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WHORL

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2001

# WHORL: 2001

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*Boston University*



*Whorl*  
2001

## ***Founder's Page***

You are reading the work of healers. *Whorl* embodies the concept that medicine is art and art is medicine. The creative, artistic process can be healthy and healing for the creator, and the experience of the shared result enlightening and healing for the beholder—even when parts of the process or experience are actually unpleasant and challenging. Even the sharing itself is a point of contact that, like many moments between healer and patient, promotes health and humanity on both sides of the relationship. I came to believe this in a very personal way, first through the benefits of a balanced education, then through my own private efforts and explorations, and finally in what I was able to experience and accomplish through the Creative Arts Society. By the time I entered the School of Medicine in 1994 I was long in the habit of writing and singing to maintain my sanity and awareness through the trials of life, so I was determined to keep it up during the trials of medical school. Sharing my conviction became part of my desire to help and heal even before I could practice medicine, because you don't need to be a health professional to improve the well being of others.

The idea for a literary journal actually came from Creative Arts Society cofounder, Tri D. Do (BUSM '98), as we introduced ourselves to each other at the very beginning of our first year. Forming an official organization around this concrete work called *Whorl* and the abstract concept of creativity for wellness reflects the intensity of my belief and my desire to promote it. The fact that it continues beyond my graduation from the School of Medicine, growing and thriving, confirms that this power in art and the artistic process is very real. At the very least it is fun, and that too is healthy.

Through CAS I have met, worked with, and learned from so many enthusiastic, talented individuals that I consider them and CAS important parts of my education. I am still learning how to achieve and maintain balance and health in my life. I hope that participating in or experiencing what CAS has to offer inspires and helps you to do the same.

Margaret S. Lee, M.D.  
BUSM, Class of 1999

# WHORL



## 2001

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#### ***New Horizons***

*Black & White Photograph*

*Thomas Rünger, M.D.*

*Professor, Dermatology*

*Whorl Online: <http://people.bu.edu/creative/whorl>*

## **Editors' Note**

Thank you all for the overwhelming response to last year's *Whorl*! With the heightened interest in *Whorl*, we saw an increase in the number of submissions we received this year. It was great to see contributions from so many different people within the BUSM/BMC community. We tried to include a wide variety of literature and artwork that spanned different backgrounds, affiliations and genres. In addition, we have expanded this issue of *Whorl* to include additional pages, new color inserts and the premiere of *Whorl Online*.

Started diligently by Online Editor, **Lars Hansen**, *Whorl Online* will hopefully be a continued addition to the print version of *Whorl*. *Whorl Online* contains a larger selection of color artwork with a distinct selection of written pieces and can be found at <http://people.bu.edu/creative/whorl>.

We would especially like to thank **Dan Madigan** from Educational Media Center for his support and assistance throughout this entire process. His guidance has been invaluable and he has contributed to making *Whorl* a great success this year.

We hope you are as impressed with the works in *Whorl 2001* as we are. Please feel free to contact us with any suggestions or comments you may have. Enjoy the issue!

Co-Editors:

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# **The Alumni Association of Boston University School of Medicine**

## **Student Committee on Medical School Affairs (SCOMSA)**

### **Division of Graduate Medical Sciences**

We would also like to acknowledge the following people:

**Dr. Barry M. Manuel**

**Dr. Carl Franzblau**

**Domenic Screnci, Ed.D. and Dan Madigan**  
from the **Educational Media Center**

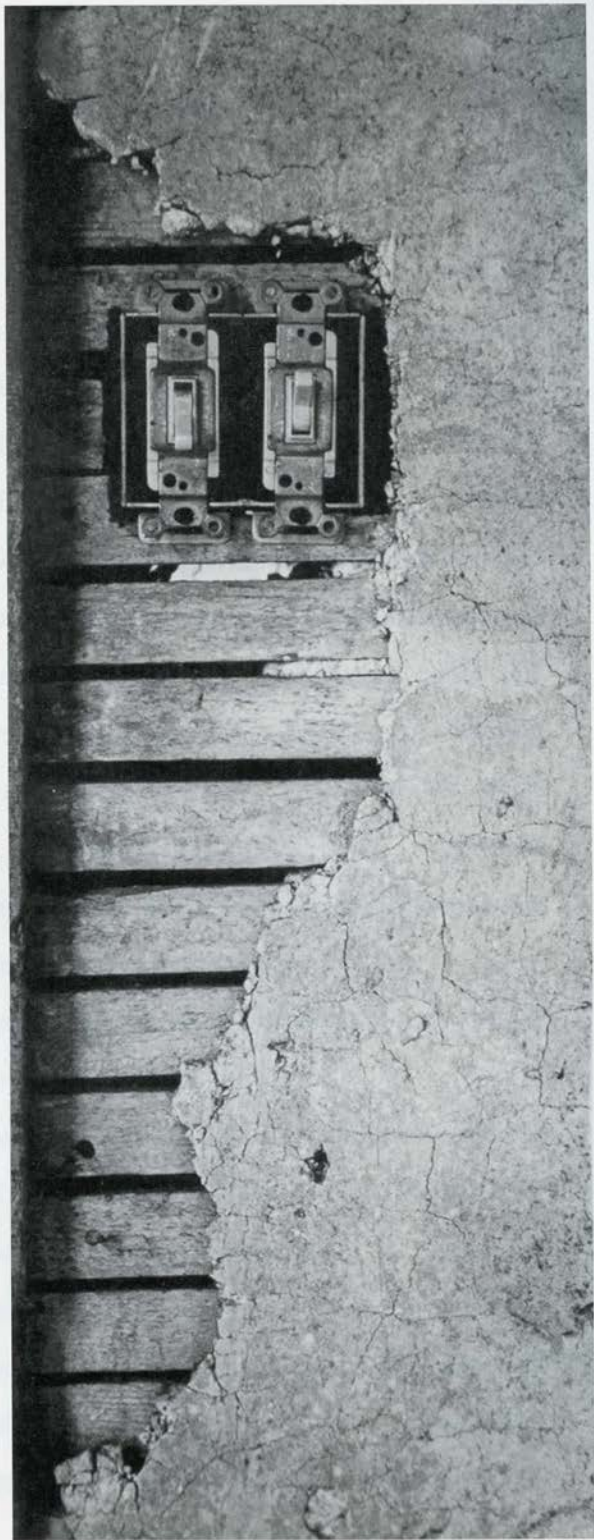
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*Black & White Photograph*  
*Michael Mansour*  
*MD/PhD Student*

## **Skull**

I shut my eyes at night's end,  
Slowly from exhaustion,  
And still my skull is grinning madly.

When in pain, I cry. And the drop's path mocked,  
By my skull that is grinning madly.

Nothing can I do that strays that bony course,  
Or slays that look,  
Of my skull that is grinning madly.

So, in my surreptitious house,  
Some would say it sadly,  
I give myself to my natural gaze,  
And join my skull in grinning madly.

*Gabriel M. Belfort*  
*MD/PhD Student*

Why isn't there a microscope for the soul?  
A way to test the flame  
that no longer wants to burn.  
I look at a stranger's body  
yet all the pieces look familiar.  
I look for track marks left behind  
by isolation, joy and fear.  
This body it speaks to me in a language  
of creaks and groans,  
pains of age and disease  
that I pretend to comprehend.  
What is the meaning of this?  
This skin is gray,  
these eyes are lost.  
I walk in a shadowy realm of encoded  
meanings  
and I realize  
I have no key to this map.

