



# **HUMANITAS**

**Medical University of South Carolina**

**Volume 6, 2002**

# PREFACE

Through the knowledge we gain, through the perspective we form, we are invited by the world to experience serendipity. As members of the healthcare field, we have daily exposure to some of the most personal areas of our patients' lives. This makes our view of the world more poignant and sensitive.

Welcome to the sixth edition of *Humanitas*, the literary journal of the Medical University of South Carolina. The poems, short stories, photographs, and art in *Humanitas* are the creations of our colleagues in the many fields of health care represented at the University.

This 2002 edition takes the reader on a journey, full circle, through the life cycle. Starting with the innocence of "Youth Before Me" and the carefree "Pluff Mud Song," we move on to themes of career ambition and modern angst in "Hands That Move the Clay" and "Kettle." We hear of untimely death in "The Towers." Next is a series about aging, mental decay, and finally, death: "The Mailbox," "How to Help," "It Falls Away Easily," "Edna," "The Owl," and "Learning To Say 'I'm Sorry.'" Ultimately, we find ourselves "Returning Home," and seeking meaning with "Budweiser-Gothic." In the end, "Zion" reminds us that time is merely an illusion in the "endless cycle. . . ." Text is complemented throughout the issue by the photography and visual art of our talented contributors.

It was a pleasure to edit this year's edition of *Humanitas*, and we would like to thank the University, the readership, and most of all, the artists and writers who submitted their personal works for public display. In particular, we are grateful to this year's staff: Laura Spruill, Lena Heung, and Virginia Baker. Kristi Rodgers deserves recognition for her extensive help with organizing this issue and past issues. Finally, we thank Drs. Carol Lancaster and Bert Keller for their continuing support and instruction. Their vision and guidance have made this endeavor possible and have kept it strong.

Erica Grace Smith  
Editor

Eric Sribnick  
Editor

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Cover: **21st Century Daybreak**, Kathryn Meier



## **Dunes**

**Michelle Peterson**  
Hollings Cancer Center

## **Youth Before Me**

Kites above air  
Riding cloud cover  
String tied  
To your lesser finger  
You run  
Across green  
Down hill  
Through water up  
To your ankles  
Laughter spilling  
From your tongue  
Like butterflies alighting  
Flower tops and  
Moving on  
You are my youth  
Before me

**Valerie Evans-Kreil**

Department of Speech Pathology

## **Pluff Mud Song**

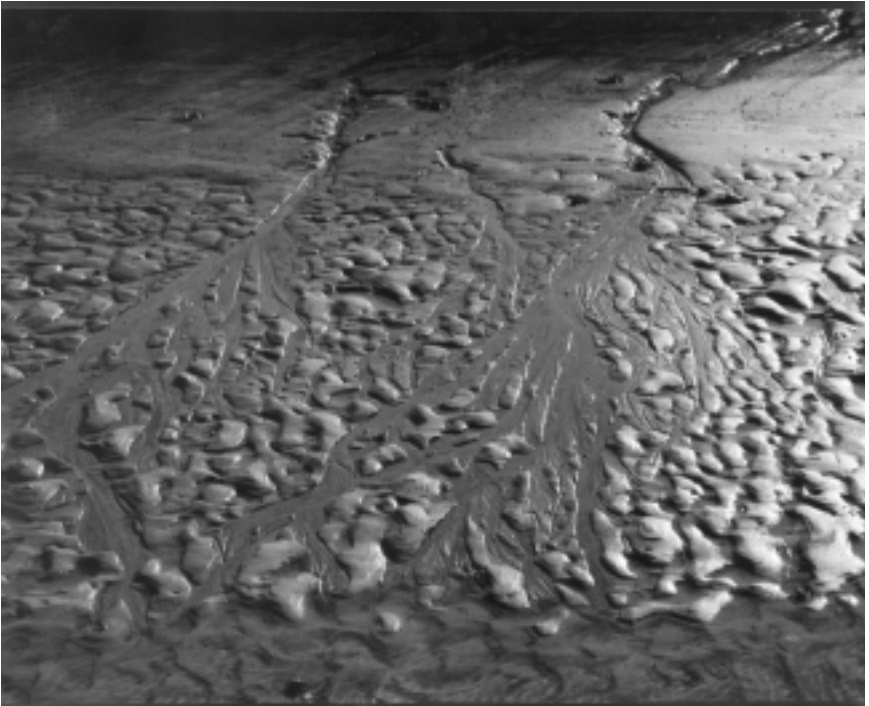
I sucks off yo topsiders  
Cuts off yo toes  
Why you still loves me  
Nobody knows

I gets in yo scrapes and I gets in yo cuts  
An' gives you vibrio vulnificus

I raise half the fush and the swimps in the sea  
That's why you can't get along without me

Pluuuuuf Muddddd!

