Sullivan’s Totality
Jackson Gregory | Student, College of Medicine

“A composite of the path of totality during the eclipse on August 21, 2017. The photos were taken on the beach at Station 28.5 on Sullivan’s Island. Cloud coverage made for an interesting experience watching the eclipse and provided a unique challenge in photographing it.”

HUMANITAS | 2018

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I had the opportunity to attend the MUSC-sponsored solar eclipse viewing party this year when the Path of Totality descended upon Charleston. I have to be honest, I wasn’t as pumped or excited as some and I mostly went to avoid future shame (“Grandma, did you see the 2017 total solar eclipse??” “No, darling, I was feeling bloated that day and stayed home to catch up on Netflix.”)

It was a hot, sweaty day sitting out on the lawn behind the Drug Discovery Building with about a hundred other professionally-dressed faculty, staff and students all rocking the same throw-away sunglasses. There was cloud cover, so the viewing party was muted by frequent cumulonimbi running amok. (My parents would later tell me that it poured down rain in Ladson and they missed the whole thing.)

MUSC had hired a DJ who rocked out a themed playlist where every third song was “Total Eclipse of the Heart.” I’m not complaining, I’m just saying (#bonnietyler4ever). The combination of “vintage” canned music, the chatter of a hundred bored grown-folk, and the Master of Ceremonies giving us periodic updates on the “Countdown to Totality” felt like a dry wedding reception where you live in constant fear of getting dragged into The Chicken Dance with Creepy Uncle Chuck.

I’d look up every now and then to see how far the moon had made it and confirm that yes, this thing was happening, albeit slowly and just slightly faster than my nails dry.

But then, the countdown came to a close, the pesky clouds parted, and the shadow of the moon cast a surreal, complete twilight upon our unlikely garden party. I was transported to a time when ancient peoples looked up and watched the sun die, knowing that the Earth must be next. I was encapsulated in a moment so visceral, so completely out-of-time, that I could barely move. A hush fell upon us as the umbra of the shadow passed, like someone walking over your grave. I felt inextricably linked to every single person around me, like we had witnessed something so very strange and wonderful together, that now our paths would be forever linked.

Barely a few moments passed, and the moon continued her march across the sky, returning us to our sweaty afternoon and professional obligations.

These kinds of moments don’t require a celestial syzygy (look it up—you’re welcome). They are tucked away in the corners of the mundane, amidst white coats, scrubs and sterility. MUSC might seem like any other hospital system with its fluorescent lights and fax machines, but within these pages you just might catch a once-in-a-lifetime glimpse into a strange, twilight world, glimmering beneath the surface.

Melissa Koci | Editor-In-Chief
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I’M TO BLAME

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there's so much I cannot know
like the word for
two-fingered trees twisting
in Pomegranate gardens,
thumbing out back
where the poor sleep, red footed.
thigh against thigh

or how the birds here, mouth yawns
fit morning loosely like silk sleeves.
how light folds them into infinity
with all the colors
chloroform can make

All I know is the ease
he opens the porch door at night
his ‘fro kissing the framework and
the feeling of my chest twisting
as tight as buds not blossoms
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SELFIE

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College of Graduate Studies
TIDAL THOUGHT
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Bill Basco
Faculty, College of Medicine
a twist
then a crack
of the Spine
Stuck in an
uncomfortable position
bent over backwards and
I can’t move
a rib
juts out
pokes
a Split
breaks
the Skin
a Spine
misaligned
growing Sideways
and out
and around
twisted and convoluted
and unable to Stop
My body
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Reflective Poem on *The Diving Bell & The Butterfly* by Jean-Dominique Bauby

It’s hard to accept
The relative weightlessness of happiness;
The illusion of light hearted content.
It’s hard to be happy
When the best part of your day
Is spent disobeying nature
And staring in to your own eyes.
Eve & Adam were not satisfied
With dominion over all of earth
Nor every living thing that moved upon it.
How could you be?

What is control or power without sovereignty over yourself?
The sin that you see in your reflection;
In all its historic glory,
Is nothing but a shadow
Cast by the leaves
That stem from the roots of knowledge.
Did the Serpent corrupt the simplicity that is in Christ?
Or did he remind you of the complexity that is in you?

