

MIND TO MIND

*Creative writing that explores the abstract side
of our profession and our lives*

Carol Wiley Cassella, M.D., Editor

Within a Breath

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I shut the door and turn off the light. Only the light from the computer screen gleams through the dark while I catch my breath, my only connection to life, the life I preserve and maintain. The breath I am now conscious of, a breath I do sustain: an artificial intervention marks the loss of human autonomy, the soul and the machine.

It is an austere sound, yet calm, warm, and spiritual. I have never thought about my breath before, nor paid attention: then I recognized. Once, we were calmly gathered for the meeting, one at the "Art." Students and faculty sat together and shared stories, their foes, love and death, fear and bravery: a breath to seal our consciousness. Now I remember it.

Our soul is like a breath; God is like a breath; wind is Nature's breath. I breathe, thinking about life, sorrows, happiness, and death. I close my eyes and imagine their smiles, their faces, their eyes. They melt into one another, yet their breath is one: simply following my breath gives me so much perspective, so many dimensions. Indeed, measuring space and depth, I use one word: breath.

It is the first function, and it is the last; it is the entrance of our soul into this world, and it is the way out. Breath can be easy or it can be hard; it is calm or it is furious; it can be soft or grating; it is short and fast, it is long and paused. One breath... a life...

It is time to open my eyes, turn on the light, and exit this call-room. As I walk down the hallway, my thoughts return to my daily business and

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bustling activities. I don't want to forget though; I want to remember the breath of life.

I enter "The Room," where lights are on, where people are sitting and chatting. My hand turns the knob and the level of sound moves to about "5." I want to remember. As "You," my patient, are about to stop breathing, I turn on the ventilator. I hear your breath going away, and then a new breath starts.

With your breath gone, another one started, I breathe again myself.

"You" are keeping me alive.

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