



THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

## The HEAL Mission

HEAL is a place for medical students to share their growth and development, for faculty and staff to impart their knowledge gained from experience, and for members of the community to express how health and healing have impacted their lives.

We hope this work increases your appreciation for the art of medicine.

Thank you,

HEAL Newsletter team

## In This Issue:

### Prose

<a href="#">Gratitude</a> by Mia Klein.....	1
<a href="#">The Limitations of Medicine</a> by Shawn Shah.....	4
<a href="#">I Didn't Know</a> by Eileen Sperl-Hawkins.....	5
<a href="#">Hazel Eyes</a> by Angela Guzman.....	8

### Poetry

<a href="#">Cowboy Winter</a> by Carol Faith Warren.....	2
<a href="#">September</a> by Alexandra Mannix.....	2
<a href="#">Life</a> by Jason A. Boothe.....	3
<a href="#">The Brink</a> by Eva Bellon.....	5
<a href="#">2012</a> by Nilda M. Rodriguez.....	6
<a href="#">Mothers and Daughters</a> by Andra L. Prum.....	7

### Artwork

<a href="#">Birds in Nicaragua</a> by Kevin Yan.....	1
<a href="#">Feeling Small, But Epic</a> by Fernando Guarderas.....	2
<a href="#">Wakulla Springs</a> and <a href="#">Dew After a Summer Storm</a> by Ryan Humphries.....	3
<a href="#">El Haitiano</a> by Rennier Alejandro Martinez.....	5
<a href="#">Sunflowers</a> and <a href="#">Winding Road</a> by Joshua Greenstein.....	6
<a href="#">Mother &amp; Daughter Love</a> and <a href="#">Two Day Old Miracle</a> by Mitali Agarwal.....	7
<a href="#">Care</a> by Marielys Figueroa-Sierra.....	8

# Heal

Humanism Evolving through Arts and Literature



*Birds in Nicaragua* **Kevin Yan, Class of 2015**

## Gratitude

*Mia Klein, Class of 2014*

Reflecting back on the medical mission trip I went on to Nicaragua this past summer with a team of medical students and faculty, I recall one particularly hot day. Feeling sticky from the thick humidity and overwhelming heat, I looked up to see an elderly woman in a wheelchair being pushed down the long field towards our makeshift clinic. I went out to meet her and sat with her while we waited for the doctor to finish with his current patient. She told me about her partial foot amputation nearly a year ago, which left her unable to walk. Losing her independence, she was distressed by the burden her care placed on her family. She had run out of her diabetes and blood pressure meds several days before we got there and was unable to afford more. When I told her we had the medications she needed, she grasped my hands and thanked me. When I told her that another team would be back in August and she could

be seen by a doctor and get even more medications then, tears came to her eyes. I realized the true difference our teams were making in these tiny towns in Nicaragua. We are providing continuity of free care to these people and to see the tremendous relief this afforded them was deeply moving.

Every patient was gracious for whatever we could do for them. From the patient with pneumonia and diabetes that needed multiple medications, to the woman that needed a pregnancy test, or the family that needed multivitamins—they were grateful. Our patients dressed in their very best clothes out of respect for us, and sometimes waited the entire day to be seen, but they always shook our hands and expressed their gratitude for providing medical care in their small town. Now I am the one grateful, for the people we treated in Nicaragua reminded me of the power and joy of medicine.

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your excellent submissions.*

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## Cowboy Winter

*Carol Faith Warren, Circulations*

Once upon a winter's night  
The snow was blowing hard.  
Throwing kisses made of ice,  
It whipped across the yard.  
It beckoned to a snowman;  
It wanted him to play.  
It raced along the ridge line  
And chased the cows away.  
It sang along the wire  
Until the fences broke.  
It whistled in the chimney  
And curled up in the smoke.  
I stepped outside to ask it  
Please to go away,  
But it shoved me in a snowdrift  
And now I'm here to stay.  
In the spring time  
They'll find me  
As froz' as froz' can be;  
They'll bury me in spring time  
Beneath the tall pine trees.

