“Prayer of St. Francis Lived by Nurses (Nurses’ Shared Prayers),” Kathleen Blanchfield, College of Nursing, Lewis University, Prose, 2016-ongoing.

_Nursing faculty at Lewis University created a Booklet of Prayers and Reflections to share with students, faculty, and staff. A prominent quiet area for reflection was developed for Students, Faculty, and Staff to pause in their day. The pictures show the booklet and the Reflection Place._

_Lord, make me an instrument of your peace._

_Where there is hatred, let me sow love:_
An American nurse who was a Vietnam Veteran started a post war healing process by returning with fellow Veterans as their nurse, to foster sharing and reconciliation with Vietnamese Veterans.

_Where there is injury, pardon:_
A mother of eight children, who as a nurse understood the guilt and remorse of a teenage driver who crashed into her husband’s car causing his death. She waited in the bleak courthouse corridor to speak with the young driver and his family. She tearfully told them that she held no hatred and offered her hand in pardon.

_Where there is doubt, faith:_
A nursing faculty group that volunteered to support the family of their beloved dying colleague by offering round the clock nursing presence. This reassured the family that they would have care for their loved one as she struggled to faithfully live her last days of earthly life.

_Where there is despair, hope:_
A nurse, who after serving in the military, organized an International Service to gather surplus medical supplies to be shipped to countries suffering the horrors of war or disaster. This continues today.

_Where there is darkness, light:_
A hospice nurse by her presence and compassion offers her patient and family the light of peaceful hope and reverence for the spiritual journey of leaving this earth. She speaks to
church groups to help members understand the spiritual, physical, and emotional support that she feels privileged to offer as a hospice nurse.

Where there is sadness, joy:
A nurse’s aide realized a distraught family needed someone to lead them in a spiritual hymn before leaving their recently departed mother’s bedside. She brought a housekeeper to the bedside, who shared her God-given talent of song to help the family to raise their voices in praise, sorrow, and joy.

Poetry written by Joan Lamb Callahan, Retired School Nurse, Sacred Heart Schools Chicago

Words, both written and spoken have always been my tools for understanding the world and myself. Words can wound, but more powerfully, they heal as well. Poetry is words woven into essence. I write for myself mostly as a way to keep the essence of a memory, contain an experience, share some wisdom. It keeps me whole when life seems to want to scatter me.

The School Nurse Ode
(With respectful apology to Emma Lazarus and a nod to Florence Nightingale)

Not like the Teachers of education fame,
Girded with teaching styles from sea to sea;
Here among classrooms & bulletin boards,
At the Door of Health Office shall stand
A Mighty Nurse with Lighted Lamp, whose flame
Captures light of comfort, and her name
Nurse To All.
From her healing hand
Glows school-wide welcome; her keen eyes command
The stairs and playground that street corners & fences frame.
“Keep your ancient school history, your traditions”
Cries she with silent lips.
“Give me your skinned knees, your bumped heads,
Your sore throats yearning for ice,
The feverish, the itchy eyes, the stomachaches who yearn for comfort.
Send these, the growing, groaning, distracted ones to me,
I lift my lamp beside the School Nurse Office Door!

Joan Lamb Callahan
@2013
Ordinary Time

The arc of a day, a life carries us forward.
Still ordinary time is where we hold center.
Small touchstones anchor us
Through days, seasons, years.

Morning passage; sunrise coo of doves, smell of spring earth,
sunlight patterns skim walls, coffee brews,
first robin, gentle rattle of breakfast dishes in soapy sink,
silence of others about solitary tasks and tock and tick of clock.

Noon approach; moving art brings leaf patterns to shimmer on walls,
distant drone of lawn mowers, breeze rippled curtains,
icc cubes clink in lemonade glasses, sheets snap on line,
porch swing creaks to rhythm of turning pages, time suspended.

Late afternoon; light falls in line shadows, colors fade with early sunset,
a child gift of wonder scatters red orange leaves above kitchen sink,
homemade fragrant breads, savory soups simmer,
brilliant crimson sun sets through bare trees, minute hand sweeps along.

Night deepens; indigo sky poked with stars, smell of dry heat,
windows dressed against chilly drafts, cups of tea warm cold hands,
armchairs wrap in shawls embracing tomes of dreams and adventures,
last to bed, calmed by deep slumber of others to the chimes of ordinary.

Joan Lamb Callahan
@March 2018
The Lost

It began that day at the museum.
Somewhere in the crowd you stopped,
Perhaps fascinated with colors, a portrait.
And suddenly
You were gone.
Guards were called, we spread out,
All looking for the forgetful missing mother.

