

An artistic illustration of two hands, one above the other, with their skeletal structures rendered in a golden-yellow color. The hands are set against a dark red, semi-transparent background. Between the two hands, there are intricate, wavy lines in shades of teal and blue, interspersed with small orange circular motifs. The entire composition is set against a black background filled with white specks, resembling a starry night sky.

SYNAPSES:
A NEUROLOGY ART AND
LITERARY MAGAZINE

VOLUME III: 2025

**SYNAPSES ARE CONNECTIONS
BETWEEN TWO NERVE CELLS,
ALLOWING NEUROTRANSMITTERS
TO PASS FROM ONE CELL TO THE
OTHER, ENABLING ELECTRICAL
COMMUNICATION TO OCCUR.**

INTRODUCTION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Synapses Art and Literary Magazine is a project through The Department of Neurology at West Virginia University. It is supported by the Back to Bedside Initiative through the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME). The Back to Bedside Initiative encourages the development of innovative project ideas that will foster connections between resident physicians and their patients.

The goal of the Synapses magazine is to promote the humanities amongst patients and providers through the use of artistic expression. Physician residents deal with burnout, stressful situations, and emotionally draining experiences often without an outlet to express their experiences. Likewise, the patients' experiences in the hospital can be frightening and intimidating. A variety of chronic illnesses can have longstanding impacts in patient quality of life. The goal of this magazine is to showcase the artistic expression of both patients, medical providers, medical students, and family members of those individuals, ultimately allowing for a meaningful way to reflect on such experiences.

Just as synapses promote connections in the neurologic system, we hope the Synapses Magazine will promote connections between patients, medical providers, and others impacted by those experiences.



MEET THE FACULTY



Welcome to the third edition of Synapses! We are thrilled to showcase the works of our talented and creative patients, faculty, medical trainees, and more. This project began as an idea that medical humanities can help form human connections, especially during times that may be stressful or difficult. Over the years, we have been excited to see so many new and interesting perspectives regarding neurology, the patient experience, the caregiver experience, and how medicine is interpreted. We hope that you enjoy the art and literary pieces that are enclosed- and we hope that they inspire you to reflect about your own connections, and perhaps even form some new ones.

Sincerely,

Justin Frey

Eric Blum

Gauni Puri

A detailed microscopic image of neurons, showing their cell bodies (soma) and a dense network of branching processes (dendrites and axons) against a dark background.

Magazine Cover Designed By:

Abigail Montgomery,
Web & Graphic Designer
Family Member of Patient

Synapses

Inspiration: "The premise of the magazine, from my perspective, is to humanize residents and nurses so that they are less intimidating to patients and visitors- improving rapport."

MEET THE TEAM



Nina D'Andrea is a fourth-year medical student at WVU School of Medicine and Editor-in-chief of Synapses. She earned her bachelor's degree in Biochemistry and English from Case Western Reserve University. She has served as the president for the Student Interest Group in Neurology. In her free time, she enjoys reading, outdoor sports, and baking.

Danielle Sblendorio is a first-year neurology resident at West Virginia University and a member of the neurology educational track. She has been a part of the Synapses team since she was a second-year medical student at WVU. She earned her bachelor's degree in Microbiology & Cell Science from the University of Florida. Her hobbies outside of medicine include theater, singing, piano, reading, photography, exercising, roller coasters, traveling, and having as much fun as possible!



Sara Berzingi is a current third-year psychiatry resident and incoming chief resident at WVU. She earned dual undergraduate degrees in Biology and English from WVU, where she also completed her medical degree. With a longstanding interest in narrative medicine, she has led efforts to integrate the arts more fully into medical education and residency training.

Laura Loeffelbein is currently a third-year medical student at the WVU School of Medicine. She earned her bachelor's degree in Neuroscience from WVU, with an emphasis on behavioral neuroscience and medical humanities. She has previously served as the community service chair for the Student Interest Group in Neurology chapter at WVU and is a MATTER track student for neurology.





Untitled work
Stormy Merrifield, Neurology Patient

Inspiration: "The piece of needlepoint I chose to honor the neurology team that worked hard to help me is medical in theme. I tried to find a more neurology based but time constraints made it impossible. The team who worked with me were friendly and professional during my stay. I was surprised at the interest shown in my hobby. I have been stitching for 40 years. Most people are too busy to even notice. The doctors and students were interested in everything. It amazed me with how busy they must have been taking time to chat about my needlepoint. I was impressed by the teaching going on at the time of each exam. Students were attentive and the doctors were so good. I hope my little project makes them as happy as they have made me with their success with my feet and legs. I am not completely progressed as much as I would like but each day, I pick up my hobby and it gives me the confidence the team instilled in me with their great attitudes and professional attitudes. I hope if any of my family need a neurologist they are Lucky enough to be treated by these Drs."



Total Eclipse of the Sun **Stephen Chen, Ophthalmology Resident**

Inspiration: "The title of my piece is Total Eclipse of the Sun, and was inspired by the total solar eclipse on April 8, 2024, which I was fortunate to witness in Cleveland, Ohio. I drew this as a fourth year med student heading into ophthalmology, and I am fascinated by artistic depictions of light, shadows, and the beauty of nature....along with the importance of eye protection with such phenomena."



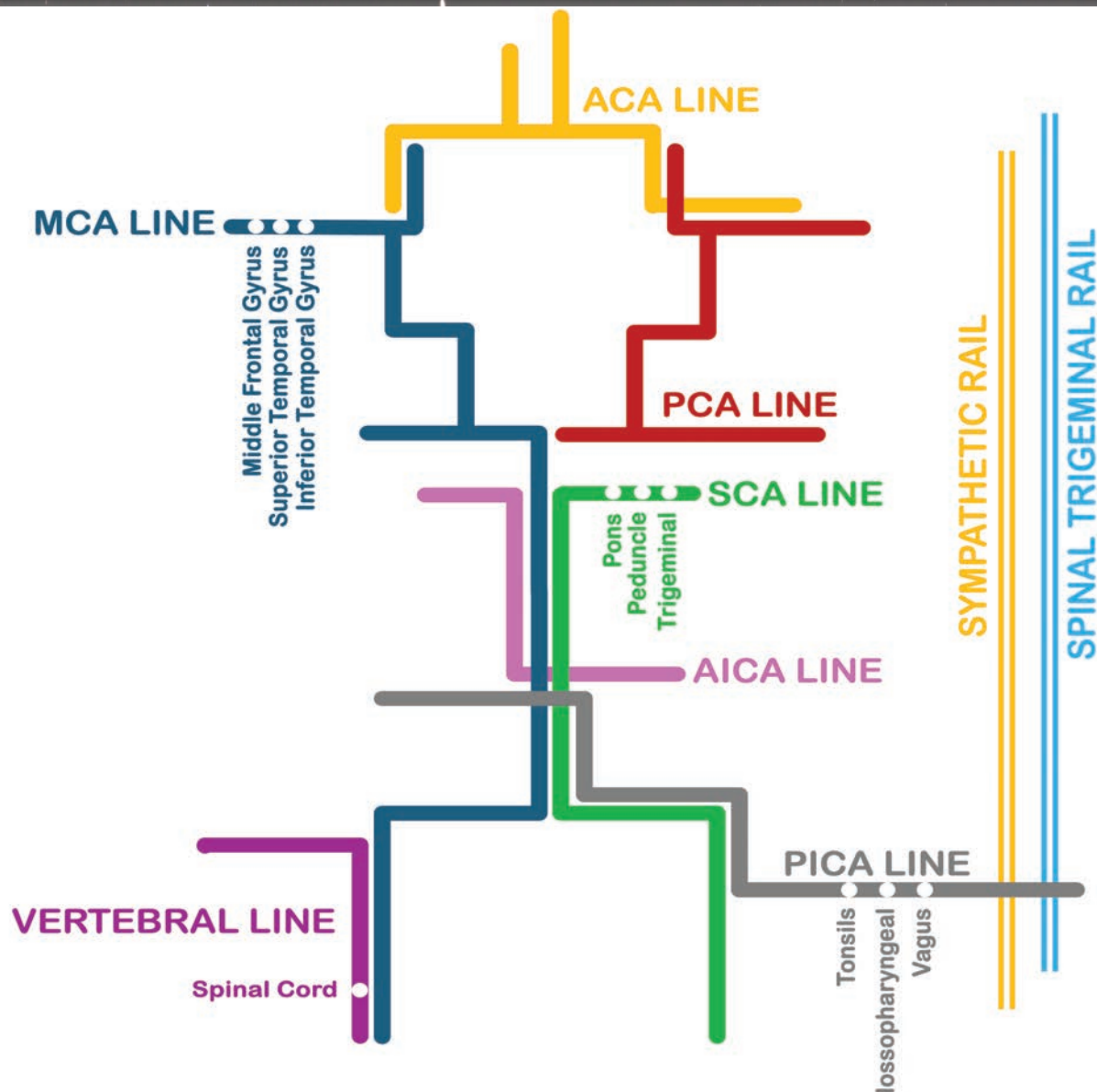
**Flowers from Sarah
Georgie Francke, Neurology Patient**

