

# MIND TO MIND

*Creative writing that explores the abstract side  
of our profession and our lives*

*Carol Wiley Cassella, M.D., Editor*

## A Calling

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**I** In your hand, my little hand,  
I must have been only seven or eight,  
Going round and round on Sunday rounds,  
In church clothes,  
Bribed with lunch,  
And barely matching your tireless gait.  
In your hand a stethoscope,  
In your wake I waited in the hall,  
Trying on your scrub pants,  
Swimming in your shoes,  
In silence.  
And fingering your pager,  
I wondered if I would answer the call.

In your hand a colleague's greeting,  
To me it always seemed,  
A hallway handshake of prisoners or priests,  
Bracing each other here on holy ground,  
With tales of war and wit,  
One fleeting weary respite,  
For two soldiers not wanting to be found;  
Two captives not wishing to be released.  
In your hand your briefcase brimming,  
By your side a boy just ten so willing,

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To carry it off to your office,  
 Where "an hour" might become three,  
 But feel like one.  
 For with toys from the shelves asunder,  
 He would sit in selfish wonder,  
 How the books behind could be so thrilling.

In your hand a fountain pen,  
 Poised mid-thought above considered notes,  
 Held in check by a man of words,  
 Exacting meaning amid semantic throes,  
 And jewelling phrases like a man who knows,  
 The thought better written is the one better heard,  
 While the boy who listened heard more than you wrote.  
 In your hand a needle driver loaded,  
 With keen intent for a boy now twelve,  
 Lacking stitches as boys are apt to need,  
 And waiting in abject horror for the needle,  
 The pain of Novacaine that never came,  
 Because you distracted me.  
 It was also my fear you knew to treat.

In your hand the lives of so many,  
 And always room enough for the lost and the frail,  
 All of them persons worth knowing,  
 With loved ones, lovers, and lives,  
 All of them mortals with their mortality showing,  
 All persons whose sacred trust you never failed.  
 For in your hand a scalpel flashing,  
 Before your eyes the course was always set;  
 No deviation from perfection accepted,  
 No compromise of competence allowed,  
 No quarter granted to disease or suffering.  
 You knew the best within you,  
 Was the best they could get.

In your hand a dying woman's chart,  
 In your other her withered tired hand,  
 All of eighteen, and I watched you heal,  
 With words of comfort, an unhurried ear,  
 That which time and illness had tried to kill;  
 The courage and dignity of your fellow man.  
 In your hand always a higher standard,  
 To which you held yourself.  
 Whether a humble pilgrimage or a holy crusade,  
 From a journey of integrity,  
 Only a rare man returns unscathed.  
 Would that I, for just one day,  
 Might live my life so well.

In your hand now, just one last time,  
The key to your office door,  
And in your gaze an empty neon glow,  
That both beckons you back and bids farewell.  
In your hand the knob so idles,  
And upon the switch your fingers dwell,  
Heroic hesitation of a life unfinished,  
Watching a career come to a close.  
And in that moment,  
Let no doubt, no regret, no sadness cloud your eyes,  
For if you look back inside,  
You'll find what you left behind,  
And see again your boy once ten,  
Still looking up to you.  
And that there in his bigger little hand,  
My hand,  
Has always been your hand,  
Still guiding my way with a tireless gait,  
On a calling I too so proudly chose.