One day, may you be more inclined
To believe in God’s Deception,
As you should believe in yours.
For it is hurt, not happiness,
That makes a heart grow heavy
Like a pendulum’s mass.
A coming of age
Not a fall from grace
That provides the restoring force
Driving the oscillation
Between purpose and passion
Until they align.

It is knowledge that holds
Both the light and the darkness
In this world.
It is sin that holds the chains
Of the cuffs that bind you.
A consequence of one another –
It is my hands that hold yours.
Life is not meant
To be lived like an apology,
However graceful it may sound.
Keep your shackles in this world,
Seek forgiveness from those you love,
And more importantly from yourself.
Ignorance is not bliss…
Eden was never meant to be home.
BATTLE HYMN OF THE ORTHO NURSE
Valerie Kneece Harris  |  Staff

Sharp syncopated snap
The scream of creaking, crumbling bones
When pray-tell
Did the marred marrow marry
The cancer in her blood?

Marauding morose malignancy
In his thoughts
Lying there
Externally fixated, internally confuscated
His daughter is dead
From that motor vehicle crash on the news
How does he live after this?
Wasn’t it his fault?

Foolish fluctuating fallacy
Of easy days and still nights
Trauma call 3am
She stabbed him
He shot her
shattered splintered spliced
Bones
Always broken
Like their impoverished spirit

Disjointed disarticulated denizens
We the watchers of the ward
Avascular necrosis
Angels of Morpheus
And all his fevered dreams
If we can’t take the pain away
Are we even nurses?

Pontificating the potential plight
Of the scared, the vulnerable, and the damned
Once more into the breach
We move
On and on again
We slog

For we are the ortho nurses
Waging a constant war
Against the
Obstreperous osseous opposition
That permeates all mankind’s bones.
To my well intentioned friends . . .
Yes, I am mixed, black and white.
But please remember I am a human being

Not a collection of beautiful body parts to “oooo” and “ah” over.
I am a human.

Do not tell me how exotic and beautiful I am
It only reminds me I’m different, I’m strange and I don’t belong

Do not discuss the color of my skin or touch my hair,
I am not an exotic piece of furniture or a new species of animal

Do not say mixed children are the most beautiful;
Do not fetishize and objectify us

I am not here so you can learn about other cultures
Not a museum exhibit to be studied and examined

I am not a social statement on race
Not a genetic experiment my parents thought was “really cool” to try,

Questions about my ethnicity, or where I’m REALLY from
Only revive painful memories I’d rather not talk about

Comments about my race, or the color of my skin
Only remind me of a lifetime of mean, cruel and hateful taunts;

Innocent comments meant to be compliments
Are razors that tear at a lifetime of wounds,
Slicing open deep scars that will never heal.
A FAR AWAY PLACE

James Rex  |  Student, College of Medicine
Tonight I moved through a choking fog in old Krakow,
Past the crowds, the clean white lights of the old square,
Aiming instead for the sad and burnished streets of old Kazimierz,

wondering what friendships, what unspoken words,
what betrayals,
must lie in your and my pasts.
I walked along the wall of the old Jewish cemetery,
in an opening I saw weeds bent over in frost,
yielding names hidden close to the ground.
This is when I knew our past stretches before
nights we spent over wine and malt,
into perhaps the sandy overgrown lots next to these walls,
or in a field, in the shade of poplars lining a dirt road,
or against the dark and molded wood of slouched A frames
nested together along the high banks of the Poltava.
In this district churches and synagogues share walls,
and I walk along their crumbling brick, with white stone
caked at the base like salt crusting from deep wounds.
In front of cafes and Ariel and Esther
high heels march and click through the snow,
they move to the damp warmth of wine bars,
and I to quiet corners, where asphalt shines quietly and
cleanly in the cold.

