



# HEAL

Humanism Evolving through Arts and Literature

## 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.

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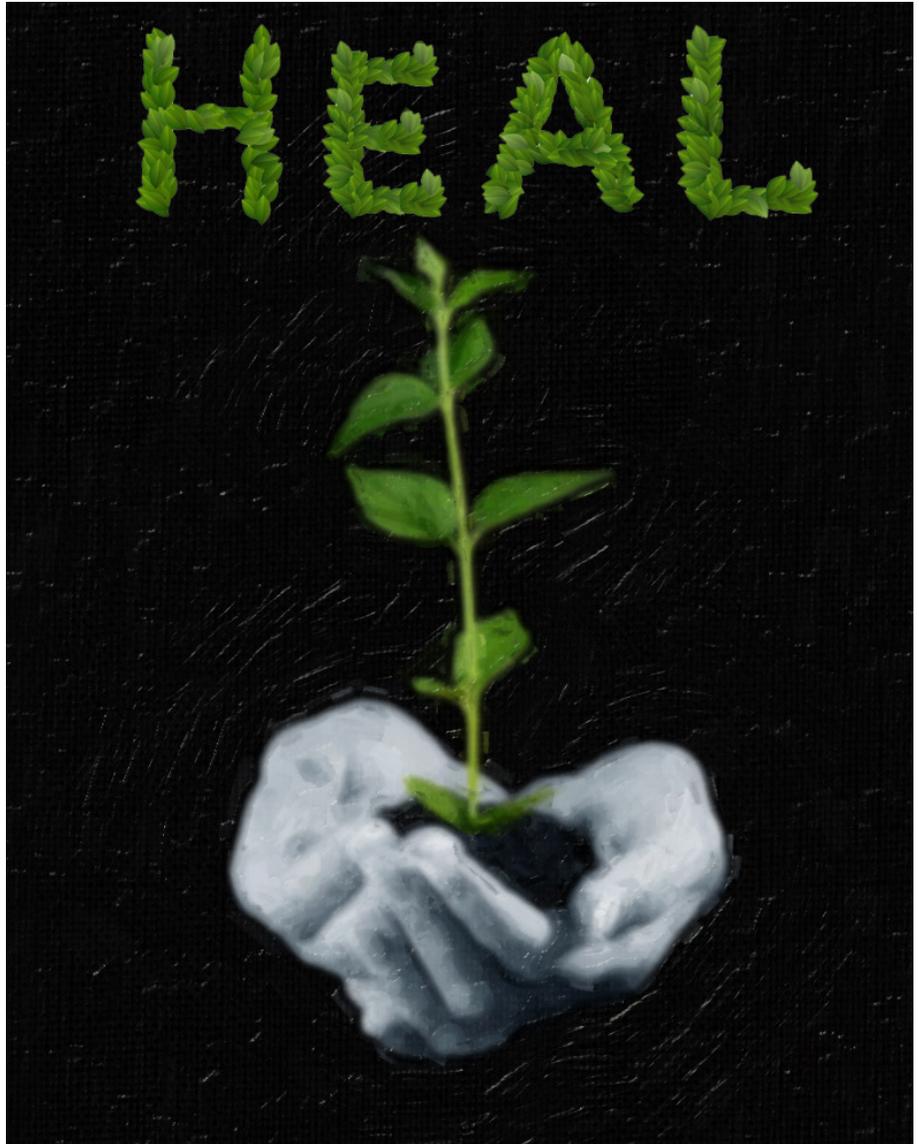
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Jesse O’Shea, Class of 2015

## Water-Women and the Wombs Within

Yaowaree Leavell, Class of 2015

No abundance of floral prints and chiaroscuro baby portraits can soften the stark contrast between the primal violence of childbirth and the institutional frigidity of the hospital setting. Despite the harsh glare of the operating lamp and the endless supply of sterile towelettes, we insist on entering the world accompanied by the gush of organic fluids and animal odors that have marked labors and deliveries since before continental drift. Around my fourth or fifth delivery I discovered how much truer this is of “natural” births than of those assisted by increasing degrees of pharmacological intervention.

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## Calling all Artists!

Would you like to see your artwork on the cover of HEAL Volume 6? Submit your original artwork or photography by November 10, 2014. More info at <http://journals.fcla.edu/heal/announcement>



She checked into the Labor and Delivery ward with her boyfriend a little after dinnertime, dreads askew and sweat already beading on her hazelnut skin. Depending on the intensity of her contractions, she alternated between incoherent whimpers and lucid, tense questions about the likelihood of completing her delivery naturally. We reassured her that she was ultimately the mistress of her own delivery, and that while the epidural would not be available once the final countdown was initiated (so to speak), she could choose a number of other pain management options, or not, as she saw fit. She relaxed into her hospital bed and appeared to retreat to some remote corner of her mind. I had a sudden, misplaced urge to ask her to take me there, to walk me through where she had gone verbally; was she visualizing star patterns? Was she conducting some kind of take-no-prisoners negotiation with her baby? Was she taking her own internal inventory to better assess her chances of successful delivery, or was she leaving her body altogether to avoid the pain? The moment passed and I contented myself with placing some paper-towel wrapped ice in her hand instead. She rubbed it back and forth across her forehead and upper lip and sighed in obvious relief.

