

Room to **Write**
Chapbook

Creative Writing **at**
Colorado Resiliency
Arts Lab

Dedicated to everyone who works in healthcare

Table of Contents

The Little Sticky Note

By Nicole Catherine Evelina Meiklejohn

Last Words

By Mimi Kate Munroe

My First Drive

By Jason Kotas

The Mundane

By Lindsay Markham

Bagels & Blood

By Mimi Kate Munroe

Resolve

By Doug Hicks

Not Driving is One of My Absolute Favorite Things to Do

By Nicole Catherine Evelina Meiklejohn

Musings After Dinner

By Mimi Kate Munroe

The Little Sticky Note

By Nicole Catherine Evelina Meiklejohn

I unfold the little yellow sticky note carefully. It's no wider or taller than my thumb, crammed tight with secret desperation.

*Every second I'm dying a little faster
and I do not want to spend
my final moments with you.*

I stare down at the distressing little tercet delicately cupped in my hands. I don't remember when I wrote it, what happened at work to yield this small, vicious moment. *I never want to be that sad again.*

It brings me back to nine years ago, to a day during my Freshman year at college when I was strolling between the Clark and Eddy buildings with my friend, Katie. The red brick path beneath our feet was warm, the sky that jeweled Colorado blue, and the trees green with temptations of skipping class.

Katie looked a bit shyly at me out of the corner of their eye. With a resolute purse of their lips and a sudden turn to me, they blurted, "Do you ever wake up and feel as if you lost another day? Like that's another day you'll never get back?"

I stopped out of surprise. I stared at Katie, openly gawking at them as I tried to wrap my mind around the question. It must have been a moment too long as they looked away, crossing their arms around their ribs.

"As if you feel like you're constantly losing time," they muttered, kicking a stray rock across the bricks. Fear rippled down my bones as I began to understand, began to feel the press of death on our conversation, shock evaporating the words on my tongue.

What an absurd question to ask, I had thought, my confusion blooming into anger. There we stood, in sunlight and fields of tomorrow. It felt almost sacrilegious to ask such a morose question, to look so morbidly backwards when there was so much to look forward to. There was no need to bring in death where it was not needed. It was pointless and uselessly depressing to think like that.

"No, I can't say I have," I finally managed. With that, we began walking back to class, the question lingering after us.

Ah, what it is to be young and not petrified of tomorrow. To not feel the weight of the eventual end, that ticking clock inside you. I look at the calendar on my desk, the repetitive slashes of red Sharpie marking off my days one by one, all of the yesterdays now gone and evaporated in front of that computer, in that horrible black mesh chair, in that office I didn't need to be in.

I stroke that little sticky note in the heady quiet of my office. The plastic filigree clock on my wall ticks away, several hours and minutes off track as I neglect to give it more batteries to suckle down.

Instead, I think about all the things I want to give my time to. The creative writing degree I've barely used in favor of a stable paycheck. The paint brushes and canvases that collect dust in my garage, crammed tight next to the faded yoga mat and dumbbells. The Yeti microphone that sits in a tattered box next to years of sheet music, voice acting scripts, and *Dungeons & Dragons* handbooks. I think about all of the people I want to give my time to. I think about my family who lives an hour away, but that hour has stretched into several months of "we'll see each other next time" and sending pictures of nephews learning to talk or starting Middle School, growing up ever faster in the distance, keeping updates to a manageable vignette amongst crowded To-Do lists. I think about the friends I used to live across campus from, who I used to see every day, now separated by several cities and states and the tangled brambles of schedules, leaving small, unobtrusive texts of "we should get coffee sometime" instead of clamoring the deafening truth of "I miss you. I miss us. The way we would write together or sing in the car or grab each other's hands and race into the mountains to be fairies for a day."

It's infinite. The things I could be doing instead.

Sitting in that unchanging, cookie-cutter office, I always felt like I was slowly bleeding out, year after year. Fake plants can only do much against the searing fluorescence of a windowless office.

