



# HUMANITAS

Medical University of South Carolina

Volume 8, 2004

## PREFACE

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the 2004 edition of Humanitas, the literary journal of the Medical University of South Carolina. As I read through this year's magazine, what strikes me most about the collective literary works is their presentation of the dual nature of humanity. While each person is an individual with unique experiences, we share common forms, beliefs, and emotions. With the great diversity of works presented, I am confident that you will find something in this year's journal which resonates with your own personal story.

As always, Humanitas is a community-wide effort, and I would first like to thank the writers and artists who submitted their work this year. Their creativity and drive are integral to this project. The University also deserves our thanks for their eagerness in funding Humanitas and other Humanities-related activities on campus.

This year, the staff of Humanitas grew as we developed a council of readers to critique the submissions. The 2004 staff included: Jodi Anderson, Greg Black, Rita Cuthbertson, Jon Dumitru, Steven Fountain, Robert Geist, Brian Hutcheson, Walter Limehouse, Erika Manning, Nathan McArthur, Tom Smith, Lisa Sooy, and Kathleen Williams. Their time and feedback were quite valuable.

In closing, I would like to extend a warm and personal thanks to Dr. Bert Keller, Dr. Carol Lancaster, and Kristie Lynn Avery Rodgers. Since the inception of Humanitas, these three have served as pillars for the publication, remaining committed despite their own busy schedules.

Keep creating, MUSC!

Eric Sribnick

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Cover by: Noboru Mishima

## **Million Diamonds Rushing**

For a moment in time, like a solid oak in frost,  
how I let slip my cares, cancers, and conjectures.  
My heavy hello, heaving sigh, heart murmurs,  
beat a rapacious absence, and left a haunted pause.  
We sped the harbor, and careened a mercuric sheen.  
Windribbons of memory would rush and part my hair,  
each spray of salt its own second, tracing a fare  
into patterns, and pictures, and themes to be seen.  
And, knot by knot, the weight would wear away,  
leaving my shoulders supple, tan, and free,  
as pendulous colossals in this pensive serenity,  
bracing for a mundane return, yet hoping for the sway.  
The aperture that caught us drunk, deaf, and silly  
against the thin whistle of a million diamonds rushing  
might find me next, deafened again, and hushing,  
knowing that when I was burning and loving – I was home-free.

**Greg Black**  
College of Medicine



## **Winter Wonderland**

**Rachel Bullington**  
College of Pharmacy

## Wonder Woman

Once Lynda Carter wore  
blue jeans, or perhaps perfume,  
or maybe ate some drug  
since she looked so healthy  
out in the meadow,  
arms comfortably crossed  
over bare, fleshy  
breasts.  
She wasn't naked,  
except for those  
downy-forearm covered  
breasts.  
Without a belt,  
blue jeans hold  
themselves to hips,  
especially on  
a sloping meadow,  
right hip slightly  
hiked.

**Tom G. Smith**  
Writing Center



## **Leaning to the Right**

**Marlisa Sooy**  
Department of Cell Biology  
and Anatomy

## **Fox Sicks Cockroaches**

Lately, sweltering in sheets,  
victim of unconditioned air, I've  
found sleep rarely, but last night  
I dreamed—must have slept—  
I offended Michael J. Fox.

Everywhere in a category-  
killing store, Fox's masked minions  
glanced askance, cast spells,  
made walking through the aisles  
of socks and pancake mix like  
quicksand, and Fox himself  
made cameos, turning ice  
cream to swimming trunks.

At last, the stern star blocked  
sliding doors, and I asked release:  
“I am so sorry.”  
Though his cocked brow  
seemed to grasp my gesture,  
I could still sense displeasure  
in my feet, hot and bare and  
crawling with palmettos.

Palmettos are roaches in South  
Carolina, where, atop wring-needing  
sheets and now starting from sleep, I  
felt on my slowly sweating cheek and thigh  
the prick-tickle of exoskeletal feet.

