

2004 Eugene England Memorial Personal Essay Contest, First Place Winner

POSE

By Jana Bouck Remy

POSE OF A CHILD. *Balasana*. Sitting on knees, forehead to the floor, arms at my side. A child. Curled inside an egg and doesn't want to hatch. Warm, dark and close. I don't want to raise my arms like the others. *Ujjayi* exhale. Hot and hard and whistling against the back of my throat. I lift up my head and reach toward the sky. I open my eyes and see the fireworks.

July Fourth, 1984. I am twelve years old. The view is spectacular from the fourth floor of the downtown hospital. Sitting in a wheelchair at the window, I can see the fireworks all over the city of Denver. Popping, exploding, lighting up the sky. I look at the reflection in the plate glass window and see my dad, standing tall behind me, his hands resting lightly on the back handles of the wheelchair. He is quiet. Staring out the window but not seeing.

I wish now that I had held my leg in my arms and told it good-bye, that I had taken a picture or asked for my ashes. But there had been so many prayers and much fasting. My father had assured me that when the surgeon opened my leg, the cancer would be gone and he wouldn't have to amputate. My patriarchal blessing, given a month before, had said: "You will have the faith to be healed."

MOUNTAIN POSE. *Tadasana*. Standing tall, back straight, arms at sides, weight even on each foot. Eyes half closed, body strong and tall and straight. Immovable, like a mountain.

Mom is in the kitchen preparing dinner. I'm alone in the rocking chair, and I want to walk. I stand up, trying to shift my weight from my left to my prosthetic foot. I stand there, trying to move my intention to my artificial leg. I put the foot out in front of me and will myself to step down on it, to move forward. I stand there. Stand there. Stand there. I can't seem to make my brain or my hips or the muscles understand what my mind sees so well. I need to walk. I want to walk. I have faith I can walk. I stare at the bubble-gum pink toes of the fake foot. *God, let me walk.*



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When my Mom comes to get me for dinner, she doesn't understand why I am slumped in the rocking chair crying. She picks up my crutches from the floor, puts her hands around my shoulders, and helps me to stand up.

WARRIOR POSE. *Virabhadrasana*. Legs spread out, chest turned to one side, arms reaching out—one long and straight in front, one in back. The balance is difficult, but I breathe and concentrate. I can maintain the pose. I am a warrior. If I doubt, I will waver. Tilt. Sometimes fall.

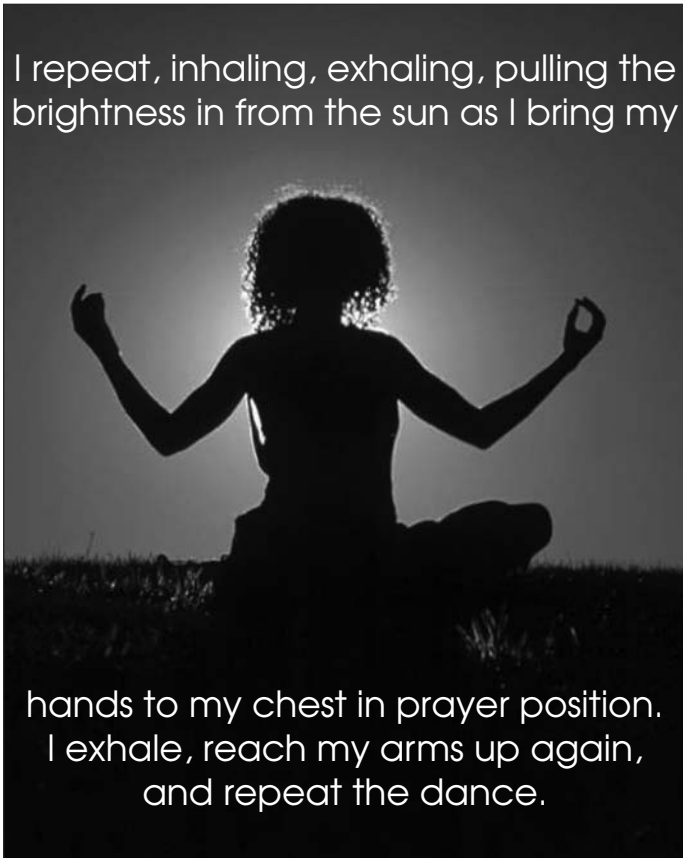
I am pregnant now, almost due, despite the doctors' fears that the chemotherapy left me infertile. The ultrasound shows a healthy boy. I cry when I see his two beautiful legs. The technician takes a picture of them for me. I love their fragile symmetry. I can't wait to see my son, the one that will look like his father, the one who defies the odds of ten years since my cancer. In my ninth month, my dad tells me he has been diagnosed with incurable pancreatic cancer. He will fight it with chemo, radiation, surgery. He is sure he will be healed.

