



# CUENTOS

A COLLECTION OF ART FROM THE INTERNAL  
MEDICINE RESIDENTS AND ATTENDING AT GW

2019



A group of people is sitting on a grassy hill, watching a sunset over the ocean. In the background, several Moai statues are silhouetted against the bright sun. The scene is peaceful and communal.

"WE HAVE ALL  
KNOWN THE LONG  
LONELINESS AND WE  
HAVE LEARNED THAT  
THE ONLY SOLUTION  
IS LOVE AND THAT  
LOVE COMES WITH  
COMMUNITY."  
-DOROTHY DAY

**Sunset at Tahai** by Stephan Hanes, MD, RESD '12, *Associate Professor of Medicine*

"I am fond of a photo I took last year on the evening of the Southern Hemisphere's Winter Solstice in June 2018 on Easter Island, Chile."

# Letter from the Editors

Welcome to *Cuentos* 2019, the eleventh edition of the humanities magazine produced by the George Washington University Medical Faculty Associates Division of General Internal Medicine.

*Cuentos* originated as a humble effort by three medical residents to create a space where creativity could be shared and cultivated. Over time we have evolved with the different perspectives brought by new contributors, resident editors, and faculty advisors. This year, Dr. Anokhi Shah leads the endeavor as a new faculty advisor.

As we enter our second decade of publication, we believe that *Cuentos* will continue to play an important role in highlighting both the common and unique experiences of our healthcare team. With each turn of a page, you will discover the photographers, writers, poets, painters, and artists that are thriving within our very own Division of General Internal Medicine.

Whether you are a first-time reader or a longtime advocate, thank you for spending your time with us.

Yours Sincerely,

Danielle Engskow, MD, 2nd year Resident  
Esosa Imasuen, MD, 2nd year Resident  
Katrina Naik, MD, 1st year Resident  
L. Nedda Dastmalchi, DO, MA, 1st year Resident  
Katalin Roth, MD, JD, Professor of Medicine  
Anokhi Shah, MD, Assistant Professor of Medicine

## On the Cover



**That Wanaka Tree**  
By Anokhi Shah, MD, RESD '18,  
*Assistant Professor of Medicine*

"The strength of a tree is in its roots." A century old, this tree stands proudly in New Zealand. I like to think of our GW community as that Wanaka tree!

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## Letter from the Chair



Alan G. Wasserman, MD, MACP  
Eugene Meyer Professor and Chair  
Department of Medicine  
The George Washington University  
School of Medicine and Health Sciences

*Cuentos* is now entering its second decade of publication. Who would have thought that anyone would be interested in the humanistic side of our physicians? There is an old joke or saying that ends something like: ".....I would rather he/she be a good physician."

Well we have both. Good docs and talented individuals. I have a full collection of *Cuentos*, all ten of them (now eleven) and I am counting on them to pay for my retirement. That and my wife's original Woodstock Ticket. It is a pleasure to occasionally go thru the back issues and remember some of the house staff and faculty that have moved on to other locations.

It is what Bob Hope said in 1938 in *Thanks for the Memory* (lyrics by Leo Robin)

Thanks for the memory  
Of candlelight and wine, castles on the Rhine  
The Parthenon, and moments on the Hudson River line  
Thank you so much

It became Hope's theme song but time moves on and more fitting lyrics may be from the Fall Out Boy in 2007 in *Thnks fr th Mmrs*

And I want these words to make things right  
But it's the wrongs that make the words come to life  
Thanks for the memories, thanks for the memories

So we have moved on with new words, and pictures and photographs. It appears that we have an endless amount of non-medical talent and I am very appreciative of this year's editors for keeping this important endeavor vital and new.

Thanks for the (new) Memories.



REFLECTIONS

**Eye of the Beholder**  
***Colonne de Buren, Paris, France***

By Natasha Ang, MD, RESD '14  
*Assistant Clinical Professor of Medicine*

An engagement shoot  
Palace gardens in days of old  
A child's playground

## Beautiful

By Oyetewa Oyerinde, MD  
1st Year Resident

She was in second grade  
When my niece came home from school,  
She was crying.  
I ran to the front, opened up the door,  
Brought her in and hugged her tightly.  
When I pulled away and looked at her face,  
I swear my heart went 'thud'  
Her face was red.

Not from crying,  
Not face paint,  
It was blood.  
So, I cleaned her off,  
Used alcohol  
Amidst her tears and screams  
This girl's skin was hanging off!  
It truly was as bad as it seems  
Asked if she got hurt  
*Baby, did you fall?*  
And she said, *Not quite, Auntie.*  
*But the kids at school, they been really cruel*

*But the truth is they're right, Auntie.*  
*I cut the skin off my own face,*  
She said to me in defeat.  
*They said though I'm ugly cause I'm dark,*  
*I'm light-skinned underneath.*  
Only eight years old  
And the story goes,  
Found scissors in her seat  
Took the blades to her precious face,  
Cut down to the 'white meat'  
So she could be  
Beautiful.

## Cephalopod

By Sonia Silinsky Krupnikova, MD  
2nd Year Resident

Ink pen on paper.





## New Beginnings

By Kusha Davar, MD, RESD '18, CHIEF '19

For so long,  
I have felt content.  
With one deep sigh,  
Carrying on.

Intimacy,  
Guiding me to security.  
And static equilibrium,  
Bringing me solace.

Every beautiful lie,  
Has closed my eyes.  
But where is my hope,  
When things turn awry?

Illusions of what I used to love,  
Gazing through the reflection of the past.  
Now I have clear sight to see,  
What I have left behind.

## ◀ Kennedy Center Washington, DC

By Matt Taglieri, DO  
*1st Year Resident*

Vertical long-exposure image accentuating  
the celebratory lighting as it fills the water of  
the Potomac. Nikon D610. 2018.



## ◀ Zongzi

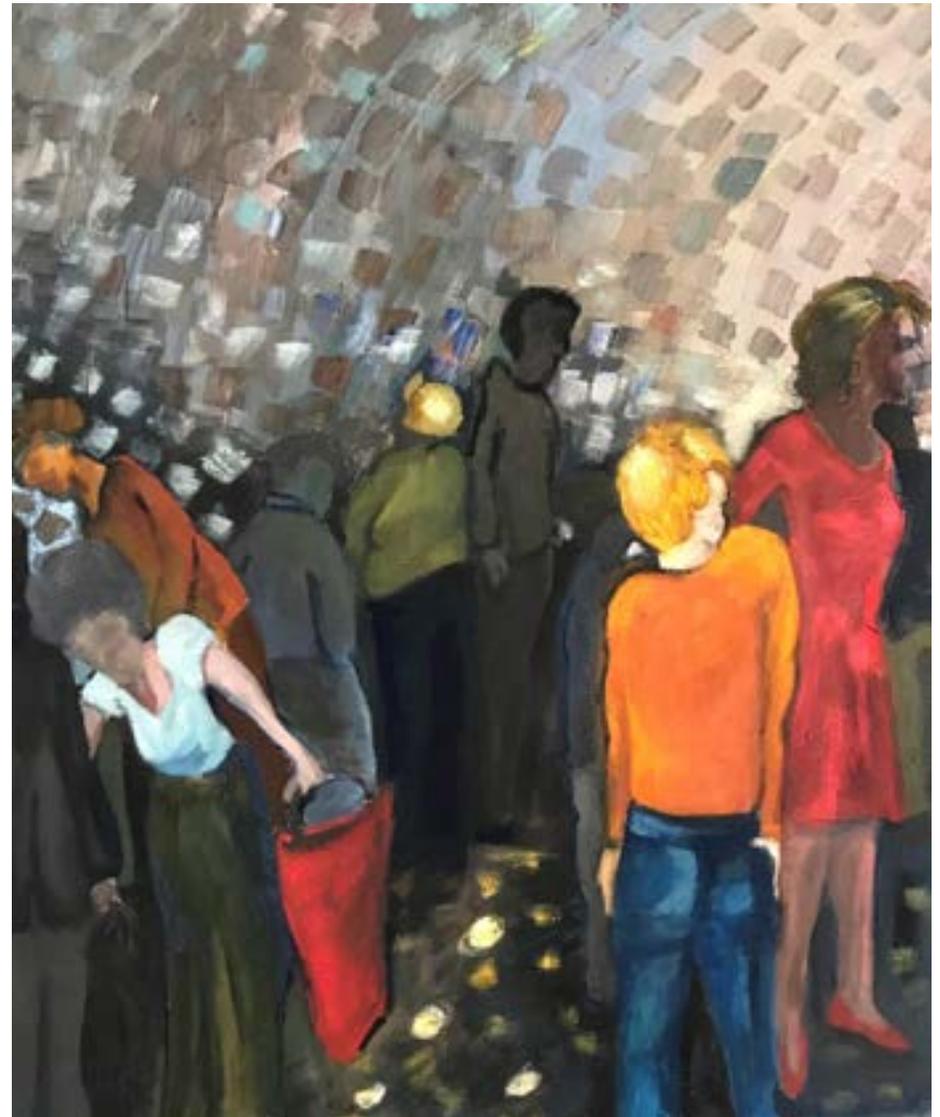
By Aileen Chang MD, MSPH  
*Assistant Professor of Medicine*

Zongzi are Chinese rice dumplings wrapped in leaves and tied with a string. Many years ago, a poet drowned himself in the Miluo River after trying to warn the government of a pending invasion. The people who lived there, distraught by his death, began throwing packets of rice into the river for him. These packets were named zongzi.

