2018 Anthology

Telling Our Stories Through Word and Image

Patients, Loved Ones, Staff and Volunteers Present Their Original Work
COVER ART:

**Blossoms & Butterfly**
Acrylic by Barbara Oldenburg

- *See artist’s statement on page 67.*

ANTHOLOGY DESIGN:  Michelle Belinda Davis
EVENT PHOTOGRAPHY:  Kimberly Alexandra Davis

NOTE:  The individual writers and artists hold the copyrights for their own work in this anthology.
Welcome to the Telling Our Stories through Word and Image 2018 Anthology, a collection created by patients, loved ones, staff and volunteers at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Norris Cotton Cancer Center.

We believe the opportunity to express oneself creatively has the capacity to promote healing and are honored to share this heart-felt collection with you.

Our Creative Arts Program is a joint project between Norris Cotton Cancer Center and D-H Arts. This popular program consists of one-on-one visits and group activities with a writer, visual artist and a musician. Having a team of artists-in-residence available to our patients and their families is a rare gift and is made possible through the support of philanthropy. We thank the Cancer Center Administration, the Friends of Norris Cotton Cancer Center and the individual donors who make possible a patient arts program through which so many can benefit.

In addition, the staff of Patient and Family Support Services is grateful to D-H Arts and Marianne Barthel, whose resourceful vision increases our capacity to reach patients throughout DHMC.

Finally, we acknowledge the dedication of our creative arts staff, Marv Klassen-Landis, Samantha Wiebkin, Margaret Stephens, Laura Foley and our many creative arts volunteers, for inspiring hope and healing, one person at a time.

Thank you for honoring our artists with your attention. To have one’s artistic expression witnessed, listened to or seen by others is a rare and profound gift.

To all those who stepped forward with art pieces, stories, songs, poems and a willingness to share a part of yourself with all of us, we dedicate this collection to you.

With Gratitude,

Andrea & Michelle

Andrea Buccellato, Manager
Michelle B. Davis, Resource Specialist
Patient and Family Support Services, Norris Cotton Cancer Center
Thank you, writers and artists, for contributing to this annual collection. I celebrate your journey into creating new expressions of life.

Thank you, readers. It takes an audience for creative expression to become communication and community. I celebrate your opening yourself to the words and images in these pages.

Marv

Marv Klassen-Landis
Creative Writing Specialist
DAMN MY GENES
Blair Brooks

It was a fly by comment
barely noticed by me.
“Dad, your belt is riding higher,” she airily noted.
I laughed and surreptitiously tugged my blue jeans south,
pretty sure no one noticed.

I was certain I had fixed the problem,
that is until later, when I realized my crotch was too low
and my pants butt too baggy.
Maybe it is the brand of blue jeans, I told myself.
Must have been her angle of view. I am still cool.

Next morning, I looked in the mirror
but not before perfecting my belt.

I had thought about it all night.
About my Uncle Stacey, a 6 foot 8 skinny guy with a low gut pooch.
He used to cinch his belt way above his belly button.
But, I thought, he was old (probably as old as me now, but never mind)
and old fashioned.

Then I remembered Uncle Bant, who,
in spite of his childhood polio, still got around pretty well.
But I often marveled how he could find pants long enough
to reach from just below his arm pits
all the way down to his ankles.

So, there I was standing in front of the mirror.
I see it.
It is creeping north,
approaching my umbilicus.
Oh dear! –
I really meant, Oh s***!!
I just couldn’t help wondering:
When everything else is sagging,
why is my belt climbing?

RHODODENDRON
Blair Brooks

I think you have been
in front of my nose
for many years.

Oh, I have looked at you,
your grand magenta explosions.
I probably paused to say, “Wow.” Briefly.

But now, I have had to stop.
And as I look closer, I focus
on your individual flowers.

I cannot move on.
I am stunned by your intricacy.
Hues and designs I have never seen.

Yes, as a whole, you are beautiful,
but each blossom is simply exquisite.
And new to me.

Maybe I have bloomed like you,
or because of you,
my love.
ODE TO A NURSE
Blair Brooks

Taken down by a new cancer diagnosis –
all seems lost. Life as I know it – gone.
Even in the initial chaos,
you infuse hope and care – real care.

You see the fear.
You see the eroded confidence.
You see the threatened will.
You see it all and embrace it, embrace me.

You know what I can eat
and get me a smoothie.
You push me to get out of bed
even though I don’t want to.

You clean my embarrassing mess
as if it is normal.
You smile and are patient.
Sometimes, you stop to hold my hand.

You anticipate what is coming
and take time to sit with me.
You share what will help get me through
and you are right.

2 am. The worst time.
You help get me to the bathroom
when I am too unsteady
and sure I am never going to get better.
You assure me this won’t last.  
I feel just a little stronger  
thinking that I will be someday.  
You told me so.

I share my life with you  
and discover you have a life too.  
Sometimes a very difficult story –  
You and your family have been through this too.

You laugh at my jokes.  
You listen to my poems.  
You have no time  
but you stay with me anyway.

You hold my wife’s hand when she needs it.  
You greet my kids with warmth and familiarity –  
so comforting for them  
and for my friends too.

Sometimes you confront me  
for safety or therapy.  
You can be tough, kindly tough –  
oh that old bed alarm I hated.

I really didn’t like you for a night.  
Shame on me,  
you were just doing your job.  
The next night we worked it out.

You got me a new bed.  
Mine was broken and bruised my ribs.  
You ran the request all the way to the top.  
You followed through just for me.
You see me in the hospital or in the infusion suite.  
Sick, scared, recovering, sometimes rebelling.  
You see so many like me.  
I know, because I did too, before this.

Maybe I can give something back to you  
though I’m not sure how to do you justice.  
You made me feel worth it.  
I hope I…we make you feel worth it.

My hat goes off my bald or curly haired head to you. 
You are what makes surviving the assault  
of disease and treatment possible.  
We could not do this without you.

Thank you.
Appreciating the art
Telling Our Stories 2018
SIT INSIDE
Mia Brown

Sit inside your grief
as if crouched in a hollowed trunk

Green flesh becomes brittle
Roots grasp, but rot

There is nothing to do now but smell the scent of transformation
Breathe, even if it’s barely sufficient

Listen for the crunch of termites
Beckon them into the softness

Don’t try to move
Let moss creep along your spine

None of this tree was meant to last forever
Not in this form
THE HUM
Mia Brown

One day she saw the rift, the dark crevasse.
The scars the land revealed unearthed her own.
Her parts sought unity to walk en masse.
The tear she filled with love one stone by stone.

She chose to let the rose-petal-soft hand
Pull her towards her future knowing, old soul.
She chose surrender with no place to stand,
To be real, and wild, and untamed, and whole.

Her fractures, she tended gently with truth.
Mended with gold: Creatures, Sisters, Shade Trees.
Soothed by sweet whispers, she mourned her lost youth.
Then transmuted to light, flitted with bees.

