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# 2015 Symposium Proceedings

*Communicating through the Arts:  
Lessons in Compassion for Medicine and Public Health*

Matera—Caserta—Paestum  
Italy







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# 2015 Symposium Proceedings

## *Communicating through the Arts: Lessons in Compassion for Medicine and Public Health*

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Most people would agree that as creative expression, the arts communicate the culture, values, and ideals of a community, but few turn to the arts to understand how we heal ourselves and others, and what we mean by good health. Yet, the arts hold messages from our history about life, death, and healing, and immersing ourselves in an unfamiliar landscape gives us the opportunity to approach these vital issues from a new perspective. Few places offer a better chance to explore both the arts and a new landscape than Italy.

Every summer for almost three decades, Professor Judy Raggi-Moore (Director of Italian Studies, Emory University) has led a group of 25-35 Emory University undergraduate students on an academic journey and cultural immersion in Italy. In 2000, she invited her colleague, Dr. Ruth Parker (Professor, Emory University School of Medicine) to develop a course that could become an integral part of this long-standing study abroad program. The resulting Medicine and Compassion course uses art, architecture, literature, and cross-disciplinary discussions to stimulate explorations of the definition and understanding of compassion and healing. Course teachings are grounded in tenants of medical professionalism and the Teaching Assistant is a medical student from the Emory School of Medicine.

In 2010, Drs. Parker and Raggi-Moore began to invite visiting faculty from numerous disciplines to join their traveling "classroom" for a concluding week-long Symposium in southern Italy. Dr. Cory Labrecque of the Emory Center for Ethics worked with them for the next few years to help build a strong and truly interdisciplinary Symposium. The results have been so positive that it is now an on-going cornerstone component of Emory's Italian Studies Summer Abroad Program.



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# Symposium Agenda

12 June - 18 June, 2015

## Matera

### Day 1

Symposium overview  
Our Symposium Participants  
Student Presentations to Symposium Participants

### Day 2

Visit to the Crypt of Original Sin  
Ethnobotany Tour  
Free Will and the Civil Society  
Exploring the Intersection of the Arts and Medicine

### Day 3

Walking tour of the Sassi  
*Christ Stopped at Eboli*  
Palazzo Lanfranchi (Levi art mural)  
Buona Notte, Matera



## La Reggia di Caserta

### Day 4

Caserta walking tour - Exploring beauty and nature



## Paestum

### Day 5

Medicine & Compassion, The Healer & Healing  
Temples and Museum of Paestum



### Day 6

*Man's Search for Meaning*  
Tenuta Vannulo: a visit to an ecological farm

### Day 7

Final Reflections from Symposium Participants  
Academic Postcards from Students  
Parting poem: "Whittling" by John Stone

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# Matera

Day 1

## Symposium overview



In 2015, 18 visiting faculty representing disciplines from medicine, public health, business, law, and the humanities joined us as we explored “Communicating through the Arts: Lessons for Medicine and Public Health.”

Geographic distance and cognitive estrangement aided the participants as they set aside personal assumptions and engaged in interdisciplinary studies that circumvented the “silos,” the academic geography that often hinders true interdisciplinary discourse within traditional university campus settings. The experience ultimately cultivated a type of learning that explored the wisdom of different disciplines, inspired constructive conversation, encouraged personal and communal growth, and above all, aspired to deeper intellectual commitment.

The Medicine and Compassion Symposium represents a true community of learning, with participants of all ages, professions, and beliefs communally undertaking a journey to discover whether we can better understand and improve our own health and that of others by engaging with the arts. Faculty and student Symposium participants resoundingly agreed that the arts can inspire us to become more engaged, more aware, and more willing to take note of the beauty, and the ambiguity, that often lies just beneath the surface of our lives. Compassion can be taught and the arts are an effective teacher. Through the arts, humanity narrates stories that reflect the uncertainties of life, often moving beyond words to express truths through the visual arts and music. The arts capture the full and complex range of our human experience, ranging from beauty, joy, and love to death, disease, and chaos. Learning to listen to and comprehend our shared humanity through the arts is a valuable lesson for future healthcare workers, and having the opportunity to pause for an immersion in the arts benefits our symposium participants as well.