We would say we lost you
But really you lost us.
In thin onion skin layers
One at a time
We dwindled then disappeared.

Our birthdays went missing.
Our children vanished.
Our spouses misplaced.
Our names replaced by others,
Your sisters and brothers.

Instead of searching for us,
You wandered in older memories
Seeking mother, father, origins of love.
And us, the lost,
We always searched for you, reached for you.

Now, in memory, here is where I find you.
Seated in front of the museum Chagall Windows
Washed in stained glass color.
Calm and beautiful, you look me with a smile.
"I wasn't lost." you say,
"You were. I have been here all the time."

Hope's Litany

Where does Hope abide?
Where to Attend?
Where does Listening begin?

In Pause between where the Holy pours out:
In Pause between beginning and ending,
In Pause between word and deed,
In Pause between before and after,
In Pause before baby's first inhale,
In Pause before dying's last exhale.

And where may Hope breathe?
In still and silent Pauses.
In dawn before sunrise,
In twilight before dark,
In match spark before fire,
In pen tip to paper before curl of word,
In leaf loose in free fall,
In wave crest before beach comb.
In sea bird glide skyward soar,
In sudden crowd quiet before drama unfolds.
In ink blackness as light turns off before rest.

Among the prayer bead moments of life
May we find our way to these In Be Tweens,
Over and over, deeper and deeper,
Folding into tiny silent spaces,
Finding Hope
Moving forward into Faith.

Joan Lamb Callahan
@November 2016
Sitting With The Unknown

In a wide trailer home among the pines
We sit
Liminal space and time
Goats have been sold
Sheep dog wandering, wondering
And worried.

She is living closer to life than I can know
We sit
Watching birds on feeder flit and fly
Outside window we see
Flowers waving, planted by her husband
For viewing.

Stillness comfortable between us
We sit
Crocheting, hooking yarn into lambs and butterflies
Discussing warped wood of weaving machine
Deadlines looming.

Listening more carefully than ever
We sit
An audible book spills a story,
A gentleman imprisoned in a hotel
Seeming to find hope in every hall, corner
Connecting history.

Timelines meander circling us
We sit
Planning next visit, conjuring meals, dreaming up projects
Welcoming silences
We lean back closing eyes, resting hearts
Breaking open.

Joan Lamb Callahan
@August, 2018

Becoming

I am poetry.
I am becoming a poem.
I am less wordy
I am simplifying.
I am whittling down
to skin & bones
sum of
despairs & hopes
spare essence
of love
so that in
last days
last moments
last breathe,
what
my life
has meant
you might
understand.

Joan Callahan
2020

At a nursing class school reunion my classmate Doris Popovich and myself asked the question, What keeps nurses working in the field? We held an essay contest for nurses and these are top 21 responses including our own.

I first made the connection between creativity and healing 26 years ago at Khao-I-Dang refugee camp. I was a 22-year-old charge nurse working in a 100-bed adult acute care hospital with traumatized Cambodian refugees fleeing a civil war and genocide to seek shelter in the international relief camps.

During the war, Cambodians had been forced to live in a Maoist, agrarian society. Families were separated and sent to work camps. People were killed if they were literate or had any association with western culture. They were not allowed to practice any art or religion or read or write. Many feigned ignorance, suppressed their knowledge, and threw away their books and reading glasses to stay alive.

The first time I worked the night shift alone, the hospital was full with refugees and their family members. One patient had active meningococcal meningitis, and I didn't have an emergency kit. It was just me, a Cambodian assistant, and a doctor on call from another relief hospital in a different part of camp who spoke only French. My medical orders that night were translated from English to Khmer (Cambodian) to French then back again. Our patient needed IV antibiotics and powerful steroids for treatment. Because of the language barriers, we used drawings to illustrate what his medical treatment would be. We did not need language that night; the drawings proved to be a simple, effective method of communication.

Art was more than just a convenient communication tool, it was also a way of healing. In the shelter of the camp, people's spirits came alive as they were finally able to creatively express themselves: played music, danced their indigenous dances, practiced religion, and made art. People picked up crayons and pencils for their first time in years and spontaneously drew or painted their stories of survival, stories that had been held hostage in the refugees' bodies, minds and souls for years.

