



THE HEALING PROCESS

Getting at the heart of medicine

University of Southern California

Spring 2013

Letter from the Editors

We're so glad this magazine is in your hands! This issue is very dear to us, as it is the first issue of *The Healing Process*, with many more to come. We'd like to take a moment to tell you a little bit about *The Healing Process*.

As students interested in careers in the health sciences, we're constantly concerned with details. From knowing the particular protein in a certain pathway to being the second (or third, or fourth) author in a published paper, it's easy for us to get lost in the small things and lose sight of the overall purpose of our undergraduate, health-related experiences. In the pursuit of résumé-building activities, it's far too easy to forget why exactly we're doing what we're doing, and how that experience is shaping us. This has happened to us, too, several times. But there's a certain value in stepping back and reflecting on, say, the time when you were volunteering in that free clinic and the doctor was telling you about how difficult it is to not have an X-ray machine. The patient with acute back pain you just saw - who can't afford to take more time off from his two jobs - won't go to a bigger hospital to get an X-ray, and probably won't come back until his back pain becomes unbearable again. How do moments like that change the way you perceive health and medicine?

The idea of *The Healing Process*, a medium where health and medicine can be seen through the lens of art and literature, originated from this thinking. Specifically, it's a way for us all to think about our pre-health experiences, reflect on how they've changed the way we see health and medicine, and to share them with fellow students so that they too can learn from our perspectives. In our first semester alone, we've been very fortunate to have witnessed the incredible creativity, candidness, and personal growth demonstrated by our contributors. And we're even more fortunate to have the

opportunity to share them with you. In particular, "Collision," by an anonymous contributor, is an open, brilliantly-written, and heartbreaking exploration of the inner turmoil a young woman faces after rape. In addition, this issue features artwork by students such as Nicole Lau, whose piece, "Many Hands, One Heart," represents how the beauty of healing is a common thread that ties us all together. We are proud to showcase all of these creative pieces - prose, art, and photography - and we hope you will enjoy reading and viewing them as much as we have enjoyed putting them together for this edition.

In closing, we'd like to end by encouraging you to do three things. First, enjoy this magazine! The idea of *The Healing Process* was to put together a magazine that would be a colorful and engaging read, not something dry and boring. Second, we want you to think. Think about what you read and what you see. Each piece in this magazine carries a very important message, and it's part of your education to understand what our contributors see. Finally, we want you to participate! And that's not just a plug for you to submit to *The Healing Process*, but also a call for you to start seeing the art within health and medicine. See the ingenuity of biological structures the next time you're sitting in Biochemistry lecture. The next time you are shadowing or volunteering, feel the emotions of both the patients who are plagued by disease and the physicians who treat them. Reflect on what medicine, or physical therapy, or dentistry - whatever it may be - really means to you.

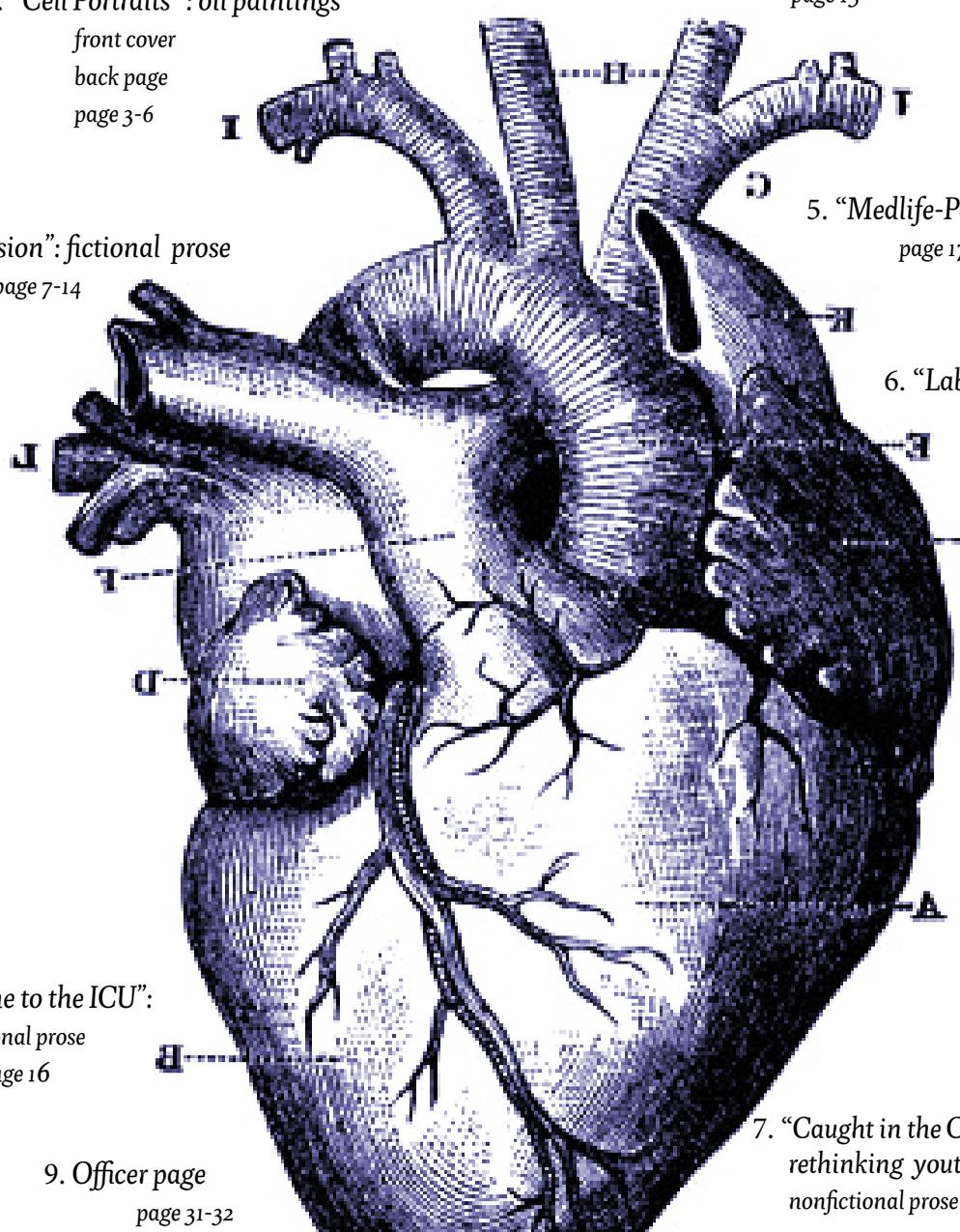
And, of course, if you get a chance, create something that captures what you see and how it makes you feel, so you can share it with the rest of us!