Listen to the hum in the depths of you.
Your voice bridges years so wisdom comes through.
MY MOTHER’S FACE
Betty Byrnes

I am dizzied by your gruesome beauty
Eyes closed – mouth agape
Frozen in time
What secret do you now hold?
What disturbing peace have you achieved?
I take photographs and write Haiku capturing moments of beauty and moments of questioning. No matter how long we live, we find that time is short. If we turn our attention to this very moment, we may experience an expansion of time and space and an increased awareness of beauty and interconnectedness. Time seems to move in a line, but it can also drop down into the well of rarely noticed things. I hope that my work acts as a bucket to bring the treasure of the little seen and little noticed to the surface.
FALL
Alejandra Casco

With both windows opened wide I organized the closet. I walked up and down the room, each time passing my neighbor's tree. I began to laugh when I saw the tree's colors – orange, red and gold – in unison calling me. Even though I was not surprised when it happened, I wondered in amazement how suddenly it all changed. It no longer stood still; my neighbor's tree was visited by an unusual wind. All the leaves moved in unison up and down; the colors pulled me closer. Like gravity pulling me forward I fell towards a beautiful sunset and am reminded of this place I've once seen before. In a vision the Grand Canyon called me.

DEEP CALLS TO DEEP
Alejandra Casco

I close my eyes to rest but when I open them I am standing close to a cliff on the Grand Canyon. I am surrounded by the color orange all around me. The Sun is setting in a golden sky. I anticipate that I am not alone. A hand appears made of blue fire and flips the pages of a flip book. I now know I am standing inside the pages that quickly start to flip. I see an outline of a man walking towards me; each step he takes is effortless like walking on clouds, he climbs this cliff. I must focus on his eyes or I'll miss him, his outline is transparent; he blends with the rocks that are behind him. I see Jesus my rock clothed with the Grand Canyon rocks, his eyes calling me deeper into him.
Margaret Stephens, Enchantress
also known as the nice harp lady
Telling Our Stories 2018
A LIMERICK
Kerry Clifford and Marv Klassen-Landis

I take a long walk on the beach,
Looking up at the stars... out of reach.
I need an arm extender;
Do you know where there’s a vendor?
I’m willing to pay ten bucks each.

TURNS OUT, I AM MR. POTATO HEAD
Kerry Clifford

Sometimes, when I begin a journal entry, I have no idea where it’s going. There’s no road map. What’s inside will come out. It may be the first I’m aware of it – the only pathway it’s found to expression, or it might be something I’ve thought about and repressed a hundred times. That’s the beauty of the writing that I have been privileged to do through the Creative Arts Program at the Norris Cotton Cancer Center.

When I began working with NCCC Creative Writing Specialist Marv, I had no clue what would emerge out of the dark recesses of my mind. I was struggling with processing my diagnosis and finding a way forward through it. As we spent more time together, writing became a way for me to label my deepest fears, to express the gratitude for the community that surrounds me, and to laugh at how much I’ve hated chicken noodle soup since getting sick.

Around the same time that I began regular sessions with Marv, I was also seeing a therapist. I wasn’t sure what it was I was looking for from either of them, but I knew that getting a diagnosis/prognosis like the one that had just been handed to me definitely merited some soul searching. The therapist attempted to work on my anxiety without really digging into the heart of my grief. Marv, on the other hand, coaxed out the feelings of loss, fear, anger, and all of the other things swimming around in my head. His questions, perhaps shaped by his vast experience with others traveling roads similar to mine, have always zeroed in on the very topics that are bubbling just beneath the surface.
When I say good-bye to Marv, I leave feeling lighter and happier than when I arrived. (I have subsequently found my way to a therapist who is a better fit than the first one, one who shares Marv’s talent for asking great questions and hearing the most salient themes in my answers.)

As deeply grateful as I feel for what I’ve gotten out of the Creative Arts Program, I have to admit that I don’t always see the value in Marv’s coaching immediately. A few months ago, when he asked me this ridiculous question about what kind of toy I am (followed by what kind of toy I wish I was and what toy other people might think I am), I rolled my eyes as I picked up my pen...

...then was fascinated by my answers.

I hadn’t realized until that moment how hard I had been working to keep a positive affect/attitude in front of my friends and family:

“People think I am a doll – a face with a permanent smile.”

And I figured out why I had been wrestling so with what I was feeling from moment to moment:

“I wish I was a Rubik’s Cube, with a clear and organized solution; but I am actually Mr. Potato Head, whose emotions fluctuate constantly, and whose shoes always seem to be missing.”

Seriously. How do you reconcile a Rubik’s Cube with Mr. Potato Head?!?

I think you begin by naming it. Thank you, Marv, for helping me put the words to the things.
TWO LIMERICKS
Tim Cronan

I used to be full of vim and of vigor
Until a lump in my ass became bigger
It’s gone, so I can smile
For it should be quite a while
Before anyone calls the grave digger

Morbid describes my sense of humor
But I’m really not a gloom and doomer
I don’t think it’s bad
As fun should be had
At the expense of a malignant tumor
ON MUSIC
Tom Davis

For me music is a real source of renewal. No matter how stressful the day, by the time I finish tuning my guitar, it’s gone. The magic of sound is that it touches on what is absolutely perfect in physics. Tones are pure oscillations that blend with each other perfectly. It’s like grasping a rainbow. Music is a way to connect one’s life and one’s emotions with the physical perfection of making musical sounds. Take the messy stuff of life, channel it through a chord progression, and the lyrics and the sounds line up beautifully. And you send those out to the audience and you and the audience resonate – like an instrument. You can sense the audience right there – that’s powerful. And playing with other people is a real joy, having a wordless conversation, sharing the joy of music.

Dr. Tom Davis
Telling Our Stories 2018
WHEN I CLOSE MY EYES
Tom Davis

Mirror on the wall, can it be
That old man’s face belongs to me
Say it isn’t so, so I’ll know
It’s just my eyes deceiving me

When I close my eyes, I can see
Once-upon-a-time staring back at me
Always on the go, don’t say no
Why can’t this go on endlessly

Then one day something changed, rearranged
The easy life I held so dear
My body had been strong for so long
With eyes closed I still see it clear

Then I look to my lover’s face
I see her smile, her grit, her grace
And all the gifts she has to give
And all the love that’s helped me live

So hold your lover close, and believe
In love you give and you receive
Open up your eyes, see this day
Let go the past and let it fly away

Open up your eyes
JOHN’S ROCK
Ginnie Dennett

In January of 2018, my husband John underwent surgery while battling cancer for the sixth time. I was waiting in the waiting room and finally got the call that I could go back and see him. I went through the double door and saw three nurses looking over at me and one was pointing to me. My heart started pounding, feeling as if something went terribly wrong. A nurse approached me and said, “Are you John’s wife?” I said yes. She started to tear up and I felt something is terribly wrong. I said, “Is he okay?” She smiled and said, “Yes, he’s fine. We’re all worked up because of an incident that took place. As your husband was coming up from anesthesia, he was asking for his rock. We went all through the sheets and blankets trying desperately to find his rock. We proceeded to tell him it wasn’t there. He then started to cry and said, ‘She’s in the waiting room. She’d never leave me.’ Then we realized he was asking for his wife.” The nurse was all teared up. She gave me a big hug. She told me she had been there for thirty years and had never had a husband wake up that way. I was bawling as she told me this. We all looked like idiots. It really made my heart soar. I felt so proud of how he felt about me. He was under anesthesia and confused, but it came through. Everybody sitting in the waiting rooms waiting for a loved one — you are a rock, too.
MY ROCK
John Dennett

I call my wife Ginnie “My Rock” because ever since my parents died, she has been my mom and my dad. Everything I need, she’s always there. No matter how hard things get, she is my rock. She is my solidarity, my soul, everything. She’s mentally tough and always giving. She never stops. She’s my Nurse Cratchitt. She’s my best friend. She’s everything.
Sharing their words their way
Telling Our Stories 2018
MEMORIES
Dave Dolan

Memories soften the blows of reality and
my ability to romanticize my time with you knows no bounds.
I would return to you if I could
If only to satisfy my curiosity....
To replace my expectant hopes of what could have been
With the vision of what has become.