There was an explosion of art: images documenting heroic escapes from Cambodia and years of torture in prisoner war camps; drawings of family members butchered by Khme Rouge soldiers; cartoons of starving people working in rice patties with fat soldiers taking their food; paintings of beloved lost family members, and watercolors of destroyed sacred temples. Each image was a portal for documenting the unspeakable and for memorializing the dead.
After returning from Thailand I continued my nursing practice only to later find myself entering into my own healing process from severe “burnout.” This included working with a Jungian analyst, taking art and writing classes, and learning powerful centering techniques like mindfulness meditation. As a child, I was always creating: drawing, making papier mache masks, candles, jewelry and collages. I would hole up in our basement for hours, away from the chaos of school and a family of nine, to just do art. When I entered nursing school, I repressed the creative side of me, but years later it came back disguised as burnout and screaming for attention.

I took one painting class at the Art Institute, and like the refugees, I began discovering a new vocabulary for working with my emotions. Then I took a drawing class, then another painting class, then another. With each class, I felt my soul returning. Art was my antidote to depression; it moved me from surviving to thriving. I could once again see creative possibilities for my life.

Art has sustained me for the past twenty-seven years. The type of art I do varies on any given day. Some days I draw paint, make a collage, write in my journal, or read a poem. Some days, I just look at art. Whatever form it takes, art is a non-negotiable part of my life.

Since that first art class, I have transformed my nursing career. My experience includes, ICU, maternal/child health, community health, health promotion and wellness, and now hospice and teaching. I integrate the arts into my current nursing practice, providing services that merge the worlds of art and science. Candice Pert in her book *Molecules of Emotion* documents through research the profound connection between our mind and body. We now know that when the ability to express is suppressed it can have severe consequences for people, often manifesting in physical, emotional and spiritual diseases. Art therapy is based on the theory that the creative process has healing effects. When we express what matters to us, both our emotional and physical health improves.

I could have left the nursing profession; I chose instead to reinvent it. I have created my life so that I can be an artist, a nurse and a healer. Art is integrated into every aspect of my work. I now teach expressive arts at several Chicagoland universities and I provide expressive art services to hospice patients. On a recent patient visit, a well-traveled professor of geography with early Alzheimer’s disease and I made a collage of all the places in the world he has lived. After looking over the pictures of China, India, Hawaii, and Japan he smiled and said, “I had forgotten what a great career I had. What a spectacular life!”

The refugees taught me that it is possible to creatively move beyond one’s history, whether that history is surviving the battlefields of Cambodia, our medical system, or the
rigors of everyday life. Art heals. It unravels suffering, validates our life experiences, and leads us back to our humanity.

In memory of Haing Ngor, who survived the “Killing Fields” and became an international example of peace and creativity in action.

“The Idolatry of Security or Broken Open,” Mary Chase-Ziolek, Professor of Health Ministries and Nursing, North Park University and Seminary.

This poem was written upon a trip to Burkina Faso in West Africa that included spending three days in a rural Fulani village as part of a class on Missions and Ministry in Africa made possible through the support of Covenant World Relief. It was a humbling and powerful experience contrasting using my nursing knowledge to attempt to protect myself and receiving lavish, unexpected hospitality.
The Idolatry of Security or Broken Open
Mary Chase-Ziolek  October 2007

Carefully, methodically, I prepared myself to go to Africa
Clothes that would keep me cool and protect me from the sun
An LED headlamp that would protect me from the dangers of the dark
Immunizations that would keep me disease free
Medications that would comfort my body should I become ill
Shoes that would protect my feet from blisters
Walking and exercising to get in shape
I was well prepared to protect my body

All of my preparations for protection were an attempt to create barriers to keep danger at a distance
and yet, walling myself off from danger, was in itself a danger -
a danger that I would protect myself so much that I would miss what God wanted to
give me in this foreign and unfamiliar place

As prepared as I was to protect my body, I was totally unprepared for the extravagant hospitality of our
hostess Misee
Hospitality so freely, joyously and generously given by this woman with few material resources
and a very large family
this woman who milked the cows in the field every day
who lived in an immaculate mud brick hut with a dirt floor
who brought water from the well for me to bathe
who wove grass mats for our latrine to accommodate our
foreign need for privacy

Nothing could prepare me for such lavish, unexpected hospitality
Christ could not have been more welcoming

Hebrews 13:2 says, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have
entertained angels without knowing it. “
I wonder if it could be turned around to say,
“Do not neglect to receive hospitality from strangers, for by so doing some have
been ministered to by angels without knowing it.”