I wonder whether it was here, in 1939, when this temple
was bombed,
or earlier, in entryways musty with dusty stone,
where in July pigeons coo and gobble like in old Jerusalem,
that we knew each other.
I have walked these streets hundreds of times,
and yet I do not know which way the river is,
and which way my mother’s church.
I carry memories that are not even mine,
I do not want to uncover them, or know them too well,
only to know that on some nights,
as finely stockinged calves huddle in jazz bars,
and tourists eat to thick klezmer,
they are here,
hidden under uneven cobbles, in the tallow light,
where promises were made, or broken,
and other lives imagined,
that you and I now live.
The elevator doors parted, and I was greeted by a deflated “Get Well Soon” balloon hovering over the trashcan in the corner. If only, I thought, and made my way into the oncology ward. I walked by the nurses’ station, put on my cheerful face, and knocked on Jen’s door. Her husband Jay let me inside. There was a dedicated crew of Jen’s buddies making sure she never spent a single minute alone while she was in the hospital; that Saturday it was my turn.

Jen had been in the hospital for about a week. We knew a year and half ago when she was diagnosed that this time would come. That the cancer would spread, and that she would die. For weeks before she had entered the hospital she had been enduring unfathomable pain so she could participate in those precious daily activities like driving carpool, picking up extra school supplies, and watching her daughter Maddy tear it up on the soccer field. All that week my hope had been that Jen would get better enough to get discharged, and that she would die. But here we were on game day, and she was still in the hospital. And at this point we knew chemotherapy was not working, and that she was going to go into hospice. So I was more than a little surprised when I put down my bag, and Jay said, “Ladies, I have a proposition for you.”

“I bet you do,” Jen said, wryly.
“No, really. I’m thinking of a....jailbreak. Let’s go to Jack’s game.”

Jen fired him a look, then said, flatly, “no f-ing way.”

Jen was one tough broad, but she was also a major league rule follower. Always obeyed doctor’s orders. And traffic laws. And laundry instructions. Any instructions. The only person more of a rule follower than her is me (Jen would say I wasn’t quite so good at following traffic laws). Sneaking a patient out of the hospital was not something either of us would ever have even considered. But when she paused, then looked at me with those gorgeous blues and asked, “What do you think?” the proverbial ton of bricks fell on me: she wants this in the worst freaking way. And so did I.

Jay was pacing in the corner by the IV pole, trying to look nonchalant. If only he could get her out of there, he thought, out where their real life was happening maybe her body would automatically shake off this nuisance; being reminded of how very necessary she was would trigger a reaction that could result in a cure. He and my husband Ravi had obviously already discussed a vague sketch of how to get Jen out of the hospital and to the ballpark, and they both had anticipated the critical nature of this particular moment. If I said yes, she’d say yes.
The guys astutely decided to ambush me, not telling me beforehand about their “shenanigans,” as Jen later called this scheme, so as to avoid anything like female practicality getting in the way of an otherwise perfect idea.

I swallowed hard, and said, “Sounds fun. Let’s do it.”

“Really? Can we do this?”

“Sure,” I said. “No big deal.”

A couple of phone calls to certain key figures put the ball in play. I coolly walked back to the nurses’ station. “Would one of you mind disconnecting Mrs. Cronin’s IV from her fluids for a while? We just want to take her outside for a little fresh air. If that’s ok, I mean.” I braced myself for resistance. We were breaking the rules, after all. I met with none.

“Be there in a minute,” her nurse said without even looking up at me.

Maneuvering her out of the bed alone took quite a while and it hurt like hell but she bit her lip and powered through it. She brushed her teeth. She brushed her hair, and laughed about how it was coming out. She even put on eyeliner, as Jay and I stared at her in awe. We eased her into the wheelchair as best we could, and then Jay pushed her slowly to the elevator. Slowly so as not to raise any suspicion, and so as not to exacerbate the excruciating pain in her belly while going over the bumps on the way.

“See you in a few,” I said as we rolled by the nurses’ station. We had strategically timed our escape around shift change. How clever, I thought to myself. There is no doubt in my mind now, however, that those kind and experienced caregivers knew exactly what we were doing.

The perfect accomplice was waiting for us downstairs: Jill pulled up in the getaway car, ready for The Sting. Somehow everyone in the valet car waiting area seemed conveniently to look the other way as we gingerly loaded an obvious inpatient into the car. James Bond had nothing on us.