**Russell Harley**  
Department of Pathology and  
Laboratory Medicine



## **Ripples**

**Bill Basco**  
Department of Pediatrics

## **The Hands That Move the Clay\***

Soft, strong hands that move the clay  
Giving guidance to show the way  
Starting firm to shape the ball  
Pressing, moving, molding all.

Pulling up, giving height  
Gentle pressure, forming right  
Easing the touch when near complete  
Pleased the work will endure the heat.

\*To mentors

**Tim Hutchison**  
Department of Family Medicine  
(Newberry)



## **Kettle**

When the tea kettle boils  
cocktail party murmurs  
build to a crescendo,  
street corner rush-hour buzz,  
10,000 voices swirl into  
late-night TV static,  
endless whispering blizzard.

My voice hid behind  
the rustle of papers  
scuttle of feet, until  
silence  
strength builds  
lungs suck  
cold breath and then  
white scream.  
Hot steam burns  
paper-thin cords.

**Eric Sribnick**

Colleges of Medicine and Graduate  
Studies

## **The Towers**

**SEARING, SEETHING,**

**FALLING, REELING,**

**GNASHING, CRUSHING,**

**BLAZING, BLINDING,**

**TOPPLING, DEAFENING,**

**RIPPING, WRITHING,**

**HUMBLING, WRENCHING,**

**GUTTING, CRYING,**

**PAIN.**

**Natalie Montanaro**

College of Health Professions



## **Gare Moderne**

**Erica Grace Smith**  
College of Medicine

## The Mailbox

The mail hadn't come yet. She watched the road in silence from the large, thin living room window. Her fingers gripped the ends of her shawl, and she felt it hug her as her arms crossed her chest. She had considered calling a handyman to come and put up the storm windows, but Ben might return any day now, and he could put them up for her. Leaning against the icy wall, she shifted her weight to one leg so the muscles in the other could rest. Usually the mail came around eleven, but the grandfather clock read eleven thirty and there was no sign of the blue and white mail truck. Her slight frame shivered, but her eyes never left the road. If they did, the truck might come and go unnoticed. The mailbox stood beside the black asphalt road on the far side of the circular driveway. On either side, dense patches of brush hid the road from view, making it easy to miss a passing vehicle.

She'd been staring at the mailbox since a quarter 'til eleven. It was possible the truck had come and gone earlier while she sat on the worn, blue sofa across the room knitting a new wool sweater for Ben. If that was the case, then the mail was already here and she was wasting time. Considering this possibility, she strode across the living room and into the foyer. She reached into the closet, grabbed her thick wool coat, and pulled it on as she darted out the door and into the yard.

The cold air slipped down through her collar and up under her skirt. Her thick wool clothes did little to protect her from the icicle fingers of the Maine winter that ran through her hair and over her eyes, lips, ears, and nose. She quickened her pace as she felt them tearing through her stockings as they crawled up her leg. Fifty feet of frozen grass and dirt driveway separated her from the mailbox. The hard ground sent jolts through the heels of her boots, up her legs, through her torso, and all the way to her head with each rapid step.

The mailbox stood beside the still black road, its aluminum sides hiding the mail or emptiness within it. She reached the road and pulled on the latch with her gnarled, brittle fingers. The door swung down and she peered through her breath and into the yawning abyss.

Nothing.

Not trusting one sense, she put her hand into the darker shadows at the back of the box and felt around for an unseen letter or postcard, but her numbing fingers only found smooth, cold metal. She sighed, withdrew her hand, and closed the door. She stared at the box for a moment, and her lips parted as if she were about to say something, but then they closed and she turned to look up the road.