I tried to protect myself, yet my soul was broken open
by the gracious reception of this humble Muslim woman and her frequent blessings
through whom God worked to receive me - an unknown stranger who must have looked
odd to my Fulani hostess with all of my protective gear

God took my anxious human attempts at protection and turned me inside out
breaking me open to receive that for which I did not know to ask -
the profound experience of being a stranger in a strange land
where I was welcomed as a long lost sister
“Slept Like A Baby,” Manar Daghash, Nursing Student, University of Illinois At Chicago

My name is Manar Daghash and I am a senior nursing student at the University of Illinois at Chicago. As the daughter of Palestinian refugees, my sense of identity and renewal comes from my activism and fight for equality, justice and liberation of the Palestinian people— and all those oppressed around the world. My art, both writing and painting, tries to speak to and galvanize those who are more privileged- like me- and inspire them to educate themselves, find their voices, and become the voice for the voiceless.

**SLEPT LIKE A BABY**

Ya Yumma*
I remember holding you in my arms
telling you prophetic stories
stories of Adam and Eve
Eating apples from the forbidden tree
and being expelled from heaven
I remember telling you that Palestine is like Jenna (Heaven)
and you asked me if we were like Adam and Eve
expelled
yet destined to return

Ya Yumma (My son,)
Ya habeeb immak (The love of your mother)
Our lives have been a compilation of ironies
I have never thought of death so much as I sit in the living room
They say there is life and death
but all we know is death and death
I tell you every night that we we remain together as a family
Ya Ibny (My son,)
Do I lay you to sleep alone or do I tuck you in alongside your siblings
so that when death intrudes with no invitation and no welcome
he takes us one by one or all together?
Why must I make these decisions?
I am only a mother
I remember believing that the womb was your only safe place
I now realize that your tomb is that reality
I grew accustomed to death
I knew it like my last name
Everyday, almost religiously,
looking for bodies among the rubble
like unwrapping presents
unwanted surprises
Palestinian. Villager. Neighbor. Family
It is my job to tell the world that they killed a human being
tell them to ironically cut flowers
to honor the memory of a blossom yet to bloom
but as I hear news of my lifeless baby
a baby just born
a baby with no voice and no foe
I wonder
how do you first tell a mother her child is dead?
how can you tell me that the blood and flesh that was produced
inside me for months
has returned to nothing more than flesh and blood
in seconds
was it seconds?
Every Palestinian is my child

“Every Day With Mary (Reflections by the Affiliates of Mayslake Ministries),” p. 66 and 70,
Mary Beth Desmond, PhD, RN, AHN-BC, Spiritual Director- Mayslake Ministries, Assistant
Professor- Lewis University, College of Nursing & Health Sciences.

I am an affiliate Spiritual Director at Mayslake Ministries. I contributed nine reflections to the
daily devotional on the concepts of Peace & Love using Scripture and the Blessed Mother as
an example of living the fruits of the spirit.

February 24

“Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” – 1
Corinthians 13:7

As a nurse, I have been blessed to see love come to my life. When patients are
surprised by a sudden illness or an unexpected admission to the hospital, they often feel
disconnected from what is meaningful in their life. They long for the simple pleasures they
love, whether the presence of family, prayer time, a pet, music, a morning walk, MAss, a
cup of coffee, or just being able to go to work. They long for love in their lives.
I am inspired by Mary and her life experiences. As the mother of Jesus, Mary endured many moments of disconnection from things that were meaningful to her life. She was a refugee in a foreign land, the mother of a lost child, and a witness to the crucifixion of her beloved Son. Yet Mary’s love for God never wavered. Loving God can help us reconnect to all that is meaningful for us, for love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

"A Nursing Student's Reflection on Thick Skin," Short Essay, Theresa Gibbons, MS Nursing Student, University of Illinois At Chicago.

Writing makes me feel like I can slow down my life just a little. It helps me grow from my experiences, unmask my internal incongruities, and discover the guiding principles by which I want to live. I've usually kept a journal, but I have never shared my personal writing. However, I have gained so much from others who've shared their insights, so I thought perhaps someone can relate to mine, too.
In the 1971 book *Crime in America*, former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark speaks about the human compulsion to harm one another. There will always be crimes of passion, he writes, because we are emotional, reactive, aggressive creatures. Premeditated predatory crime, however, could one day be eradicated, if only we created the societal conditions in which care for one another was recognized as essential to our own survival and safety.

I wonder if I could make a case for this postulate in terms of disease and injury. While we cannot prevent the natural (even untimely) breakdown of human body systems, nor prevent every accident from happening, we could, someday, create the conditions in which no one becomes ill or disabled due to environmental toxins, lack of access to safe drinking water, state violence, isolation, or hopelessness.