Inspiration: "This art project was fun. I have very limited vision, hopefully temporary. Being able to reproduce the image of the flowers in a vase from my dear friend was encouraging!"



Gesture of Support **Liza Grossman, Medical Student**

Inspiration: "I believe an outstretched hand reflects the foundation of health-care. It is a gesture of compassion, symbolizing the willingness to support others. It is a reminder that no one should have to face their challenges alone."



Willis Metro Ryan Blake, Medical Student

Inspiration: "I spent the summer between my first and second year of medical school in Boston, and this was my first time living in the New England area. The city was buzzing during the summer, for sure, and I don't think I was prepared for how essential public transportation was for the majority of those living there. The train system, specifically, was an integral part of Boston's landscape, and I can't even count how many times I was fumbling over those stereotypical train diagrams posted at every subway station. These diagrams have such a characteristic look, and their ability to convey complex information in a "relatively" simple & artful manner was the only thing that got me to the hospital on time. Long story short, I couldn't help but draw connections between the complexity of cerebral circulation and the representative "train" diagram highlighting its function. It felt like a perfect clash of worlds to represent the Circle of Willis this way."



Waves

Nina D'Andrea, Medical Student

Inspiration: "Before I began medical school, everyone told me how challenging the next four years would be academically. Exam after exam—wave after wave—it can very easily feel overwhelming especially when a cloud in your personal life decides it is time to rain. In the moments when I feel like I am sinking below the surface, weighed down by the anchor of school expectations and personal commitments, I turn to my family and friends to throw me a life preserver until the storm passes."



Arched Bookshelf **Vincent Melemai, Medical Student**

Inspiration: "This bookshelf was my hobby project during our neuroscience blocks in first year. It represents the countless hours of listening to lecture while exploring new concepts and techniques in both woodworking and medicine."



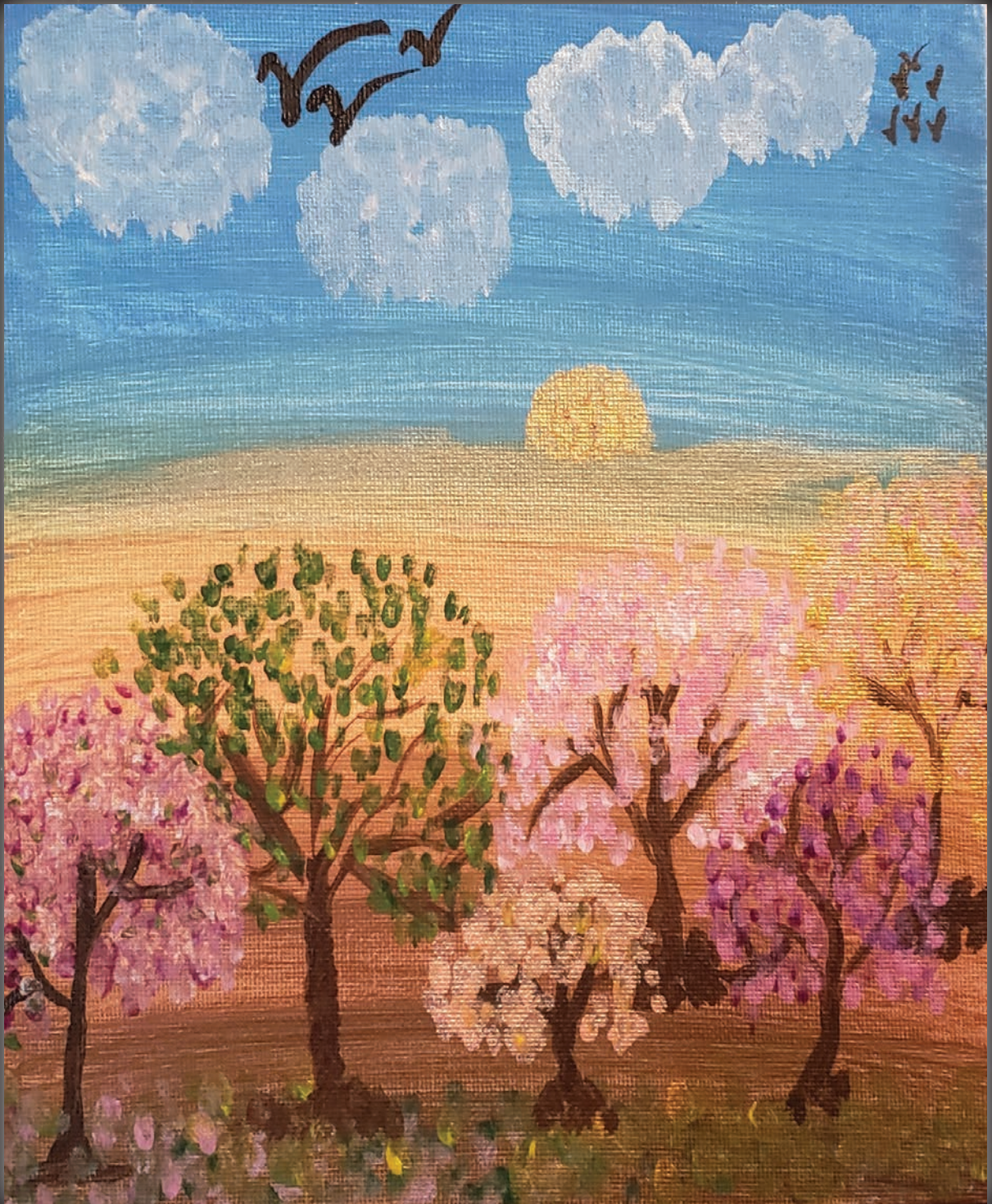
Mind and Soul
Alyssa Brashear, Medical Student

Inspiration: "My inspiration is the human side of medicine. In psychiatry and neurology, treating the brain means treating the mind and soul — the very essence of a person."



