



HEAL

Humanism Evolving through Arts and Literature

April 2012 Newsletter

Numbers :)

Angela Green, Class of 2014

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I was a 4.3 in high school
Number 5 in my class
Maintained a 3.8 for 2 years in college
but this love affair did not last
We were torn apart by the second round of
Organic Chemistry
Our relationship
Too shattered to be mended

I pretended I could win you back
Licking my wounds, I pressed forward
Working harder
Longer hours
Poisoned relationships
Broken friendships—
I lost focus of life
And I lost faith in my ability to birth
this dream that lived within me
I bled for biochemistry and with Physics
I went to war

My greatest enemy was myself
I did not rest
I had no peace
I built my life around a dream
That revolved around a test
I must confess that my aptitude was mauled
by my attitude
20 years of self-love torn apart in 2

Into Bridge I was accepted
Still infected by the mentality of my past
I harbored an insatiable thirst for perfection
Desperation permeated my self-reflection
Despite the smile upon my face
I struggled secretly with self-acceptance
Numbers haunted me
Scores defined me, and I defiled myself
By refusing to put myself first
Because I was trapped in a system that used
numbers to define my academic worth

Lost and Alone
I decided that freedom was the key
So I smashed the definition of the numbers
in front of me
Now I laugh when I used to cry
And smile at every number
Through meditation I found definition
Redefined my self-worth
And now KNOW that I am so much more than
a number on a paper
From these chains I'm unbound
Irrevocable freedom
Eternal Joy
I embrace this and so much more
I am MORE than just a score and a number—
I've found freedom
Will you join me?

Drawing by Saritha Tirumalasetty, Class of 2015



Crossing the Pond

Jasmeet Kataria, Class of 2013

I still remember when my parents made the announcement to me and my siblings that we were leaving England and moving to the US. The same thoughts crossed our minds at the same time: will it be exactly like the American movies? While our parents continued to ramble on about our reasons for leaving, my siblings and I began to picture ourselves living in a beautiful, sunny place, with a big, luxurious house. We each saw ourselves with our own bedroom, each bedroom with its own bathroom. We could see ourselves never having to travel to the community pool ever again because we would have our own pool in our huge back garden. Although our parents fulfilled all of those dreams for us, we did not realize what we were about to leave behind. When I think back to the excitement I felt about moving to the US, it never crossed my mind that there was no turning back. You see, in my mind, I always thought I could go back to England if, for some reason, the US was not my cup of tea. It was not until we were finally here that I realized how hastily I was able to leave my childhood behind for the luxurious American life I had seen in movies and TV shows. All of a sudden, I started to remember everything I had left behind. Gone was the house in which I had grown up, all my family that lived so close we were practically neighbors, my closest childhood friends, and most importantly, all of my childhood memories. I was not ready to do it all over again, to recreate my home in a new locale. When the time came to start my first day of high school,

I was terrified. As if high school isn't hard as it is, what could be worse than starting the first day of the ninth grade without knowing a single soul in the entire school? It felt as though I had a huge stamp on my forehead that read, "I'm an outsider." Although I am sure my hair and clothes had already given that secret away. I didn't even know how to dress outside of the safety of my British school uniform, let alone what to take with me, which building to go to first, where to sit, or who to talk to. I was accustomed to a white shirt with a tie, a skirt, blazer, the same black shoes every day, and my hair tied back. Now, all the choice was paralyzing. I was used to being with the same classmates all day long, moving from one classroom to another for our different subjects. I was used to one small building, where everybody knew where they were going and it was harder to get lost than it was to find your classroom.



Spirit Guide

Yaowaree Leavell, Class of 2015

Along with the worries of fitting in, my accent had only made things worse. I could feel myself becoming red in the face when my accent drew too much attention to me. I would sit through all my classes without uttering a word in hopes of going unnoticed. However, it only took a word for me to give it away. Once the secret about my accent was out, my fears of having a label had inevitably become true. I was known as the "British girl," or the "Brindian" because of my Indian ethnicity. I remember being automatically given the part of Juliet in ninth grade English class while acting out Shakespeare's play. Having an accent like mine has a magical effect on people, even complete strangers are not immune. It triggers something innate deep in their minds that says, "Hey, tell her any random connection you may have to England, she'll like that." Usually, I don't really mind this, but it sure makes it hard to fit in.

