

HUMANITAS
Medical University of South Carolina
Volume 10 , 2006

Humanitas

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PREFACE

For 10 years, *Humanitas* has served as a forum for the artistic pursuits of the students, faculty and staff of the Medical University of South Carolina. This 10th volume of *Humanitas* showcases ethical dilemmas, emotional encounters and beautiful moments captured by our dynamic contributors. The editors of *Humanitas* would like to thank MUSC's Humanities Council for many years of support. Carol Lancaster and Kristy Rodgers also deserve special thanks for overseeing each step of the production of *Humanitas*. Lastly, Bert Keller, the founder of *Humanitas* deserves special recognition for bringing this dream to life.

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Front Cover: **Kaleidoscope**
Charles F. Degenhardt III, College of Medicine

Back Cover: **Tripoli**
Ashley Mason, College of Medicine

**To Whom It May Concern:
(especially my ex-love, the budding writer)**

An average November goodbye
Leaves (me) changing colors.
The loneliest sight of all—
An almost-winter nightscape, a car-less city street, the red light blinks
Steady the night through,
I see, I hear, I feel.
My window every night, like clockwork.

Even the wind speaks of you—the lonely howl
Or maybe it is a song of myself, the afflatus surging and surging.
I talk to myself tonight. It's 2 AM—
I'm fine.

Write for me a happy-ending—
Sugar sweet with cherries.
Goldilocks meets Hemingway.
But, don't mention the word heart.
Or Love.
Nebulous words.
Trite
Overused.
Easily read but not breathed in.

Use words like: guttural throbbing, knifing lust
Or describe your love with flames, knives, cuts, burns, slaves, salves,
Pray to them for kindness—your muses.
Confess to them on a beach.

“A guttural throbbing overcame me, as I watched her brush her hair.”
Take some more pain-killers out of your pocket.

It was easy to leave her, he thought. Like throwing a pass.
Like smiling at the crowd.
Like rolling over in bed.
Like feeding yourself
Chilled Grigio grapes filled of her purest soul.
Anything but love.

Ashley Mason
College of Medicine



Morning at Folly

Charles F. Degenhardt III
College of Medicine

7-11 Matches

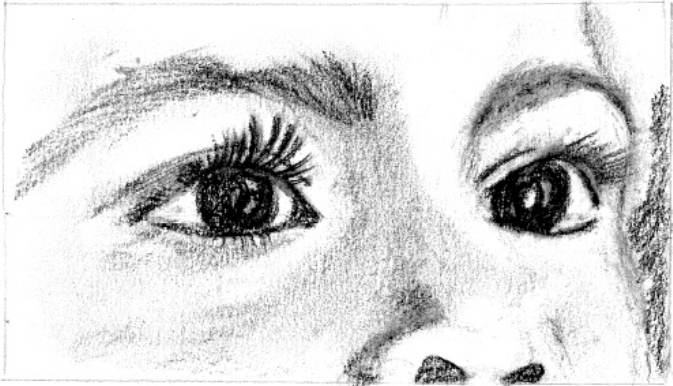
Man you ran!
Tsss! Still can see
your bushy brown crown
dragging the wind as
you ran the ghetto.

I remember sitting on the porch steps,
between your nephews, on June evenings.
Listening as they measured their futures
by you-6'4,"
I watched you run
to Sugahboy's cornerstore
to get you some 'ports
and me some penny candy.

Mesemerized, I memorized
your backside-
the auburn highlights
of the sun's light in your hair,
the caramel beads of sweat
around your long neck,
the darker skin of your elbows
the cream-colored palms
that you used to cup my breasts,
fashion my behind,
the smooth easy rhythm of your feet
against the street.
Man, was your style sweet!

But baby, did you run
The city ragged!
Cops on the corner,
sleepless night owls,
always hawking you,
clocking you,
watching you.
But, they cannot perceive
you, camouflaged in the dark alleyways
of life's ways, smoking pipe
dreams lit with 7-11 matches.