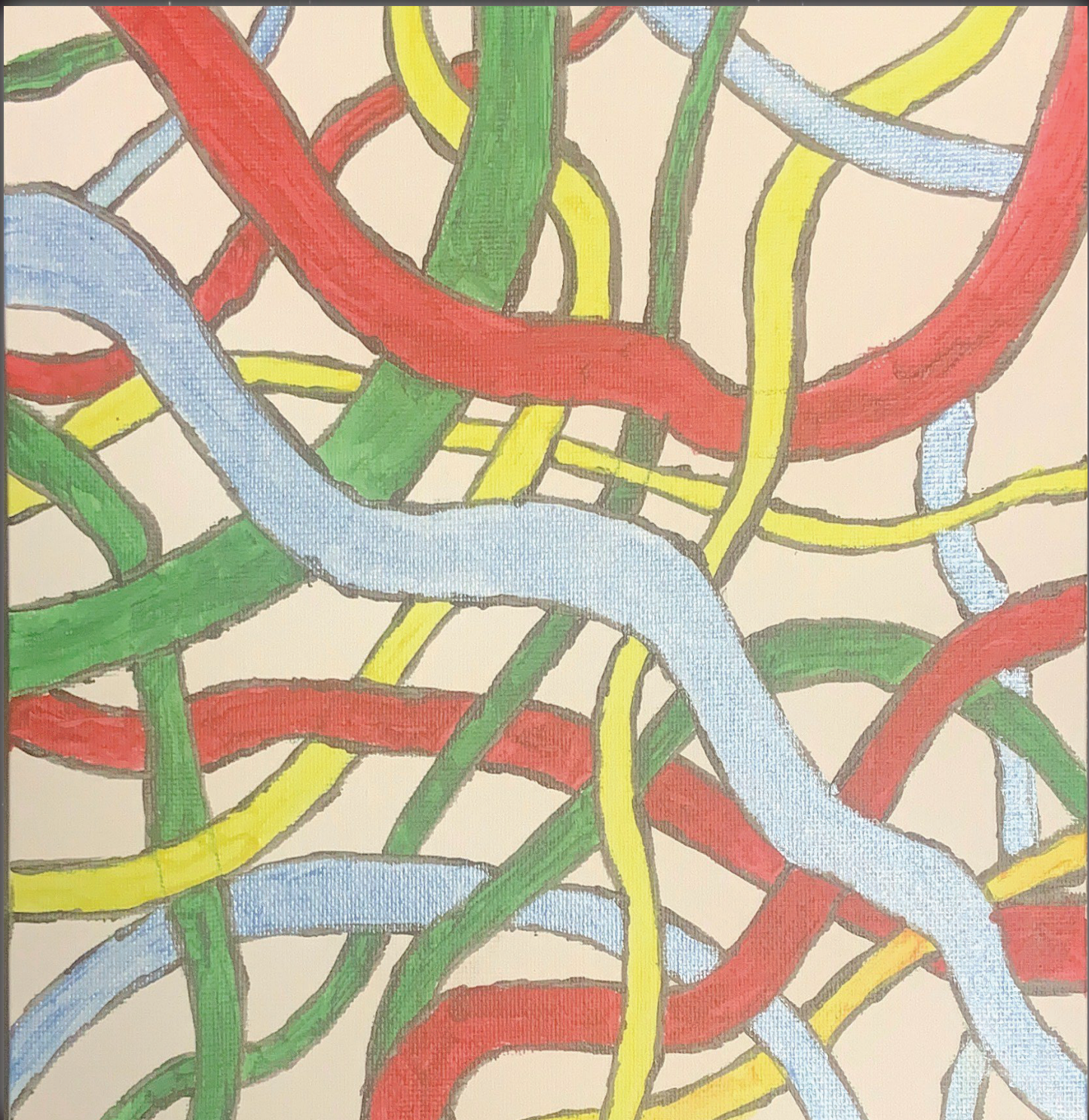
A Pod to Success **Sadhika Jagannathan, Psychiatry Resident**

Inspiration: "Dolphins utilize teamwork to hunt which is necessary for survival. There are dolphins in various positions (some jumping a lot out of the water, some just above surface, and some just underneath the surface as seen in this picture). This reminds me of how teamwork impacts patient care and the importance of working with every member of the team (nursing staff, pharmacists, doctors, case managers, etc...)"



Change, The Only Constant
Silpa Beegala, Graduate Research Assistant

Inspiration: "Symbolizing a time of transition and renewal, and creating a space for new beginnings and revival, through abscission allowing for rejuvenation, is personified by the leaves changing colors."



Messy
Nicholas Nestor, PM&R Resident

Inspiration: "I love drawing pieces like this because it's up for interpretation (even to myself) what I actually drew. To take a neuro perspective, it could represent how axons are overlapping in the brain and even though it looks "messy" its still very organized with each thread playing an important role to formulate a thought or action."



Dendritic Arbor
Wendy Tan, Medical Student

Inspiration: "The inspiration is relating tree branches on a wise old tree to the dendritic arborization of neurons in our brains that create more synapses as we learn."



Fallen Leaf Jessica Frey, Neurologist

Inspiration: "I once had a patient with an incurable neurologic illness tell me very nonchalantly and in jest: "I'm like all those fall leaves out there, falling down and dying. But best believe I'm gonna be one of the pretty leaves." It was a simple and beautiful reminder of the importance of humor and human connection in the midst of something so fragile and painful. This photo reminds me of the beauty that can still be seen during a time of pain or loss."



Solitude

Jessica Frey, Neurologist

Inspiration: "This photograph of a lone figure amongst the backdrop of the fall leaves during the golden hour reminds me of the importance of savoring simple moments. The moments of silence, peace, and reflection are important aspects of connecting with a patient in the clinic, just as they are in day-to-day life."



Window Sills and Waiting
Danielle Sblendorio, Neurology Resident

Inspiration: "On the inpatient wards, one might hear the phrase "hurry up and wait" jokingly being said to patients when the clinical team is updating them on their current hospital status and plan of care. This photograph reminds me of the patients in the hospital I have taken care of who have had extended stays, who I would often find staring out their hospital room window - hoping, wishing, and waiting for answers. They tell me stories of their travels and the places they have explored, looking onward through a cloudy window-pane to a picturesque view of a brighter tomorrow."



The Calm Before the Storm
Danielle Sblendorio, Neurology Resident

Inspiration: "When I took this photograph during my first vacation time in residency, I remember there being complete silence around me aside from the occasional whispers of the Spanish moss in the wind or trickles of the river. This reminds me to savor each moment of peace possible, to find joy even in the little daily moments, and to pace myself because medical training is a long and challenging journey that requires periods of rest before starting up again. By finding peace within ourselves and who we are, we as medical providers have the opportunity to be the calm before, during, and after "the storm" for our patients and their families."