This seemingly hopeless act is a testament to the hope and tenderness that we humans possess in the face of political struggle, sickness, and the many other challenges we face today. I painted them hanging from green leaves to show hope.

## Metro Dreaming ▶

By Katalin Roth, MD, JD  
*Professor of Medicine and  
Director of the Division of  
Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine*



## Can You Hear The Waves? *La Jolla, California 2018*

By Tanuka Datta, MD, RESD '18, CHIEF '19

Acrylic on canvas.



## Rope

By Oyetewa Oyerinde, MD

*1st Year Resident*

I wonder if anyone noticed the college aged girl that  
walked into the corner store that day.  
Skinny, average height, shoulder length hair, caramel skin...  
Did anyone see her?

I wonder if anyone noticed her as she walked gingerly  
toward the back shelf  
that held the bag  
that held the rope

Did her legs drag like the last thirty minutes of a twelve-  
hour work shift?  
Did her chest move up and down deeply with each breath,  
air filling each lung cavity like even her lungs knew it may  
be the last time...  
Did anyone notice?

I wonder, did anyone see her back bent as though broken,  
heavy laden with the weight of unbearable grief,  
with turmoil, tequila, lime and a hint of salt  
stained into creases on her palms,  
scabs picked at too many times on scrawny slit wrists  
and arms and hands that reached towards the shelf  
that held the bag  
that held the rope.

When the rope made contact with her hands,  
did anyone notice the moment of silence...  
as dingy Chuck Taylors shuffled imperceptibly across store  
floors  
SILENCE.

For that moment, the Quiet itself screamed out  
*SAVE HER, SAVE HER,*  
*Can anyone see shes drowning?!*

I wonder...  
if they could smell the blood that undoubtedly tainted her breath when  
she asked:  
*Excuse me sir, how much for this rope?*  
Did the cashier notice the rigor mortis handshake she gave him after  
paying,  
could he see dirt accumulating around her feet as she turned to walk away,  
I wonder if he heard the coffin-top thud as the store door slammed shut  
behind her.

But most importantly...  
I wonder if she finally felt intelligent  
as she calculated exactly how long a piece of rope  
she needed to capture her impending audience.  
I wonder if she finally felt beautiful  
when she placed the rope tenderly above her collarbone,  
like a necklace passed down through generations  
Did she feel strong, as she fastened it securely around the base of her  
neck,  
and skull, and bones pinned against each other with its weight  
I wonder, did she finally feel love?  
When each individual fiber in the rope tightened around her neck,  
promising to be faithful,  
promising never to let her go,  
like the pain in her life,  
like the friends who never called,  
like the love of her life who walked away,  
like the finances  
like the grades,  
like her parents,

who found out she was gay  
her choices were too much for their faith,  
Said their love could no longer reach her until she made her  
path straight.

So many events, like single strands... intertwined into the  
strongest type of rope:  
noose around her neck,  
the further she stepped away,  
the tighter the rope felt.  
The tighter the rope felt.  
THE TIGHTER THE ROPE FELT....

She was my friend...  
And then she was gone.  
Didn't leave a note.  
No warnings.  
Just a tragic farewell postcard,  
Close your eyes and picture it...

Paperweight hanging. Feet dangling.  
Five feet above the ground in front of her parents' four-  
bedroom home  
Three hours before the two of them got home from work  
One warm afternoon in LA county, California.  
Too heavy to rock in the breeze, she hung there. Still.  
And in my mind's eye, she still hangs there.

I wonder HOW DIDN'T I KNOW SHE WOULD DO THIS  
She was my friend!  
And we all cried for her.  
I wonder if she knew we loved her.  
I wonder if we'll ever look at rope the same.  
Again.



## Cherry Blossoms in Daylight *Washington, DC*

By Kathryn Humes, MD  
*3rd Year Resident*



## Cherry Blossoms at Night *Washington, DC*

By Matt Taglieri, DO  
*1st Year Resident*

Captured at around 2:00 AM, using long-exposure technique. The purple coloring is a result of city light reflecting off the clouds and then reflecting off the water in the Tidal Basin. Nikon D90. 2010.

A photograph of the Marine Corps Memorial in Arlington, VA, captured at sunrise. The memorial's figures are silhouetted against a bright orange and red sky. In the background, the Washington Monument and the U.S. Capitol dome are visible against a clear blue sky.

**Marine Corp Memorial at Sunrise**  
**Arlington, VA**

By Matt Taglieri, DO  
*1st Year Resident*

Captured at around 5:00 AM. The sun was just about to rise over the horizon, which allowed the image to retain elements of both red sunrise and blue atmosphere. Nikon D60. 2009.

## The Zen of Yard Sales

By Robert Jayes, MD, FACP

*Associate Professor of Medicine*

I used to worry a lot about money. I took out more loans than most of my peers for college and medical school, and entered academic medicine. To add to this, my wife and I wanted a simpler lifestyle without hectic schedules of babysitters and housekeepers as we raised our two kids, so we only had one of us work. So, how did I manage to lead a fulfilling life up to now, with minimal financial anxiety?

Yard sales are a big part of it. But let's back up a bit to hear about how I formed my attitude toward money. I have always liked the Dalai Lama's admonition, "We need to learn how to want what we have, not to have what we want in order to get steady and stable happiness. Add my friend Brad Moore's advice to his learners, "the key to happiness in medicine is, learn to be flexible and live within your means." Wise words. I might expand on this and say you really don't need many more material goods than you can find at yard sales. It is a store where you can afford everything.

Don't get me wrong, you can't get everything you need at yard sales. You need good food. New underwear. Travel. College for your kids. But if you do most of your retail therapy at yard sales you can

better afford all of those things. Yard sales make hobbies cheap without the burden of high costs. Try a kayak instead of a yacht. Buy your own home gym and swim at the city pool rather than pay for that health club. Shop at yard sales rather than Bloomingdales.

I get great stuff at yard sales. I have all the tools I need in my shop for any household project. I keep myself outfitted in sport coats and dress shoes. I constantly accumulate Christmas and birthday presents for friends and family years in advance. My fabulous downhill skis were bought for fifteen dollars from a neighbor who must have the latest equipment. Two of my four bicycles are yard sale bikes under fifty dollars. We furnished one of our son's New York apartments for a few hundred bucks, complete with an antique oriental rug. The list goes on and on.

Yard sales are also a great people-watching and social event. My wife, Ginny, and I make it a part of our travel experience when we visit other cities or other countries. We also find it a way to peer into others' lives and to break the ice with strangers. Peoples' life histories and ailments are often on display. The people holding a yard sale make all the difference; if they are happy and secure, chances are you will have a great time and have some great finds.

Bargaining at yard sales can be a thrilling team sport. Ginny and I work as such a team. She whispers in my ear about a find; say, a worn but functional bicycle rain jacket. Then I carefully make my way over to the jacket, looking nonchalant and preoccupied with the fine weather, yet my muscles are tensed as I am ready to lunge across the table if anyone makes a move towards the coveted jacket. I may ask, "Is this the free table? I didn't see any price tags." Then, "How do we know any prices?" Asked to make an offer, I pick up the jacket and say, "Is this a tear here? Would someone be able to get these spots out? I heard this brand leaks a lot, did you have that trouble? Is that why you are selling it?" I seek to part amicably, with both parties feeling good at the end. But I have some fun getting there.

