



September 2005

Volume 5, No. 3

## POETRY

From Robert Carroll, *The Art of the Brain*, Los Angeles, CA: Bombshelter Press 2004.  
<http://artofthebrain.org> [www.bombshelterpress.com](http://www.bombshelterpress.com) 44 pp \$8 (including S/H)

This is a sample from an unusual book with a spectrum of moving collaborations between poets and people who are facing major health challenges.

### Aerika

Aerika Wiseman was born to loving parents in the quiet countryside of Everett, Washington. She spent her young years in the Seattle suburbs enjoying family camping trips and neighborhood adventures with her brother. Aerika's family moved to Stuttgart Germany when she was a teen. The opportunity to travel throughout Europe, Egypt and Israel for three years and to experience new cultures set Aerika on a budding spiritual journey.

Upon returning to high school in Washington, Aerika discovered through volunteer experience a love and talent for working with children, and she decided to become a nurse. Aerika attended Azusa Pacific University, where she became involved with foreign missions and residence leadership. While earning her B.S. in Nursing, she met James, her future husband, whom she married in 1997. Aerika began her nursing career at Loma Linda University Children's Hospital caring for children with cancer. Her passion for teaching then led her to a position at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center, where she trained fellow nurses to care for cancer patients.

In early 2003, Aerika was working at Harbor-UCLA and earning her Masters of Science in Nursing from USC when a seizure led to the detection of her brain tumor. A few weeks later, she discovered she was pregnant. With her loving husband by her side, Aerika finished her Master's degree and gave birth to Ashleigh, a beautiful baby girl. Post-delivery, Aerika underwent surgery and was diagnosed in February 2004 with a grade IV glioblastoma. She received radiation and continues with chemotherapy. Aerika lives each day to the fullest and is grateful for all the loving people in her life. She is optimistic and hopeful that she will be with her family for each bright and beautiful tomorrow.

## **The Beauty of My Brain Tumor**

(In the voice of Aerika Wiseman)

Thanks to the initial generalized seizure I experienced  
during a run one evening through the Pasadena hills,  
this beautiful eight-month old baby ball of fire  
is teetering on my lap, babbling up a storm.  
My daughter Ashleigh is the beauty of my brain tumor.

You see, the anti-seizure medication messed with my cycle,  
and I discovered I was pregnant one week after  
the tumor diagnosis.

Soon, my husband and I brought a 7-pound, 19-inch angel  
into our world,

a beacon of light through the dark matter in my brain.  
We never suspected that a Glioblastoma Multiforme  
was creeping around the left side of my motor strip,  
growing as my baby grew.

“Did you just not feel challenged enough?”  
my mother asked. We laughed.  
Life has never been something I questioned.  
Keeping the baby; giving birth; enjoying time with family;  
creating opportunities for children, students, and friends:  
these are the things that have made my life happy and full.

My husband James said that we could choose  
to become better people, or we could choose  
to become bitter. The decision was simple.  
The prayer of St. Francis of Assisi states,  
“For it is in the giving that we receive.”  
I have spent my life trying to lead and serve others.  
Now, I must find a new way to give to the world  
that operates within my chemo-fatigued limits.

It is ironic how life prepares us for challenges.  
I am a Pediatric Oncology nurse  
and a chemotherapy nurse educator.  
James is a medical student.  
We practiced Ninjitsu as a hobby,  
the martial arts defensive training  
that taught us how to fight and rise from a fall.  
So, we can say that with our backgrounds,  
we were prepared to battle brain cancer,  
but no one is prepared to rise from this type of fall.

I do not focus too often on the mini-seizures  
or my right foot not balancing as it should  
or my hair growing back in the pattern of a Mohawk-  
yes, really, a Mohawk.  
No, my focus is my daughter and my husband

and the love we share.  
 My focus is getting through each day  
 with a little more strength.  
 My focus is getting back to work,  
 so I can teach my nursing students  
 how to care for cancer patients.  
 I cannot even do the small details right now.  
 But someday, I hope to hike Yosemite again,  
 or even snowboard.  
 I never say never.