When I think about what will be emotionally toughest about this shiny, new career, I don’t think it’s any different from what I find difficult to endure on a regular day out in the world. I have come to terms with my own thin skin when it comes to heartbreak and suffering—and with my persistent attraction to this space. I can accept that life is difficult. Rather, it’s the cruelty and neglect that will wear me out, perpetrated by systems that value some lives over others, manifest in disease, injury, and isolation. The quality of nursing care I deliver will depend on my abilities to sustain compassion toward others, to integrate all that I learn, and to seize opportunities for healing—not just patients, but broken systems, and myself. Proximity to suffering born of human dysfunction will undoubtedly get me down, but it will also get me up and push me to speak, to act, to write.

It turns out that I’m not so worried about being impacted by the suffering of others; in fact, I think being sensitive to it will make me a better nurse. And the thick skin that would protect me from devastation from social injustice—well, maybe that isn’t so useful after all.

Up and over my head down to my hazel brown skin I am black. Sometimes I stowaway inside myself to revive the strength of the black goddess inside me. When I close my eyes my spirit carries me back to Africa and my senses become my ancestral tracker. I am Truth. A poet. A mirror of Black Excellence...
Strong to carry our babies, made our lips full to project and pronounce our intelligence, made us sassy toord to give us confidence. You still love lusty salivating tongues drenched in images of me, of you, a Queen, A Woman! Embrace all of you as a Woman.

No matter what shade of skin you are, you are all beautiful. Your beautiful because you are a woman, a vessel that gives birth to nations from our bellies. A Woman. Sisters, I close my letter leaving you with this, after today no more silent cries, bruised eyes, sinking ships, neglectful relationships, drugs, or saving guests for the sake of having some one. After today you shall rise up! God provides us with our needs and blesses us with our desires, thus making it OK to go through our trials... Rise up.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE
“Angels on Aldine (Pandemic Initiative),” Terry Ratner, RN, MFA, Prose.

I’m a nurse, freelance writer, and photographer. I use a process called Ekphrasis, which explores who we are through words and images. A photo is a declaration that our lives have meant something, and like a detective, I seek out those fragmentary details and bring about a living resurrection with my writing. Photography offers a distinct perspective of the world outside of my nursing profession, while writing gives me an introspective view of myself in relationship with the world.
The Changing of the Seasons

There are two main seasons in Phoenix: summer and winter. Our fall and spring are bypassed for long stretches of sameness. Maybe there’s a hint of spring in March, when a frail rain falls, casting a silver net over the neighborhood. Then the sky clears and the flowers smell like baby lotion until the aroma is suffocated in blazing heat. These are our seasons.

Nursing also has its own seasons. They follow no direct weather pattern and occur as suddenly as a hurricane or an earthquake, without much warning. There are brief periods of calm with little activity, just the daily comings and goings of patients—the ones who recover without much pain, without any scars.

Then the changes occur: trees with still branches begin their dance; the full moon wears an orange veil as winds throw blankets of dust like confetti up toward the sky. In daylight the air fades to sepia, like an old photograph. That’s when code bells chime and intensive care units fill to capacity with dying patients and grieving families. The scent of loss is everywhere, and one can’t escape the inevitable season of death.

It begins in the arteries, rushing words without words. Some agree: “It’s too soon for death.” Others welcome the freedom from pain. The season of loss passes by like a series of cold breaths, one after another.

The way I practice nursing might have been different if I hadn’t lost my mother in the spring of 1993. The time of year when the nights stay cool and days begin to warm. That’s when I began to bond with little old ladies wearing turquoise rings, silver earrings, and glittering beads. I’d hold their hands and laugh with them like old friends. I’d study their faces, searching for a
connection: hair the color of freshly fallen snow, skin paper-thin, eyes shining like topaz, and a
dimple on the left when they smiled.

My nursing care changed again in the spring of 1999, when my son, Sky, died in a
motorcycle crash. All the young patients became a part of me—each one taking up a small space
in my heart, trying to fill the emptiness. They brought about poems of music, stanzas without
metaphor, making something out of nothing.

It all happened during the season that’s sometimes missed. During the season that hides;
the one that smells like jasmine and sprouts tulips from the darkness of the earth. It’s a season
that cools the evening sky with its sweet resinous wind while orange tree petals drift to the
ground like snow. The season filled with colors; fairy dusters with pink puffs radiating from their
centers and clusters of purple wisteria trailing their vines around budding trees. That was the
season when my world caved in.

Those deaths affected my career in ways I never understood until now. They left a
sickness in my heart that can’t be healed from medicine. No drug can take it away. No narcotic is
strong enough to dull the pain.

