

Kindness of Strangers

The Parma Portraits



Atim, Doctor, 2023

Donald Farnsworth

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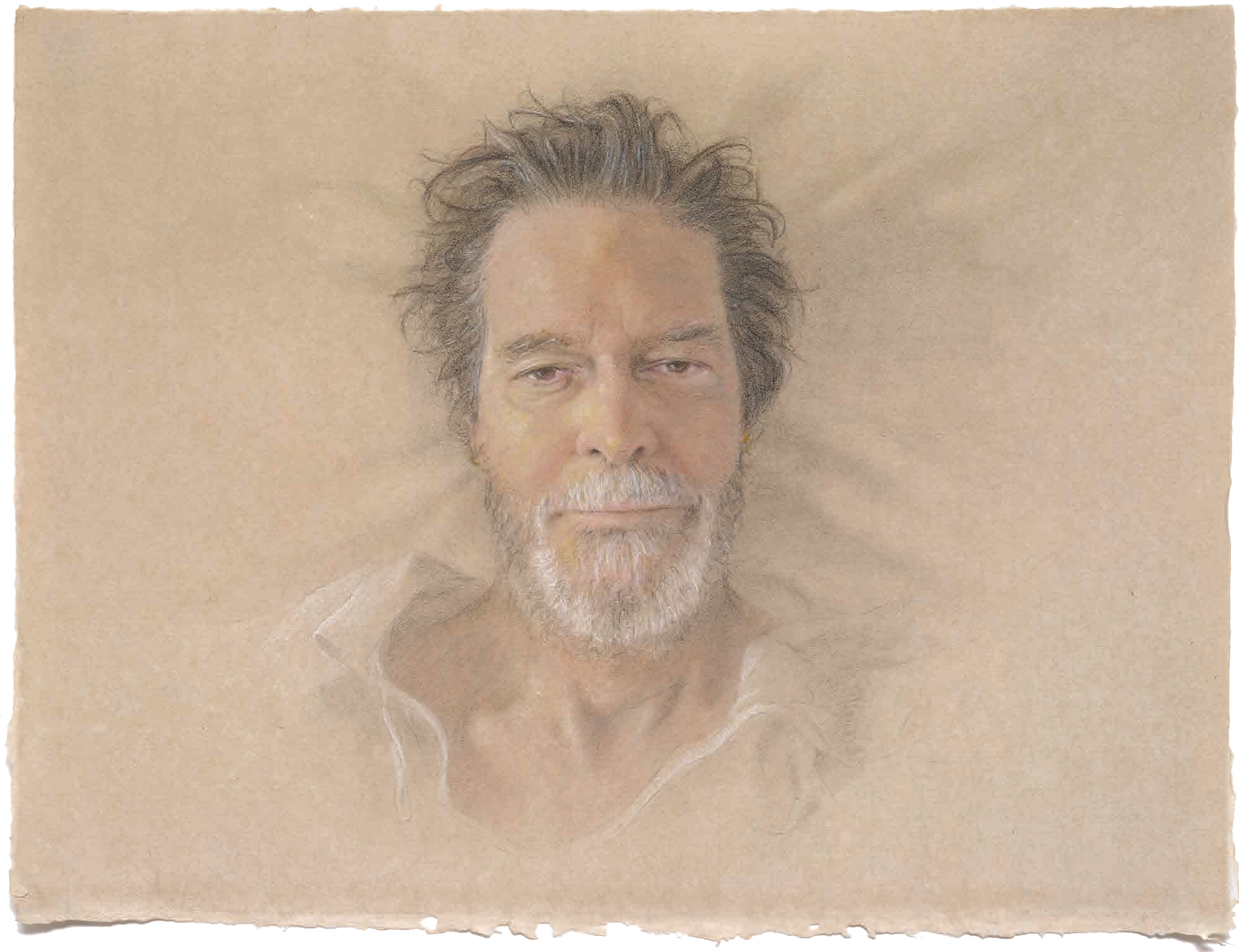


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Self Portrait, 2023

(Receiving second transfusion November 3rd, 2022 —Parma University Hospital)

*I wanted to write a love letter to my wife
and to the physicians, nurses, and staff
who devoted their time and energy to see
me through to the other side, whether life
or death; these drawings are the letters*

—Donald Farnsworth

Acknowledgments

I received the highest quality care and experienced powerful solidarity at the University of Parma Hospital, Italy – a clinical collective with empathy and understanding, striving to heal individuals, empowering them to live, prosper, and, hopefully, make meaningful contributions to society. Reflecting on my hospital time in Parma, I recall the pervasive sense of human compassion, dedication to collective problem-solving, and embracing scientific medical progress. These elements encapsulate the essence of solidarity, wherein a group focuses on an individual. With gratitude, I acknowledge that, in this case, I was that individual. Their concerted efforts extended my life, making the work herein possible.

I want to thank: my wife, Era Farnsworth, for her unending compassion and support. Were it not for her, these pages would be blank. The Parma doctors Arianna Alfieri, Claudia Schianchi, and Monica Crugnola, their fellow doctors, interns, nurses, and staff whose portraits are pictured here who cared for a stranger as if we were long-lost friends. To my friends and essay writers for taking the time to write down their remembrances and thoughts, Marc Goldyne, Robert Flynn Johnson, Enrique Chagoya, Guy Diehl, and Max Thill, Gail Nanao, Archana Horsting. An thank Gail, Archina and and Greg Harper, for deviating on their vacation to comfort Era in Parma. To Jono and Annie Salt, who drove day and night from France, rendezvoused with my daughter and granddaughter, and continued to Parma, giving comfort and help to Era and lending a hand in my recovery and care as an outpatient in Parma, to my daughter Marisha and granddaughter Mia, who traveled from California to comfort us both in a time of crisis with love and uniting the family. Mia (who gained the age of four while in Parma) would take my hand and pull me down the street, calling for me to walk faster and thereby gain back my strength. And to Alessandra Chiari, who, like an Italian sister, befriended Era, who loved hanging out in Alessandra’s shop, l’Arca, Parma.

The staff at Magnolia Editions deserves an emphatic thank you for their technical, critical, and competent contributions and suggestions (here, I again include my wife). Master printers Tallulah Terryll and Nicholas Price make excellent suggestions and provide specialized expertise and help. Guy Diehl and Max Thill’s keen eyes, painterly and paper conservation experience make him a trusted critic - I thank Max, all the volunteers like Nicky Yeager, interns, Navajo-Churro felt maker Mina White, and mycology experts, study room and museum curators who helped in the research to bring this ancient paper back to life making these portraits possible. And I will sincerely strive to recipricate to all our family and friends who sent loving thoughts supporting Era in a time of crisis and kind wishes for my recovery.

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*The good physician treats the disease;
the great physician treats the patient
that has the disease.*

—*Sir William Osler MD*

Don's beautifully executed portraits are a unique and heartfelt homage to the Italian physicians and their clinical colleagues who collectively focused their skills, both scientific and humanistic, on saving Don's life. They followed the early 20th century adage of Sir William Osler MD (considered the father of modern clinical medicine): "The good physician treats the disease; the great physician treats the patient that has the disease."

The clinicians in Parma displayed the empathy that is the core of the "Art" of Medicine. And that was a critical connection into which Don, and I believe Era, were able to tap and from which they received reassurance and comfort during a time of great stress and fear. I have always felt that the desire to help people as a physician is only born out of an appreciation of what human beings can achieve when given their health. Don's portraits are the quintessence of such human achievement.

Marc Goldyne, MD, PhD
Fortunate friend of Don and Era Farnsworth
Clinical Professor Emeritus
UCSF



My wife, Era, on the No. 4 bus to the Parma Maggiore Hospital

Era's email on October 30, 2022:

Subject: Don

Hello dear friends and family,

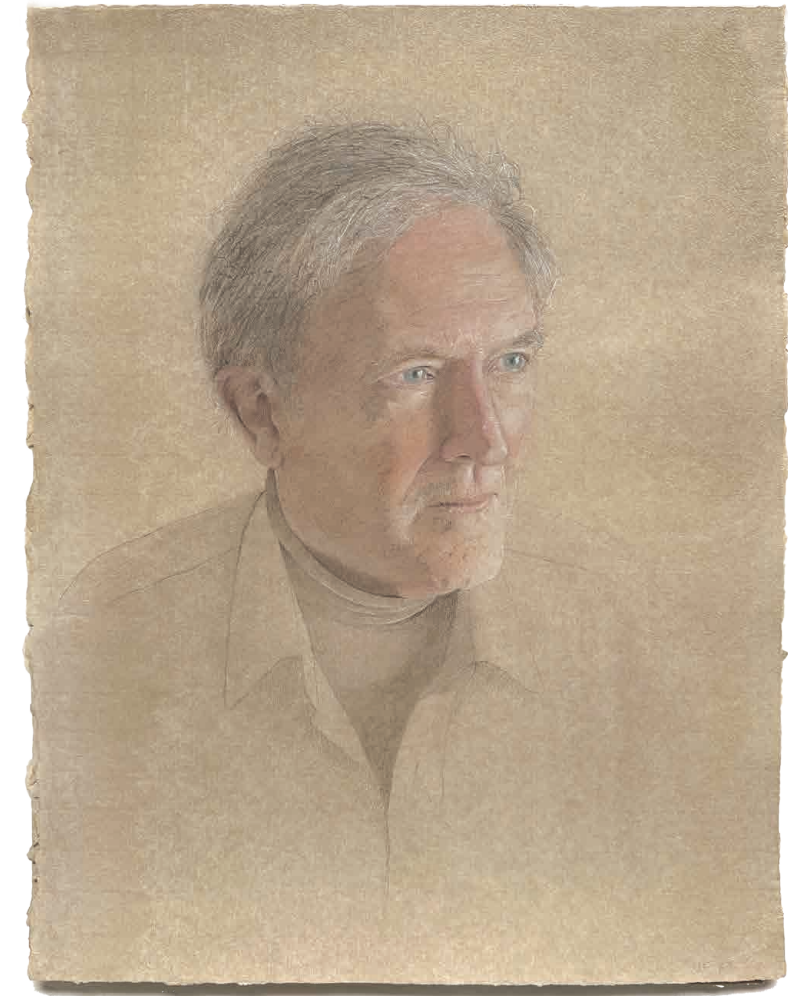
Don is in the hospital here in Parma. He has, as a consequence of Covid which we both contracted earlier on the trip: pneumonia, anemia, very low blood pressure and extreme fatigue. The good news is that he seems to be in good hands, at least being taken care of by caring people, which is so important, and also that he is feeling better. They have given him blood transfusions after a CT scan and a battery of tests. He has been pleasantly surprised at the time and attention the doctors give to him.

Covid hit Don hard, but instead of recovering, even a slow recovery, he seemed to get worse. That was probably as a result of the pneumonia and whatever caused him to lose blood.

The hospital gave him a PCR test, and it came out positive, so they put him in the covid ward, which he says is in a nice room with one other person. As a result I am not allowed to visit him, although I brought him a care package yesterday and will again today. I can hardly believe he has covid after testing positive now weeks ago, and at least two negative rapid tests spaced several days apart and almost a week ago. But I can't blame the Italians for being very skittish about covid after what they've been through and I'm grateful that they are taking care of him as he was very ill and felt like he was dying...

(Complete series of emails on page 58)

Commemoration of Care



Portrait of Rober Flynn Johnson, 2023

In Massachusetts many decades ago in the chapel of an abbey that was under renovation, a monk was struck in the head by a beam that fell from the ceiling. In critical condition, he was rushed to St Vincent, a Catholic hospital in nearby Worcester where my father, Dr. Robert Andrew Johnson, a neurosurgeon, was tasked with trying to save his life.

Despite his severe injuries, my father was able to stabilize him and miraculously over several days, his condition went from critical to out of danger and on the road to recovery. One morning my father stopped by to see the progress of his patient. One of the nurses, who were nuns in this hospital, rushed up to my father and excitedly exclaimed, “Dr. Johnson, Dr. Johnson, it’s a miracle, God has

seen fit to save Brother Timothy’s life.” My father listened quietly but then replied with the dry wit he was known for, “Sister Marie, you are incorrect, I was responsible for saving Brother Timothy’s life. It was God who struck him with that beam in the first place! “I am happy to say that the nun could do nothing but see the logic of my father’s argument and laugh.

Doctors, nurses, first responders, police, and firemen are a somewhat anonymous group of individuals in our consciousness... until we need them. They, in turn, live their professional lives in anticipation of crisis where their skill, judgement, and calm demeanor under pressure is necessary. They rarely receive individual recognition once the crisis has past. It’s just part of their job.

It’s not that people do not appreciate the medical care they receive in an emergency. They do. It’s just that after the crisis has past, there is usually just a generalized thank you to the “medical staff“for their care and concern which seems to suffice. It could have been the same with Don and Era Farnsworth after experiencing the medical trauma they went through in the Fall of 2022 in Parma, Italy, but that would not have been in keeping with the character of the Farnsworths.

Don and Era were keenly aware that the medical staff of those doctors and nurses in Parma were individuals who, despite being strangers to them in a foreign country and despite a language barrier were doing everything in their power to restore the health of this American that was, without warning, put in their care. For the Farnsworths, these doctors and nurses were individuals with distinct personalities and their caring was personal and needed to be recognized as such.