*Anafidelia Tavares*  
*Medical Student*

## *the unexpected affront*

sometimes a hand has its own movement  
acts without thinking  
sometimes it raises up and strikes  
blows to the face  
to the body  
without knowing  
what it's doing

sometimes the body can respond  
but it's usually too late  
the hand can't be stopped  
the movement's already finished

apologies flow suddenly  
as a delayed reaction  
the time lapsed response  
appears illusory, insincere

## **TWO MEN IN THE NIGHT**

Two men  
in the night  
together,  
lost in the smoke,  
heads bowed down  
in forced attrition.

Two men  
in the night  
together,  
a closed door,  
a dark corridor,  
half-empty cups  
and cigarettes.

Two men  
in the night  
together,  
both dreaming  
of a time  
and a place,  
of better days.

*Laura Ngwenya*  
*MD/PhD Student*

*Vijay S. Persad*  
*Assistant Manager, Facilities Management*



***"Canopy" 1997***

*Oil on Canvas*

*Tirsit Mogues*

*Research Associate*

## ***Nastaran***

The earth should have shook  
when she left the world,

Perhaps it did.

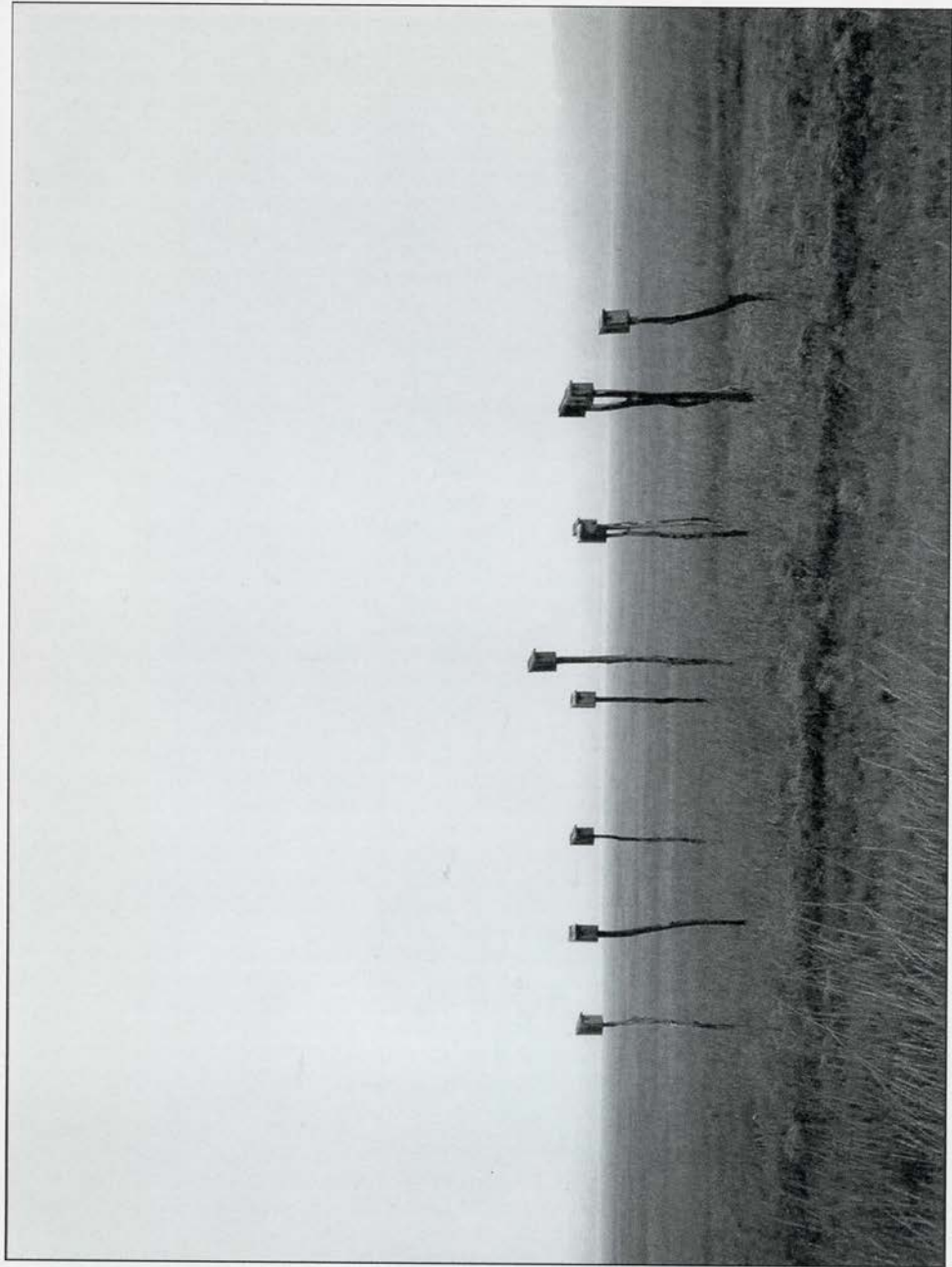
As usual  
People chose not to notice.

Surely the wildlife stalled:  
Birds stopped flying  
Insects dug for shelter  
Fish dove to the surface  
Pets escaped their masters

However humans  
Can restrain a kind gesture  
a loving word  
the truth  
even their own authentic desires

Surely can ignore  
The land collapsing beneath their  
feet.

*Grace Monis*  
*MD/PhD Student*



***Board meeting***

*Black & White Photograph*

*Thomas Rünger, M.D.*

*Professor, Dermatology*

## **Twig**

On the pavement  
shriveled and curled  
remnant  
dried  
hoping to reenter  
the earth  
cold damp  
impacted, surrounded  
can you tell me  
where I come from  
where I am going to?

or are you like me  
helpless  
predestined?

Frozen in its  
last embrace  
a final plea  
to something above  
high up  
higher  
from where  
it fell.

*Grace Monis*  
*MD/PhD Student*

## **Prophet**

Moist, as if it were freshly harvested from good earth,  
Elanor draped the Persian washcloth across Elijah's head.  
He winced  
Then watched as his hand resumed its intention  
Quivering, but dripping with effort  
Up against her cheek  
Which paused before daring to blush-  
Just long enough to see him die.

*Jason Fisher*  
*Medical Student*



*Black & White Photograph  
Mary Ellen McDonough, R.N.  
Pediatrics*



## **HARVEST MOON**

Did you speak to the harvest moon  
last night,  
as it watched in the wings  
of a smudged blue sky,  
while the sun bowed out  
to an earth half-filled  
with hues of leaves  
left spent by summer's dance?

Did you know to wait  
for the second set  
'till the sea runs black  
and the loon calls out  
to a distant mate  
in a sky unheard  
when the sun held sway?

Did you whisper words,  
did you blow a kiss  
to the one you love

hoping

she too  
spoke  
to the harvest moon  
last night?

*Raymond Wiesen*  
*Professor, Information Technology*



**Rome, 2000**

*Color Photograph  
Eugene Petcu, M.D.  
Resident, Pathology*

## **A PRAYER FOR HOPE**

don't give up.  
the sun will rise tomorrow.  
I know it hurts,  
I know the pain of betrayal-  
when your body commits treason  
and becomes a stranger.

but I will be the offering.  
I will appease the gods of pain.  
my hair will be your wig,  
when you lose yours.  
my arms will be your cradle,  
when the heaviness of your burden becomes  
too much,  
when your stomach rebels  
vomiting this fear that plagues you.  
I will be your eyes  
when you can no longer read the line of  
smudgy newsprint.  
I will be your legs  
when your joints fail  
and when your knees ache I will carry you.  
I will be the pillow to bolster your aching back  
I will be your laughter  
when you can find no humor in the struggle  
to get up each day.  
please don't give up.  
the sun will rise on you tomorrow.

