

# The Poets on Parnassus Poetry Competition

These poems were the winners of the 2003 Poets on Parnassus Poetry Competition, coordinated by Joan Baranow and David Watts, M.D., a member of the editorial board of *The Pharos*, and judged by Ms. Baranow, Dr. Watts, and fellow *Pharos* editorial board member and distinguished poet Jack Coulehan, M.D. The prize winners were:

First prize, Michelle Bitting of Pacific Palisades, California, for her poem, "Giving My Son His Meds the Morning of the Big Meteor Storm," which will be published in *Prairie Schooner*.

Second prize, John Rybicki of Delton, Michigan, for his

poem, "Julie Ann in the Bone Marrow Unit, Zion, Illinois," which will be published in the *Iowa Review*.

Third prize, Abby Millager, M.D., for her prose poem, "I tell myself."

Fourth prize, Sandy Smith of Walnut Creek, California, for her poem, "Eat."

Fifth prize, Charles Atkinson of Soquel, California, for his poem, "Internal Bleeding."

For information about the next contest in 2005, contact Dr. Watts or Ms. Baranow at 73 Hillside Avenue, Mill Valley, California 94941. E-mail: [hdwatts@earthlink.net](mailto:hdwatts@earthlink.net).

**I tell myself** it won't be that tough. IV team's given up for pure aesthetic reasons, seeing as how this guy's room smells like nail scrapings. He won't let the nurses give him a bath. Hemophiliac with AIDS, he is also crazy but I'm lying—this man's been here forever being poked. His veins are scarred-up voodoo. I grab paraphernalia, say hello. Just thirty, he figures he's dying, no matter what. I feel out his hand, divining, I am Vlad the Impaler, this my secret weapon vein, side of wrist, base of thumb. It is Pristine! Bouncy! Plump! Now I *know* Phlebotomy's faking, *everyone* knows this vein, the Intern's Vein. But I am not proud, pray to get in first time, not spill much, this particular blood.

Abby Millager, M.D.



Abby Millager received her M.D. from the University of Pittsburgh in 1988, and her MFA from Bennington College in 2002. Her poetry and reviews have appeared in numerous literary journals. She was a finalist for this year's Slope Editions Book Prize and in the Alice James Books New York/New England contest. Her home is Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, where she edits the poetry journal, *Diner*.

She writes, "I tell myself" is about an actual experience. More than that, though, it is about what one may and may not say, as a medical professional. Think about this: discomfort? Or pain . . ."

Dr. Millager's e-mail is: [amillage@bellatlantic.net](mailto:amillage@bellatlantic.net).

## *Eat*

*Because you will not  
they lower a tube  
into the banded ring  
the clenched fist  
the slippery coil*

*they stand watch  
over this apparatus meant  
to mimic the bend  
and curve of your interior  
maneuver this underskin  
periscope until its light catches  
the brown shell of your abdomen*

*like light catches the edge  
of glass. They think  
they can separate out appetite  
like dividing blue light from green*

*they cut  
an opening into your belly  
four inches from your navel  
two inches above the jut of your hip  
drawstring it closed with a plastic tube.*

*A liquid, chalky as crushed pearls, gushes  
into this new gasping mouth.*

*Content they have corralled your shimmering  
hunger, they do not smell it, fragrant  
as vanilla  
leaving your skin.*

Sande Smith

Ms. Smith is a writer, originally from Philadelphia, living in the San Francisco Bay Area. She works with the Global Fund for Women, which funds women's rights groups around the world.

She writes, "This poem was inspired by my experience with my mother, who had Alzheimer's for many years. While the Alzheimer's was devastating, the medical interventions to prolong my mother's life, once she no longer wanted to eat, often seemed worse."

Ms. Smith's address is: Global Fund for Women, 1375 Sutter Street, Suite 400, San Francisco, California 94109. E-mail: [sande@globalfundforwomen.org](mailto:sande@globalfundforwomen.org).

## Internal Bleeding

*Next day you're worse not better  
something not right in the gut  
almost in tears on the phone. He  
drives you for tests your son  
light off the hood in your eyes.*

*Cars shush by who cares please  
turn up the heat don't talk.  
Chrome-edged waiting room chairs  
buzzing ice-blue tiles those  
glossy pages shout the  
headlines hurt.*

*A call for  
Max his slippers shuffle  
by a bent old neighbor  
years ago how could it—?  
Debbie her tag says. Fragrant.  
Calls you come with me this  
room this sheet what's wrong?*

*Almost weeping again as  
if your body belongs to  
someone else your child.  
She works quickly those hands  
slide over belly and chest  
cool instrument beep.*

*Quiet now she's gone.  
(Everything red and black:  
crashed a bike on the tracks  
flopped to the side a heavy  
laundry sack. Bent over  
hands eyelids lips  
whisper chant for me. Please.)*

*Twilight blue crevasse  
up there living people  
move they're half the world.  
Here a quiet anteroom:  
which way will you turn?*

*Footsteps by your head ahh  
lavender. Nearly ruptured that  
spleen of yours—it'll heal.  
What is it draws you up—her  
scent the words you need?*

*This  
voice a son at an elbow to  
lift you steer you to the door.  
Pigeons—rainbow throats!  
Where does an arm get strength?  
Warm car seat a humming  
stay here awhile—this body  
seems to like the sun.*

Charles Atkinson

Charles Atkinson teaches writing at the University of California, Santa Cruz. His first volume, *The Only Cure I Know*, was awarded the American Book Series for poetry (1991). A second collection, *The Best of Us on Fire*, won the Wayland Press chapbook contest (1992). Since then he has received a number of national awards and his poetry has been published frequently in literary magazines.

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