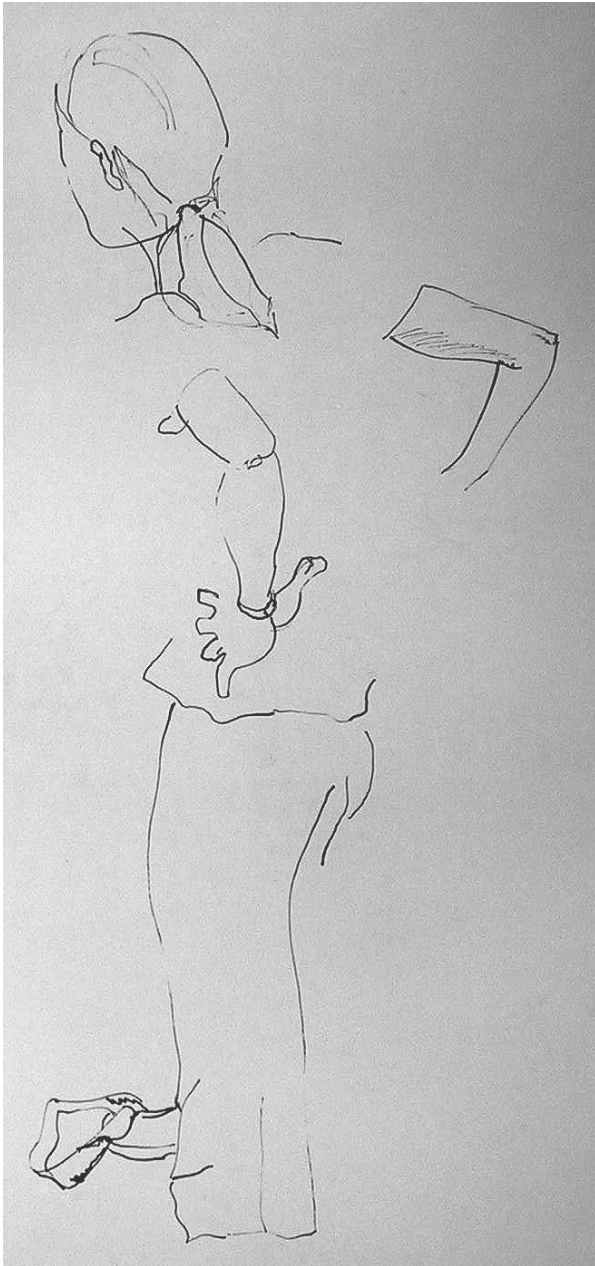
Kesha Thomas
College of Health Professions



Sherry

Eyes

Sherry Nesbitt
IOP, CDAP



Woman Standing

Dan-Victor Giurgiutiu
College of Medicine

Vietnam Scholarship Essay

As the son of both a Vietnam Veteran and a refugee from Vietnam, I feel especially qualified as an Angelfire scholarship candidate.

My father was not drafted into the Vietnam War. He volunteered because he believed in America and in its struggle against Communism. After completing Ranger school, my father served as a platoon leader and advisor to the South Vietnamese Army in the northern part of the Mekong Delta for two tours of duty between 1971 and 1973. Because of his fluency in French and his outstanding leadership ability, he was one of the relatively few Americans to have also fought the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. Only recently has my father begun telling me stories of his experiences, and I am amazed at the situations that a man can live through. I am immensely proud of my father and what he survived.

Eventually, my father would meet my Vietnamese grandfather, a man born alone. As an orphan, he never knew his mother, father, or any brothers or sisters. Raised in an orphanage, he grew up and taught himself French, English, and German. Eventually, he achieved a position in the South Vietnamese government, and he, his wife, and his family of eleven children prospered. Unfortunately, during the war he was falsely accused of aiding an alleged Communist working underneath him, and imprisoned. My family became very poor during this time. To make extra money, my mother, who is fluent in several languages, began teaching Vietnamese to an Army officer who would later become my father.

As the fall of Saigon loomed, my mother married my father and was able to escape. The rest of the family was left behind. My Vietnamese grandmother, now a widow, was an uneducated but very intelligent woman. She herself was fluent in Thai, Vietnamese, and Laotian. As the Communists approached, she knew that the family of a former official of a toppled regime did not face a rosy future. She knew that they had to escape.

She sold all of their possessions and over time sent groups of her children to the coast, disguised as fishermen. When they were all finally assembled, they set out on a rickety fishing boat, with no money and no possessions—quite literally, with only the clothes on their back.