WRITING
Dave Dolan

Why am I in these classes?
I just can't summon anything.
What's wrong?
Where did it go?
Was it ever here?
What is it anyway?

All of these and more rolled up into a ball of yarn
that my mind will forever be pulling apart?

Does it matter?
To me and only me.
Leave the audience in God's hands and write from your heart.
If there is no target
My aim must be true.
THE PROMISE
Dave Dolan

I lost my way
Following the footsteps of my past
In search of our future.

And so became discouraged and turned away
From the promise that was you.

REFLECTIONS
Dave Dolan

As I come upon a stranger
I realize the need for a smile.
Yet, knowing I can only see what I reflect,
I say hello with a grin.
SELF-FORGETFULNESS
Dave Dolan

Can a channel feel?
I want to find out.
To carry the message of hope
and not be the source
But know the relief.

Can a window see?
I want to know.
To provide a frame of reference
Without understanding what it means.

Can a door open?
I want to see.
To be moved by you
Without a thought of me.
WHAT THE LIVING DO
Dave Dolan

I'm scared of the monotony of the days
as I live through them free of pain
and full of expectations.

It's what the living do
Going on without really knowing what's going on.
And that's okay,
it's just nice to pretend.

Where's my focus?
I dunno – where's yours?
I can look at the despair that I know resides within.
Or I can just give it a knowing wink
and turn my attention to loftier thoughts – real or not.
But hopeful nonetheless.

Is delusion ignoring the obvious?
Is denial a flagrant violation of free-will?
I don't know, but I do believe
that though pain is inevitable in this life,
Misery is optional.
I am a life-long artist, expressing myself by doodling, drawing on paper, painting on canvas and wood. Using pens, pencils, oils, watercolors and acrylics. Art is everywhere waiting to be captured on canvas. I cannot paint them all, but some I try!

My goal is to inspire those who see my work to look more carefully at the world around them, to discover beauty in unusual ways and places. My creative mind never stops. I have fun in the creation process so I hope you enjoy the outcome.

**Coffee and Donuts** with family or friends at home is a painting I created most recently, realizing the little things in life mean so much.
I have painted for many years and enjoy trying different techniques of painting.

**Stormy Sea** is a recent acrylic pour painting. This is created by pouring acrylic paints onto a canvas then tilting the canvas, in all directions, moving the paint over the canvas. Creating a painting that catches the eye and engages your attention.
THE JOHNNY ESAU BRIDGE
Johnny Esau

All the students learned – and loved it.
We cut all the rafters and trusses,
Trunnels, double chords and flooring
Under the outback.

We cut all the rafters and trusses,
Joists, flooring, and siding
Under the outback.
In spring we put it all together.

Joists, flooring, siding…
Drawing, measuring, cutting, drilling…
In spring we put it all together.
It was beautiful.

Drawing, measuring, cutting, drilling…
Trunnels, double chords, flooring…
It was beautiful!
All the students learned – and loved it.
SEATRAIN
Bill Faucher

I was a Standardbred harness racing trainer and driver in the seventies. Tom Fay pointed out Seatrain to me. He was a little horse and he raced as a three-year-old in the Little Brown Jug in Delaware Park and won. Then he went sour. He was tough to keep on the course, but I still recommended Seatrain to Tom. Tom said, “You’re crazier than hell.” Seatrain was barred from many tracks for running off the tracks. Finally, I convinced Tom to purchase him. I brought Seatrain home to the farm. The week before a race I couldn’t get him to stay on a race track. I thought, “Oh, boy.” If he ran off the track with me I might be done with racing. Then I got a brainstorm. Seatrain had a lot of speed and was a nice horse and I figured him out. I put a blinder on one side so he couldn’t see the gate to run off to. That worked. When I raced him, I raced him carefully. He had been abused and didn’t want to race for that reason. I spoke to him and treated him well. The first race at the Meadowlands I was in the middle of the pack and he came out front and won. He was a smart little horse. I trained another week and raced again and don’t you know he won again. We paid $50,000 when we bought him and soon he was worth $100,000 a year later. He raced in his class and held his own. The owner did well and we all did, even the horse.
THE MEANING OF THE DOG DIGGING IN THE GRASS
Laura Foley

Same as the hill quiet with dark green pines,
the air rent by a crow’s screeching,
the woodpecker’s tap-tap-tapping into a hollowed tree,

same as the green clover sprig rising from a new-mown field,
a purple flower emerging after autumn frost,
feathers of milk weed seeds releasing into flight,

same as a poplar tree’s silver shimmering in wind –
the cloud come to cool the skin of a human
sitting cross-legged on the grass, breathing oneness in.

Published in Crannog Magazine
WHAT THE DEAD MISS
Laura Foley

This morning I think I see, in the light
dimpling the river’s emerald green
beneath me, the faces of my dead husband,
parents and younger sister,
feel their fingers in the fresh breeze
on my cheeks, as I breathe the diesel smell
of passing trucks, reminding me
of my need to refuel. As I hold the nozzle
in place, I watch clouds scurry
and reform, like traveling crowds.
I hear music in the liquid trickling,
filling my tank to the brim
and in my steady footsteps,
tapping percussion on pavement,
the car door closing with a click.
They say that’s what the dead miss most,
an ordinary day, spent like this.

Published in DMQ Review
SWING
Laura Foley

While the giddy bird feeder
swings over crusted snow,
Clara waters geraniums,
pots of rosemary, thyme,
a lemon tree. Come, she says,
smell the lemon tree, so sweet,
like Spain in spring, see
the fig, it grows new leaves
as if it doesn’t know
we’ve got three feet of snow,
four months of winter left.
I bend to the replete
yellow buds she proffers,
then pivot, focusing
on yellow finches, as if
their golden fluttering
might gild me.
I have to turn away
to savor the love
one of us will lose,
our loneliest day.

Published in Adelaide Literary Magazine
Viking blood runs in our veins. We are cancer warriors – me, my mother, her sister, their mother and likely her mother, as well. We do not go passively on this journey.

Two are gone now. I was not present for their battles, but I know they fought them well.

Shine incorporates ancient Viking symbols and modern sensibilities to convey a message of faith and empowerment as the wearer goes through daily life.
FOLLOW YOUR HEART*

What I love most about you…..
What I will always remember…..
What I learned from you….
What I will miss most about you…..
What I hold close to my heart is…..

*The writer, who chose to remain anonymous, said that these are the things that someone nearing death needs to hear from loved ones.
MEDITATION AND WRITING
Linda Garbinski

I love the peaceful feeling of meditation. Gaze softly at the candle flame. Breathe in. Breathe out. Notice the silence between the breaths. But there are times, like today, when, like all of us admit, the thoughts run through our minds like monkeys jumping from branch to branch. They say, “Let it pass like a parade.” Today, that’s not happening. I feel stress but think, “You sat down with intention to feel better.” So I walk into my bedroom and pick up a journal and think, “Okay, for now we write down these thoughts and see where it leads me.” Just in case, I also have a note pad for things that belong on my “To Do List” and quickly jot them down to get them off my mind. When the thoughts quiet down, it’s back to the candle flame and my breathing.