How long is a reasonable amount of time to feel this way?

I wrap my arms around me in that stagnation, that frozen space enclosed around me, my ticking clock.

I am a limited resource. A rare piece of commerce to spend wisely.

The words glow within me. What an empowering thought that is. To take my time and walk my dog in the morning before I have even had my coffee. To dance unabashedly when the music strikes that cord of need. To flop down onto the carpet at the top of the stairs and quickly scribble something down in a journal I had just re-found, not minding the tangles of dog hair beneath my elbows. There is only so much time to spend. Why bother spending it being so unhappy?

A deeply privileged thought, yes, certainly. To think that everything can be so easily resolved with a change of mindset, as if that will always yield tangible changes in circumstances. But even so, there is still time enough to pluck a magenta leaf from the sidewalk and carry it home. Time enough to take that drafted letter of resignation and bravely turn it into a decision.

I gently press the sticky note back onto the cheap black plastic of my standing desk. I silence the avalanche of emails and open that drafted letter. There's no plan of "What will tomorrow be?" There's only the resolve of "What today can no longer be."

I look at that sticky note. That little yellow rectangle of who I was. And who I never want to be again.

It doesn't take long to finish writing my letter of resignation. All it was really waiting for was an end date.

I print out three copies of that letter and begin the walk to the offices of my various supervisors. All it would take was quietly slipping the papers into their respective plastic mailboxes and that would be it. It would be over.

The hallways are empty. The office doors are closed, the labs now just a distant hum. Even the stacks of freezers that have overflowed from the labs seem to have settled into the lull of the late afternoon. I find myself smiling as I walk, each step a little lighter. I let myself slow to a stroll and drift along. As I'm about to turn the corner, something catches my eye.

The break room is dark, afternoon light slanted just beyond the window in a speckled array of greens and yellows and oranges. The turn of autumn. One of the square plastic tables in that little room has a small red Tupperware and a pink sticky note on top.

Have a Snickerdoodle.

Last Words

By Mimi Kate Munroe

It was an otherwise normal Saturday evening. A gang of friends and I were listening to music in the living room. My parents were in the back of the apartment. At some point, my mother walked down the hall towards me and said, "I need your help in the bathroom."

"Ooh," chimed out my immature boyfriend. "Your *mother* wants to see in you the *bathroom*."

Ignoring his idiocy, I dutifully and resentfully trudged down the hallway after my mother. She closed the bathroom door, stripped naked, and climbed into a tubful of hot water. She asked me to pour warm water over her back so she could belch. It helped her, she said, with the pain.

My mother had 14 stomach ulcers from the time I was born until she died shortly after the bathtub experience. We were so accustomed to her silent suffering that we ignored her wraithlike existence until it was too late.

I looked at her emaciated body and felt a mix of disgust and shame. She was so thin that her head looked huge, like a fledgling, featherless bird that will never fly. This was the woman who molested me at age 12, climbing into my bed and asking if she could feel my young and large breasts, who asked me if I wanted to feel hers in exchange. Looking at her naked in the tub filled me with revulsion. The belching was disgusting. I said, "Mother" (a term I never used), "this is making me ill," to which she replied, "Sometimes we have to do unpleasant things for the people we love."

When she'd had enough, she got out of the tub, dried off, climbed into a nightgown, and went back to her bedroom. I returned to the gang in the living room.

Oblivious to my mother's pain, self-absorbed in the teenage world of friends and music, I was shocked when, an hour later, EMS arrived and went straight to my parents' bedroom, escorted by my father. He had been sitting with her when she'd said, "I wonder if it's worth dying to escape the pain." He called 911 and they arrived just as she died the first time. They got her breathing and rushed her off to the hospital. Of all the ulcers, this one had perforated. At the hospital, they did surgery to repair the perforation.