As an artist, even while in distress, in his hospital bed, Don conceived what he hoped to do and endeavored to photograph all of those, even including his fellow patients, who accompanied his journey from sickness to recovery to be memorialized and honored later through a series of portrait drawings. As those doctors and nurses tended to the care of this sick American stranger, little did they know that their patient was choosing to make the deeply

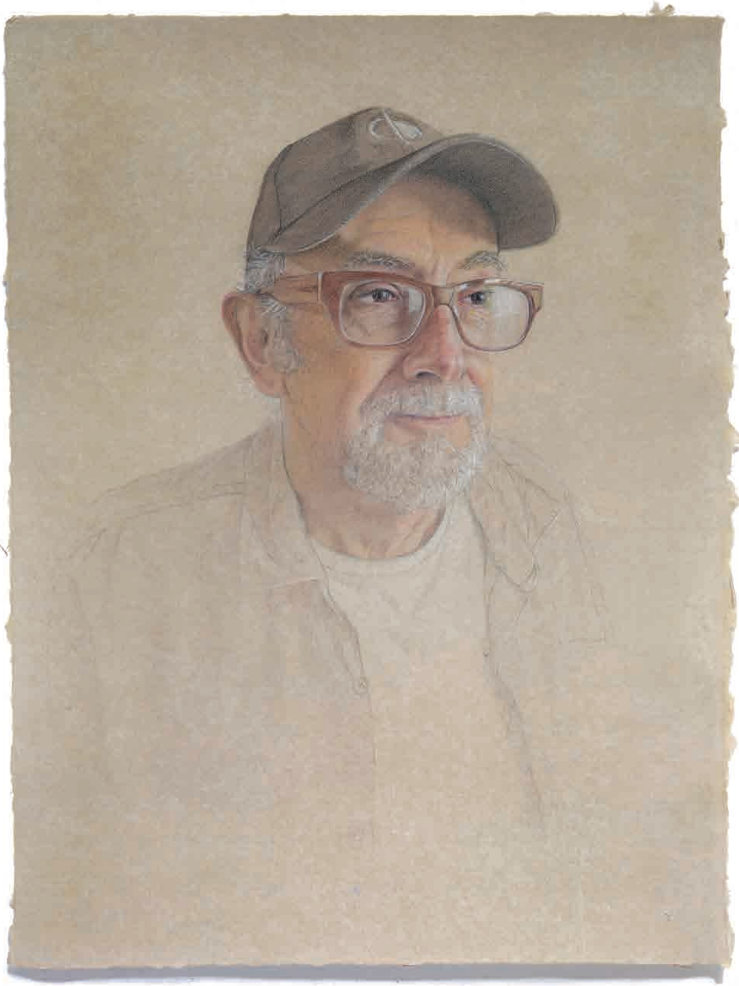
personal choice to remove the anonymity of his caregivers by commemorating them in portraiture.

I can think of only one other instance of an artist recognizing a necessary but generally anonymous group of individuals that serve the common good. From December16, 1999 through January 11, 2000, the British artist, David Hockney drew a series of guards at London’s National Gallery titled, Twelve Portraits after Ingres in a Uniform Style. Hockney has a great love of the National Gallery and the paintings it contains. He is also aware and appreciative of the dutiful security necessary to keep them safe undertaken by vigilant but, to the public, essentially faceless guards. Hockney, in honoring these twelve guards with formal portraits, chose to bestow individuality and respect to their profession.

In the aftermath of his medical crisis, Don Farnsworth has done the same. For Don, it was never to be just some heartfelt acknowledgment to some anonymous medical staff but, instead, these poignant renderings of twenty-three individual doctors and nurses plus fellow patients and friends who shared his journey from trauma to recovery. That experience will not now fade into memory but will have a permanent visual record of a community in Parma that displayed caring and compassion inspiring those in the future.

—Robert Flynn Johnson, June 2023

Fearing for a Friend



Portrait of Enrique Chagoya, 2023

Don scared the crap out me and his friends who know him in the Bay Area and beyond when Era reported that he was in the hospital in Parma with Covid in an email on October 31, 2022. It was an anguished message describing an unclear outcome of his treatment which sounded complicated with serious, mysterious, and hard to diagnose symptoms. On top of that, Era was unable to stay with him due to the Covid isolation rules from the hospital (even though she had just recovered from Covid and was probably immune). It was a Babel Tower crowd, with neither Era nor Don speaking Italian, and with very few Italians speaking English, and without any local friends. I worried very much for Era, too, being alone in such an uncertain sleepless nightmare.

Memories

*Recovery's art blooms,
An echoed thank-you in lines,
Memory's gift blooms.*

—Seiko Mori

Thankfully, after many amazing doctors and health care practitioners working on him, after many gallons of well-seasoned Italian blood transfusions (the envy of any starving vampire), and many hours of loving-kindness meditation we all sent his way, he got better. The invisible powers that rule life in the universe sent him back to Planet Recovery and Don and Era back to Planet Oakland.

Don took some nice pictures of everyone around him while he was in the hospital, and what nobody predicted is that those images in his phone would become some amazing drawings of his doctors and nurses, plus Era and some new Italian friends. Now those wonderful portraits can be appreciated by everyone who opens the pages of this book. Some of us were lucky to have witnessed the progress of those drawings at the studio during the last few months. Now that Don has finished them, we can see some very beautiful people, and every single person in those portraits seems alive, or about to talk, including the one of a very sick patient that is no longer in this world. Those portraits could hang proudly in the corridors of the hospital in Parma to give peace of mind to any patient in their care.

Most importantly, and secretly, with my wicked humor, I worried that we would be missing one of the best kinds of espresso coffee in the world! That's the coffee Don makes like a Nobel Prize chemist in the kitchen of Magnolia for everyone who works at, or visits the studio, using a digital weighing gadget for the number of coffee beans per cup (organic fair-trade beans roasted at Magnolia in the back of the studio) and grinding them just before brewing each cup in his super-espresso machine, served on a glass etched at Magnolia with the atomic structure of coffee around it. Just like there is an Italian Roast, a French Roast, there is a Magnolia Roast and a Magnolia Blend (dark and medium roast beans from Mexico, Central America, Kenya and Ethiopia as far as I know) negotiated

with studio collaborators. None of that coffee experience would exist without Don.

But this is only a tiny sample of Don's approach to making or inventing anything (paper, prints in all media, and what not) like a mad genius child who enjoys life and his artistic collaborations with the virtuosi: Era, Nicholas, Tallulah, Max, Alyssa and dozens of local, national and international artists. Many inventions happen here like Mexican mameyes growing in a tree in Switzerland.*

—Enrique Chagoya, June 2023

Memories can be potent in times of danger. When Era informed me of Don's hospitalization in Parma, Italy, I initially downplayed it, suspecting maybe a twisted ankle or a batch of bad clams. Believing it to be minor initially, it was distressing to discover his condition was quite serious.

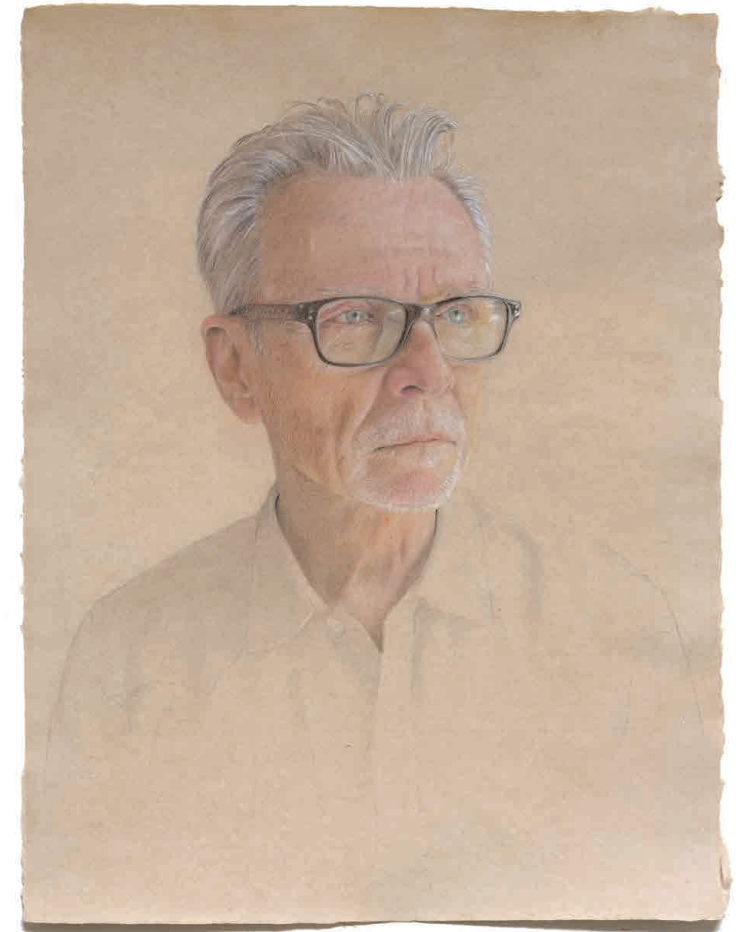
Recollections of our decades of collaborative art projects at Magnolia Editions filled my thoughts during the anxious waiting period. Despite the distance, I found solace in assistance from my neighbor, Dr. James Ryan, who provided invaluable insights on Don's Covid-induced Cold Agglutinin Disease. His reassurances about the proposed treatment and recovery offered much-needed Relief. (Dr. Ryan's assesment paralleled the information Don and Era's friend, Dr. Marc Goldyne, had provided.)

Soon after returning home, Don resumed his work at Magnolia with an unexpected project — portraits. He decided to honor the healthcare professionals and patients who helped him recover. This deep respect and gratitude manifested through every drawing, each one a token of his journey back to health.

In our 30-plus years of friendship, I'd never seen him so devoted to a personal project. These portraits not only showcase his skills but also act as tributes to the team that saved his life. Each sketch, a testament to their care, immortalizes his gratitude.

Don, may we continue cherishing life's memories and the adventures that foster them

—Guy Diehl, June 2023



Portrait of Guy Diehl, 2023

•Mamey-Pouteria Sapota is a tropical fruit native of southern Mexico and Central America, relative of the avocado with pink-salmon colored flesh, and a hard brown skin. Sweet as a papaya. Very difficult to export due to its fragility. It is little known outside of Mexico. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pouteria_sapota

Memories In Lines

*Each stroke upon the page recalls a day,
Memories sketched in lines of black and white.
From hands that tremble, yet still find a way,
To paint a testament in morning's light.*

*A face, a gaze, a moment held in time,
Familiar strangers drawn from life's grand play.
Through illness's tempest, to recovery's climb,
Their kindness etched within the artist's gray.*

*In shadows cast, each portrait bears a name,
An honor given, recognition due.
Their care, compassion, forever to claim,
A tribute rendered from a point of view.*

*May art and life together intertwine,
In every memory sketched in life's design.*

- William Butler Yeats



Competence & Compassion

It's challenging to start at the beginning, as there is no beginning and no end (you can quote me there). Nevertheless, I will tell you the whole covid-induced story, point by point, how I got to the University of Parma Emergency room, into a Pathology Department bed, and received treatment from some of the most competent and compassionate people with whom we share this blue planet.

It all started five weeks earlier, on September 13th, 2022, with a complex schedule that included London, the Lake District, a presentation in Cambridge, Paris, hiking in the French Alps, Rome, Parma, and Venice.

Era and I landed in London and found ourselves entangled in the throng of mourners attending the Queen's memorial. We threaded through the madding crowds to the Royal Academy to see the William Kentridge exhibition –inspiring – Then to the consistently excellent British Museum and the Tate, where we stumbled upon works by Faisal Abdu'Allah, a long-time collaborator at Magnolia Editions. We called and congratulated Faisal right from the Gallery.

We managed to extricate ourselves from the melee of royalty followers, there to honor the deceased monarch whose portraits were ever-present in shop windows lining the streets of London. We traveled by taxi, train, and a rental car to the Lake District for some incredible hiking, which followed a visit to Mark Cropper of the Paper Foundation in Kendal, which occupies the fabulous old Cropper family estate and houses a collection of old European and British paper equipment and other historical papermaking items.



Loweswater lake, 2022



Portrait of the Queen in a London shop window

Back in London, again skirting closed roads, the Royal Regiment of Horse Guards (The Blues), and a million visitors looking to get a last glimpse of the Queen, we made our customary pilgrimage to the Victoria and Albert Museum's Works on Paper study room. When we had satisfied our desire for basking in the presence and communing with Old Master drawings, we took a taxi and train to Cambridge.

We were in Cambridge for a talk I was giving at the British Association of Paper Historians' annual meeting at Madingley Hall, set in magnificent gardens that cast long autumn shadows on lush, well-manicured grassy knolls. There, I described my seven-year quest to recreate

Renaissance-style paper. Like meeting long-lost friends, we listened to other well-considered presentations and took a tour of the Cambridge Library's rare book room. It may sound dry when falling on your ears, but quite the contrary, at least for me – riveting.

The next leg of our journey, London to Paris via the Eurostar, is where things get dicey. Because the Omicron Covid virus was loose in the wild, mask-wearing was common in California but not so in foreign lands. My wife, Era, and I stood out on the over-crowded platform and train carriage as lone mask wearers. Boarding the train with only 60 seconds to spare, we sat directly across the aisle from a family of four desperately ill with a definite overabundance of mucus. We kept our masks on and reassured ourselves not to be concerned as we were fully vaccinated. When the food arrived, we inadvisedly doffed our masks and ate with gusto – a big mistake.

Three days in Paris were fabulous; we walked everywhere save for our bicycle ride around the Parc du Grand Trianon in Versailles. A visit to the fabulous Musée de Cluny in Paris, which has been remodeled and improved since we last visited.



Era cycling in Versailles

We dined with a childhood friend of Era's who happened to be in Paris and ate to our hearts' content– life is good.



Paris, toasting a childhood friend Deborah Hoffman

On our way by train to Gap, France, I started to feel uneasy about my health. After we arrived, another train pulled in (right on schedule), and out poured our four traveling companions, artist Squeak Carnwath, her husband Gary Knecht, Tom Andres, and his wife Jan. I informed them I was not feeling perfect, and we all masked up. Then, in our host's minivan, we opened the windows for the half-hour drive to the chateau. Sitting in the very back seat of the minivan, away from my friends, the cold air of the French Alps blasted from the open windows on my neck during the drive; my California attire did not keep me warm. Once at the chateau, I tested positive for Covid-19. I suspect the cold winter air on my neck may have contributed to my Covid induced Cold-Agglutinin disease diagnosis.