We are pleased to offer here the proceedings from our 2015 Symposium and invite those interested to contact us about future Symposiums.



# Symposium Participants



**Ruth Parker, MD**  
Professor of Medicine,  
Pediatrics, and Public  
Health,  
Emory University SOM

**Judy Raggi-Moore, PhD**  
Professor of Pedagogy, Italian;  
Director, Italian Studies  
Emory University



**Donald Batisky, MD**  
Professor of Pediatrics and Director,  
PreHealth Mentoring Office  
Emory University SOM

**Adam Carlisle, MD**  
Cardiology Fellow  
Emory University SOM



**Ann Critz, MD**  
Associate Professor of  
Pediatrics and former  
Director of Nurseries  
Emory University SOM

**Frank A. Critz, MD**  
Founder, Medical Director  
of Radiotherapy Clinics of GA



**Stephen M. Forte, JD**  
Managing Partner  
Smith, Gambrell, & Russell, LLP

**Susan Forte, RN**

**Lisa Hasty, MD**  
Founding Partner, Atlanta Center for  
Reproductive Medicine



**Arian Hatefi, MD**  
Assistant Professor of  
Medicine  
UCSF School of Medicine

**Joel Howell, MD, PhD**  
Professor of Medicine and Victor  
C. Vaughan Professor of History  
of Medicine  
University of Michigan



**George Isham, MD, MS**  
Former Chief Health Officer and  
Medical Director, Health Partners  
Minneapolis, Minnesota



**Alex Kotlar, BA**  
PhD Candidate, Genetics and  
Molecular Biology  
Emory University

**Bethany Kotlar, MPH**  
Research Coordinator, Marcus  
Autism Center

**Paul M. Parker, MD**  
Clinical Associate Professor of  
Surgery, Division of Pediatric  
Surgery  
Emory University SOM



**J Richard Pittman, MD**  
Assistant Professor of Medicine and  
Internal Medicine Clerkship Director  
Emory University SOM

**Andrew Smith, MD**  
Professor of Medicine and Director of  
the Center for Heart Failure  
Emory University SOM



**Phillip Thompson, PhD, JD, LL.M**  
Executive Director, Aquinas Center  
of Theology  
Emory University

**Jennifer Wilkinson, MD**  
Assistant Professor of Medicine  
Emory University SOM



## Symposium 2015 Medical Students



**Rachael Postlethwait** -  
MD Candidate, Class of 2018  
USF Morsani College of Medicine

**Alexandra Reitz** - MD/MPH Candidate,  
Class of 2017  
Emory University SOM, Rollins School of  
Public Health





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## Student Presentations to Symposium Faculty

Student teams delivered 20 minute PowerPoint orientations to Symposium faculty when they arrived. The presentations explored the idea of compassion and its connection to the major themes of the class, including love, civic virtues, power, hospitality, fate, suffering, and death. Using examples from art, literature, landscape, cuisine, and architecture, the students illustrated our journey thus far, and familiarized the faculty with the multi-disciplinary approach of our Symposium.



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# Matera

Day 2

## Visit to the Crypt of Original Sin



Despite grinding poverty and relentless disease, the inhabitants of this harsh, yet beautiful landscape around Matera have always practiced the ancient art of hospitality.

In the 8th and 9th centuries, Christian monks fleeing persecution and seeking a hermitage were welcomed by the local people. They lived simply and worshipped in limestone caves, which they began to decorate in the Byzantine style.