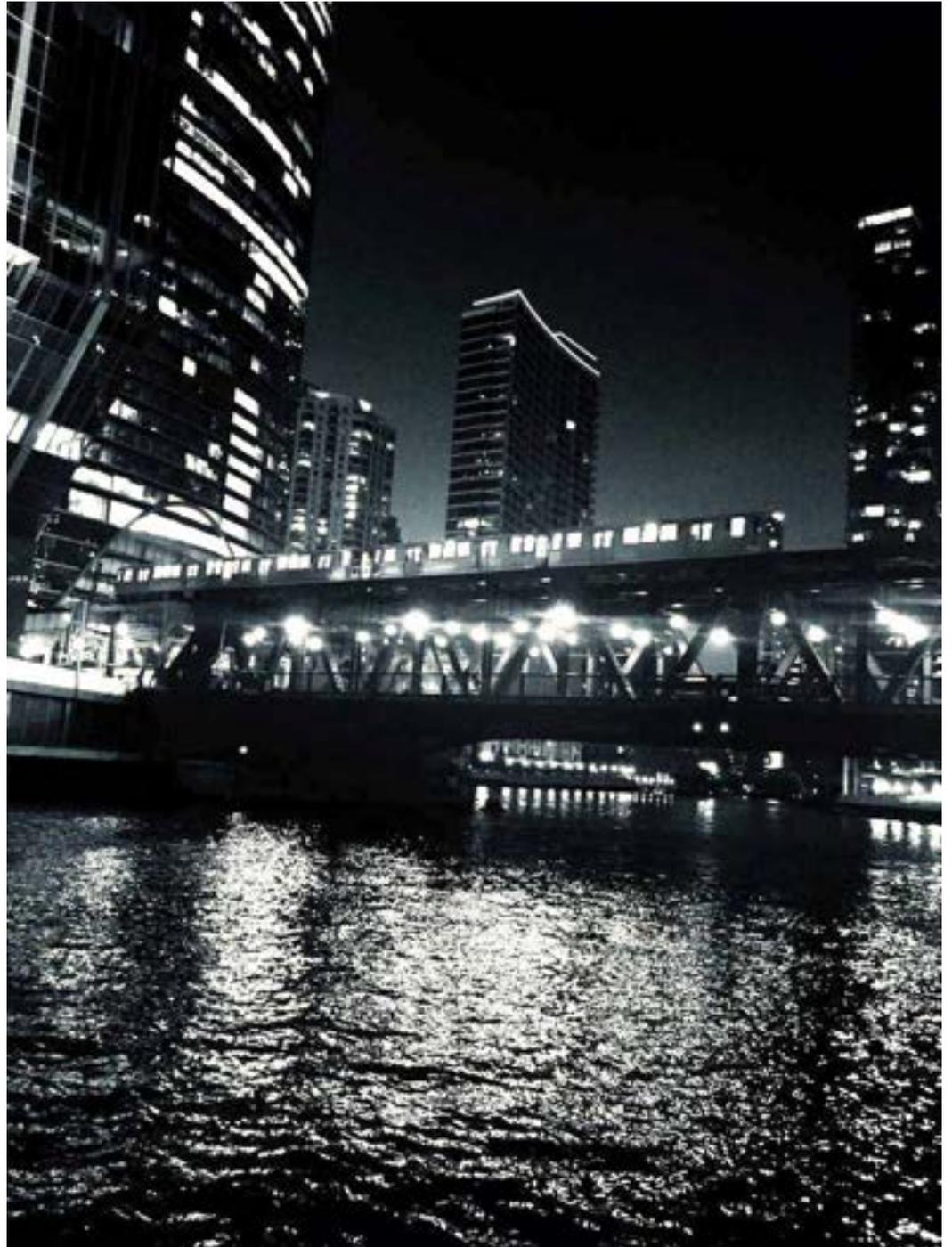
In medicine we are extremely lucky to have important work where we get to help people, have a front row seat in the theater of life, and get paid fairly well. We also have flexibility to change our work to suit our interests. I find that if I keep my costs down (with yard sales), I can relax and enjoy the ride more.

I wonder if the Dalai Lama goes to yard sales?

## Chicago Waters *Chicago, IL*

By Esosa Imasuen, MD  
*2nd Year Resident*

There's something special about late night photography, perhaps it's the contrast or maybe it's the inviting mystery of darkness.





## Wreaths of Williamsburg, Virginia

By April Barbour MD, MPH, FACP

*Associate Professor, Director of the Division of General Internal Medicine, and Director of the Primary Care Residency Program*

The creativity and natural materials used to make these wreaths, puts my simple evergreen wreath with a single red bow (though lovely) to shame!

## Why I Paint

By Elizabeth Bluhm, MD, MPH, FACP

*Assistant Professor of Medicine*

Every room in the sailmaker's house was a different shade of brown. But the house outlasted hurricanes and seemed sound, so it became a home away from home. Everyone wanted to help paint. One or two at a time, they came out to see. Every painter was different.

K was parsimonious with the primer. She cringed at wasting paint or primer. Meanwhile, L told stories about an intense connection she once formed with a painter who worked in her family's house. That painter showed her how a flick of the wrist is as good as blue painter's tape. L is tall, and her stories were so thrilling that no one noticed the bare patches she left above the windows.

For C, abstract painting is a joy. During a brief visit, she painted half of a door and removed some aesthetically displeasing knobs. She also added several impressionistic streaks to the door.

Another K came for a weekend but never picked up a paintbrush. She went to Arby's bait and tackle shop (which is also the local restaurant) and spent a day drinking beer and playing pool with old watermen.



J loaned his truck and the phone number for day laborers he'd picked up at the Home Depot on Rhode Island Avenue; he wanted to see the job done fast.

F said straight away that he hates painting. So he went to the harbor and caught a dozen crabs. (The extra bait was saved in the freezer for another weekend, but the power failed, and a rotten squid smell filled the house.)

B reminisced about jobs he'd done for realtors when he was younger. He preferred to use the Cadillac of rollers, which is the 18 inch wide model. He brought plastic bags full of tomatoes and okra, however he had to sit down and catch his breath as soon as he arrived.



D, a professional, wanted to bid on the painting job as well as the roofing and drywall. But soon afterward, one hot August afternoon, D set a state record for largest sheepshead ever caught. After that, he stopped working.

M had already earned a reputation for painting her own house with a mixture of different colors from the unused paint cans donated to Habitat ReStore. Therefore M was not invited.

The okra was stewed up with the tomatoes. The crabs were steamed and then picked to make several fine crabcakes. But the rooms of the house were still brown. This is why I paint.

## #LifeGoals

By Jillian Catalanotti, MD, MPH

Associate Professor of Medicine

Director of Internal Medicine Residency Program

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It started with a lie. He was a few days late getting back to campus to start junior year because he “had a mole re-examined, but everything’s fine and I’ll be back next week.”

The next week, Szymon called me to his room. It turned out the “re-examination” left a wound like someone scooped a large melon ball from his lower back, the gash lined with red pearly flesh like the inside of a ruby red grapefruit. It required daily wet-to-dry packing.

Szymon chose me because I was pre-med and because you had to straddle his back to reach the wound while he lay half-naked on his bed – an act he said he could only ask me to do. Each morning, he would lie face-down on the bunk bed in

his boxers and we would chat as I packed the wound. As the wound began to fill from the inside out with healthy, pale pink tissue, I felt increased confidence in my career plans. On the last day, Szymon thanked me with flowers and a note: “From your first and only patient.”

**(HE) THANKED ME  
WITH FLOWERS AND  
A NOTE: “FROM  
YOUR FIRST AND  
ONLY PATIENT.”**

It was only later I learned the original mole was removed over a year earlier, that the abnormal pathology report had fallen through the cracks, that by the time Szymon was diagnosed that summer, the melanoma had already spread to his bones.

Szymon attended medical appointments between classes, a fact I only learned when he invited me to one so I could learn to give intramuscular injections, just in case he ran out of places he could reach himself (he never did). Szymon told me in confidence that he was undergoing chemotherapy, but he didn’t want to dwell on it, and his outward appearance as well as his mood were unchanged. I didn’t grasp the gravity of his prognosis until my medical-school-boyfriend told me that Szymon was brought by his oncologist to speak to the medical school class about dying young. I didn’t tell Szymon I knew this, nor did I reveal his secret to our friends.

The next Summer, Szymon and I both stayed on campus – me to work as a lab tech and Szymon to have a portion of his liver removed. Come Fall, new rounds of chemo began. Szymon lost his hair and quickly purchased two hats (Euro-quirky, consistent with his usual taste). I realized just how successful Szymon had been at keeping his illness private as I overheard speculations in the dining hall about why he shaved his head – none of which involved his health. His closest friends knew the truth, but we knew better than to reveal it to others – pity was not in Szymon’s plans.

When Szymon asked me to accompany him to his first brain radiation session, it took all my strength not to cry. Instead, we laughed at how strange the mesh molding of his face looked, including Xs where the beams would aim to converge on his tumor, and we decided the mold was fit for a Halloween haunted house. After finishing his treatments, Szymon gave it to me so I could use it to scare future party-goers.

In March, Szymon called me to his room. We sat on the ubiquitous late '90s black futon and Szymon told me his Spring Break plan to admit himself to an inpatient hospice facility near his parents' home. I held him and we quietly cried together; he

would not live to graduate. As our classmates agonized over how they would spend their final two months of college, Szymon and I secretly planned his last two weeks on campus. Everyone said their usual Spring Break "see you soon-s" without realizing that they were actually "good bye-s." I called Szymon once in hospice - he was tired and it was clear that mustering his normal façade on campus had required a lot of energy, an act he could no longer keep up.