Four months later. Dad's breath, slow and deep, continues on as I put ice chips on his tongue and refresh the cool cloth on his forehead. My son nurses at my breast and sleeps at my father's side, cradled by the hand with the IV needle for morphine. My brother returns early from his mission to Belgium. We sing "I Stand All Amazed" in French for Dad: *Oh! que c'est merveilleux. Que son amour pour moi l'ait fait mourir pour moi. Oh! que c'est merveilleux, merveilleux pour moi.*

FISH POSE. *Matsyasana*. Supine, chest arching to heaven, shoulders and head pulled back and top of the head on the floor. I am floating, weightless as the water pulls me with its current. My heart is high and open.

I slide an unlabeled videotape in the VCR and push play. The screen flickers on, and I see myself standing at a picnic table. It is my son's birthday, and I'm trying to light the candles on his cake as the wind blows them out. I am laughing, working hard to shield the cake with my body, trying to improvise a screen of cardboard, and at the same time re-singing the birthday song. Tendrils of brown hair escape from my ponytail and slip over my face and blow in the wind.

I want to be repulsed when I see myself walk, the ungainly shift of shoulders and stiff-legged limp that I have learned not to watch in mirrors or plate-glass windows because I hate the



difference. But I am surprised that I'm not conscious of the limp in this moment of joy. In the wind, everything is moving—the air, trees, the trees and me, rocking gracefully between cake and child.

SUN SALUTATION. *Surya Namaskar.* I bring my arms high over my head, then bend at the waist and drop my hands to my ankles. I repeat, inhaling, exhaling, pulling the brightness in from the sun as I bring my hands to my chest in prayer position. I exhale, reach my arms up again, and repeat the dance.

Clinging to the wall of rock, searching for another handhold. I lunge higher and miss a seam, dropping into my harness. I anchor my feet back on a thin ledge and reach again. I am breathing fast and shallow. Every muscle is straining. Instead of a regular prosthesis, I wear a metal pylon with a rubber plunger that can grip the rock face. My skin is hot, flushed. The tension building like an orgasm, but with no climax, only the continual joy of strain and pull. I am tall and free as I hang in the air and move and stretch as I wish I could on the ground. With no fear of a fall.

When I rappel down from the rock, I shake so hard that I can't untie my shoe. My husband helps me, and I don't care. Tears run down my cheeks. Tears of joy.

CORPSE POSE. *Savasana.* Lying flat on the floor. I am cold. I pull a woolen blanket up to my chin, rest my hands on my abdomen. Feel the belly rise and fall as I breathe deeply to relax.

My yoga instructor comes over to where I am lying. She puts a hand on my forehead and one behind my head. She gently twists my neck and pulls it straight. Then she kneels at my side and holds her hands in the air over my artificial leg, palms down. Her eyes are closed, and she is concentrating, perhaps praying. She knows I am exhausted from a morning of physical therapy, of effort to use my new bionic leg. Every time I take a step, I must trust the computer that controls the knee. I need faith so I can walk better. But I can't move forward without remembering first.

As my teacher steps away, I realize I want her to stay. I need someone to pray for me, to touch me. I want her to grieve with me. To help me find my leg. *To be healed.* 🙏



CYCLONE OF VOICES

Imagine a quartet of women whose mouths are the origin of cyclones singing into the mics take after take until the human music of the sky is perfect, the sound of unearthly wind. Afterward, they go to their homes of the 1930s where history does not record them standing in the dark by a window.

I live in that small room, rock back and forth while the twister takes the house. Farm animals, picket fence and Elmira Gulch float past the window. Somewhere in the harmony the storm is a rage of judgment, but somehow the rough landing leaves the house intact.

—LEONARDO DELLARocca