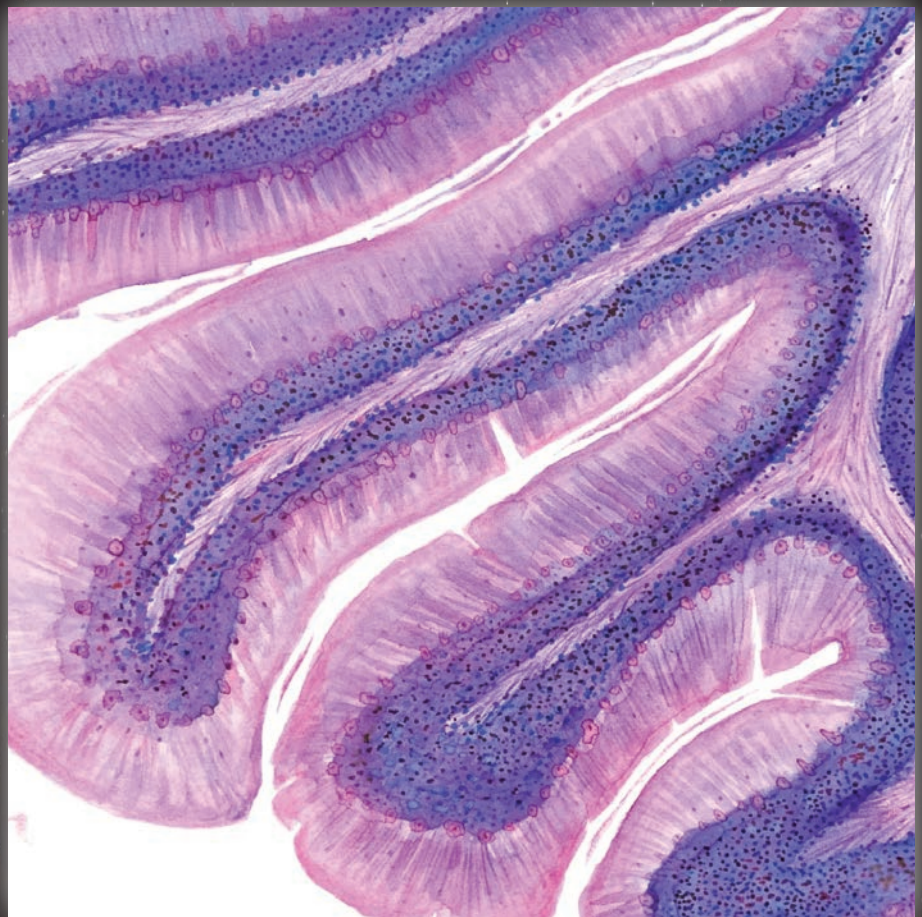


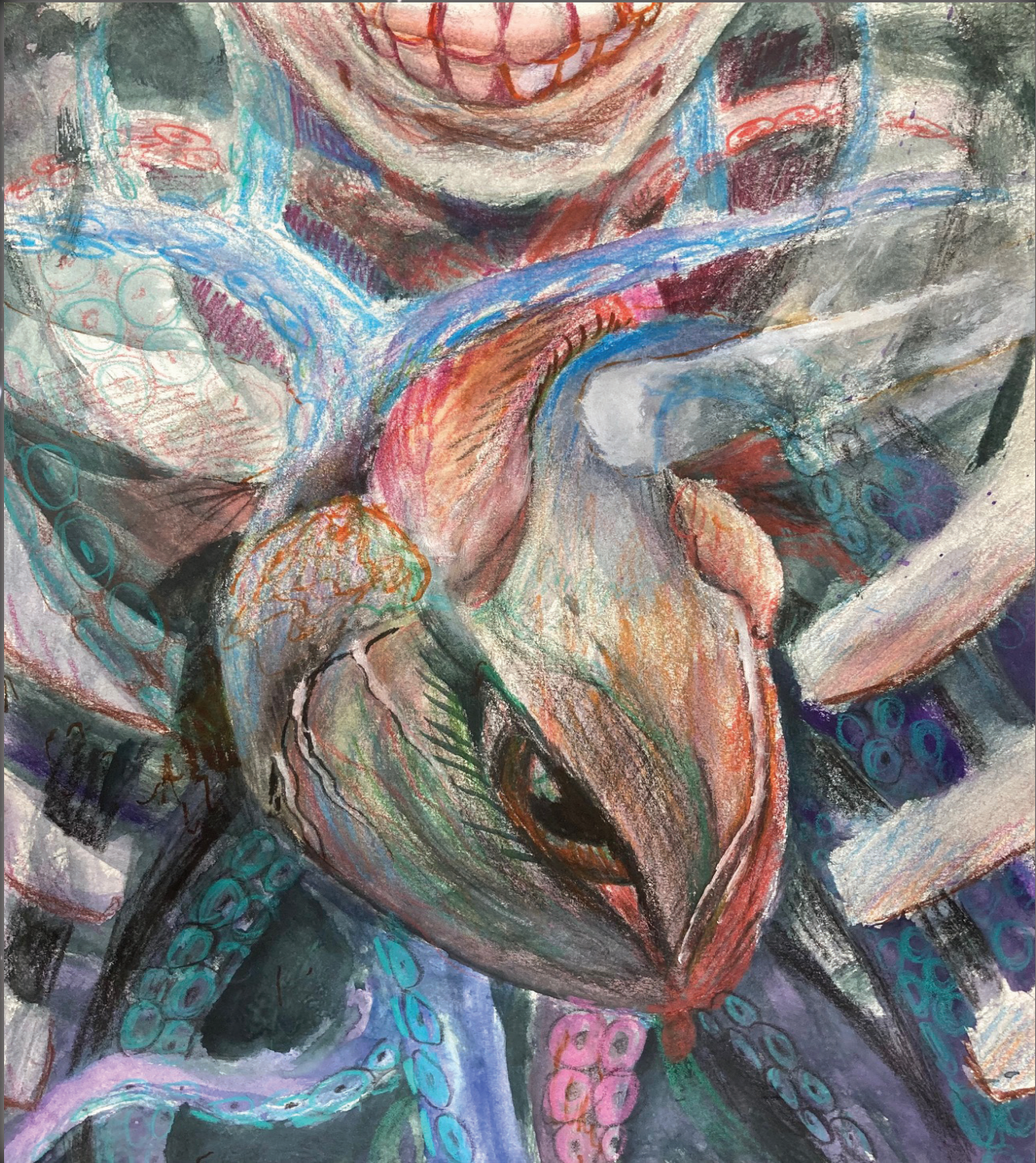
Brachial Plexus
Jack Goembel,
Medical Student

Inspiration: "This painting is based on a color scheme used by Dr. Petrone in her anatomy lectures, which I found really helpful in learning the spinal nerve."

Cerebellum
Jack Goembel,
Medical Student

Inspiration: "It is based on a cross section from the WVU Histology Online site."





Occult Heart Disease

Jack Goembel, Medical Student

Inspiration: "My friend experienced severe shortness of breath and exercise intolerance growing up, which providers initially attributed to POTS. In reality, his superior vena cava had been completely occluded by scar tissue due to an implanted port that was never removed. His azygos venous system expanded dramatically and compensated for years until the obstruction was finally discovered, after which he received stents to restore normal blood flow. His resilience, both anatomical and personal, inspired this piece."