My experience with brain cancer has changed me.  
 I was always thinking about my next step.  
 Today, I am just thankful for what is now,  
 focused on what is now.  
 Suddenly, the once dreaded *turning thirty* is an exciting time.  
 I appreciate spending hours with James and my mom  
 traveling to appointments and eating meals together,  
 and being at home watching Ashleigh play—  
 all the things that would not have happened  
 had we been *doing the rat race*.  
 I hope other people will think about the little moments  
 and not miss the opportunity to live.

My family and I do not dwell on prognosis.  
 Too many people beat the odds.  
 I plan to see my little Punky  
 step onto her first snowboard  
 and someday graduate from college.  
 I will watch my family grow,  
 and I will grow with them.  
 This is my life journey.  
 Faith, hope and my child's smile  
 have taught me how to rise from any fall.

© 2004 by Teri Goldman

**Teri Goldman** is a writer and a social worker. A Los Angeles native, she earned her MSW from UCLA and spent several years on the Pediatric Social Work staff at UCLA Medical Center. Teri is a member of the Los Angeles Poets and Writers Collective, and her poetry has appeared in *Onthebus*, *The Art of the Brain*, and the chapbooks *Indigo Days* and *Complicated Lives, Simple Truths*. She is currently writing her first novel and completing a collection of short poems.  
[terigold2@earthlink.net](mailto:terigold2@earthlink.net).

Order *The Art of the Brain* from  
 Robert Carroll, M.D.  
 Editor, *The Art of the Brain*  
 1314 Westwood Blvd. #210  
 Los Angeles, CA 90024  
 email [RobertCarroll@att.net](mailto:RobertCarroll@att.net)

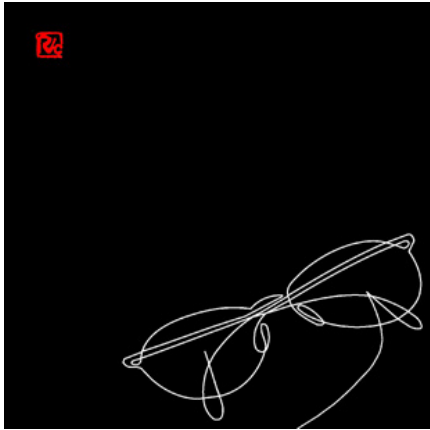
## POETRY AND HUMOR ARE HEALING

Ric Masten

### NO SLAM DUNK

-- THE SET UP — Last week I had "roll" when I meant "role." A post or two ago it was "rain" when I meant "reign" or was it "rein?" And then there are the misplaced apostrophes and hyphens. Thank Heavens that on my W&O list of 2000 good souls there are 2000 marvelous proof readers, quick to e-mail suggestions and keep me from making a total dunce out of myself. Thank you all for that! I am now in the process of proofing my forth coming book "WORDS & ONE-LINERS - Take 2" My neighbor and dear friend embree (she doesn't capitalize the "e") sits beside me while I read the book aloud to catch lost words chortling at the horrendous way I spell.

-----In colleges I am often asked why I don't use much punctuation. My answer is, "I don't know how. I have always written for a listener not a reader. If it really troubles you, get a pen or pencil and you do it yourself" And so, to further cover my nudity with fluttering hands I post the following —



in a candid moment mother once said  
 "Show me a man  
 who thinks he's in control  
 and I'll show you a clever woman."  
 and certainly  
 she was the sovereign head  
 of the kingdom I came from  
 I didn't go to college.... I was sent!  
 off to study optometry  
 groomed  
 to step into my step father's shoes  
 another "sight for sore eyes" she'd joke  
 another professional man  
 she assumed

thank god  
 I was learning disabled!