The Crypt of the Original Sin is a recently rediscovered and restored prime example of a "chiesa rupestre" – a rock cave church. Inside, a cycle of beautiful frescos dating back to the 9th c. narrates scenes from the Old and New Testaments. Dr. Judy Raggi-Moore led us through the Crypt, known as the Sistine Chapel of Rupestrian Art.





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## Ethnobotany Tour



Hospitality was also the theme of our second visit, an Agriturismo that offered us the opportunity to learn about grain production and use, and about how a respectful engagement of the earth, through sustainable farming practices, is mutually beneficial, and delicious!





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## Free Will and the Civil Society



Steven Forte and Phillip Thompson led the discussion of free will and civil society. Dr. Thompson began with the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden as an illustration of our human instinct to transgress boundaries, but also of our thirst for knowledge and our need to create order in the world. He suggested that if we accept the idea that experiencing pain, suffering, and loss are part of what makes us fully human, we also accept the idea that we can use our free will and reason to create structures, or laws, in our society that help us to create and maintain order for the benefit of humankind.

Mr. Forte continued the discussion by exploring the idea of Law – who makes it? Whom does it apply to? Who enforces it? In a civil society, individual need and public good must be balanced and controlled by a generally accepted, and reasonably enforced, code of behavior. Just as medical professionals try to bring reason, thought, and compassion to ease suffering, we have experts in the law who create legal processes so that we can resolve conflict and live together in large, functioning groups. The Symposium participants were then led through an overview of the history of the civic code that began with the Romans, from Cicero to Justinian, to the American founding fathers, to the contemporary American system of law and justice. The distinction between secular law and religious or canonical law was discussed, as well as the concept of natural law. The concept of the law as a set of rules that operates for the public good is a fairly universal concept, whether in religious philosophy or classical philosophy.

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# Exploring the Intersection of the Arts and Medicine



The arts are restorative. If you listen to a concert, spend a few hours in a museum or gallery, or read a good book, you can feel the effects – you sleep better, you wake up refreshed, you approach your work in a much better fashion. If that's all there was to the arts, they would still be a wonderful addition to healthcare, both for healthcare providers and their patients.

But are there more valuable lessons about being human to be learned from the arts? How to suffer, how to die, how to bear pain? How to heal, how to soothe, how to empathize?

**The arts can help doctors become better at being doctors."**

Those were just a few of the questions posed by Dr. Joel Howell, MD, as he led students and faculty through an exploration of how the arts can help caregivers become better doctors, nurses, social workers, or pharmacists by teaching how to listen, how to communicate, how to think.

Dr. Howell ended with a question that we brought home from Italy – a question that we can approach again and again, through different works of art, and find different insights each time: Do we know how to listen when the arts communicate with us?



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# Matera

Day 3

## Walking tour of the Sassi

**"Materah, città bella, estesa et popolata."** (Idrisi, 12th century Arab geographer and voyager)

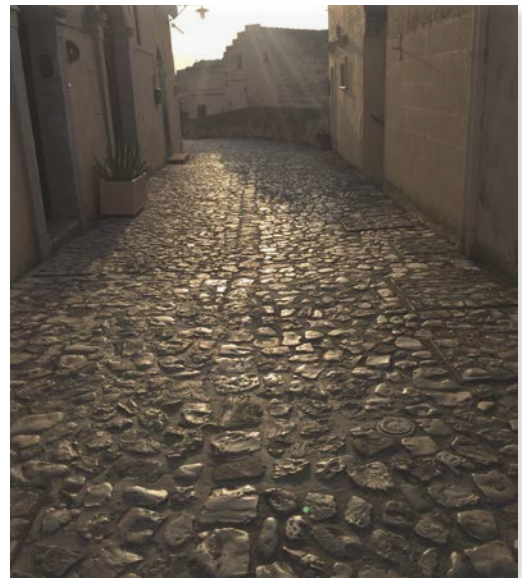
**"Chiunque veda Matera non può non restarne colpito, tanto è espressiva e toccante la sua dolente bellezza."** (Carlo Levi, 20th century Italian writer, painter, physician)