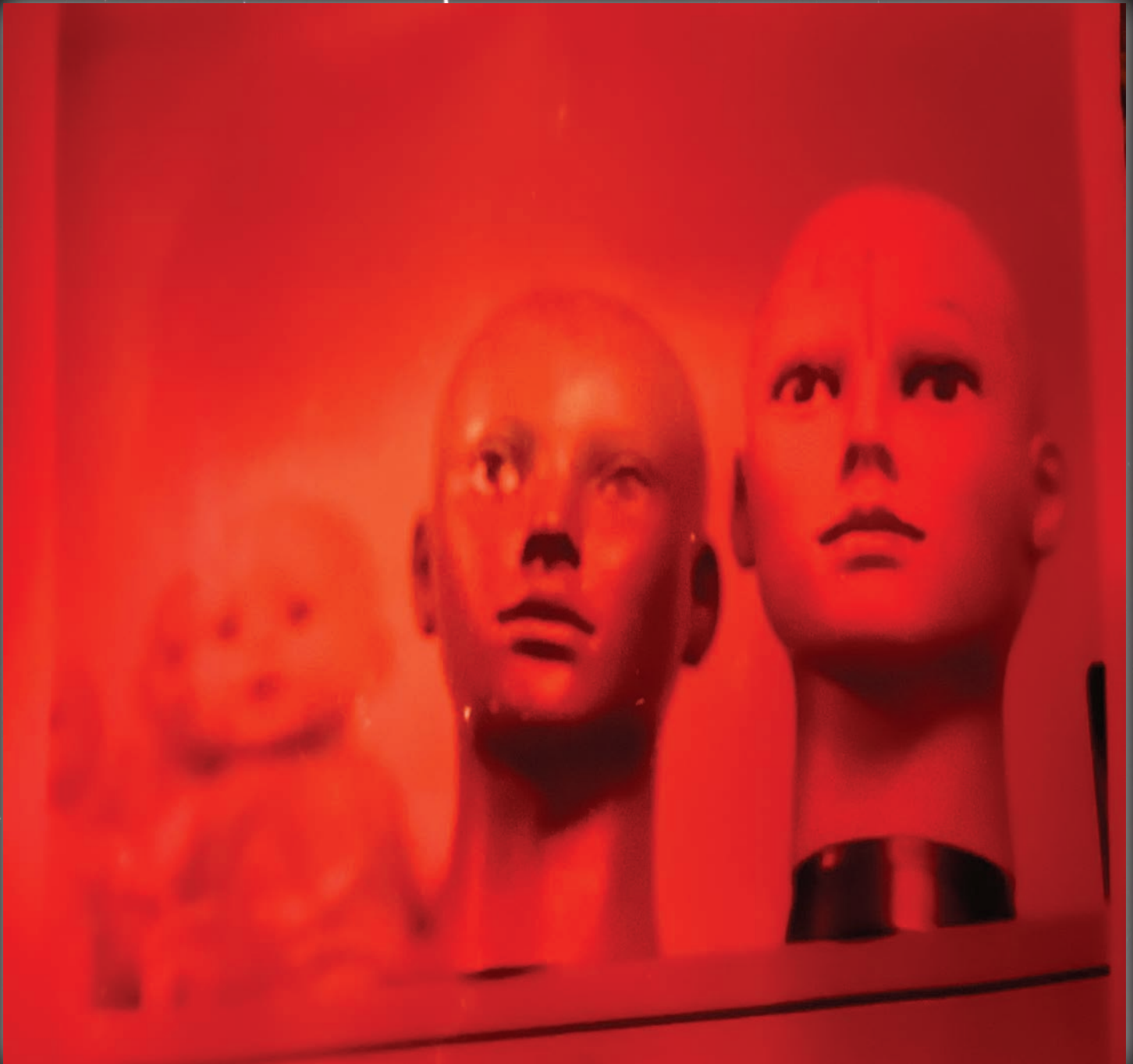


ALMOST A POEM

Benjamin Silverberg, EM Physician

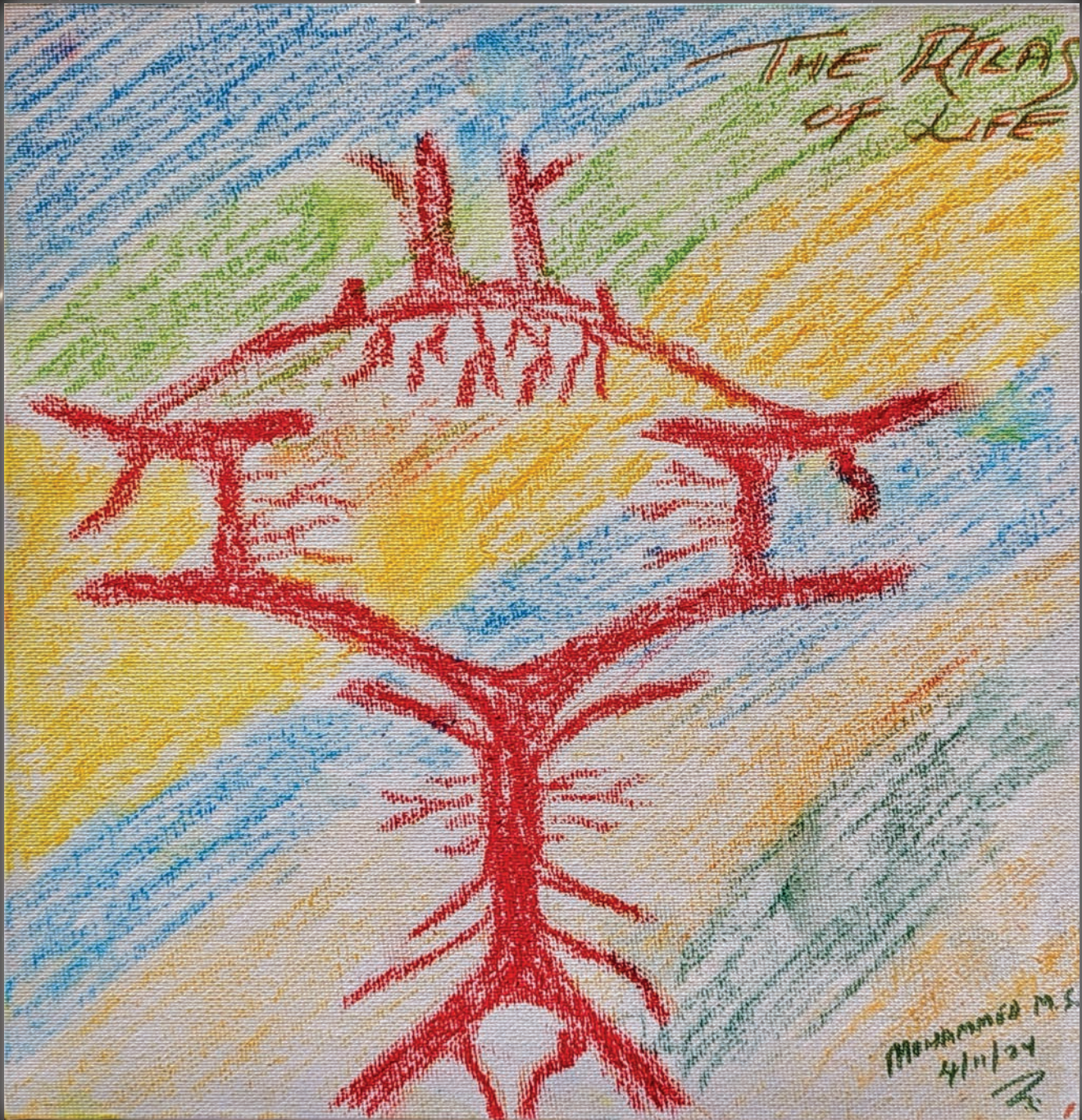
Bryan Silverberg, Spouse of EM Physician

Pink and gold in the morning. White but not bright. Gray skies. Birds sing. An almost morning. Almost perfect. If only the sky were blue and the sun at full force. If only the bright green blades of the grass were vibrant. If only the tulips and hyacinths were out. Almost. And yet... perfection in the imperfect. Beauty and serenity in the tzvishn, the space in between, the almost. We live in the almost. Make space there for laughter and beauty and love. The in-between is the everything.