As careful as we were, I managed to infect my wife, Tom, and Jan with Covid-19. Squeak and Gary got off scot-free. Era, Jan, and Tom all recovered in a week or so and completed some of the scheduled hikes and fine dining.

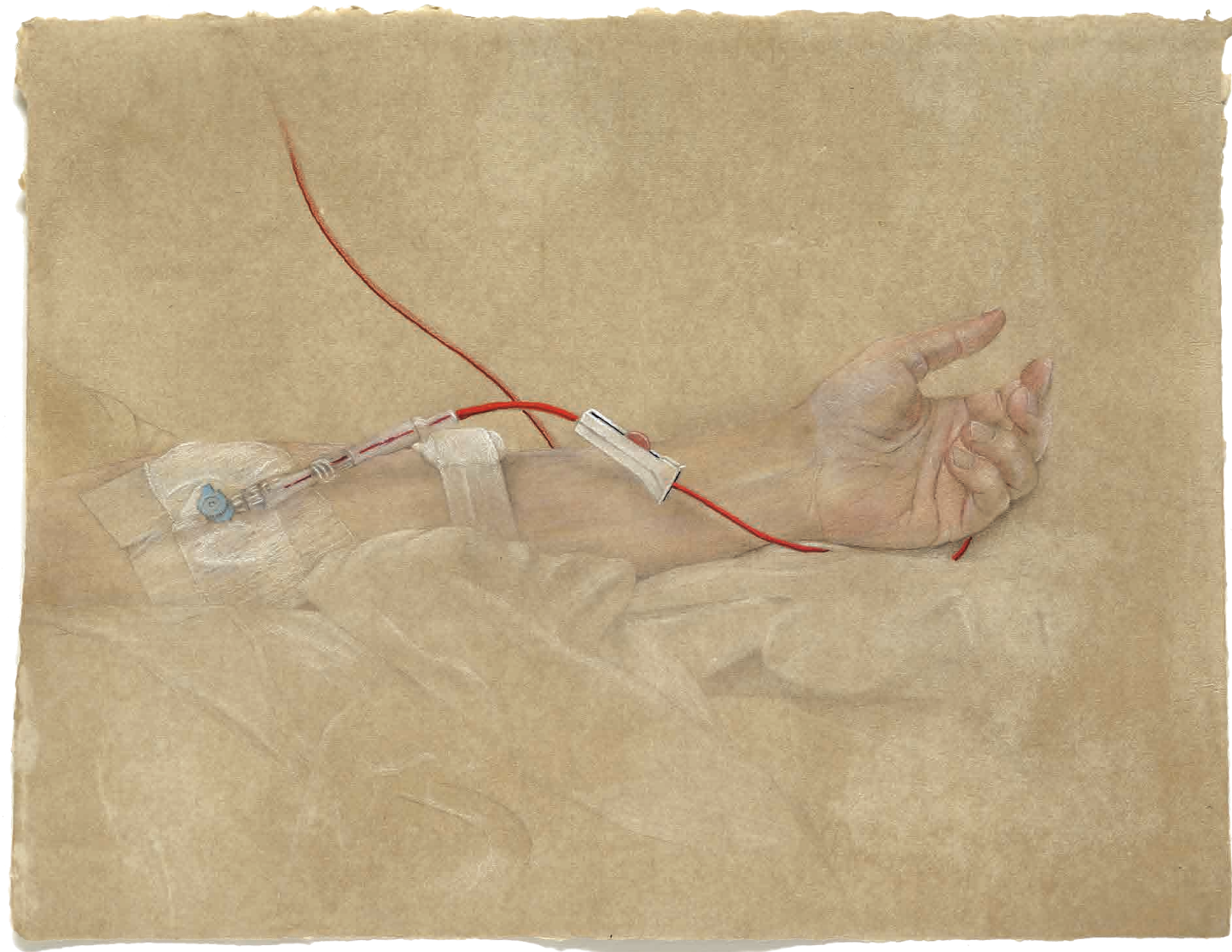
I, on the other hand, did not do well. My energy was nonexistent, my neck and shoulders were in utter pain, and I had no interest in food; all I did was sequester and sleep.

Saying goodbye to our friends, Era and I flew to Rome, where I continued to rest, happy to see I was testing negative but oddly in pain and exhausted. I never left our Airbnb. Leaving Rome, I staggered through train stations dragging my luggage like a 100-year-old man straining under a heavy burden. Many Italians (known for their solidarity) sprang to help when they saw my predicament and graciously carried my suitcase to the train platform. We made our way to Parma, where we planned a three-day stop on our way to Venice to hang out with our good friends Michael and Jill Wild.

However, on the second day in Parma, October 28th, despite the negative tests, I had not improved. I ate very little, and the pain in my neck and shoulders persisted; I could barely stand, and lifting my head was difficult and painful. Consulting the internet, we read that shoulder pain is associated with a possible heart attack. We called the University of Parma Hospital E.R. that night, and they advised us to come in the following day. My condition worsened overnight; on my arrival, I staggered from the cab and collapsed on the gurney. I told the English-speaking E.R. doctor I thought I might be having a heart attack. They took blood samples, swabbed my nose, EKG, a CT-Scan,



in the Emergency Room, Parma



Receiving Italian blood in the winter of 2022

and vitals in short order. The doctor came to my gurney with Era on hand and said, “The good news is your heart is fine; the bad is you still have Covid, you have pneumonia, and you are extremely anemic (a hemoglobin of 7.0) - you need a blood transfusion today.” Travel was now off the table as the University of Parma Hospital Emergency Department issued me a No-Fly order. Within hours I was in a bed on the third floor of the pathology building with Italian blood dripping into my arm.

Everything was as foreign to me as I was to them, the only American in memory in this 1047 inpatient-bed University hospital. Emerging from a semi-conscious slumber, I understood my situation – in a hospital ward, where pretty (unintelligible) foreign words were spoken. I was caught up in a cyclical wheel of daily activity. As the days passed, I learned hospital life’s patterns, sounds, and regimens, made new friends, asked questions, cracked jokes, and

started taking photos. Expressing gratitude to the doctors and staff became my passion.

Most of the nursing staff spoke no English. I developed new communication skills with the help of a two-way instant translator app I found on my iPhone. After two weeks, I graduated out of the Covid Ward and found a little appetite when Era would bring me delicious Parma food from local sources, something I looked forward to as the hospital food was nothing to write home about - even in Parma, the city of Parma ham and parmigiana cheese. Three times, we had picnics on my bed.

For the first two weeks, the Pathology Department conducted an aggressive investigation, ruling out what was not my problem. They left no organ unchecked (CT-scan, PET-scan, EKGs, sonograms, thyroid and bone marrow biopsies, urine, and feces test, and over one hundred blood



Maria calling a cab for Era

tests – no disease went untested; malaria, hepatitis, cancer, thyroid, and more - daily testing and monitoring my vitals went on until they found the issue in the third week and started therapy. Until that diagnosis, my caregivers kept me alive with transfusions to keep my hemoglobin in a semi-safe range. In the end, the staff gave me ten bags of Italian blood. The conditioning of scheduled regimens: food, pills, injections, infusions, meals, blood pressure, temperature, glucose, oximeter levels, blood, and other bodily fluid sample extractions reminds me how lucky we all are to live free from rigidly fixed timetables and constant monitoring.

While confined to my bed at the University of Parma hospital, battling pneumonia, remnants of Covid, and critically low hemoglobin, I found myself in awe of the dedication, compassion, and professionalism devoted to my care. Despite the lack of circulating oxygen in my body (or because of it), I judged I had better capture photo studies so that, if I survived, I could remember the kindness and express my appreciation by producing visual letters of gratitude. I wanted to draw



Nurse Corina – talented and empathetic

my caretakers’ portraits on the ancient Renaissance-style paper I had been researching, making, and testing these past seven years. Could there be a more fitting canvas for an Italian love letter? I echo the sentiments of this fragment of a medieval love letter:

*So if I express something
less elegantly than I’d like,
I don’t want you to laugh at me,
as long as you perceive tenderly,
together with me, what I long for in my mind...*

Even if my portraits fall short of the mark, I hope they will imbue my most sincere sentiment in the viewer.

It was the time of COVID-19, a time fraught with danger for all involved; my life was not the only one hanging in the balance. One wrong encounter or viral mutation and doctors, nurses, patients, and visitors alike could be infected, reinfected, and devastated by this novel coronavirus. For the first week, I lay lifeless in my hospital

bed as if washed up on the shore of a foreign land, bedraggled and devoid of energy, a supplicant at the mercy of my generous caretakers.

When I presented at the Parma Hospital Emergency Department, I was in pain, barely able to move. Once settled in the Covid Ward, with Italian blood in my veins, I started meeting the doctors and nurses who led me to this body of work.

Let me describe memories and events from that time (now six months back) of the extraordinary solidarity and united purpose of those tending to me (and others).

Remembering these moments, and so many others, trigger a warmth in my heart and that grateful feeling we all get in the tear ducts.



Pathology Building at the University of Parma Hospital My room was located on the third floor

I vividly remember the day when seven medical professionals huddled around my bed, mulling over my situation. Dr. Arianna Alfieri responded to my lingering question, wondering if my anemia was simply a common post-Covid symptom (information I’d come across in the news). She gently touched my shoulder and softly replied, “No, Don, your situation is... different.” I could discern the shimmer of tears in her eyes, indicative of profound, uncommon empathy. This heartfelt moment resonates within me just as strongly today as I recount the event with a warmth that mirrors the tenderness of that day.

Loving family and friends’ directed thoughts and energy flow seem to have miraculously brought Era (alone and vulnerable in a foreign city) together with Gail Nanao. Gail is a Berkeley artist friend strolling the colonnades that day and scheduled to return to the U.S. in two days. Gail appeared before Era as if beamed down from the Starship Enterprise. Gail kindly provided empathy, good company, and comfort for Era – two days after my E. R. admittance.

Stranded in bed, realizing I was wasting away with zero

appetite and no desire to eat the hospital cuisine, I asked my wife, Era, for bizarre, almost unexplainable items, as if I was pregnant and had strange dietary cravings – sending Era on a quest in a foreign land for hard-to-find items (persimmons, chocolate with almonds, Japanese take-out, and organic granola to name a few). Like Hercules and his labors, she always prevailed. Looking back, I am awed by her devotion and wish I had more ways of expressing my gratitude and love.

As the hunt was on to identify the cause of my underlying ailment, it did appear that I might very well be on my deathbed. I was a suffering stranger in a strange land, and my wife, scared and alone in Parma, could only visit me for five minutes a day while masked and dressed in head-to-toe plastic hospital garb. In under two weeks, I tested negative for Covid and was moved into a recovery ward on the opposite side of the third floor, and Era was able to spend more time at my bedside.

One cold winter evening, Era arrived by bus, walking her usual 12 minutes route past the construction sites

surrounding my location, through a large parking lot, and up to the third floor of the Pathology building. She brought home-prepared food from her favorite salumeria and various items I had requested in my delirium. A picnic dinner was laid out on my bed, and we feasted. With my meager appetite satisfied, we lost ourselves in conversation, and soon it was 7:00 pm, long past visiting hours; Using sign language and simple Italian, I asked nurse Maria (who jokingly enjoyed calling me “George!”) how we could arrange a cab for Era as it was too cold and dark for walking and taking a bus. Maria, generously using her personal cell phone, called and spoke rapid-fire Italian, describing our location in the middle of the sprawling Hospital University campus, and, in Italian, indicated to Era the imminent arrival of the cab that would only wait one minute and leave if Era was not there; but where is there? Struggling to communicate the arrival location, she took Era by the hand and walked her down three stories to a building entrance unknown to Era, where the cab was arriving.

KALA Institute director Archana Horsting, and her husband, Greg Harper, veered from their Italian travels to reach Parma to support Era, taking her mind off the harrowing situation with fine dining in beautiful Parma – another compassionate gesture for which I am eternally grateful.

Because of my dire situation, my daughter Marisha and granddaughter Mia flew to Italy from California. In a fantastic show of friendship and intention, Annie and Jono Salt drove from Pepieux, France, to Milan, Italy (over 8 hours) to meet up with Marisha and Mia, flying in from San Francisco, Chicago, New York, to Milan. A long flight delay caused Annie and Jono to wait at the airport for 10 hours before the 2.5-hour drive from Milan to Parma, arriving at an apartment Era procured for their temporary abode.

On the afternoon of day 23, I was released — an outpatient, weak but ready to finally experience Parma. My family, Annie, and Jono, had a celebratory dinner at Trattoria Corieri – Parma ham, traditional deep-fried bread, pasta, salad, seared meat, wine - the works. I love strolling the colonnades and seeing the inspirational city

of Parma with Era, Marisha, and Mia – Family love gives life meaning.

My second night of extended life in our Parma apartment was a joy whose declaration here would fill pages - suffice it to say, awesome, in the true sense of the word. Nevertheless, the conditioning of the Pathology Ward, or any hospital stay for that matter, is hard to shake. The week following my release, my body was still on the hospital schedule at our lovely Parma apartment near the university; I would wake early, imagining I heard the restocking cart squeaking at 5:30 am, the floor cleaning at 7:00, the nursing shift changed at 7:45, and I was ready for my blood pressure reading and pill delivery, my temperature reading and blood sample extraction. 9:00, my bed sheets would be changed, then breakfast at 9:10, and the interns and doctors’ visit at 10:00, followed by more measurements, injections, infusions, and blood sampling—strange mind games.

In a beautiful shop in Parma Era found earrings inspired by the wire basket weaving of Ruth Asawa via the gifts artists leave in their wake. The shopkeeper of L’arca, Alessandra Chiari, became her Parma sister and dined and consoled my guardian angel. Once out of the hospital, I met Alessandra, and we had drinks - she is kind, gentle, and filled with energy, recommendations, and ideas.