Enjoy!

Warm regards,

Abhishek Verma & Kush Gaur Editors-in-Chief

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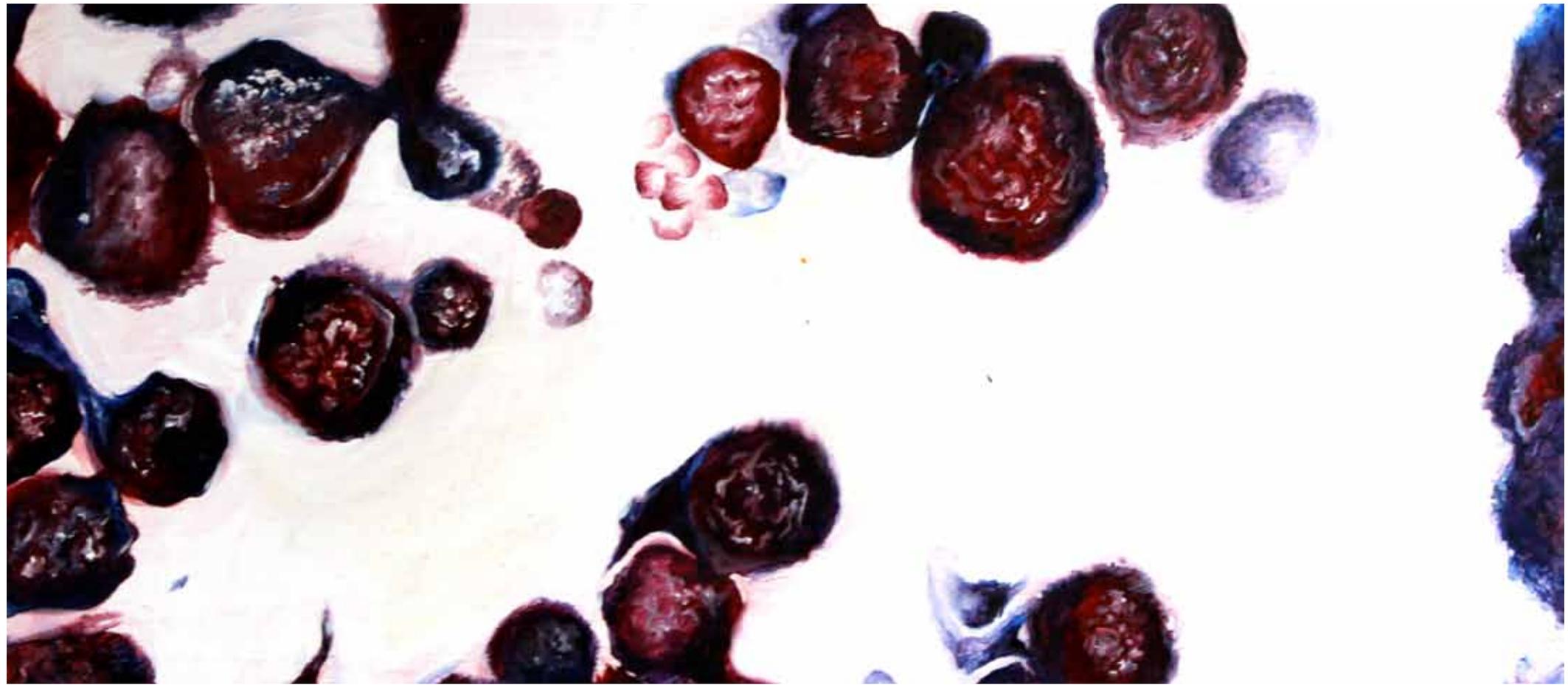


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Amanat Singh
"Cell Portraits"

An artistic portrayal that captures the paradoxical beauty of cancer cells and their formidable nature.



Collision

-anonymous

fictional prose

The nurse had to take her blood pressure three times before she finally got it right. The rusty old machine she was using seemed more likely to give tetanus than a proper reading. The hallways shone dully in the fluorescent light, and the occasional nurse shuffled by. All the patients in the ward were asleep and the nurses flitted like moths under the palelights. They hustled her down the quiet hallway through the double-locked doors labeled WARNING: FLIGHT RISK. They took measurements, asked questions and muttered amongst themselves. The silence ticked on, out of sync with the rapid thump of her heartbeat.

A lone patient shuffled by, shooting her looks as he whispered to himself. He glanced back and forth, approaching her slowly as he padded along the linoleum floor. She had been waiting for twelve hours now, and the nurses still pushed their pencils and acted like she wasn't there. She shifted uncomfortably in her chair and tried to find interest in the sad kitten painting in front of her, like a forlorn toy in a forgotten dollhouse made of toothpicks and lead paint. The hospital was a horrible place. Its swallowing hallways and locked doors were a respite from the tiresome world.

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Selene and Christine had been best friends since junior year of high school. Selene was always the loud one who said what she meant and didn't take no for an answer. Christine on the other hand was the quieter one whom everyone gravitated toward for some inexplicable, magical reason. She didn't let people into her life easily, so Selene was thankful that she had been allowed to peek into the windows of Christine's life just a little bit and see crumbles of her soul. She didn't want to lose that.