*Anafidelia Tavares*  
*Medical Student*



*Color Photograph  
Claire Folger  
Research Technician*

## PROMISE TO BABES

Through the eyes of Babes, what does he see?  
He told me, I'm scared will anyone hurt me?  
I think of my childhood, no guns, violence, fury  
I think of my childhood, I never had to worry

Through the eyes of Babes, what does he see?  
He told me, I'm scared, what will happen to me?  
I told him don't fear, the world is outrageous  
I told him don't fear, be strong, be courageous

Through the eyes of Babes, what does he see?  
He told me, I'm scared will the world be here for me?  
I think of the earth, disease, war, decay  
I think of the earth, I pray, I pray

Through the eyes of Babes, what does he see?  
He told me, I'm scared, I see too much for me.  
I don't want him to live with so much distress  
I don't want him to grow up, stay a child it is best

Through the eyes of Babes, I need to do more  
He told me, I'm scared, in his eyes I explore  
I try to find solace, delight, giggles, bliss  
I'll find it, I'm Mommy, I promise you this...

*Dedicated to my baby Chris.*

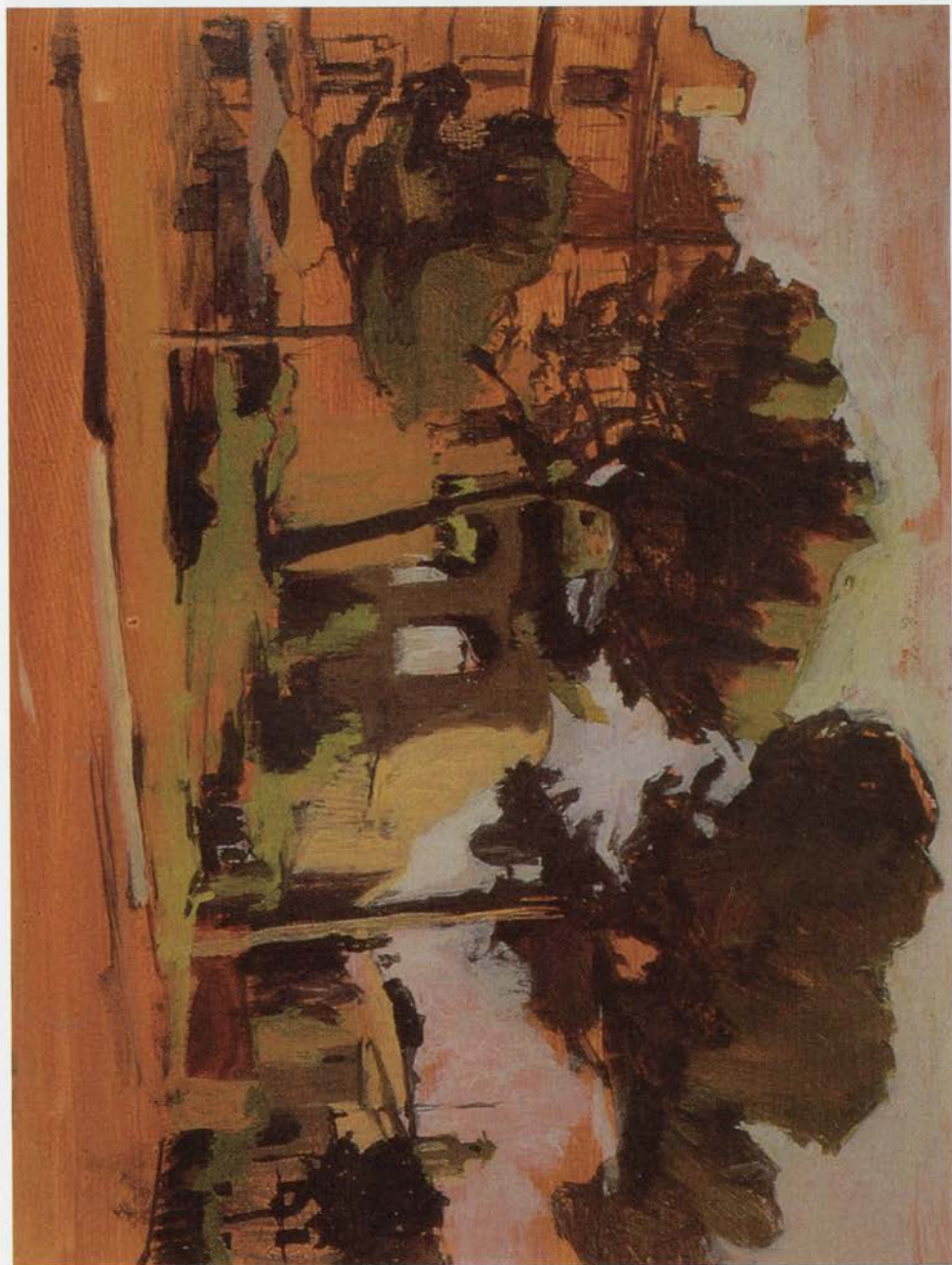
*Susan M. Gomes  
Office Manager, BUSPH*

I do not have names  
for the scent of rainwashed air  
nor titles for dreams

*Margaret S. Lee, M.D.  
Graduate Student*



*Black & White Photograph*  
*Claire Folger*  
*Research Technician*



**Landscape, Rome**

*Oil on Panel  
Karen Shore  
Medical Student*

## ***Four Lingering Breaths of McAllen, Texas: Memories from 1996-97***

I breathe in the sweetness of  
The hanging purple flowers, the orange blossoms,  
And face the sun  
That bathes the waving palm trees and  
The dark Latino children with deep brown-black eyes  
And white smiles...

Who also remind me  
Of the kids in Mexico who live without and who made me cry in pity and the Border  
Witness Program that made me a witness to the poverty and the responsibility that is  
pushing on my shoulders to do something about it and how I just want to forget  
everything.

I absorb the lively tejano music that surrounds  
Downtown McAllen corners lined  
With large signs boldly painted in red, green, and gold,  
Taquerias and discount tiendas  
Beckoning with "Muy Sabroso!" and "Mucho barato!"...

But then  
I talk to a clerk who knows no English which makes me think about the "wet-backs"  
who drown in the Rio-not-so-Grande trying their damndest to crawl into a country  
that really despises them and keeps them down and pushes them away and hides  
them in the dirt roads between the stores and I just want to forget it all.

At the hospice home,  
I Tickle my eleven year-old patient  
And ask the mumbling Jose  
If it is the wind I hear when I know  
He just farted,  
Just to get a smile...

And the next moment I remember  
The residents who get very sick and the attachments I form and the difficult families  
who distrust me and how my patient Ted hatefully called me a little girl and how I  
never get to say goodbye and then sometimes I want to forget everyone.

It is so easy for me to breathe in wonder...

I am scared, though  
Really scared that I just might forget that I have to exhale to live.