The next day, Sunday, my dad and I went to see her. She was awake and alert. I asked her if she was going to continue smoking cigarettes when she got out of the hospital (this had been an ongoing and contentious issue in our household), she replied, "I will never smoke again."

She then grabbed my hand, looked as deeply into my eyes as I allowed her, and said, "I love you."

"I love you, too," I responded, with my eyes buried in the bright linoleum floor.

"I love you," she repeated insistently.

Those were the last words my mother spoke to me.

My father told my school that I was allowed to leave classes and go to the hospital at will. I didn't get there until Wednesday.

I made my way to my mother's room, where she appeared to be sleeping. I sat there awkwardly for an hour, watching her eyes roll around under closed lids and trying to make out what she was

muttering. At some point, I took her hand and, not wanting to wake her, whispered, “I love you,” and left. As I was leaving, I asked a nurse to let her know I’d been there when she awoke. The nurse gave me a strange look because, as I later learned, my mother was not asleep but in a coma.

My sister arrived the next day with her one-year-old son. She took her turn going to the hospital and I let myself off the hook, deciding I would go Friday night but, when Friday night rolled around, I did some ‘downs’ with a friend and didn’t go. I slept well that night.

I was awakened by my sister and my nephew at around 8:00 AM on Saturday morning. My sister shook me semi-conscious—the downs were still at work—and said matter-of-factly, “Bad news. Mom died.”

I was suddenly fully conscious, sobbing. Aren’t parents supposed to be immortal?

I was instantly laden with despair about not having gone to see her the night before. Would anything have been different if I had?

My parents were older when I was born. I was an “accident,” an “oops,” as some people call it. I’d confronted them both when I was old enough to realize it. My mother, who didn’t have a disingenuous bone in her body, looked at me sheepishly and said, “Well, what a great accident!” My father’s response was, “Who cares? You’re here now.”

Because they were older than all my friends’ parents, I knew they were going to die, and I’d be left all alone. At age five, I remember crying in my bed at night, silently and alone, sobbing that I would have to be responsible for myself from that moment on.

My sister’s pronouncement confirmed that fear. It aroused in me as much victimhood and “poor me” emotions as I could muster. I remember the hollow ache, the permanence. I’d experienced other deaths before – my dog, my grandmother, a young acquaintance - but this one hit me squarely in the solar plexus. I walked breathlessly around the house looking at my mother’s things, at the places she’d sat, at her clothes on which the scent of her perfume and cigarette smoke lingered. But she was gone. “Where to?” I wondered.

Chaos ensued – people in and out of the apartment, expressing sympathy, bringing food, taking up space. And then – BAM – all gone, leaving just me and my dad in the echoing silence.

I dropped a hit of acid that night. It provided me with a clarity I otherwise might have lacked.

My father, doing his best to restore normalcy, cooked a beautiful meal for the two of us - steak, steamed broccoli, baked potatoes. Because I was tripping, I didn’t have much of an appetite but, also because I was tripping, I dutifully ate what I could because I, too, craved the appearance of normalcy - both to support his valiant effort and because I didn’t want him to know I was tripping. We

ate in silence for a bit, neither one of us wanting our tormented, roiling emotions to explode out of us. Being on LSD heightened my sense of how thick and crowded the room was with our feelings, and simultaneously how hollow and empty we both felt. Without finishing his meal and without any warning, my father stood up and said, “Even if your mother didn’t eat with us often, you could still feel her presence from the other room.”

That presence was clearly missing now.

In hindsight, I wish I’d thrown myself in my father’s arms and wept with him. I wish I’d grieved to the core of my being. I wish I’d thrown things in a rage of abandonment until I collapsed, exhausted—emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and physically—in a pile on the dining room floor.

I did no such thing. I grabbed my coat and went out to the park, where I hung out most of the night with friends.

