Foreword

When a project is first getting off the ground, the focus is entirely on the nuts and bolts of creation. It is only as it begins to mature that the gaze can pull back to a more wide-angle view. And so it has been with the Bellevue Literary Review. The initial years were consumed with the intricacies of manuscript processing, journal production, and logistics of public readings in a public hospital. Now that these tangibles have smoothed out, we’re finally able to step back to admire the growth and ponder the upcoming challenges.

Perhaps the most startling revelation is how much time has passed since that initial meeting in the fall of 2000, when the idea of a literary journal in a medical center was first contemplated. The bittersweet reminder of this passage of time is the stepping down of our founding publisher, Dr. Martin Blaser.

After thirteen years at the helm, Marty is moving on to head the new Human Microbiome Program at NYU, exploring the complexities of our inner microbial communities. In his downtime between investigating Helicobacter pylori in his research laboratory and editing the Mandell microbiology textbook, Marty has picked up the pen and begun writing a book on the potent consequences of our changing micro-ecology.

All of us carry an immense debt of gratitude to Marty for helping to bring the Bellevue Literary Review to life. His wisdom and energy will be missed, but we look forward to the upcoming articles and books articulating our relationships with our bacterial brethren.

This issue of the Bellevue Literary Review is subtitled “A Mosaic of Voices” and focuses on how culture intersects with health, illness, and healing. The diversity of manuscript submissions we received was staggering and it was both a delight and a challenge to winnow the pile down to what could fit between these two covers.

One of the most intriguing, and often the most honest, perspectives on culture is the child’s point of view. The seven-year-old narrator of Pria Anand’s story “Commotio Cordis” navigates Carnivale, her first bicycle, monsoon season, and her mother’s deafness with both innocence and incisiveness. In “Sirens,” a story by Joshunda Sanders, middle-schooler Tasha craves rescue from her landlocked culture of family dysfunction and poverty.

Sonia Sarkar describes in her poem “The Rice-Eating Ceremony” how chubby baby fingers were guided to choose a destiny: “Nine months into my life, I am asked to eat on command/These tiny bursts of cylindrical snow that will reappear/Again and again…”

In the essay “Family Portrait, Guam, 1979,” Katherine Lien Chariott matches childhood to present. “You are not that man in those sunglasses…wearing those flared maroon slacks,” she says to her father in the photo. “Instead, you are…the smells, the colors, the emotions that overwhelm me from out of nowhere.”

Sometimes cultures jostle each other, in love and in illness, as happens between a Malay crooner and the Chinese daughter of a Singaporean pub owner in Amanda Lee Koe’s story “Flamingo Valley.” The Indian protagonist of Prasad Bodas’s story, “Mr. Abhyankar Learns to Drop Bombs,” is bewildered by the black moods of his Americanized teenaged son.

Then there are the subcultures within American culture. Bored suburban Coloradans rub elbows in David Milofsky’s story “Passion Parties.” Overly cultured but ultimately unmoored foreign-service families maintain protocol in Susan Land’s story “Diplomacy.” Denizens of the psychiatric emergency room recite their reasons for being there in Jacob L. Freedman’s poem “Intake.”

We hope you enjoy the variety of settings and points-of-view in this special issue of the Bellevue Literary Review. This multicultural literary adventure is a fitting farewell to the peripatetic Marty Blaser, who is equally at home crisscrossing Manhattan on a Citibike as he is trawling the Amazon.

We leave the last word on this topic to poet Hal Sirowitz—a veteran of many BLR readings. “I don’t know how you can sit there and accuse me with a straight face of not being multicultural, mother said. Haven’t I taken you to Chinese restaurants…?”

Danielle Ofri
Editor-in-Chief