Jen sat in the front seat, Jay and I in the back. Shut the door, then quiet, then-Freedom. I was worried Jen would be nervous, but she wasn’t.

Ravi had gone ahead of us to the field so the umpires and both teams’ coaches knew we were coming, and they held the game until we arrived. Jill pulled her Highlander right up to the fence, just left of the first base dugout. Best seat in the place. A beautiful spring day
in Atlanta, not a cloud in the sky. Jack ran out of the dugout and up to the car. “Hi, Mommy!” “Hey, Boo,” she said, oblivious to any behind the scenes activity.

Jack’s Giants were the home team. The ump looked around, got the thumbs up from Ravi, leaned forward while he pulled down his facemask, then yelled, “Play ball!”

Jen said, “Hey, look; that’s Jack on the mound. We’ll see how this goes; he’s never pitched before.”

He struck out the first batter. Jen was pleased, but being an experienced coach herself, still saw some opportunities for improvement. He kept throwing strikes, and his defense took care of the next two batters, so Jack got out of the top of the first with no runs scored. Coach Randy put Jack at the top of the lineup that day, ensuring that Jen would get to see him bat no matter how long we stayed. He singled hard past the first baseman.

I had the overwhelming sensation that we were all in a movie. Who wrote this screenplay? Is Ron Howard here? Where’s Tom Hanks? And even though the simultaneous high and heartbreak made my eyes brim with tears, I beat them back reminding myself that there is no crying in baseball. Especially not around Jen.

Jen was calm, and happy, just absorbing the bliss of being outside. Being normal. Jay and I were giddy.

Thank God for Jill, who was steady, keeping her head in the game, keeping up the conversation. I was a little concerned about getting in trouble for our illicit adventure if the word got out, but I just had to share the excitement via surreptitious text with a few of our friends. Meanwhile, they all already knew because Jay had posted about a million pictures on Facebook.

We left in the third inning. We didn’t want to push our luck, and Jen was getting tired. As we pulled onto the street out of the ballpark Jen said, “I don’t know whose idea it was to do this, but I love you all for it.”

Jen went into hospice the next evening, and she died two weeks later. She never left the hospital again. That day at Medlock Park is emblazoned in my memory. I keep watching the movie over and over again in my head; I always hit pause at the part where Jack runs up to the car.
END OF WORKING DAY
Konstantin Voronin | Faculty, College of Medicine
CHARLESTON HOUSES

Glenda Brunette
Staff
164 WINDOWS
William Black | Student, College of Dentistry
LULU'S LEMONS
Lucy Cofran | Staff
FLOWERS

Leslie Cargile
Pharmacy Technician
ALLIGATOR

Emily Hutson | Student, College of Medicine
Bouncing along in the bed of the truck, my spine cringed with every jolt in the hurricane washed-out road. The sun was sinking lower, casting a majestic glow across the mountainous landscape. After a long day in a remote mountain village, it was time to head home to the clinic in Port-au-Prince – back to basecamp. As a young medical student among a team of experienced Haitian and American doctors, I was assigned to the back of the truck. I did not mind though, as it allowed me to take in not only the sights, but also the sounds and the smells, of a country that was so different from my own.

Then the rain came. Water flowed down the mountain like a growing river racing us to the bottom. I huddled against the cab of the truck, which provided little relief, but I was already hot and dirty, so the rain hardly mattered. After decades of deforestation, there are only two kinds of days in Haiti – dusty and muddy. This was quickly becoming a muddy one. I said a prayer that the truck would not slide off the mountain, which was not unheard of on this road.

Finally, we reached the bottom of the mountain – halfway home. Now at least there would be stretches of pavement. We drove for a few minutes before coming to a standstill. Haitian chaos, I thought to myself. When you introduce hurricanes, earthquakes, political unrest, and social turmoil to the poorest country in the western hemisphere, anything can happen at any moment. There is no rhyme or reason to Haitian traffic, but cars were moving in the opposite direction, so I assumed that we too would start moving soon. My nostrils filled with the smell of melting plastic as piles of trash casually burned on the side of the road. Across the street a group of Haitians were playing dominoes on a wooden table, savoring the last bit of daylight. Only a third of the population has electricity, and they mostly live in the wealthy neighborhoods, far away from where we were.