When something good happens that I want to capture, I write it down in my journal in detail and mark it with a pink tab so I can easily find the good days whenever I need to revisit the blessings in my life. Such as when I think of a recipe, either new or tried and true, especially when I can use the fresh herbs from my garden. I feel so good when the house fills with the scents that I love. Gardening gives me pleasure, as well. In addition to my precious herbs, I have perennials and a host of annuals to bring color, scents and even the sound of the breeze through the ornamental grasses. There is a botanical garden less than a mile from my house for those times when I want to see different plants and flowers, and I get exercise on the extensive walking paths where there is always a friendly person to greet – many of them walking dogs. What could be better than puppy therapy? All of this finds its way into my journals with pink tabs.

We all also experience less-than-perfect moments. Writing feelings of hurt, anger or disappointment helps me to release and move on, always in search of better subjects to write about. Last April, my doctor and I had the discussion about my myelofibrosis. Now, nine months after my stem cell transplant, I have a stack of writing tablets filled with fears, questions, hopeful days and even helpless days. I am able to enjoy spring again without all the roller coaster emotions. Spring is my favorite time of year, so this is an easy time to turn things around. I probably won’t be revisiting my writing about those hard days, at least for a long time, but the therapy received from my journaling has been priceless, perfect, most necessary.
My journaling has become more relaxed again and allows me to focus on the things that I love. I find my thoughts are starting to slow back down and even cease to flow from time to time. I know to be ready for whatever comes, so when my mind clears, I put the pen down, gaze softly at the candle flame. Breathe in. Breathe out. Cherish the silence between the breaths. Become renewed.
In both photographs and painting, I like to get in close to my subjects for a more intimate view. I feel this is similar to my work as a Reiki practitioner with surgical patients. I am privileged to experience that often when people are at their most vulnerable, they allow themselves to be touched, to be seen and known, to shine as human beings full of grace, optimistic and brave.
ZINNIAS IN THE FALL
Hamilton Gillett

It's hard to let the zinnias go.
They are so bright and boisterous.
If they were members of a choir,
They would be the most vociferous.
They're bright and so unsnifferous.
.....the most vociferous.
O CANADA
Alison A. Grass

I noticed before you share your diagnosis, your jaw is more angular, your scrubs a bit looser. Maybe you are working out harder. *Muscle man.*

You’re one of our own, it’s a blow to our team, straight to the core. *Shining star.*

We know no one is exempt from the possibility of being dealt the cancer card. No one. *Humble.*

We miss your wit and quick smile and even quicker response to, “Could I have a check please?” *Considerate.*

You’re our own computer guru, you’ve kept us in stitches at times. You have kind words for everyone. *Authentic.*

We pray, we pray, we pray. *Family.*

You come through surgery, radiation and chemotherapy. *Strength.*

You’re back amongst us, your work family. We love you, your wife, your children. Your triumphs are ours. *Amazing.*

Another setback. *Optimistic.*

You recover and lift our spirits with your part-time return. Giving us energy to keep doing what we do. *Encouraging.*
You’re weaker this time. You try to appear confident. You are fading. Your strength dwindling. Your sadness is shared. *Compassion.*

Damn this cancer! Damn it for stealing our strongest team member, for making us question why we continue to wage this war, for trying to break us apart. *Rally.*

For you, we will try to laugh in its face, to not lose our spirit. *Resilience.*

For you, we will keep up this work, being present for each and every one who walks through our door. That’s what you would want. *Caring.*
THOUGHTS OF A LAVENDER LION STUCK IN A CAVE
Nichole H

I am a mother lion in the jungle,
with the king and surrounded by cubs.
I am very protective of my family.
I am totally content and lazy –
unless you’re messing with me or my family,
and then I am a wild beast ready to attack.

I am lavender. I am light, I am airy.
I hope to calm and soothe people.
I pride myself on being a beautiful purple flower.
Any chance you get to relax with me
Is a chance indeed.

I am a rugged log cabin with dark wood
running through my veins.
I offer a place that is far enough away from chaos,
but close enough to feel like you are at home.
I offer warm blankets, cozy slippers and hot chocolate
on a chilly night. (That comes with the territory.)
I offer peace and serenity
that you can’t always find elsewhere.
MR. WHISPER MAN
Janet T. Hudon

I saw you long ago not knowing the glimpse it could be
when in fact I was running even from me....

The bristling of the waves the smell of gardenias the crisping of the wind
and the sense of never seeing you again brings the sand between my toes
and crinkles my nose whoever knows what the wind will bring to me....

Smokey coal burning wood the fog in the midst and rolling off the waves
into the night no more fright no more fright off I roll with the dragon tonight
tumbling into the night swiftly with such ease nothing matters when
the waters come to me....
LABOR
Kathy Kirkland

One night,
about ten months after his death –
a gestation not much longer than
the one that
produced her first
born child,
(now grown) –
One night,
as she sat alone in a chair
that used to be his,
it became clear that she needed,
urgently,
to write –
just as she had needed
(years before)
to push.

What moved within her this time?
No grainy ultrasound image or
chromosomal tic tac toe
foretold what
this labor would
bear.
Nourished by grief,
the story shuddered and stretched
within taut confines,
breathing tears, then
bearing down
down
insisting, contracting, dilating, effacing,
pushing its way out,
with a cry, a long
wail of freedom.
REMAINS
Kathy Kirkland

What remains of you
is falling,
falling
in bits of bone
like broken shells
to litter the soft
silty bottom, to lie
unmoved
by the clear, cold water that
passes over.

What remains of me
is rising,
rising
hurt but unbroken
as if through cold
clear water, still
submerged, but
swimming up, toward the light,
toward the promise
of air, of sky.
Open Seas
Acrylic by Alan Shulman

Rhapsody in Blue
Acrylic by Alan Shulman
Good friends of mine were sailors for much of their mid-adult years and would often tell stories of their adventures on the ocean – the wind, the waves, the weather, the wildlife encountered. These experiences were foreign to me, yet over time and influenced by these tales, the image of Open Seas came to me; my non-literal attempt to capture the feeling of being on ship in a world of seemingly endless ocean and sky. There is a mystery in this world I wanted to capture.

Rhapsody in Blue (not related to Gershwin’s famous music) is an attempt to embody some of the feelings evoked through a piece of music by Virgil Thompson called Louisiana Story. That music was composed for a movie I saw as a young boy. It depicts the changes that come to quiet and rural Louisiana when oil rigs begin to appear, and the effect of those developments on another boy who paddles through the shadowed bayous observing plant and animal life he loves.

I paint to depict the feelings that are important to me, whether I have actually lived the formative experiences that give rise to them, or have become aware of them through other sources. A painting’s colors and composition help me recreate the feelings I want to keep and convey.
IMPORTANT, MEET ESSENTIAL
Marv Klassen-Landis

Important wears a suit;
Essential wears a smile.

Important builds pyramids;
Essential plays with stones.

Important watches the watchers;
Essential sees.

Important directs traffic;
Essential finds a path.

Important sounds alarms;
Essential points the way.

Important plans tomorrow;
Essential lives today.
RELEASE
Marv Klassen-Landis

“Release one leaf at break of day;
At noon release another leaf” – Robert Frost

We can’t hold back the planet’s
swing away from the sun;
We can’t hold back the leaves turning
by the fistful, the treeful, whole
forests flaming into festivities
of shouting color. We can’t hold
back the frosts, the flying leaves, the bluebirds
heading home. We can’t hold back time,
but we can soak it in.