After over three weeks in the hospital, a diagnosis confirmed: Covid-induced Cold Agglutinin Disease with Positive DAT. A weekly treatment of four infusions of Rituxan (a chemo drug) was prescribed, and my hemoglobin number slowly improved. As an outpatient, I returned to the Parma hospital for weekly tests and five-hour infusions. Living in an apartment in Central Parma with my family proved an intoxicating, fabulous rehab, reaffirming the joy of life. And after my last Rituxan infusion, we were in possession of a Good-to-Fly and Diagnosis letter. We returned to the hospital one last time with boxes of chocolates and heartfelt goodbyes. We took the train to Bologna and, from there, flew home on December 11th, 2022.

— Donald Farnsworth



Technical Notes

Back in the studio in Oakland, on December 12th, Max Thill and I beat linen, flax, and cotton fiber and made paper for three print editions by Calida Rawles, a Magnolia publication Tallulah Terryll and Nicholas Price (Magnolia Master Printers), had created in our long absence. They were anxious I survive and return to work since many of the prints had pre-sold in advance of completing the editions. While the handmade sheets were drying, I found the time to begin work on the Parma drawings. The cold water of December papermaking caused a bit of a downturn in my hemoglobin levels because the critical tenet of Cold Agglutinin Disease is to stay warm – I quickly learned to stay warm. By New Year’s 2022, my first two drawings indicated the project was afoot, but those two drawings I rejected. I soon found myself struggling to achieve the vision in my head. Like all art-making attempts, I realized this would be my continued education in the arts, a struggle of process, experimentation, re-examination, and making.

In these drawings, a face is evident at first glance, and abstraction is found in the paper texture’s minutia (up-close viewing). The opposite is true in the portraiture created in my twenty-year collaborations with artist Chuck Close, where abstraction at first glance resolves into a face at a distance.

I began working with Chuck at Magnolia Editions 20 years ago, creating weave files, Jacquard tapestries, prints, and ceramic murals. A large-scale tapestry and ceramic portrait of Lou Reed by Chuck Close was exhibited at the Museo d’Arte in Ravenna, Italy, 2019. The ceramic piece was similar to the pieces we at Magnolia Editions created with Chuck for the New York Subway Second Ave line, 86th Street Station. Our collaboration ended this year with the design of his headstone (Self-portrait Yellow Raincoat) – fabricated in glass tiles by Mosaika.

Collaborations with the many artists who have worked at Magnolia, without doubt, play a role in these Parma Portraits; Tapestries for Kiki Smith graced the walls of the Pitti Palace in Florence, Italy, also in 2019. She and other artists I have worked with have significantly influenced these portraits; Artists Hung Liu, Mildred Howard, Enrique Chagoya, Alexandre Arrechea, Rupert Garcia, Kiki Smith, Guy Diehl, Mel Ramos, Squeak Carnwath, and working with my wife (on miniature portraits on actual dollar bills).

This Parma series allows me to study the nuances of a sitter’s face, pose, and lighting (on my terms) — although the lighting was dictated by the windows in my hospital room and the changeable Northern Italian winter weather.

In this series, I coupled these personal character studies with my seven-year pursuit of recreating ancient paper, a paper with a unique surface that influences every chalk mark, breathing life into any drawing. The fibrous patterns found embossed on the paper’s surface come from ancient DNA (heritage wool) and provide the surface for the effort to achieve the drawing’s texture, color, values, highlights, and black point—above all, warming the image in my endeavor to encapsulate the thoughtfulness and tender care I received from those who so kindly posed for these portraits. The drawings imprint the memory of my loving caregivers and a time and place (a hospital room in Parma, winter of 2022) and express the emotions found in letters of gratitude and love.

The influence of solarization, inverting some of the darker values to exaggerate core shadows and altering the balance of light and dark (tipping my hat to Man Ray), helps bring the Old Master aesthetic to a more recent century — that and the stethoscopes and the pocketful of pens and markers, the standard uniform for our contemporary medical professionals.

The key drawing is graphite in the later works, and red polymer chalk in earlier drawings — every kind of pencil imaginable, quarried chalk (from Florence), colored pastel

pencils, white chalk (Generals), Prisma (wax pencils), oil-based color pencils (Lightfast Derwent), polymer chalk (American and Japanese), and acrylic. Erasers: Mono Zero (thin, extendable) and gum eraser. Before drawing, I manipulated the photos in Photoshop, enhancing core shadow through solarization and modifying the foreground and background. Displaying the photo on an iPad as a reference enables me to zoom into facial details and find my way around the fantastic varieties of human facial details. Every drawing is a learning experience helping me to evaluate Renaissance-style linen and hemp animal-sized paper that changes with every batch (run) of paper making.

Portraits:

Medium: Mixed media drawing

Paper: 18 x 24-inch antique laid paper, linen, flax, and hemp, animal skin sized with coarse felt hair marks

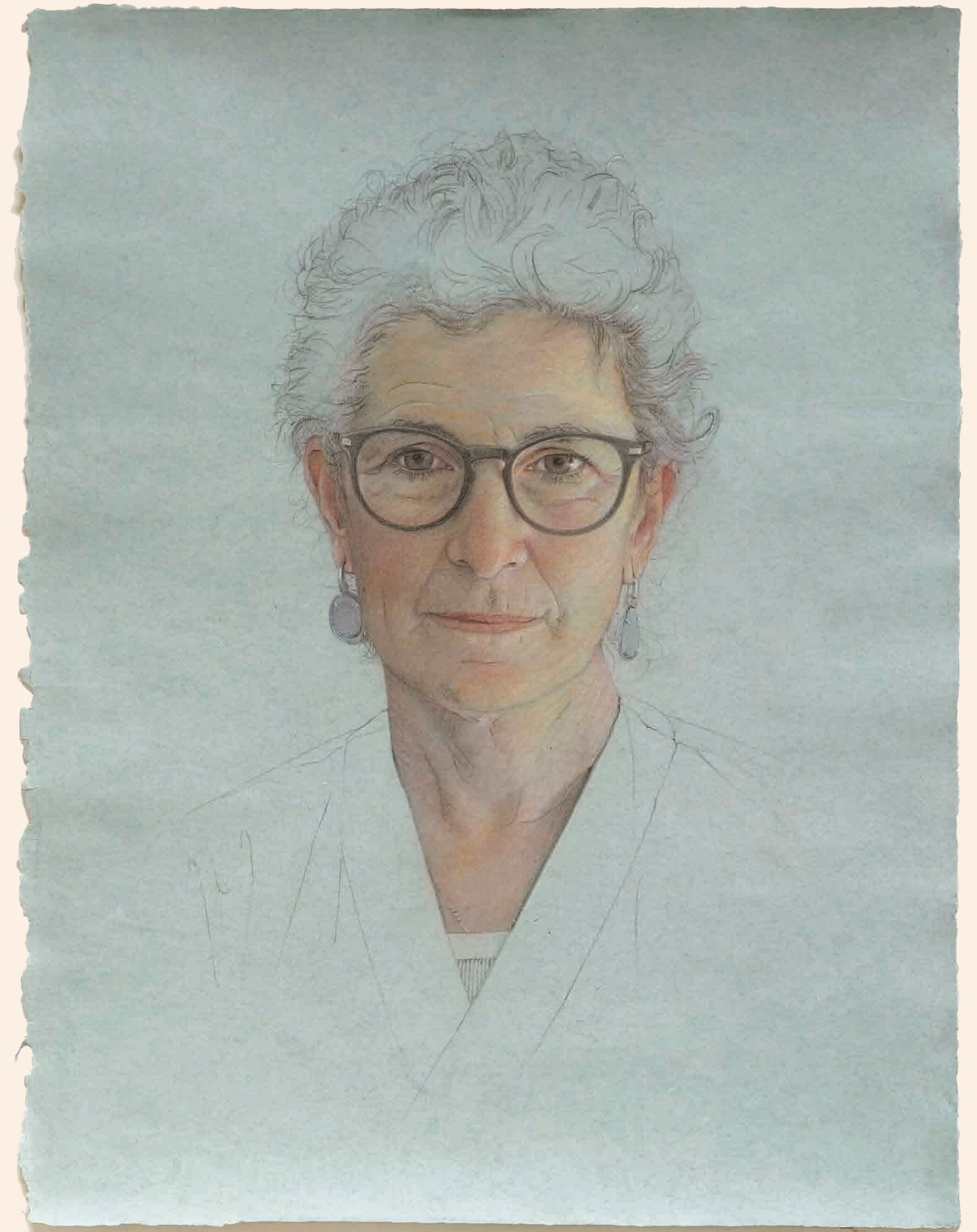
—D.F.

