will happen if he is sent overseas again and we can’t go”, the words gained momentum. “I had to stay with my parents the last time...they don’t mind...but having more children would be hard...and on his salary...so he’s having a vasectomy”, crash end of thought. “I mean what is the big deal”, she giggles, “cut...snip...snip and you’re done”. Mike winced painfully, “Cheryl do you have to say it like that?” We laughed.

In the early morning we stopped for coffee at a near by diner. The jukebox was playing Little River Band’s “Reminiscing”. The melody and mood brushed lightly against my face as I closed my eyes inhaling the heady fragrances of morning coffee and a cool crisp day. Fall was creeping with stealth like progression toward the Metropolitan Area observing the crimson red and gold dotting the landscape.

Cheryl looked at me, “so what are you going for?” The question stirred the butterflies in my stomach suddenly making my heart rate increase, “A biopsy of a lump in my breast”, I said quietly. She gave me the “look” then clucking like a mother hen began a lengthy discourse about the probability of cancer at twenty-two. I refrained from disclosing a diagnosis of fibrocystic breasts and from giving my spin on the situation, which was that an “ego tripping” lump was trying to be the center of attention. A personification made it a little comical and less threatening.

Our journey continued on the Belt Parkway gliding along the outskirts of Brooklyn toward the Verranzano Bridge. I looked out
the window remembering long ago car rides and familiar exits: to Grandma’s, to church, to play while Cheryl chirped on happily about growing up in West Virginia, military life and motherhood. I was only familiar with one out of three. She looked at me “So you are the Marine and your husband is the civilian…interesting”, she said. I shrugged nonchalantly “It works for us”. “So what does he do?” She began probing. “He teaches elementary school in the Bronx”. Her eyes widened with curiosity “and he doesn’t have a problem with your being in the military?” I sighed feeling the familiar challenge from the same tired question that magnified the uniqueness of my situation and tried hard to not to put my hands on my hips while working my neck back and forth saying “Baby I do what I want”. However I understood that I was an oddity and this was the new frontier especially as a Black woman in “this man’s Marine Corps”. I chose to ignore her question fascinated instead by the swarms of gulls circling the huge landfill to the left of the expressway. Cheryl settled back in the front seat somewhat hurt by my silence.

The U.S Public Health Service Hospital is a huge dismal looking structure. The front of the building cloaked in the chilly morning shadows seemed foreboding. Like most hospitals of its time constructed with an architectural type of “early ugly” it was built for function not form. In the darkness of the entrance it reverberated the message “be served then leave”, my thoughts exactly as we parted company.

The atmosphere was relaxed as men causally walked the halls in bathrobes with cigarettes hanging from their lips that undulated in staccato rhythm like horizontal speedometers as they spoke. I entered the Surgical Waiting Room went to the reception window then waited to be called.

After a lengthy conversation with the surgeon followed by several unsuccessful attempts to extract fluid from the mass finally he advised surgery. “What about next week”, he said gently flipping through a book on his desk. I did a quick mental calendar scroll. Next week… indoor track season had just started with Monday, Wednesday and Thursday practices then Saturday and Sunday meets. Despite my best effort my voice was shaking “next week would not work”, I said quietly. Our eyes met briefly, he smiled understanding “you call me when you are ready…don’t wait too long”.

I found my way to the area where Mike and Cheryl were waiting. They sat cuddled together talking in hushed tones as she occasionally kissed his cheek. Relieved that the procedure was over I sat on the bench closed my eyes still hearing “Reminiscing”.
A woman suddenly flopped down on the bench beside me. We smiled at each other. I went back to “Reminiscing”. “It’s hot”, she announced, wiping the perspiration from her forehead “I’m sweatin’”. I was a little chilly despite my woolly pulley sweater and shirtwaist. She looked at my uniform “you’re a Marine”. It was more declarative than question, “never seen a Woman Marine before”. I suppressed the urge to jump up and give my best rendition of a Looney Tunes “ta-dah” complete with a side step and open arms… a funny but irreverent thought. She looked me up and down. “What do they call youse?” Derogatory names from our male counterparts popped up. “Marines”, I said finally. I was slumped down on the bench and adjusted my cover on my head. I thought maybe I should sit up straight…first impressions of a Woman Marine… comfort won… I smiled graciously.

She looped her hair behind her ear and sat back. “you waitin’ for someone?” “Another Marine and I came up here together”, I said “what about you?” “My husband…he’s in there”. I followed the direction of her finger. “I am dying of uterine cancer. “He’s having a vasectomy “, she said bluntly. This was an example of a definite “TMI”…too much information. I sat up straight.