*Feeling Small, But Epic*

**Fernando Guarderas, Class of 2015**



## September

*Alexandra Mannix, Class of 2014*

And Sunday  
I spent with you in mind  
Your eyes chiseled in my brain  
And on Monday  
It was finally time  
To erase all my pain

So I wonder  
Now lying in my bed  
With obstructed sight  
Crashing thunder  
Shakes my ears, broken dead  
Reminding me of night

The leaves turn brown  
A fierce wind ripped my corpse  
And cold rain burned my soul  
I heard a sound  
We fell so fast apart  
I tried to keep it whole

But in September  
We sat and watched our lives  
Turn black and gray with dust  
And  
In October  
Left with who, what, why  
Wanting us



## Life

*Jason A. Boothe, Class of 2013*

I saw...  
I watched...  
A person...die today  
She seemed confused  
As if she wondered why I stared at her that way.  
Momentary gasps of air  
Escaping her lungs  
Were the only sounds heard.  
Neither one of us said a word.  
Eyes glossy, skin dry, body frail  
I remember my attending telling me, one day soon,  
He thought her major organs would fail.

But I can't stop thinking  
I'm the one who failed!  
Blessed with what gift,  
My hands are now useless,  
She gripped my fingers with the little  
Strength she had remaining  
As I found myself refraining,  
Or simply holding back tears.  
All of a sudden all of my fears hit me at once.

I could do...nothing  
Nothing in years one or two  
prepared me to do anything like this.  
Years three and four didn't prepare me for much more  
Nothing more than life.  
Death wasn't a part of the plan.  
Now I stand silently holding this woman's hand  
Thinking, God, why does she have to die,  
I don't understand.

Will I ever understand?  
How Cold and Lonely  
Death must be.  
I don't even think this woman has a family  
It's... just me.  
Over the past two and a half weeks  
I've become her son.  
No not just her resident, not just her doctor  
I've become a part of her  
As if I exited her womb  
And I knew someday soon  
I would have to watch as my mother dies  
Consumed by pain,  
How will I ever be the same?

Will I ever be the same?  
I just kept thinking  
To save this woman's life  
There simply must be another way  
Because truly, I don't ever want to say,  
I watched another person die...today.

*Dew After A Summer Storm* **Ryan Humphries, Class of 2015**



*Wakulla Springs* **Ryan Humphries, Class of 2015**



# The Limitations of Medicine

Shawn Shah, Class of 2013

It was just another ordinary morning on the fourteenth floor of the Ginsberg Tower at Florida Hospital. Akin to every morning for the past few weeks, I printed out the list of patients, sifted through new laboratory data and scans from the previous day, and chatted with the nurse to learn if any overnight changes had occurred with our surgical patients. It had been nearly three weeks since my surgery rotation started, and I had already developed my own routine. Indeed, I had become adept at condensing an overnight history, performing a pertinent physical examination, answering a few questions, and writing a patient note in approximately ten minutes. I understood this was imperative to being efficient.

However, this morning would transpire to be unlike any that I had experienced.

The first room I had visited was that of Mr. R's, who was on day one post-operative from an open cholecystectomy. As I walked into the room, I flicked on the lights, only to illuminate a gaunt elderly gentleman of seemingly Indian origin slumbering in the recliner. As I crept closer, I startled Mr. R as he quickly awoke, still groggy but with a warm smile. I introduced myself and told him that I was a third year medical student who was working with the surgery team to check on him this morning. "Any trouble overnight, Mr. R?" His deep-set eyes pierced blankly back at mine. "Well, I imagine you are exhausted. Your nurse said that you did just fine last night. I am going to check your belly, and then I will have the attending come by later this morning." Mr. R continued to stare back at me, empty of any expression on his furrowed face. I proceeded with my examination and was pleased to find a well-healing incision site with no signs of dehiscence or infection. As I left the room, I waved goodbye, and Mr. R in response uttered, "Okay, doctor." Moving to the next room, I could not help but think about how peculiar my exchange was with Mr. R. Nevertheless, I continued to proceed with rounds in order to make it to the first surgery on time.

As I sat down to complete my last patient note, I watched Mr. R's nurse swiftly leave his room. She appeared rattled, and exclaimed, "He will not even stay still to let me do a finger stick!" While uncertain of what to do, I instinctively wanted to help. I vigilantly approached Mr. R and asked him if everything was okay. His face remained devoid of any emotion. I asked, "Mr. R, do you understand what is going on here?" He anxiously began to look around the room as though his eyes were searching for words. I was baffled. However, just as I too began to frantically look around the

room for words, Mr. R broke the silence with, "Indian?" I nodded. He then asked, "Tame Gujarati bolo cho?" which translated to, "Do you speak Gujarati?" Stunned, I nodded yet again. Within seconds, tears began to trickle down the elderly man's cheeks as he bent forward to touch my feet, an act that Jains use to ask for blessings from those who are elderly or deities. I was dumbfounded. I had been so fixated on Mr. R's biological condition and getting the information that I needed that I neglected to care for Mr. R as a human being. And how was it overlooked that he did not speak or comprehend English? Did no one care as long as he was improving?