My uncle tells a story of holding his hand over my youngest uncle's mouth, then only five years old, so that he would not cry out as they were hiding in a dark cargo hold of a boat, while a Communist soldier interrogated the owner of the boat on the planks above. He tells a story of being on a boat, while waves swelled three stories high around them, eating only one small handful of rice and drinking only one gulp of water, per day, for two long weeks. He tells a story of being completely lost out on the ocean, not knowing which direction to go, somewhere between Communist China, which would bring punishment or even death, and Taiwan, which would bring freedom and escape.

They all survived. They reached Taiwan and were able to contact my mother who had by then reached America with my father and a new baby girl—my older sister. My mother and father had solicited the help of local churches and managed to raise enough money to fly my grandmother, uncles, and aunts to America. I can only imagine what a tearful reunion that must have been. I am immensely proud of my Vietnamese family and what they survived.

I was born several years later. My mother did not teach me Vietnamese when I was a child. She wanted her children to be American, and not to be discriminated against. Early in my twenties, I recognized that there was something missing inside of me, and I began to teach myself Vietnamese, the same way my grandfather had taught himself foreign languages. After I learned how to sufficiently read and write, in February 2005 I boarded a plane and left America for Vietnam. I lived in Vietnam for four months, learning the language, meeting people, and traveling.

I met countless people and had countless conversations. People were always curious about me, a young man clearly not fully Vietnamese, yet clearly not fully American. The conversation inevitably turned to what my profession was, and I always said that I was going to study to become a bác sĩ—a doctor. After their admiration (and my bashfulness), another inevitable question—*“are you going to come back to Vietnam?”*

And now, it is five months since my return to America. I think about when I was younger, and how idealistic I was. My battlecry was the same as every young idealist’s, that I wanted “to help people, to save the world, to make a difference, to make the world a better place, etc.” The problem was, I had no idea how. Living in Vietnam before I started medical school told me how. Every Vietnamese person who asked me *“are you going to come back to Vietnam?”* wasn’t asking me a question, but was, in fact, telling me *“if you want to put your idealism to work... here’s your chance.”*

I do not know exactly what role Vietnam will play in my life. For now, I can only see my obligation to succeed through the next semester. Nevertheless, I do hope that one day in the foreseeable future, I will be able to return to Vietnam, not as a soldier like my father, but as a physician and be able to put my idealism to work, as an homage to the countless refugees who did not survive, whose stories ended at the crack of a gunshot or at the bottom of the ocean.

Eric Bonno
College of Medicine



Dawn Work

Charles Brown
Library Services

mountain lovers

Christine put the purple coat across her back. It fit snugly, as it should. In the mountains, cold air filtered about and swirled with great intent. To freeze, to cold, the death of anything that was not ice. But life, in the form of happy people, continued. She traveled light this time. Just some simple equipment, lost in the flared orange tent behind her. The whole night was a harsh one. Brittle. A hurricane of slumber. Christine lied awake all night, missing the necessary sleep, even now, but couldn't put herself down. The lumbering snow caps, several hundred feet away, called to her. The bright smile came smooth upon her face. Goggles to protect her eyes shone the sun back towards the valley. Everything was white. The Asian symbol taut on her back represented a new freedom. Christine was sure exactly what it meant, but it did do things to her. When she saw it hanging on a rack in a favorite suburban store, it had to be hers. The wind ate at it, snapping its jaws. But she was too much even for this mountain. She kicked a mound of clumped snow over the ledge. If she too was to fall, down down, twirling in mists of scented memories and cavernous echoes of cries for help, then that would still be a happy life. She stretched her arms across the set of scenery, hoped for the world, and gave a kiss to the mountain. Being in love with everything was easy when you were utterly alone. God felt like this sometimes, in the small hours of a new day. The chance to be thrown to the wind, land anywhere, be complete in under an hour. Christine blinked, only a moment, and missed a giant boulder crash down to a valley below. The sound came her way and gave her a chill.

