

MIND TO MIND

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

Stephen T. Harvey, M.D., Editor

A Proper Burial

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It was a crisp early spring New England morning and the temperature was flirting with the ability to tease the buds out of the barren branches. I was post-call and exhausted. With my adrenalin levels too high to sleep, I went out for a run to clear my mind of the night's imagery related to the bloody death of a young cancer patient. The morning's silence and stillness were broken by the hum of a vehicle accelerating toward me around the bend. I watched a small red squirrel dart out from the woods trying to capture a barren acorn that somehow had survived the winter. The truck roared past me and crushed the squirrel as it tried to drag the large acorn to safety. The squirrel never got a chance to enjoy a bite.

I jogged on. I did not feel sadness or pity. Was this just my exhaustion, or a glimpse of a darker side of me? Had my medical experience and training simply taught me to disconnect? The squirrel was just another victim of a senseless event that could not be changed or fully understood. Additionally, I was slightly annoyed at both the squirrel and the truck for ruining my therapeutic time alone in the woods.

The next day, as I jogged by, I expected the squirrel's remains to have been eaten by another animal. However, it was still there, unchanged but for some flies and dried blood. As summer faded into fall, my jogs continued and so did the presence of the squirrel's remains. Even though now grotesque in appearance, I knew the squirrel's story. In fact, I was the only one who knew the squirrel's story. I also knew that the squirrel was once

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beautiful and full of life. As the days passed by, I developed a progressive pity for the squirrel in that not even a creature of the night wanted to consume its remains to gain sustenance and strength. The squirrel was a product of an artificial death and then rejected by nature.

On my last jog that year prior to the first snowfall, I peeled the squirrel's remains from the road and buried them under the oak tree from which the acorn had fallen. I said a small prayer and hoped that the squirrel knew that I cared.