I explained to Mr. R in Gujarati his operation and prognosis. I explained to him that they needed to perform a finger stick to evaluate his glucose level because of his diabetes. Tears of relief continued to stream down his face.

That night, I could not wait to call my parents and tell them about my day. They too were in awe, but reminded me that patients are human, and like my family and closest friends, deserve my utmost deference and kindness.

The next morning, I immediately went to check on Mr. R. As I entered his room, I hung my white coat on the door and asked him how he was feeling. He responded with a resounding, "Bao saru," which means, "very good." I sat down beside Mr. R and just held his hand. He began to tell me how he worked as a farmer his entire life in Gujarat, India, and had recently moved in with his daughter after his wife passed away from a heart attack. His daughter and son-in-law worked during the day so they were unable to manage his care until the evenings. However, during the day, he was all alone with different people coming into and out of his room, talking to him in a manner and language that was incomprehensible. This had become routine.

I was about to leave the room, when Mr. R told me that he was pleased to see me again as I had now become a part of his family. Taken aback, I was already in motion before I realized that I was touching his feet, asking for his blessing.

I came to medical school to absorb as much scientific knowledge as I could, but failed to realize that the limitation of medicine is truly fulfilled by humanism and beneficence. In fact, I once had an attending who told me that, "understanding the medicine will be the easy part of your journey." Mr. R showed me that warmth, compassion, and empathy are just as integral to patient care as scientific knowledge. Perhaps, it could be said that my white coat has come to exemplify the medical knowledge that I have accumulated over the past three years, but up until my encounter with Mr. R, it lacked the true art of medicine.



## I Didn't Know

Eileen Sperl-Hawkins

"I'm Dr. T. I will do your open heart surgery."

*My eyes blink in rapid spurts. My husband exhales with a force that echoes in my ears.*

"If I do it Thursday, I promise to have your three chest tubes out by Sunday."

*My teeth dig into my lips; my head pressure focuses in my frontal sinuses.*

"Let's hope the myxoma has not compromised your valve. If so, you should decide if you want a pig or cow..."

*I ask: "Open heart surgery? What's going to happen? How long will I be in the hospital? We have a wedding in L.A. in mid-November. What's a myxoma?"*

"Well...you discuss those questions with Dr. S, your cardiologist. He'll let me know your decision. The myxoma could break off at any time; you must have it removed as soon as possible."

[Dr. T pauses.]

"I'll see you again before I operate."

*My husband and I sit. He grabs my hand; he is squeezing it. I've no idea what is involved here.*

**I didn't know** my rib cage would be sawed open and that it would be wired shut.

**I didn't know** my myxoma (the floating vegetation attached inside of my heart) would be scooped out and the hole in my heart stitched closed.

**I didn't know** the myxoma would be the largest one Dr. S had ever seen.

**I also didn't know** that usually doctors only see myxomas in pathology reports after the patient has died.

El Haitiano  
Rennier Alejandro Martinez

## The Brink

Eva Bellon, Class of 2013

I'm trapped in the base of my mind  
I exist only where Atlas holds up my world  
I'm sitting in my brainstem trying to claw my way to the front  
I feel pain and I hear you  
Oh I hear you  
But I'm stuck back here  
It's a long thin rope in the dark  
I try to use it to pull myself out, hand over hand  
The more I pull the deeper it seems I stay, an equal force  
roots me here  
I haven't the slightest clue with whom I am playing this tug  
of war  
I never reach full submersion  
I don't get swallowed in darkness  
I can still feel the rope in my hand  
But this place doesn't feel like consciousness





*This poem was written by a woman who was about to celebrate 50 years of marriage to her husband in the year 2012. The year started with her husband having a heart attack, while they were 250 miles away from home. She was terrified, but she did what she could to stay calm. After she got her husband to the hospital, she called her physician son and told him to notify his siblings, but not to come. I am that son. This poem is revealing to me, as I had no idea how difficult it was for my mother, and I did not know how scared she was until she shared this work with me. It was written in the middle of the night, while my dad was in the hospital, and she was all alone. —Jose Rodríguez*

## 2012

*Nilda M. Rodriguez*

January came as expected;  
A dull pain in the chest,  
A drink of water, a rest  
In a corner of the sofa, seated.