A tap-tap passed by – an open-back pick-up truck that serves as a Haitian taxi and is so named because passengers tap on the side of the truck whenever they want on or off. As the overcrowded tap-tap drove past me in the dusk, it swerved to avoid a hole in the road, and a young woman was thrown off the back. She landed on her side, lying in the wet road just a few feet from where I was. I immediately turned to look for oncoming traffic. An SUV was barreling down the road. My mind started racing. They must see her, I thought. Surely they are about to slow down. They’re not slowing down. Why aren’t they slowing down?! How can they not see her?! I jumped to my feet and threw my arms in the air and yelled. It was too late. I was too late. I watched the next few seconds of time unfold in what felt like hours. The
SUV slammed on the brakes. The tires skidded over the young woman. The SUV screeched to a halt with her body lying between the front and back tires. I heard her shriek. I watched her body convulse and then lie limp.

My fellow passengers were facing forward, enclosed in the security of the cab of the truck. They had seen nothing and heard nothing. I banged on the roof of the cab and then jumped out into the street. The crowd playing dominoes had gotten up, pointing and yelling. Their voices were heated, and I struggled to understand the Creole. I felt a hand on my shoulder. It was Thomas, one of the men from the cab of the truck. “Get in the truck,” he said. “They are going to riot. We have to get out of here.”

Thirty-five years my elder, Thomas had been working in Haiti for decades. He was a mentor and friend to me and first introduced me to Haiti when I was in college. I did not want to get back in the truck. I wanted to do something. I wanted to help the young woman. But I had to trust Thomas’s judgment. Traffic was starting to move forward. Reluctantly, I climbed back into the truck. As we pulled away, I watched one of the dominoes players drag the woman’s body out from under the SUV.

By the time we arrived home to the clinic, darkness had set in. My scrubs were soaked from the rain, and I was covered with mud that had sprayed into the bed of the truck. Thomas must have seen the shell-shocked look on my face. As I walked into the clinic, he grabbed me by the shoulders and looked at me.

“Are you okay?”
“Yes,” I lied.
“It’s Haitian chaos,” he said.
“I know,” I replied and walked away.

I did know. I had been to Haiti six times in the last two years. I had spent every summer, Christmas, and spring break of medical school in Haiti. I knew that chaos was everywhere in Haiti. I also knew that the doctors and nurses at the public hospitals in Port-au-Prince had recently gone on strike to protest the inadequate pay and working conditions provided by the Ministry of Health. If by some miracle the young woman was still alive, there was no ambulance to transport her and no hospital to treat her. She would likely die on the side of the road, alone in her suffering.
I knew Haitian chaos. I knew that death was part of life. But when I crawled into bed that night, I tucked the mosquito net under my mattress, I pulled the sheet over my head, and I wept. I wept for the young woman’s hopes and dreams that she would never fulfill. I wept for her pain. I wept for the people who loved her, who expected her to come home that evening. They would never see her again. I wondered if they would even know what happened to her. I did not know the woman’s name. I did not know how old she was. I did not know where she was from or where she was going. Yet I wept for her. I grieved for her. I lamented the loss of her life.

It was not the first time I had wept for someone I did not know, and it was not the last time. Now, in my clinical years of medical school, I see patients dying on a regular basis. I do not always weep, but I do grieve the loss of my patients’ lives. I grieve the hopes that are crushed and the dreams that vanish in the face of disease and death. I used to wonder if there was something wrong with me. Why did I feel so much pain with the death of people whom I hardly knew and, in some cases, had never even met?

Over time I have come to find meaning in my pain, because my pain is more than grief; it is a deep lament. Lament deals with the harsh reality of loss, disappointment, and death, but it does so in a way that allows me to be deepened, not diminished, by it. Lament does not end in the same place that it begins. Lament begins in the depths of despair, but it rises in hope. It rises through the strength of love.