It ran next to a field and over a hill, so she couldn't see more than a hundred feet before it met the sky. She remembered watching Ben's big, blue Ford drive over that hill and away to college. She'd waved excitedly as tears trickled down her silky, red cheeks. With each wave the diamond had sparkled in the warm, crisp sunlight, its gold band gripping her finger tightly. She looked now at the tarnished, gold ring around her finger with its hungry setting. Such smooth, supple hands,

she thought as she ran them over each other, the ring slipping back and forth between two knobby knuckles.

Where was that mail? She wondered if the mailman realized the apprehension his tardiness was causing her. She was expecting an important letter from Ben. That truck couldn't be far away. She stood very still, and her reddened ears probed the air for the sound of an approaching engine. At first she heard nothing, but then she could make out the slow movement of air in and out of her own body. She held her breath to eliminate the sound and listened again. Again she heard nothing until she realized she could hear her own blood pumping through her arteries and a faint ringing from somewhere in her head. Frustrated with her body's interference, she tried to filter out these noises. Her blood seemed to roar past her ears, and the ringing grew louder. Her ears and nose stung with cold, and she tried to keep her eyes from freezing by covering them with her thin lids. She stood nearly frozen and then opened her eyes as a different ring came from inside the house.

As she pulled her arms away from her body to run, her coat loosened and cold air swept over her chest. With each rapid inhalation her throat and lungs seemed to harden and freeze, and she felt as though a vacuum were forming in the center of her chest. Finally, she reached the door. The brass knob seemed to shock her hand as she flung the door open and ran in leaving the house open to invasion by the cold, still air outside. She ran past the hall mirror and snatched up the receiver. "Hello?" she said, breathing heavily. She waited to hear his deep confident voice, but all she got was a dial tone. Biting her bottom lip, she put down the receiver. A moment before, she'd discerned a sweet tickling sensation deep inside her head, but now it sank back into her mind and finally imploded. Her eyes began to thaw, and she felt the vacuum inside her chest begin to fold her in on top of herself. Pulling the receiver back to her ear, she pushed redial and waited for the ringing to begin. The fluttering sound met her ear once, twice, three times... She hung up the phone, then picked it back up again. This time she punched in the number, just in case the redial was set for the wrong number. Still the fluttering sound repeated itself endlessly. She put the receiver in its place and glared at the phone, wrinkling her brow and pulling down the corners of her lips.

She took a deep breath and walked back to the foyer where the open door welcomed in the frigid air. She closed the front door, walked into her bedroom and over to her dresser where a faded black and white picture stood in a discolored metal frame. She gazed past her own reflection on the glass and into his bright eyes. A young girl stood next to him, smiling and holding onto his strong arm.

She'd expected him to call yesterday, but the phone had been silent. He was probably busy and didn't have time, such a hard working young man. She touched a chilly finger to the glass just above his face and let it rest there for a moment. The corners of her lips began to rise, and she felt the tickle growing inside her once again. The phone was ringing. She skipped through the foyer and into the hall. She stopped at the phone and took a deep breath before carefully lifting the re-

ceiver and bringing it to her ear.

“Hello?” she said. There was silence. She stood very still and listened. She heard breathing. Just as before, she held her breath in order to hear better, but this time the breathing didn’t stop. “Ben?” she said. Still there was only breathing. It was slow and regular just like her own. “Who is this?” she demanded. A very slight “humph” came across the line. “Is that you Ben?” she said. A few choked chuckles entered her ear. “Hello?” she said. The chuckles built and became guffaws which slowly grew into sharp, full laughter. The sound struck at her ear like a tiny hammer, over and over. She let it pound at her ear as she bit her lips and trembled. The laughter at the other end moved away from the receiver and then the line was dead. Slowly, she put down the receiver and walked away from the phone, covering her mouth with her hands.

She crept down the hall, wondering what to make of the strange phone call. Ben would never do such a strange thing. He was a polite young man. Maybe he was teasing her. Perhaps he would call back in a minute and apologize for not calling in so long. She understood. It was painful for him to hear her voice, knowing she was so far away. It was better just to wait until he could come back home for good.

The dusty carved wood mirror hanging on the hall wall came into her peripheral vision and she stopped. She turned her head up by inches until she could see her reflection.