After Spring Break, I broke the news to our friends. We went to the Provost's office, arousing not a little suspicion when I asked to copy the exact text of a diploma. But a hysterical 21-year-old girl shouting about her dying friend usually gets what she wants and eventually the office staff even found us graduation paraphernalia to include in our care package. Together we flew to Florida to see Szymon one last time, but he was too tired to talk much. We returned to campus with heavy hearts, knowing Szymon would not graduate and our next trip to Florida would be for his funeral.

**I BEGAN MED SCHOOL  
WITH THAT PHOTO  
IN MIND, KNOWING  
IT WOULD ALWAYS  
MOTIVATE ME TO HELP  
MY PATIENTS ACHIEVE  
THEIR #LIFEGOALS.**

A few days later, we learned that we had crossed paths with our Dean. He had consulted Szymon's professors and learned that in between treatments Szymon had done enough work that semester to pass his courses - even if he no-showed his finals. Szymon was alert as the Dean presented him his diploma in a hospice bed with his parents at his side. The photo is one of my favorites, with everyone in it wearing an expression that conveys both sadness and joy. I began med school with that photo in mind, knowing it would always motivate me to help my patients achieve their #LifeGoals.

## If You Were Her

By Esosa Imasuen, MD  
*2nd Year Resident*

If you were her  
You'd feel every groove in the  
tapestry of life  
Smell every molecule in the  
breeze  
Hear every chirp in the sky  
And see every hue of the  
rainbow.

If you were her  
You'd watch as the emotions  
seep through your pores  
Into the bones of your soul  
As you struggle to stay objective  
while also being empathetic to  
those who pour out their hearts  
to you.

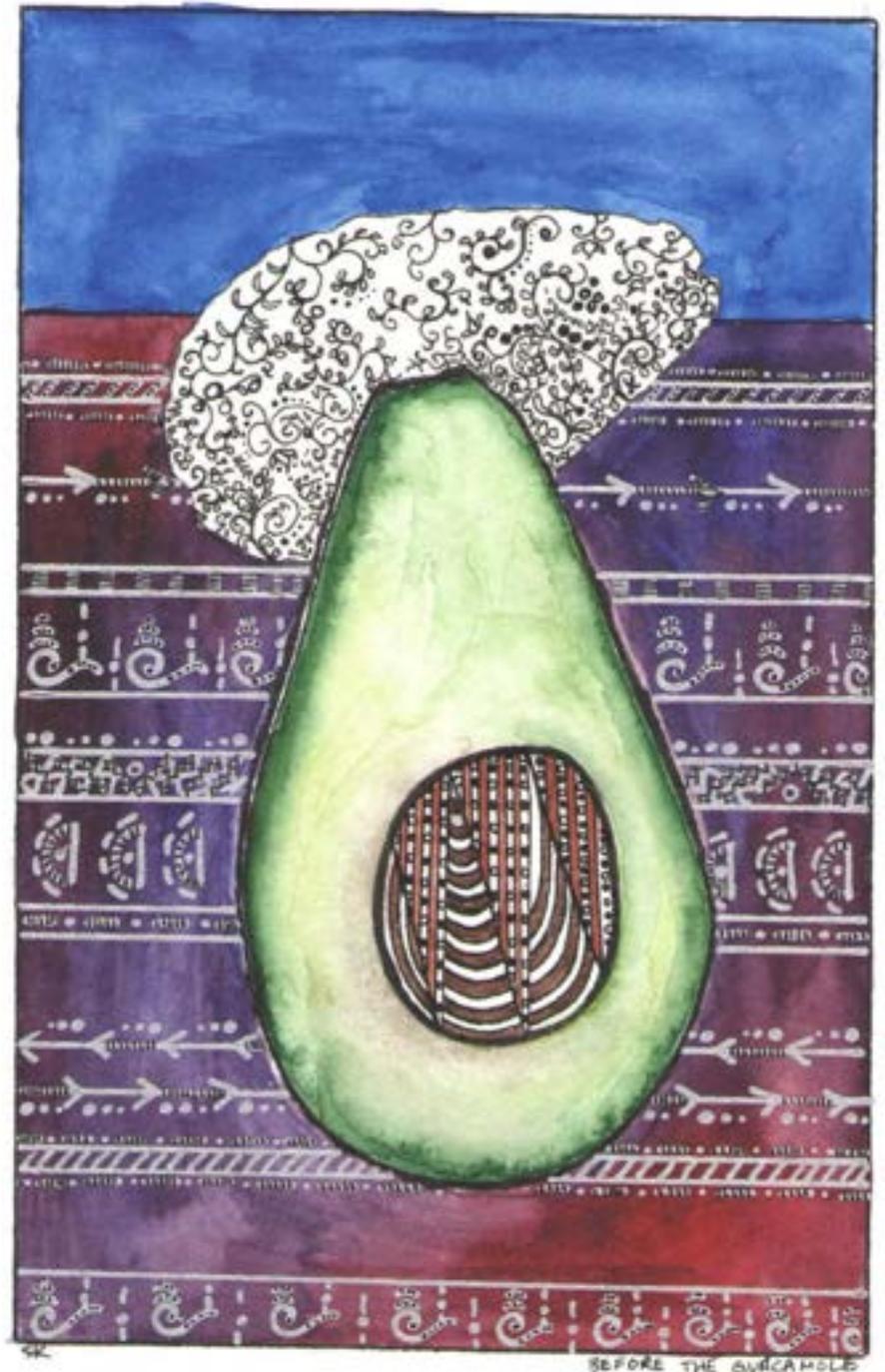
If you were her  
You'd feel your response to  
other's pain  
Viscerally bathe your insides from  
head to toe.

If you were her  
You'd feel the curse and the  
blessing of feeling all things.

If you were her,  
If you had her gift,  
You'd run mad a few times too  
And someone like you would  
judge you.

**Before the Guacamole** ▶  
By Sonia Silinsky Krupnikova, MD  
*2nd Year Resident*

Watercolor, ink, and metallic pen on watercolor paper.





HEART  
AND  
HOME

**A Beautiful Wedding in Leavenworth, Washington**

By Kathryn Humes, MD  
*3rd Year Resident*



## Sarita Kochhar

By Karan Kochhar, MD

2nd Year Resident

My mom moved from the Ludhiana district in the Indian state of Punjab to Jersey City, New Jersey in the United States of America with her family when she was fourteen years old. Whenever I hear her friends recount their childhood they describe my mom as this free spirit that was exactly herself all the time, someone you would be hard-pressed to sway. Here are a few stories that highlight her personality.

On the way to her best friend's birthday party down the street from her home she was grabbed by a man that tried to pry the gift she was carrying from her hands. He did not know it at the time but that 105 lb Indian girl was far from docile. She bit down on his arm with such force that he screeched in pain and fled. I asked my mom once why she didn't just give up the gift as it wasn't particularly expensive. She said it was because it was for "MY friend". My mom is fierce when it comes to her loved ones.

Once while driving around in her AMC Pacer, a light green hatchback, she was so lost in the blaring music she didn't hear the sirens wailing or see the lights flashing.

Three police cars ended up on her tail trailing her for miles as she was going 59 mph in a 25 mph zone. She pulled over, confused as to what she had done wrong. She was given tickets for speeding, evading a police officer, and a broken tail light. Did I mention she was on her way to the courthouse to pay off another ticket? My mom really knows how to get lost in fun.

**...SHE WILLED HERSELF TO CHANGE HER POSITION. SHE REGAINED HER FIERCENESS, HER LOVE, AND THE ABILITY TO BE COMPLETELY LOST IN A CELEBRATION.**

When she was a bit older, the "Dot Busters" were targeting the Indian community in Jersey City with intimidation and violence. Gang members threw a brick through my grandparents' kitchen window, with the shock and fear inducing premature labor in my mom's sister. They are credited with

numerous assaults, burglary, and property damage. This was at a time when there was indifference by the police towards the plight of the South Asian community. None of this affected my mom negatively. My mom lives life unintimidated and with positivity. When she talks about this time, she focuses on the love the Indian community received from their neighbors.

My mom had these beautiful qualities taken from her by depression. The superhuman person who did everything possible so her children lived with every comfort could hardly leave the bed. She endured countless therapies for months on end. My dad often quotes a cutting board hanging in the kitchen, with the painted words across a cartoonish mother, "if Momma ain't happy, ain't nobody happy". He's right, when my mom is not happy the world closes and becomes a very small place. There isn't adventure, possibility, bravery, or brazen fun. She wouldn't stay in bed for long though. With the help of her psychiatrist, medical treatments, and strong support of my dad, she willed herself to change her position. She regained her fierceness, her love, and the ability to be completely lost in a celebration. She made our family whole again with her perseverance.



## ◀ 2019 Winter Landscape

By Sarah Alsamari, MD, MPH

*3rd Year Resident*

This winter, I was thrilled by the unexpected snowfall in the city. It was a delight to walk around DC, watching sledders at Meridian Hill and adults indulging in childhood whims by throwing snowballs at one another.

