

## Lifeworks

### An act of remembering

#### Something Happened

Drawings by Jane Martin  
Exhibited at The Red Head Gallery,  
an artist's cooperative, Toronto, Ontario  
June 4–28, 2008

Artist Jane Martin's husband began to have difficulty speaking and remembering around Thanksgiving of 2000. Ewen McCuaig was subsequently diagnosed with a glioblastoma and, despite having surgery, radiotherapy and chemotherapy, succumbed to his illness at the end of November 2001.

A well-known Canadian painter, Martin took her first Polaroid of Ewen on Nov. 4, 2000, after his surgery and

then hundreds more thereafter. She also kept a journal of his last year, paying close attention to his idiosyncratic and often poetic use of language, as the brain tumour progressed.

Her first drawing, using colour and charcoal pencils, was undertaken 8 months post-operatively. Ironically, her plan to create a visual narrative of "what happened" was delayed by a head injury she herself sustained in a car accident. She returned to the difficult task 3 years later.

Thirty-nine drawings were produced, each entitled with a quirky phrase used by her husband (for example, the image shown here: "The roses are just moving into fabulosity").

At the vernissage, the exhibit was

introduced by Dr. Warren Mason, the neuro-oncologist who treated Ewen at the Princess Margaret Hospital in Toronto, Ontario. Mason spoke of how visual art such as this allows all of us to contemplate the inevitability of death and, in particular, challenges physicians to reflect deeply, as opposed to adopting the usual strategies we all use to distance ourselves from dying patients. He also emphasized that doctors need to choose their language carefully when giving bad news, as those words will become "forever etched" in the minds of those who hear them.

The drawings themselves reflect their Polaroid inception in their simple format. They are strikingly realistic, when compared to Martin's more interpretative,

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Jane Martin

Jane Martin, *The Roses Are Just Moving Into Fabulosity* (2005). Coloured pencil. 11 × 18 cm. Private collection, Daintry Topshee.

vibrant oil portraits. They are tender, yet unsentimental, as they portray Ewen's gradual disappearance. He becomes more fragile, his skin hangs, his gaze becomes more distracted. All colour gradually vanishes as he does. One of the most striking and moving images is the juxtaposition of roses against his fresh neuro-surgical scar.

In an interview, Martin described the work as an act of remembering. She spoke of the conscious artistic choices she made as she selected photographs, then, with pencil in hand, reinvoked Ewen day after day on the page.



Jane Martin

Jane Martin, *This Noise Thing And Then I Lost Everything* (2002). Pencil and coloured pencil. 11 × 9 cm. Private collection, Erna Paris and Tom Robinson.

This is clearly a trained eye, undertaking a painful, “sometimes dreaded,” yet redeeming task. There is “a little story within each drawing,” each informing the larger “Something” of the collection's title.

The result is a profoundly moving visual account of loss, but one that allows us to imagine our own journey toward death and those we will leave behind.

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## Book review

# Sweet dreams

### Combating Sleep Disorders

Kathy Sexton-Radek and Gina Graci  
Praeger Publishers; 2008

152 pp \$34.95 ISBN 978-0-275-98973-6

Had I been able to read *Combating Sleep Disorders* 25 years ago I might have enjoyed more and better sleep during my years as a shift worker. Much of the information regarding sleep hygiene succinctly laid out in figure 7.1 on page 67 took me several years to acquire during nocturnal conversations with emergency worker colleagues.

In retrospect, many of the book's recommendations seem self-evident: limit noise, light, alcohol, nicotine, and caffeine; manage diet, exercise, room and body temperature; improve bed comfort and air quality. But I wonder whether I could have put these directives into practice back then, when I was often chronically sleep-deprived.

Authors Kathy Sexton-Radek and Gina Graci bring much expertise to the subject. Sexton-Radek is a psychologist involved in research and treatment of sleep disorders. And Graci, a sleep specialist and director of a program in Psychological Oncology at Northwestern University in Chicago, Illinois, has a research interest in insomnia.

Their short book is intended as an introduction and guide for the individual referred to, or in the care of, a sleep specialist. As such, it is also somewhat of a primer for anyone curious about sleep problems.

The first half of the book provides basic information about sleep architecture, sleep hygiene and the work of sleep specialists. Rather than starting off with a chapter entitled “Signs of Poor Sleep,” the book would be better served with some of the material from Chapter 3, “Sleep Medicine Facts,” incorporated into a cogent introduction to

the nature of sleep, a simple schema for thinking about sleep disorders and a few paragraphs about the work of sleep medicine specialists.

The latter half of the book features a mixed bag of “common sleep battles,” presented in no particular order. Diverse topics, such as menopause and poor sleep, sleep and athletics, work and sleep, cultural influences on sleep, and the use of melatonin (*not* recommended by the authors), are briefly considered.

Physician readers may get a little impatient with some of the content. On the topic of food and sleep we are told: “Maintain a balanced diet. Yes, maintain a balanced diet of foods to give you optimal health.” In a chapter on emotions and poor sleep comes the rather impractical suggestion: “If you feel that you are depressed or have a family history or past history of depression and are experiencing sleep disturbance, please schedule an appointment with a sleep specialist.”

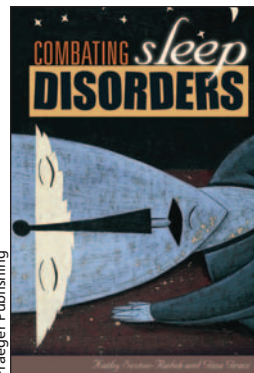
I smiled at the end of the micro-chapter, “Should your pet sleep with you?” I had a vision of Wallace and Gromit as I read the authors' well-intentioned warning: “[P]et owners on [continuous positive airwave pressure] machines or other health care machines are at risk for some interference of the instruments' functions with a cat or dog climbing around the wiring or machine to get into bed.”

*Combating Sleep Disorders* is not designed to be a clinical reference text; at the same time, it contains a

lot of useful, referenced information, including suggestions for further reading from the sleep literature, and the website address for the non-profit National Sleep Foundation ([www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org)). File it under books your sleep-disturbed patients may or should be reading.

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