In the darkness of the hallway she could make out the small shape of her body and her long hair. She reached out and touched the wall beside the mirror. Her hand ran up the wall and found the light switch. She flipped the switch and squinted her eyes at the sudden bright light coming from just above the mirror.

She could see her face clearly now. Her cheeks and the tip of her nose were red from the cold outside. She studied her pink lips and the small mole just above her right eyebrow. Moving in closer to the mirror, her gaze ran over the slope of her eyebrow, down to her eyelashes, and finally down to her own eye. The whites were reddened from too little sleep, and her cheeks were puffy from shed tears. She inspected the brilliant blue iris just below where the wrinkled face of an old woman stared back at her out of the darkness of her pupil. Backing away from the mirror, she smiled and straightened her shoulders.

Maybe the mail had come by now. She walked out the front door and started across the front yard to the mailbox. The snow began to fall and the frozen grass and dirt began to disappear beneath the tiny white crystals. She stopped before the mailbox and held her breath to listen. The snow muffled all sound. She wasn’t even sure if she could hear the blood pounding in her arteries this time. She decided to check the mail and then go in and pick out a dress to wear for Ben’s homecoming.

**Dewey McWhirter**  
College of Medicine

## How to help

Visit with funny stories  
Fix a casserole  
Walk the paper to the porch  
Ask for advice.

Rake  
Keep an eye out  
Show babies and puppies  
Invite for hot tea and warm cookies on cold days.

Give your phone number  
Ask for a daily grocery list  
Make sweets for the holidays  
Give a sunny pansy.

Smile with your mouth and eyes  
Ask questions, then  
Listen.  
Hug.

Most of all, smile and wave

Expect no recognition  
no thanks  
no compensation.

Dedicated to “Pappy,”  
Colonel (Retired, USAF) William Thomas Avery, WWII Veteran.

**Kristina Lynn A. Rodgers**  
Department of Institutional Research

## **It Falls Away Easily**

It falls away easily.  
Passive                      Quiet  
A single brightness in the starry firmament  
A tiny nerve cell among millions

Blinks  
Dims  
Goes out

It falls away easily.  
Small facts                      Past times  
Little things first  
Yesterday's dinner                      Monday's news

Blinks  
Dims  
Goes out

It falls away easily.  
Inevitable                      Unhurried  
The fibrous tangle unraveling  
Soft hum of a familiar song

Blinks  
Dims  
Goes out

**David Bachman**  
Departments of Neurology and  
Psychiatry





**Untitled**

**Lena Heung**  
College of Medicine

## **Edna**

The walker painted the pine floor with scratches  
During the years before her death. After the stroke,  
Five years earlier, she dragged herself  
Around the house, pushing that metal cage  
As a beacon of her coming. About her was  
A smell of cedar, pond water stagnant at the birdbath,  
And dust settled in crevices and cloth of antique furniture.  
On the upright piano, the keys lay silent but once  
She made sound jump from them with her fingers, and  
Her voice was clear with the singing of  
Remembered hymns. In the oven, she baked pound cakes,  
Their aroma surrounding her like a halo.  
Then her face was flushed, her lips were reddened, her eyes  
Were bright at the sight of me, but each turned gray  
As she was transformed into old woman, intolerant of  
Childhood noise. I hated her dying: its odor  
Permeating other rooms from hers. I avoided  
That place while her frail body lay heaped beneath  
Yellowing covers. I left her alone in that bed  
While I played with mosquito larvae in the stagnant water  
Of the birdbath. And when she died, I was gladdened.  
No longer was the house dense with silence.

**Valerie Evans-Kreil**

Department of Speech Pathology



## **Roots**

**Lena Heung**  
College of Medicine



## **The Owl**

“The owl nested in the tree beside my mother-in-law’s bedroom window last spring. It is a sad tale, but she loved watching the owls. She passed away in her room on the Tuesday after Easter Sunday. Native American spirituality identifies the presence of an owl during the day to signify that “change is about to come” and sees the sightings of owls during the day as an omen of death. The owl stayed for about four months. I was able to take the picture with my Canon 35 mm.”