Christopher Savage
Support Services



Snow Scene

Charles F. Degenhardt III
College of Medicine

At Times

It's like walking in the footsteps of Joe Goldberger, USPHS. How did he keep studying pellagra among the most impoverished, destitute patients in the South? For years in the field and in the lab, observing the diet of inmates and orphans (corn mush and molasses)? Believing, against all the wisdom, monotonous diet the cause.

At times, I feel a kinship with Joe, but not very often.

Especially this hot, humid afternoon in one of the poorest counties in our state. I find myself passing time, brushing gnats, seeking a little shade, no hint of a breeze, outside this abandoned sharecropper's shack. Inside, my chemist is swabbing baseboards, the baby's crib, the dirt-infested corners of two concrete slab rooms. Maybe there will be a lingering trace of household contamination.

Here I stand, waiting, beside our ice-chest cooler, in a weedy, dusty yard, for the next rack of labeled specimens. The sun so brutal for farmhands, so essential for tender cotton plants, reaching right up to the house. Cotton the major cash crop here, unless any one of the hazards prevail. Usually it takes dozens of applications in a single season to control weeds, bollworms, thrip, nematodes, rust, etc.

Sweat dripping, I wait in muggy heat, gnats busy and buzzing. The air-conditioned lab at the Medical Center seems hours and miles away. The Center, where, if I had more sense, I 'd still be making white coat rounds with docile interns, role-modeling tertiary-care.

What am I doing here, of all places? Shooing a stray dog rifling piles of garbage strewn all about. Watching scrawny chickens scratching gravel in the dust.

Here, simply because our moonlighting resident phoned me in the middle of the night, reporting his quandary, asking me to come and investigate. The family doctor agreed, also curious about this poor tenant farmer's family getting into so much trouble: three children and both parents filling the tiny ER Friday and Saturday with acute signs of some kind of poisoning.

At first, the infant appears, desperate with pneumonia, and is rushed off to the Childrens' Hospital. Then the 6 year old with stiff neck, ataxia, and muscle twitching (negative LP). Next, the 9 year old with severe cramps and diarrhea (viral?). Finally, both parents "not feelin' good" with cramps and blurred vision.

After a while Dr. Marion and the resident sort out the cases (confused at first by their different last names). Atropine and 2-Pam seemed to work for everyone.

But now the question of the common source of the toxin.

Air- water- or food-borne? Household drift from treated fields? Intentional homicide, a case for the sheriff?
Report to the remote health department?
Or consult with us at University hospital?

Or, more likely as not, forget it.

With or without investigation, life in this hard-scrabble corner of the universe will go on, as usual. With few skills and less education, this family of five will toil to eat, pray at the Baptist church for safe passage to Heaven, and hope to recover soon to return to the fields.

Standing by the ice-chest, I figure the chances of finding anything on the mass spectrograph, from week-old samples, are next to nil. Just another unexplained incident, nearly fatal, understandably delayed diagnosis, and bad luck.

So be it, I admit, brushing at more gnats.

But then, under a scrawny oak with a tire-swing, my eyes focus on a huge iron wash tub, filled to the brim. Its surface sparkles brilliantly from sunlight. I move closer for a good look. Half-floating, half submerged in the murky tub are several Army-wool blankets, dark and dank. Another cloud passes overhead, letting a second shaft of sunlight hit the grimy stew..... wow!.... I can't believe it!

There, reflected, an iridescent oil ring floating on the surface, and another, and another!

Now I suspect, no, I know, this is no dry run. The specimens will come out positive. Most likely, oil-soluble organophosphate, fitting the clinical picture to a T. The common source settled, beyond a doubt. Field-study over.

.... Three ways to absorb the toxin: inhalation, skin absorption, even ingestion! Saturated Army blankets against bedbugs and roaches on a rampage. Every food surface a chemical battlefield. The baby's crib and mattress soaked with toxin.....

Stan Schuman
Retired

undigested last man

the man who sat in the back of the warehouse,
lodged largely into
his little shirt by sheer weight of
skin,
did not smile in the face of the
morning.

he was a graveyard shift working,
son-of-a-bitch spouting,
last died-in-the-wool ass-kicking,
fiend of a fierce friend.

