

NIGHTINGALE SONGS

A forum for nurses to share their silent moments of reflection on their nursing.

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LYRICS

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"The active care and conditioning of your body for the last few years are assets as you face this surgery," I tell Ms. C as she awaits exploratory laparotomy that may confirm the diagnosis of metastatic cancer made twenty-four hours ago. "I've had a massive heart attack - just like that - out of the blue - and the doctor told me if I hadn't been in such good shape I never would have survived it," her husband cuts in, wanting to be a part of her experience and openly questioning his ability to survive her loss.

They had met in 1944. He was a hot-shot *top gun*, a Yankee; she a lovely Texas Hill Country girl. "I couldn't believe how her whole family touched and hugged and loved each other," he said, reliving the wonder and the possibilities of love. "Her parents didn't want us to be married before the end of the war - and then after - she was pregnant - you know before we had gotten over being the strangers separation with war makes...forty-six years of ups and downs like any married couple... and then all of a sudden they [children] all moved away...after all those years...to make their own way. I knew they needed to and would but - they did." I hear his terror in the face of yet another deep and awesome loss - this possible end of we and thee. I feel the full weight of the price of loving well. "I know you have work to do," he says, moving away to go to her.

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She is exhausted, pale, lids swollen. No narcotic has touched her since the unexpected C-section hours ago. The cramps, shadows of the labor she could not complete, will outlast the Pit drip. Her mother pulls me aside to whisper, "The baby has Downs you know - now she will know what it means to have a mother." Her husband appears, his face a twisted question. I tell him my plan to promote her sleep and rest and he is relieved. "I'm sorry about

the baby," I murmur. He nods. Later, she is resting; he is at her side, on the phone. "...I just wish everyone would stop saying how sorry they are...we have a son...this is an event to celebrate not to mourn. I slip out and shut the door quietly - to think.

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She is my faculty advisor, no longer a practicing nurse. Before our appointment there were few people I had told about my newly diagnosed cancer. I was still struggling to find an alternative to the prevailing metaphor of "cancer as enemy; war as action." I have *become* this person with cancer - there is no "invasion." I struggle for a good part of our time together. Words and ways of saying my experience, of making this my own are still hard to find.

As I leave I say "It's not a miracle I am asking for or expect. I don't need a miracle. I need only a healing." "That's the first positive thing I've heard you say," she replies.

Mary Ellen Fogarty

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TOGETHER, WE BEGIN

I entered your room, to meet you,
 hoping to enter your world
 to know you.

I am still new at this and certainly
 must look as unsure as I feel...
 but you do not seem to notice.

You are busy...
 noticing yourself
 and this situation
 you find yourself in.

You look up, and I see in your eyes
 a light of recognition.

You see me as someone who has
 come to help you understand
 and make sense of this "stroke,"
 of this thing that has happened
 to you.

So, together we begin to get ready
 for the day.

As I comb your hair, you notice
 a button
 missing from your blouse,
 and you are embarrassed.

I am sorry I didn't notice before,
 so I adjust things
 so no one will see,
 and I realize this makes
 you feel better.

I check your "tubes," your "sites,"
 your vital signs and I
 wonder what you feel
 and I ask you,
 "What do you need?"

Your paralyzed face turns to me,
 and cracks a smile.

You accept me
 and I see that I
 will be okay with this,
 and that you are, too.

Diane Zried

FLYING

Falcon, I was unfettered
 free to soar or
 with flick of wrist
 dip down
 to hover just above
 the earth's green trees.
 I had to laugh
 at such excess
 epiphanies tumbling
 one upon the other.
 I had forgotten
 in my joy
 what I remembered
 as I lurched
 ungainly earthward.

What is this ghastly place?
 Why did you drag me here?
 Why have you bound me
 made of me a living corpse
 sentient yet immobilized
 a spellbound player
 in a hellish dream?
 You bastards!
 Won't you understand me?
 HEAR ME!

Look at these battered struts
 my obstinate legs and arms
 that once responded
 automatically
 before I even had the idea
 lodged firmly in my mind.
 Falcon, I thought I was
 master strapped inside
 a wondrous snarling beast!
 I am strapped again
 but to a different breed of beast.
 Not master now...
 I'm held down, earthbound.
 Still my will endures
 I even laugh at times
 and I would tell you if I could
 already I am flying
 soon, very soon,
 I will soar.