NOTICING
Marv Klassen-Landis

I notice where the sun is, especially when I am lost or nearly so.
I notice movements and shapes and quality of light
    and the smell of approaching rain.
I notice the smell of almost done, no matter what is baking
    or who is in charge.
I notice even the smallest flinch, a quick intake of breath,
    a tightening at the corner of the eye.
I notice angles and ricochets and possible cascading consequences.
I notice the difference between the silence of contentment
    and all the other kinds.
ANOTHER ODE TO AUGUST
Amelia Lincoln

I do my best to relish every bit of August. Some years ago I spent its entirety ten floors up in a city hospital. I was unable to see green grass or to see my husband’s face without a mask. Unable to breathe fresh air, unable to eat fresh fruits or vegetables, unable to do so much. I was able to breathe though, and I was able to hope and to dream for a future. I was able to put one foot in front of the other, at least some of the time, and I was able to endure.

So now when the eighth month of the year rolls around I breathe the fresh air especially deeply. I listen to the song of the crickets, the soundtrack to August in Vermont, like it is a symphony. I eat fresh berries and produce from my garden, giving the cucumbers only a cursory wipe on my t-shirt before savoring them as I pull weeds, thrusting a bare hand in the rich soil while I munch. I mow the lawn and I pet the animals without washing my hands. I let the cat nuzzle my face and I walk with the dog feeling so grateful I am not attached to an iv pole. This month I’ll swim and I’ll eat soft-serve and I’ll drink beer which were among so many things I was forbidden to do for ages.

I am still able to hope and to dream for the future and some days it seems I am only able to put one foot in front of the other. Some days I still must endure and endeavor to persevere, but mostly I try to relish and to savor and to breathe in the month of August.
Enjoying the reception
Telling Our Stories 2018
Enduring multiple cancers, my husband and I both continued like these dried hydrangeas, standing tall and firm in their vase.

To us, this vase signifies our ever-present preciousness of God’s spiritual grounding.

Like us, these dried flowers have lost some petals. But, our relationship with God has remained strong.
DON’T FEEL SAD
Darrell Mallory

Don’t feel sad and don’t pity me.
This is the way life goes, don’t you see?

When we started, nothing was for sure.
Riding this coaster while looking for cure.

Following blind, each step leaving me vexed
Trusting, wondering, fearing, what the heck come next!

Frustrating, maddening, driving me nuts
Not wanted to give in to the feeling in my gut

All in all I think I’ve done OK
Chuckling and laughing along the way

I’ve played the hero and been the fool
But I always lived my life by my own rule.

So, don’t feel sad and please don’t cry!
It’s just the way life goes, that’s why!
SHELTERING
Margo Marrone

Illness or injury is disorienting. It is like free falling through an unfamiliar void where nothing seems normal. You want to become grounded – to see clearly, but it is impossible. Then ever so slowly, compassionate faces begin to appear. Loving hands tenderly reach out to you. Soft whispers of encouragement float around you. The distress might not lessen, but you are not alone on this journey. Somehow, there is shelter even in the turmoil. That is what we can be for one another.

WHAT IS NEEDED
Margo Marrone

Broken body, broken spirit – please mend both. Even in the midst of pain, peace can be found – let it be so. Little inconveniences melt away – falling from my fingertips like the unnecessary irritants that they are. What is truly important is relationships. Feeling the Creator’s love and the embraces of those placed along my way. Even as my body decreases, my heart expands.
GEMS
Margo Marrone

Rainbow droplets sparkling in the trees
Changing colors with the gentle breeze
Reminders of blessings sometimes unseen

Life is a journey with ups and downs
A choice to take them with smiles or frowns
Patience is a virtue that knows no bounds

We look ahead, then make our plans
Time in the hourglass shifts its own sands
It’s not within our power who falls or stands

Rich in love our relationships should be
Negating judgment will truly help us see
Others on our path are not “them,” but “we”

For in this world we all have our place
Helping one another’s hardships to face
Extending compassion and ever-present grace
HOW HIDE AND SEEK CHANGED MY LIFE
Tom Metzler

I have always loved playing games. Any kind of games: board games, sports games, tag, games that I made up – it didn’t matter. So, I guess it was only appropriate when three years ago Cancer found me while I was playing hide-and-seek. I knew he was out there looking for me, but there were so many others he could have chosen, and I had hidden so well....

I thought my game was over. I was afraid and wondered what would happen next. So I went to the Game Master for some answers. After many tests, evaluations, and consultations, she told me that I had two choices. I could give up and quit the game forever, or I could continue, but with the realization that it would be short and with the likelihood of playing with suffering and pain. I was angry and upset! What was the point of going forward under those ridiculous conditions? She replied, “You may be surprised. There could be much to learn about yourself in a short period of time!”

So, as silly as it seemed at first, I decided to keep forging ahead. The Game Master had said I could learn things about myself by not playing to win nor being concerned about setting goals or worrying about outcomes – rather, to enjoy each day and simply observe what the game had to offer. And learn I did! I have learned many things over the three years since Cancer discovered me, but the three that stand out are: I had not taken time to appreciate each and every day. Also, I began to realize how lucky I am that I could still make a difference in the lives of others less fortunate. I got over feeling sorry for myself, and noticed there were many people who were much worse off than I. Finally, I discovered that during my entire life I had been afraid to do certain things or take chances for fear of failure or worry about what others would think.

So I began to change. I began each day with a meditation of gratitude that I had simply, but miraculously been given another day. I volunteered at the Council on Aging and helped with meal preparations and drove seniors to their doctors’ appointments. Also, I no longer worried about what people thought of me. I changed my appearance and transformed from a conservative-looking senior to one sporting earrings, decorating my body with tattoos, styling my hair in a Mohawk, and coloring it green, purple, blue or red whenever the mood struck me. Also, if cancer ever takes all my hair,
I look forward to adorning my bare scalp with a huge butterfly tattoo! That way, when I look in the mirror, I will be reminded not to take myself or life too seriously!

In short, I had learned what I had been oblivious to my entire life and which ironically, it took Cancer to teach me and make me become fully alive. I learned that life is filled with beauty and so many small, daily miracles that I used to overlook. I began to realize life is too short not to be kind, caring, and loving. Also, it’s way too short not to discover your inner self – to be daring and not to worry what others think.

These things that I have been taught have enriched my life much more than I could have ever imagined. I know that everyone must find their own path on their own unique Cancer Journey. It is my sincere wish to all those battling cancer or any other diseases, illnesses, or personal struggles that you may find peace along the way.

A very special thank you to my wife Anne, my sons Jeff and Mike, my daughter-in-law Sara, and my grandson Noah, all who make it a pleasure to keep playing the game.

Tom Metzler
Telling Our Stories 2018
ROLODEXING SPIRIT
Lindsay McClure Miller

On the morning my father passed it was a beautiful day. I awoke to the singing birds and the stillness of the large surrounding pine trees.

He had been in coma for three days. He lay on his side, eyes closed with a soft groggy snore. During those three long days his spirit was what I call rolodexing. He was spiritually visiting people he had met and played with in his action-packed lifetime. You could see the rolodexing process on his face. I knew him well enough to know his extroverted self was greeting people.

His eyelids flickered and sporadically a sweet, small smile would come over his face.

Many family members recounted during those days that they felt his spirit in their presence. Cousin John and Jody lived on a boat and said his spirit sat up on their mast and sailed with them – stirring up the wind and fun.

My father had extraordinarily lived twelve years longer than his oncology doctors anticipated. He was diagnosed with colon cancer when I was sixteen, and every year they made it sound like it would be his last. At Mass General, his doctors called him the Bionic Man because he kept living!