Untitled
Kristina Lopez, Neurologist

Inspiration: "Training mannequins utilized in the education of technical procedure of placing EEGs. The looming gaze of sentries as one passes in and out of the gates of clinic, day in, day out, ever present. Silent greetings, judgement, approval or lack thereof. Today is meaningful for someone, and they bear witness."



The Atlas of Life
Mohammed Sarvath, Neurologist

*A crimson lattice, finely spun,
Through silent folds, where thoughts are won.
Each tiny stream, a vital art,
Where life's own current plays its part,
A hidden beauty, yet begun.*

Joshua Rhudy Psychiatry Resident

Inspiration: "This poem was inspired by something that unfortunately many of those who work in healthcare field have experienced: struggling with the grief of losing a patient. Specifically, these words were inspired to be told from the perspective of a psychiatrist having difficulty with processing the negative emotions which came with the loss of a patient to suicide, although the phrasing was intentionally left open so deeper meanings and connections can be interpreted from the poem and apply to broader scenarios in healthcare. It describes the powerful emotions that the lingering silence can bring when suffering from grief, with the mind trying to fill the void with thoughts and memories which sometimes only further carry forward the silence."

Echoes of Silence

Darkness consumed you and took over the reins,
And the hole deepened to the point of no return.
My voice didn't reach, now only silence remains.

Shadows slowly crept in to augment your pains,
But such emotions I could not quite discern.
Darkness consumed you and took over the reins.

Echoing memories keep ringing my brain,
And as tears fall my heart continues to burn.
My voice didn't reach, now only silence remains.

A struggle to process and break from these chains,
Pondering every word spoken as our final meeting adjourned.
Darkness consumed you and took over the reins.

Anguished thoughts fill deep in my veins,
A losing battle which I cannot spurn.
My voice didn't reach, now only silence remains.

My mind and my heart fight the strength of the strains,
For these quiet echoes to cease I yearn.
Darkness consumed you and took over the reins,
My voice didn't reach, now only silence remains.

Inspiration: "The inspiration of this piece is from patient's sharing memories of their past, but seeing their current obstacles in clinic – how they used to run a 19-minute 5k, but are now struggling with metabolic disease, or how they used to garden, but now cannot bend their knees. These stories reminded me of the quote at the beginning of the poem which reminds us to be thankful for the blessings we have."

It's always time to be thankful

A wise man who could not write or read,
Told his people to awaken and take heed.

"Take advantage of five before five:

1. Your youth before your old age
2. Your health before your sickness
3. Your wealth before your poverty
4. Your free time before being preoccupied
5. Your life before your death"

Although this advice nears 1500 years in age,
Human have not fully appreciated this sage.
His words remain immortalized in our books,
But we have yet to give them a second look.

The elderly patients I see daily in IM,
Have stories of gold, each memory a gem.
Reminiscing, however, they rarely ever say,
I wish I studied less, and spent more time in play!

Often struggling with the ales of old age,
Diseases, medications - stuck in the hospital's cage.
Reminiscing, they regularly mention,
I remember I was healthy without all this tension!

Debts, interests, and fees on an upward trend,
Bills, payments, and loans with no end.
Reminiscing, they rarely would ever recall,
I wish I spent more in luxurious sprawl!

Although some patients are retired with free time at hand,
Those who are employed cannot make time for their body's demand.
Reminiscing, to me, they often would tell,
Of times they ran and climbed so well!

Each one of my patients, young or old,
Remembers their stories of valor and gold.
Once close to their decided fate and last stance,
They look back on life's ever-changing dance.

Most do not look back in sorrowful regret,
But do think about what goals they could've met.
Many do relish in their successes and wins,
But others do reflect on how things might've been.

Hearing their journeys makes me wonder,
How in the end we all will be deep under.
Our fame and possessions will turn to rust,
But legacies of good will outlive our dust.

Inspiration: "My first rotation upon my return to medical school following a leave of absence was in the NICU. I was nervous to return, and to start clinicals so far behind my peers. During the rotation I witnessed an infant who required surfactant to help them breathe, a process which was intense to observe given the size of the infant and the need to use a tongue blade to deliver the medicine to the lungs. After the procedure, my preceptor and I practiced intubation techniques, and he discussed the tiny instruments needed to care for critically ill premature infants. The following day, on my drive into the hospital, I noticed a church sign which read "Because He lives, I can face tomorrow." I thought this message perfectly captured my experience in the NICU and in medicine; it is the strength of each patient which inspires me to continue in school."

Size 00 Laryngoscope

The day rises pink over
The far-off mountains viewed through the haze
Of unblinked eyes and the fugue of not-sleep.
I am making myself go back.

The church sign glares its proclamation,
Hand-placed blocks arranged to tell me
Because He lives
I can face tomorrow.

And they aren't my words,
And maybe *He* isn't my god
Anymore
But, forgive me, I need them;
I take these words under my breath like
Prayer.
I can face tomorrow.

***Inspiration:** “Somewhat interestingly, with the prompt of “promoting connection to patients,” my general feelings went immediately to “preservation of the connection to patients.” And that, for me, is stemming from this insidious burnout felt by so many of my generation. For background, I am an early career, woman physician in a dual-career household. I’ve now practiced through too many major historical calamities of medicine – notably the (hopefully two) epidemics of opioids and Covid. I straddle the inception of duty hours while in training, but then also the glaring lack thereof as an attending.*

For me, the rising tide of burnout is something I work everyday to mitigate (compress? coagulate?) to stop this slow bleed from seeping into my patient care. And when I dial into achieving source control for my burnout, it’s come down to a simple premise for me: I’m a better person at day 3 than I am at day 10 straight of working. Viewed as a personal failure by many (sometimes even myself), I have yet to figure out the antidote. This seems to worsen as I continue to grow up. So often I am torn between the needs of my family and the demands of my job – the inflexibility for me to be both of those people, mother and physician, sometimes is staggering. I wade into this space an interloper – the demands of my profession are not meant for those of us who, heaven forbid, have sick children, sick parents, sick spouses, or even our own sicknesses. Instead, it was built for people who had someone else at home, bastions of health, these concerns left to someone else to navigate. And now Medicine is in the slow reconciliation of change, to see, if this profession wants people like me. I hope so?

And so the following pieces hint at my work to stop burnout - and this inherent sense of outsidership. “On Doctoring” is based on a letter I found posthumously written by my father (created at the time of my birth, I suspect). I think of this often, perhaps as a way to absolve myself of the tragedies and suffering we are so often beset against; a reminder, that I am not an executor of Fate. And that those wise teachers, parents, and patients, will always remain with me as a small particle of thinking matter, as I wander through the stories of their lives.”