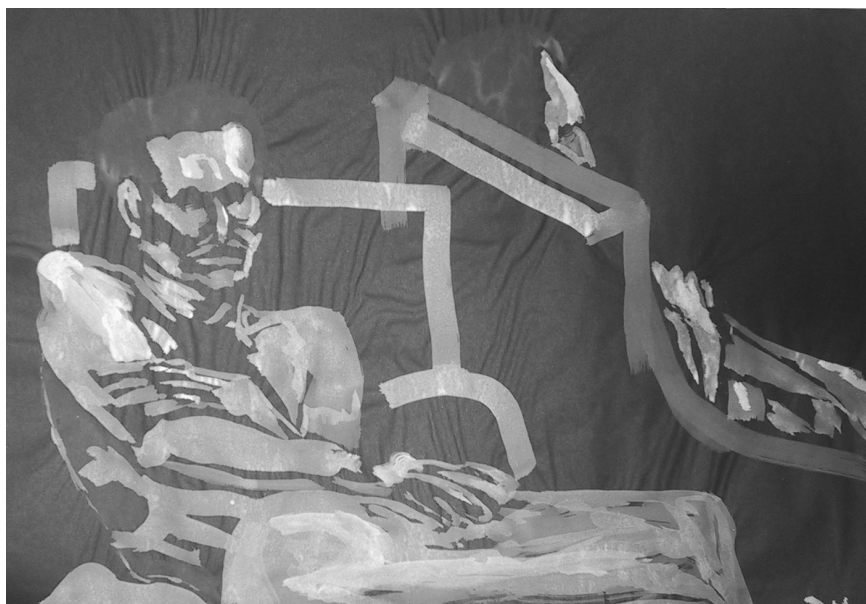
the night time contracted from the
touch of his skin;
the
air outside often grew cold
around his
molded presence.

it wasn't always as this.

when he grew young, twenty,
thirty odd years
so,
the whole city he lived in
fit into
his pocket.

"I got a wild side," he'd repeat over
and over,
then jump down a manhole and
roar and prowl,
no
reason whatsoever.

Christopher Savage
Support Services



Man in Chair

Dan-Victor Giurgiutiu
College of Medicine

For Roberta

Last time I saw her,
She sat covered and ready.
Sun kissing her lap in vertical blind stripes.
Invisible to herself and ready to wheelchair places.
Cut my chicken please, she smiles. blinks her tired eyes. blue-green like
mine. Hazel.

working through the details of her funeral in her mind.
a song, a hymn. two Presbyterian ministers. ordained by God. A grand
day, she thinks.

My Kodak memory of your garden, our huge sunflower summer, me
behind flowers and dwarfed—just five and smiling.
You were fearless riding your wheels down the hill into your garden.
With one leg and a half, pulling weeds from mint.
Herb smelling fresh on your sunspotted hands when you touched my
face, wiped the dirt from my baby cheek.

When you died, they buried you in pink. I saw them tuck you into your
fat silk pillow. Luxurious, perfectly fluffed. I had a front row seat.

If no heaven comes to good Christian women, find it in the grass cover-
ing your grave like a thick mane. Turning new life over. Pax.

For days since, listening to the stranger in my voice. Searching for the
sweet Southern cadence of yours.

Ashley Mason
College of Medicine



Bromeliad Hermoso de Costa Rica

Candice Gillespie
COM Dean's Office

hospital in stereo

the white landscape of dreams
that
captures lives and
fractures bones
started to play live
from
the halls of the old hospital.
the nurses
and their necessities
narrowly made it out alive.
the sounds, the screams and the doctors
dancing
in surgery
was almost too much.
the people reflected by the white
linoleum tiles stayed
away from their own reflections.
it was a dangerous world after all,
and in the past,
this place had only carried through
some sounds.
some images.
some dreary thoughts and
some tragic disasters.
but
tonight, tonight with the
injured and incensed cry,
is for healing
and hollering.
this hospital has shouted out its
name
for any faithful believer to hear,
beyond the walls, beyond the floors and floors
of rooms,
some sad safe saint
is crying out as well
“save the people,”
she chants,
but she knows that a nice
day isn’t too
far off.

Christopher Savage
Support Services



Folly Fishing Pier

Jill Laundry
Physical Therapy

Mr. Wyman

Mr. Wyman,
do you ever stop taking your medication?
Forget about it.