There was a brief moment of awkwardness when Selene got into Stanford and Christine didn't. But that passed, and they were okay, even better than okay. Christine was at Berkeley now, and time had tried to wear down their friendship but the glittering strands were still tethered there.

It was winter break of college freshman year, and they met up just like they used to in high school. They sat together under the Christmas lights with their homework sprawled out in front of them. Warm cups of cocoa steamed in front of them, and the radio trilled cheerily in the background. They looked up occasionally from their work to trade stories, and then fell into a companionable silence.

They took a stroll in the dusk, Christine's dog scurrying alongside. The trees cast strong shadows on the ground as their feet crunched along the brown gravel. Selene chattered on while Christine smiled along in silence. Their feet meandered along in sync, Selene's solid march offset by Christine's light tread. Their lives meshed together perfectly, the threads of existence intertwined in blazing beauty.

Tonight was a night to drink away. Selene's dorm had an in-house dinner party, and she was in a great mood. She had three finals next week, not to mention an essay and two homework sets due this week. But everything would be okay, and summer was just two weeks away. Her phone rang.

"Hey Colin, what's up?"

"Hiiii Selene I'm at Stanford tonight! We should hang out!"

I mean... if he has to... ugh another one of Christine's boyfriends. But he's been around for a while so I'll just be happy to see him. Her boyfriends were all the same anyway.

"Yeah sure sounds good, I have a party tonight but afterwards, maybe?"

"I'm going to be at this birthday party thing you should come if you can!"

"I'm probably going to stay here tonight but you can come after you're done."

Click. She rubbed her forehead. Babysitting was a full time job. Why do I have to be nice to these people anyway... the things I do for Christine. The house was bedecked with decorations, and there was even a fake Hogwarts Express crawling along the front lobby and cauldrons full of gold coins by the door. The outside parties had expectations and flirtation and awkwardness that she didn't want to deal with, and so tonight would only be with friends that had become family. It was going to be a good night, filled with friends.

One drink in: Responsible and interesting conversation.

Two drinks in: Louder, bawdier conversations. Gossip ensues.

Three drinks in: Harry Potter re-enactments, complete with British accents. She began pretending to fly on a broomstick.

Beyond comprehension:

By now it was getting to be about eleven or twelve o'clock. One of her friends in the house hadn't drunk that night and was itching to go out, so they went for a drive. They drove high up into the hills of Palo Alto, up to a lookout spot over the bay. Dim figures shuffled around the pullout, their dark shadows illuminated by cigarette butt embers. It was a quiet night though, and they took a walk into the continually rolling fog. The sounds of the city and the men by the cars faded out into the distance, until there was only the sweet silence of the fog and the moon and the whistling long grass.

They sat out in the dusty dirt and watched the moon pass by. The city glittered below them, dark shapes crawling along little roads and little streets. The trees moved together, and the water on the bay lapped in little white waves of foam. The mountains rose up around and before them, their dark majesty shadowing the tiny human creations below. Her heart was calm for a second. She took in the world and all its beauty amidst the whirling grass and she was content. The world was behind her, and all would be fine.

✧ ✧

They go home, and she wanders around the war zone that was the dorm dinner--cups, beverages, food and more litter the large dining area. Her phone buzzes and she looks down and sees a text from Colin. Oh yeah... he was stopping by. Time to be diplomatic. But damn it was late. Belligerently drunk Selene needed to take a backseat.

Hey Selene I'm on campus! Can I stay with you tonight please? I can't get a ride home. Yeah sure I guess; when will you be here? Soon.

She runs into some friends that were still up and chats with them for a bit. Selene starts getting impatient though, her body exhausted from the night's festivities. She texts Colin again to ask where he is.

Finally, he shows up at three in the morning. Selene lets him into the building and introduces her friends to him, but they soon leave for bed. He has a slurry smile.

"So... you can stay on one of the couches out here."

"Where is your room?? I want to see your room."

"I guess you can stay in my room, it does get pretty cold out here. I have my futon pulled out though, so I have a pretty big bed. No funny business though."

"What are you taaaaalking about."

"Like... My blankets stay on my side and your blankets on your side. Don't try to steal my blankets."

"Yeah yeah."

She turns off the lights.

He snuggles up to her for warmth.

"You're soooo warm."

"Why are you hugging me..."

"You're just like a big teddy bear. Don't worry, this is totally normal."

"What would Christine say if she saw this."

"Shhhh don't worry."

He puts his hand under her shirt.

"What are you doing???"

"Your body is soooo warm. It's even warmer under the shirt."

"Okay... NOW what would she say."

"Don't worry."

"I don't think this is a good idea."

"Don't worry."

He tries to kiss her unmoving mouth.

"Oh my god STOP."

"Shhhh... don't worry."

He keeps going and she just wants it to go away. She just wants it to go away, so he has his way. What would Christine say? Don't tell her. Making a scene doesn't do a girl any favors—take the path of least resistance. She doesn't want to make it a bigger deal than it is— maybe she's just imagining things. You're supposed to lie there and take it, don't you know? It'll all be okay. Wasn't that easy.

She woke up the next day, and he was gone. She looked down at her phone. There was a text from Colin asking her not to tell Christine. He felt guilty for cheating he said. She stumbled over to breakfast, greeted by smiling faces and chatter. She sat down in a semi-daze, contemplating where to begin. Her friend's boyfriend had tried to sleep with her! The clatter of the bowls paused momentarily, and she laughed a bit to herself at the ridiculousness of the situation.

I'm so sorry. What? Why would you be sorry for me? I just can't believe he would do this to my friend! Isn't that crazy? What should I tell her? Why did you feel sorry for me?