My patients are the medicine I need: elderly women with blue hair who want to hold my
hand and call me “honey” because no one else is there with them. The old men with salt and
pepper sprinkled on the few hairs they have left who tell me a joke because their children are too
busy to listen. The young people who are having surgery because they were reckless, the ones I
caution and catch myself preaching to—these are the patients who fill my void.
I prepared a young man for surgery last week. Behind the paisley curtains, he cursed as he shook his head from side to side and moaned, sounding more like a pop star singing a song of love and loss.

"Help me, someone! I can’t take this pain any longer!" he yelled.

I pulled a chair close to his bed, placed a cool wash cloth across his forehead, and injected morphine into his intravenous port. I asked him how the accident happened.

"I was riding my dirt bike out in the desert and got carried away performing some fancy stunts. I fractured my left leg."

I looked at the external fixator attached to his leg, the swelling in his ankle and knee, and the metal pins that disappeared into his bone. I watched his temple pulsating and thought about life, about luck, about my son, and wondered why he had to die.

I took the young man’s calloused hand in mine and listened as he talked about the accident.

"I don’t know what happened. The bike just got away from me," he said.

The connection between him and Sky went deeper than motorcycles: their bushy eyebrows, big brown eyes and olive complexion, a build referred to as “buff,” and flawless skin. I wanted to save this young man and his parents from a worse fate. I wanted his parents to be immune to the disease that afflicted me.

"You’re playing Russian roulette with your life," I told him. I felt his hand squeeze mine. His forehead dripped with tiny beads of perspiration.

"My belief is we all die when our time is up. I’m not afraid of death," he said. "We all have to die sometime."

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Hi, my name is Kalli. I have always been attracted to the simplicity of Haiku poems. My twin and I love this poet, Tyler Knott Gregson, who writes a haiku per day on love. Together we decided that we could do this, without a theme, and occasionally share our work with each other. We have never actually shared our work despite the first haiku being about her. Writing a haiku is not much of a time commitment as they are relatively short. This was the least daunting way for me to channel my frustration, anger, sadness, love, etc. despite being busy with school and life.
I know you hate it
But your soul is beautiful
Even if broken

You ignored my plea
Like my illness wasn’t real
Or you couldn’t care

You reminded me
Of a home long forgotten
Still so welcoming

Their feelings are real
Despite what you may project
Believe them wholly

You preached trust in you
Actions speak louder than words
You only had words
Poetry, Shirley Stephenson, APRN, Mile Square Humboldt Park, UIC College of Nursing Faculty Practice & Partnerships.

All of these poems have to do with how I live within healthcare/nursing and vice versa. The connection is more obvious in some than others. A few have been published in literary journals.

**Practice**

The lacerations outside
and within the lower lip
don’t communicate. One
is vertical, the other supine
and jeweled. The shallow
slash bled more, coating
her teeth rust. They thought
she’d lost some teeth.
Her brother’s tear makes
her cry. The other child
has two puncture wounds
where the dog took hold.
The uncle stopped her
from pulling away so
the skin wouldn’t tear
into flaps. At the time,
no one understood why
he clasped them together.

Our gowns wear thin.
A small island marks
the left side of the fifth
boy’s forehead, above
the eyebrow. He fell once
and was glued. Four days
later, he fell again. Now
he can’t wet his head or
the second wound, the one
that can’t be glued, will
release and flare. We line up
before the Tumbling E.
We don’t remember names.

They arrive on sunny days
in April and wait beside
the aquarium. The ninth
or tenth needs a singed cast
removed. Her father
brought her. The mother
remains angry and away.
Halos of blisters are the fault
of the fire makers. We wrap
their children in sheets
and tape them to boards.
We hold their skulls until
our arms quiver and their
faces bead. They arrive
in rain without shoes.
Some break into song
and some can’t breathe,
lips clamped bluish over
tight-hinged throats.
We count the rise and fall,
lay the fields and reach
around them. We run
before the little weight
goes limp. The gun bumps
marrow. We hold the note.
We hold the strings taut.

**Red Arrow Farm**

When I arrived in spring
with my mother, brittle
ladybugs littered linens
and stairways. We swept
their shells and made
wishes. We ate pancakes
on the porch. The fields gusted.
We tugged a blue wagon.
We did our best. Snagged
between seasons, sky
lanterns bobbed above
a thawing shore. This time,
December says stay put.
Now there’s a fence for loping.
Now there’s something feral.
The shush of turned pages,
a fire’s static. Logs buckle.
Our future, once set as this
oilcloth map, now fugitive.
Three slow ladybugs
tap their bright cloaks
along the bannister.
A lamp timer awaits
the blizzard. Tsk-tsk, tsk-tsk.
We stand in the wingspan
of porclight, mercury eyes
just beyond the orb, beyond
sleep. Our boots could be
warmer. Our children
will never give enough.
Bloated as a boxing glove,
the cream of wheat sky
muffles August’s brambled
relics. Rusty spears of prairie
pierce snow banks,
the storm’s shrill whistle
like a knife in a bathtub.
Patient Population