*Colleen Keyes  
Medical Student*



## SUNFRUIT

drawn to red  
smooth turns and comely curve  
I touch my lips to cool moisture on the skin  
then underneath soft flesh and fiber sticky sweetness  
dripping down my fingers my hands the folds of my wrist I lick  
laughing as I offer you a taste a slice the experience of this  
tropical orange ambrosia this jungle nectar heavy and thick scented  
twisting seeping straight to our senses a celebration of the moment  
so red green golden like something stolen from the gods' gardens  
a flavor too strong for the fainthearted no need to be greedy  
come share this summer treasure I have brought with me  
the glow of sun grows in your smile now  
see hear feel smell taste  
good yes

*Margaret S. Lee, M.D.  
Graduate Student*

## *perfecting the taste*

wrapped in pita bread  
covered in cheese  
would you be the feast  
I could nibble with red wine...  
or are you better on crackers  
with an artichoke dip  
an aphrodisiacal appetizer  
whetting the tongue;  
could I have you with beer  
and a bowl of stale pretzels  
or would you be repulsed,  
never speak to me again

*Laura Ngwenya  
MD/PhD Student*



*Black & White Photograph  
Karran Phillips  
Medical Student*



*Color Photograph  
Karran Phillips  
Medical Student*

## **"PEARL"**

This is the day to appreciate things  
of incredible beauty.  
This is the day "PEARL" emerged  
from a sheet of Canson paper  
Into the world of credible reality  
With her majestic mien  
And her total alopecia  
After her chemotherapy.  
She sits before us steadfastly posed  
Great dignity and sweetness  
Like her stateliness - imposing lady  
yet delicate.  
She is liberated now - into the spring-  
time she will pass,  
After two hours of creation, her artist,  
Iris, will glorify her essence and  
her being  
And set her free.

*Herman Edgar Carr, Jr., M.D.  
BUSM, Class of 1946*

## *Anders' Welcome Home Sign*

Anders knew this was a special day. She ran into the kitchen as soon as she woke up. "Good morning dad!" "Good morning back at you, Anders!" "This is the day mommy and our new baby, Anola, come home from the hospital," said Anders. "Yes, and what a happy day this is for our family," said dad.

"Shall we have cereal or pancakes for breakfast?"

Anders thought for a moment. "Let's have cereal." "Then cereal it is," said dad. And tomorrow, you and I will get up early and prepare a special pancake breakfast for mommy." "Oh dad, that's a great idea." "Let's eat!" said dad. "All this talk about food has made me hungry."

While dad got the bowls, cereal, glasses and spoons, Anders went to the refrigerator to get the milk and orange juice. They sat at the table to eat.

"Anders, about your going to the hospital with me. I think it would be better if you stayed home. It's going to be very cold, snowy, and windy all day, and I should leave for the hospital earlier than I originally planned," said dad.

Anders' looked toward the kitchen window and saw the trees blowing and the snow falling. "But I promised mommy I would go to the hospital when she was ready to come home," said Anders. "I know you did, sweetheart. Mommy will understand if you're not with me." Anders pouted as she looked down at the floor. Trying hard not to whine, she said softly "but I promised mommy."

"You're right. You did promise. And I know how disappointed you're feeling right now and how special today is for us. But you'll be safer and warmer at home," said dad. Suddenly Anders thought of her mommy and the new baby, and was worried. She looked at dad. "Will Anola and mommy be safe and warm?" Dad smiled at Anders.

"Yes, mommy has all the warm clothing she needs. And if I leave for the hospital soon, I'll have extra time to drive carefully over the wet and icy roads."

"I'll tell you what. When I'm ready to leave the house for the hospital, you may call mommy and tell her I'm on my way," said dad. "Also, Uncle Kenny will be here soon to help you make a welcome home sign." "Yeah! Uncle Kenny's coming," said Anders as she gave dad a big hug.

The doorbell rang. It was Uncle Kenny with a shopping bag in his left hand and an odd-looking object under his right arm. "Hi, Uncle Kenny," Anders squealed as she and dad greeted him. "Hi back at you," he said.

"What's in the bag?" asked Anders as she looked inside. "Well, I've brought art supplies to help you make your welcome home sign," said Uncle Kenny.

Anders was so happy to see Uncle Kenny that she forgot to ask what the other thing was. As dad was leaving for the hospital, she hugged and kissed Anders. "I love you," said Anders. "I love you too," said dad. "Kenny, thanks for coming over." "Hey, it's my pleasure." You know how much fun Anders and I have when we spend time together," said Uncle Kenny.

"Anders, don't forget to call mommy and tell her I'm on my way." "Okay," said Anders. She felt the strong cold wind chill her body when dad opened the door. She was no longer disappointed that she was not going for the ride to the hospital.

Making the sign for mommy with Uncle Kenny would be more fun than being cold.

Anders called mommy and gave her dad's message. Mommy was happy to hear her daughter's voice. "I love you, Anders. I'll see you real soon," said mommy. "I love you too," said Anders. "Bye mommy. Kiss Anola for me." Anders hung up the telephone.

Anders and Uncle Kenny began to remove the items from the shopping bag and place them on the table. There were stencils, colorful pencils, glitter, glue and string. There was also a small, mysterious bag. Uncle Kenny had a great idea for a sign that he had not yet shared with Anders.

"Anders, I like the idea of using glue and glitter for the sign." But I've been thinking about using something other than paper." Anders gave Uncle Kenny a puzzled look. "What should we use instead of paper?" asked Anders. Uncle Kenny smiled at Anders and his eyes sparkled with excitement as he said, "Let's make a welcome home sign that floats in the air!"

"How will we do that?" asked Anders, and then Uncle Kenny brought out the mysterious object and set it on the floor. "What is it?" she asked, and for an answer he popped a balloon onto it and turned a knob. "A helium tank! What a great idea! Let's get started," Anders shouted. She had gotten the idea right away.

"Mom loves rainbows, so we should use rainbow colors," said Anders. "Okay, colors of the rainbow it is." "And what do you want the sign to say?" asked Uncle Kenny. "Welcome Home Mommy and Anola," said Anders.

"Anders, you're good at using stencils, so you stencil the letters, and I'll use the glue and glitter." We should write the message on paper and check each letter off as we go along," said Uncle Kenny.

