

eudaimonia

VOLUME 2 | SUMMER 2026 ISSUE

Wednesday, June 17, 2026



eu • dai • mo • nia

(n.) human flourishing, well-being

table of contents

VOLUME 2 | SUMMER 2026 ISSUE

Title Page (cover art by Thomas Hoag).....	1
Table of Contents.....	3
Letter from the Editors.....	4
“The Hour of Consciousness” by Daria Hoang.....	5
“Life in Flux" by Kirti Veeramachaneni.....	9
“Physical" by Shveta Abraham.....	10
“The Liminal Hour” by Celine Rochon.....	11
“Switchback" by Taylor Wilson.....	13

letter from the editors

Welcome to *Eudaimonia*, a medical humanities journal created to promote critical reflection, creative expression, and healing amongst those who live and work within the world of medicine. Our journal takes its name from the Greek term *eudaimonia*, often translated to "human flourishing" or "living well." Derived from Aristotelian ethics, *eudaimonia* goes beyond fleeting happiness (which it is sometimes mistranslated to mean) or the mere absence of disease; it refers to the pursuit of living a life of purpose and virtue.

This issue, themed "*Transitions*," explores the many personal and physical changes which accompany our patients' lives, as well as our own, as we navigate medicine. In "*The Hour of Consciousness*," we follow a man with ALS as he contends with his rapidly declining health and hopelessness; he arrives, in the story's final moments, at a personal epiphany which reframes his illness—if only for an hour. "*Life in Flux*" reflects on the personal transformations medical trainees undergo as they contend with difficult decisions and conversations, while "*Switchback*" encourages us to enjoy the journey, even during those moments of discomfort.

Finally, moving away from the immediate realm of illness and medicine, "*The Liminal Hour*" recounts a Thanksgiving dinner punctuated by the recent loss of a loved one. The essay explores how death transforms not only the ones left behind, but even the grammar we use to describe those past—a phenomenon which follows us universally, whether we are the patient, physician, neither, or both.

It was a pleasure reading these pieces, and we hope you enjoy them as well.

The Hour of Consciousness

Daria Hoang

*Saint Louis University School of Medicine, Class of 2026
PGY-1, Stanford Neurology*

The leaves were just beginning to change color when Charles went to turn and his left leg refused to follow. He tumbled awkwardly onto the grass and sat for a moment, stunned, before embarrassment flushed his cheeks. A student rushed forward to help him up, but he waved her off nonchalantly.

At dinner that night, he recounted the event to his wife, chalking it off to the strange twist of the path. A wandering mind. Old age. Judy scolded him for being absent-minded. They laughed over wine and forgot about it almost immediately.

But the falls continued. A week after Easter, Charles looked down in the midst of grading papers to find the muscles of his hand twitching, as if they had a mind of their own. He watched in morbid fascination. Caffeine, his coworker said the next morning, could be the problem. So Charles switched to tea—a lovely jasmine his daughter, Marie, had bought him a few months prior, while on a trip to Japan.

Eventually his wife insisted he see a physician. One visit turned into two, then three. There were a string of tests, most of them a blur. Judy kept track of them in a small blue notebook. The only test he remembered clearly was the painful one. They'd been referred to the nearest place that did nerve conduction studies and electromyography, about an hour away. It had started with a series of shocks, followed by painful needle sticks into various muscles throughout his body.

"What are you looking for?" Judy asked cautiously, her blue notebook open to a new page.

The neuromuscular specialist, Dr. Liu, removed the needle from Charles' hand, holding a cotton swab to the puncture site. "Electrical

muscle activity," she explained matter-of-factly. Then, as if to demonstrate, she removed the cotton swab, turned his hand over, and promptly stuck him again, this time in the forearm. The machine began to make a terrible static noise as she poked the needle around. As she watched the monitor, her face was drawn and focused, in an eerie way. She shook her head. Charles closed his eyes after that, trying to will the test to end sooner.

After Dr. Liu was done, perhaps anticipating Judy's barrage of questions, she informed them she was just the person who interpreted the test—that she'd need to sit down and review the data before coming to any conclusions. The final report would be sent to his neurologist within the week.

"Dr. Singh—he's a good doctor. I knew him from residency," she said primly. Then she was gone, replaced by medical assistants who kindly reminded them how to get back to the parking garage. On the walk there, Charles thought Judy might try to cheer him up. But even Judy, the optimist between them, could sense there was something terribly wrong.

And so the diagnosis came a week later, on a bright August afternoon, not long after they'd sent their daughter off to college. His neurologist, Dr. Singh, explained carefully that his nerves were dying—in his spinal cord, motor cortex, and brainstem. Then he started to say the words which Judy had begun throwing around, too, after all her WebMD and PubMed searches. "ALS." "Lou Gehrig." "Motor dysfunction."