Tom Smith, The Writing Center





## **Moving on**

**Kristina Lynn Avery Rodgers**

## **Targets 1966**

The order comes, "I will need fifteen from your area this week."  
I look over the maps at the cluster of red battalion symbols.

How old are these sightings? Is this map current?  
What areas have been struck recently?  
Has there been any follow up from previous weeks?

Photo runs are requested and assembled into one montage  
For each target, covering a minimum of one square kilometer.

One to six planes capable of saturating one to six square  
kilometers make up the strike force.

Targets are accepted or rejected. Then all the way to top  
commanders - accepted or rejected.

The targets disappear into the plans and the planes appear to  
drift over the countryside, nearly out of sight and sound.

The ground erupts in smoke, flashes, and dust as each plane  
saturates one square kilometer and then lifts up from the loss  
of weight.

The planes turn back toward their base and the order comes,  
"I'll need twelve from your area for next week."

**Charles Brown**  
Library



**Paper Cranes**  
**Children's Peace Monument: Hiroshima, Japan**

**Christopher Crosby**  
College of Medicine/Graduate Studies

## The Cat from the Ocean

Three years before the great unsinkable ship Titanic slipped below the waves of the North Atlantic on a memorable starlit night, my mother, Jessie Stoddart, was born in the Outer Hebrides off the Northwest coast of Scotland. The island of North Uist, where she was born, and lived until age twelve, was a remote island with a desolate beauty, miles of sugar white sands, known in Gaelic as “the machir,” and high, rocky cliffs. My grandfather, Andrew, was an accountant who worked, managing the estate of a gentleman who owned some property on North Uist. My mother, her brother George, and her parents, like all the inhabitants of the island, were native Gaelic speakers, using English only when necessary for business purposes. They lived in a long, low-to-the-ground log cabin with a deep thatched roof. The house was low to the ground to keep in warmth in the punishingly windy, cold winters on North Uist. The house, my grandfather was always proud to relate, was made of Oregon pine, imported, since the islands of the Outer Hebrides had long been deforested. My grandmother, Mary Morrison Stoddart, was a native of the island of Harris, also one of the Outer Hebrides islands. In her youth, she was known as “Mairi Ruach,” or “Red Mary” because of her flowing mane of dark auburn hair.

The children, Jessie and George, had marvelous fun roaming the hillsides and rocky beaches of North Uist, exploring caves, watching for whale spouts out at sea, and often observing wildlife, including golden eagles, hawks, deer, and occasionally, one of the elusive wild cats, very much like a lynx, which inhabited the island.

One of the events which unfailingly caused great excitement to the inhabitants of the island was news of a shipwreck, which unfortunately, in the wild North Atlantic Ocean, was not an uncommon occurrence. The men of North Uist would keep a lookout watch on the cliff tops when debris from a shipwreck was sighted, going out in small boats to see if they could rescue any survivors. They would also watch from the cliff tops for barrels and other items which were sometimes swept on-shore.

One day when Jessie was ten years old, she and her brother received word from a passerby spreading news around the isolated homesteads, that debris from a shipwreck had been spotted. They ran to the cliffs and soon saw floating flotsam and

jetsam from the doomed ship. The ocean was turbulent, and the wind at gale force. They saw what looked like planks of wood, baskets, and other items surging through the waves. Suddenly, George pointed at a far off plank, and shouted to his sister above the gale, “Look – there is some animal clinging to that wood!” Getting as close to the edge of the cliffs as they possibly could, the boy and girl watched intently and spotted the bedraggled, sodden small creature clinging to a floating plank. They finally identified it as a tabby cat, probably the ship’s cat from the wrecked vessel.

Several times, they watched in breathtaking fascination as the plank disappeared behind walls of dark green, foamy great waves, only to resurface a few minutes later, with the poor, determined sodden little creature desperately clinging on. Once, a huge wave actually upturned the plank, and they saw, to their horror, the animal’s body propelled through the foamy air. The children, raised by their parents to show respect and kindness to all living things, were desperately hoping to see the cat survive; although, it seemed completely hopeless. Time and time again, they would spot it still clinging on to its raft, only to disappear behind the wall of water, and again, resurface.