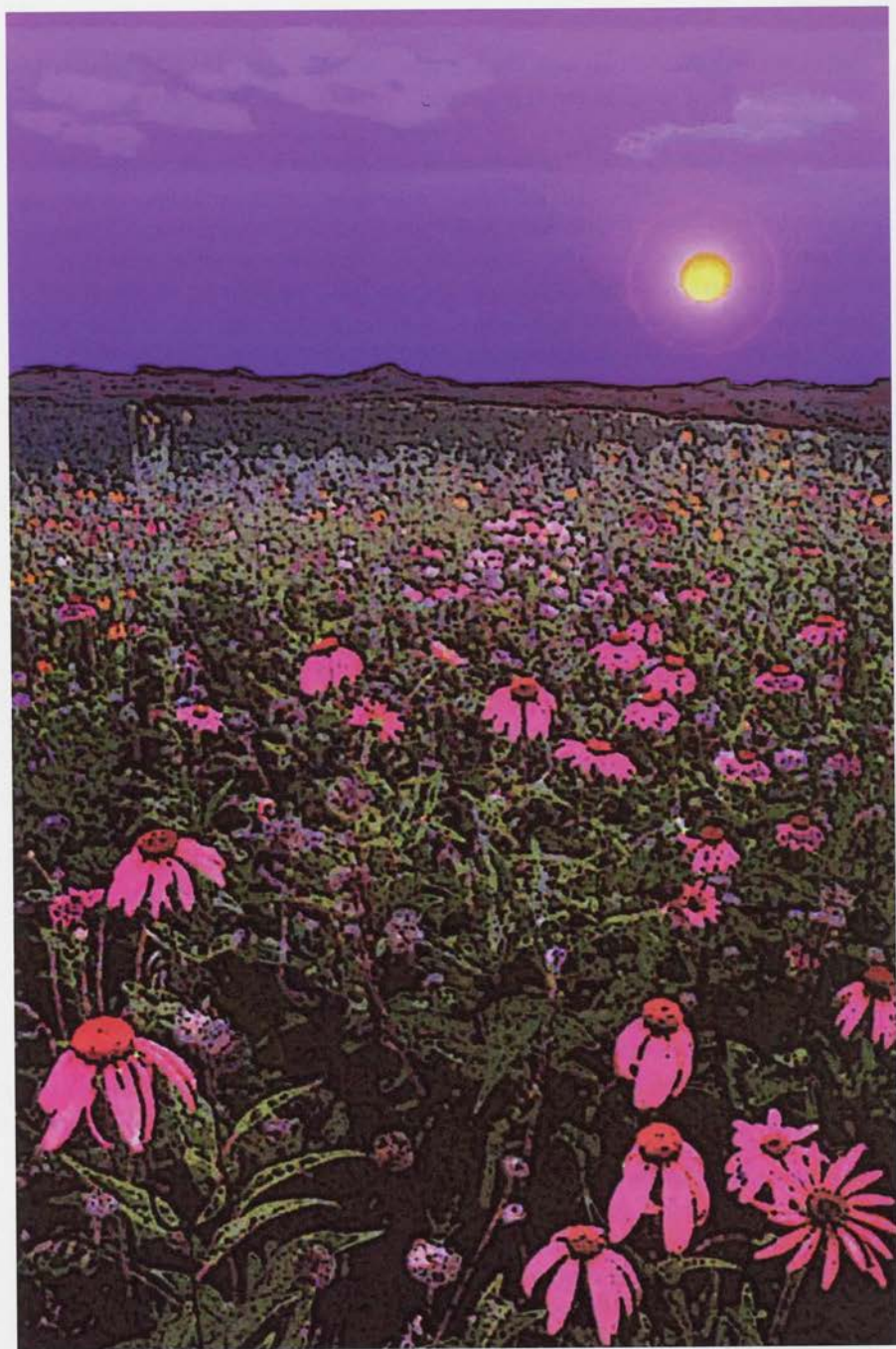
Anders began to stencil the letter **W** onto the first balloon while Uncle Kenny wrote out the message. They worked side by side until all the balloons were stenciled and covered with glitter. Anders and Uncle Kenny were now ready to fill the balloons with air from the helium tank and tie their ends with colorful string.

"Uncle Kenny, mom's going to love her sign," said Anders. "I'm sure she'll be very happy and surprised when she sees it," said Uncle Kenny.

Uncle Kenny held each helium-filled balloon while Anders tied its end with colorful string. One by one, Uncle Kenny and Anders let each balloon drift to the ceiling. "We should start to clean up before your mommy and dad get here. You clean off the table while I put the helium tank away and sweep the floor," said Uncle Kenny. "Okay," said Anders. Uncle Kenny and Anders were busy cleaning when the front door opened and mommy's voice called, "We're here!"

Anders looked at Uncle Kenny, then ran to the door. "Mommy, mommy," said Anders as they hugged and kissed. As dad walked in the house carrying Anola, mommy looked up and saw her special welcome home sign bobbing in the cold breeze of winter. "Anders! Kenny!" she cried, and smiled her nicest smile. "What a wonderful welcome home for Anola and me!"

*Jeanne L. Washington*  
*BUMC Employee*



## ***Flowers-in-Field***

*Adobe Art*

*Louis Gerstenfield, M.D.*

*Professor, Orthopedic Surgery*

## *The Mile*



Burned by ignorance,  
Charred by carelessness

A mile destroyed with a single match...

But as I walk the mile,  
And feel the eerie calm,

Beauty springs from tragedy,  
As Mother Nature pokes her fingers

Through the ash...

*Jason Hinman*  
*MD/PhD Student*

*Photograph on the Leach Trail on shoulder of Eagles Peak in the Adirondack Park in New York State.*





*Color Photograph  
Vatche Bezdikian  
Medical Student*

## NIGHT VISION

It washed over me in the dead of the night like a feeling of *deja vu*. It tasted like a color but had the weight of a dirty suggestion. The planet's gravitational force suddenly evaporated and I fell up towards the ceiling spiraling like a skydiver. I landed on all fours and scurried like a spider towards the doorway. I needed to find escape.

An ominous shadow with pure white light illuminating from eyeless sockets pulled at me from the corner of the dark room. I wrenched myself away and streamed like a comet through an open window.

The night sky drew me up and I soared above the trees as the shadowy entity slithered in pursuit below shooting out its menacing tentacles. I found the moonlight and sucked it in deeply into my lungs. The lumens streamed from my eyes and scorched the spidery tentacles. They recoiled and slithered back into the dark mass below.

I plunged towards the earth in search of a clue, but instead found myself sitting in a parlor in an old, stuffy chair. A figure sat across from me. I was looking at my long dead mother. Her mouth moved as she talked at me but no sound came out. I tried to reach out to her, but found myself wholly paralyzed. The phantom moved past the only lonely window in the room. A soft breeze scattered the silky, colorless curtains as a shadowy appendage abruptly slid through the opening. Another followed and they snaked around the specter across from me. She opened her mouth in a mute scream and one of the shadowy appendages slithered down her throat. Suddenly, she was ripped from the chair and out through the window. The window-pane shattered and splayed shards of razor sharp glass in a kaleidoscope as she disappeared. She had been taken from me once again.

*"Better her than me"*, I thought.

I got up and slowly climbed the stairs. I lay softly on the bed careful not to mess the blankets.

*T.S. Flaherty*

*Clinical Engineer, Clinical Engineering Services*



## **Planting**

*Special Paper Cut*

*Hong Shao*

*Supervisor, Center for Human Genetics*

***the carambola thieves***  
***(National Arboretum 1991-99)***

it was so warm inside  
as we stood before this great tree  
    hanging down heavy with fruit.  
in this eden hothouse,  
overwhelmed, by the unforgiving scent of lilies from the next room.  
you waited for the german tourists to shuffle past,  
then stepped off the path,  
into a forest to fill your pockets.  
we couldn't let it go to waste.

afterwards we walked home, eating the starfruit.  
biting into tartness,  
the sharp corners rolling on our tongues.  
and holding hands, quietly  
walking past the monuments and embassies,  
in the city in which i love you.

and we climbed back into bed on a sunday afternoon,  
and the only thing you said when  
    you rested my hands on your belly, was  
    'someday...'

years later  
(after you were married),  
i returned here  
to where this building used to be...  
to an empty shell.  
all flora had been removed —  
    the forests gone.  
paint stripped from the walls,  
the glass panes removed one by one.

and for some reason,  
    i knew exactly how it felt.