When I was 14, two years before my mother’s death, I made two decisions: that I would never regret anything and would never wear a girdle. I’ve never done the latter. And I’ve done pretty well regarding the vow not to have regrets. All the terrible acts I’ve committed in my life I’ve been able to turn into opportunities to grow. But the one regret I carry is any time I was unkind.

I was unkind to my mother a lot. I had reason to reject her. But I also was not granted the time with her to grow up into a woman in my own right and make amends and clean the slate. Raising my own kids and experiences with my daughter have shown me that my mother understood anyway and that her last words to me, “I love you,” held more power than adolescent me could possibly have understood at the time. It took me a lot of years to come to know what a gift she had given me.

As I got older and got help with emotional baggage from that time, I came to realize that I had experienced sexual abuse. At the time it occurred, I was young enough to rationalize that maybe that was just what mothers do. Besides, my mother was not normally affectionate, and it initially felt nice to have her lie beside me.

But I began to experience tremendous shame and, in exploring it and wondering who it was that could have abused me, I finally realized it was that fleeting experience at age 12. Gathering that awareness, I vowed that the buck would stop with me and, though I made plenty of mistakes as a parent, molesting my children is not on the list. I came to recognize that it’s very likely my mother experienced something similar as a child.

What I did take away from the experience of my mother’s death was, “Sometimes we have to do unpleasant things for the people we love.” And, since her death seemed so sudden in my young

world, to this day, even if I'm very angry with someone, I will not part from him or her without insistently letting them know that I love them.

My First Drive

By Jason Kotas

My mom was pregnant with my sister. I mean really pregnant, the kind of pregnant that induces a penguin-like waddle when she walked. We lived in an idyllic cul-de-sac on the edge of town. It was the front lines of suburban expanse as it gobbled up open fields of grass, hay and mud.

The cul-de-sac was my world. I was three and had the run of the place. All of the homes were filled with families and the central asphalt circle we all shared became our home base. At any given time, it resembled a bustling day care center with laughs, cries, food covered faces and the stomping of rubber tennis shoe soles resembling a heard of elephants on a rampage.

That's why it was a miracle that no one was run over or smushed when I decided to go for my first drive. Our full-size Ford van was green with rows of cloth bench seats organized like the pews of a church. The driveway sat on a steep incline and our home was positioned at 12 o'clock in the cul-de-sac. Parking that big metal beast on such an incline involved parking, applying the parking brake and listening as the metal teeth engaged and ratcheted up the tension to hold such weight.

My dad was next door with a friend and my mother was on the phone. It was a bright pastel colored plastic wall phone in the shade of mustard yellow but with a tinge more gold than the condiment. The only reason I so vividly remember the color of that phone, was that I watched it fly across the kitchen bay window as she threw it in panicked horror.

While my folks were distracted, I had climbed into the front seat and began to mimic my fathers' motions as he would drive us around. Turn this dial, pull this lever, adjust that mirror...it felt just like the real thing. My chubby little three-year-old fingers explored under the dash just below the headlight pull knob. It was a fake wood grain knob, trimmed in a faux chrome adhesive. Just below it I felt a T shaped pull that filled my sweaty little hand perfectly. It was begging to be pulled. My right hand found the gear shift lever to the right and behind the steering wheel. Just as I had witnessed my father do hundreds of times before, I pulled that lever down while my left hand pulled out the T knob directly towards my leg.

There was a loud thud as if something outside had hit the hood of the van. My head popped up and that's when I locked eyes with my mother who was in the kitchen looking out the large bay window. They were currently the size of cereal bowls as she watched the van roll backwards and chucked the phone in pursuit.

It felt like it took forever for that hulking van to finally gain some speed. My mom penguin-ran out the front door as fast as a very pregnant woman could possibly waddle. She was screaming and trying desperately to grab a mirror or anything in a futile attempt at slowing the backwards roll. I remember crying as it reached peak velocity, swerved across the cul-de-sac like a stumbling drunk crossing the street. My very first drive only stopped when the rear of the van slammed into a neighbor's front brick porch with a loud metallic crunch. It was an absolute miracle that no kids were squashed as I blazed across our home base.