## Frozen

By Stephanie Clark, LICSW

This picture was taken flying over the Potomac River heading home after the passing of my father in January 2018. It reminded me of the poem written by Andres Fernandez who writes as The Man Frozen in Time.

“caring for you  
was never a decision i made  
it just happened  
with every conversation we held  
with every second we invested  
with every wound we healed  
with every moment of vulnerability

i even tried to suppress the feeling

but you swim through my mind  
asleep or awake  
drunk or sober  
happy or sad  
and i dont know how to stop it

truth is  
i dont want to stop it  
i want to let it run wild  
and see where it takes me”  
- The Man Frozen in Time



## It's Something Like Home Sickness

By Connell Knight, MD

*3rd Year Resident*

It's something like home-sickness –  
by now I could walk blindfolded  
the single street to your apartment door.

Here roads are straight  
and I cannot name the fan-leaved trees  
that tangle their skeleton fingers  
making shadow-puppets in the streetlight.

I once thought we too were shadows here—  
weightless, gone by morning.

Instead we tangled our skeleton fingers  
and painted oily love into the plaster  
of two tiny studios in Dupont.  
We shed our skin into their HVAC ducts  
so these buildings will forever breathe us.  
We became living ghosts wafting in the air  
of somewhere not-quite-home.

We will forever haunt this place.

## Unexpected Beauty

By Kaylan Baban, MD, MPH

*Assistant Professor of Medicine*

While taking a walk with my husband down just another DC street on a gloomy November morning, we came across this gorgeous scene: vivid, delicately strewn goji leaves lighting up the sidewalk! Not such a humdrum morning after all. It is amazing where beauty can be found when you are paying attention.





## ◀ Connections

By Talia Bernal, MD, RESD '18, CHIEF '19

This is a picture of one of my favorite family traditions. Each year my brother brings a new board game home for the holidays. There are no classic games allowed, and certainly none where the victors earn their title based on pure luck.

The pattern that ensues during this time is always the same: anxious speculation about what lies ahead, panic as we attempt to comprehend the rules, unrelenting competition and red wine, then eventually the sobering realization that you are unlikely to ever stand a chance of winning against the clear victor.

Family time around the dinner table has evolved over the years, yet at its core it is the same. I look forward to these hours when there are no distractions from the true goal at hand: make as many connections as possible.

## Painted Gallery ▶

By Sarah Alsamari, MD, MPH  
*3rd Year Resident*

I love exploring different parts of the city. One of my favorite places is the Blind Whino art gallery in Southwest, DC, which always features interesting themes with unique pieces.





## Lost and Found

By L. Nedda Dastmalchi, DO, MA

*1st Year Resident*

Five years had gone by since I last visited my family in Tehran. So much had changed. Where I would go to reconnect with my heritage, I found I was more displaced. The neighborhood where my grandparents lived was filled with new, larger buildings. Local restaurants and shops were replaced by modern, more pretentious spots. The connection to my heritage I so desired I hoped to find at my grandparents' home. Unfortunately, my grandfather had passed earlier that year. He was no longer there sitting by the window admiring the snow capped mountains, which were now covered with the growing infrastructure surrounding his home. I felt his absence, the air was thick. I had never felt so isolated, so alone in a changing environment where I hoped to find identity and peace. During my trip, I went to a large market and bazaar located in Tajrish, Tehran, Iran. I sighed in relief when I found that the culture I was raised in and loved was still vibrant here through the ingredients used in traditional dishes. Each of these photos replayed fond memories of what I seeking during my visit: identity.



Balal, Tehran, Iran



Rose. Tajrish, Tehran, Iran



Torshi. Tehran, Iran

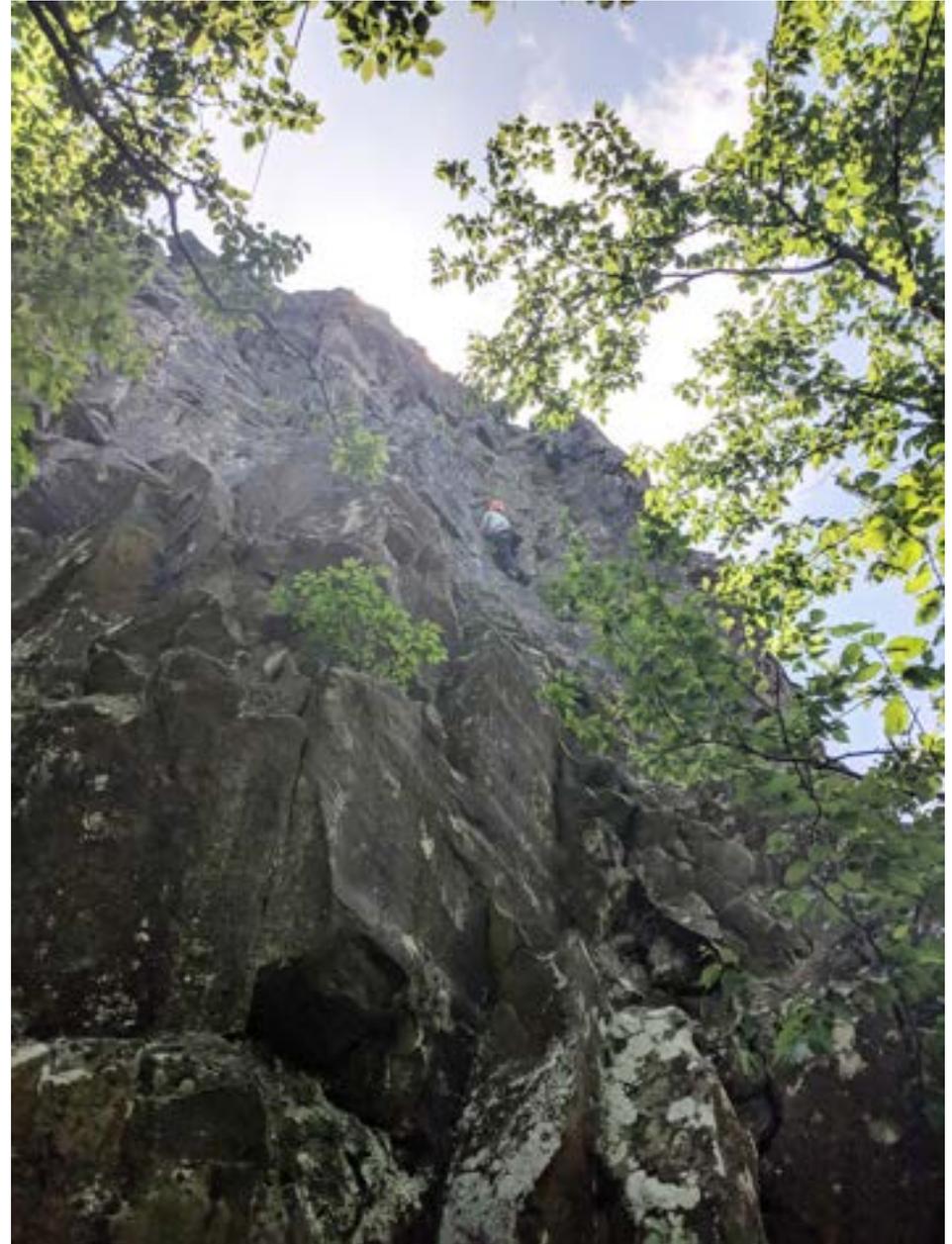
The photos are of fresh rose petals used in morahbah (Persian preserve), rose water used in numerous desserts and tea. Now a trendy ingredient in beauty products and food was a staple at my home growing up in the Washington DC area. Torshi (pickled vegetables) reminded me of my childhood; going in my parent's refrigerator where numerous jars of various torshi were labeled making a colorful display on the top shelf. The first photo is of balal, a Persian "corn on the cob." This was a dish that I always associated with my American identity, with summers by the pool and the Fourth of July with friends and family. I had never thought of this as being part of my Persian heritage. This style was different and considered a street food. The corn is grilled over charcoal and later dipped in salt water. Ironically this new dish was the one I felt most at home and nourished by. Something equally American and Persian.

## A New Hobby

By Danielle Grams Engskow, MD

*2nd Year Resident*

My husband and I started indoor rock climbing during my fourth year of medical school. Neither of us had much experience with the sport but we had always wanted to try it. Recently we started learning how to climb outdoors. This was a trip we took last year to Shenandoah National Park where we spent the day climbing the Little Stoney Man Cliffs. You are never too old or busy to learn a new skill!