**Terry Wilson**  
Pastoral Care

## Learning To Say “I’m Sorry”

As I sat at my desk getting ready to start seeing patients on a busy Friday afternoon, one of my employees knocked on my door, motioning that she needed to tell me something privately. “Dr. Hutchison, I don’t know how to say this, but Mrs. Smith, well, um, she says she doesn’t like you, and, well, she wants another doctor to take care of Mr. Smith.” As she said this, the words exploded in my ears like fireworks. On top of the line of patients for this afternoon, I now had a disgruntled patient who needed my attention.

However, instead of raising a shield of defense, I asked Cathy to explain the situation. As she related the message her husband, Mrs. Smith’s pastor, shared with her over lunch, I began to review my interactions with Mrs. Smith over the past couple of weeks. Mr. Smith was dying. The night before, I had admitted him to the hospital from the nursing home for the third time in 3 weeks. In fact, until 2 weeks ago, he had been the patient of an Internist for the past twenty years. But his declining health necessitated a nursing home admission. As the Internist did not admit to the nursing home, our practice was asked to accept him at the nursing home which one of my other partners did last week. But unfortunately, a flare up of Mr. Smith’s emphysema required readmission to the hospital last weekend. As the physician on call for the practice, I met Mr. and Mrs. Smith for the first time last week. At that time, I tried to reassure Mrs. Smith that despite the fact that I was the third physician to see Mr. Smith that week, I had indeed reviewed his chart to be able to provide good care for him during the hospitalization.

As I reviewed his chart, I learned that he was 92 years old and had a long history of chronic medical problems including COPD, CHF, Depression, Hypertension, and Dementia – all for which he was taking several medicines. I also learned that, despite his poor health, he had been cared for at home by his wife of 65 years until a year ago, when she broke her hip. According to the Internist who had cared for the patient all these past years, “If it weren’t for Mrs. Smith, Mr. Smith would have died 4-5 years ago.” Amazingly, I also learned that Mrs. Smith recovered within 6-8 weeks after her hip fracture and was able to continue to care for Mr. Smith at an assisted living apartment here in town. It was obvious that her care and resolve had been more therapeutic the past couple of years than any of the medical interventions Mr. Smith had received. Unfortunately, even her resolve was not enough to restore Mr. Smith to better health now. However, Mr. Smith seemed to improve enough that after his weekend stay in the hospital, we transferred him back to the nursing home.

But time was running out. I received a phone call from the nursing home that Mr. Smith was now unresponsive and breathing fast. Despite the fact that we were not to resuscitate Mr. Smith, his wife asked that he be sent to the hospital. Realizing that the end was near, I bypassed the emergency department and sent Mr. Smith straight to the floor for his medical management. When doing rounds the next morning, Mr. Smith was unresponsive, and Mrs. Smith was quite despondent. In fact, her pastor was in the room, praying with the Smiths when I entered. After a

brief assessment of Mr. Smith, I told Mrs. Smith that things looked bad and that we probably should consult Hospice to coordinate comfort care. Mrs. Smith became silent and walked out of the room. Being in somewhat of a hurry, I also left the room to finish rounds.

As Cathy finished telling me the situation and concerns of Mrs. Smith, she concluded by saying, “Dr. Hutchison, I know you care about people, so this must be just some misunderstanding.” I politely nodded and assured Cathy that I would visit Mrs. Smith this evening and try to correct the situation. As Cathy left, I realized that it was a misunderstanding, and it was my fault. I had not spent enough time with Mrs. Smith this morning, and I had been too blunt. Even though my words said, “I’m not giving up on Mr. Smith”, my body language did. I had tried to avoid the time consuming task of providing comfort in a difficult and bleak situation. Mr. Smith was dying, and I couldn’t help that, but Mrs. Smith was hurting, and I could have helped that and didn’t. Without being defensive, I realized I had but one option; I must apologize and ask Mrs. Smith to forgive me.

Later in the evening, as I made my way to Mr. Smith’s room, I noticed a small commotion from his room. A family friend was leaving the room in a hurry. As I entered the room, I found frail Mrs. Smith leaning over the rail, gently kissing Mr. Smith on the forehead. As she looked up, with tears in her eyes, she whispered, “He’s gone. He’s gone.” I pulled my stethoscope from my pocket, and began to examine him. I looked up and reaffirmed her greatest fear; Mr. Smith had died. Mrs. Smith then began to explain his last moments as she again reached her thin bony hands and caressed her lifeless husband. I stood there silent, taking in the sweetness of 65 years of faithful devotion. After allowing her to grieve over her husband, I came along side of Mrs. Smith, grabbed her hand, and said I was sorry. Sorry for her loss, and sorry that I had caused her unnecessary stress by appearing too busy to listen. She graciously accepted my apology, and I gave her a much needed hug.