Mommy Track

**My patients tell me
Becoming a mother
Made me a better doctor
If only, Medicine
Would listen**

JB Young
General Internist Practicing in Appalachia

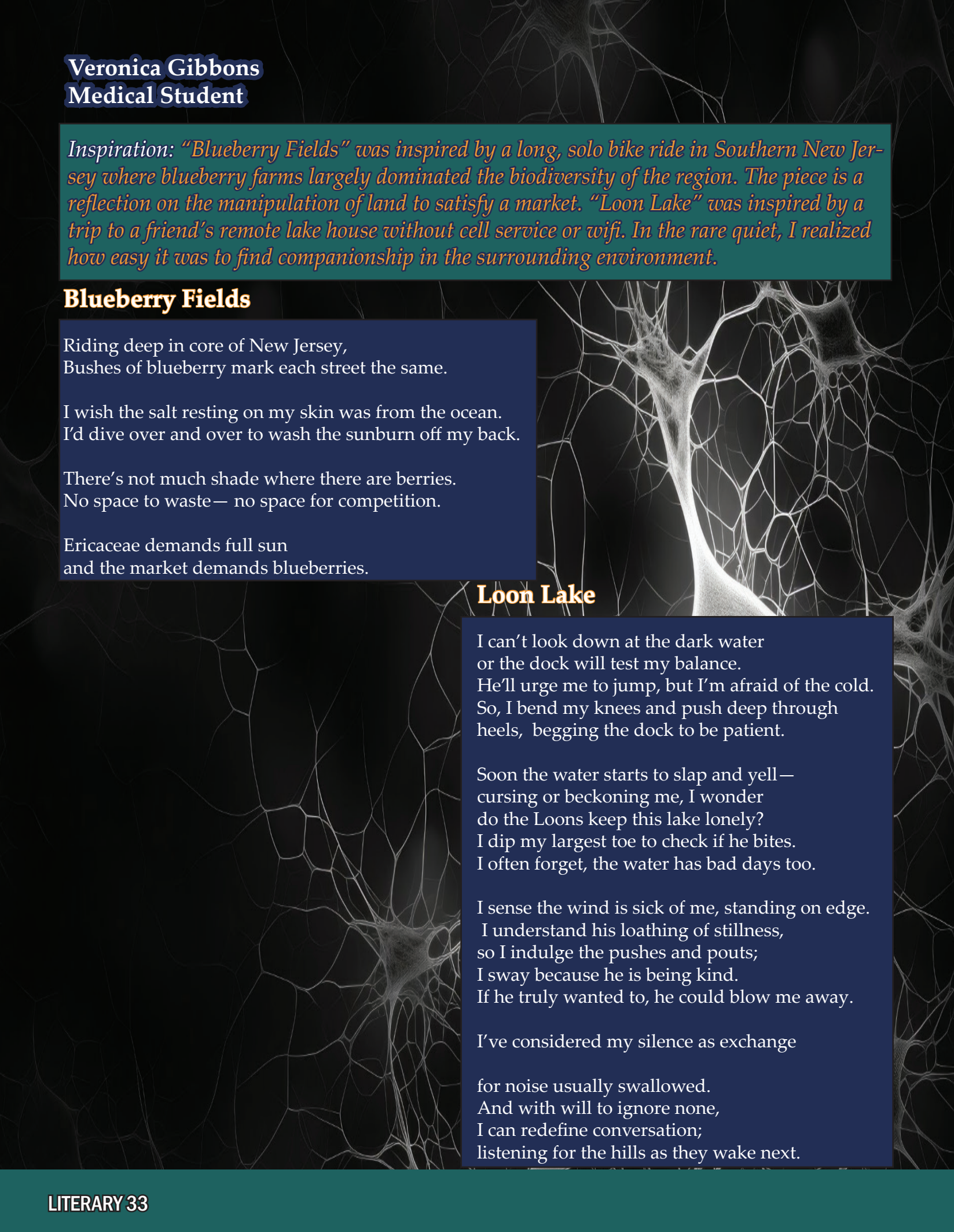
On Doctoring, Or A Father's Letter to his Daughter

I am not an executor of Fate.
I come from Nowhere, and
Nowhere do I go
I am beyond Time and Space
A fragile cord of ether
I will remain with you (always)
A small particle of thinking matter
As you wander through
The stories of your life

JB Young, MD and J.R. Sizemore (Deceased)
Edited from original correspondence from J.R. Sizemore to his daughter,
Who often thinks of this, when Doctoring

Haiku on Resiliency

Hard lesson to learn
Protect your soul for patients
Work won't love you back

The background of the entire page is a detailed, grayscale image of a neuron network. A large, central neuron with a prominent cell body and many branching dendrites and axons is the focal point. Other smaller neurons are visible in the periphery, all interconnected in a complex web. The image has a high-contrast, almost ethereal quality.

Veronica Gibbons Medical Student

Inspiration: "Blueberry Fields" was inspired by a long, solo bike ride in Southern New Jersey where blueberry farms largely dominated the biodiversity of the region. The piece is a reflection on the manipulation of land to satisfy a market. "Loon Lake" was inspired by a trip to a friend's remote lake house without cell service or wifi. In the rare quiet, I realized how easy it was to find companionship in the surrounding environment.

Blueberry Fields

Riding deep in core of New Jersey,
Bushes of blueberry mark each street the same.

I wish the salt resting on my skin was from the ocean.
I'd dive over and over to wash the sunburn off my back.

There's not much shade where there are berries.
No space to waste — no space for competition.

Ericaceae demands full sun
and the market demands blueberries.

Loon Lake

I can't look down at the dark water
or the dock will test my balance.
He'll urge me to jump, but I'm afraid of the cold.
So, I bend my knees and push deep through
heels, begging the dock to be patient.

Soon the water starts to slap and yell —
cursing or beckoning me, I wonder
do the Loons keep this lake lonely?
I dip my largest toe to check if he bites.
I often forget, the water has bad days too.

I sense the wind is sick of me, standing on edge.
I understand his loathing of stillness,
so I indulge the pushes and pouts;
I sway because he is being kind.
If he truly wanted to, he could blow me away.

I've considered my silence as exchange
for noise usually swallowed.
And with will to ignore none,
I can redefine conversation;
listening for the hills as they wake next.

Inspiration: "Glioblastoma patients that I worked with before medical school, who demonstrated grace in response to hardship."

Brain Tumor Blues

The autopsy reveals
That the diffuse glioma
Is indeed diffuse

Though its infiltration is dual
Elusive yet ubiquitous
Invading both the brain
And the life

Its shadow always cast
Though in shadows it hides
Oh, to discover
The enemy inside

And yet you have shown
That we can create dignity
Not despite
But within calamity

Humanity on so pure a display
In tones subdued
And in your own graceful way
Like playing the blues

What ... Another Congressional

Before becoming commanding officer of a combat support hospital in the Middle East, I assumed that the military was rather nonpolitical. Sure, I realized that senior military officers were always talking to politicians or testifying before Congress. However, I never thought that so many members of Congress would be writing to me. Actually ... they were not specifically writing to me. No member of Congress knew my name or who I was. These congressional inquiries (a congressional for short) eventually filtered down through the military hierarchy to me because the issue involved a sailor working at the hospital or a patient treated in the hospital that I commanded. Moreover, I suspect that none of the congressmen or congresswomen who sent the inquiries that made their way to me were even aware of the inquiry. I learned that many people are quick to complain to their elected representatives.

My superiors instructed me on how to deal with congressional inquiries ... just handle them and respond quickly. As commanding officer of a combat support hospital in Kuwait, we frequently had members of Congress, or their staff, visit the hospital to thank wounded service members. When asked, they also gave me advice on how to deal with congressional inquiries ... just handle them and respond quickly. Consistent advice ... so that is exactly what I did.

"So, what is this congressional about?" I asked.

"It seems we have a sailor at Camp Liberty who has been here for two months and has not yet told his mother that he arrived here safely and is alive and well. His mother called her congressman to complain."

My staff had already started to draft a response explaining that all military personnel entering this designated combat zone had been provided a form postcard when they arrived in theater where you could just fill in your parents' or spouse's name and address to indicate that they had arrived safely. I tore it up telling them no one cared about that. I told them that the only response to the Congressman that I would sign was one that read, "This sailor spoke to his mother on this date and at this time." I called the troop medical clinic at Camp Liberty and instructed the senior enlisted sailor there to take this sailor to a phone and have him call his mother, and report back to me the date and time the sailor was observed and heard speaking to his mother. With humor in my voice, I also instructed that the Skipper did not want to hear from his mother again.