My dad explained he lived through the power of love. He said he spent much of his "sick" time loving life, loving other people and loving himself. The more he loved, the longer he lived.

When it was his time to go, he allowed it. He leaned into the process. He was ready. I had to get ready.

Thankfully, trees helped me get ready, and they supported me when it felt like no one else could.

On the morning before he passed away, I was awakened by the singing birds and the trees called to me.
I went outside behind my childhood house; it was 5:30 a.m. I somehow knowingly greeted every tree with a hug, a climb and a sit. The faraway trees – I beamed an extended energetic arm hug to them, thanking each of them.

They had stood tall, strong through it all. They supported our family by creating a circular energetic container around our home and land. The trees witnessed the years of my father's terminal sentence, yet our family’s reality of him living longer. They became my friends in the unknown unpredictability.

The tall pines and other climbing trees filled me with peace on the morning he died. My father's rolodexing spirit was with me and the trees that morning. I told him it was ok to leave. His time on Earth had had a tremendous impact and we would be ok here without him.

At 8:30 a.m., back inside, I was listening to his slowed breaths while holding his hand. A beaded prayer pendant I had made was in between our hands.

There was a long slow breath, followed by a pause. Then a small shallow breath, and a long pause that became stillness. I let go of his hand and watched the essence of him, his capacity to love, leave his body. His body quickly became a shell. You could feel his energy was no longer in his body. You could see it near the ceiling, swirling.

He had taken his last breath, and his heart beats stopped.

A beautiful realization overcame me – all the love he had shared was still alive within us. That did not disappear.

I am amazed by life. Humbled really. Our heart beats all day every day, until it doesn't. We breathe in oxygen to feed every cell in our body, then we expel carbon dioxide, part of the waste formed in our body.

I’m comforted by the full circle connection that our expelled carbon dioxide is food for the trees. The trees. The trees who stood tall, strong through it all.
AIM IT HIGH
Dan O’Neil

When I was young…. looking back at all I’ve done.
I’ve consumed a lot of time, searching for the sun.
I have been waiting, for confirmation, for something to appear.
Anticipating, still waiting, for something to draw near.
I’m gonna aim it high. Reach out and touch the sky.
Aim it high. Let my flags fly.
Aim it high. Won’t let this world pass me by.

When I was a working man, I did everything I could.
The best I could, with what I had.
That’s the way with life. It comes and goes.
Take the best out of everything. Everything that you know.
And aim it high. Reach out and touch the sky.
Aim it high. Let your flags fly.
Aim it high. Don’t let this world pass you by.
Aim it high. Don’t ever let go.

Dan O’Neil
Telling Our Stories 2018
I am a native Vermonter, wife, mother and creative soul. I don’t think of myself as an artist, but as a crafter. I have always been a creative person in various aspects of my life. I enjoy photography, various forms of card making, crocheting and now painting. I find taking the time to have a creative outlet lets my mind clear of daily stresses. Working full time, raising a family and being the spouse of a three-time cancer survivor can be stressful. When I focus on my artistic endeavors, it gives me a sense of peace and accomplishment.
MUFFIN TELLS A STORY
Rory Panza

I am running in a meadow
with a forest far away.
It’s a sunny, pleasantly
warm and beautiful day.

I look up to my right
and see a bunny in the clouds.
Straight ahead is a hunter;
His dogs are barking – loud.

The bunny in the clouds
pays no attention.
He just sits there,
then slowly fades away.

UNIQUE PAINTING
Rory Panza

I am a watercolor painting
of a sunset over a California mountain
that goes down to a beach.
The water is very still.
Fading into darkness,
the sky is full of oranges, yellows and purples.
I am unique in my own way.
A HAWK’S LIFE
Rory Panza

I am a hawk on a nest
on the top of a tall pine tree
in a Vermont forest
beside a lake,
with high mountains
behind it.
I’m looking for food
and watching for danger.
I live alone; my babies have grown up
and flown away.

WAITING NUGGET
Rory Panza

I am a pretty good-sized gold nugget
buried in the mud on the bottom
of a medium-sized fast creek
in the mountains of Colorado.
I’m thinking, who is going to find me?
Will they find me? Or will I sit here
forever? They probably will find me.
Moving out of the darkness of several cancers, the road my husband and I walked took a sharp turn. We had been traveling toward a brighter future, led by God’s ever-present presence and light, when the road before us suddenly took that turn to an unknown destination.

We chose to remain constant in our relationship with God, for His comfort and guidance, and be grateful for the wisdom and care here at DHMC.
MEMORIES FROM THE WOODS
Robert Walter Paton

You learn something new all the time in the woods. Sometimes you don’t. I had a friend who had a tree come down on him and broke two bones in his back. Couple of weeks ago.

I had a tree come down on my back once, but I had a lot of snow to go in so it didn’t hurt so bad. I was on crutches at the time. There was a tree leaning on the one I was cutting. I told the young kid, “Let me cut it. I have more experience.” But I couldn’t run away fast enough. I’ve thought a lot about that kid and the whole family. His father died at forty-seven and left nine kids.

I used to climb up to about the top section of a tree, taking the small limbs off as I went but leaving the big limbs to hold against the other trees to keep it from rolling or coming down fast. Then I would cut that top section and turn off my chainsaw and climb on. Then I’d ride it down slow to the ground. An old guy told me how to do it. He said to be sure not to cut just one side because that could roll it and it could land on you. I’ve worked in the woods all my life. I cut some of my fingers off when I was seventeen. It was hard to get work. I love working in the woods. Seen all kind of animals. I read in the paper once about a Vermont guy who trained a moose to skid logs. The moose had his own stall in the barn. This was in Washington, Vermont.
HOW I KEEP MYSELF TOGETHER, PART ONE
Fred Pelka

I found myself trapped in hope,
flung about between its many rubber walls.
I’m so easily distracted.
There should be an award for that,
a regal ceremony with massed trumpets,
and me bowing my head to receive a ribbon
à la the Tin Man in the Wizard of Oz.
Truth is I can feel my heart ticking
even as my face turns into a silver trowel.
There’s hope in that – in the ticking I mean,
but couldn’t it also be an IED,
and where’s the bomb squad when you need it?
If you’ve ever been rusted in place
you’ll know what I mean,
how you strain to listen as your heart careens
from this spark to that missed connection.
You have to know what you’re doing,
to watch how things modulate
between one tick and the next.
Open the door and see what matters.
Pick up your axe and find your own oil can,
then dance until your joints no longer squeak.
IN WHICH LOVERS IMAGINE THEMSELVES TO BE THE GHOSTS OF TWO WILLOW TREES THAT USED TO LIVE IN OUR BACK YARD
Fred Pelka

The First:
Our crowns were preeminent in their majesty,
our roots flossy tendrils swirling into bedrock
below streams that seep their way
down the tap-rock mountain.
How greedy we were then,
sucking nutrients from soil,
our leaves a million fingertips sampling moisture,
our branches home to vagabond birds and
rapacious squirrels, all of them
now in need of shelter.

The Second:
We might have been twin monks,
the years like leaves passing between us,
around which the wind brushed its hollow palm.
But then came axes and chainsaws,
pain and noise too gross to be considered.