**"vergogna nazionale"** (1948, Palmiro Togliatti, 20th century politician, leader of the Italian Communist Party)



From rock-cut settlement, to beautiful city, to "national shame," to European Capital of Culture 2019, Matera's evolution is inspiring. Dr. Raggi-Moore led us through this unique landscape which offered us lessons in survival and resilience. First occupied in the Paleolithic era and continually occupied until the mid-twentieth century, the Sassi district of Matera exemplifies a unique and fruitful balance of nature and humans. The troglodytes, or "cave dwellers," lived in symbiotic harmony with the land, reliant on a carefully created balance between water supply and drainage, and they flourished in their geological setting for centuries. However, by the mid-twentieth century,

Matera had degenerated into the wretchedly poor, disease-ridden peasant community described so vividly by Carlo Levi in *Christ Stopped at Eboli*. After the publication of Levi's book, Matera was described as a "national shame," and in the mid-1950s, the entire population was relocated to housing projects. In the 1990s, artists and entrepreneurs began to reclaim the ancient caves. Now a protected UNESCO site, Matera is, according to UNESCO, "the most outstanding, intact example of a troglodyte settlement in the Mediterranean region, perfectly adapted to its terrain and ecosystem." [Citation <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/670>]





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## *Christ Stopped at Eboli* by Carlo Levi



Carlo Levi writes about his discovery of the "Lucanian within each of us."  
What does this mean?

Dr. Ruth Parker led this in-depth discussion of Carlo Levi's *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, an account of Levi's forced exile to a remote town in southern Italy. Levi, an artist and physician who had angered the Italian Fascist regime, lived among peasants who had been ground down by generations of poverty and "saddled" by disease, particularly malaria. The peasants considered themselves equal to animals, yet they shared a sense of brotherhood from suffering together, and they practiced the ancient virtue of hospitality in a way that humbled Levi. Dr. Parker included the history and epidemiology of malaria as background. She spent some time talking about the Romans as public health geniuses because they understood the importance of clean water and a latrine system. She noted that Levi was an unwilling medical practitioner; his preference was to paint. However, as his connection with the peasants grew, he began to feel compassion for them and, in time, to love them. Levi described the beautiful risk of opening oneself up to a patient's suffering, sharing the experience and the emotions, which leads to moments of unity. After a lengthy and lively discussion between students and faculty, Parker ended with a challenge – to look at ourselves and the things that divide us from others, and to take the time to listen, to reach across the barriers that divide us, to be vulnerable, and to love.



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## Palazzo Lanfranchi (Levi art mural) - Listening to Art



Standing in front of Carlo Levi's 18.5 m x 3.2 m canvas triptych, Dr. Judy Raggi-Moore led us through a contemplation of Levi's painting that encompassed where we've been and where we hope to go as we return to our lives. The painting shows the harsh reality of peasant life in southern Italy – the relentless disease, death, grief, despair, and crushing poverty that batter the families who live here among the rocky hills. But there is more to this story. Levi shows that life continues, even in this desolate place. Family, hard work, faith, hope, love, responsibility, hospitality, and even pride – all of these values inspire people to survive.



The left side of the painting shows the world of the women, the matriarchs left behind by men emigrating to find work. The women work the reluctant land, scraping out a living while raising children, caring for the sick and the old, and burying the dead. But they also give birth, continuing the cycle of life and death. On the painting's far left, Levi echoes the traditional composition of a pietà in his depiction of mourners gathered around a corpse; yet, a few steps to the right, we find an equally deliberate

echo of the Madonna holding the Christ Child. The hope of resurrection, rebirth, and a new life is always present.

The right side of the painting shows men gathered around Rocco Scotellaro, the mayor of the town of Tricarico. He was a politician and a poet, and, like Levi, he used his art to express his political views. This side of the painting represents government, civic life, order, and culture; here, Rocco's poetry inspires people to act, to rebel, and to hope, as did Levi's painting and prose.



