

# Lifelines

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The following poem is from a collection of mine entitled *Lifelines*. After spending a day as an observer in the intensive care unit at Hôtel-Dieu Grace Healthcare in Windsor, Ont, I became acutely aware of the fine line that exists between life and death. Medical professionals are important lifelines in our society.

After years of practising emergency medicine in Scarborough, Ont, and now working in community-based palliative care in Toronto, Ont, during the pandemic, this poem I wrote 20 years ago resonates even more, especially the references to singing and choir, as being in a woman physicians' choir now has brought me balance between work and life. 🍁

## The ICU

An aura of sorrow encompasses as  
Steel doors slam behind  
Penetrating merciless air.  
Stagnant aromas wafting  
On white walls with no peace  
Sterilized of all hope.  
Alive corpses molded into beds  
And tangled in transparent vines  
An ensemble respiring in tune,  
Singing a synonymous song.  
Holy choir directors like Angels of fate  
Are ready for any dissonance,  
Summons a congregational gathering.  
Sheets drawn, a hush ...  
And one less beautiful voice is heard.

The song continues.  
Brilliant whites are separated from our colours  
With inanimate finesse.  
An empty place remains;  
Vacancy holding for a fraction of a second.  
A new guest arrives  
And is silently accepted.

Quiet disbelief binds us,  
Our naïveté gags us, and we fall.  
New-found prisoners among guards of habit,  
Stained by thoughts of panic,  
And invigorated to be elsewhere.  
Frustrated by the limits of man,  
And rankled by the strengths of technology.

The point has been made.  
We contemplate our own deaths.  
Where to die?  
In accustomed arms.  
When to die?  
Through necessity not negligence.  
How to die?  
With perseverance, then peace.  
The doors release us.  
We are free ... we must remember.

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**Competing interests**  
None declared

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