

## Room for a view

## The shadow

Some years ago, when I was visiting New Zealand, I looked toward the equator in the middle of the afternoon and noticed that my shadow fell to the right. This was quite disorienting: in Canada, when you look toward the equator at that time of day your shadow is on the left. I began to reflect how our shadows are part of our identity. I suspect we take our shadows for granted. Maybe we shouldn't.

In my practice I often hear patients refer to their shadow side. Yet a shadow varies so much in size and shape, depending on the angle of the light. It's hard to see your shadow behind you; you can only really know the shadow in front, which means keeping your back

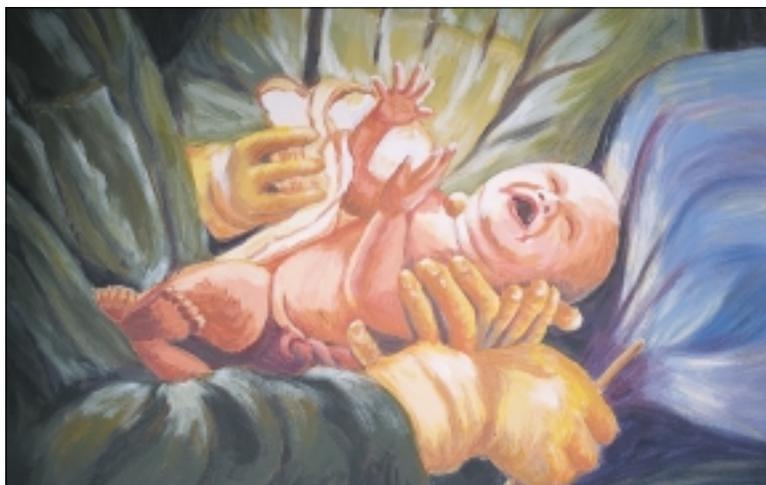
to the light. At noon in the tropics you stand on your shadow. In the evening, your shadow can be huge and frightening as you walk away from the setting sun. Cast against a distant wall, it almost disappears because of the immensity of the sun. If you walk toward a bright, glaring light, your shadow can only be seen by others. The same is true when you walk toward a bright, glaring truth.

I have found in psychotherapy that people who are most insistent on knowing the harsh truths about themselves, their family or their culture benefit most from their personal inquiry. The most useful history is always the most painful. And the most painful is the

most deeply buried, whether in the recesses of the mind or in the archives of a nation. I sometimes ask my patients to do a role-play in which they persistently insist, "I must know," while I counter with all the usual rationalizations: "It's too painful." "What's the point in digging up the past?" "You'll upset everybody." "You can't remember it clearly anyhow." They come to understand that these resistances have been handed down for generations. The more they push through their resistance, the better they are able to face the harsh light of personal truth, and the better they are able to see their shadows.

Most people claim that they want to know the truth about themselves. And

## Lifeworks



I have been a family doctor for 28 years. My hobby is painting, and over the years I have managed to take many small courses at night or on weekends at our city art gallery and in high schools. However, I was always too short of time to do any work on my own. Last year, when my father died, my lifelong desire to paint suddenly became more urgent. I turned an empty bedroom into a studio, and every Sunday afternoon I work there, determined to express some moments of life through this medium. My main interest is acrylic and watercolour portraits and scenes with people, which I suppose is not surprising for a middle-aged doctor reflecting on her life so far. This painting, *First Breath*, measures 18 x 24 inches and was done in acrylic on a canvas panel. It was inspired by a photograph taken by the father of the newborn in the days when I was still delivering babies, and is intended as a tribute to the family doctors and nurses who attend the miracle of birth. — **Lianne Lacroix**, Kelowna, BC

## The warranty is running out

For middle age  
I lack at times  
enthusiasm.

Those in charge,  
the politic, the parent  
authoritarian, omnipotent  
well of knowledge and support,  
have crumbled into human remains.

The DNA which never failed  
to mount repair of my immortal frame  
is giving up.

My friends —  
playing tag  
just yesterday,  
are dying piece by piece.

This was not part of the bargain.

**Robert C. Dickson**  
Family physician  
Hamilton, Ont.