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HEAL

Humanism
Evolving through
Arts and
Literature

May 2010

Iris Study

Brian Bauerband, Class of 2013

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Stitches

Stephenie Pollock, Class of 2013

When I was five years old my mother developed late-onset schizophrenia. It was devastating to both our family and to the community who supported her. She had always been elegant, classy, beautiful and well-rounded. She was a woman of many talents, and within a year her life drastically changed. After a brief time, a divorce, and extended psychiatric care, I was able to spend time with her again, both supervised and unsupervised. It was great to have my mother back, and even though she was different, I was still able to enjoy her company and learn from her in more ways than I could understand at the time.

One of the things my mother and I shared was our passion for painting. During our visits, she would teach me about the most famous artists and their artistic techniques. One day we came across a three and a half foot canvas, and she told me I should paint "Starry Night" originally done by Vincent Van Gogh. After a few visits, and some wonderful quality time, I finished the painting and she hung it above her couch. Everyone was impressed that I finished this project, and my mother was especially proud.

However, later that year, my mother fell into a very bad episode of psychosis, and took a sharp

knife and slashed straight lines down the entire painting, leaving it ruined and full of slash marks. I was devastated when she called to tell me it was the result of a break in. I knew better, and we both cried. Everyone in my family understood how much quality time had been put into the painting, and what it meant to my mother and I. My sister tried to have it re-matted shortly after, but nothing would do the trick.

As time went by, and all was forgiven, I realized it was time to repair this painting, which still had not been discarded. After a few days of thinking, I decided that, like the doctor I wanted to be, I was going to hand stitch each slash with thick gold thread. When the stitching was finished, the painting took on a whole new light. It looked better, not because it had repeated gold stitching down the slash lines, but because to me it meant that in any bad situation, whether sad, angry, depressed, or broken, there is always a way to move through, overcome, or "mend" a problem or wound. I was able to turn my mother's illness into something positive, as this painting now hangs more beautifully than ever before. It is no longer "Starry Night", a version copied from Vincent Van Gogh, or a painting ruined by my mother's attacks of hallucinations and paranoia, but a symbol that no matter what bumps you hit along the road of life, there is always a golden lining and a way to overcome obstacles. I live my life by these ideals and will always remember this story.



The Gown: A Pathography

Jill Ward, Class of 2010

I walked in wearing my white coat to make a point and because I had just rushed from my medical school rotation to my doctor's appointment. "Take everything off, including your underwear, and put the gown on open to the front." I had already drowned out the voice of the nurse. I know how to put on the gown, I thought to myself, I'm twenty-seven years old and have had enough exams to know the routine of what to do and where to stand. The nurse knew this, didn't she? Doesn't she know who I am? She not only has seen me here three times in the last two months but she saw me walk in with my white coat on. The *white coat*, which clearly indicated my status in the medical community. I'm the one who says "Take everything off..." I still smiled and waited for her to exit. You have to act gracefully at these visits, don't you? Say "Good Morning" with a high-pitched squeak at the end to show your enthusiasm and how much you enjoy letting everyone see you half naked. I took off my white coat, hung it neatly on the chair next to the exam table, and then quickly took off the rest of my clothing.

There I was, sitting on the cold exam table in what I would barely call a gown; it is paper after all... thin, see-through, humbling paper. Why even call it a Gown? Gowns are full, covering, and beautiful, made for parties, dances, and fun. "Isn't that ironic?" I thought. Even more ironic was me, the fully capable senior medical student having to sit here waiting for the doctor to see me. Just this morning all the patients scurrying in the halls and in the waiting rooms were waiting for me. Now, I had been waiting for hours, only to finally be triaged into a room and stripped down. I am made to sit in a freezing exam room and wait even more. I wanted to open the door and yell: "Hello, doctor, do you know who I am in here? My disease is not some routine visit, the others can wait. I need to be seen now!" But I was shivering enough now that my seat was becoming a little warmer and I refused to give up that heat by moving, even to voicelessly summon the doctor to my Ballroom exam room. And more dreadful was the thought that getting up would risk my Gown falling off, or even worse... tearing. The only help I had was a thin plastic belt that tied around my waist to keep the Gown on me. Right, I thought as I looked down at the Gown, like that belt would save my breasts from falling out, or the bottom of the Gown from flinging up and exposing my buttocks.

My Ballroom hardly had enough space to move, just about two feet to the door and three feet to the sides of the bed. I stared at the walls, decorated in pertinent patient-centered informational posters. My Ballroom, full of the things I told patients everyday in 'layperson' terms about their disease or condition. "Breast Development, Fibrocystic Breast Disease, Finding a Breast Mass", my eyes danced over the poster titles in boredom.