The Mundane

By Lindsay Markham

A chilly wind gusted through as the door opened. The long hallway down the tunnel was lit with artificial light. The chill in the tunnel involuntarily raised goose bumps on the back of my neck, my hairs standing on edge ready for a flight response. I shook off a shiver as the door closed. The securing of the door latch echoed down the hallway.

I walked at my usual pace – quick and with purpose. I had no need to run today. I had plenty of time to get to my meeting. The sound of the concrete floor reverberated off the walls with each step. The illogical fear of the lights suddenly going out and encompassing everything in darkness kept my pace steady. I walked past the natural wood shadow boxes focused on the children’s artwork slightly glancing at each of the six boxes insides. The echoing of voices coming in the opposite direction provided a sense of relief. I knew if the lights were to go out at least I wouldn’t be alone and the silly fear dissipated slightly. The twosome walked by quickly and their noise drifted away as the door closed behind their conversation.

I reached the radioactive storage area. The radioactive warning sign hung on its last metal fastener, as if unseen fumes and chemicals had slowly eaten away at the metal over the years. Interesting that the metal gate seemed intact—maybe we replace it each year, I thought.

And then I saw it. A tiny creature. The size of a dollar bill. Covered with white prickly hairs. It too was walking with purpose in the same direction I was headed. I quickly looked around—no one was near. I had stopped in my tracks curiously observing the creature from afar. Its steady stream of movement was fluid and did not slow. I slowly crept closer, quieting my footsteps. I approached the creature and gasped.

It was much larger than I had thought. Six inches, no eight—is it growing as it moves?—I questioned myself. The creature had to be two or three inches in height. The prickly hairs were much

larger and more imposing than I thought. Each leg, each of the tiny feet dutifully moved forward at the same pace. Naturally, I thought, the head is at the front. The creature seemed foreign to this planet.

And then. It stopped. Suddenly. A shrill involuntary scream escaped my lips. The creature stayed motionless. I took a step back. The multiple feet took a step towards me—from the back. It. Has. Two. HEADS.

It paused seemingly to consider its next multi-step move. I backed up quickly and turned running back down the tunnel for the door. I pushed the door closed with force, the automatic arm screeched with protest. I peeked through the door's window. The creature hadn't followed me. I could feel the beads of fear and sweat on my forehead. The corner where I ran from remained empty. The tunnel had no signs of movement. I backed away from the door towards the stairwell and returned to my office. I missed the meeting.

And now I run. Every day in the tunnel. I haven't seen the creature again, yet I know it could be there... waiting to surprise me.

Bagels & Blood

By Mimi Kate Munroe

I was standing the break room at work cutting a bagel. The knife was serrated and oops! I sliced through my fingertip and the blood poured out. At least the skin was still attached.

Damn! I was hungry and looking forward to that bagel.

I walked down to Nurse Maureen's office, the bloody paper towel in which I'd wrapped my finger almost saturated.

"Do you think I need stitches?" I asked.

"Let's see," she said. "What were you doing? Cutting a bagel?"

My jaw dropped a bit.

"As a matter of fact, yes," I replied.

She called the doctor's office next door and sent me over. He took one look and said, "What were you doing? Cutting a bagel?"

My jaw dropped a bit more.

Bypassing the ED, he sent me to the office of a surgeon friend. He took one look and, well, guess what he said. Yup! "What were you doing? Cutting a bagel?"

I got stitches and went back to work. I went back to the break room and ate that bagel with gusto.

Who knew that bagel could cause so much injury?