All congressional inquiries should be that simple.

"What is it this time?"

"Seems a corpsman's mother complained to her congressman that we were having her daughter perform perimeter guard duty without a weapon or body armor while everyone else at this camp was carrying a weapon and wearing body armor. The mother thought that it outrageous that her daughter would be sacrificed in this manner should the camp be overrun by terrorists."

I began laughing uncontrollably. I knew immediately the basis for this complaint. I called the troop medical clinic at that camp and confirmed the only perimeter duty this corpsman had ever been assigned.

In my response, I explained to the Congressman that this corpsman had never been assigned guard duty, adding the Geneva Conventions prohibits such activity by medical personnel. This corpsman was performing mayoral camp duty. That is, she was picking up trash along the camp perimeter. This duty was required of all permanent party personnel at all camps. Even I picked up litter, albeit only occasionally. Most of the soldiers and marines at these camps were transients, and did not have a safe secure place to store their weapons and body armor. As permanent party, medical personnel had our own armory; thus, we did not have to carry weapons in camp. I assured the congressman that when any medical personnel left one of the camps for any purpose, they were armed and had the proper personal protection gear as stipulated by the current local threat condition level. I drafted my response in such a matter that it could be sent by the congressman to my sailor's mother and was worded so as not to minimize her concern regarding her daughter's safety.

On delivering another congressional inquiry, the brigade staff that I reported to joked that this complaint will require more effort on my part. This one concerned a soldier seen at my hospital and was now claiming that we had refused to evaluate his hearing loss. He then had seen a civilian audiologist while at home on rest and recuperation (R&R) leave and received \$7000 hearing aids. Tricare (the military health insurance) refused to pay for those hearing aids, as he should have utilized the military's medical system. Now this soldier was stuck with a \$7000 bill because we refused to provide care. The congressman wanted an explanation.

(Continued on next page...)

This did not sound good. I located the electronic medical record of this patient's visit to my facility. He had seen an ENT nurse practitioner. As I read her note, I could have kissed her if I did not think it would have gotten me in trouble. It was the most thorough note I had seen in the desert. She had offered to send this soldier to Germany for a complete audiology evaluation. He had angrily refused saying that he had R&R coming up and he was not going miss it for a doctor's visit in Germany. He told the nurse practitioner that he would get hearing aids at home and make the army pay for them. The nurse practitioner dutifully quoted every "F-word" and "GD-word" this soldier had used in refusing care at my facility and detailing his plan to get hearing aids at home.

My response to this congressman was very brief, "The attached medical record note of this soldier's evaluation at U.S. Military Hospital Kuwait is self-explanatory." I heard nothing further regarding this complaint.

The principal in responding to congressional inquiries was to keep it simple, keep it non-defensive, and allow the congressman or congresswoman to respond to their constituent with resolution or explanation of the issue. Civilian control of the military is a fundamental American principle (Figure). Congressional oversight of the military ensures adherence to that principle. Although congressional inquiries were a frequent distraction from pressing war-inflicted medical issues, they were/are entirely appropriate; especially in a war zone, where America's sons and daughters were/are dying.



Figure: One of several US Congressional delegations to visit US Military Hospital Kuwait in 2005 (shown with hospital leadership kneeling, author second from left kneeling). The congressional staffers initially wanted to stage this photo with them kneeling before us ... no way was that going to happen!

Inspiration: "A description of what it feels like with residency applications approaching and the match in sight."

A Girl Who Thought The World A Race in Technicolor (Part II)

Many years ago
A dear friend
Used me as a muse for a poem entitled
A Girl Who Thought The World A Race in Technicolor
The piece was
An endearing adage
About a determined runner
with a zest for life

While my track spikes
Have long since been retired
I now near the end of a different marathon
Legs numb
as I propel myself
Through a kaleidoscope finishing chute
of dizzying hues

A myriad of new shades
Collected over many miles
Adorn a finish line
That teases my burning muscles
And excites my racing heart.

Kayla Steinberger
Medical Student

Inspiration: "Becoming a parent during medical training resulted in cognitive dissonance - a strong desire to be a present mother while also training to become a pediatrician has resulted in more time spent taking care of other children than my own. This poem reflects the quiet moments of guilt and growth that define my journey as both a mother and a medical trainee. Little Hands is an exploration of the sacrifices, stolen moments, and the eventual realization that growth—both as a physician and a mother—happens in the in-between."

Little Hands

Moon out, eyes open, it's morn
Minutes pass, I want more
Leave in haste, what for?
Goodbye my love, first born

Met with new faces, fresh tears, sorry you must be here
I spoke fast, forgot my place, I wished I was clearer
Sink on, I stare in the mirror
I see the imposter is me, it's sad that I fear her

Phone rings, "Hi momma! Can you hear me?"
Oh, yes. I love you and I miss you baby
I'm learning to care for others, but not caring for my family lately
Guilty here or there, but can you blame me?

My headlights are finally in my drive
Moon out, eyes closed, goodnight
In the dark, tiny hands find mine
I smile, guess there's lost sleep for me tonight

Weeks go by, same days, same nights
It's finally getting better, more than alright
New tiny hands hold onto me tight
A thankful nod, some relief, I sigh

I know I am learning- about medicine and mothering
I am growing and becoming
More

Inspiration: "Although much can be said about this poem, for different reasons, I'll leave it entirely in the eyes of the beholder. Ultimately, you were an inspiration, and my friend as well."

You and My Friend

How can I be lost when I'm right here?
I see the path, yet my mind goes in 100 other directions.
No time to turn the engine off
To give it a break
To recover
To take that deep breath
To smile

You. You claim you can help me?
You probably don't claim it, but you could. Help me.
You could perform a miracle, but you won't, at least that's what you say.
I don't believe you.
I don't believe you.
I don't believe you.

My friend. My friend is near and ready.
My friend will do me company any time I want,
but never stays for long, and always leaves.
The very next day, my friend is near and ready, again.
When my friend is around
I'm happy
happy
happy

I'd rather be with you, but you don't help me.
My friend does, albeit in a highly limited fashion.
You. You could help me forever.
But you won't.

Catherine C. Sblendorio
Grandmother to Neurology Resident

Inspiration: "It was a delightful surprise to know my poem was chosen. I never realized at the time how busy and fast the years seemed to slip by. I will soon celebrate being 90 years old and am grateful for all the fine blessings and family that have come my way."

Life's Journey

We are born into this world innocent as can be
Everything is before us, but so much we cannot see
No crystal ball to tell us what the future holds
Life's many events soon to unfold

The days are carefree and fun when we are small
Next thing you know, we have grown so tall
This is a time to pursue all our dreams
Working on so many things, it seems

These years can bring us a lot of strife
While finding our true place in life
At last it's starting to make some sense
When work and plan fall into place, hence

Love comes along and married we are
Little did we know it would take us so far
Busy were these years, young children in tow
My how the time went, much to do, you know

Life can be hard with some bumps in the road
But it's great to have someone to help share our load
Proud of our children and their families
Nothing else matters compared to these

Children all gone with homes of their own
It seems too quiet now where little ones roamed
But soon grandchildren run through the door
Noise and laughter come alive once more

Love, family, and friends become center stage
While life has turned another page
Many songs have been sung at this late date
Having grown so close to our friend and mate

As the years hurry by, one day after another
Those golden years get closer, so we discover
We're grateful for all the gifts on earth
While passing through since our birth

The best is yet to come,
They say
Be joyful and happy,
Come what may.

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