I may have jumped  
 whenever her majesty spoke  
 but I couldn't spell my own name  
 let alone "ophthalmology"  
 a fatal flaw  
 even mother couldn't remedy  
 each spring the educational system  
 cleanses itself of dummies like me  
 in those days a dyslexic  
 was labeled "slow"  
 "A nice guy but a brick shy you know."  
 no one to be grinding your lenses  
 five times Ma tried to slam dunk me  
 five times academia had to flunk me

and so  
 much to mother's dismay and despair  
 her failed optician wound up  
 in rock & roll - song selling  
 going on from there  
 to a unique and rewarding career  
 speaking poems - story telling

learning disabled?  
 hell, I was learning advantaged

they say  
 "It's all in the timing." and I agree  
 because if the PC with "spell check"  
 had existed  
 back when my mother held sway  
 I'd be trapped in the life

of an optometrist today

of myself

I did, however  
wind up making a spectacle

+++

## NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON PROSTATE CANCER, 2005

### Ric Masten

---THE SET UP — The setting was the Omni Shoreham Hotel in Washington, DC. And as an actor in this cast of characters I played my part as best I could. This is not meant to be poetry but rather a poetic summery of two days a week ago.



all were informed and knowledgeable  
but one had a quiet thoughtful style  
a sweet gentle smile — someone who  
was in the same boat as the rest of us  
finding him was like coming home

in Baltimore International  
I wait to fly home to my wife  
having just spent what arguably  
has been the two best days of my life  
dubbed the “Poet Laureate of Prostate  
Cancer”  
I’m probably the only poet ever invited  
to address a medical convention  
but for me advanced PC is the subject  
that gets all the ink these days  
this is not to say  
I didn’t have hidden agenda — I did  
in due time I will need a master navigator  
to guide me through the treacherous waters  
that lie up ahead

not an easy task as the panel of speakers  
were the best of the best  
but to be totally honest  
the technical talk sailed over my head  
but preparing and reading nautical charts  
is what the navigator is paid to do

so it wasn’t so much what they said  
rather the manner in which they said it

but this  
was only icing on the cake  
what made the last two days arguably  
the best two days of my life  
was putting faces on the friends  
encountered in cyber space  
that mystical place where care and concern  
is not determined by age, gender, race,  
physical appearance, financial situation  
or geographical location — souls  
whose mind and spirit I’ve embraced  
suddenly appearing in person  
Abe, from South Africa  
Rose, charming and helpful  
Judy, who waltzed a turn or two with me  
Saint Howard, Marty, Al and Ray  
they all came by in a never ending parade  
and new friends were made

a weeping woman from India  
whose husband was newly diagnosed  
I held her hand thinking of my wife  
“I know, I know, I understand.”  
a feisty old duck from South Carolina  
a gay coming out to me  
a brother from Harlem another from  
Charleston  
with charts and digest to share and compare  
with mine — even a woman who had once  
been a man  
the surgeon leaving the gland behind  
a band of brothers ...and sisters  
united by dire circumstance  
but oh, how we danced!

on speaking tours  
I often ask my audience if there  
is any hurtful thing that they have done  
to another or had done to them  
any accident or illness  
that when I snapped my fingers  
would be out of their life forever?  
many raise their hands

not me  
how would I know not to hurt another  
until I hurt my best friend  
a knife wound so deep it took years to heal  
lessons are learned the hard way  
and dealing with "terminal" cancer  
and what that entails  
is the last thing I would wish away  
if it meant I would miss arguably  
the best two days of my life

+++

From  
Ric Masten's weekly  
WORDS & ONE-LINERS  
<http://www.ric-masten.net>

#### TERMS OF USE

The International Journal of Healing and Caring On Line is distributed electronically. You may choose to print your downloaded copy for relaxed reading. Feel free to forward this to others.

**The International Journal of Healing and Caring**  
**P.O. Box 76, Bellmawr, NJ 08099**  
**Phone (609) 714-1885 - Fax (609) 714-3553**

Email: [center@ijhc.org](mailto:center@ijhc.org) Web Site: <http://www.ijhc.org>

**Copyright 2001 IJHC. All rights reserved.**