Fireworks return you to the night bullets splintered your hip, starburst windshield, smear of sound on pavement. I declare Loud noise may trigger. I lack words about passion and its collapse, but chronicle the slow boil in your lung, how you lost your hotdog stand, your parakeet. I record your assaults and safaris. The water you shouldn’t have drank at the camel pageant, the blood I dabbed from your eyes. You un-roof my sleep with checklists futile as leaf blowers. All I may have failed to appreciate. Susceptibilities, anatomical pockets. I say foreign body, meaning burrowed worm-treasure. I say we, meaning I too have broken. I chart your interrupted moments—kite in the pond, broken fish tank, shards of a jigsaw puzzle iced to the stoop. Your photo of the miscarried, the metallic tang on your tongue. I try not to talk about you over dessert, or upon waking. That body too full of sweetness, glistening as I knelt to breathe. Sometimes, I want to buy you flowers. I understand why one afternoon in a hammock would be better than a month here. Sometimes, when I spot a salt truck’s swerve, it is you I thank. I document the crimson blisters on your scapula, your shame at the revoked license, the decayed graft, the chicken costume you wore for pay. I want to write about dancing in the kitchen or the willow that rains hours after the last storm. Instead I detail the side you favor. Your legs beneath the bedside tray, blued circulation. I can write compromised and resistant, but I must eliminate bleak and unfathomable. I can’t write getaway heart, although I felt its stampede beneath my interlaced hands.

“I am Inspiration,” Isabelle Jane St. John, RN-Cardiac Critical Care, Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin, Poetry, 2020.

I am not just a nurse, I am an artist of care. And as any artist, I must engage in the enduring pursuit of inspiration, or the quality of my work, the care I provide, will suffer. Even in this early stage of my career, I have faltered under the weight of burnout. I realized how strong the temptation to become jaded is in this profession, and I made my vow to never forget my “why”, to never lose my inspiration. It is said that nurses save patients, but I firmly believe patients can save nurses too, for I have renewed my inspiration thanks to so many of my patients. This piece is for my fellow artists of care: have courage, reach out to those you serve, and be relentless in your pursuit for inspiration.
I am Inspiration

By: Isabelle J. St. John BSN, RN

You are tired, you are broken;
your light ceases to shine.
You take the plunge, into vulnerability
day after day,
but you are scared to go on.
Beneath the shroud of doubt, you become cold.
Jaded.
Swept up by the tide of temptation, swallowed by the swirl of cynicism.
You showed no resistance.
You gave in. You gave up.
Is this what you want? Is this what you have worked for?
You reach out, desperate to not fade away.
Desperate to shine again.
Take my hand.
I am Inspiration.
Hold tight to me. Vow to never forget me.
I will show you the way again. I will illuminate your purpose.
Lay your tired mind and aching heart to rest in my arms.
Let me replenish you, refresh you, reinvigorate you.
Let me cleanse your soul,
so that your light will shine brighter,
so that your heart will love deeper,
so that your mind will be filled with clarity, instead of obscured by doubt.
My gift to you is the courage to be vulnerable again.
To feel, and thus,
to heal.
To remind you of your purpose, to remind you of your “why”.
Who am I?
I am Inspiration.
I am all around you.
I can always be found, even in the darkest of times.
Look inside yourself, look to those you serve.
I am there.
Heal each other. Serve each other.
I exist because deep down, you believe I can still save you, regardless of reality, so harsh and bleak.
Never stop believing in my power. Never stop searching for me.
I am here to serve you.
I am your muse.
I always was. I always will be.
Go forth and drive out the temptation of darkness, spread light.
Give in to the vibrance of my essence.
I am Inspiration.

“The Art of Nursing: Reflections from an Artist of Care,” Isabelle Jane St. John, RN-Cardiac Critical Care, Children's Hospital of Wisconsin, Short Prose, 2020.