✱✱

We're back in high school now. It was getting close to midnight, and Christine still wasn't picking up her phone. I had college applications to finish and finals to study for, but Christine still wasn't here. I paced around the kitchen until my phone buzzed. I snatched it up, but it wasn't Christine. Warily, I picked up the call. Hello? Yes Christine is here. She just went to the bathroom and left her phone in the kitchen with me, sorry she didn't pick up. Yes I'll tell her to call you. Don't worry, we're just watching TV. Goodnight to you too!

I was about to call Christine again when I saw headlights flash through the front window. I ran to the front door and quickly flipped the locks. Christine entered the doorway, her hair still perfectly put together even with the wind. The car lights receded from the driveway.

Where have you been?! Your mom has called me like a million times, you better call her back soon. Oh yeah sorry Henry was taking forever. Christine I can't keep covering for you, your mom will only believe so much. You worry too much Sel, she loves you she'll believe whatever you say.

So, how is Henry? Ugh, the worst. He keeps doing this thing...

Every week it's like this. Soon, Henry will be just a memory, just like Will and Josh and all the boys before them. Flakers, cheaters and general douchebags walked into her life every couple months, stayed their tenure, and dumped her. And then they were replaced.

Seriously, Christine why are you still dating him? I don't know he's cute. He's kind of a horrible person. Aww Sel don't say that. You know I'm right. Yeah I know... but he tries?

✱✱

I try too. But I don't go breaking your heart. I pick up the pieces when they do.

✱✱

Hey Christine, Some weird stuff came up when Colin visited, I know you're coming back from Italy soon but I wanted to chat when you got back, it's kind of urgent. Let me know when you're free, preferably before you head back to school.

She sees Christine waiting outside the coffee shop, coiffed and statuesque as always, her dainty fingers curled around an expensive purse. Selene pulls into the parking lot, and Christine waves and walks over. There aren't any seats inside, let's just chill in the car. Sounds good, how are you? I'm good, what did you want to talk about Selene?

You're one of my best friends and I would never want to hurt you. Okay... you're scaring me. What is this about? Last weekend... Colin came over... and did things that 100% counted as cheating, and that made me feel really uncomfortable. They sat in silence. Wow. Okay well thanks for telling me, I'm so sorry he did that. He's in such trouble. She gets out of the car and walks away, leaving behind her lingering fairy glamour.

Selene drives away, her heart slightly settled. Everything should be okay now, they'll break up and I'll never see him again. Thank god she listened to me.

Now I know why they felt sorry for me. As the days creep on, it slowly starts sinking in. The taste of him in my mouth. The memory of his tiny lips on mine, so weak and disgusting. Little arms and little fingers. But most of all, Christine's face, her biting words. And what she thinks I've done to her.

✱✱

Everything is a reminder. Her brain would not let her forget. A dark, viscous tar trickled down from the walls of her mind, coating the floors with its numbing stickiness. It dripped down like blood. A stone cabinet rose in the midst of the tar, filled to the brim with her terrible secret. The chains around it were wound up tight and the padlock was shiny and new. It refused to budge. Day by day, it grew heavier until it was sinking sinking and there was no way to pull it back up and she tried and tried and tried but it just wouldn't move. So it goes.

The clear answer should have been no, but she said no a million times and it still meant yes because he did what he wanted to do. So she let it happen, because saying no didn't make him go away and it seemed like saying nothing would.

And she was right. After he finished, he rolled over and said, "Well that was easy, wasn't it? Now we can both go to sleep."

It is 3:00AM. She stares blankly at her textbook, a final in two days. "It is clear from these examples of physical regularities..." His face again. Every detail disgustingly vivid. "the assumption that light is coming from above has been called..." His skinny arms, pinning her down. Nothing is going into her brain, only tears coming out.

✱✱

A couple days later, Selene walks over to the student health center. She calmly checks herself in to an appointment, and waits in the lobby. The clock ticks on the wall, and she reads a magazine and waits. The doctor comes to bring her in, and she politely sits down on the sofa across from the desk.

How are you today? Fine, thank you. What brings you here? I've been feeling pretty poorly. How come? I'm going to kill myself. So it goes.

✱✱

The hospital grows quiet again, its newest patient shuttled into her proper place. Selene lies in the hard cot and stares at the linoleum ceiling, contemplating life. It's a hard thing to do.

✱✱

Her phone buzzes at 9:00am the morning after she met with Christine. Groggily she swipes at the screen until the message pops up.

You both disgust me. How could you do that with my boyfriend. I don't think we can be friends for a very long time, I can't believe you would do this to me.

The boulder starts rolling back down the hill. Sisyphus, you poor chap.

The next few days inched and flashed by simultaneously. Time did not move in a continuous stream, but jumped back and forth between anxiety and forgetfulness. But forgetfulness did not last with Selene. She slept fitfully, her mind blank save for the tar and the stone cabinet. Sleep evaded her. Every time she closed her eyes she saw him laughing, the tar swimming around his feet. Christine, Christine how could you let him get away with this. Like a white hot flame it consumed her until she burnt to ash.

Hey Christine I— Why did you do it. I don't know I don't know I thought I had to. I was only thinking of how wrong this was to you and how to make it all go away. Well you didn't have to do it. He didn't force you. I can't believe you did this. I don't understand why you couldn't just say no. Why didn't you just say no?? I did. He did force me. Did he have a knife or something? No, but I just felt forced. I guess it wasn't enough to just feel forced...

She cried after every call from Christine, every reminder of how much she had failed and how much she had done wrong. She didn't say yes she said no but he did it anyway. That must mean yes, I suppose. She didn't know any better than what they yelled at her. The world told her she was the home-wrecking, dirty slut. She brought this upon herself. Shut up and stop looking for sympathy you whore. You boyfriend-stealing whore. He gets a slap on the wrist and Christine still sleeps in his bed. No one believes you Selene. Her march slowly turned into a wander, then disintegrated into a stumble.