Kindness of Strangers

*The
Parma Portraits*



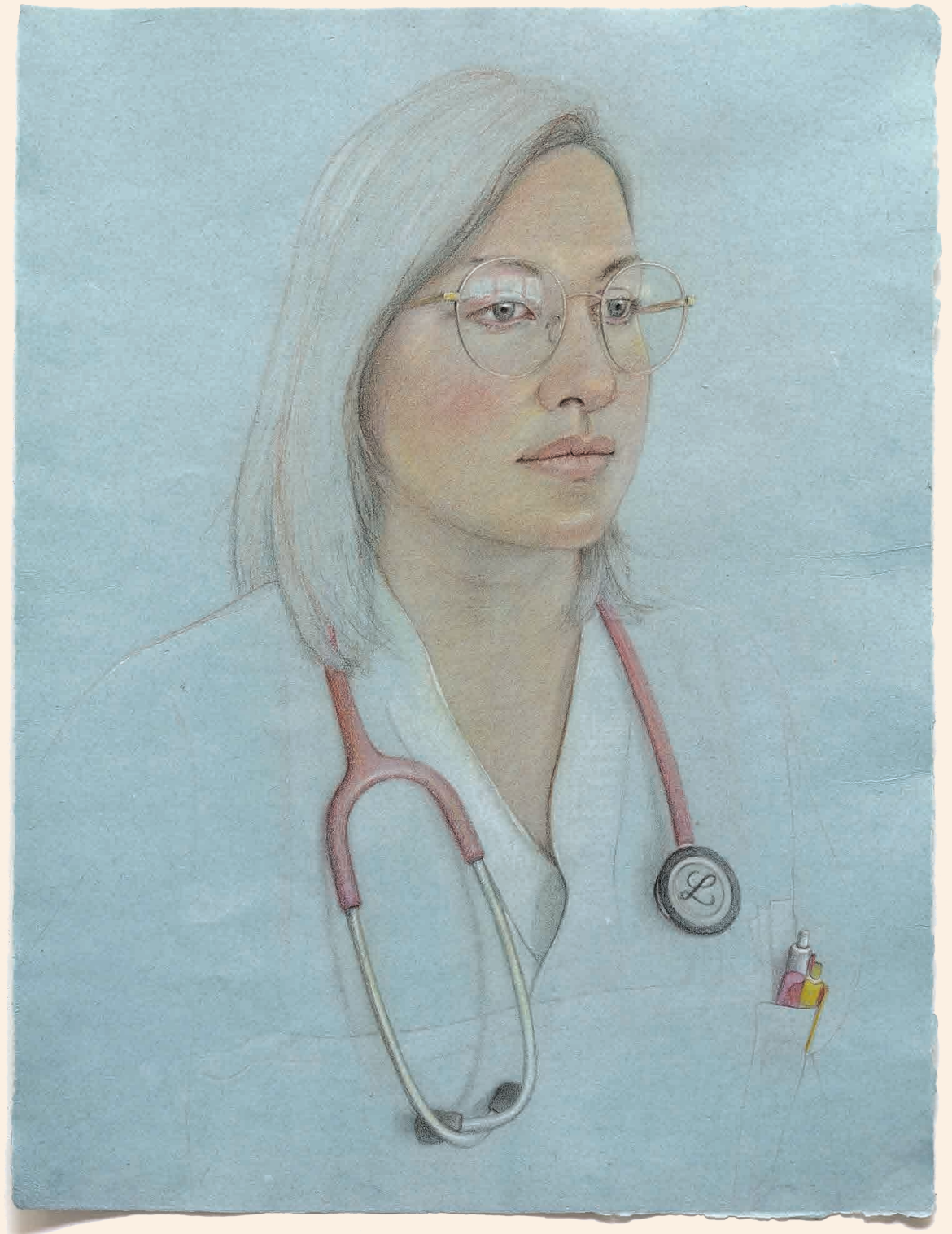
Arianna, my primary doctor – April 2023



Claudia, Doctor – Feb/May 2023



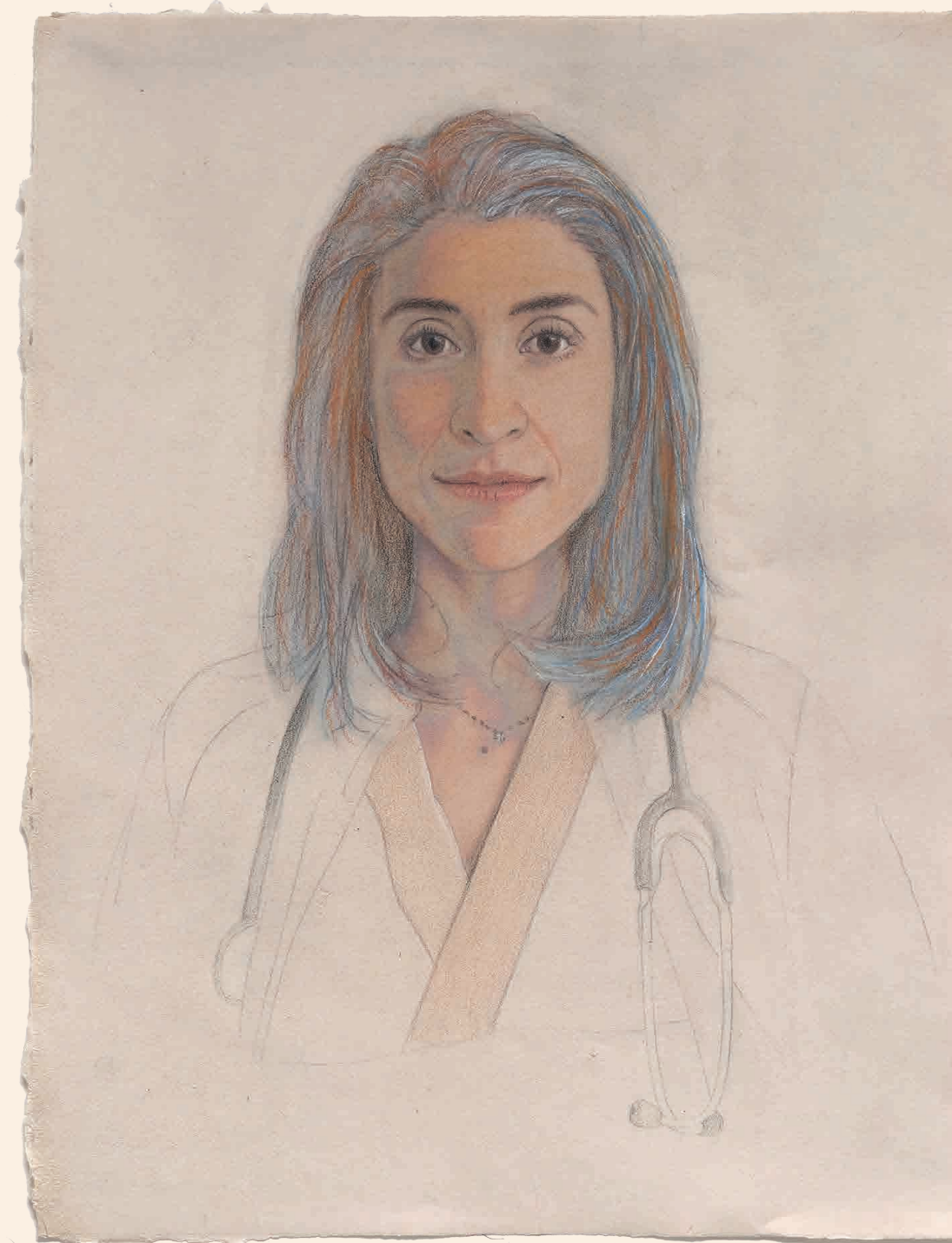
Atim, Doctor – March 2023



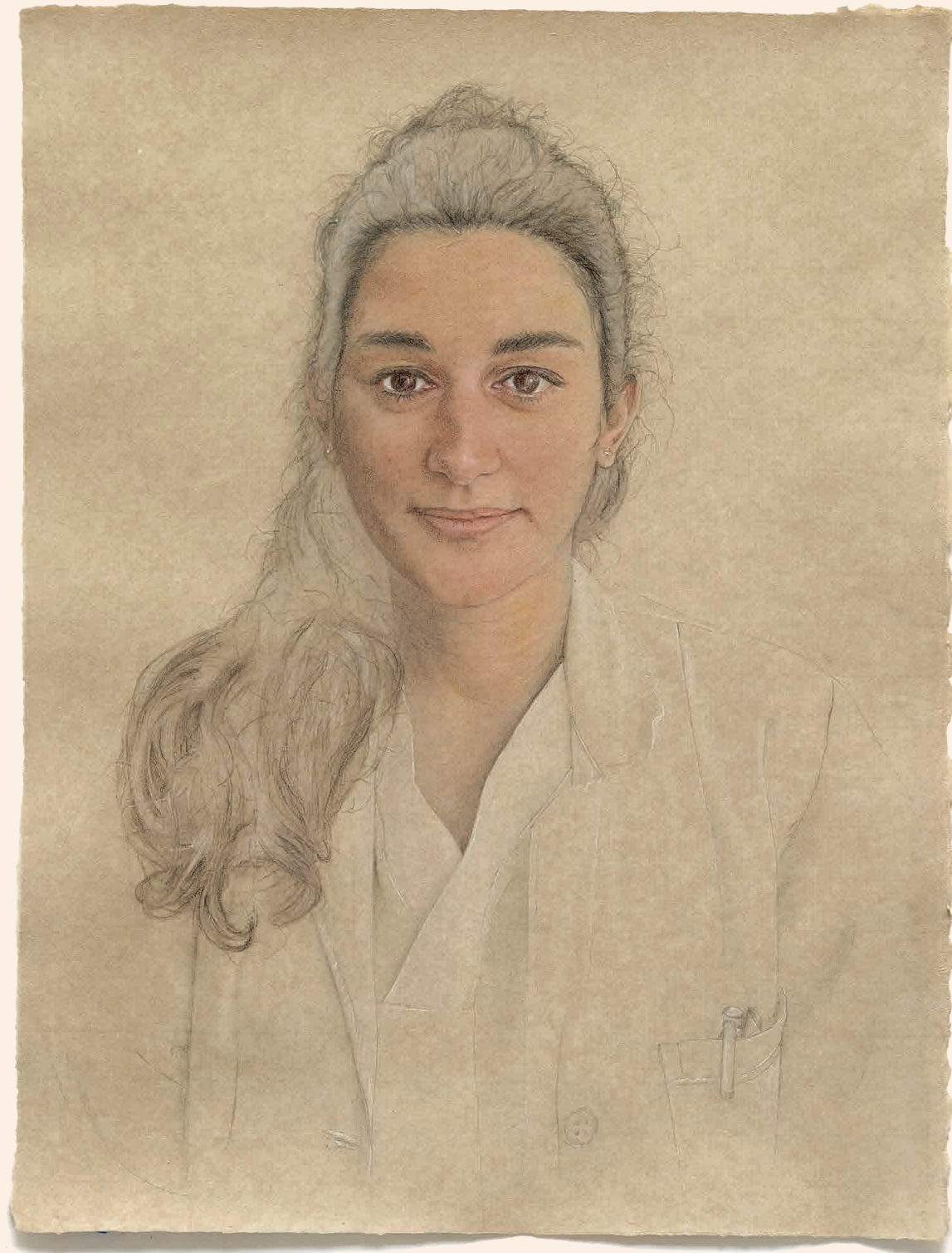
Adelina, Doctor, January 2023



Laura, Doctor – March 2023



Federica, Doctor – February 2023



Alexa, Doctor – May 2023



Monica, Doctor (hematologist) March 2023



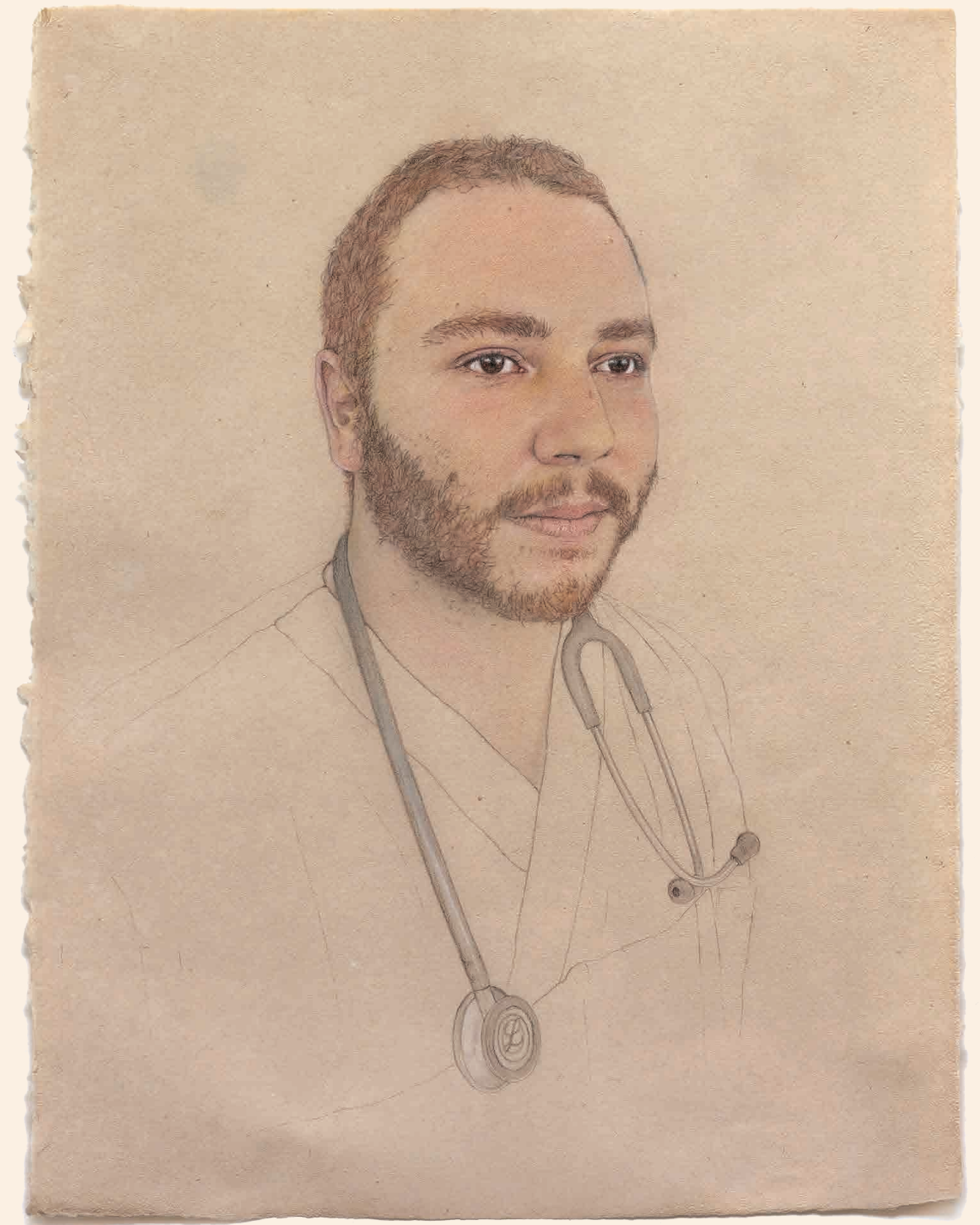
Federica, Doctor – March 2023



Giuseppe, Doctor – April 2023



Simona, Doctor (endocrinologist) May 2023



Gabriele, Doctor - February 2023



Francesco, Doctor – March 2023



Federica and Giorgio, Doctors – my vantage point while lying in bed



Arianna, my primary Doctor – December 2022



Gaetano, Nurse – December 2022



Corina, Nurse – February 2023



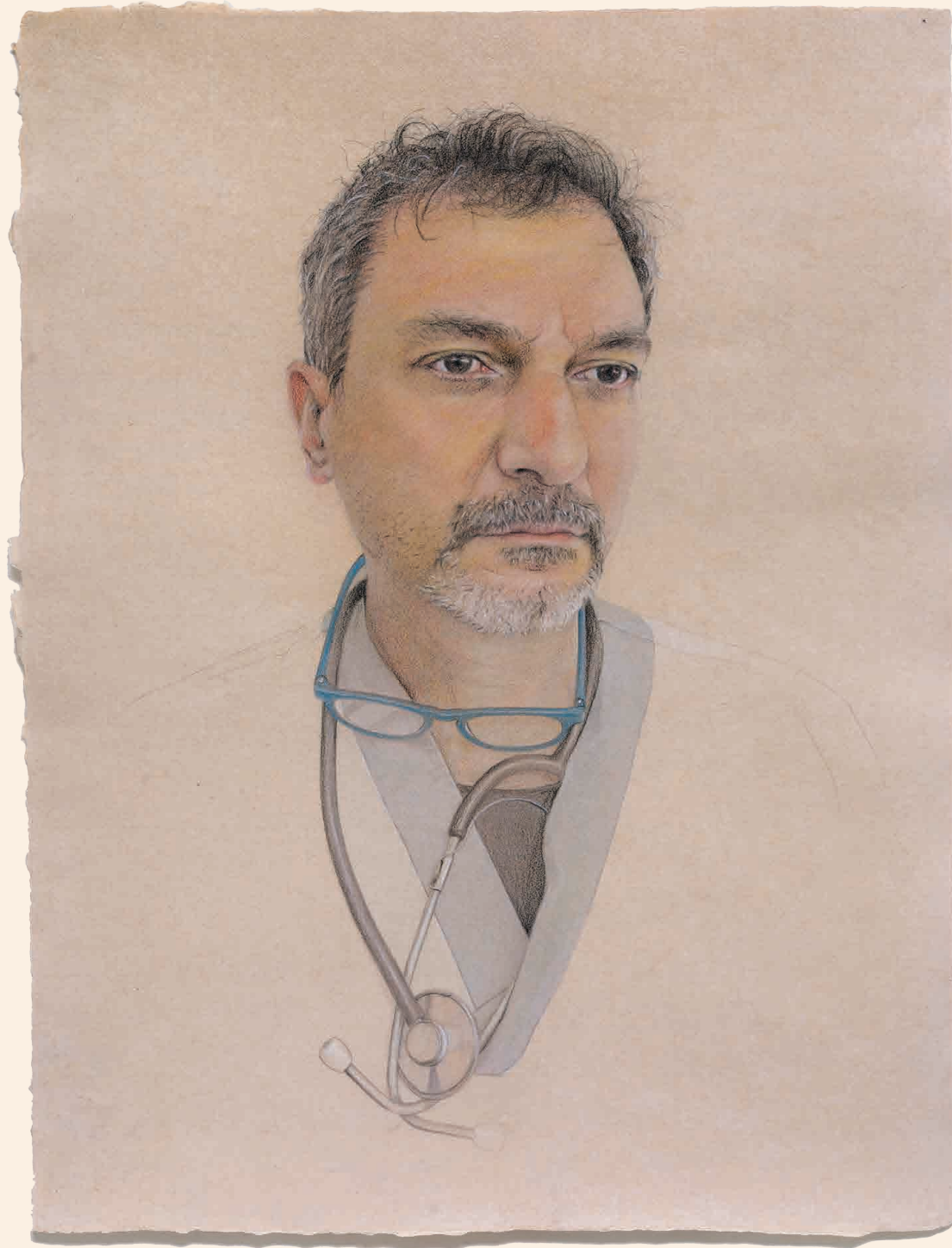
Angelo, Nurse (drawn January 2023)