Friday must be vasectomy day I mused, the urologist could only get here once a week. I wondered how many vasectomies were preformed in one day…how many in an hour. She interrupted my mental query “I know he’ll remarry one day…I want him to…it’s only right”, she said quietly. “He promised me if he does there would be no more children… just our three”.

She shed the baseball jacket and leaned back against the wall again. I looked down, seeing an open pack of cigarettes in her purse. She reached in for one then changed her mind. My thoughts were reeling. First impression… she didn’t look sick. There was a brief silence “How many children do you have?” I asked finally. “We have three… two girls and a boy…twelve, ten and two”. She pulled at her jeans standing suddenly, “See I have already lost about thirty pounds, you should have seen me before I got sick”. Her hand lifted a corner of the shirt exposing her midsection and the sagging waistline of the pants. She sat down again. “Do your children know about your illness?” I asked “Oh yeah”, she said casually “we talk about it. Her voice dropped, the casual tone disappeared momentarily exposing a profound agony. “My girls have started goin’ to my mother’s house more. They call and ask her to come get them. For days at a time they might be with her. Right now I can still do things for them…I don’t know how long that will be. My mother… she helps out and they got lots of cousins to play with. I don’t say nothin’ when they don’t wanna stay with me…it’s

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hard on them. My little guy is clingy...you know what I mean... he cries a lot. I know he don’t understand whats goin’ on. My husband tries to spend time with me... he has to work...its hard on him. They did all they could for me. I’m only thirty-five... they give me about a year”, she said flatly. She brushed her streaked shoulder length hair back then exhaled heavily, “everyone’s gotta die one day”.

A nurse opened the door and called for Mike. In the distance I watched as Cheryl gave him a parting hug and kiss. Three children came towards us “my kids” she said. The little boy whined and climbed into her lap. The two girls sat on near by bench talking. “Take him”, she called to the girls. He squirmed out of her lap and made a run for it squealing in delight. The oldest girl sighed and followed in pursuit scooping him in her arms. His lungs went full throttle as he screamed “Mommy” while squirming to get away from her. She got up and took him from his sister, and then set him down with a stern “stop it now” then shook her head, “kids”. I wondered why the girls were not in school, but decided not to ask. She pulled up her sleeves and brushed her hair back again.

A man pushed the doors open looking pale. The children called “Daddy” in unison. Before the boy could rush towards his father she caught him by the hand as he walked over to her. She stood putting an arm around his waist, “How ya doin?” He put his arm around her shoulder “Lets get outta here”, he said softly. She let the child’s hand go and watched him dash off. A laugh rattled in her chest “That one is a hand full”. She smiled picking up her bag and jacket, “take care and good luck”. I nodded and smiled, “you too”. I was still watching long after they walked toward the end of the hallway and disappeared around the corner.

Cheryl came and sat beside me. Thirty minutes later Mike emerged from the room. We stood up as he walked over to us. “You all right hon?” she said. “I’m okay...it wasn’t that bad”, Mike said smiling. “The doctor said rest, Tylenol and ice for the swelling. He was driving back...I felt bad.

We were quiet on the way home. Cheryl looked back at me, “What did the doctor say?” “Surgery”, I replied. “When”, she asked. “I told him I would call”. It was Friday the workweek was over and the weekend stretched before us. The daylight waned into late afternoon. I settled back and watched the red hues of the early evening sky as we crossed the Verranzano again, thinking about the words to “Reminiscing”.

~Karen Culley
~Photo jonathan black
Tanka Number 11

a light switch flicks on
forms under crumpled sheets stir
the hesitant hand
still pauses in the doorway
before returning to dark