*Lars Hansen*  
*Medical Student*

***Just so you understand the magnitude  
of my experience:***

I thought you were a warrior; a poet  
You were this marvelous thing  
too good for this world that tortured and tormented you  
I pledged myself in service of something huge and perfect  
Something I was honored to have anything to do with

Do you remember our first kiss?  
We sit in silence now  
I think it's Wednesday  
And I'm mad  
I look at the mess we're in now  
And I just want to sit and watch you undress  
What were you wanting, when my head burned, when you tasted so good

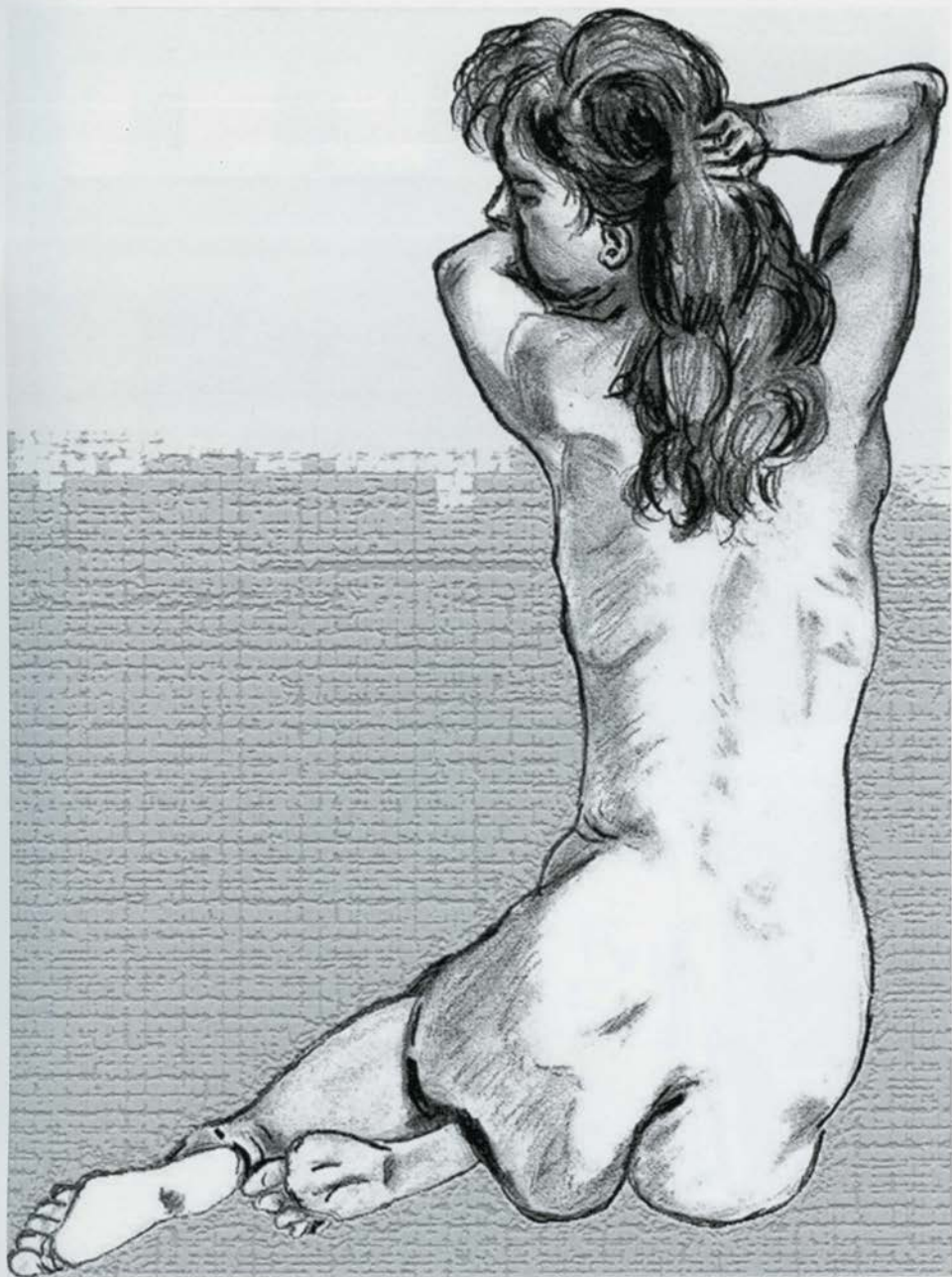
I was leading an armed revolution in the name of love  
And you were writing brilliant angsty poems  
Painting gigantic painful pictures  
You know, *living*

And when I broke up with you  
It wasn't because I didn't love you  
It was because I was lost in you  
How was I to know that you wouldn't forgive me

Like the girl said,  
I've come so far only to find myself here  
Hopeless and harmed  
Aimless and disarmed

So, now *I* am the warrior  
*I* will live and *I* will thrive  
But still,  
I just want to sit and watch you undress

*Anonymous  
Medical Student*



**Morning Stretch**

*Adobe Enhanced Pencil Sketch*

*Louis Gerstenfeld, M.D.*

*Professor, Orthopedic Surgery*

## ***The Number 1***

The Man with dirty yellow socks smelled powerfully on the bus,  
His struggle was vivid as well as pungent,

It was annihilated by the laughter of the little girl,  
With her many braids twisting into those colorful beads, all over her head,

She seemed to dance and lever off the metal pole she groped in her pudgy hand,

And her eyes gleamed and her expressions shown,  
in tangible beams past the rest of us and,  
Straight on into the Man,

He smiled and waved his fingers as if tickling her from across the way,

She giggled and squirmed as she was tickled,

The Man's eyes filled with this success and then they filled with tears.

*Gabriel M. Belfort*  
*MD/PhD Student*



*Black & White Photograph*  
*Michael Mansour*  
*MD/PhD Student*



## **A KITE IN A TREE**

A kite in a tree  
a broken string,  
limp branches  
and half-eaten leaves,  
caterpillars snoozing  
in the fading sun.  
Naked trunk  
rocks on roots,  
no birds, no fruit,  
no wind,  
a kite in a tree  
a broken string.

*Vijay S. Persad*  
*Assistant Manager, Facilities Management*



## **Summer in the City**

*Black & White Photograph*  
*Tammy Fitzgerald*  
*MD/PhD Student*

## **BRAIN STORM**

a leg goes limp,  
a pain in the night,  
fingers that tingle,  
the head's not quite right.  
and we worry each time  
that the problem will stay  
but after days or weeks  
or months  
it usually goes away.  
and we know that this condition,  
which physicians call MS,  
will continue for a lifetime  
causing anguish and distress.  
but I also know, my dearest,  
that with each new twist and turn  
these brain storms serve the purpose  
of helping us to learn  
that they cannot steal the spirit,  
although they hurt the flesh.  
they cannot take my love for you  
that wakes each day afresh.  
and perhaps on some tomorrow  
when a cure at last is born  
we'll know that calm most precious,  
the calm that follows the storm.

*Julian A. Waller, M.D.*  
BUSM, Class of 1957

## The Interview

Bob Evans sat at his desk staring at the wall of his tiny office. The morning shadows had advanced passed the filing cabinet and were climbing the wall towards the ceiling. Bob had watched the crawling phantasm so many times now he could set his watch by it. *It was half past the paint chip two hours till lunch.*

It was an anniversary of sorts for Bob. As of today, he had occupied the same office for seventeen years. "Seventeen years" he mumbled to himself. All that time taking up the same space in this microcosm of his. "*Bob's World.*" He thought. His days, his weeks, his years, his life was fixed before him like a table setting. The various objects d'art cluttering his office marked the stages of his career. He sighed and watched the second hand on the desk clock jerk in precise spasms around its simple face. The particular piece had been a gift from the company. It had been awarded to him at a small luncheon in the cafeteria, in tribute for his ten years of continued service to H.P. Ryan and Sons. A small bronze plaque at the base of the twelve-dollar timepiece reminded him daily of this indisputable fact. He knew the price of the cheap trinket because he had signed the invoice. *Had it already been seven years ago?* He wondered.

Two minutes passed without him taking his eyes off the orbiting second hand, then three minutes, and then four... five... The phone rang suddenly breaking his concentration momentarily from the steady throbbing of the clock. Bob knew it would be Muriel telling him that his ten o'clock was here. He let the phone ring until he could feel Muriel's impatience at the other end. After the fifth ring he punched the speaker button.

"Yes, Muriel."

"Mr. Alan Parker is here for his appointment Mr. Evans." The speaker squawked back at him. He was so conditioned now to the tinny voice through that box he expected the same squeaky voice when they talked face to face now. Bob looked back at the second hand and sighed.