Suddenly, after what seemed like hours, a great wave swept the plank ashore onto the sugar white sands. The two anxious watchers ran, stumbled, and slid down the rocky cliffs, and with a few scratches, reached the beach. They ran headlong along the beach and came to the plank of wood. Lying near it was the lifeless, sodden form of a brown and black striped tabby cat. Its mouth was slightly open, and eyes closed. Jessie always remembered later how the sand along the cat’s gumline sparkled in the bright, cold air.

They wrapped the cat in a wool scarf, and headed home. On arrival at the cabin, the children breathlessly recounted the tale to their mother, and at her suggestion, they laid the lifeless form of the shipwrecked feline on the rug in front of the fireplace, where as always, except for the short summer, a cheerful fire constantly burned. The family’s West Highland terrier, Sheila, sniffed at the cat, and deciding there was no life in it, returned to her basket at the side of the fireplace. My grandmother told the children before they went to bed, that if the cat was indeed dead in the morning, they would have to bury it at the back of the garden behind

the house. Before Jessie went to bed, she stole a last look at the cat lying in front of the embers of the fire and noted what looked like steam rising from the sodden fur.

Next morning when they arose, my mother ran into the kitchen, and to her absolute amazement, her mother, at the stove, nodded silently in the direction of the rug in front of the fireplace, where the cat sat peacefully grooming herself, fur dried and shining in the firelight.

They kept the cat from the ocean and named her Spunky. My mother and her brother would often watch the quiet cat staring into the flames in the evening, and they would speculate endlessly about the ship she came from, its origin, and what language the crew spoke. They never learned any official news about that particular shipwreck.

Two years later, my grandfather left his accountant's position on the island of North Uist, to seek a better paying job with one of the major shipping lines on the mainland of Scotland, bringing his family from the Highlands to the large industrial seaport of Greenock on Scotland's Southwest coast. Among the family's belongings on the ferry taking them to the mainland was a sturdy basket containing Spunky, the tabby who had used up most of her nine lives braving the wild waves of the North Atlantic when her ship sank. Sheila, the West Highland terrier, walked on a leash with the family.

My mother's family settled down to "city life" in Greenock, far from their beautiful, desolate island, until years later when my grandfather retired, and he and my grandmother returned to North Uist, never to return to the mainland. Jessie and George stayed in Greenock, married and raised families of their own. Spunky, the Cat from the Ocean, lived for quite a few years more in Greenock, living a remarkably less adventurous life than she had lived previously.

**Joyce Freeman**  
Department of Medicine



## Untitled

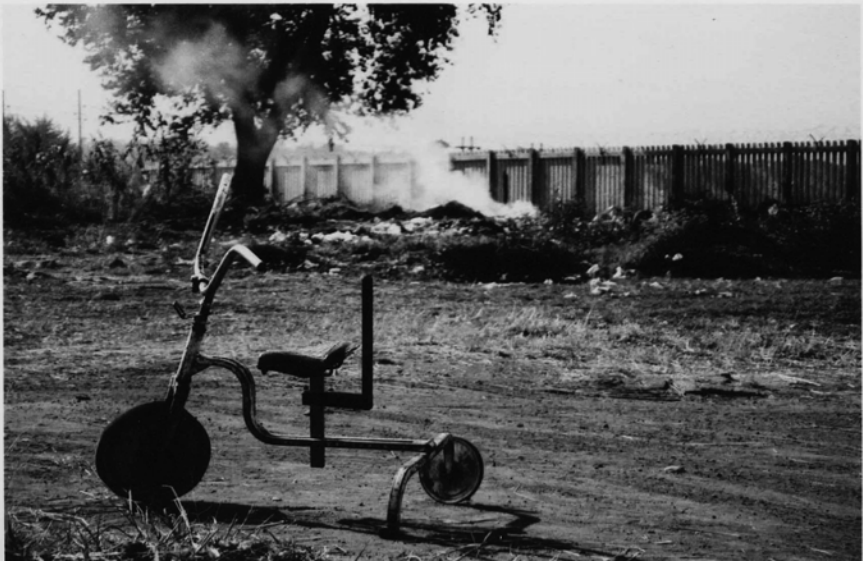
**Amy-Marie Kay**  
Liver Transplant Services