In the time it took us to set up the room and grab an instrument tray she was already in the grip of some terrible, ancient, pre-programmed sequence that I had not observed in any of the previous deliveries. It was futile to ask her to stop pushing; her lizard brain had detached itself from the reins of its wrinkled primate cortex many minutes before and decided that the time was nigh. There would be no carefully timed waiting for the contraction to build, and laboring down seemed no more possible than the sudden arrival of a baby-laden stork at the windowsill. Her groans progressed to guttural bellows which resonated through my surgical boot covers and up

into the base of my ears, as if she were trying to distribute her pain through some forgotten vibratory medium. Her nails dug little half-moons into the seasoned wrists of the night nurse holding her quivering thigh, and her skin took on a dusky cinnamon hue. Her belly was covered with a gown and a blue folded drape, but I imagined her uterus clamping downwards like some kind of monstrous mollusk expelling the foreign body within it. On the third bellowing push she screamed, "He wants to come out NOW, get him OUT OF ME!!!!!"

And with impeccable narrative timing, he arrived.

Not to be outdone by his preceding birth-fellows, the six pound peanut of a baby exploded out of his mother in a matter of seconds. The attending tried gamely but with little success to control his head and shoulders as they slithered out. Amniotic fluid splashed across both of our gowns with audible force and just like that it was over. The clocks started ticking again, the lights brightened, the spectators sprang into action and the ancient force that had possessed her released its hold.

On his way out, the "wolverine baby" (as the attending called him) managed to inflict a long sulcal laceration and a labial tear, both of which were bleeding vigorously. The subsequent rapid delivery of the placenta and the tense repair which followed were striking in a completely different, wincing, breath-holding kind of way. When the bleeding finally stopped and she was allowed to hold her squalling boy to her breast, it seemed to me that they had become a new kind of human circuit; she had fed him with her blood, she was feeding him now with her milk, and she would (judging by the serene contentment on her smooth features) continue to feed him physically, mentally, and spiritually for as long as some spark of life animated her fierce, brown little body.

**On the third bellowing push  
she screamed,  
"He wants to come out NOW,  
get him OUT OF ME!!!!!"**

# The Hours

Tamra Travers, Class of 2016

*malignancies, neoplasms, cancers*

Described in gruesome detail, page after page after page. I spend my hours studying cytogenetic markers, defective receptors and signaling pathways. The cells do not die. They are constantly replicating, constantly creating more and more and more cells that will never stop growing on their own.

*leukemias, lymphomas, neuroblastoma, esophageal cancer, breast cancer*

But all I see on these pages are the faces of warriors. Faces of children, grandparents, and friends. Playful blue eyes and flowing blonde hair on a slender frame only 8 years old, always dancing. Deep dark brown eyes of wisdom and understanding, but these eyes also know laughter well. All familiar faces of determination, courage, and tenacity. These faces that are so dear to me are formed from the medical terminology and microscopic images.

Many conquered and now live with the agonizing memories of how the poisonous drugs slowly destroyed the cancer cells and so many of their own cells alongside, leaving their bodies ravaged and weak. Their faces are now strong with new flesh and color that radiates. The fear of recurrence or new cancers still hauntingly lingers.

And there are some who do not live with this fear. Whose faces are memories, still pale and thin. Their physical weakness was crippling, but their soul's strength carried the unknowable weight of death forward into the distant pages we cannot yet see.

*Central Park, NY*

**Danny Bernabe, Class of 2016**





*Backyard* **Kevin Yan, Class of 2015**

## Breathe

*Tamra Travers, Class of 2016*

The air surrounding me is clouded and thick with the stench of negativity.

Overstressed, behind, rushing. The clock speeds faster, faster, and I am grasping for air.

The breath I try to catch is stale and thick with slimy grouch. It does not satisfy.

Suffocating, I drag myself across the hall while the screams of tummy aches and ugly coughs bombard my ears. I turn to see a flood of tears, exhaustion, and fear swirling towards me. My emotions have begun their attack. I reach for the handle of the door and dart inside.

When I look up, three faces are staring at me. Three beautifully round and dark faces.

The mother stares with relief. The wait is finally over.

A child glares with fear and clutches her mother tightly in a fit of panic. Needles and pokes shake her imagination. Her thick hair hangs down low on her back in a silky black stream, but a few clumps stick to her tears on her fever flushed cheeks. She moans and clings tight to the comfort and safety housed within her mama.

A third face watches intently with curiosity. He follows my every motion with a smile of wonder, and wonder pours into the air from that smile. I gratefully breathe it in, and the sweet air fills the depths and even the tiniest crevices of my lungs. My face relaxes and the corners of my mouth turn slightly upward. The curious little brother smiles back, shining his tiny teeth at me. I wrinkle my nose and cross my eyes, then unwind my face to see his face mimicking my own contortion. Laughter leaves his mouth and fills the room with its beautiful, soft sound.

I can breathe again.