I'm thinking of reporting this Christine, he really did do this to me. Well, I'd really prefer it if you didn't, I mean what is sexual assault you know? It's when someone makes sexual advances without an active yes. Are you sure? Is that the definition? Yes, I've been doing a lot of reading on it. Well... okay like wouldn't you say this was your fault too? You didn't have to let him sleep in your room, and you didn't have to open your mouth when he forced your head down. I feel terrible that this happened, I'm so sorry but he forced me. But did he though? Didn't you want it too? You didn't have to open your mouth, but you did. So wouldn't you say this is kind of your fault? But it felt so wrong. But you did it. But I didn't want it. Well he forced your head down but you didn't have to open your mouth. But... I mean I don't know I just did it. He also tried to climb on top of me... and put it in me... but I pushed him off. But he didn't. So nothing happened. But it felt so wrong. But then is that assault? He pressured you but wouldn't you say you wanted it? Like it was 50-50? I mean maybe... I really don't know but it felt know what to think or who is saying what and what she believes doesn't seem to make sense anymore. What if Christine's right? I'm asking myself those same questions.

I don't know. I really don't know. The questions become the answers and the answers become the questions. She doesn't know what to think or who is saying what and what she believes doesn't seem to make sense anymore. What if Christine's right? I'm asking myself those same questions. I don't know. I really don't know.

✱✱

He's there again, in my head. We're standing at the front of the courtroom, his smug smirk in place and little fingers reminding me that I was once and still am theirs. The judge or jury or facade of justice has declared me wrong and he is rubber-stamped as normal. She runs up to hug him, and he laughs. He walks out of the courtroom and erases me from his record. I have nothing but a pair of pale, tiny hands tearing my heart apart and there's nothing anyone will do about it. If a girl is raped in her room and no one is around to see it, did it make a sound?

Selene wakes up, the dream sweaty on her brow. She turns on the light and sits on the side of her bed, staring at the floor. It's five in the morning. She has finals next week and nothing will let her forget. What would make everything go away? Sleep, permanent sleep. A set of cold train tracks or a bottle of pretty little pills. Her shoulders slump, and she crumples onto the cold hard ground and rocks back and forth. Goliath, defeated.

✱✱

There's not much to say when someone tries to rape you. That's ironic or some literary device because this entire story is something someone said about rape.

You say no as loudly as you can in your head and nothing comes out. Your body betrays you, your heart beating and your body flushing like you want it but it lies. Your brain is going a million miles an hour but your body does nothing, it stays still and quiet and says yes while everything else says no. No scars indicate anything is wrong--your body didn't find anything wrong. Isn't that a part of life, it says. So it goes.

Her entire fragile life she ignored the soul inside and put on the mask that everyone wanted to see. The angry girl with no fears and no inhibitions, living her life the way she wanted. But no one wanted this. How did it go so wrong.

★★

The old man in front of her shuffled pages as he peered into his papers. Dr. Bolton his nametag says. So, Selene, what brings you here? It seems like you wanted to kill yourself. Yes, I suppose it does. Well can you tell me more. I've just been feeling really anxious lately I guess. It says here you said you were sexually assaulted, is that true? Yes. And was this a guy you knew, how did this happen? I mean it just sort of happened. Hm. Did he actually penetrate you? I've explained it to like fifteen nurses already; do I really have to spell it out for you again? Please explain again. It doesn't really matter, they gave me a physical and I will be okay. He didn't actually have sex with me, he just tried to. He also made me perform oral sex on him. Is that good enough? Yes that sounds fine. Okay well you don't seem crazy to me, so I think we can let you out of here soon. Ok... Seriously? That's it for today; I'm going to prescribe you some sleeping and anti-anxiety medication. Have a nice day.

That's it? But the door has already closed behind her. You don't want to hear more? She wandered back down the hallway, sunlight now streaming in from the locked windowpanes. It was almost noon. She padded into the hospital lounge and stared at the television. Loneliness gave her a lot of time to think.

So she's not crazy. The doctor said there was nothing wrong with her. So why did everything feel so wrong?

The boy from her admittance night stalked past her again, and they watched the television together in silence. Finally, she turned toward him. Alex? From Rutherford Elementary? Did we go to elementary school together? He turned toward her, but did not make eye contact. Yeah, Selene right? We also went to middle school together. Oh okay... this is so weird. His eyes darted around unsettlingly. They didn't speak, but his hands jittered and he scribbled uncertainly on a coloring book. The nurses came by and gave him a pill and some orange juice, and he took them silently. His eyes flickered around continuously.

How did we get so different? He was in my classes and just as smart as me. Or maybe, how did I get so different? Are we the same now? How did he end up here? How did I end up here? I don't want to be him, but I'm sinking. Two parallel universes coming into one.

★★

She opened her eyes to linoleum for one last time. They were releasing her today. She didn't know what she would do when she was back on the outside. It scared her to think about it, but they didn't want her in here either. No one wanted her anywhere.

She walked down the hallway toward the double locked doors. Alex was sitting in the lounge by the doors. He rocked back and forth in his chair and the nurse tried to feed him pills. She looked away. Crying is for babies.

She spent the next couple weeks at home in a daze. She received no calls from Christine, no texts. She thinks you hate her, a mutual friend said. She thinks I hate her, so she doesn't try to apologize?

Have you ever felt so angry that your heart seizes up and you are paralyzed with your anger and hatred? Your brain becomes a haze of tight feelings and wound up thoughts, and there is no outlet through your fists or your mouth and nothing you ever say or do will make that anger go away. You can scream and claw and scratch but nothing will make that red hotness settle. Like your shoulders are perpetually hooked up on two pegs and your muscles clamped in a vice. So much anger with no way of getting it out and telling the world what happened and making everyone understand exactly how you feel.