## **Moth Remembered**

While walking through a wooded way,  
I happened in part upon a moth,  
Whose failing flight caused failed flight from danger's end,  
And so, in parted escape of one or the other,  
Displaced carcass from faulty wings.  
The body, being gone, might have been better,  
Having inched worm-like away, abandoning inept wings,  
Or maybe the wings, with body in death's grip, fell free to safety.  
Either way, the moth, in the sense of moth-ness, was no more.

**Wythe Wyndham Owens**  
College of Medicine





## **Tricycle and Trash**

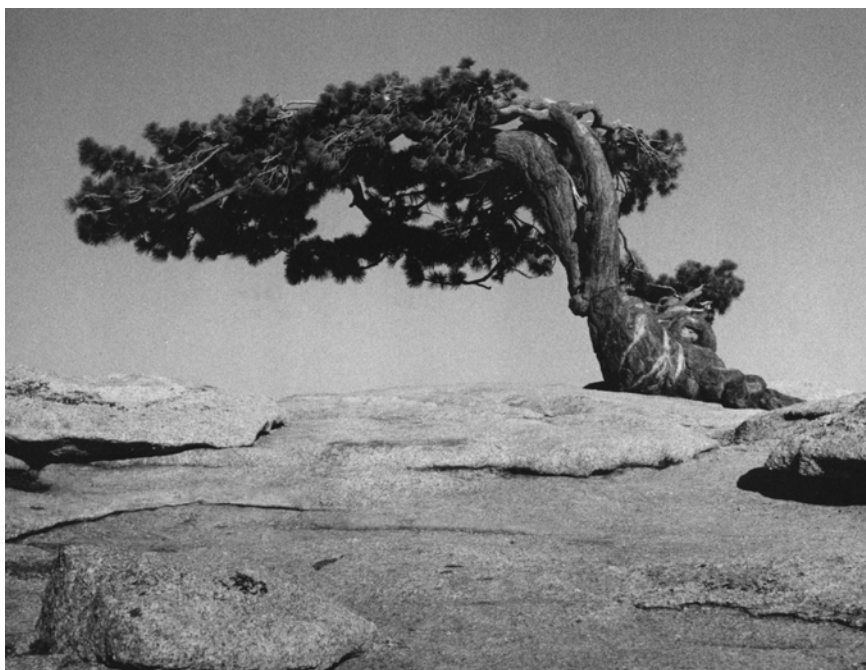
**Jill Landry**  
College of Health Professions

## **Time Management Haikus**

Too many yeses  
Lead us to a stressful life.  
Better to say no.

All the poetry  
I have time for are haikus  
At least they're a start.

**Lilless Shilling**  
College of Health Professionals



## **Sentinel Pine**

**Elizabeth Bear**  
College of Nursing

## **On the Death of my Grandmother, Helen Dunlap**

Collect your images of her in a mirror  
and bind it in black cloth  
to keep the memories within,  
the stopper of a perfume bottle.

Take a hammer to this vessel  
and grab a sliver of glass  
to tear a mark in your clothing,  
the mark upon your heart.

Lift a shard to your cheek  
and place the edge to your beard  
to carve the mourner's growth,  
the death-time fog of apathy.

Look into the largest piece  
and find her in your face  
to glance upon her gifts,  
the slice of immortality.

Line the fragments on a string  
and wear them round your neck  
to bounce glances from the sun,  
the selfless act of giving.