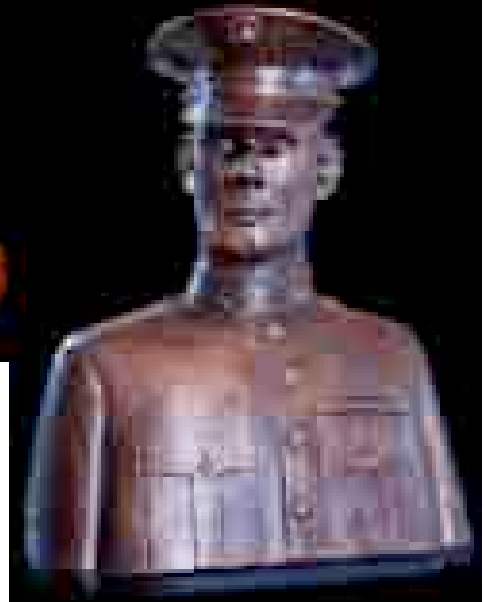
The door finally opened, and then he knocked. What was that? He had already granted full view for every passing person in the hall and had made full eye contact with me before knocking. I quickly shuffled my Gown around, grasping and crinkling the paper to cover my bottom. I could feel the breeze of the opening and closing of the door and my tummy now showed, but perhaps I had to live with that for another shift of the Gown and it could be on the floor. I focused; I needed to gain my composure so I could intellectually get some work done here, and so I crossed my arms tightly over my breasts and smiled. The doctor rambled on and on, shifting through my chart, clearly he was busy today, I thought. "So we'll need to biopsy, set it up on the way out, then be back in two weeks for a follow up. We can talk about BRCA analysis then too." His voice echoed loudly as if he were at the top of one of those long staircases you see in movies giving a speech. I sat there, shifting in an awkward dance as I felt my Gown falling and moving. My aunt must have had to go through something like this, the in's and out's of being diagnosed with Breast Cancer, a double mastectomy, a repeat surgery, and reconstruction. I had questions, concerns, worries, but he already had the door cracked open to leave before I could even recheck how much of me the Gown was exposing. I clung to my Gown for modesty, hoping not to be seen while the nurse scurried out with him to the next patient.

He didn't even examine me. Did my Gown mean nothing to him? This dress should have signaled the need to *do* something to me, either poking or prodding. I did not do this in vain! I quickly glanced over to my clothes, the mundane everyday clothing. I saw my white coat, hanging on the edge of the chair. Didn't I know that what he said is what I would have said? Didn't I know what a busy schedule he had, overbooked patients, and how unconcerned I should be?

I stood up and tried to rip off my Gown to hurry and get dressed. The paper flew in the air landing everywhere in the room. Intruders could enter this unlocked room, so I thrashed harder to get out of the Gown; the paper had never seemed so strong and yet too thin to cover me. I had to fight it off my left arm and rip the belt off my waist.

It was over. I placed my Gown on the table, now all torn and disfigured. In all its gloriousness it could not grant me my one wish and desire. I put on my white coat. I grabbed my chart and went to check out. Opening the door I peered down the hall, catching a glimpse of a woman clinging to her Gown as the doctor flung open her door.





Dormant Ability

David Page,
Class of 2013

My phone rang sometime between 8:30 and 9:00 AM on the Monday of spring break. I heard "You awake, son?" It wasn't my dad; it was my next door neighbor. I had made breakfast plans and, not surprisingly, I overslept. I mumbled that I would jump in the shower and be over in fifteen minutes.

I suppose having breakfast with a sixty-four year old man isn't quite what everyone expects a medical student would be doing on spring break, but I wouldn't have it any other way. Mr. Cliff Leonard has lived next door to my family since before I was born. Although we seem like an unlikely pair, we spend a good deal of time together every time I go back to Jacksonville.

Mr. Leonard received a new heart over a decade ago and we have grown close ever since. He recently described his distinct memory of returning home from the hospital. My entire family came over to visit. He said that we all had the same awkward response when we reached the end of the driveway. We did not know exactly what to do or say, well, everyone but me. Being the uninhibited kid that I was (and probably still am), I ran up to him and gave him a big hug. I almost knocked him over, not realizing the fragility of his condition at the time. As he was rehabilitating that summer we spent a lot of time watching the World Cup.

Prior to receiving his transplant, Mr. Leonard had been a marine, police officer, home remodeler, and graduate student in psychology. With his new physical limitations, Mr. Leonard found himself with a great deal of free time. In an effort to find something to do with this time, he tried his hand at art. With no previous sign of artistic ability, Mr. Leonard began to create some amazing sculptures. He now works almost exclusively with clay and specializes in busts.

Looking for a way to give back, Mr. Leonard began a particularly touching form of community service. He has fashioned a bust of every marine from Jacksonville who has fallen in service to our country over the past few years. He has donated his work to either the family of the late soldier or the school that the soldier attended prior to deployment. The bronzed bust of a twenty-year-old Private First Class Nathan Clemons who died in Iraq on June 14, 2005 is now on display at his Alma Mater, Terry Parker High School in Jacksonville, FL.

Mr. Leonard has done a bust of my three oldest nieces in addition to giving our family several other hand-made gifts. One piece I find particularly amusing is the hand-carved wooden work named 'Jaws' that he gave to my father, an attorney, who is a 'shark' so to speak. Only recently have I become involved in his artwork. Over Christmas vacation, Mr. Leonard was working on a bust of a soldier who looked a bit like me. He asked that I come over to put on a marine jacket and hat to pose for this soldier's likeness. I felt bizarrely honored to model for this young man who gave everything he had defending our country. Since that point, Mr. Leonard has asked me to come over and help him in his studio whenever I am in town. He says he likes to have an extra set of eyes on the work, but I think he just enjoys having a good friend around. I certainly don't mind the free bagels and coffee.

My relationship with Mr. Leonard is one that I cherish and I have enjoyed seeing his phenomenal artwork. It has only been recently that I have begun to understand how much his artwork has helped in his recovery from having a heart transplant. Obviously, his artwork comes second to his phenomenal wife, but his art is clearly a big part of what keeps him going. Mrs. Leonard, the principal of a special needs school, is the epitome of a saint.

The most interesting thing about Mr. Leonard is that he had this dormant ability. He was entirely unaware of it for four decades and it wasn't until he underwent a life altering surgery that he was forced to explore himself and find this gift. It makes me wonder if I have talents that I have yet to realize. Maybe there is something I've been missing because I've been too busy or just plain dense.

More of Cliff Leonard's artwork can be seen at: www.sculpturebycliffleonard.com

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