Charles couldn't bear to listen as she asked about prognosis and treatments. His head started to hurt. He wondered if his daughter had gone to class by now.

Charles stared at the neurologist's shoes as he began rattling off a short list of medications, things they could do to preserve his current function. 'Delay symptom progression' is how Singh phrased it. Judy jotted the words down in her blue notebook. The words rolled around in Charles' head. *Delay*, he repeated, not *fix*. He wanted to yell. What was the point of writing that down?

The car ride home was quiet. Outside, the light had shifted into something unfamiliar and dreary. He put on some Chopin to fill the silence, but the piece's minor key seemed only to punctuate their sadness. Judy turned it off, and he settled on watching the cars pass by.

x

He continued teaching at the local college. The routine he'd kept for the last twenty years seemed like it might disappear at any time. Sometimes, when he closed his eyes, he imagined a thread burning at one end, picking up speed, on its way to becoming dust. He wondered what was on the other side of it—nothing, everything? If the Buddhists had it right, perhaps he'd reincarnate into the body of a cow, or a chicken.

Or, perhaps he would reincarnate as another human, one where the nerves weren't dying.

This was what preoccupied his mind, at least, the morning he went to lecture on Albert Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus*. It had been one of his favorite readings from college—a study of the Greek king condemned to rolling a rock up a hill every day, only for it to roll back down. Charles set up his powerpoint and waited for the kids to wander in. Some listened; some others disregarded him and surreptitiously pulled out their phones. No matter, he thought, the paycheck was the same whether they listened or not. Charles shook his head, cleared his throat, and turned the class' attention to an excerpt:

"That hour, like a breathing-space which returns as surely as his suffering, that is the hour of consciousness. At each of those moments when he leaves the heights and gradually sinks towards the lair of the gods, he is superior to his fate. He is stronger than his rock."

And then, the famous line:

"One must imagine Sisyphus happy."

As always, there was a student who pushed back. "There's no hope in sight," said a young woman in the front row. "How can we imagine him superior to his fate? Let alone, happy?"

The academic argument, which he used to take great pleasure in explaining, was this: Sisyphus' punishment for outwitting the gods was an endlessly futile physical labor, a constant asphyxiation of the mind. By finding peace in that hour of descent—by willing himself a moment of reprieve—he rebels against the gods. He triumphs against them and the rock.

But the words soured on his tongue now.

His student was appeased; Charles was not. He dismissed the class a few minutes early and stared out the window. On the grass where he had fallen a few months ago, a group of athletes were playing spike-ball, laughing merrily. It dislodged something in Charles' ribcage, a bitterness he had tried to hold back, for Judy's sake. He contemplated Sisyphus rolling his rock—and now, the rock before him. The neurologist had warned him he might lose control of his limbs, his tongue, his capacity to swallow. Breathe. He considered himself proud, and yet as Charles reached into his mind, he could not procure even an ounce of peace or happiness to spite the gods. He scoffed. Camus was wrong. The rock was bigger; it won every time.

x

Marie came home for Thanksgiving break. She talked about some of her classes, some clubs. Charles waited until the morning of her flight back to break the news, trying not to watch the way her face fell. She was young and unable to mask her shock.

"How much time?" she asked.

He didn't know how to respond and eventually said, "Could be a long time, could be a short time."

Across the table, Judy looked at him pointedly.

"Well, maybe not a *long* time," Charles amended, and this time, he couldn't keep his voice from catching.

x

He managed to get through the holidays, hobbling around on a cane, and then a walker, but by February his legs had given out. In one of the pamphlets Judy read to him, it had said a small minority—something like five to ten percent of ALS patients—lived longer than ten years past their diagnosis. So Charles prayed this might be a temporary malfunction, that his nerves would sort themselves out and spur back to life. His body was more resilient than this, he thought, it must be. But to his despair, everything in life moved on except for him. The leaves fell, then grew back again. His legs grew increasingly atrophic. It was insidious, this disease of plateaus and precipitous drops. When one deficit seemed manageable, another would rear its head. His deterioration marched on, relentless.

Eventually, Judy ordered the wheelchair. Marie happened to be home when it arrived; she showed him the various remote features, but her enthusiasm irked Charles. It wasn't a toy. He unceremoniously threw the remote at the wall and turned away.

"You're upset," Judy said matter-of-factly, after Marie had left the house in tears.

He exhaled tiredly. "Wouldn't you be?"