## My Blessing

By Haneen Ismail, MD  
*2nd year Resident*

"Having somewhere to go is home. Having someone to love is family. And having both is a blessing." -Unknown





INTERNAL  
IZING  
MEDI  
CINE

**The Happy Room**  
*Lagos, Nigeria*  
By Esosa Imasuen, MD  
*2nd Year Resident*



## ◀ The Happy Room Lagos, Nigeria

By Esosa Imasuen, MD  
2nd Year Resident

This picture was taken at Sao Cafe in Lagos, Nigeria during my global health elective in the fall of 2018. These vibrant hand fans are used by Lagosians to cool down in the scorching heat. So, it was quite nostalgic to see them being used as decor in the entry way of the cafe. The free WiFi, the snail stew and yam chips were also welcoming bonuses to my two hour stay as I responded to messages from my patients back home in DC.

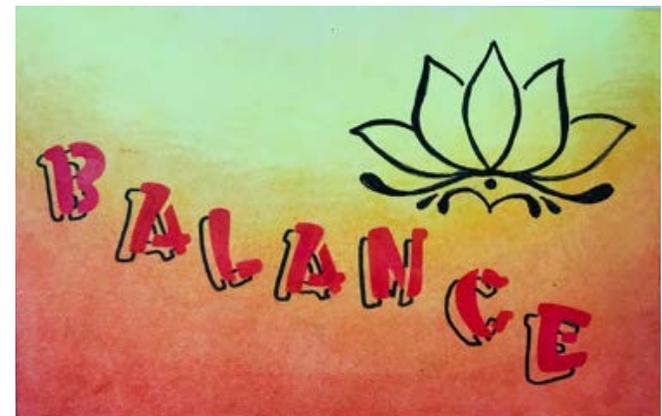
A little more about the design, it was created by a company called The Yellow of Lagos and entitled The Happy Room. In Lagos, yellow is a prominent color associated with modes of transportation just as yellow is to New York taxis. One of the goals of The Yellow of Lagos is to preserve the color yellow as a symbol of Lagos by creating such pop-up art installments throughout the city. Besides creating immersive experiences, The Yellow of Lagos runs several campaigns through the year. One of which (#KeepTheYellow) rallied youth to sign a petition in response to and against the government's plan to slowly phase out the color of the yellow iconic buses, to blue and white. This may seem like a little problem, but imagine New York without the yellow taxis, is it still New York?

## ▶ Balance

By Pooja Parawesmaran, MD, RESD '18

Materials: oil pastels and ink.

I use this as a daily reminder to be mindful and purposeful in how I take care of my patients while I balance my own wellness.



## Goodbyes

By April Barbour, MD, MPH, FACP

*Associate Professor, Director of the Division of General Internal Medicine, and Director of the Primary Care Residency Program*

The message read, “Your patient called to discuss an upcoming surgery.” Now this patient is well known to me so I wasn’t surprised to get the call. He had been in the hospital for three weeks at this point and the team taking care of him hadn’t been able to find the source of his problem. I suspected they needed to do a procedure to get more answers and he wanted my advice about it, but I was only partially correct. It took only a minute or two in the conversation for me to realize why he called that day. He called to tell me goodbye. The doctors had done a great job explaining how serious, and yet necessary, the procedure was and he heard them. He had been my patient for almost 15 years and we had been through a lot together, so when he said, “Doc, I have had a good ride” I knew what he meant.

As a practicing primary care physician for over 25 years, I have had many difficult conversations with patients. Conversations about death and dying, conversations about decisions with no good outcomes and conversations about how to go on living when life is now very different from what one expected. Yet this conversation was new to me. Neither of us knew what would happen but he was planning for contingencies and he wasn’t leaving things unsaid. What I didn’t expect was how much his call would mean to me, how touched I was that he even thought to call me in that moment.

I marvel at the resilience of some of the patients I have had the honor to know. I continue to learn so much from them in times of illness and in times of health. Lessons about how to live life with gratitude, how to be hopeful in dark or uncertain times, and how to always keep things in perspective.

This patient is one of the most courageous men I have ever met. In addition to facing his health problems head on, he always greets me with a smile no matter how much pain he is in, he loves to bring me okra from his garden with tips on cooking it and he always laughs at my jokes.

This story has a happy ending. He made it through the procedure and eventually was discharged to a rehab facility before going home. His goodbye wasn’t actually our final goodbye, nevertheless, he taught me a lesson in that moment too.

## Dear Attending

By Danielle Grams Engskow, MD

2nd Year Resident

Dear attending, I'm a third-year medical student fresh out of the classroom. I've studied from books for years, and now I finally get to see what it is like to be a doctor. It's exciting but also a daunting experience. I look to you as a guide: what you wear, how you speak, what tools you use, and how you treat others. This is the year I will be socialized into the medical profession. How you treat your patients not only affects them, but it will affect how I treat my future patients. Your attitude sets the tone of my educational experience.

**DEAR ATTENDING,  
YOU COMPLETELY  
CAPTIVATED ME.**

Dear attending, let me illustrate what I mean. The first patient I evaluated in the ED on my rotation with you was Mr. K, a 60-year-old extremely cachectic man with stage IV lung cancer. He had been in and out of the hospital for the previous two months and in that time had lost 20 pounds. He was presenting with an acute pneumonia. Upon meeting him, it was very clear that he was heading toward the final stage of

his life. On admission he was adamant that he wanted to be a full code. Moreover, he was estranged from his family, and he did not have any support. The next day at rounds, Mr. K's case was discussed including his status as a full code and lack of family support. As rounds progressed, I felt uneasy about the conversation to come and how it would be handled.

Dear attending, you completely captivated me. You began by kneeling on the ground so you could be level with Mr. K. After the initial introduction and review of his history and current symptoms, you eased into discussing Mr. K's code status. You explained what happens during a code and how Mr. K would expect to feel after being resuscitated. You compassionately clarified with Mr. K his diagnoses of stage IV lung cancer and that his treatment is tailored for palliation, not cure. You took your time with the discussion. You did not appear rushed, distracted or uncomfortable. I think Mr. K recognized that his physician cared and had his best interest in mind. When the conversation was finished, Mr. K decided to change his code status to DNR, "do not resuscitate", as well as consider enrollment in home hospice. The value of this initial conversation became even greater several days later when Mr. K began aspirating his vomit and his health quickly deteriorated. At this point a conversation about hospice was needed. This one was

equally as compassionate and built upon the trust of the initial discussion. In the end, Mr. K agreed to be transferred to the inpatient hospice ward as well as contact his estranged family members. It was clear that he was beginning to accept his impending death.

**YOU ALSO TAUGHT ME  
THAT SOMETIMES THE  
BEST CARE POSSIBLE IS  
NOT A TREATMENT BUT  
A DISCUSSION.**

Dear attending, this story could have ended differently if the appropriate time and consideration had not been given to Mr. K's end of life discussions. Discussing a patient's approaching death is never a comfortable conversation. Most people enter medicine seeking to help their patients by curing disease; when this is not an option, it can be easier to avoid the difficult but necessary conversations about death. As physicians we have a professional duty to provide the best care possible to our patients. In taking the time to be present you not only helped Mr. K come to terms with his illness, but you also taught me that sometimes the best care possible is not a treatment but a discussion.

## Try To Trust Me

By Paula Mohyi, MD

*1st Year Resident*

Trust...a five-letter word that slips off the apex of the tongue so carelessly.

And yes, me, the sleep-deprived intern with three hundred thousand dollars worth of debt, one hundred and forty thousand minutes of existence and a zeptosecond of patient care is telling you to trust me to make every correct decision. I cannot. I can only simply ask that you trust that I am here to learn. While I swore that I will do no harm, I will make mistakes. Trust me, over the long white coat I wear - which represents years of studying and memorizing thousands of pages of textbooks - there is a heavy weight of fear. Fear, that for the first time in my life, I do not know what I am doing. Trust me, the seconds you feel you waste behind walls in a bed that is not your own, I share them too. We miss joyous celebrations, affection from those we hold dearest and postpone memories we longed to make. You're scared? Trust me, I'm terrified because I know the stakes are too high to be arrogant, lazy or foolish. Above all, know that as much as you trust me, I trust those who have joined the family of medicine before me. I trust that I can look to them for guidance. I trust that I can ask for their advice without being ostracized for my deficits in knowledge. I trust that they see that I am worthy of being taught because I am teachable. For without this system of trust, medicine cannot be.

## Syndrome of the Day Off

By Danielle Grams Engskow, MD

*2nd Year Resident*

1 day off in 7  
and today is the ONE  
I've spent the last six thinking about

Thinking of there while I am  
HERE  
And thinking of here while I am  
THERE

The best laid grand plans  
derailed by  
Syndrome of the Day Off

## Hamiltonian Medicine

By Paul A. Silver, MD, FACP

Associate Professor of Medicine

Physicians find inspiration in many places. Over the years, I have been influenced by many traditional writings such as the addresses of Sir William Osler, *The Citadel* by A. J. Cronin, the essays of Dr. Clifton Cleaveland and, most recently, by the book, *Unanticipated Outcomes* by Dr. Jerome P. Kassirer which traces his ascent from Buffalo, NY to the editorship of the *New England Journal of Medicine* and his fight to keep that esteemed journal free of commercial influence. Dr. Salvatore Mangione's lectures have always left me deeply moved. Remarkably, I have most recently been stirred by an unusual source: the musical, *Hamilton*.

