

Lifeworks

Youth and observation

Yea, from the table of my memory
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,
That youth and observation copied there.
— *Hamlet I, v, 98ff*

In *Table of My Memory*, Dalhousie University's Medical Humanities Program revisits the success of last year's student art exhibition on organ transplantation with a second Art in Medicine Project: this time, a meditation on Alzheimer's disease. The show features 50 works by Dalhousie medical students, who have used installation art, sound, painting and sculpture to explore their theme. Each artwork is accompanied by a written commentary on the symbolism used to represent the disease. More important, perhaps, is the personal engagement and self-exploration disclosed by these brief texts, in which the participants consider the implications of Alzheimer's disease not only for their patients but also for their own development as physicians.

Project coordinator Jonah Samson writes that "one of the greatest strengths of the project is that, in creating these artworks, medical students really had to focus on the patient and to consider what the disease means to both the patient and the people who are close to the patient. This is particularly important when we consider the impact of Alzheimer's. We hope that through our participation in this project we are brought closer to providing humane patient care to our patients and their families."

Timed to coincide with Alzheimer's awareness month, the exhibition is on view until January 30 at the Sir Charles Tupper Medical Building at Dalhousie's Medical School. An illustrated catalogue of the exhibition will be published later this month.

Anne Marie Todkill
Editor, The Left Atrium



Stephanie Smith, Class of 2001. *Memory Tree*. Mixed media. "The first contact I had with a person with Alzheimer's was when I was 16. I was volunteering at a nursing home and was asked to spend some time with one of the residents of the home. When I walked in she was quite agitated. She was sitting in her bed flipping through a book tearing out every other page, which she proceeded to throw up in the air so that she was surrounded by fluttering pages. The book was her address book. She could no longer remember the names in her book and was frantically trying to get rid of the evidence of her lack of memory. This image has stuck with me through all these years and many encounters with other Alzheimer's patients. This art project is a symbolic representation of this woman, the trunk symbolizing her body, rooted in reality, and the leaves, her memory, fluttering to the ground, out of her reach."