Art brings a new understanding to these men, and to us as viewers. We spent these summer days forcing ourselves out of our comfort zones, confronting questions about life and death, power and corruption, beauty and disease, and compassion and suffering. As we stood in front of Levi's beautiful testament to this often over-looked region of Italy, we knew that we were all deeply changed by our journey.



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## Buona Notte, Matera

At the head of everything is God, the Lord of Heaven.

Everyone knows that. Then comes Prince Torlonia, lord of the earth.

Then come Prince Torlonia's guards

Then come Prince Torlonia's guard's dogs

Then, nothing at all.

Then, nothing at all.

Then, nothing at all.

Then come the cafoni. And that's all

[Silone, Ignazio. Fontamara qtd. in: "A book from Abruzzo: Fontamara." ItalianSide.



<http://www.conversationsinitaly.com/buonna-nota-matera/>



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# La Reggia di Caserta

Day 4



Another UNESCO World Heritage Site on our schedule was the Royal Palace of Caserta. Dr. Judy Raggi-Moore led us through this architectural masterpiece, which was built for the Bourbon kings of Naples in the 18th century. Our discussion centered on two areas of the grounds called

"The English Garden," designed to present an apparently "natural" disorder that attempts to "perfect" nature through manipulating trees, architectural ruins, bodies of water, and even the topography itself into pleasing compositions. We considered definitions of wealth, power, and beauty, both natural and that created by humans. The themes of the day culminated in the Italian garden with our contemplation of the Fountain of Diana and Actaeon, sculpted by Paolo Persico.

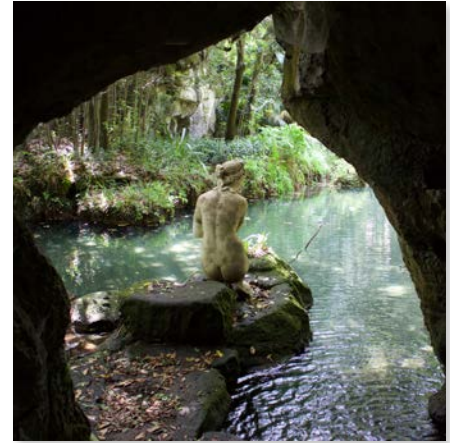




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## Caserta walking tour — Exploring beauty and nature

The myth of Diana and Actaeon describes the swift and terrible vengeance taken by the hunting goddess Diana on the human hunter Actaeon when he sees her naked, bathing in her sacred grotto. Some versions of the story, including Ovid's, describe Actaeon's transgression as accidental; others as deliberate. The result in both cases, however, is that the furious Diana splashes water on Actaeon, transforming him into a stag. The young man flees and is subsequently torn to pieces by his pack of beloved hunting dogs, unable to recognize their master.



Western art is usually read from left to right; reading the Fountain in that order shows a reversal of the mythological events – Actaeon, depicted in mid-transformation, is set upon by his dogs on the left, while the vengeful Diana, surrounded by her frightened attendants, is on the right. The sculptor which leads to a rich discussion about justice, punishment, fate, redemption, and the elevation of actions over words.

Here, in the Italian Garden, we found beauty and violence.



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# Paestum

Day 6

## Medicine and Compassion, The Healer and Healing



Dr. Howell used Dickinson, Hemingway, W.C. Williams, Beethoven, Verdi, and Strauss to illustrate the ways that readers, viewers, and listeners can understand the unfamiliar through art. He looked to specific works of art for their insights into pain, death,

healing, joy, and empathy.

A photograph of a piece of lined paper with handwritten text in cursive script.