Night comes, and with it shadows.  
Heavens brighten the earth  
And dreams of a better morning  
Show up in the bitter night.

Six a.m. comes very fast;  
A pain, a cry for help rings  
In the cool morning of January 3rd.  
A soft I love you is heard.

The phone, the phone, no signal!  
A quick prayer is sent to the Lord.  
Response comes fast, we are on our way.  
The heart, the heart is giving up.

The heavens are flooded with prayers,  
The Lord and Master responds  
With expert care and love—  
He is here to guide and help us.

*Winding Road* **Joshua Greenstein, Class of 2015**



*Sunflowers* **Joshua Greenstein, Class of 2015**



# Mothers and Daughters

*Andra L. Prum, DO*

I am my mother's daughter.

I cry,  
smile,  
laugh,  
speak,  
walk,  
run,  
play,

hug and kiss sweetly,

cuddle,  
express,  
emote,  
aspire,  
achieve,

in the eyes of my mother gently guiding me thru life,  
loving unconditionally.

She passes away.

I am devastated.

I am my daughter's mother.

She cries,  
smiles,  
laughs,  
speaks,  
walks,  
runs,  
plays,

hugs and kisses sweetly,

cuddles,  
expresses,  
emotes,  
aspires,  
achieves,

in the eyes of her mother gently guiding her through life,  
loving unconditionally.

She rejuvenates my soul. She helps me heal.

I am reborn.

This poem is dedicated in memory of my loving mother,  
Marilyn Grosser, who blessed my life for the past 38 years  
and to my daughter, Amber Prum, who continues to do so.



*Mother & Daughter Love* **Mitali Agarwal, Class of 2015**



*Two Day Old Miracle* **Mitali Agarwal, Class of 2015**



## Hazel Eyes

Angela Guzman, Class of 2014

Beautiful hazel eyes greeted me as I entered the room. I shall never forget them. They belonged to a woman whose beauty was profound. She was an avid runner and a powerful kick boxer. These eyes belonged to a woman full of life, and stage four colon cancer. Prior to entering the room I reviewed her chart. I read her story, and yet, her fragility was not immediately a reality for me. Perhaps it was because she called this a minor setback in her life. Or, could it be that her radiant smile overshadowed her current trials? I am certain that it was our seemingly endless conversation about the fullness of her life that made me lose track of time. Our conversation ended abruptly by the entrance of my attending, and my report was severely lacking. I was not brave enough to tell him that we conversed about everything other than the reason why she was here today. In this moment of inadequacy I smiled because this conversation with my patient was worth more to me than my ability to recall her prescription history.

The gravity of my patient's situation had not hit me until my attending enlightened me with the truth. Her prognosis was slim, and God only knows how long she has to live. I felt as though the life had been sucked out of me the moment I was conscious of her situation. Sadly, this shouldn't have come as a surprise. Nonetheless, I was speechless and fought back the tears swelling in my eyes. While my attending offered me constructive criticism about my lackluster performance, my mind drifted back to those hazel eyes belonging to a woman who was turning 55. We jokingly discussed how she would get a Pap smear to celebrate the occasion. How

**She was not a diagnosis, she was not a woman dying from disease, she is a woman making the most of life, and I will never forget her.**

did I miss this prognosis?

Looking back I am confident that I bypassed her history because she chose to focus on the present. We laughed and conversed about jovial things instead of dwelling on the challenges of the past. I suppose time passes quickly when you're lost in good conversation. Although I apologized for my poor report, I do not regret the time spent simply talking to my patient. She was not a diagnosis, she was not a woman dying from disease, she is a woman making the most of life, and I will never forget her. Subsequently, I now realize that there is an invisible emotional barrier present when you are studying diseases in a book because we are estranged from the gravity of its destruction. Today I was reminded that diseases are not inseparable from people. As physicians we are called to manage and treat disease. More importantly we are called to care for the person living with the disease.

Care **Marielys Figueroa-Sierra**