And sadness. Sadness along with all that anger so that all the red hotness is fringed with frosty blue that doesn't calm the red at all it just feeds it. The two foxes circling each other and goading each other on. Sadness at everything that was and now is lost. And there's nothing you can do to kill those sly foxes. They smile their demonic smiles.

She skips alongside her sister as her parents follow behind. It's a beautiful day and the fall leaves have just been coming in. Karen skips ahead, daintily jumping over cracks in the pavement. She reaches a pile of round berries on the sidewalk and easily jumps over them. Selene follows with trepidation, and pauses in front of the pile. She makes the jump, but her little legs don't carry her far enough. She lands in the pile, and her legs swing out from under her. There is a sharp crack as her head hits the pavement. I'm going to die I'm going to die!!

Later in the ER, her mother chastises her. Did you have to do that Selene? Now your head is cut up, but you'll be okay. I know mom... I wish I could undo it but that's it. A split second decision can ruin you. A parallel universe away, Selene sits down for dinner after an uneventful afternoon walk with her family. No stitches are necessary, and everything is fine. Why did you have to jump? I don't know mom, but I did. Now what?

★★

The sky is cloudy and grey while a light wind whistles around the windows and the smell of rain swirls around. The hospital visit is a misty dream. Selene picks up a textbook and scans the pages, jotting down notes and making flashcards. She writes down some acronyms and outlines the section, repeating words until they sink in. The world is quiet outside, and her heart slows down to tick alongside it.

There is nothing she can do about the way things are. No charges are filed, no lawyers brought in. The police said she didn't have enough evidence, and she's too tired to fight it. Christine is still with Colin. To the world, nothing happened to Selene. The doctors have forgotten about her and everyone says she is okay.

She was happy. Those demons would haunt her forever, they said. It was okay to be weak. No! She was better than weak. She was a champion, and she had beaten this forever. It had taken time, but she was healing. There were only wins and losses.

The car engine throbbed on as her body lay limp in the front seat, the invisible fumes fogging her lungs. There was no Humphrey Bogart in this movie. You're a champion, her peaceful brain said to itself. This is okay, and this way we'll both be happier.

Two parallel streams of time, merging and flowing into one person, life crisscrossing in between the two until the final destination. Each of them equally likely, each of them nonexistent.

★★

It's Christmas. A carol plays plaintively through the house as the rain patters outside. The electric fireplace gives off an electric flame, encased behind the glass. It has been almost a year now since that fateful night, and slowly things are folding back into shape. The tar has been mopped away and the stone cabinet has been chiseled away into a single drawer. It's movable now.

The doorbell rings. The cold wind flutters in, and Christine is standing in the doorway. They embrace, and everything is a little bit all right.

The doorbell rings. The guests file in, but she's not one of them. Selene sits upstairs in the dark of her room, waiting for the visitor that probably will never come.



Sona Shah

*Anatomical
Dances*

A life size sketch depicting the skeletal and muscular nature of dance inspired by Bollywood.

page 15

Welcome to the ICU *Jade Parker*

During a typical ICU rotation, the nurses and doctors work feverishly to save some patients and to keep others alive, at times to no avail. On one particular day, a nurse lost in her work was interrupted by the charge nurse, and was ordered to “clean up” room 3329. With barely a glance at me, the nurse instructed me to help her and to do so expeditiously, in order for her to get back to more pressing matters. We walked into the hospital room and I immediately froze, for the smell of fresh blood still lingered silently over a motionless patient. There it was, the first dead body I had ever encountered, still stained with tears on its cheek from loved ones. I forced myself to look at the face of the woman who no longer breathed, partially to pay my respects, but moreover, to assess my own reaction to death. The nurse interrupted my thoughts, demanding me to “clean up” so she could leave early for lunch.

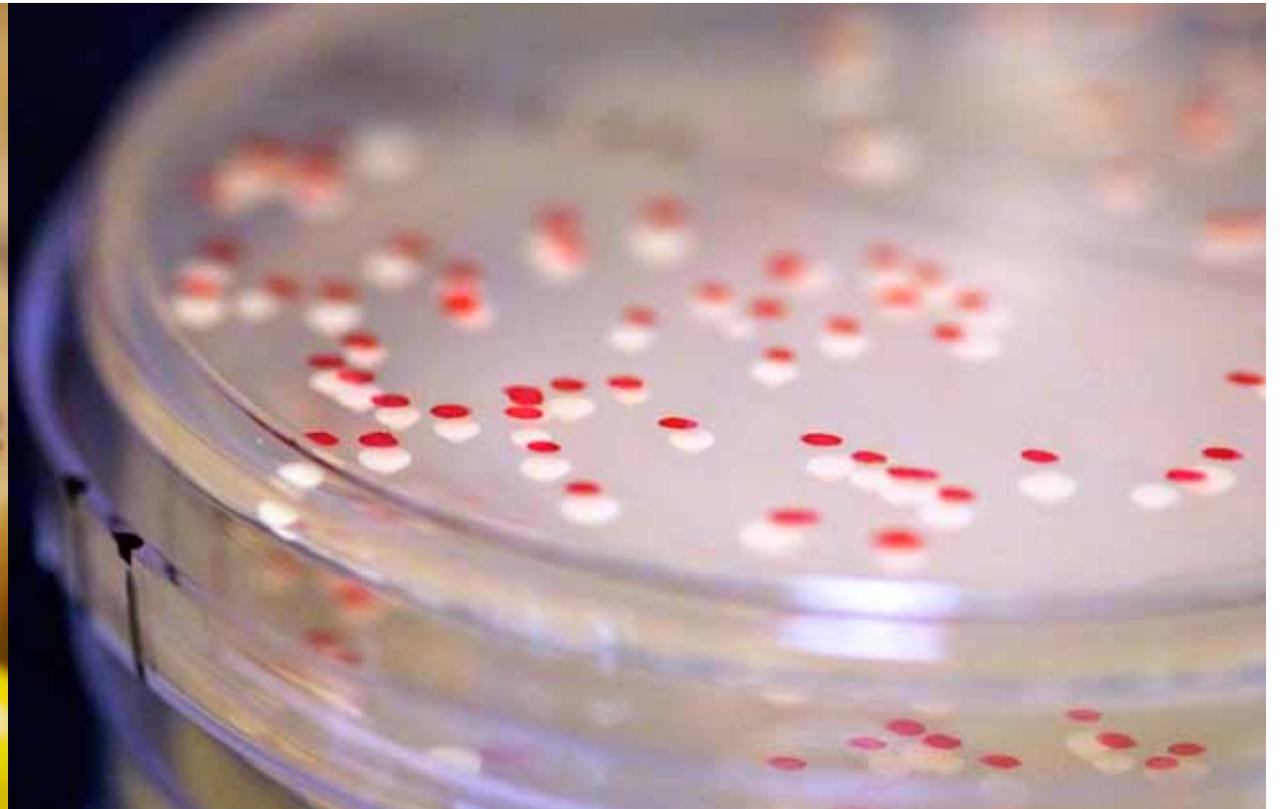
“Hurry up and grab her feet. Not that softly or we’ll never get out of here! Cover her up? Are you serious? You push her arm right there and I will grab her gut. No... you need to really get in there, it’s not like you can hurt her. What’s the matter with you, aren’t you a volunteer? Haven’t you seen a dead body before?” as she chewed on her lip, grunting while positioning the lifeless body into the bag. “No... this is my first time...” “Oh,” she smirked, and I caught a glimpse of my dismay eventually fading and easing with time, just as it had with her. “Oh,” she smirked, as if that was her way of acclimating me to the shock of the ICU, but even more so to the unapologetic and unsympathetic nature of death... welcome to the ICU.