Sanford Russell

THE EMERGENCY ROOM

Spilling guts
 Gunshot wounds
 Battered babies, barely breathing
 Heart attacks
 Hurting backs
 Lacerations, broken bones
 Broken lives, sad sacks.

Rushing past
 are the faces
 Acting now, running races,
 All before a life erases.
 Swirling movement
 Dizzying activity
 then,
 a soothing voice, a patient voice,
 Out of the Blue
 with a pat,
 then a stroke:
 A Smile
 A word of advice
 of concern
 of compassionate caring

And all the horror
 the pain
 the nightmare

Melt away.

chris P. green

From The Editors

Some readers have responded with financial support for future seasonal issues. We appreciate this assistance, and to avoid the expense of a special account, we ask that checks be made payable to: Marilyn E. Parker.

We invite your continuing responses to this forum and encourage your contributions to these pages.

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NIGHTINGALE SONGS

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MY SPIRIT CRIES OUT FOR THE YOUNG IN NURSING

Have we forgotten?
 The fear of failure?
 The humiliation of fumble?
 The trepidation of doing?
 The realization of harming?
 The anxiety of not knowing?
 The conflict of professionalism and caring?
 The tension of performing?
 The terror of inflicting pain?
 The embarrassment of being corrected?
 The frustration of still not getting it right?
 The apprehension of "What will I face today?"
 The insecurity of "Will I ever be good enough?"
 The pain of "I can't do this?"
 The agony of someone's defeat?

Is it so different now? Are they any less affected
 emotionally than we were?

I think not?

What happened to our compassion? Did we lose it in the
 quest for control?

I see and I hear and my spirit cries.

The battle rages,
 Would that it could be different!

Ruth Rodenberg

BORN TOO SOON

Born too soon
 I lay in this artificial womb you've created
 and wait for your touch.
 I feel like broken glass as I lay here
 surrounded by the sound of the machines I need.
 The flashing light keeps me company as I wait for you.
 I sleep as life-giving fluids drip in my veins
 and
 still
 I
 wait.
 I live for your touch. That's when I feel most alive!
 Are you my mother?
 I don't know but I love you and know that love
 is returned a hundred times as we rejoice in my progress
 towards life.
 And every day I know that you will come and give me
 your loving touch.
 And when you come you touch me ever so gently careful
 so as not to dislodge the many tubes that keep me alive
 But they are nothing compared to your touch.
 You hold me so softly in your hands
 turning me, weighing me, washing me, recording my progress.
 And finally the moment I long for comes as you
 hold my hand in yours
 stroke my head
 and sing a lullaby.

Elizabeth Dodge

SAME MELVIN

A boy of twelve
The excitement of life within him
Became in an instant
One who struggles to become, not another,
But himself, again, still whole.
He's not "the quad in room 325"
But Melvin - just Melvin - the same Melvin.

Five years later the struggle continues
For others to accept this same Melvin.
No, he doesn't need re-defining
When his soul remains constant.
In report I heard "totally dependent"
The nurses say his strength has all gone,
But they're wrong.
His power is inward and strong
With enough for others to rely on.

A month has now passed
And I find it hard to move on.
I take his strength
And blend it with mine
As I turn, tearfully, to say good-bye.
I pause at the window
For one more last glance,
Thanks Melvin - just Melvin - Same Melvin.

Patti Solino

SEEING FRED ON A RESPIRATOR

Oh, God, I will never
take a breath, breathing,
blowing a kiss, a candle
for granted again.

The breath
Take a breath
The in breath
The out breath
The infinite number of
moments in a breath.
The gift of breath.

What we take in first on our arrival
And the last we give up
On returning
to infinity

The place
without the rhythm
of breath.

Carol Picard

FOR MICHAEL

The fine line.
We've been there.
The fine line where life and death
enmesh
so that one seems so like the
other.

The fine line
We've been there.
Not to pass over. No. Not yet.
You and I are luckier than most.

We have seen the wholeness of our
world,

how to love life and,
Learning to respect the beauty and
sense of the world.

The fine line.
We've been there, you and I.

Kathleen Maria Fox, 1954-1988

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