Charles could sense she had a lecture for him, but in the end, she turned into the bedroom and didn't emerge for the rest of the night. Marie didn't come home, either. The house was painfully quiet as Charles' thoughts hung over him into the early morning hours, when light began to slant across the living room.

x

The next afternoon, Judy suggested they go on a trip. An olive branch, he knew. They needed a change of scenery. She suggested San Diego, or maybe San Francisco?

"Monterey," Charles said, without thinking.

Judy looked thoughtful. She knew he had grown up there, until his mother passed away and his father's new job landed them in Chicago.

She didn't pry.

"Well, that sounds lovely," she said, and went to make the bookings.

x

They arrived in Monterey a month later. He stopped by his childhood home, which happened to be a few minutes from the hotel. It was painted a different color now and, by the stickers on the car parked out front, belonged to a family of five. The sparrow nest from his childhood was still there, beneath the east window. He couldn't tell if it was abandoned now. A sparrow only lives so many years. Three, based on his Wikipedia search. If the statistics were to be trusted, he had one sparrow's lifetime left in him.

x

On their last day, he brought Judy to Moss Landing. It was late afternoon. They'd scheduled a whale watching tour, but it had rained the entire morning and looked as if it might rain again.

They boarded the boat at four and departed soon after. Monterey looked very much the same after all these years. There was a knot in his stomach every time the boat tipped; he didn't know what he'd do if the wheelchair tipped as well. He held on feebly to the upper deck railing.

It was cold and beginning to sprinkle again. Half the party, including Judy, turned inside to watch through the glass. Charles stayed, wrapped in a poncho and Judy's scarf. An hour passed without fanfare. Then two. The sun began to set, a long descent across the sky. The boat began to turn back around.

As he waited, he recalled the time his mother brought him whale watching for his twelfth birthday. They'd eaten french fries and watched the line of the sea. He'd been obsessed with whales that year—drew them in art class, knew just about every species, their migratory patterns, feeding habits.

Suddenly, breaking his reverie, there was a great spray of white sea foam in the distance. Then another. A pod of gray whales weaved through the water, approaching slowly. One of them, a calf. He fumbled for his camera and let out a whoop of excitement, as if he were that same schoolboy from forty years ago, his mother beside him, ruffling his hair. He snapped a few photographs and planned to send them to Marie.



Artwork by Daria Hoang

Such was Charles' hour of consciousness.

The rock had rolled down the slope. He watched it go—all the efforts of the day: Judy washing him, taking his meds, getting into the wheelchair, the spilled coffee on his shirt as his hand had trembled. Tomorrow he'd wake and get into the wheelchair again. Perhaps his right arm would give, or perhaps his lungs. But he had made it to Moss Landing today; he'd seen the whale and its calf surface, like magic. He'd felt his mother's presence beside him.

They reached shore ten minutes later. His hand was pulsing again, but there was a content look on his face when Judy wheeled him down the ramp to land. It was as Camus said: in that hour of descent, Sisyphus was superior to his fate.

Today, Charles thought, so was he.

Life in Flux

Kirti Veeramachaneni

Saint Louis University School of Medicine, Class of 2026

PGY-1, University of Pittsburgh Psychiatry

No one tells you about the changes
About the ups and downs
About the black and white moments that are actually gray

They don't tell you about the liminal spaces
Where up is down and left is right
Where truth seems cruel
And lies are a comfort

They don't tell you the crossroads you'll face
The moments of indecision
The moments of hesitancy
The moments of desperation

No one tells you about the things you'll see
The things you'll hear
The things you'll dream

No one tells you about the changes
Changes in how you think
Changes in how you listen
Changes in how you talk
Changes in who you are

And yet you must reconcile the changes in yourself
Where you are shaped and contorted and forced into an outdated template
Though if you strive to flow outside of the template, you may flex into a shape more suitable

Physical

Shveta Abraham

PGY-4, UT Health Houston, Psychiatry

White bag brings You in,
Cold, rigid, unchanged
Limbs askew
Eyes piercing
Seeming to ask a question

I stand in blue
Staring at You— intact but hollow
Vague questions of who You were
Flit through my mind

What sticks though
Is how You were
At the end
Before we got to your after

And I'm here
With what used to be You
Giving you the respect you deserve
That you were denied when you needed it

I heard your story's end
How they say it happened
But how did you start?
A story, as I said

Now an image
Tangible but real
Still and rigid
Colorful while muted

Diagrams are drawn
Recording every mark that defines you
Vials are collected
Analyzing the things inside you
This is surgery with a different purpose
Not to save, but to preserve

Knives and scissors weave together
Paring away your shell
Going deeper
All the way to your core components

What You are
Not who You were
Every part made even smaller
Studied carefully for contributing factors

A search for the reason
Why your story
One so short
Was forced to remain forever unfinished

Then it's over
You are woven back together
Your story now different from before
With an ending

Not the one you deserve
But one with an answer

Life was cruel
Death was harsh
Let the after be peace

The Liminal Hour

Celine Rochon, MS4

Saint Louis University School of Medicine

I'm not sure when time stopped for the broken clock face. The fractured glass displayed a big and small hand that was perpetually frozen at eight o'clock, but whether that was morning or evening I could not tell the difference. It was a liminal hour, created by an absence that was never wanted. Perhaps the house felt melancholy too, expressing itself through the eternal crack etched across time and surface.