Pain has an element of blank  
It cannot recollect  
When it began, or if there were  
A day when it was not  
  
It has no future but itself  
Its infinite realms  
Its past, enlightened to perceive  
New periods of pain  
  
Emily Dickinson

Dr. Howell reminded us that we can revisit a work of art again and again, finding new meaning and new insights every time. Because of these multiple meanings, the arts teach us to be more comfortable with ambiguity. There is not an immediately obvious "right answer" when we approach a work of art, just as there is not an immediately obvious "right answer" when we



approach a patient. Medicine is not an exact science—and its ambiguity goes beyond the complex diagnosis. What about decisions that must balance quality of life with invasive or painful treatments? Or decisions about resuscitation or end-of-life care? Even when faced with ambiguity, healthcare professionals must assess the options and advise the patient and family.

Art can also help us to connect with our patients, even during the most challenging times. Our patients may be from a different culture or a different religion, but art can help us to find common ground and help us reach a place of empathy. When you pare away the technology and the complicated treatment plans, medicine is humans taking care of humans. When there are so many layers of technology and bureaucracy between doctors, patients, and their families, we have to make an extra effort to connect – by listening, by communicating, and by showing compassion. Art helps make these connections. Music, in particular, can reach places that words cannot reach – through barriers of age, culture, language, dementia, pain, even death.



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## Temples and Museum of Paestum

Paestum was founded as the Greek city of Poseidonia in the early 7th century BCE. Dr. Judy Raggi-Moore led us on a tour of three splendidly-preserved Doric temples, two devoted to Hera and one devoted to Athena. As we observed the differences between the archaic temple of Hera and the classical temple of Hera, we pondered the role of proportion, symmetry, and balance in creating beauty.



The Archaeological Museum of Paestum provided an excellent vision of the area's history, progressing from its foundation as a Greek port to a Lucanian conquest to a thriving Roman city. Paestum started to go into a decline around the 4th c. CE and was abandoned in the middle ages, probably because of malaria.

Centuries of neglect may be the key to the survival of marvelous ruins housed in the museum, including the Tomb of the Diver, the only surviving example of a Greek funerary wall painting containing human figures from the Classical period. The top slab painting of a young man diving into a stream of water, representing the passage from life to death, and the interior scenes of a *symposium*, brought us once again to a discussion of suffering, dying, and death.



The graceful figure of the diver reminds us that there is beauty, even in this ultimate transition. Inside the tomb are figures of reclining young men, laughing, talking, and drinking together – a *symposium*, perhaps waiting to welcome the Diver.



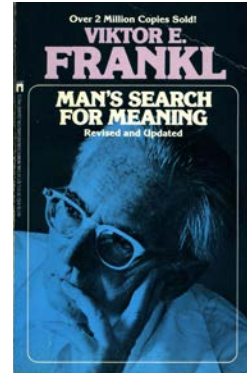
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# Paestum

Day 7

## *Man's Search for Meaning*

Dr. Phillip Thompson used Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* as the basis for a discussion of universal truths and human freedoms, specifically, freedom of thought. The conversation ranged from Marcus Aurelius, to the 6th century philosopher Boethius, to Alexander Solzenitzen as the participants discuss the nature of suffering and what it means to be human. Frankl's years of suffering in Nazi concentration camps led him to conclude that suffering is meaningful, because it teaches us that "the salvation of Man is through love and in love " – that love can help us endure suffering.



The connection to practicing compassion in medicine is both obvious and immediate. Thompson concluded that the one thing humans can control, when all else is out of their control, is how we respond to a situation. Even prisoners, or the suffering and/or dying, have access to this most important of human freedoms - the ability to control one's thoughts, desires, and reactions. How do medical professionals choose to react to human suffering? How do we show compassion in the face of fear, pain, and death? And how do we, in turn, help our patients as they suffer?





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## Tenuta Vannulo: a visit to an ecological farm



Outside of Paestum, we visited the Tenuta Vannulo water buffalo farm to consider the "art" of producing organic buffalo mozzarella. Several hundred female animals, and a few males, wander this bucolic landscape, relax on rubber mattresses, and have some self-determination about when they are milked and what they eat.



