

Foreword

This is the fourteenth issue of the *Bellevue Literary Review*. Since the journal's debut in 2001, our submissions have grown exponentially. As the editors begin to read each round of new manuscripts, we always wonder what we will find, if there will be fresh perspectives on our themes. Each time, we have been surprised and delighted by the creative interpretations that come our way.

As the journal has developed, coincidentally, so has the public's interest in literature, medicine, and the importance of empathy in a medical exchange. The Science Section of the *New York Times* regularly publishes articles about the experiences of doctors and patients. Medicine has become increasingly technical, and now many medical schools include humanities in their curriculum. Our view at the *BLR* is that literature enriches our lives. It enhances the practice of medicine, as well as the experience of being a patient or being a friend or family member of one. At some point, all of us will become patients or will have to cope with the illness or death of someone we love. Stories, poems, and essays allow a reader to live a different life, experience unfamiliar situations and perspectives. Literature elevates and clarifies ordinary moments of intimacy, crisis, and change. If and when we face a similar situation, or a family member or patient of ours does, hopefully, we will remember the insights we gained from reading. In this way, literature expands us, makes us more complete as people, and can also bring comfort.

This issue includes the winners of the 2008 *Bellevue Literary Review* Prizes. We are grateful to our judges Rick Moody, Marie Howe, and Richard Selzer, and to the Magliocco, Goldenberg, and Kaplan families for their support of the *BLR* prizes.

We are pleased to offer new perspectives, especially from the point view of ordinary people struggling with their lives. In "Letters to Michiko"—the winner of the Goldenberg Prize for Fiction—Leslie Jamison writes with humor and delicacy about the illness of an estranged father and the surprises which reveal themselves after his death. "Comfortably Numb," by Mary Akers, vividly conveys a hurricane's aftermath and how two wounded people—one by drugs, one by war—manage to connect. A teenage boy confined to a wheelchair is a main character in "The Kid Who Always Won at Checkers," by Robert Keaton Mac Donald. In this story, the sick and the healthy clearly live in separate countries, yet the citizens of these disparate worlds become friends.

Many of the contest winners explore diminishment and death. The winner of the Kaplan Prize for Nonfiction, Merilee D. Karr, writes of illness

in nature and in people. In her beautiful essay, "Plant Life," she wrestles with what constitutes a good death in each.

"Lines Written in the Unit, March," by Brittany Perham, the winner of the Magliocco Prize for Poetry, contains startling images. The poet instructs us to "Think of everything in terms of absence." Amanda Auchter, who received an Honorable Mention, writes of absence, too, in "Nothing But the Shape." In the poem, she floats through rooms, trying to remember: "How is it that I've forgotten/how many years your body has become/white roots, a box of ash?"

"The Road from Cubabi," by E. Dianne Bechtel, was also chosen for an Honorable Mention. This story and "Okahandja Lessons," an essay by Emily Rapp, take us to faraway places and immerse us in the beauties and tragedies that two women face.

There are an unusually large number of stories and essays from children's perspectives. These writings give us a sense of illness, loss, and sexuality through youthful eyes.

The Spring 2008 issue of the *BLR* also includes the debut of our book review section. We will highlight books that deal with *BLR* themes, and that might be overlooked by reviewers in the commercial press. Erika Goldman, editorial director of the Bellevue Literary Press, selected our first book and reviewer.

We are pleased to announce that the Bellevue Literary Press has published *The Best of the Bellevue Literary Review*. This anthology, with a foreword by Sherwin Nuland, gathers together some of the finest poetry and prose from the journal's first six years. The book is accompanied by a study guide for both teaching and reading groups. The guide is available free-of-charge at www.BLReview.org.

We hope you will enjoy our current selections. We hope, too, that this issue of the *BLR* will remind you—whether you are a health care provider, patient, friend, family member, or interested reader—that although our life circumstances are different from one another's, we share similar hopes, fears, and needs for comfort.

Ronna Wineberg
Senior Fiction Editor