Next came my chance to perform in physical education. Given my excellent skills in a famous British sport, netball, which I assumed was also a sport here, I was very excited to participate. I soon came to learn that there was no such thing, that “Rounders” had been replaced by softball or baseball and that netball was really a modification of basketball. I had expected that my Kappa tracksuit bottoms would impress my sporty classmates, but even that failed miserably as that British brand-name hadn’t crossed the Atlantic yet.

Although I had heard the famous “potato chips” and “soda” being ordered in the TV shows, I never thought to utter those words myself. When I chose “crisps” and “a fizzy drink” at lunch instead, I was met with a blank expression in the cafeteria. Although I tried to make multiple mental notes to remember this new vocabulary, it proved quite difficult, especially when paired with learning trigonometry and having to catch up on summer reading assignments of which I had not been aware of.

Needless to say, when I returned home from my day at school, I wanted to crawl under the covers and wish myself back to the comfort of my school uniform and a plate of familiar fish and chips. I did not make myself any promises to try to fit in more, I did not resolve to participate in American sports activities and certainly did not start uttering words such as “soda” or “pop.” I kept in contact with my family and friends back home and eventually, with much effort, positive attitude and little heart-ache, I slowly felt myself starting to fit in to the American culture.

After ten years, I have learned to enjoy the small quirks of the American culture, such as the friendly greeting by the clerks when I walk into a grocery store, a pleasantry not afforded in Britain. I also appreciate the ability to make a u-turn at almost any intersection, opposed to navigating a roundabout, and not having to squeeze two cars onto a one-lane road. It almost feels unnatural for me to call a parking lot a “car park,” an elevator a “lift,” a line a “queue,” the movies the “cinema,” and to greet my family and friends with the words, “You alright?”

Surprisingly enough, I have now become used to being asked the famous question, “Where are you from?” But I enjoy talking to others about my origins and nationality, even if they respond with a short story about the trip that Uncle Bob’s ex-plummer took to see Big Ben. I no longer shrink in my seat when asked a question. I am proud of who I am, my cultural diversity, and my ability to relate to others of various non-American cultures. My accent and way of speaking do still attract attention, and I find myself having to repeat myself often, but I have learned to make adjustments accordingly. I enjoy living that American dream when swimming in my own pool, basking in the warm sun during winter, or getting dressed in a closet that was the size of the bedroom I shared with my sisters back in England. The funny part is, now even when I go back to England, I have an American accent. I better just embrace being a little different!



Photograph by Trung Tran, Class of 2014

Prevention is a Luxury Naomi Salz, Class of 2013

It's been almost a year since I met Carmela. I invite her into my thoughts from time to time, but she also graces into my awareness unexpectedly; she is always welcome. It may seem odd but often in the middle of a rigorous smoking cessation discussion she visits me. I admit it is strange, but hear me out on how cigarettes are indeed related to my past patient Carmela.

On the fourth day of our trip to Los Cedros, Nicaragua it was decided that home visits were in order. Many patients who wanted medical care simply could not make it to the church in the center of the village where our clinic was set up. We divided into groups and scurried off on our separate ways. A shack at the end of a muddied path, deep in a wooded area on top of a hill, was found to be the home of Carmela. Outside the decrepit hut was an equally decrepit woman appearing to be in her late eighties sitting with a well-known figure of the community, Sister Maria. After brief introductions we began to listen to Sister Maria describe the tale of Carmela's recent medical struggles and ventures into Managua to be seen by a doctor. I gazed off for a moment and pondered how frail Carmela was able to fare the thick roots that covered the dilapidated dirt road we traveled on. As Maria sought our medical advice for her dear friend, Carmela sat hunched over in a plastic patio chair holding a half empty small bottle of water. "That is all she has had to drink in days," Maria said when she saw me looking at the bottle. The details of Carmela's trek into the city led us to understand that she had a long standing pulmonary condition and was likely deteriorating from it. Her breathing had become increasingly difficult which was the reason for seeking medical care. After multiple medications and a nebulizer treatment in the hospital, she was sent back home with instructions to do these treatments when she experienced strained breathing. We exchanged knowing looks with each other because it was clear this withering little lady needed much more than a watered down breathing treatment. In fact, our thoughts were further validated when Maria went on to explain Carmela had awoke the night before due to a frenzy of coughing and uncontrollable wheezing for which Maria had to run to a home yards away to borrow electricity to merely use the nebulizer. To be frank, I still don't know how she was even able to get the machine. What could we medical students do for this declining patient if she barely had electricity? I began to examine her to get a better idea of what we were dealing with. Each tiny muscle in her neck and chest were working hard to help her breathe. I delicately lifted her shirt to listen to her lungs and check for consolidation. I can assure you I saw every last one of her thin ribs bracing together her torso. Her heart was beating so hard and fast I can still picture her heart muscle lunging out of her chest. Her lung sounds were dismal at best with crackles, pops, and wheezes and large areas of no air exchange at all. When I held Carmela's hand in support, her bulging clubbed finger tips and icy blue nails caught my gaze. Again, the other students and I humbly exchanged glances, but this time they were of bewilder-