Using the buffalo population as an example, Dr. George Isham led a discussion about managing population health to achieve a certain outcome. Contributing to this outcome are genetics, healthcare, health behaviors, socio-economic factors, and environmental factors.



At Tenuta Vannulo, the water buffalo population is managed to create an excellent product in a sustainable manner, to preserve a traditional cultural practice, and to contribute to the ancient art of hospitality. As we tasted forkfuls of fresh mozzarella, we agreed that the advantages of a happy and healthy population were obvious and tasty!





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## Final Reflections by our faculty



**Joel Howell, MD, PhD,**

Professor of Medicine and History of Medicine, University of Michigan

This was my third experience with the course. I don't know what's more moving, the sheer beauty of the environment, or the beautiful insights offered by the students. They "get it" in profoundly meaningful ways, ranging from the verbal, thoughtful comments to the nonverbal tears that not a few of them displayed in response to an especially moving musical performance. Every time I teach this course I come away with renewed hope for our future generations of healers.



**Donald Batsky, MD**

Professor of Pediatrics and Director, PreHealth Mentoring Office Emory University SOM

Without a doubt, I became more aware of and grateful for my senses. The views were amazing – the ancient cities, the vistas, the people. The sounds - of tower bells, the language, and the banjo. The flavors – everything from espresso and cappuccino to fresh pasta, basil, cheese and, of course, gelato. From a tactile perspective, the rugged streets and byways and the need to often 'hold on' to the walls. The aromas of fresh bread, wildflowers and steaming cappuccino. The daily meals in community were always filled with great conversation and laughter. As the journey was winding down, it was becoming clear how powerful and transformative these experiences had been. To summarize this journey, the greatest feeling that I had was the feeling of gratitude. Gratitude for the opportunity to do this, for having the means to be able to participate, for the insights to reflect on the experiences, and for having the chance to meet everyone else who was along for this magnificent ride.



### Other faculty highlights

"standing in front of a painting and considering what story it was telling."