Maria, Nurse – February 2023



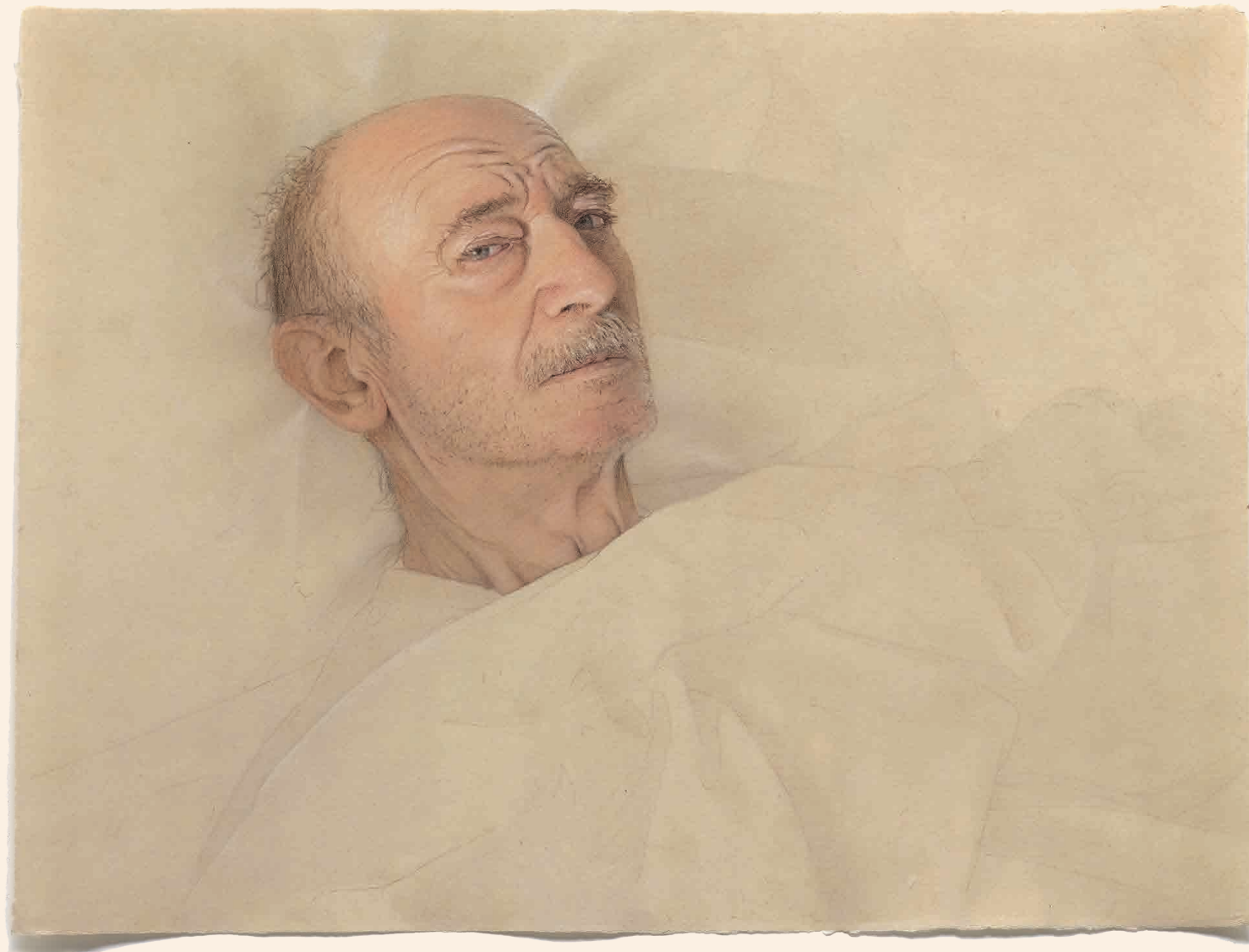
Salvatore, Nurse – May 2023



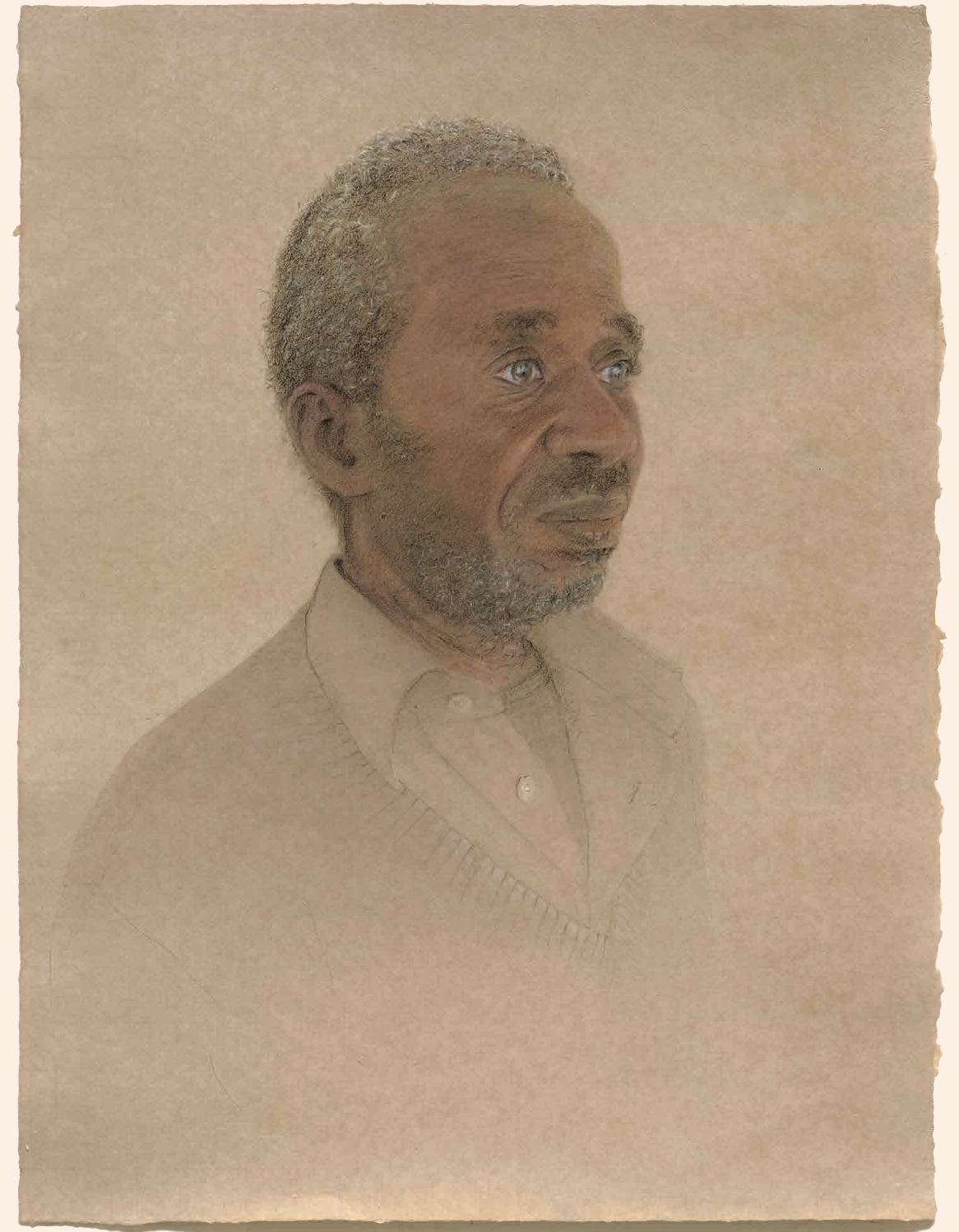
Domenico, Nurse – February 2023



Letizia, Nurse – January 2023



Giancarlo, roommate (Italian school teacher) – January 2023



Sal, Roommate – January/June 2023



Alessandra, friend and owner of L'Arca, Parma – May 2023



Filippo, friend and clothing designer, Parma – May 2023

In the Haiku book written by R.H.Blyth in the chapter IV Wordlessness there lies the Wordsworth description of wordlessness as:

*This is a time
When the light of sense
Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed
The invisible world*

I indeed have difficulty finding the words to describe the serendipity of the moment when Era Farnsworth and I literally almost ran into one another in Parma, Italy. I had been walking through the streets of Parma on my own, absorbing the cacophony of smells and sights, having just returned to the main thoroughfare after getting hopelessly lost in the ancient streets of the old city. There was a flash of a woman coming towards me. As she came into focus, I experienced an almost uncanny moment as I saw her face unblurring from the sea of other faces under the arcade. I knew her. Or at at least, I thought I did. In the moment it took for us to look at each other, we simultaneously recognized one another.



Gail Nanao at a cafe with Era in Parma

Era was alone because her husband Don was isolated in the Parma Hospital with a life threatening case of Covid. We agreed to meet the next day for lunch and I invited her to go on the tour of the Parma opera house with me. During our lunch, we discussed her plans for a delicious repast for Don as soon as he could receive visitors and eat real (i.e. not hospital) food. Meeting Era by chance on the ancient streets of Parma seemed almost too random to be believed. Although we did not see it in these terms at the moment, I believe we both felt that our meeting that day was one of Blyth's flashes in which the invisible world momentarily becomes visible.

—Gail Chadell Nanao, Berkeley, 2023

Era's Emails:

October 30, 2022

Subject: Don

Hello dear friends and family,

Don is in the hospital here in Parma. He has, as a consequence of Covid which we both contracted earlier on the trip: pneumonia, anemia, very low blood pressure and extreme fatigue. The good news is that he seems to be in good hands, at least being taken care of by caring people, which is so important, and also that he is feeling better. They have given him blood transfusions after a CT scan and a battery of tests. He has been pleasantly surprised at the time and attention the doctors give to him.

Covid hit Don hard, but instead of recovering, even a slow recovery, he seemed to get worse. That was probably as a result of the pneumonia and whatever caused him to lose blood.

The hospital gave him a PCR test, and it came out positive, so they put him in the covid ward, which he says is in a nice room with one other person. As a result I am not allowed to visit him, although I brought him a care package yesterday and will again today. I can hardly believe he has covid after testing positive now weeks ago, and at least two negative rapid tests spaced several days apart and almost a week ago. But I can't blame the Italians for being very skittish about covid after what they've been through and I'm grateful that they are taking care of him as he was very ill and felt like he was dying.

So I am haunting the streets of this beautiful, elegant city like a ghost, not knowing a soul, although I have met some very nice shopkeepers. Please send Don some healing thoughts, energy, prayers, if you do that kind of thing. I believe it often does make a difference, especially from a group effort.

Thank you, and love and good health to you all,

Era

October 31, 2022

Subject: Don 2

Thanks, everyone for your healing thoughts, good vibes, prayers, love, good intentions and whatever you did.

I went to the hospital today, getting lost, as per usual, as the Map programs are not accurate for the area around the hospital - showing some streets as not going through and showing other streets as thoroughfares when they are blocked off.

When I got to the hospital, I handed over the cappuccino and the chocolate croissant to the nurse who brought it to Don. Maybe not the best diet for an invalid, but he was craving that cappuccino, as I would be. Hospital coffee, even in Parma, Italy, is swill, Don says.

I had a long talk with one of the doctors — long for a doctor. I told her I needed a letter on hospital letterhead stating that Don was unfit to travel, which is exactly what they had told me when they said they could not release him. British Air said they needed that letter if we were not going to be dinged for a new airfare and also a letter clearing him for travel when that time came. She agreed to write the unfit for travel letter. Then out of the blue she asked me if I would like to visit with Don for a short time. She said two minutes. My friend, Elizabeth Wholey, who lives in Italy, said the doctor must have been pretty certain Don was not contagious or not very, as the Italian hospitals are being so careful about spreading covid. So I got to visit with Don for what was far more than two minutes. Thanks, guys, for your positive thoughts.

She also told me that Don can't be released until he (A) tests negative — I guess this is completely negative on a PCR test or (B) he has no symptoms for 14 days. I asked her if she thought Don had Covid symptoms now and she said no. They are also trying to figure out why he is anemic and what has happened to his blood — where has it gone?

Don definitely seemed improved. He has gotten a translation program on his iPhone to work, so that he can talk to

his Italian roommate, a retired engineer, and some of the nurses who don't speak English. He showed me a photo of his doctors, who all seemed young and female and his nurses with his roommate. He's invited them all to come visit us in California.

On the way back to my "home" which is a gorgeous AirB-nB (see below), part of a former convent ...

... I was walking through downtown Parma, and there was Gail Nanao, an artist friend of mine who lives in Berkeley. She used to be married to Kenji Nanao, an artist and professor. She looked like a vision and almost seemed to be glowing. We could both hardly believe our eyes. She is on vacation with her son and his family, who live in France. We talked for quite a while, and she invited me to go see a tour of the Parma opera house (Teatro Regio) with her tomorrow. So thanks again for those good vibes.

Then I went to visit my new friend who owns a store where I purchased some Ruth Asawa earrings. One in a string of birthday presents I (and thus Don) have purchased for myself. I showed her some Ruth Asawa baskets and she loved them. She had never heard of Ruth Asawa. She told me about a good friend of hers who lived in San Francisco for 20 years, working as a translator, and now lives down the street. I invited her out for a glass of wine and asked her to bring her friend. So that will be Wednesday.

If I look tired, it's because I am. Don't look at me, look at the earrings. But I am leaving the state of ghost consciousness and re-entering life consciousness.

Got to go. Big day tomorrow. I have to move my luggage and Don's luggage to a new location.