# Unconditional Friendship

*Angela Guzman, Class of 2014*

I've been betrayed  
Misled and should be jaded  
From friendships that faded  
Time persuaded them to pack their bags and leave...  
Ticking quickly as the seconds pass by  
Remind me that life is too short not to breathe and appreciate the nature of man  
The hurt, the pain, abandonment...  
But in spite of it all I stand with an open heart waiting to be slain yet again  
By another so called friend  
That comes to mend...but really destroys  
I am too loving to be hating  
And more than willing to be betrayed again  
In hopes that these trials would lead to a permanent friend  
The kind that I try to be  
Relentlessly giving...even when I have nothing to give  
Loving freely; even when it hurts  
You see my passion is my weakness  
I am pleasantly gullible  
With meekness and humility  
I willingly present myself as a gift to be enjoyed...then discarded  
Cherished temporarily  
But I do not cry over the departed  
Instead appreciate the moments of time spent together  
Built to weather many storms  
Including this one  
My "friend"...I am here even when you are not  
And when you return  
There will I be standing with open arms  
And an open heart



*Orphanage—Dumay, Haiti*  
**Rhea Ramjit, Class of 2017**



*Peacock Portrait*  
**Trung Tran, Class of 2014**



*Plumeria in the Rain*  
**Debra Danforth,**  
**Director of the Clinical Learning Center**

# Orchestra

Angela Guzman, Class of 2014

The conductor in the red hat stood at the head of the patient's bed, his arms crossed as he assessed the status of the 33-year-old man who had just been hit by a semi-truck. He was deep in thought, mentally processing the condition of his crashing patient. The team members ran into the room and instinctively donned blue gowns, caps, and gloves. Then they stood in attention at the patient's side, awaiting command. Without hesitation each member performed their task at the signal of the conductor. Moving rhythmically they simultaneously worked together towards one goal: to save a life. I desperately wanted to be a functional member of the team, so I stood in attention awaiting my command, holding blankets to cover the patient once he stabilized. As each member worked quickly to complete their task, the conductor watched the monitors for signs of improvement. The surgery residents inserted chest tubes, but did not yield signs of reassurance; there was no blood or rush of air. Concurrently, the ED resident did an ultrasound searching for blood around the heart, abdomen, or pelvis. Again, the test was negative. In spite of being given liters of fluids, the patient's blood pressure began to drop quickly. The seasoned conductor must have anticipated the event because he augmented the tempo effortlessly. Following his command, three men stood in a line at the patient's side, and the largest man started the chest compressions. His pace was methodical and his arms were powerful as they compressed the chest wall. The clinical pharmacist marched forward to supervise the administration of the pressor agents while the conductor assessed the monitor for signs of a shockable rhythm. After multiple rounds of the same dance the conductor finally

**Moving rhythmically they simultaneously worked together towards one goal: to save a life.**



*Red Flower* **Desiree Sant**

decided to end the symphony. Time of death: 11:59. At the conclusion of the performance the conductor removed his red hat and bowed his head. He thanked the team for their efforts and stated that he would notify the family. As he was signing forms, I heard him confess that he felt the patient's final pulse and watched

him take his last breath at the beginning of the code. I was naive to believe that this symphony would end with a cheerful melody as we stabilized the patient and rolled him to the ICU. I spent the rest of my shift replaying his song in my head while the other members of the orchestra changed the tune.



*The Dragonfly That Crippled Me*  
**Mickey Adair**

# Mi quinceañera

José E. Rodríguez, MD

Fifteen years of happiness  
Fifteen years of joys  
Fifteen years of laughter  
Fourteen of them with our boy(s)

You've changed my life completely  
Fixed my attitude, cured my doubts, set me free  
As I watch from a short but safe distance  
I see you change eternity

I know that when you turned fifteen  
Your *quince* was not celebrated  
But you will always be my *quinceañera*  
A fact that cannot be debated

So maybe we won't have your *quince*  
Yet I know you'd look great in that dress  
With the new high heels, and the expensive jewels  
But I know big parties can stress

These first fifteen years of marriage  
Will be hard, maybe impossible to beat  
With you I have felt and experienced  
Love's purest joys, exquisitely sweet

I pray that when our daughter arrives—  
A little girl who will soon bless our home  
The child that will change our family  
Joining us, making us her own—

I have only one wish for our daughter  
A small dream of what she can do  
I hope that when she turns *quince*  
She will have grown up to be just like you





*Morning Reflection*  
**Tyler Wellman, Class of 2017**

## I Stole

*Charles Howze*

I stole from my folks, I stole from my friends,  
I stole from myself again and again  
I stole from my kids, I stole from my wife,  
I stole from Jesus Christ, like it was all right  
I stole off my jobs, I stole out of stores,  
I even stole my brother-in-law's watch, my sister's rings and my nephew's clothes,  
I stole from my brother, the best one I ever had  
I pray that one day he forgives me, but for now he really mad  
I stole from my sister, I mean I really let her down  
I can't explain why I did what I did, and I was too ashamed to stick around,  
When I stole from my sister, I knew I had to go,  
But that's why I'm back to let her know  
That her little brother don't steal no more