**Eric Sribnick**  
College of Medicine/Graduate Studies



## **Untitled**

**William Hunt**  
College of Medicine

## Sitting in Back Bay Station (Boston)

Sitting in Back Bay Station (Boston)  
- not the one that burned in 1928  
and was rebuilt the next year  
lasting the next fifty -  
but this one  
where brown mottled brick walls  
frame the tracks  
gravel-bedded, nail-jailed;  
and sport black brick strips  
accenting street scenes from years gone,  
city maps, and diagrams of the MBTA  
and grey painted (peeling) concrete columns  
graffiti less or painted over  
support broad brown board gables and roof  
over side and center platforms -  
concrete, etched as squares  
and edge-sealed by cobbled yellow steel -  
and long white fluorescent bulbs  
hang overhead, dully illuminating  
the marker "Track 1"  
black "5 cars"  
red "5"  
and while this hard brown bench pinches butt,  
sunlight streams through the far open end  
of this Back Bay Station  
inviting cool brisk autumn  
outside  
as the flashing scroll bleeds red  
"all trains operating on or near schedule...  
Friday October 10, 2003"  
I wait  
for the 1:40 Amtrak to Providence  
at 2:13.

**Walter Limehouse**  
Emergency Medicine



## **Untitled**

**Marlisa Sooy**  
Department of Cell Biology  
and Anatomy

## Retrieval

“I had no idea that you would find it,” I said.

“Well, I just got lucky, I guess,” said Luce.

“Where was it?”

Luce looked at me with her clear eyes, smiled slightly, and glanced away. “I... you probably know already.” She laughed that tinkling chuckle she has.

I thought a moment. I could see in my mind’s eye the thing lying somewhere, but where? I put my glass down beside the fork. I thought *that’s not where the glass is supposed to be on a table, is it?* I smiled at Luce.

“Don’t you know?” she asked.

I did not respond. I put my stubbled chin in my hands, and gazed at her eyes again. They were so clear, so very blue. I realized again how much I loved her. I shook my head in answer to her question.

She said, “Well, I am surprised at you. I would have thought, obviously, that you would be able to figure it out.”

“Guess not,” I said, shrugging my shoulders.

Luce giggled, and said, “I don’t believe I’ll tell you.”

“Okay. But, I’m relieved that you found it. I was worried when I lost it.” I thought *I was worried you’d have my head; that’s what.*

“So was I,” she said with total honesty. The glint in that right eye was cold. I looked away. When I glanced back, the glint in her eye faded.

“You shouldn’t have bought it,” I said.



Without hesitation, she said, “Oh yes, I should have!” She placed her hand on mine, which I had draped across the table to touch her elbow. She had it in her hand. I saw the gleam.

“Well, do I get it back?”

“I don’t know,” she said. “Maybe you should suffer a little like I did.”

“Maybe so, Luce. Maybe I should.”

“No,” she said with a hint of a smile. And she reached out, holding the ring, and placed it gently on my finger. It had been there before, so there was a small indentation in my flesh that was a perfect fit. The ring was comfortable, like a blanket one has had for years. I ran my other hand’s forefinger along its smooth surface. I looked at Luce, and said, “Thanks.” I leaned across the table, and gave her a quick kiss on the forehead. She shied away, looking at her lap. I saw the tears.

I asked, “You okay?”

“Why do you ask?” she said with a slight irritation in her voice.

“Well, you’re crying, for one.”

“No, I’m just happy.”

Luce always confused me like that with her tears. They just came on without cause sometimes. I mumbled, “Happy . . . okay, I guess I can buy into that.”

Luce gazed at her own ring. It matched mine exactly; part of a set Luce had bought us for a recent wedding anniversary. *Which one?* I could not remember. I looked down at the ring on the third finger of my left hand. The ring did not fit me. My fingers had lost the padding of adipose that had been present when Luce bought the set. The ring slipped around my finger when I moved. I would lose it again. The ring needed to be sized. I was not ready. I needed, I wanted to lose more weight first.

Sure enough, Luce reminded me, as she so often did, “You should take it to a jeweler to have it cut down to fit.”