Soon after Mr. Smith’s death, I learned that my apology had meant so much to Mrs. Smith. Cathy reported to me that I had “really won Mrs. Smith over.” But as I reflected on the whole scenario, I realized that it was Mrs. Smith who won me over. She taught me the importance of looking at the whole picture before deciding what needed to be done; her husband didn’t need hospice, he was going to die soon anyway. What was needed was a little time and empathy that Mrs. Smith was losing her husband. I also learned the extreme importance of apologizing for my thoughtlessness and hurry. If I had defended my actions from earlier in the day, I would not have stopped by Mr. Smith’s room later that day. But by willingly going to apologize, I was there in Mrs. Smith’s deepest time of need; the moment her husband passed away. I learned that I can build a patient’s trust by learning to say, “I’m sorry.”

**Tim Hutchison**

Department of Family Medicine  
(Newberry)



## **Yosemite Falls: Early Winter**

**Elizabeth Bear**  
College of Nursing

## Returning Home

Eternal swells light upon an endless sea,  
Long since past. Dynamic whispers breathe.  
The body, fragile, rhymes along a million, peaceful billows.  
It sojourns softly in illumines of the deep.

My thoughts are with Odysseus and the fish.  
Truths unbeknownst to those whose paths were stormy  
Ahead, lay all the living legends—  
Hopefully inclined to take a bow.

Regret has no inviting island here;  
His soul is hearkened to the rising tide,  
Now faithful, hovers close to comfort's shoreline—  
And I resume the charted course from whence I came.

Where far beyond the fields of Elysium  
A captivating heaven rules the gales.  
In my God's hands I rest among the waters—  
As grace abides with humankind to sail.

So wait for me beside the edge of paradise,  
Let tempests go travel far away.  
Keep memories of my ocean by your bedside—  
And speak of me to countless grains of sand.

**Natalie Montanaro**  
College of Health Professions





## **Untitled**

**John Welton**  
College of Nursing

## **Budweiser-Gothic**

How joy sometimes  
Eludes me,  
Like sunrays sifting  
Through gray cloud,  
Overarching the wintry beach,  
Thin shafts barely touching  
Distant waves with rims of silver,  
A hint here, a hint there, now nowhere.

Elusive and unpredictable,  
As the sudden luminescence  
Of a piece of amber glass  
Lurking beside the dank, dark seaweed,  
Wave-polished to perfection  
By the master-craftsman Sea,  
Creating Budweiser-amber  
For a sacred lamb's eye  
To grace some artisan's chapel window.

How the Sea takes his time,  
Rendering beauty from the ordinary,  
Tempting the lone beach-walker  
To seek meaning, ever so fragile,  
In the gathering twilight.  
Feeling the gentle ocean breeze,  
Hearing the hush-hush  
Of incoming and outgoing waves,  
Waiting, waiting,  
To be 'surprised by joy'.\*

\*CS.Lewis, 1954

**Stanley Schuman**  
Family Medicine



## **Ocean Shadows**

**Susan Shelley**  
College of Medicine

## **Zion**

Great primeval stuff  
kaleidoscoping in layers  
epics of bygone death.

And rebirth – exposed by the effortless work/sweat  
of wind, sand, and water  
tempered by the oneness  
played against the compacted soot of worlds.

I have happened upon the staircase this time  
like the Kaibab thrust up  
only to be slowly weathered down  
becoming other things.  
Atoms finding new form.

Painted chasms  
teaching us to die and be reborn  
in the endless cycle.  
Beneath the sand,  
the dove and the falcon pursue their pattern  
as before  
with time as the only illusion.

**Timothy Garvey**  
Department of Endocrinology



**Stairway to...**

**Bonnie Dorazio**  
Hollings Cancer Center



## **Untitled**

**Jill Landry**  
College of Nursing