Love, Era



November 2, 2022

Subject: Don 3

Dear, dear friends and family,

Thank you so much for your healing thoughts, good vibes, prayers, love, good intentions, positive woo-woo, as Squeak says, and whatever you did. I am speaking lightly, but I am completely serious when I say it is making a big difference. When I was walking the streets like the Phantom of Parma, my eyes were welling and I was blinking back tears. Really, I was a mess. Soon after I made my request, I started feeling better. Some of the friends on our email list are in parts of the world (Europe, Asia) where they were awake and got the email and started sending their good energy right away. Then the US and the West Coast woke up and it got even stronger. I am so grateful for the positive effects on both Don and me. And the wonderful email messages. I wish I could thank everyone personally, but I would be up all night, and as it is I get pretty tired early and am sleeping more than usual.

I apologize that inexplicably some people have fallen off the email list, and I can't seem to put them back on. I am working on it. We have had problems with our Address Book before. So feel free to forward this to people who know Don and me who aren't getting this.

Some of the replies had some interesting information. The Italian hospital has been rather dumbfounded as to why Don has anemia. A number of people have written to tell us of what great experiences they had in Italian hospitals, some while hospitalized. The hospital staff and doctors have been so kind and attentive to both Don and me. I'm so glad they aren't having a Covid spike now.

This just in from Don. The current thought is that he has an auto-immune condition. I asked if he needed to stay in the covid ward and he said yes, until he tested negative.

His team (it's a teaching hospital connected with the U of Parma). The doctor on the far left is a total sweetheart.

One of our friends had a very similar experience to Don's after covid:



I am so very very sorry for Don and for you. How horrible when you are in a foreign country not knowing anyone.

Please tell Don to be very careful and not to rush to get moving too fast. I had the very same thing happen and my pneumonia would not go away, nor the fatigue and anemia. I kept trying to move past it and ended up in the hospital multiple times- even after I stopped testing positive. The Pneumonia would seem to back off a bit and then came roaring back multiple times. I now have damaged lungs so please make him take it easy for as long as possible – even when you return home. I do not mean to scare you but it took me multiple months to get better.

Sending you both love and prayers for a rapid recovery! Please keep us all posted.

This was very timely and good for me to hear because I was just that day going to start pushing for Don to be released. Now I am trying to be patient and let him rest and recover. There is no doubt that he is getting better and acting more like himself.

Another friend wrote:

After my COVID symptoms were over with (I had a dose of Paxlovid), I would test day by day, sometimes negative, sometimes positive. I contacted my general doctor and she called me. She told me to stop testing, that the amount of dead virus in my system would linger and give inaccurate results. This was a month after my first symptoms, July 5th to August 5th. My surgical procedure was September 14th. After that, they NEVER tested me, though this is

standard procedure for most folks. They said a PCR test, being even more sensitive would give false, useless positives. That's all I know. Perhaps Don's doctor at Kaiser in Oakland can write a letter to that effect as it seems that that is Kaiser standard practice.

Very interesting; dead virus can give a positive test result, especially on a PCR test? Has anyone come across any articles on this phenomenon? It may be useful to show the Italian doctors if Don seems to be recovered, but is still testing positive. He was testing negative over several days on the rapid covid tests. I would like him to be moved to a regular ward so I could see him for more than 5 minutes at a time, and I also don't have to wear all this protective gear which gets thrown away after the visit.

Otherwise, the suggestion to try to get Don's doctor at Kaiser to write a letter is a good one, although those doctors are so friggin busy.

Another friend, Susan Filter, chef extraordinaire, sent me a list of restaurants in Parma, and the first one, which the author calls her happy place, but outside the city, is right near the hospital! I couldn't believe it. So I believe I will be able to bring some decent food to Don. This just in: Don doesn't want the food. He's not hungry. That doesn't sound good.

Finally, a message from Don:

Love to you and gratitude to all. We have fantastic, loving friends.

xoxo

New digs. Don wanted to see some photos. I'm just here two days and then I will be moving a little closer to the hospital.



November 4, 2022

Subject: Don04

Dear Friends and Family,

I'm getting a little confused about various emails I have sent out to different folks, so please forgive me if I seem like I'm repeating myself.

The good news is that Don was given what looked like a huge amount of iron infusion, and he was doing way better yesterday when I saw him. I had gone to a restaurant, Ristorante Cocchi, not far from the hospital, which was recommended in an article Susan Filter sent. At first they didn't want to let me order food to go, but they relented, probably when they saw my sad and disappointed expression. I brought Don duck with orange sauce — I knew he really has liked the French version — also roasted potatoes and super fresh ravioli stuffed with either spinach or chard and perhaps ricotta. He happily ate it and proclaimed it delicious. He ate more than I've seen him eat in weeks. So gratifying.

So please keep those good thoughts and prayers coming. I know some of you will feel silly doing that, but it really does seem to be working for us and has made things so much easier. You don't have to spend a lot of time on it. Just sending some love, intention that Don will get better, picturing him healthy and happy. If you feel the inclination and can spare the time, please spend as much time as you'd like. I don't mean to suggest that you should rush it, but it's okay if you rush it. While we're at it, let's put in a good thought or two for our poor world. It seems pretty sickly right now — I am including the population of the world. I was just listening to a Sam Harris interview with an expert on the Ukraine. Very informative.

Here is a photo that Mark Wholey sent me of the last time we were in Rome and Mark came down from Umbria and met us. This is now on his studio wall and it certainly shows Don healthy and happy and able to get out and see Rome. So maybe that can help with your visualizations.



What is keeping me sane over here (esp. when Don is having a bad day): the kindness of strangers, making new friends, running into an old friend.

I believe I mentioned running into Gail Nanao, an artist friend, on the streets of Parma. She invited me to go to a tour of the Teatro Regio with her the next day. I readily agreed and then remembered that I had to change AirBnB locations around the same time. It was also a holiday here in Italy. Some type of Day of the Dead or All Saints Day. I got my old BnB to agree to let me keep my luggage at their place for a little while, then I got the new BnB to agree to let me drop the luggage early. This is both Don's luggage and my luggage. I had a helluva time finding a cab, but finally got one, then rushed to the Teatro Regio and got there just in time. Gail was nowhere to be seen. She had sent a message saying that the tour started earlier than they had anticipated. She said the tour guide had said that she would let us in by ourselves after the tour. So that was probably better than the tour, as that had been all in Italian.

We made a tapestry of this opera house with Doug Hall. His photo is a lot better and more inclusive than mine.

One of the private boxes. Gail ready for the opera to start. Now I want to go see an opera in a beautiful old opera house.

The royal box (a side view), the one with the crown above it.



Gail had made lunch reservations around the corner at a restaurant I had earlier seen and which interested me.

Gail. Thank God for sunglasses, she says. She looks like a cool youngish hipster of a certain age, but not her actual age, or mine for that matter.



We talked about how amazing it was to see each other on the street. We both had the same experience: She sort of came in and out of focus, and then fully materialized and started to glow. She said she had the same thing happen with me. It could be that we were both in denial that it could really be the other. Or maybe it was something else. In any event, how wonderful it was for me to run into her.

We (or I) already cut into this when I remembered to take a photo, but it is sort of an eggplant patty and eggplant chips. Too good.

Duck and veggie tagliatelle.

Our desserts. Hers was a fancy cheesecake and mine was something whose name I can't remember — some sort of delicious almond cake/cookie. Took some to Don and he loved it.



Sadly for me, the next morning Gail left with her family to drive back to Grenoble.

The holiday was over, the city emptied out, it started to sprinkle. Don didn't feel like eating. I was feeling a little down. Fortunately, I had a date for drinks with my new friend Alessandra, the shopkeeper and designer.



Very cute place. Alessandra's friend, Cecilia, is having a Campari spritz and Alessandra and I are having Lambrusco spritzes.

Unfortunately, I didn't get Cecilia with her eyes open, but this is Cecilia who lived in San Francisco for 25 years, working as a translator. Naturally, she speaks English perfectly. She and Alessandra are good friends and have known each other since they were in their early twenties.



This is Alessandra, speaking with a doctor friend of hers who worked at the Mayo Clinic, but is now here in Parma. His daughter is a doctor and works at Maggiore Hospital, where Don is. He told her the Italian govt will probably not even charge us!! Because it was not an elective procedure. It was very bad luck on our part. We had 5 vaccines and almost always had our masks on in enclosed spaces and crowds. If it is the case that we aren't charged, we will make a large donation, as I don't feel right about taking all these services while the Italians foot the bill. I know Don will feel the same way. Alessandra can help us to find how to make the donation.



Finally, some of our friends and family seem to have some anxiety about Don being in an Italian hospital. I asked some of our friends who have experience with Italian hospitals to write some thoughts which might help ease this anxiety. I am not going to mention names, but some of you will know who the authors are:

One is from a dear friend who lives in Italy. She was kind enough to write this, even though she is not feeling great right now. She has been very happy with her outcomes, care and treatment at her local Italian hospital.

I have had 2 cataract ops, a gall bladder out, a knee miniscus repair, and a mitral valve repair at the Perugia hospital, which is also a teaching hospital and very highly rated. My friends, also "older" have also had very good experiences with the Italian health system. I think the Italians are really experts with Covid and related issues.

A friend of ours who practiced at UCSF for many years and did a residency in Italy (I think it was a residency, at least he was working in a hospital in Venice) tells us that "there is a Covid associated anemia that can be seen in up to 60% of Covid patients." So it is not a rare condition. Perhaps getting pneumonia also and becoming so ill is rare. He also said that the Italian doctors are very experienced with Covid.

There is a misconception that every other major nation in the world is "third world" medically compared to the USA. My time spent training at the Mayo Clinic, my forty years on the medical staff at UCSF, and my 10 + years doing private practice and telemedicine taught me that there are great medical groups and hospitals all over the world. In regard to Covid. One of the more informative articles on Covid-related anemia comes from a 2021 cooperative study done by a group of Italian physicians from Pavia , Italy (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33728538/>). They have had a lot of experience with Covid- related health problems, one of which is anemia. So I feel that the group taking care of Don currently are perfectly up to the task. Getting Don back to familiar surroundings is obviously a goal we all want, but nursing him back to good health is primary and In my experience, he is in a good place with dedicated physicians.

I loved getting these emails and another from our doctor friend; it really soothed my ruffled feathers. I hope it helps alleviate any anxiety any of you may feel about Don's care in Italy,

Love,
Era

November 8, 2022

Subject: Don 05

Dear Friends and Family,

Don had a bad day today. It really affects my mood and throws me off balance. I feel so badly for him and, of course, worry about him immensely.

His hemoglobin levels are very low. When he gets a blood transfusion, they go up a little but then come back down. When the levels are low, he feels exhausted and weak. They've drawn, he thinks, over 40 vials of blood and have done so many different tests. All his organs appear to be in good shape; they can't find anything else wrong with him. Finally today they did a bone marrow and bone tissue biopsy. He said that despite the pain reliever they gave him, it was pretty painful. He also said their kindness during the procedure was very moving. They held his hand and were physically so supportive. They are not, generally, able to speak the same language.

It's very moving to think about these doctors and nurses putting out emotionally over and over for their patients.

Meanwhile, I had a surprise visit from two friends of mine, Archana Horsting, founder and former director of Kala, and her husband, Greg Harper. They were in Bologna, a city about an hour away, and heard from Elizabeth Wholey that Don and I were in Parma and that Don was in the hospital. They had been traveling through Italy — Archana speaks Italian and had gone to high school for several years in Padova, I believe it was. Archana said they had several days unplanned in the middle of their trip; she said, "It was almost as though it was meant to be." Yes, that seems to have been happening lately. (Thanks, guys. Those of you who are sending the love, energy, prayers, healing thoughts, etc. We love you even if you're not doing any of that, but we really love the ones who are doing it.)

Archana and Greg showed up and immediately took me to dinner. My new friend Alessandra recommended a restaurant owned by her friend, Croce di Malta, and they were so nice to us. The food was great also. We seemed to be the only non-Italians there. Pretty rare. But Parma is not a big tourist center.

I take back any negative comments I have ever made about Prosciutto di Parma. I do like it and I eat the versions of it we have at home, but I have tended to like the Spanish pata negra better as it tastes a bit like the acorns the pigs are raised on. But this prosciutto was fabulous. Sooo good.

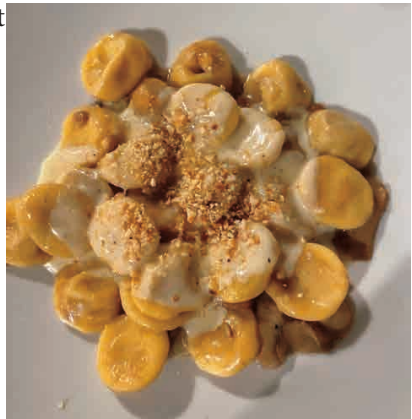


Archana has a temporary patch as she is seeing double. The super kind couple, Archana and Greg.



This was only the second meal I've eaten out after over three weeks in Italy. I have been eating well, but it's all been food I've cooked myself (with great ingredients), or food I've heated up, or food I've gotten to go. Don was not up to going out. The first meal was also in Parma with Gail Nanao.

Most of the sauce is hidden underneath. Delicious porcini sauce. Meat-stuffed pasta which Greg and I had. Archana is a vegetarian.



Unfortunately, Archana and Greg never got to see Don because he was in the Covid ward and even after he tested negative, the hospital had no spare beds for him or anyone.

I've asked if I could take him "home" and he could continue treatment as an out patient, but they said out of the question with his hemoglobin at the level it is.

Greg was sooo kind and helped me move our luggage (wheeling it) from my last place, which was perfectly adequate, but I didn't love the neighborhood. I felt uneasy walking by myself after dark. And I am now in this fabulous place, across the river, which is absolutely



They also kept visible the old stone latrine.



The bathroom is huge.

And the kitchen is very ade-



superb, well-located, and reasonably priced.

They kept their Roman column for all to see.



quate. I'm not taking a photo because I've already messed up the kitchen. I've booked this place for at least another week.

Greg in the basement where the wine is stored.