To me, home is the place where I sleep and eat, where my family gathers. I left behind the bold, yellow color of my room and clothes that were too small, forgotten in dust and darkness. But then there were things that are yours. Frames of Ansel Adams. Running shoes with worn soles. An aged, clunky leather recliner perfect for afternoon naps or watching your favorite movies. I imagine you exploring those worlds of epic westerns, space and fantasy. For the sake of normalcy, I slept and ate, although this time on my own. The house was a time capsule of memories. Once difficult to face because it reminded me of you, and now the only place I find comfort because it still does.

Without meaning to, I sometimes notice how grief makes itself known in other homes. I walked into a dear friend's house and was greeted by a stillness, the kind that asserts itself boldly during the holidays, staining togetherness and intimacy. One chair less, we sat down to spring rolls and noodles carefully placed in delicate china. It was an unconventional spread of food so it didn't feel too much like Thanksgiving. Conversation flitted a beat behind sips of soup. I told myself everyone was just too engrossed in smells and taste. As if challenging the moment, my friend made an endearing comment. She spoke their name, a sound that rippled through the air and unsettled it gently. Family members stiffened, recoiling from words and memories like hands withdrawing from hot steam. Dinner settled back into silence, the quiet itself a form of graciousness.

What becomes more apparent about loss is how it affects your grammar. It's natural to inquire about life in a way that seems simple. One friend was asked, "What is your dad like?" The question led to a thoughtful pause, *he was like* offered as a subtle correction instead of explanation.

But there are things that remain in the present tense, like ownership of belongings or describing cultural background. So maybe time doesn't always stop; it oscillates somewhere in between ceased existence and preservation. A broken clock face is still a working clock; it just never occurred to me to reset it.



Art by Kirti Veeramachaneni

Switchback

Taylor Wilson, MS3

Saint Louis University School of Medicine



Photograph by Taylor Wilson

"It's like climbing a mountain; one step at a time," is a mantra oft-repeated to M1s and pre-Meds.

To us, who have been made aware of the realities of the process, this phrase brings little comfort. To me, it was just a metaphor for the duration of our shared journey; even though it sucked, each Anki card, each exam, each hour in the library inched you closer to your goal. A reminder of the big paycheck at the summit. The performance of mountain climbing is a much more complex experience than the phrase

reveals. A mountain stream may have rotted away the shoddy bridge of 2x4s that two of your friends crossed, but your weight broke the beam, soaking your boots for the last vertical 2,000 feet. You may spend 2 hours sitting silent in a mosquito-filled mudflat, ignorant to the bites as you gaze over a crystal alpine lake, watching a marmot scurry over the blinding snow. You will encounter switchbacks; grueling trail for which hours of step-by-step advance brings you only inches closer to the summit.

You may fall behind.

You may fall far enough behind to see your travel partners reach your goal without you. It is easy when climbing a mountain to recognize how good the journey feels, to appreciate each flex of your quads as bringing you closer to a place where few have been, to appreciate the euphoric swim in your vision brought on by the soaking of serotonin and the lack of oxygen in the air.

It is much harder to have this perspective when we are studying, when the scenery does not change, when the goal feels impossibly distant, when your greatest efforts sometimes result in no forward progress. There is no runner's high.

Finally, exit the library and enter the wards, with confidence that this will be easier, this is what you wanted. We will learn that wet boots are easier to address than the turmoil of treating other human beings. Of examining your own dismissiveness and countertransference. Of seeing fear. We will experience the unfamiliar embrace of doubt. Some of us are great at climbing mountains. Born where the air is thin, bodies and minds and sculpted for decades for this specific task. Some of us have asthma. Some of us are smokers. While of course, we all make it to the top eventually, some faster than others, I think we all must learn to better embrace the switchbacks.

In moments when it is hardest to move forward, do not stare straight at the ground, do not, as Sam (in the front) puts it: "go internal". Pause. Catch your breath. Look around you. Enjoy this part of the journey as much as you will the summit, because you will remember your time here much better than your time at the top.

eudaimonia

email: eudaimonia.medjournal@gmail.com
eudaimoniajournal.com