MED LIFE : Peru 2013

On a recent visit to Peru this past spring break, The USC Medlife group was given the unique privilege of helping local clinics with administering basic medicine and care to the poor rural communities. Faced with scarce living spaces, these communities often stack themselves onto the steep slopes of Pamplona Alta with no governmental support or outreach.

In the past, pregnant women have fallen down the mountain because of no viable means of transportation. Touched by this tragic back story, students were greatly honored to have helped with building a staircase for them and celebrating its completion with the local families.



Lisa Eberly

"LAB"

These photos are an intimate documentary of my research in biogerontology. They were taken in my lab in the USC Andrus Gerontology Center with a macro lens.

Caught in the Crossfire: Re-thinking Youth Gun Violence

Danica Liberman, MD
Children's Hospital Los Angeles

Dear parents of "Acute X,"

My name is Dr. Liberman. I took care of your son in the emergency department on September 17th, 2007. I wish I had a chance to know him. I never knew your son's name nor heard his voice, but I want you to know that he changed the way I look at the world and the way I look at my role as a physician. On September 17th, I was working a shift at Children's National Medical Center when I took a call from Emergency Medical Services. The paramedic team was several miles away from the hospital with a 14 year-old male who had sustained a gunshot wound to the head. Five minutes later, we were actively resuscitating him in our trauma bay. Two hours after that, the ICU team pronounced him dead.

Over the following week more pieces of the story surfaced by way of the media, my colleagues, and your family. He was a kid who had begun hanging out with the wrong crowd, breaking curfew, and skipping class, though never previously arrested or officially tied to any violent acts. On this particular night he had stolen a cop's motorbike. When the cop found him riding the motorbike, a chase ensued, shots were fired by both sides, and your son was hit. He was in the wrong place, at the wrong time, doing the wrong thing. What happened to your son, though, was not random. Many factors, failures really, got him to where he was that night. How did he get there and why are there thousands of other kids on a similar path towards self-destruction?

Youth violence, including gun violence, is a problem we cannot ignore. The United States of America holds the tragic indignity of the highest rates of youth homicide and suicide among the 26 wealthiest nations in the world. U.S. teenagers are now more likely to die of gunshot wounds than all natural causes combined, with one out of every four deaths in 15 to 19 year olds attributable to firearms. Gun violence among youth is a subcategory of youth violence in general and the research and public health interventions rarely distinguish between the two. With increased urgency, government and advocacy organizations are tackling the problem of youth violence. We are studying the factors that cause, permit, and perpetuate youth violence, with the ultimate goal of creating effective programs aimed at prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation. As a pediatrician I believe that prevention, if possible, is preferred over intervention or rehabilitation. This was so vividly reinforced when I met your son. Unfortunately, sometimes an opportunity at prevention is the only opportunity we get, and at the point of intervention or rehabilitation it is already too late.

Rehabilitation

During the decade between 1983 and 1993 youth violence in the United States was at record levels, causing the public to speak ominously of a nation under siege by a new generation of "superpredators." In response, the government, both federal and state, attempted to tighten control over young

people with passage of new gun control legislation, interest in alternative military-type schools, and movement of youth offenders out of the juvenile system and into adult criminal courts. The reported incidence of youth violence has decreased since its peak in 1993, largely as a result of diminished access to guns and therefore a fall in the lethality and visibility of crimes committed. Trying kids in adult court and forcing youth into alternative schools has only made matters worse. A growing body of evidence shows that youth transferred to adult criminal court have significantly higher rates of reoffending and a greater likelihood of committing subsequent felonies than youth who remain in the juvenile justice system. Other programs born of the fear generated in the 80s and 90s, such as boot camps, temporary residential programs with milieu treatment and behavioral token rewards, and “shock” programs are proving to be equally ineffective when studied methodically.

What, then, comprises a sound tertiary prevention program with the highest chance at successful rehabilitation? Previously, many argued that rehabilitating youth offenders was not possible and that they were a lost cause. Presently, however, we are beginning to realize that that is, in fact, not the case and that many of these violent youth can escape a future of destruction and crime. Recent meta-analyses reviewing existing tertiary prevention programs for violent youth conclude that comprehensive interventions with a multimodal approach, including skills training, behavioral modification, and family participation are significantly more effective than one-dimensional and unstructured programs.