When Lin Manuel Miranda first performed what became the opening number of the show at the White House poetry jam in 2009, he introduced it by saying he was working on a concept album of someone whom he felt embodied hip hop: treasury secretary Alexander Hamilton. The room, including President Obama, erupted in laughter. Seven years later, when the cast of *Hamilton* performed the show in the same White House room, President Obama noted the previous laughter and said, "Who's laughing now." So what does the story of a "Bastard, orphan, son of a whore and a Scotsman" have to do with the practice of medicine? The key is in two other lyrics: "I'm looking for a mind at work" and "I'm never satisfied."

I believe that these two phrases are the key to being an excellent clinician. When residency candidates ask me what I value in a trainee, I reply, "thinking carefully and thoroughly about a case." I



***"Think, men, think!"***

*A screenshot of a scene from The Music Man.*

am, indeed, looking for a mind at work. Answers are easy to come by once you frame the right questions; most answers can be found hooked to my belt on my smartphone. In line with that, one should never be satisfied. You always have to ask, "What else could this be? What am I not considering?"

This brings me to another musical, *The Music Man*, in which the con man, "Professor Harold Hill," convinces the citizens of River City that he can form a boy band by teaching music via the "Think Method": you think of the Minuet in G and then you can play the Minuet in G. He is caught and brought to the school auditorium to be tarred and feathered. At the last minute, the boys appear in uniform with their instruments. Hill is given a pointer to use as a baton. He stands there, dripping sweat, and says with great intensity, "Think, men, think!" Remarkably, the boys play.

I want to post pictures of that scene with the caption "Think men, think!" in all the clinics and wards.



BEYOND  
THE  
WATERS

**Unfiltered**  
**Cape Coast, Ghana**

By Chavon Onumah, MD, MPH, FACP  
*Assistant Professor of Medicine*

Breathtaking yet serene  
Waves calming my two rivers  
If only time stood still...

Last summer I went on my first backpacking trip. Over three days, my boyfriend and I would cover 24 miles by foot. We carried everything we needed to survive on our backs - food, shelter, and water that we would replenish from streams along the way. It was time to shed the stress and worries I carried over three years of residency and embark on a journey where I would carry only the things that would meet my basic needs and allow me to make it through the trail.

So we ventured to the southwest corner of Virginia, to a place known as the Grayson Highlands. This photo was taken on the last morning of our three-day trip. We began our trek through the covered forest along the Appalachian trail, before ascending the mountainside in the occasional torrential downpour and reaching the open balds surrounding Mount Rogers just as the warm sun shone down on us from a blue sky. Three days of putting one foot in front of the other, stopping to refuel, reaching our destination for the evening to cook dinner and set up camp before the next cloud rolled through. This was life out on the trail.

When we came to this view, we took our time to stop and rest, to capture the layers of mountains in the distance, to soak in the quiet before returning to a world of too many distractions and too many decisions to be made. Here, I could take a deep breath. I had everything I needed. Simply being present, feeling the sun on my face, the breeze against my cheek, noticing the shades of green—and that was enough.



## Grayson Highlands State Park, Virginia

By Celia Mouyal, MD, RESD '18

*Palliative Care Fellow*



## Artistic Expression in a Cairo Vegetable Market

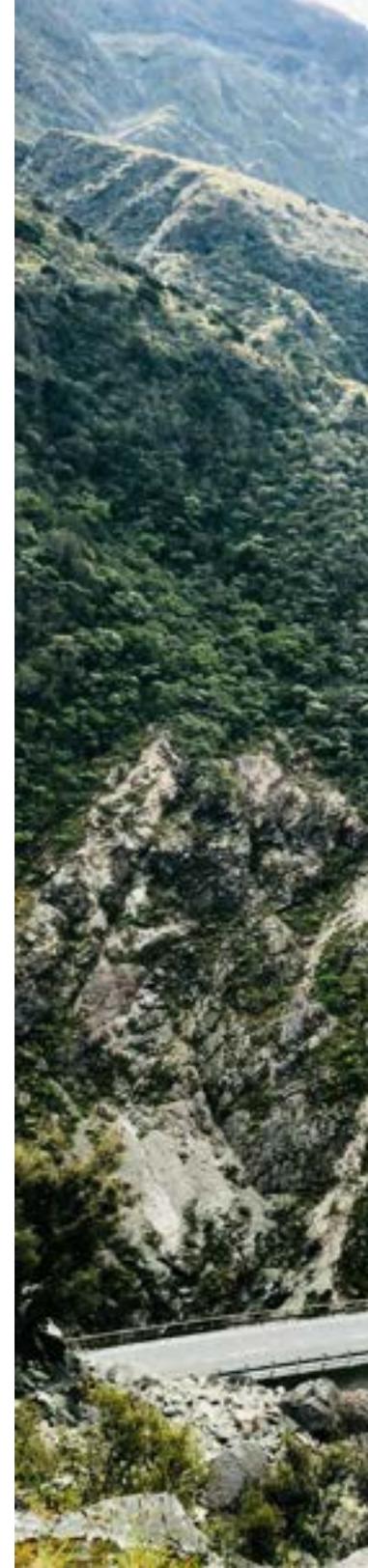
By Jehan El-Bayoumi, MD, FACP  
Professor of Medicine, Founding  
Director, Rodham Institute

## **"Deaths" Corner Arthur's Pass, New Zealand**

By Anokhi Shah, MD, RESD '18  
*Assistant Professor of Medicine*

This area is so named because of tragic deaths incurred from earthquakes. The passageway was shut down repeatedly for decades due to the resulting landslides and pieces of the mountain crumbling onto the interstate. My husband and I only learned of the route's history after driving over a seemingly durable, albeit winding road and stopping at this viewpoint. The sight drops your insides onto your feet.

We take risks every day without knowing it, some days brushing up against death's door more so than we realize. It's funny how you can appreciate life, value health, and count your blessings in the most unexpected places!





## Cappadocia, Turkey

By L. Nedda Dastmalchi, DO, MA

*1st Year Resident*

The evil eye is a symbol common in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. It serves to protect individuals from others' poor wishes, jealousy and negative thoughts. I found this tree decorated with evil eyes, as if they were fruit hanging from its branches, overlooking the fairy chimneys in Cappadocia, Turkey.





◀ **Spiritual Views**  
***Fira, Santorini, Greece***

By L. Nedda Dastmalchi, DO, MA  
*1st Year Resident*

Orthodox Metropolitan Cathedral.



## To Infinity and Beyond

By Shivangi Vachhani (formerly Pandya), MD, RESD '14

*Endocrinologist, Leesburg, Virginia*

Scotland is such a beautiful country with many rolling hills and open paths. This picture was taken on one of the scenic roads of the Scottish Highlands.





## All Aboard the Hogwarts Express

By Shivangi Vachhani (formerly Pandya), MD, RESD '14

*Endocrinologist, Leesburg, Virginia*

This is for all the Harry Potter fans, presenting to you, the Hogwarts Express!





## **Up, Up, and Away!**

By Shivangi Vachhani (formerly Pandya), MD, RESD '14  
*Endocrinologist, Leesburg, Virginia*

Finding technology in the midst of nature.