Resolve

By Doug Hicks

The time was spring of 2006, the year before had been a tough one, going through some deaths of family members due to cancer. I had just changed my major to biochemistry, going all in on a pursuit of a career doing cancer research and of the ambition of curing cancer. At that time I was like any other pre-med student looking for different ways to bolster their candidacy and applications to med school. I came across this email about this camp counselor position for kids with cancer. The commitment was only one week of the summer and thought this would be perfect opportunity to my med school application. My selfish thought was spend the week in the mountains, hang out with kids, a good story for the personal essay, what more could you ask for.

Little did I know, that commitment was much more than a week, but changed my life forever for the better. At that orientation at the old CU Med School Campus, I heard stories from kids, parents, counselors, etc. Stories of how kids, some of whom were confined to a hospital room for weeks at a time for cancer treatments, got to regain some semblance of normalcy in their lives and just be “normal kids” again. It felt for the first time in my life that there was a purpose, a calling, that feeling you were truly meant to be a part of something greater than yourself.

The first summer of 2006 became a yearly tradition of going back every year until the summer of 2018. 13 years (at that time half my adult life) A little longer than a week’s commitment. It became a huge part of who I am and have made some lifelong friendships and many other benefits.

I did use that experience in my personal essay in some unsuccessful attempts at getting into med school. Stories of watching kids in real time overcome their fears such as a fear of heights and go down a zipline, or complete a high ropes course high up in the forest trees. Kids that instead of having tubes and wires attached to them, could enjoy just running around full speed ahead in a game of tag. Playing with friends they instantly made or people they might have seen each other since the summer before, but somehow pick up where they left off. But no worries, I still have a nice career doing cancer research still in that long pursuit of curing cancer.

The camp is called “Wapiyapi” an old Lakota-Sioux word meaning healing and the word/camp both live up to the hype as it has helped heal the soul. This place and everyone involved have to have a certain **resolve**. Most of the kids and families learn that skill before ever coming to the camp. The

resolve to face literally one of the scariest fights for their lives. This kind of experience forces resolve on them whether they want it or not. The **resolve** it takes to face and battle cancer is a resolve like no other. You can ask any cancer survivor, a person currently going through cancer treatments, or family/friends of people who have died from cancer. I am sure a we have all met one type of those people and I am sure they will all say it is the toughest battle they have fought or will ever fight in their live and that kind of fight builds **RESOLVE** to everyone involved.

Not Driving is One of My Absolute Favorite Things to Do

By Nicole Catherine Evelina Meiklejohn

I-25 is never a worthwhile endeavor, always crammed with headlights and slick with middle fingers, drivers swerving down an off ramp at the last moment without a turn signal (as if finding the next exit would have been far too much effort). You try to blink the sleep out of your eyes and peer through the early morning darkness, coffee thermos tucked between your knees so you can steal sips in this rolling, labyrinthine hellscape, barely awake, but alert out of necessity.

No, when you work from home, you get windows and a slow yawning start to the day, allowed to hug a warm mug and watch the cascading sunrise. No one will walk in on you demanding why you haven't already responded to all 57 emails that were sent in the past 20 minutes. At home, you can enforce patience. Your breaks can be for loading the dishwasher, waltzing down the nearby bike trail with your hands in your pockets, or carefully timed for when your dog demands her 10:00 AM cuddles. Your legs will fall asleep, but you'll both be happy.

The office is never the heart of happiness, despite how your managers will try to make it so. Yes, those \$7 lattes are nice and it's sweet to be offered a peppermint patty or a little hallway chat, but it always has that forceful, unspoken question of "You're happy here, right?" It billows awkwardly in the air, tempting you with a chance to go on a ranting dissertation about the uselessness of driving for an hour to an office that only offers less than what you left behind: fuzzy socks and blankets to work on top of, pots of fresh coffee, the meditation of cooking lunch for yourself, taking the hours you would spend driving to and from work to instead do any number of other things. You can actually start working out again and have the time to stick to it. You can reconnect with the hobbies that got stashed into the deep corners of your storage closet. Or you can walk your dog through the open space park and stare up at the blue dome of the sky, tracing your dreams in the tinsels of clouds.