I just glared at her for a moment. My eyes were also blue, but I could not generate that glint that Luce had so naturally in that right eye. “I’m not ready,” I said. I thought *didn’t I just say that?* I could tell that Luce realized she had overstepped herself again, that she knew I was perturbed that she was giving me advice that I did not want or need. But, she did not say *I’m sorry*. Luce had been working on not saying *I’m sorry* for every little jot that goes into the wrong position on a page, so to speak. As I sat across from her at the small table, I thought again, as I had thought from the beginning *Luce is the most beautiful, most sensitive child-woman a person could want to have, to hold, to be. Luce is the world wrapped up in candied apples and vanilla ice cream, too sweet, too sharp, too smooth, too filling.*

I decided. I said, “Yeah, I think you’re right. I’ll go ahead. I’ll take it to the store where you bought the set. I’ll ask them to resize it. I would hate to lose it again. We might not find it next time.”

Luce looked at me. Her eyes sparkled, the way a child’s light up with the gifts of Christmas.

**Val Evans-Kreil**

Department of Otolaryngology



## **Calla Lily**

**Andrea Semler**

Department of Endocrinology

## **Creation: Three Parts**

The Snake bites its tail  
Summer is over  
Passing  
Spinning around fire  
Believing  
To have spun out  
Forever cold  
In final stillness  
All ends blind  
Then the Slap  
Awakened to Creation's Chaos

Light in long golden rays shot straight a bright beam to the dark newly dampened earth. Spots of daylight glided slowly across the storm torn landscape. The songs of night creatures, the frogs, the crickets, the night birds, cried out with fresh life. The smell of rain, a strange mixture of dust and moisture, pervaded the air. Among the chaos of creation, this was the time of my ease.

In blue seas  
Reflecting moonlight  
Against dark night  
A breeze blew  
A scent familiar  
Like life

One flesh  
T a m e d  
Till creation's caress  
S u s t a i n e d  
Two hopes  
Love laid

Twin ribbed  
a world  
To subdue  
and be subdued  
To rule  
and be ruled  
Now done

**Wythe Wyndham Owens**  
College of Medicine

## **A Roadside Attraction**

Perhaps the bird mistook him for a round stone,  
Or the snake chanced upon one of her chicks.  
I don't know which. Nor can I know to which species  
Each might belong. I know both were brown.

The snake and the bird were brown,  
Engaged in a battle of necessity—  
Neither could consume the other.  
I suppose they'd shared the yard a year in peace.

The snake had kept to his hole under some sad stump,  
The bird, aloft in her nest of twigs and newsprint,  
Nibbled worms and regurgitated sustenance for her young;  
They had avoided a contest.

At fifty-nine miles per hour I spied by the side of the road  
A heaving cloud of dust, whirling feathers within,  
A tangled mess of fang and claw and beak,  
Each in venomous pursuit of the other, not fueled by hate.  
The creature clot, knotted and hopping,  
Flung dust in the face of the sun.  
That furious coil, frantic from afar, slowed with my approach—  
My speed did not wane; I passed laughing, and pitied both.

**Adam Ellwanger**  
Writing Center



## **Sans Souci**

**Marlisa Sooy**  
Department of Cell Biology and  
Anatomy

**Thomas Edison's dying breath  
Held in a test tube  
At the Henry Ford Museum \***

The old inventor lay dying  
Beneath a precise square of linen  
In a four poster bed.  
His breath expelled in quiet puffs.

Suddenly quick gasps break rhythm  
The dilating pupil – taken by surprise – stops cold

Subtle struggle in the chest  
A final spasm  
Then - release

A hand darts from below  
The clear glass tube captures  
Last breath suspended  
Cap firmly in place.

Now  
Leaning on a stand  
In a small display case  
The final moment  
While electric lights blaze overhead.

\*Caption from the *Wall Street Journal*  
November 21, 2003

**David Bachman**  
Department of Psychiatry