Lament is embedded in the rhythm of my life, and I hope that it always will be. My lament is a testimony to the worth of that which is lost. It is an expression of the value of human life, even the life of a single person in a foreign country whose name I do not know. I do not want to run away from the pain. I do not want to “get over it.” More than anything, I do not ever want to be numb to the agony of death, because death is not the worst thing. The worst thing is failing to deal with the reality of what is lost, failing to honor the sacredness of life. Life matters, and if I am numb to death, I am numb to life. I embrace lament, and I embrace it redemptively. My lament is a love-song to humanity.
Today I chased away a mourning dove,
That sat down on my outer window sill.
Oh, perhaps, if I had been more still
When I peeked out of the dusty pane,
Or, maybe, if I hadn’t fixed my stare
On his eye, he would have sat longer there.
The fact that he’d lit down at my address
Gave me a sense (almost) that I’d been blessed.
For such a bird is seldom seen ‘round here
Where greens and browns are plainly rare.
But as if to say “You’re wrong, it’s not your grace
That led me to this stopping over place.”
He flew off hastily and left in his wake
a little bit of a heartache.
A SECRET RECIPE
Leah Snipe  |  Student, College of Medicine

Cool, calm, and collected they call me.
Adding to my soup of uncertainty,
a roiling, boiling goulash of
rutabaga regret, garlicky guilt,
dasheen doubt

They say a watched pot never boils
So I must be looking away,
and you’re following my gaze.
Too long and the crock will crack
How can I turn down the heat
So I can take a seat?

One day you’ll feast your eyes.
I put my foot in it for sure and
maybe it’s my mama you’ll wanna slap
But I best put a lid on it
lest you scent my descent
Simmer down now

They say a watched pot never boils
so watch me: calm and cool
Stewing and steaming?
That’s my secret to keep
Mama raised no fool
Let that steep
When we talk amongst our class, it is always with the sense that we are on a speed bump, paused for a moment before the next stretch. Conversations catch us when we are supposed to be looking over for the second or third time or submitting an assignment. Or in later years, when we should be trotting off to find our resident or sitting down to finish the day’s board review questions. No matter the year, we always have something to print.

Conversations are unplanned events wedged into otherwise structured lives. We talk kneeling next to each other’s desks in the library, bumping elbows and knees as we strip off anatomy scrubs, over the sound of pee in the library bathrooms. We sometimes wave to each other from treadmills in the gym, and we always chat while waiting for the microwave in the student lounge. At the free clinic, we talk ravenously in the front office, each of us in a state of waiting for patients or waiting to talk to the doctor. We often collide in the lobby as we stream out of small group sessions. Some of us will collapse into chairs in front of the coffee shop while others of us stand, hover around, declaring that we are in fact leaving to study in just a moment.

We talk about professors and how long the notes are and how bad the audio recordings were that day. We devote a lot of words on our need for more coffee. We compare our patients, attendings, and the number of hours we sleep. We make plans for the weekends and share plans for breaks. We talk a lot about each other. We ask each other incessantly about what do you want to do. Everyone understands that we mean what medical specialty would you like to pursue, but we have not used all those words since we got here.

Time can feel like an accordion continuously compressing. We feel the seconds bumping into each other, as we run home to grab the stethoscope that we forgot, flip through notes walking to the exam, or leave dinner trying not to think about the scarce hours between now and next morning’s rounds.

Some moments stand exempt from that rule of compression. We sit too long on benches under a friendly April sun. We drive each other to community screenings and in the confined spaces of our too-old vehicles, we want to talk about how hard it was to date here. We find the student lounge nearly deserted in between meal times and let each other know about a family member being diagnosed with something we wished would stay in a text book. In early days of the block, disoriented by the small magnitude of what needs to be studied, we walk to lunch and share stories about our grandparents. We run into each other leaving campus close to midnight and talk sincerely about our patients and how they make us feel. In these pauses, as we leaned closer to each other, we felt like we were leaning into mirrors.
THE WAY OUT IS THROUGH
Kenneth Andrews | Staff, OCIO
REFLECTIONS OF HOPE

Billy Ellison  |  Student, College of Medicine
SNOW-COVERED PENINSULA

Billy Ellison
Student, College of Medicine