Second restaurant, Officina Alimentaria Delicata, also approved by Alessandra. It's owned and run by three women, and uses organic ingredients. Don insisted I pick up the bill this time, and I tried, but Greg and Archana wouldn't hear of it. We had a large tasting of three different Parmesans. One was aged 18 months, I think; one aged 24 months, and one aged 30 or 36 months. We liked the 24 month one the best, and Alessandra later agreed. She said the 30 or 36 month gets too salty.

My pasta made from turnip greens, a little salami and pine nuts. LOVED it.

Greg's stewed pork cheek and vegetables over polenta. I had a taste; it was very good.

Archana's risotto with onion; also pretty darn good.



Today I had to say good-bye to them and had a very hard time holding back my tears. I didn't want them to regret coming to Parma (if I went into hysterics), but they said they had a wonderful time.

I walked through the Parco Ducale, it was a beautiful time of day, and crossed the bridge to the back of the Pilotta. I walked through the massive arches. Where I'm staying is just a few minutes away.



Taken on a previous day, a pano of the Pilotta, taken from its courtyard.

Much love,
Era

November 10, 2022

Subject: Don 06

Dear Friends and Family

I was pretty depressed yesterday (now the day before yesterday). There is a new policy at the hospital that they are not allowing visitors into the Covid ward, period. I went in the morning and was told to come back after 12:00 by someone who didn't speak English, so it is very possible I didn't catch what she was trying to tell me. When I returned I was told that there is a new policy at the hospital: No visits at all in the Covid ward. A sign was posted on the doors (in Italian). I took a photo and put it through a translation program, so again, I may not be getting everything.

EXTERNAL USER ACCESS TO NON-COVID-19
WARDS IS PROVIDED:FROM 12 PM TO 1 PM EVEN
BEDS; FROM 6 PM TO 7 PM ODD BEDS.
ACCESS IS ALLOWED FOR A MAXIMUM NUMBER
OF ONE VISITOR PER PATIENT AND ONE VISITOR
PER HOSPITAL STAY.
EXCEPTIONS WILL BE MADE IN CASES REQUIRING
SPECIFIC ASSISTANCE, AFTER EVALUATION BY
HEALTH PERSONNEL.

That kind of sounds like it always has to be the same visitor? Or maybe they simply mean one visitor at a time.

Anyway, they agreed to let me go in, but for the last time. Don was very weak and subdued. It's hard to be up when you're feeling nauseous and exhausted.

As I said, I was pretty depressed when I went to bed. Then in the middle of the night, about 3:00 am here, I woke up and thought I would try to send Don some healing energy of some sort. I was getting ready to do it, and I felt such an amazingly strong feeling of Love which completely enveloped me. Maybe it was from Don, maybe it was from all our friends and family who are trying to help, or maybe it was from the Loving universe, God, gods, or something else. Or all of the above, which is what I suspect. But it lifted me right out of my depression. It was extraordinary. So even though I still feel sad, especially when I focus on the situation, I am not entirely depressed.

I couldn't visit Don today; I went to visit my friend Alessandra, but she was not in her store. So what do we sometimes do when we're sad? We go shopping. One option, anyway. I found a store which had only one size of pants, and they all fit me!! One helluva business model, as I am not exactly an average body type or height. It's true that these pants would fit more Italian women than American women. The pants were all great styles and comfortable. I was tempted to buy a half dozen or so, but restrained myself and bought only two. I also bought that hand-knit coral sweater you can see below, made by the shop owner. She must be paying herself about \$5 an hour.



Then I went back to the Pilotta, which has the National Gallery of Parma and the amazing all wooden theatre.

I hadn't been able to see the Archaeological Museum the first time I went, as it sounded as if most of it was being redone and it's rather difficult to get in — reservations and all that. I had met an American on the street, fluent in Italian, who told me he had been in Egypt, and the Egyptian part reminded him of going into a tomb in Egypt. In fact, he said it was just like. I didn't get that, but maybe I didn't see what he saw — maybe that part was closed off. What I did see of the Egyptian collection was in very good condition, but on the small side.



BTW, tourist season is well and truly over. I was the only person on the tour.

The above contained, I think, pickled or preserved organs. And then they had some mummies which I didn't photograph.

They also had some beautiful Etruscan ceramics. I am crazy for just about anything Etruscan.

That's got to be Oedipus and the Sphinx. No, it's someone with a tail.

The Farnese theater — all wood.



They also have some very good paintings which I have never seen before, not even in reproductions. This is by Giovan Battista Cima, called Cima da Conegliano, painted between 1498 to 1500. He was from Conegliano in the Veneto, not far from Venice.



This is a self-portrait by Maria Callani, born in Milano, 1778 - died Parma, 1803. A very short life. She painted this the year of her death, 1803. Oil on wood.

And enough of these photos or I will clog up the internet works as I did with my last email.



Don called this morning and said the plan is they are giving him a PET scan, then 3 days of cortisone — (not the greatest, in my opinion, but he is really very ill). He said they have determined that the hemoglobin in his bone marrow has been damaged, which was caused by the Covid. That may be extremely dumbed down or mistranslated. It wouldn't be the first time.

They are moving him out of the Covid ward, which is a good thing, as it means I can visit him.

Love to you all,
Era

November 15, 2023

Subject Don 07

Dear Friends and Family,

Thanks to all the powers that be, including all of you, that Don seems to be getting better. And let me not forget modern medicine and the wonderful doctors and staff at Maggiore Hospital in Parma and doctors elsewhere and medical researchers who have helped us. I say all this a bit tentatively as Don has seemed to improve in the past, only to come crashing down, but this time it seems more stable and the highs seem higher and the lows not so low. It was so hard to see lively, vibrant Don slumped in his chair and completely immobile because he didn't have the energy to sit up, with a crashing headache and neck ache. Only being able to walk a few feet at a time, and both of us planning our route across a train station because he wouldn't be able to make his way across without collapsing and he needed a resting place. It was really bad. We thought he was recovering from Covid, which he was also, and having a particularly rough time.

When we got to Parma, which I picked as it looked like a pleasant place for Don to rest before our flight home — we had seen it briefly as we were passing through years ago, and we knew we couldn't go to our previously planned stop in Venice where we were scheduled to stay with our good friends, the Wilds. There are no taxis (except for water taxis on the canals) or cars in Venice. You just can't go there if you can't walk. Anyway, when we got to Parma, we moved into our beautiful AirBnB and started researching what could be wrong. We decided the extreme neck pain Don was experiencing might be a heart attack, and maybe he was having multiple heart attacks. We packed our bags and got a taxi to the hospital in Parma. There is only one and it is mammoth, the Maggiore.

“Don” thru “Don 06” describe his ordeal and in them I ask — beg for healing energy, positive thoughts, prayers, positive woo-woo, etc. We really do think it has helped us both. These Don emails are not on the travel blog. I'm sorry that many people have fallen off the travel emails lists. Some people because they just didn't seem that interested and I can see how these travel emails could be offensive, especially during Covid. Some people just fell off because of some

dreadful whim of the Address Book. Even our main staff at Magnolia were taken off by the Address Book. I didn't do it. And it is so intractable that I have a terrible time trying to add people back in.

Below is a message from Don from about a week ago to all of you which got lost in the flood of emails from everywhere.

This morning (after receiving two units of blood the previous evening), I had a small spike of energy (thanks to the generosity of others and my Italian caregivers); taking advantage of my newfound strength, I showered (for only the second time in my 9-day hospital stay) and lay, my now slender body, back down, reclining in a meditative state. I was thinking about all the love, healing thoughts, Reiki, prayers, and kindness I have received from my friends, doctors, and family and the outpouring of support for Era. As I recline with these tender feelings I took deep slow breaths, focused, and open my heart chakra sending reciprocal love you all so richly deserve. It would have been the middle of the night California time, so maybe your sleeping spirit (those of you in the USA) felt a little tickle, I hope so. xoxo,
Your ever-grateful friend, Don
Looking more perky and his color is better. (taken 2 days ago)

The loving emails we have been receiving from our friends and family mean so much to us, and the loving energy. Thank you so much. It has made a huge difference to us. The amazing serendipitous incidents and meetings I have had when I needed them most is, I think, rather miraculous and out of the ordinary. I attribute it to your and others' outside help. Don reads a lot of the emails and feels the love and I feel that that makes a big positive difference in his healing.



A friend wrote, referring to this group energy, positive thinking healing effort: "They reinforce my belief in the power within us all and how together we can do amazing things."

I would say that is true. I don't think about it often enough,

and most people don't or wouldn't believe it, but I do believe that is true. I believe we can do miraculous things if we could just consider it and maybe believe or realize that it is possible.

Finally, I want to thank those who have written with articles they have found and medical theories which could very well be true and helpful to Don. I know these suggestions all come from a place of deep caring and love for Don. The hospital is being so very careful. They have done dozens of tests on Don; each one involving withdrawing some blood (which does make me a bit nervous about his anemia), but I do appreciate the care they are taking very much. They have also given him multiple blood transfusions. They have come up with a solution and a drug therapy which seems to be working very well. It's still too early to know if this is really going to stabilize him, but it looks miraculously good so far. I am more than grateful. The goal is to stabilize Don enough so that he can fly home, not to cure him.

Guy Diehl has a neighbor who is very experienced with Covid, having worked on R&D for the Covid vaccines, and is also on staff at UCSF. He seems to approve of the approach the Maggiore Hospital is taking and also sent us, through Guy, the same paper on anemia and Covid written by the team of Italian doctors which Dr. Marc Goldyne sent us.

Finally, I am going to Milan tomorrow to meet Marisha and Mia at the airport, stay overnight, and then bring them back to Parma. It will be great to have them here. My friend Annie was going to come at the same time so we have to work that out. Really would love to see them all.

The beautiful Baptistry, amazing frescoes inside.

Lunch with Alessandra. Too bad I couldn't have taken it before we inhaled the food.

Much love,
Era



*The Maggiore Hospital in Parma
(aka, Azienda Ospedaliero-Universitaria)
– a poly, high-specialized hospital –*

Maggiore Hospital offers a full range of local and specialized services for the treatment of diagnostic, therapeutic and rehabilitation services. The hospital provides 1,047 inpatients beds, with 3,850 dedicated staff, and 171 academic doctors; last year 115,726 accesses to the first emergency walk in service were registered.

The Azienda Ospedaliero-Universitaria is one of the Italian's leading health care centers including several innovative and modern Unit called Hub. The "Hub and spoke" is an organization model where high specialized departments host very high complexity centers (hub), supported by a network services (spoke) selecting patients in order to the high complexity services when/if the patient clinical situation becomes more serious.

Afterword

Why make paper?



Portrait of Max Thill, 2023

Why make paper? Paper shows us the in-person fleshy actuality of the world. The world's animistic reality, filled with irreducibly unique parts, is under constant siege by skeptics of all stripes. They flatten all things into ideal types and interchangeable parts. The result is a suspicion that the things we see are not quite what they appear, and that the world might be something less than real.

A sheet of perfectly smooth machine-made paper seeks to disappear from view and be forgotten, like a transparent background in a Photoshop file. Handmade paper can never disappear for the artist. He or she is confronted constantly by its materiality. Any desire to subdue their materials must be discarded. The textured surface of the sheet, a permanent feature from its birth between coarse woolen felts, creates the horizons of possibility. Handmade paper jolts us back into the world of real things.

People in all epochs presume their time is special. So maybe it is a personal prejudice to attribute fault to computers for our suspicions of unreality. Computer files are, in fact, completely interchangeable. A duplicate is really exactly the same as its predecessor. This gives us the illusion that they do not really live in our world. We reflect this in our speech: they descend from The Cloud like bodiless angels. Their life in the world, in physical cobalt and silicon (wrenched from the earth with picks and shovels) is obscured from our everyday experience.

Computer files and programs are, within their domains, perfectly interchangeable parts. But the concept predates them by centuries. A computer program might take the firing pin of a mass-produced rifle as its archetype. But interchangeable parts cannot be the origin either. The writing of a JPEG resembles more closely a scribe with tremendous speed and accuracy. Written language, too, is interchangeable. Could this be our genesis?

Must we go back to the commandment: believe not your lyin' eyes, for your kingdom is not of this world? Monotheism demands a contempt for matter. God spoke the world into existence, and The Word is the only truth that can be relied upon, they say. You must reject the little gods that you find everywhere, whether you see them in the unquenchable will for existence found in fruiting mushrooms, or the unique and irreducible essence possessed even in stones.

Do not think secularism escapes this impulse so easily. The adherent of naive scientism, more common these days than the monotheist, might tell you that the universe is information—that matter's essential composition can be discovered as information and therefore be recordable. They even imagine their own minds as a collection of quantifiable traits awaiting upload to the cloud. Laws of physics and properties of elements, quantifiable and recordable, are all that substance is. So they might say.

These properties hint at the real essences of things. Cobalt, atomic number 27, behaves completely differently from number 26, iron. There's a reason why you can't make cobalt blue pigment or lithium-ion batteries from iron, and

you can't make iron-oxide red or steel girders from cobalt. These things contain, in their essence, properties that can't be faked. Science can tell us some of the how, but the why is completely untouched. Why should one more proton create this galaxy of difference? That's just the way it is.

Here I take my leap of faith. I exhort you to do the same: believe your eyes when you find fleshy, living matter in front of them.

So why make handmade paper? It is a transformation that enacts the wonder and mystery of the world. With stinking, worm eaten, moldering rags, we make something beautiful and unrepentantly unique.

When the second and equally unlikely transformation occurs—the creation of a drawing or painting with crushed stones and bones—handmade paper does not permit you to forget its origin or to presume its interchangeability. The texture of the felts can never repeat. The unique flaws and features of any particular sheet can never be recreated. Handmade paper brings the work of art down from its rarified heights back into the world.

With my love and gratitude to Don Farnsworth, who makes it all possible,

—Max Thill, June 2023



Leonardo da Vinci, *Head of a Woman Called "La Scapiliata"*, 1492-1501 ca.
Galleria Nazionale di Parma



Back in Planet Bay Area
Photo by Enrique, Chagoya 2023
(No Photoshop or retouching)

Colophon