My personal philosophy that nursing is a form of art has guided me through my education and into my career, and influences the way I provide care to my patients and families. Practicing nursing as a craft enables me to create meaningful connections between myself and patients of all ages, as we journey through the healing process. Expressing the role that my artistic passion plays in my professional practice through reflective prose fuels my inspiration, and fills me with a renewed sense of purpose.
Hektoen Short Prose Submission
The Art of Nursing: Reflections from an Artist of Care
By: Isabelle J. St. John BSN, RN

I am an artist. And my medium is care. Healing. Human interaction. My supplies include compassion, empathy, the ability to educate, the ability to advocate. I am a musician. I perform among a symphony of sounds. Without my part, the piece would sound incomplete, but all together, the different parts intertwine through give and take, to create a mellifluous masterpiece. I am a designer. I create a space and a fit that are individualized and inspired, helping others find comfort and accommodation that incorporates both practicality and finesse. I am an actress. I utilize empathy to become the characters I care for, I dive into vulnerability, opening my mind in an attempt to understand what lies beneath the surface, and what influences outward behavior. I live to serve the needs of my masterpieces. I exist at the cornerstone between precision and chaos, between rigorous scientific principles and soulful creativity. It is within this space that I am able to fulfill my life’s purpose as a nurse, as an artist of care.

I have always felt passionately in touch with my artistic tendencies. From a young age, I was guided into the practice of analyzing and interpreting art, by mentors who did not shy away from challenging my peers and I to think more critically, look beyond the obvious, and dig for a deeper meaning. As years passed, I found my space to blossom within the performing arts; understanding music and theatrics became equally as important to me as nurturing the logical part of my mind with the structure of science courses. Our directors would ask us, what emotions did we want to communicate through our work? Without a strong understanding of this, our work lacked purpose and depth. When practicing the craft of nursing, I ask myself a similar question, what do I want my patients to feel when they experience my care?

Whenever I was performing, I loved knowing that I was sharing emotions with my audience. It brought a sense of intimacy and closeness between me and a group of strangers, and it has been my goal to incorporate this into my professional nursing practice. To me, art in all forms is a way for an artist to communicate through feeling, ambiance, and emotion with an audience. The core method of communication between nurses and patients aligns with this in a remarkably similar fashion. The necessity of empathy is a central pillar in creating and showcasing high quality art, and in providing high quality nursing care. To communicate and create a connection with others through feeling and emotion, one must adopt another’s perspective; they must feel together. It is this link between my passion and my profession that continually gives me the most wholesome and fulfilling sense of purpose, and has heavily influenced the way I practice nursing.
True art gathers you, cleanses you, and allows you to feel. Art has the ability to reach beyond our biases, our agendas, or whatever else our mind may be under the influence of, and be the strongest influence over us. It quiets the extraneous noise in our surroundings and enables us to focus on feeling, no matter how foreign or uncomfortable it may be. Art holds our hands, looks us in the eye and says, “Just feel with me. That’s why I’m here”. This is what it means to be a nurse, an artist of care. To quiet the chaos, to sort through the mess, to hold your patient’s hands, to look beyond the surface, and to say “Just feel. Just be here, be present, listen to how you feel, listen to the feelings I am communicating to you. I will feel your pain and fear, and you will feel my strength and confidence. I will be present and we will feel together, every step of the way.” My healing can reach beyond the influence of the strongest medicine and anxieties that obscure the mind and provide clarity, strength, focus, and safety. As an artist of care, it is my duty to create a trusting space to communicate those feelings, to create a connection through empathy.

I believe artists create because they feel, and their purpose is to communicate this with their audience, to create something that will allow both parties to feel together. I feel. I feel inspiration, potential, and determination. When you experience my care, my healing, I want you to feel and I will feel with you. We may come from different walks of life, speak different languages, or have opposing views of the world, but the core of our connection is what we feel, together. And this connection, this artfully crafted space of empathy, this presentation of my craft, my care, is nothing short of a masterpiece.


“Empty Chair” resulted as an outlet of how I release my feelings about what I go through in my profession as a nurse, having this outlet helps me express my emotions in a creative way - this process helps in bringing a sense of peace within me and the thought that my words can touch others to either feel loved or act as a reminder that the nursing profession is not just about tasks... it involves a lot of emotions and heart - this means a lot to me.
Empty Chair
by Zharmaidie Zafra

I am a nurse... a believer, a human being who cares
I wonder how you really feel
I hear the cry of your heart
I see the invisible tears in your eyes
I want to ease your hidden pain
I am a nurse... a believer, a human being who cares
I pretend your inner pain does not affect me
I feel the sadness that cloaks your entirety
I touch your hand but you don't seem to notice
I worry if you are still there...
I cry that who I am talking to
is just an empty chair
I am a nurse... a believer, a human being who cares
I understand depression is like a dark cloud
I dream that one day you'll believe that this won't last
I dream that one day you'll believe in yourself
I worry if you are still there...
I cry that who I am talking to
is just an empty chair.