Even with universal access for every youth in the justice system to the most powerful and successful rehabilitation programs, we would still come up short purely based on the capture rate. Data on youth violence is collected in two primary fashions: official reports and self-reports. When we look at data sources such as arrest reports, hospital emergency department encounters, and victimization rates we see a steady decline in youth violence following the epidemic peak in 1993. However, according to several national research surveys asking youths to report on their own behavior, for every youth arrested in any given year in the late 1990s, at least 10 were engaged in some form of violent behavior that could have seriously injured or killed another person. The vast majority of violent acts committed by youth are never reported, and of those reported, fewer than half will result in an arrest. If we cannot effectively identify those youth perpetrating violent acts, how can we rehabilitate them? It would be inadequate to rely heavily on youth violence rehabilitation programs, thereby missing the vast majority of violent youth.

Intervention

Over the past several decades, researchers have looked critically at youth violence to elucidate factors that make some people more vulnerable to violence. Broadly stated, risk factors for youth violence can be divided into four primary categories: individual, family, peer/social, and community. Each category contains a long list of different risk factors, with several overarching themes: poor social interaction and social rejection, limited family involvement, poor academic interest and success, and community level disorganization. Some risk factors identified are difficult or even impossible to adjust, such as IQ and parental education

level; while others, like involvement with drugs and low commitment to school can be deliberately targeted and modified using specific intervention programs. Although risk factors are not necessarily causes of youth violence, it is possible to use this information to identify and refer children at risk as well as to design well-timed and effective intervention programs.

Hundreds of programs already exist, and we are only now realizing, after rigorous and methodical review, the dramatic variability in these programs' success. Some of the more effective interventions include: comprehensive school-based programs aimed at improving social and problem-solving skills, family training programs to aid with parenting skills and family communication, and behavior modification programs using techniques of positive reinforcement and classroom management. Unfortunately, many of the programs currently funded and supported have proven ineffective. Peer-led interventions, such as peer counseling, simply do not work to decrease youth violence and related risk factors, particularly when compared with similar adult-led programs. Similarly, nonpromotion to succeeding grades appears to exacerbate rejection by peers and low academic commitment. Even DARE, the most widely implemented youth drug prevention program in the nation, fails to decrease rates of drug use among students who have participated when compared to those who have not. These ineffective programs not only feed us a false sense of accomplishment, but also consume resources that can and should be used for programs that work. There was a time, several decades in the past, when implementation of youth violence intervention programs was occurring concurrently with acquisition of evaluation research, forcing us to

create programs based on what we thought would work. Now, however, with quantitative data and sound research, we have a clearer idea of what works – and what does not work, and should redirect our energies.

Prevention

While the study of risk factors is relatively mature, research into the flip side – protective factors, remains in its infancy. What happens when we ask, what are the protective factors preventing kids from getting involved in youth violence? What if we could prevent the risk factors? To fairly and most sensibly address the problem of youth violence we must widen our focus to include not only the identification of risk factors and creation of intervention programs, but also the identification of protective factors and creation of prevention programs. Protective factors include aspects of an individual's life and environment that mitigate the effect of risk. At present, we have only preliminary research of possible protective factors against youth violence. Researchers have used protective factor data gleaned from youth antisocial behavior work to evaluate possible protective factors against youth violence.

As with risk factors, protective factors can be divided into several broad categories: individual, family, school, and peer group. To date, the only two protective factors that have shown statistical significance in preliminary studies are an intolerant attitude toward deviance and a commitment to school. Identifying and understanding how protective factors buffer the risk of youth violence is as important to preventing and alleviating violence as is identifying and understanding risk factors.

There is no easy solution to the problem of youth violence in our country. A successful strategy must be multifactorial, generalizable, evidence based, and cost-effective. A three-pronged approach of prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation developed through sound research would be able to tackle the problem at each stage in its development. Emphasis should be placed on the front end by enhancing protective factors and reducing risk factors. Rehabilitative efforts would then be reserved for those who failed prevention and intervention.

As a young physician, I spend most of my work day taking care of individual patients and their families. It is important that I ask my patients and their families about access to guns and exposure to gun violence. I have found that this subject rarely comes up during the course of a patient encounter unless I specifically bring it up. When I identify those who are struggling with school or drugs, I must realize that this may heighten their risk of involvement with youth violence. It is crucial to empower my patients and their families to make positive changes to modifiable risk factors while concurrently reinforcing preventative factors. At the community level it is possible to affect change in youth violence through involvement with and support of local youth programs that encourage safe after-school activities. Most communities have youth injury research and prevention programs, many of which are organized through hospital-based programs. At the hospital where I work we have an Injury Research Committee, a Child Health Advocacy Institute that works on injury and violence prevention, and several experts in the field of youth violence. Finally, at the national level and for those with a dedicated interest in violence prevention a great place to start is with the Ameri

can Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Injury, Violence, and Poisoning Prevention. A quick review of their policy statement on the National AAP website provides a glimpse into the magnitude of the problem of youth violence and the ideas the academy has to combat this problem.

In retrospect, there were many warning signs for your son – school failure, truancy, a troubled social network – that strongly hinted at potential involvement in high risk behavior and violence. As we continue to better understand the role of protective factors and warning signs for kids at risk, hopefully we can prevent other children from being in the wrong place, at the wrong time, doing the wrong things. Intelligently crafted, evidence-based prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation programs have the power to make a positive difference in our country's epidemic of youth violence.

Sincerely,
Dr. Liberman

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Nicole Lau
"Many Hands, One Heart"

A creative piece representing how the beauty of healing is a common thread that ties everyone together. It truly symbolizes the beauty and power of healing and collaboration.

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