~Mark McAllister
~Photo jonathan black
The Unsaid

Voices

Now, he realised, his voice had changed. It was no longer the pleading, grief stricken one of the youth seeking the profound, but now became that of a fellow, a colleague, who was presenting ides and facts and waiting for what he knew would be an even judgment. It wasn’t so much, he thought, that his voice had changed, but, in reality, his audience had. But then, hadn’t his voice changed to suit that change? Naturally. What was ironic, however, was that, in actuality there was no audience, nor even a voice to speak of. Both were imagined. And yet, they were there; they existed. He talked, as he had done many times before, not so much to himself, but as himself talking before someone else. Although, of course, that someone else wasn’t there, and, he had no intention of that being the case; that is, these things were not those he ever did or would tell to that person anyway. So instead he resolved to merely hold those conferences alone, sometimes even aloud (for the sake of people to hear him, but of course, no-one is there) but, naturally, all the ideas that would issue from it would be his own. He knew that. And indeed, he even limited, strictly, himself from formulating the response of the other person, or persons, supposedly present, because, after all, he was only himself and was not that other person at the same time, and certainly not now, and so he would hardly be fair or worthwhile if he were to say for them what it was that he wanted them to, or even, simply, expected them to, when, really, what he wanted was to find out was what it was that they would, indeed, say, or, more accurately, how that person would respond to what he might say. So that to avoid such difficulty, not that he was free of them altogether, he would respond to their response, after supposedly, but without in fact, enunciating what it was that he deemed appropriate or just interesting for them to say. Much like Camus, he would pause, as if to listen to what the other had to say and then continue, as if in response to what had just allegedly, been said, however, without actually doing so, because, after all, he didn’t know what had just been, or, rather, would have been, or, to be most accurate, what hadn’t been said, and how on earth could he have known? It wasn’t said. And were, it, indeed, to have been said, it certainly wouldn’t have been said by him, nor, in all probability, in any manner that could straightaway understand, let alone predict. So why all this waste of words and time?

~Imran Rafi Ahmed Abdullah Punekar
Children in the cancer ward

I wonder where the pink and yellow walls might be
The pitter patter of nurses heels

(I’m searching for your hospital).

The doctor is surely making rounds by now
Your mother by the bed

(I’m searching for the street right now).

Left turn.
5 steps around the mosque
I seem to be lost
Somehow.
Can’t make out the shapes.

A hole. A sign:
“hospital closed due to …”
Ashes
Blowing
past.

But, I think I see you sitting!
Thin arm holding head

I wonder where to take you now
Searching for a bed

Picture caption “Iraqi boy with cancer”

~Sara Bozorg
Ashish and Ramandeep were lounging on his twin size cot in the tiny college dormitory room. They were picking at leftovers from Tacos Guaymas Mexican Restaurant, and neither was talking. Abruptly, Ramandeep asked, “Can we talk?”

Oh no, Ashish thought to himself, as the ‘Can we talk?’ conversation was never a good one. He had sensed something different about Ramandeep earlier that morning, more makeup, and her hair was styled differently. Also, she was smoking a clove cigarette; unusual given her two year hiatus. Ramandeep continued, “Look, Ashish. I’ve been doing some thinking about us.”

“Yes, and what have you been thinking about?” Ashish asked.

“You know I love you, right?” She asked. Ashish swallowed and shifted uncomfortably on the bed. “Unfortunately, I’m not in love with you. I don’t know what happened, but I think we need a break,” Ramandeep continued.

“What do you mean you’re not in love with me?” Ashish demanded. “I had a feeling something was going on. Is that why you started smoking again?”

“I don’t know why I started smoking, I guess to calm my nerves.”

“This is it. It’s really over between us?” Ashish asked. It’s funny how the ending of a relationship can happen so fast. One minute you’re together with someone, the next second BAM! You’re uncoupled and alone. “I was expecting more than this though. Like a huge fight with plates being thrown at the wall, and yelling, hair pulling, maybe even some biting.”

“I still want to be friends with you. We’ve had some great times and I don’t want that to go to waste.”

“No way, we can never be friends again.” Being friends with an old girlfriend is like climbing Mt. Everest when you’re really looking for deep underwater volcanoes.

“If that’s the way you feel, I’m sorry.” Ramandeep’s eyes turned red and glazed over. Tears began forming on the bottom of her eyelids.

“Goodnight. I’ll walk you out.” Ashish coolly stated while he stood up and stepped towards the door. Ramandeep slowly walked toward
Ashish. She reached out with both arms, but Ashish crossed his arms in front of his chest. He was in no mood for hugging *this* girl and comforting her.

She left the room. Her clove cigarette smell still lingered inside the room, and Ashish almost couldn’t believe what had just happened. *Why was I so mean to her?* His coldness towards her made him shudder, as if he was really trekking up Mt. Everest.

It was too late for those actions. She was gone, forever. “Its better this way,” Ashish said aloud in the empty room. He flopped down on his bed and started sobbing into his pillow.

Ashish heard a knock at the door, and saw his girlfriend, ex-girlfriend at the doorway. He wanted to embrace her and tell her everything was going to be okay, but another part of him made him hold back. He rudely asked, “What do you want?”

“Let’s give it another try,” she looked up hopefully.