Both Together:
And the clouds expanding now to meet
our thousand spectral eyes

as the moon peeks through a door
which roving clouds then slide shut.
IT IS NOT ME
Ray Perkins

The doctor said it is cancer, but it is not me.
They said surgery was needed, but it is not me.
New diagnosis, cancer has spread, but it is not me.
Chemotherapy prescribed, but it is not me.
Many appointments in Hanover for infusions, but it is not me.
Late nights and much pain, but it is not me.
Remission is here, but side effects remain, but it is not me.
Courage personified, but it is not me.
It is the courageous one.
It is she.

CANCER
Ray Perkins

What is cancer? What does it do?
It greatly impacts our lives, me and you
Does it define us, maybe so
But if handled correctly, it can make you grow
You can take it as an interruption to your life
And the reason for significant strife
Or you can use it to broaden your view
And to awaken faith and hope within you
If it finally consumes you and takes your body to the grave
You alone have your soul to save
For you will live on in the hearts and minds
For your struggles and courage will show them the way
That you have found before you pass away
STRENGTH
Ray Perkins

The doctor said, Come in, sit down
We looked at her face, just a hint of a frown
We waited with baited breath
For she was sure to tell us about a possible death
I took her news with a teary eye
While I looked out the window and asked why
Cynthia sat there with a calm and quiet face
Displaying incredible grace
She said to the doctor, Are you sure?
She shuffled on her feet and said, Yes, there's no cure
Cynthia looked at me and said it's time we left
Five years in and she still has fight,
so strong, and still no sign of flight
We go on and live our life, not making any room for strife
It's coming and we know it is there,
but she still has much love and caring to share

Rest is coming, but it will have to take its turn,
for she has living to do
And there are autumn leaves to rake and chores to do,
for it's just an interruption
For according to her, she is still under construction
“There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature - the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after winter.” - Rachel Carson, The Sense of Wonder

Being in nature has a healing effect on us. Witnessing a beautiful sunrise, seeing the brilliant autumn reds on a hillside, and listening to the rhythm of breaking waves or the honking of geese in flight can transport us emotionally to a quieter, more appreciative place. It awakens our senses and has a positive impact on our health and happiness. Given our hectic, often stressful lives and the competing distractions and demands of technology, it is even more essential that we connect with our natural surroundings. My art reflects my appreciation for nature. Through my paintings, I try to capture a feeling of calm and a sense of wonder for the beauty around us.

The Upper Valley, with its river valleys, rolling hills and farmland, offers many inspirational vistas. I am particularly drawn to architecture in nature, serpentine waterways, local flora and fauna, and the daily scenes of barnyards and meadows. I use a variety of mediums: watercolors, oils, and pastels. I also enjoy plein air painting and the challenges of capturing constantly changing light, seeing color and dealing with the elements.

I have been influenced by many artists, most notably, my mother, Nancy Stewart Deming, who grew up in Hanover, NH. She captured the beauty of this area and the Maine coast in her many oil and watercolor paintings. Other inspirational artists include Paul Cezanne, John Singer Sargent, Winslow Homer, Willard Metcalf, and Richard Schmid.

I have been a special educator at Hartford High School since 1995. In my free time, I volunteer at the DHMC Cancer Center with the Arts Program, and I am an alpine coach for Special Olympics.

In 2010, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. Getting a closer glimpse of my own mortality made me reflect on what I had and what I needed to do to recover. I am deeply grateful for my family and friends and their support and positive energy. I am also appreciative of the natural beauty around me and the healing effect it had on me. Trying to capture this beauty in art brought a calmness that I did not feel very often during that period. Painting became a very mindful activity and a way for me to focus on something optimistic and reassuring. I hope more people can experience art, as it lifts spirits, quiets minds and inspires.
Winter on Broad Brook
Oil by Kit Farnsworth
FORGET ME NOT
Judith Reidel

I have been inspired by a lot of Vermont people, artists and laymen. My sister was a nurse with a lot of dedication. At the age of fifty-one she had a massive heart attack. She was sent down to Alabama and got a rebuilt heart which gave her four years until she got a heart transplant at Columbia Presbyterian. When she went into hospice, I went to visit her. I told my nephew, “I’m going to buy you forget-me-not flowers, and you can plant them in your garden and watch them grow.” Every spring they come up and they multiply.

As an artist, ever since I was a kid, I always have my head in the clouds and I’m always looking up in the clouds. I may see something I’ll use in a painting. If not I’ll use it in something. Nothing wasted. There’s a lot of power up there.

My art is spontaneous, honest and real. Nothing candy coated.
CANCER SUCKS
Pam Richardson

Cancer sucks!
That’s all I got.…
Except for my Harley
and I got a new puppy.

That’s all I got.
It’s very humbling – the people that come through for me,
and I got a new puppy
and all my loving family and friends.

It’s very humbling – the people that come through for me.
I have my Harley
and all my loving family and friends.
But cancer still sucks!
WHAT THE LIVING DO
Kathleen Skinner Shulman

Drift between sleep and awake
Listen for the boil of water, soon to be coffee
Cradle rough pottery filled with summer memories
The living forget they are alive
Step into their own minds
Walk around pulling open memory drawers
Hovering between now and maybe what’s next
Rain and damp tickle joints to remind us time has passed

LETTING GO
Kathleen Skinner Shulman

Fear is heavy
with tentacles stabbing into my gut
I worry about those I love
I worry about those I meet
I worry just because it seems the responsible thing to do
A web of protection to keep harm away
What if the fast white car weaving between lanes loses control?
What if the weekend is spent undoing the week?
What if none of it matters?
What if my existence is erased?

I will pick up my pen and write
I will listen to Symphony No. 9 in E minor
I will fold clean laundry still warm from the drier
I will have a picnic on the porch with hand painted napkins

Love is weightless
as soap bubbles on the wind
AN EVENING PRAYER
Kathleen Skinner Shulman

Our lives may not belong to us
May you be peaceful

Shaped by forces we don’t know
May you have purpose

How little is in our power
May you give freely

How much we forget to appreciate
May you find joy

Smell of Spring gurgling to life
May you accept love

Pink skies skitter to dusk
May you feel kindness in your heart
TO THE GIRLS AT ONE WEST
Harold Tardiff

I am doing better.
I feel great – and grateful
for progressing from my cancer
and the side effects that came with it.

I feel great and grateful
for the all nurses who walked laps with me.
The side effects that came with it
were rough – tough on me.

All the nurses who walked laps with me –
They said they would get me through and they did.
The side effects were rough – tough on me.
The nurses gave me positive energy.

They said they would get me through and they did.
I am progressing through my cancer!
The nurses gave me positive energy.
I am doing better.
Telling Our Stories 2018
Telling Our Stories 2018
TWO STORIES
Dennis Vadnais

Once when I was salmon fishing on the Salmon River in Pulaski, New York, I saw a big rock that looked like a human skull. I stood it up and on the other side was the face of Christ. I had to have it. I’m a stone freak. It was heavy and I was probably a mile from the car. The other guys thought I was nuts. They were dragging salmon back and I was hauling a rock. Every couple hundred feet I would throw it down and tell myself I was nuts. But I’d look down and one of the faces would be looking at me, and I’d pick it back up again. I called it Stoney Two Face and I made a lamp out of it. After the house fire nothing was left of the rock but a pile of sand.

One time at my buddy’s house we were running a backhoe. It was drizzling out. A rainbow came out and landed right next to us. I said, “We’re digging a hole. We might as well dig right there.” We didn’t come up with anything. I said, “Maybe the gold is on the other end. Story of my life.” We went back to digging the waterline.
Handmade Walking Sticks
by Dennis Vadnais
Dennis had relied on a walking stick for many years. At first, he would find a broken branch to help with stability while hiking through the forest. Often, the stick would find its way home with him. As time passed, such sticks provided extra strength as well as some pain relief, becoming almost constant companions.