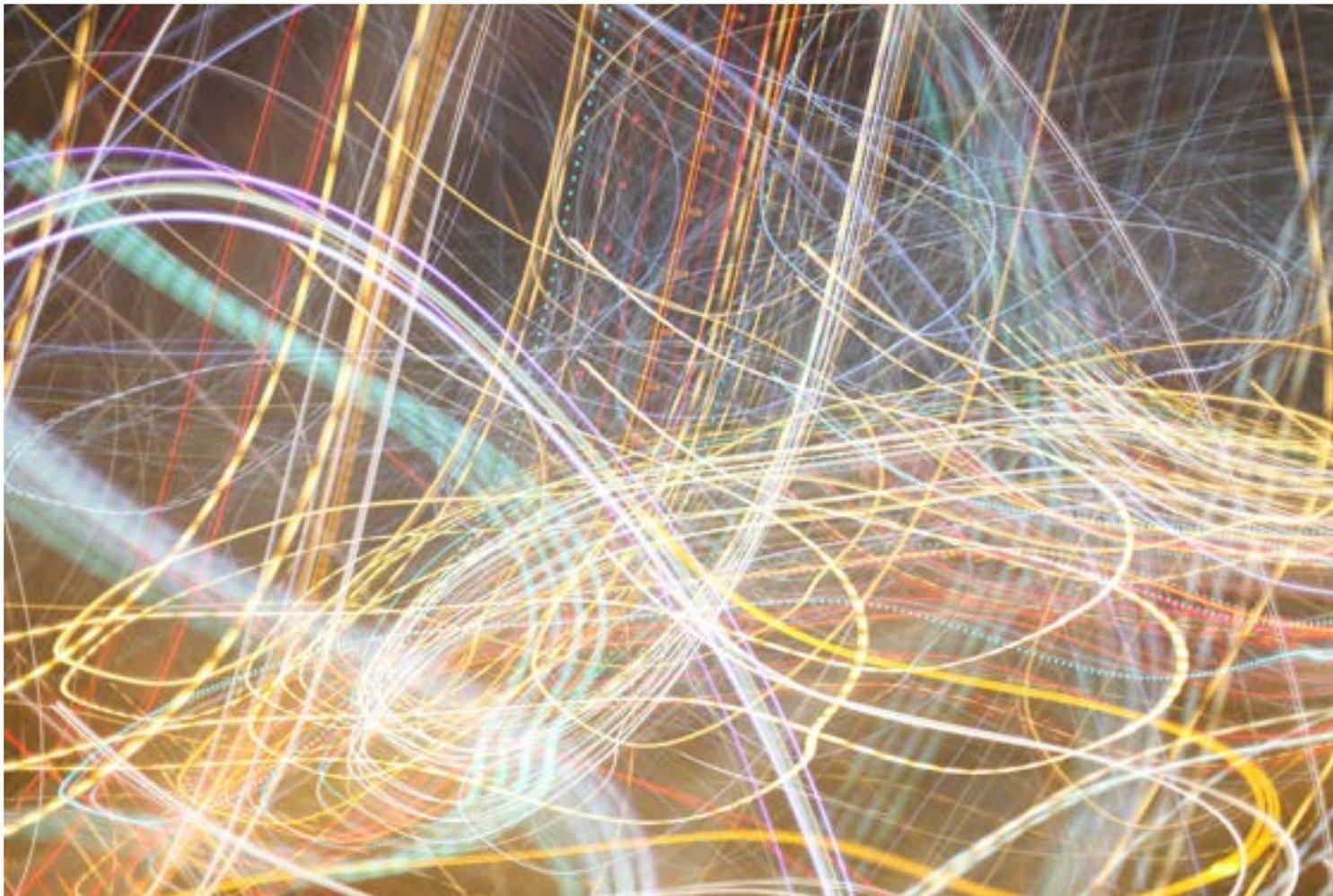


## **Dragon Fruit Still Life**

By Homan Wai, MD, RESD '09

*Assistant Professor, INOVA Fairfax Hospital*

I'm always intrigued by the visually stunning exterior of the dragon fruit contrasted with the subtly sweet and relatively plain interior. I enjoyed taking the still pictures of this colorful pair under the morning light.



## Light Scape

By Homan Wai, MD, RESD '09

*Assistant Professor, INOVA Fairfax Hospital*

The strands of light were made by swirls of the camera in a Pollock like manner, overlooking a night scene of traffic lights, high rises, buses, and cars of Hong Kong. There was no particular intent but to make an interesting pattern out of a familiar scene.



## **Heartwarming Sky Galway, Ireland**

By Maram Alkhatib, MD  
*Assistant Clinical Professor of Medicine*

When I lived in Galway, most days had drab, grey skies. On some days, however, the sunrise or sunset would take me by surprise with a burst of color, bringing joy to my heart.



## Toad

By Homan Wai, MD, RESD '09

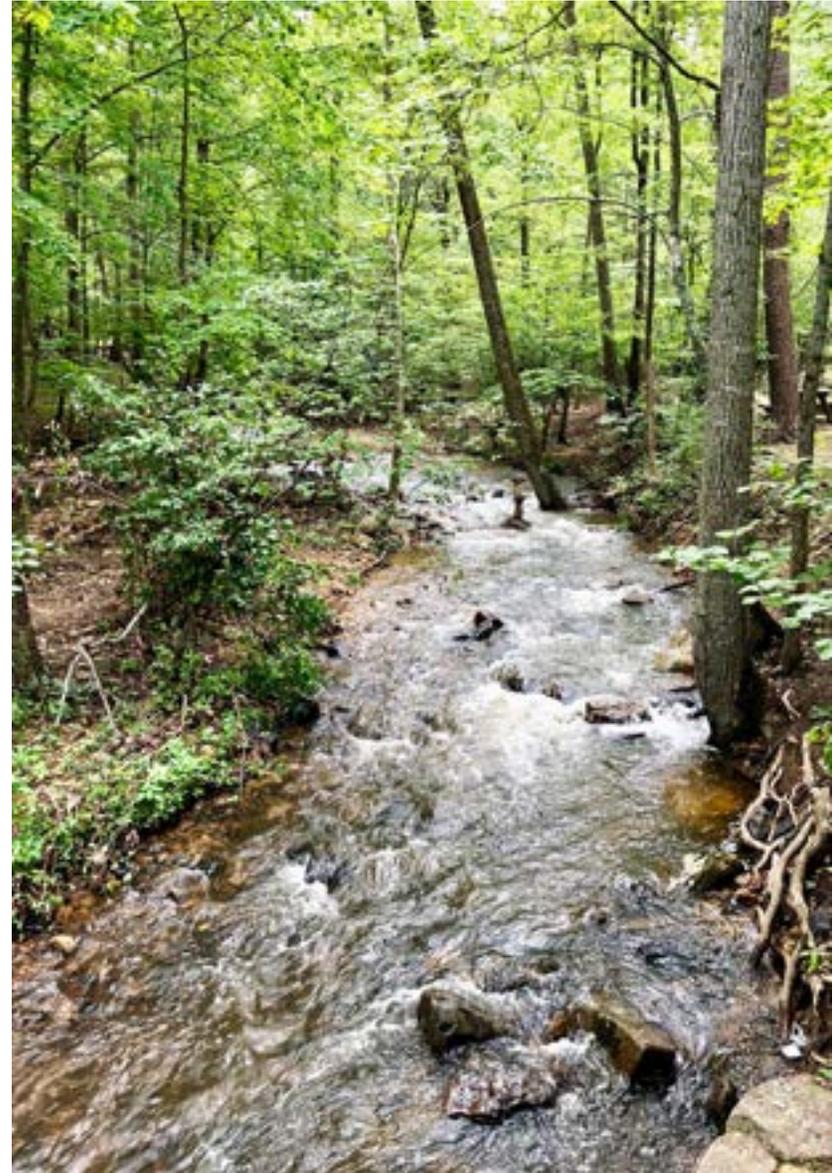
*Assistant Professor, INOVA Fairfax Hospital*

My grandparents' house in Hong Kong is located in the countryside. The croaks of the toads have always been part of the nocturnal symphony of nature. During my visit last year I found this toad crouching against the wall, seemingly relishing my attention as I was on all fours firing away with the shutter.



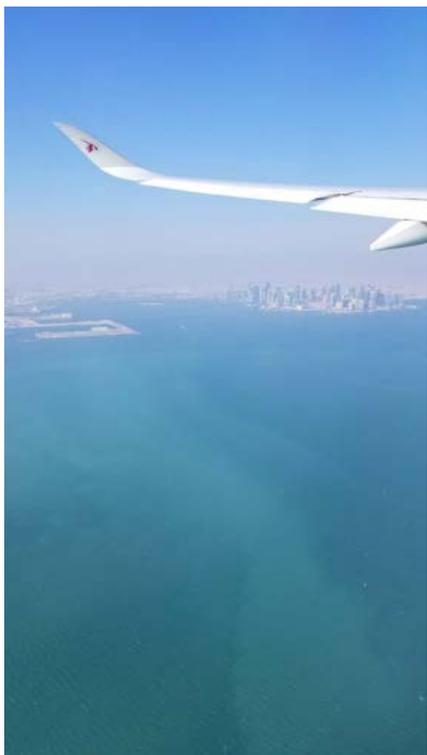
**Sunset Terrace Meal at the  
Omni Grove Park Hotel,  
Asheville, North Carolina**

By Kathryn Humes, MD  
*3rd Year Resident*



**Almost Heaven, West Virginia  
Cacapon State Park, West Virginia**

By Brad Moore, MD, MPH, FACP  
*Associate Professor of Medicine*



## Plane Over Iran

By Karolyn Teufel, MD

*Assistant Professor of Medicine*

I was flying in a civilian airplane. The first picture is the city of Doha as we took off, and the next three are over Iran.





[no words]  
*Mount Cook, New Zealand*  
By Samantha Ober, MD, RESD '18, CHIEF '19

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## 2019 Cuentos Editorial Team

*From left:* Nedda Dastmalchi, DO, MA, 1st year Resident; Danielle Engskow, MD, 2nd year Resident Chief Editor; Anokhi Shah, MD, Faculty Advisor; Katalin Roth, MD, JD, Faculty Advisor; Katrina Naik, MD, 1st year Resident.  
Not pictured: Erosa Imasuen, MD, 2nd year Resident.

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