*Another chance at the relationship? Was this a message from God?*

“No, I don’t think so,” he slammed the door in her face.

*Oh my God, I’m such an asshole. What’s wrong with me?*

He looked out the peephole and saw the back of Ramandeep’s black coat. She was walking towards the elevator with her head down.

“I can still go get her, she’s not even at the elevator yet,” he whispered.

Something was holding him back though, and he did nothing. Ashish’s teeth started chattering and he felt ascent into higher, frosty air.

~Sam Ko
The First Stage of Dying

Even prostrated his voice towered, looming in the room with a timbre that surely required two hands on the pulpit. We flanked the bed, two to a side, sent in to learn to examine a patient with “his condition.” The cancer, with its viscous fingers, had furrowed its way back into his colon, but all he told us was of fainting and Jesus and how this was a sign that he once again had to get himself right with God. No mention of the cancer’s leap from gut to brain, just blustery words mocking our horror – *how could he not know? do we tell him?* Instead, we pressed our stethoscopes flat against his chest, pretending to listen for a heartbeat, but really listening for some visceral indication that he did, in fact, understand. But it was we who did not understand, who had not heard it, the tacit quiver beneath the booming bedside sermon, “Go child, I do not have the strength to hear such words.”

~Gregg Chesney
Contributors and Staff

(reverse alphabetical order)

Aleksey Tentler is a 3rd year Medical Student/Computer Scientist with too much to do and too little time, who came to the US from Ukraine at the age of 10. His next project after the turtlequill website will be to figure out a way to warp space/time to create more than 24 hours in a day.

Erika Szymanski’s name is too long to be the third line of a Hiaku, but that doesn’t prevent her from working hard in the lab during her third year of medical school. Where she goes, nobody knows, but it probably involves horses and lots of dust.

Though she is a veracious reader (and a proud member of the U of R Literature & Medicine Book Club!), Mercedes Szpunar, a 2nd year, has done little formal writing since the few lit classes she took in college. Hence, she is very excited to be included in the latest edition of turtlequill. She continues to be inspired by various Rochester Academy of Medicine events and plans to continue writing about her medically-related experiences.

Deepak Sobti is the hailed little sib of Ravi DeSilva and has surpassed his big brother in every conceivable way except being conceived first.

Sarah Philipp: I’m a second year med student originally from Minnesota. I was an English major at Williams College and then spent a couple years in Ghana, West Africa as a Peace Corps volunteer.

When Mark McAllister isn’t pretending to be a poet he also keeps busy between the slip-n-slide and the moonbounce. Construction of the time control headphones is still in progress. He also thinks you should get a haircut.

~Photo jonathan black
Ajay Kuriyan moved to the U.S. from Nigeria when he was three. He grew up in New York City and attended the University of Rochester for his undergraduate education. He is currently a 2nd year medical student.

Sam Ko is an MD/MBA Candidate at University of Rochester who aims to be a leader in health care by learning about the finance, operations, and strategy in medicine. He is originally from Seoul, South Korea, but moved to the U.S. at the age of three. During his free time, Sam enjoys learning to write and spending time with his beautiful girlfriend, Yuri Lee.

Tracy Fuller is from Buffalo, New York and attended undergraduate at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio where she majored in Biology and Psychology. She has always enjoyed writing and during a third year elective at Columbus Public Health she decided to create a journal about her experiences. Her future career interests include both Pediatrics and Public Health.

Adam was born the son of a god in whom he does not believe. Learned to read at the age of nine. Fate would have it that he would meet his “father” in Rochester. Forgoing his plans to develop a tobacco mosaic virus to kill all the world’s tobacco, and subsequently become filthy rich after selling the tobacco companies a resistant tobacco plant, but not until all addiction had passed. Instead he thought he wanted to become a “surgeon” after an incident where “God” removed one of his “ribs”. Now he plans to save life over limb and battle the consequences of the scourge that he originally planned to destroy.

Born in France, raised in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, Annabelle de St. Maurice has three syllables in her first name, three words in her last name, is one of three children, is a third year medical student, three-star pastry maker, and three-time ultimate Frisbee player of the year. If only she owned three castles in France...

Ravi DeSilva has not found himself living in a shotgun shack. He has found himself in another part of the world. And he has found himself behind the wheel of a large automobile. He has not found himself in a beautiful house, with a beautiful wife. Yet he consistently asks himself—well...how did I get here?

Karen Culley has written numerous short stories, essays and poetry. She was born and raised in New York City. Final word...”that double portion is something else!”