Now, if you have to, you can make driving tolerable. You can put on music to sing to instead of screaming at every other hunk of metal ricocheting down the highway. You can crack open those long forgotten Duolingo lessons and dream of Tenerife when you someday have the money and time to go. Or you can plug into a podcast of insight or escapism or current events or celebrity interviews or anything else that may be considered distracting enough. The Internet certainly can provide in all regards.

But it certainly does get tough to focus on "Hidden Killers of the Victorian Era" when Mr. I Need to Weave Through Traffic Because I'm So Important skids into your bumper head and shoves you into the thick metal guard rail. And then flees the scene. Naturally.

As delightful as that is, truly, not driving is a precious gift of time and safety. When given the option to drive or not drive, you can contemplate just how much heartache you can take and then roll over in the comfort of your warm bed.

Musings After Dinner

By Mimi Kate Munroe

A new medication. So many potential side effects. The first “lifelong” drug. The list is terrifying. Liver and kidney damage, muscle aches...

I take my first pill and go out to dinner. We eat hot pot—did I bother to ask if the broth contained pork? I don’t eat pork, but it did, I find out later. I eat with gusto—everything goes into that

broth—noodles, greens, pumpkin, potatoes, fungi—the shitakes are the best. Everyone is happily slurping away—music talk between the guys, my friend and I discussing relationships.

We eat to overflowing and part.

Half-way home, stomach rumblings. Somehow, I make it home and am okay. Then I get to sit on the couch with the cats.

Aurora always needs an invitation to my lap, whereas Cliocatra won't leave. I lift Aurora up and she emits a tiny, sweet "meow" and kneads my leg (good thing her claws are trimmed), then settles down, rolling into a ball as I cradle her in my right arm and rub the soft fur on her abdomen with the left. She purrs and it resonates in my tender belly and solar plexus, the warm, soft rolls of sound and rumblings soothing my tender gut. She stares with love into my eyes, blinking as I blink back at her until she tightens the ball of herself and drowses. I feel my whole being relax into the soft warm sounds of this precious, trusting love and recall the last time I held Hiiro Ewe, the day we had to put him down.

He could no longer walk or hold himself up, but the night before, he slept in my arms lying full across my chest. We took him outside when the vet came and placed him in his little bed under the crabapple tree in his favorite yard spot. We offered him some catnip and he tried to play with it as the first injection went in. We told him to go to the Light as the second injection was given. He shuddered a little and was gone. I wanted to call him back but what kind of a life would it be for a cat that can't even stand in the litter box to pee?

Curi, his sister ran around the yard, seemingly obtuse to her brother's departure but, maybe, she knew more than we did.

Aurora wakes, licks her belly where I've been caressing, and jumps down abruptly. Clio promptly takes her place, lying across my lap with her paw reaching out and touching Patrick's knee. I'm so tired and spent from feeling sick and cat purrings, I force myself up the stairs to brush my teeth—I can never go to bed without brushing—and climb into bed. I dream all night about achy muscles and not being able to move and wake up exhausted and sore, so sore that getting out of bed is difficult.

Was it the atorvastatin? The pork broth? Do I have a virus? But no—I feel fine—clearheaded and alert, just pain. Is it in my head I ask? I am drug-averse, after all, but these muscles ache.

I call Alison and casually tell her. She has also been suddenly achy. Chem trails? No—no conspiracy theories for either of us, so why? And her friend, too. Something in the air? But she's in Maine and I'm in Colorado.

We commiserate a bit and then move to the good things. We have been friends—sisters almost—for 49 years. No need for words but we always find them anyway—just abounding love.

She mentions that next month it will be 10 years since Jeff overdosed on heroin and died. How quickly and simultaneously slowly time has moved, the grief dragging on and life moving forward anyway.

I escorted Jeff across the veil in ritual. He left me with a message for his sister—No guilt for pulling the plug. Just Love. Eternal Love.