"Mr. Evans?" Muriel queried.

"Send him in Muriel." Bob said and reached for the resume that was on top of a pile of similar transcripts. They all looked like exact replicas to him. The future of Corporate America lay in a pile on a desk in "Bob's World".

They all had a cover letter nowadays. It was like a composition contest. Then a couple pages of all the candidate's life histories exaggerated proportionately and then processed using a prepackaged template available in every word processing software program, on every personal computer, on every desktop, in every office, in every building all across America. Only the names and the faces were slightly disimilar.

His office door squeaked opened slowly and a young, scrubbed face squeezed through the crack. "Mr. Evans?" The head said. Bob pointed to the chair set before his desk. The young man slid through the partially open door almost as if he was afraid he was going to let something sneak in behind him like a dog, maybe. Bob liked dogs. Wouldn't that be wonderful if this young man had brought a dog with him to the interview, a big, old, fluffy mongrel? Bob could wrestle with him on the floor. Maybe, he would take him out in the parking lot and play fetch the stick. Maybe, fetch the clock. Bob glanced at the second hand as it bounced steadily along slowly collecting more of his life.

He knew Alan hadn't brought a dog with him, though. Alan had only brought a

brand new briefcase. A graduation gift from his parents or his wife, Bob supposed. Bob hadn't read Alan's resume yet so he didn't even know if he was married, but Bob knew if this young man wasn't he soon would be. There wouldn't be any escape. He would get married to something. *A woman, his job, the clock.*

But in the most likely scenario, Alan would get married to a pretty girl and have 2.3 kids. He'd buy a small house with 5% down and promise to pay the principal off in 30 years. He'd take the 7:15 commuter in and the 5:45 home. Maybe Alan would stop for a drink on Friday with the boys. In a couple years he'd get a promotion and a small raise and then every couple of years after that if he were lucky. Then he'd get as far as he was going to get and he'd watch his wife, his kids and his dreams grow further and further away from him as the second hand collected them slowly and methodically.

Alan stood out in front of Bob's desk smiling nervously with his hand hanging out in front of him.

"I'm Alan Parker." He offered hopefully.

Bob reached over and took Alan's hand limply. Alan squeezed it tight. Alan's father had obviously taught him the importance of a good firm handshake.

*"Look'em straight in the eye son and squeeze until you break the sucker's knuckle on the index finger."*

Bob extracted his hand gratefully from Alan's death grip and pointed to the chair. Alan jumped into it eager to tell Bob all about his virtues, life experiences, and the quality of his overpriced education. Bob knew it was all expertly drawn up in the biography he held before him. Alan sat upright with the briefcase laying flat on his lap. He was gripping the sides of it like it would suddenly defy the laws of gravity and take off for interstellar flight.

Bob attempted to read the resume in his hand but it wouldn't cooperate. He reread the first sentence five times and still didn't know what it said so he just pretended from then on. He actually flipped to the second page and stared at that for a while. He could hear Alan begin to fidget in the chair. He was also keenly aware of the second hand of the clock ripping more of his life away. Bob cleared his throat and Alan almost leaped from the chair and hugged him with gratitude. Bob asked the first question he always did on these interviews.

"Why do you want to work for H.P. Ryan... He had forgotten the young man's name and had to turn back to the first page... Mr. Parker?"

Alan smiled warmly at Bob. Bob knew Alan had probably practiced the answer to this question many times. He had most likely practiced it in the shower this morning and in the rest room mirror right out in the hallway before he had introduced himself to Muriel. Yes, Alan would have rehearsed this many times.

Alan began his soliloquy. His mouth moved for what seemed forever to Bob and the words came out in the right size and shape he was sure, but Bob couldn't seem to hear them clearly. Not over the din of the desk clock anyway. Alan finally finished and beamed at Bob, evidently it had come out just as good as rehearsal, maybe better. Bob thought Alan might float right out of the chair he was so full of good feelings and confidence. It was a good thing the briefcase was obeying the law of gravity and anchoring him down.

Bob ruffled the resume a couple of times buying some more time. He felt a wave of panic rising in his chest. He needed a follow up question. He searched the resume again

scouring for something coherent to jump out. The words finally just melted off the page and dripped onto the floor. He quickly returned the resume to the desk blotter and smiled meekly at the beaming Alan.

"You own a dog, Alan?" Bob blurted out.

Alan's smiling face suddenly hardened into a plastic mask. He hadn't expected that one. Alan's eyes darted around seemingly searching for something to anchor himself onto before his mind would flee the room altogether.

"No, not now, when I was a kid. I mean we had a couple of dogs over the years when I was growing up. Doesn't everyone?" Alan offered and then shrugged.

"I never had one." Bob said.

Alan nodded politely. Bob could see Alan's curiosity getting the better of him. He desperately wanted to know where this line of questioning was going to lead hopefully to some of the other answers he had practiced.

"Allergies." Bob continued. "At least that's what my mother always told me."

Bob noticed that Alan was squeezing the briefcase so tight his knuckles had turned white. Maybe the briefcase *was* beginning to defy the laws of physics, Bob thought.

"I don't remember actually breaking out in a rash or anything, only that when I asked for one my mother told me I was allergic to them and I couldn't have one."

Alan nodded again and looked around the room suspiciously. Bob suspected Alan might be thinking it was some kind of test companies were doing now. There was a hidden camera directed at all the applicants. It was some kind of psychological profiling. Bob tapped his fingers on the desk keeping in time with the second hand... thump... thump... thump.

"Alan...do you mind if I call you Alan?" Bob said and smiled warmly. Alan shrugged and shook his head no. "Why no Mr. Evans...please feel free..."

"Well then you just call me Bob... Is that O.K. with you Alan?" Bob said and smiled again. Alan tried to return the smile but Bob watched as it sort of wandered around the young man's face, a little out of control. Alan was visibly sweating now and pulling at his nice, crisp collar.

"Tell me Alan...when you were a kid. What did you want to be when you grew up?"

Bob watched as a bead of perspiration pushed its way through a pore and run down the side of Alan's face. "What do you mean, Mr. Evans?"

"Now, Alan, didn't we agree that you would call me Bob?"

"Ah, yes we did. I'm sorry...I'm just a little... confused." Alan looked at the air vent above Bob's head. What was he looking at Bob wondered? Maybe Alan was afraid there was a hidden microphone back there?

"Oh, there's no reason to be sorry, Alan. I'm just trying to get a little background." Bob said.

"You want to know what I wanted to be when I grew up?" When I was a kid, Alan repeated. Bob nodded and smiled beatifically.

"Like how old of a kid?"

"I don't know. Let's see...Your first recollection of a real desire or the initial attempt to define a direction you felt you might want to take. You know psychiatrists have said...I mean I have read that only in childhood is true desire an honest result of passion."

Bob watched Alan's mouth working up and down. Alan's eyes betrayed any attempt

at reconciliation with a cool demeanor. He was somewhere closer to terror. Bob removed himself from the fact that he had crossed a line somewhere and he didn't care if he ever went back. Poor Alan was just going to have to go along for the ride. Too bad Alan hadn't practiced anything along this line of interviewing in his bathroom this morning. The future young executive in corporate America had to be able to handle any situation, hadn't he? Bob waited for an answer. Had he asked a question? Alan suddenly took a deep breath.

"A veterinarian I think." Alan almost shouted. It had burst from him like an unexpected belch. He looked embarrassed.

"Wonderful!" Bob exclaimed startling him. Alan almost jumped from the chair and fled the room. Bob noticed that Alan had began to tap his right foot on the carpeted floor and was now clinging onto the briefcase like a buoy in a stormy sea.