Photograph by Trung Tran
Class of 2014



ment. If this scenario were occurring in the United States, this patient would have been admitted to an intensive care unit immediately. To expand further, if we were in the US, this patient would have been a smoker of 2 packs a day for fifty plus years and taking every top dollar prescription drug that was made for Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease.

Carmela was not in the United States. Carmela had never smoked. She barely had enough electricity in her entire neighborhood to run one albuterol treatment. Carmela was only sixty-four-years young. She worked her whole life raising a family, cooking and selling tortillas to make a living and breathing in filthy smoke from the indoor stove. She did not have the option to quit working, to quit inhaling thick black smoke. She didn't deserve this. It makes sense that when I plead with patients to quit smoking, I picture Carmela writhing in her bed at night gasping for air. It is logical why my brain conjures up an engrained visual of Carmela's cachectic body when I see teenagers purchasing a pack of Winstons at the corner gas station. I will not allow my moral outrage to be self-defeating or blind me to the needs of my own community.

I know you are probably wondering what happened to Carmela. We gave her several inhalers so she wouldn't have to scrounge for electricity, showered her in steroids to open her airways, and gave her analgesics to help with pain. I wanted to give her Tums as a source of calcium to help with bone mineralization because we all knew how frail her skeleton was. In retrospect it should have been obvious, but this pathetic attempt at a preventative care measure would have been of no utility for Carmela. As it was plainly stated by our group leader, she would not live long enough to reap the benefits. This truth stung me.

This brings me to a stark realization. Prevention is a luxury. It is a privilege to have the opportunity to quit smoking. It is a blessing to take vitamins and minerals, let alone bisphosphonates to prevent bone fractures. It is a marvel we can screen for cancers that kills us in this country. Preventative care is not a lost cause on us. Two weeks after returning to Florida we got news that Carmela died. She is still very much alive to me and brings me patience and encouragement as I try to practice prevention with every patient I meet.



Drawing by Veronica Andrade Jaramillo, M.D.

Eye've scene the Dreamtime, The In-Between time . . .

Yaowaree Leavell, Class of 2015

I dreamt of a shadow, grinning and free
a mirror-dark shape, photo-negative me
lips lean close to whisper soft and sweet
"dreams come softly on light-filled shadow feet"

I see a sky so bright that the sun goes blind
floating lovers gasp, wings and fingers entwined
myriad bells measure endless time
the blind sun weeps, molten guilt and brine

I dreamt I was flying in a watery sky
rainbow fins fan a smiling moon
she blinks salt-spray from sly silver eyes
her piscine suitors blush a shy maroon

I dreamt of your siren-voice calling me
my ear drum snaps in excess of ecstasy
my snail-curved organs ring in mute elegy
tattered aural lace, organic filigree

I dream that I reach out in invertebrate joy
A shining horde of old and jellied souls
frilled we are thrilled at our remembered touch
long-lost siblings we are many and bold

I dreamt of a dreamer who was dreaming of me
a boat on someone's technicolor R.E.M. sea
Land Ho Captain, the morning comes
the sun thunders near on a trail of starlight crumbs

Photograph by Joshua Greenstein
Class of 2015

Submit to *HEAL* via email at:
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your excellent submissions.*

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