I'm an MD
Or could be.
That medication is good they give you.

I enjoy the voices. The kind of work I do I have to think that way.

FBI, CIA, President Kennedy, phone taps, subways, prostitution, Nobel Prize, Phi Beta Kappa.

I speak in code too, Mr. Wyman. All day, Mr. Wyman. MØ, NE, ALD, TF, SMA, NADPH, THF, TV, XR, UTI, AAM, NA, PMN, MI, MHC, LDH, MCL, MCP, MCV, MEN, MEOS, Met, MGN, MHPSA. Very important work I do. MMSE: do you speak *that* language?

Does my brevity upset you?
Does it beset you with gloom?
'Cause I write like I've got oil pumping in my living room.

Sitting here for hours, 10 out of 10 today.
Contemplating how the transmitters hit your brain.
With a crash, smash, flash
Boom—I speak *that* language.

Ashley Mason
College of Medicine



Million Year Stare

Kristi Rodgers
Office of the Provost

Crossing the Ravenel

A second crossing of the Arthur Ravenel, Jr. Bridge on foot owns a different experience from the fanfare of opening day hoopla and pageantry. Now absent from the grand spires is the overwhelming rainbow sea of the bridge worshippers, historians and groupies. Lines dancing up to shuttle buses and the parking shuffle are missing. Gone, for now, is the jockeying for the best position from which to view the spectacular fireworks that illuminated the grand cables in the South Carolina night sky. Awestruck dignitaries have dispersed, and reporters with their camera crews in tow, have retreated to analyze bridge life from a distance.

The second bridge crossing invites the accompaniment of harbor wind coupled with sporadic dots of pedestrians and motorists crossing the bridge on their separate journeys through life. In the background a themes shift slowly between new beginnings, welcome change and the ambivalence of saying goodbye to faithful old community friends—like the ones named Pearman and Grace. The sentinel trusses of the Silas N. Pearman and the John P. Grace Memorial Bridges now disappear in stages and withdraw to the pages of history, oil paintings and souvenir tee shirts. Eyes of bridge athletes now focus squarely on conquering the slopes of the Ravenel against the backdrop a new view of the panoramic Southern tapestry that is called America.

The new cable extension bridge is a runway where community friends and tourists migrate to exercise and reflect in comfortable surroundings. “Ravenel Wear,” has emerged, consisting of layered pieces of lightweight cotton clothing, often tied at the waist and accented with smiles. Bridge accessories include beaded water bottles in canvas pouches, comfortable shoes, and this year’s backpack. Sunglasses are optional.

The great Ravenel is a psychiatrist treating clouded minds with salted sea air then releasing them back into society fortified with great clarity. The modern bridge is an institution of higher learning where parents and teachers share historical lessons of American ancestry. To many the bridge represents sacrifice; for others it represents accomplishment and the ability to rise above of yesterday while reaching into tomorrow.

The Ravenel affords visitors with natural tickets to the occasional harbor dance of porpoises, the swinging of marsh grasses, and the rippling of beach sands. This “natural high” affords a view of the mechanical cranes that greet and pluck at container vessels inbound from distant lands, transforming them from hazy silhouettes on the Atlantic horizon to catalysts of culture, commerce and technology of a great port city.

Charleston’s acquisition of a new bridge and the loss of its old bridges are shrouded in pregnant metaphors of hope, growth, and opportunity. Reflections off the waves of the Cooper River leave residual impressions of Arthur Ravenel’s infectious opening day smile. Omnipresent in these reflections are the visionary missions of pioneers John P. Grace and Silas N. Pearman to connect communities and to build bridges where bridges had never been built before.

These complex reflections are testimonials to a simple life lesson. It matters little on which side of the bridge one is born or from which side one decides to cross. The goal for humanity is to level damaged communication pathways, to build new bridges in places where they are needed, and to smile with satisfaction upon living long enough to see others cross them so that they, too, can see America.

Sarah Johnson
College of Nursing



Come Into My Parlor

Charles Brown
Library Services



Ocean View

Anne Marie Chalker
College of Health Professions

HUMANITAS



Do you want to be a part of the next *HUMANITAS*?

Submissions may be sent to:

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