"What made you change your mind?" Bob asked.

"Huh, change my mind about what?"

"About being a veterinarian."

"Oh, I don't remember. I was only a kid. You know how kids tend to change their minds all the time. Do kids ever really ever know why they want to do something?" Alan offered.

"I don't know, that's a very good question. But, I think children tend to be more in touch with their feelings. They're more honest and they expect more from themselves and out of life. Don't you think?" Bob asked softly. He watched as Alan wiped another bead of sweat from his temple.

"I don't know about that. Children are shortsighted. I don't think they contemplate what they say at all. They don't really have any concept about the sacrifice it takes for an idea to become anything tangible. Most of the time they don't know what they want or what's even good for them. What kid hasn't said they wanted to be a veterinarian, a fireman, a baseball player?"

"So you really don't want to be a veterinarian anymore?"

Bob was amused at Alan's frustration. He could tell Alan couldn't believe that he was actually sitting here having this conversation with a job recruiter. What was Bob doing to his plan? Bob wasn't following the script. "No, I don't want to be a veterinarian! I want a job here. That's why I'm here...Mr...Bob!" Obviously Alan emoted a little more loudly than he anticipated. He caught himself and sat back in the chair. Bob didn't care. This was getting somewhere.

"Why don't you want to be a veterinarian anymore?"

Alan shook his head exasperated now. Bob thought Alan might cry. He had obviously forgotten about the secret cameras and microphones. Bob had been supposed to ask him about marketing plans and salary demands and shit like that.

"Hey Bob, I really don't even remember if I ever really wanted to be one. It was just something I came up with at the spur of the moment. You know, thinking on the seat of my pants. I'm sure I gave a different answer every time someone asked me that question back then. If I had answered them truthfully I would have said, what the hell are you asking me that for. How am I supposed to know that? I'm eight years old for goodness sakes. Why don't you leave me all your money when you die and I won't have to do anything? I can blow it all on booze and women." Alan began to ramble. I could

do nothing. I could be nothing because what is it all really about anyway. Am I going to make any difference to anything to anyone. Am I the answer to anything? Could I possibly have anything to offer anybody? Does anybody ever really amount to anything? What is it all for anyway? What does it really mean? Do I really want to be sitting across the desk in your chair...end up like you?

"Now you're talking my boy!" Bob clapped his hands together.

"We're getting somewhere now. We're going places now." Bob smiled warmly and relaxed back into his chair. He placed Alan's resume apart from all the others. The two men sat in silence for a few moments. Bob sensed that Alan had relaxed and had become comfortable since the first time he had squeezed through the door.

"If you could have your dream job right now, what would it be?"

"I'd want the job here, Bob." Alan said,

Bob watched as Alan deflated before him.

"Do you really want to be a junior executive in a company that produces widgets day in and day out?"

"Everyone has to start somewhere. Every CEO was a junior executive once. And I've got bills like everybody else. I have a student loan and rent due. It costs a lot of money to live, Bob. I gave up on that inheritance years ago."

Bob looked deeply into Alan's eyes. "If you really had a choice, what would you *really* want to do with your life?"

Bob noticed the young man's throat knot up. What was happening to him? What had happened to him? A single tear seeped from an eye and trickled down the side of his nose catching the corner of his mouth. Alan flicked it away looking at the wet spot on the floor as if he was somehow betrayed.

The only sound for a few minutes was the ticking of the clock.

"What's in the briefcase?" Bob asked softly.

"A cheese sandwich and a newspaper." Alan said and smiled sheepishly.

Bob stood up slowly and held out his hand to Alan.

"Well, thanks for your time."

Alan stood up and Bob shook his hand firmly this time.

"Good luck. We'll let you know." Bob said.

"I already do." Alan said and stepped back to the door. He opened the door and lingered a second as if he was going to say something else, but then stepped through closing it softly behind him. Bob thought he heard someone whistling in the outer office and then it faded. The shadows had moved a little higher on the wall. He sat down and gazed over at the clock. He thought he might stop at the pet store on the way home today. He knew he wouldn't but it was nice to suppose sometimes. Suppose I did this and suppose I did that. He tapped his finger on the desk blotter and waited for his 11:00 appointment.

*Thump...thump...thump.*

*T.S. Flaberty*

*Clinical Engineer, Clinical Engineering Services*

## ***The Creative Arts Society Boston Medical Center***

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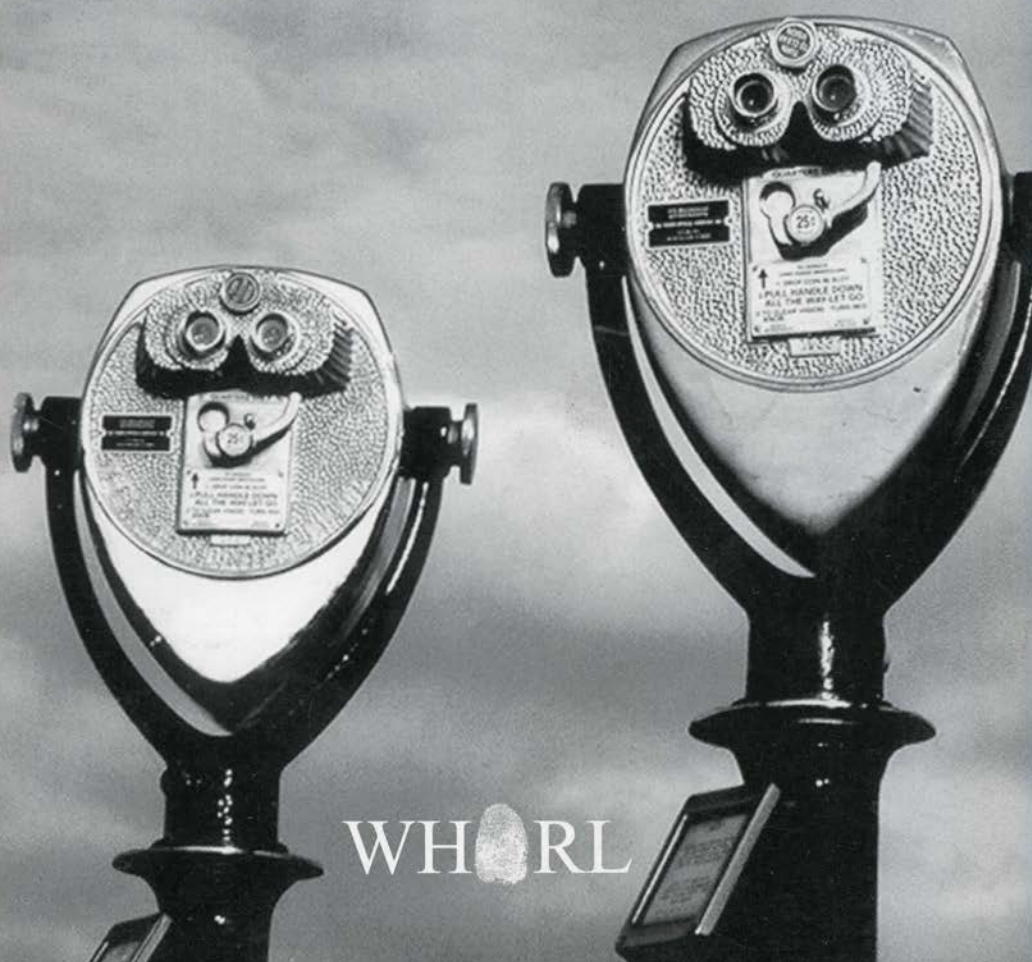
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