Dennis, or "D", had long been a whittler of wood and a carver of bone. Something was always being soaked, stripped, sanded, filed or drilled. More than one Dremel tool hung off his workbench. Especially fine tools, donated by his dentist, were always at hand. Shark is one example of the wood/bone combo finding new life.

Always alert to an interesting piece of wood, Dennis, while visiting Alaska, came upon a stand of Sitka spruce that had been denuded by porcupines. "What's in this bag?" they asked at the airport. "Oh, just sticks and stones," he answered. The future, whimsical Bird completed its flight without further questioning.

Not all sticks were started from scratch. Some just took on new life by the addition of odds and ends from almost anywhere. D had a fascination with skulls decades before they became trendy. At times, he added his signature red bandanna. Pimp Stick found his name with the donning of his furry frock. Yes, that is ermine. The weasel was allowed to live in our wood room for quite some time until he started growling and hissing at us whenever we were gathering fuel for our wood stoves.

Without a doubt, each stick has its own personality. Picture Broken Jaw at a rock concert, raised just above everyone’s head. He would pivot around from time to time facing the stage, but occasionally turning to stare at nearby audience participants.

These sticks, along with many others, could be found scattered around our house, but mostly clustered near the front door. When heading out, Dennis would pause and ask, "OK, who's goin'?"

About Fist: Sometimes we all could use a little extra strength...or just to get a grip.

Nancy Vadnais
MR. SOUTHWICK – MONOMOSCOY ISLAND 1958
Deb Williams

Mr. Southwick was an odd man,
At least that is what my parents said.
Perhaps because he played the recorder,
Perhaps because he was a city banker,
Perhaps because he was just a bit “Bohemian.”
But to the Island children,
He was just an old man who played music.

Warm summer nights,
Small groups of sunbrown kids,
Would wander barefoot,
Up and down the only sand road.
We often found him playing his tunes,
Sitting on a rail fence.
The sun setting over the salt marsh,
Behind his camp,
While Mrs. Southwick cleaned fish on the porch,
By kerosene lamp light.

One night we told him that our neighbor,
The old Colonel, could not walk anymore,
A wheelchair was now his world.
Mr. Southwick was quiet as he thought.
“He can live in his mind,” he said.
And I, from my child world, thought,
How truly odd he really was.

Sixty summers have come and gone,
Around the old fishing camps,
And I finally have understood the words
Of this remarkable and wise man.
PREPARATION
Deb Williams

They have prepared me to prepare.
Make plans, make amends, write the letters,
Put things in order,
Say I love you often,
Ask forgiveness, give forgiveness,
Give thanks.

But today we sit together.
My daughter from the west coast,
And I,
With so much to be said.
But it all seems far away,
As we watch her little toddler,
My beautiful spirited granddaughter,
Playing, running, laughing.

Two mothers,
Sit and watch together,
With simple shared joy.

HOPE LIKE A BLUE SKY
Deb Williams

Hope, like a blue sky,
After the dark storm,
Fills my soul,
With joy.

Hope, like a decision made,
After the long struggle,
Fills my soul,
With peace.
WRITING WORDS ON A BLANK PAGE
Deb Williams

Writing words on a blank page,
Listening to rain on the roof,
The comfort of wood smoke from the fire.
Writing words on a blank page,
Feeling satisfaction of pencil in hand,
The easy feel of leaves turning gold,
Starting a journey from so high.
Writing words on a blank page,
Releasing my soul to paper.

TIMEKEEPER
Deb Williams

Child Days,
Free from time.
What to do today,
Dream, run, play.
Child Days,
Free from time.
Sun, shadows, streams,
Apple Trees to climb.
Child Days,
Free from time.
Child Days gone,
Aged Days arrived.
Free from time.
What to do today?
Sweet Days without the worry,
of time passing by.
MY WISH
Liane Lambert Wind

Just another prick, reminding me I’m very sick.
Purple tonic coursing through my veins does the trick.
Worth its weight in gold, remission has its price
on broken hearts anxious for a lucky roll of the dice.

My journal warms to life’s desires, soothing laughs, love.
It seeks redemption, cures and answers from above.
It cries of hunger, pain and a haunting in my soul.
I stoke the fire with visions of dancing when I’m old.

Prayers, strength and hope fill my heart each day
from friends and family helping me be brave.
The search for understanding emanating from my bones.
So many lives, their stories, reveal I’m not alone.

Let heaven wait, to be born again is worth the risk.
Unfinished plans and goals are on my bucket list.
A kiss, a fragrance, little things I would miss.
The rain, a rainbow, a pot of gold, a life of bliss....
August Sunset
Acrylic by Betsey Peale

August Sunset is inspired by a photo I took from our backyard of a magnificent sunset.

2017 was a very difficult year for my husband and me. He had been in ill health and was recovering from a hip replacement when “mother nature” decided to visit our community with a heavy downpour on July 1.

We lost access to our property for three months and twenty days.

Our neighbor created a path through his field so that we could reach our access road by car or truck, but by the end of August, we were in despair, wondering when our long driveway and bridge would be repaired.

This particular evening, glancing out the window and seeing this sunset with the brilliant red, orange and yellow rising above the darkness of the foreground, signified a peace within us that all would turn out well in the end (which it did).
Peaceful Journey is inspired by a calendar picture.

What a difference a year makes!

2018 – Art is back to full health. Our property is in good shape, too. We have been able to accomplish further clean up and household repairs. We have enjoyed short trips and group activities, and look forward to more in the months ahead, as the painting title implies.
DANCIN WITH THE DEMONS
Michael Zerphy

Dancin with the Demons
they spin you round n round
they’ll flip you and trick you
and say that up is down

Just like a deadly whirlpool
when they have you in their grasp
there ain’t no letting go
they mean to pull you under fast

They’ll grab you by surprise
it seems as if by chance
but for them it’s deep design
to drown you in their dance

They like to start off slow
kinda dreamy in a daze
then speed up their hypnotic rhythm
till your eyes begin to glaze

I’ll tell you what I did
when I was filled with fright
as one pulled me on the dance floor…
but I survived the night

I stared him straight dead on
sayin, You want to dance around?
I’ve studied all your moves
you ain’t foolin this old clown!
You think you’re leadin me?
I been dancing quite a while
look deep into MY eyes
and try to match MY smile

We’ll do your little jig
but MY heart sets the pace
I’m dancing you right back
into the human race

We’ll dance the night away
by morning we’ll be friends
then sit down at my table
and there we’ll make amends

Come On! Dance with ME!
My heart sets the pace
We’ll dance right through the darkness
and make a human of that face

Dancin with the demons
they spin you round n round
just like a deadly whirlpool
they want to take you down

Stare em straight dead on
keep steady calm and true
breathe life out into them
life will dance back into you

Breathe life
in ... out ...
to them
it will dance back into you
Tell your story through words...
and images...
SAVE THE DATE!

We hope you will join us next year for our annual Telling Our Stories event on Wednesday, October 16, 2019.

The Creative Arts Program at Norris Cotton Cancer Center and Dartmouth-Hitchcock offers visual art-making, creative writing, storytelling and therapeutic harp music to patients and family members at no charge thanks to the generous donations of individuals and organizations who support arts-based outreach throughout the year.