## POETRY

## First time

They say you never forget your first time and I've learned that this is true.

Once in a while, my mind wanders back to a night, now years away,

The memory triggered by something ever so slight, A sound, a scent, a voice.

And I remember clearly.

I see his lovely body, the chest exposed, sweat trickling down the well-formed chest.

I see his hands. A working man's hands,

Encrusted with the remains of a day on the construction site. His arms, tattooed, declaring unfailing love for an old girlfriend.

I smell his breath, tinged with beer and cigarettes and the bar from which he had been

brought.

I hear that breath, rasping, desperate. And pleading. I hear panic in the voice of the anesthetist resident, A difficult intubation.

I see, the blood-stained drool that oozes down his unshaved jaw.

I hear, the crack of the defibrillator on that lovely chest. Crack. Quiet. Again. Again. AGAIN FOR GOD'S SAKE. And then I hear what we all hear sooner or later. The silence.

The Team stands still, in respect or shame, I am not sure which.

I hear the rubbery sound of gloves being removed. And that, more than anything else, signals that it is finished.

This memory, not unpleasant, is one I hold on to. My first death.

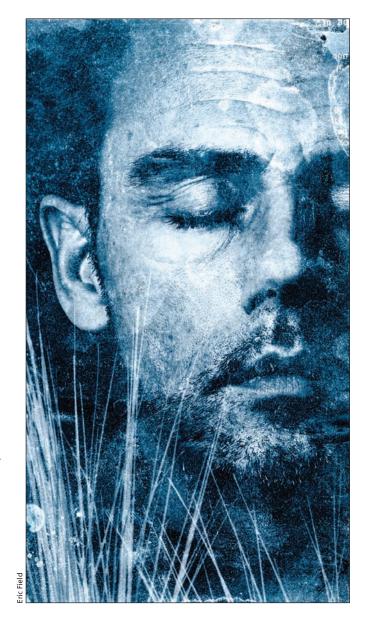
I was there to watch this young man die. So it's okay that I am visited from time to time in this way.

As always, the memory fades quickly.

I am comforted though, knowing that in weeks, months, years, it will return to me.

Triggered by something ever so slight.

**Eileen P. Sloan MD**Department of Psychiatry
Mount Sinai Hospital
Toronto, Ont.



"First time" won first prize in the poetry category of the 2012 ARS Medica and CMAJ Humanities Poetry and Prose contest.

 $CMAJ~2013.~{\rm DOI:}10.1503/{\rm cmaj.}120817$