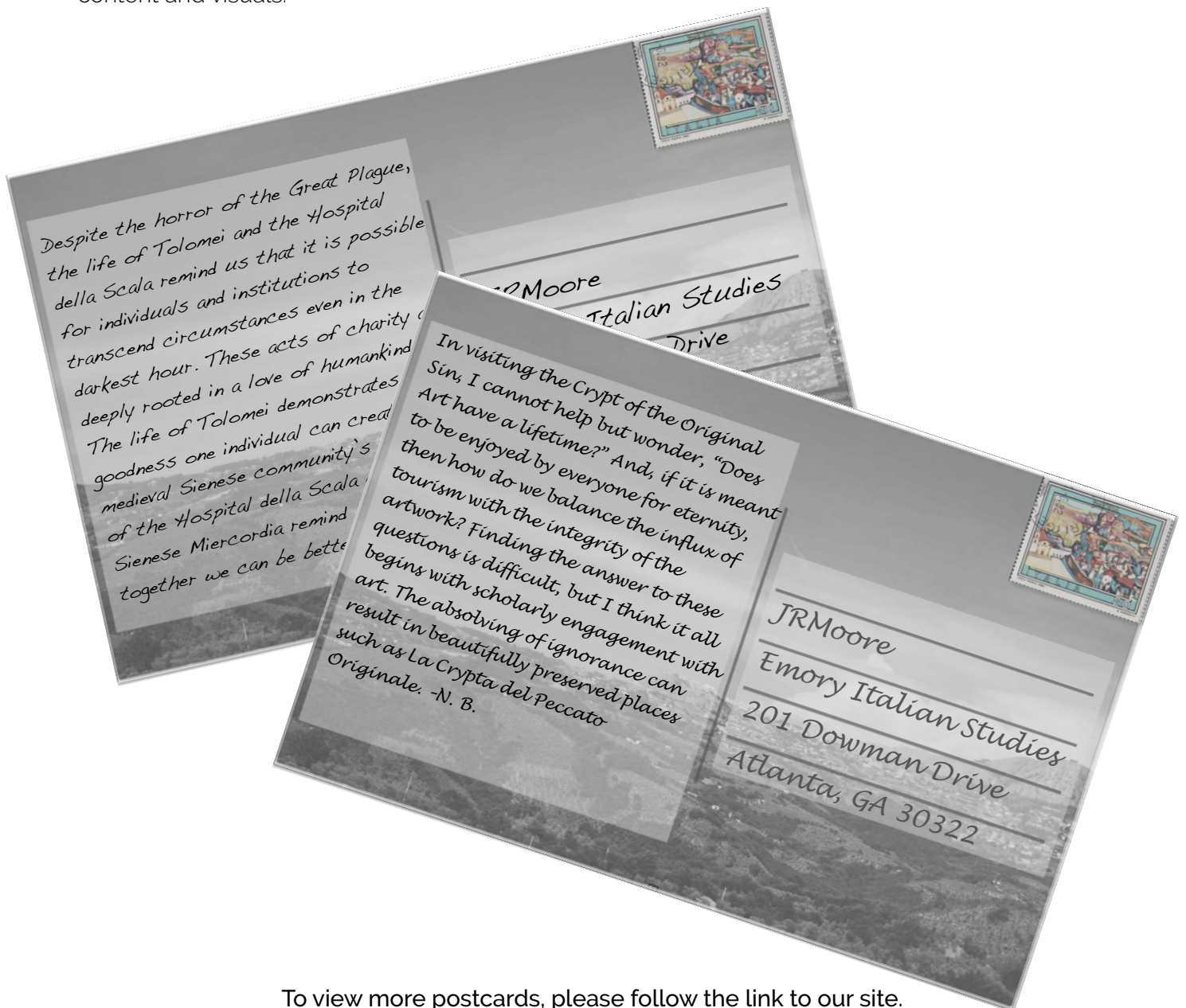
"Walking with a student who asked how he could know what his purpose in life was."

"Having to reflect what I could learn about humanity by listening to opera..."

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## Academic Postcard Assignment

Making connections across content areas is a key component of critical thinking. Accordingly, the final assignment for the Medicine and Compassion class, an "academic postcard," was designed to challenge students to sharpen this skill as they thought about the broad themes of the class. Each student selected a postcard and wrote a short essay describing "what you see, what you think, and what you wonder?" In other words, they provided context, identified thematic connections, and demonstrated higher order thinking by discussing and exploring broader considerations. Each postcard contained 3-4 hyperlinks in order to offer supplementary academic content and visuals.



To view more postcards, please follow the link to our site.  
[www.conversationsinitaly.com](http://www.conversationsinitaly.com)

## The Last Class: Whittling by Dr. John Stone (1936-2008)

What has been written  
about whittling  
is not true

most of it

It is the discovery  
that keeps  
the fingers moving

not idleness

but the knife looking for  
the right plane  
that will let the secret out

Whittling is no pastime

he says  
who has been whittling  
in spare minutes at the wood

of his life for forty years

Three rules he thinks  
have helped  
Make small cuts

In this way

you may be able to stop before  
what was to be an arm  
has to be something else

Always whittle away from yourself

and toward something.  
For God's sake  
and your own  
know when to stop

Whittling is the best example  
I know of what most  
may happen when  
least expected

bad or good  
Hurry before  
angina comes like a pair of pliers

over your left shoulder

There is plenty of wood  
for everyone  
and you

Go ahead now

May you find  
in the waiting wood  
rough unspoken

what is true

or  
nearly true  
or

true enough.













Symposium Dates 2016  
16-23 June

Interested in joining us next year?

contact Rachael Postlethwait  
[rachael.postlethwait@gmail.com](mailto:rachael.postlethwait@gmail.com)



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