

# Post-Op Poet

Category: Poems

written by Judy Schaefer | August 12, 2017

**Judy Schaefer ~**

How can I write a poem, nurse, in this pelted room? Nurse? Nurse!  
Memory loss, southern pine–nurse, this is not a poem-writing-room  
The floors ooze resin at your footsteps  
    Spanish moss, from every wall  
Spongy trod of medical students  
*Surgery went well, anesthesia lifted*  
Cologne of betadine, a boarish root for a vein  
at the same time each morning. I welcome  
the lady of the mop–tincture of mossy pine  
back and forth, she says her prayers. She is my alarm clock.  
I peek from crusty eyelids and dread the washcloth  
Back and forth–path and path–room and nurse  
How does one begin a poem? How to start?  
*Anesthesia has lifted long ago*  
I try to remember how I got here  
    What needled trail? What chartered bus?  
I was on my way to grandmother's house  
in a hooded red cloak and I visited a wolf within a worded fairy tale  
There was a turn–in a worded road–and I was lost. Nurse? Nurse!

**About the poet:**

A *Pulse* poetry editor, Judy Schaefer edited the first biographical/autobiographical work by English-speaking nurse-poets, [\*The Poetry of Nursing: Poems and Commentaries of Leading Nurse-Poets\*](#) (Kent State University Press, 2006); she also coedited the first international anthology of creative writing by nurses, [\*Between the Heartbeats\*](#) (University of Iowa Press, 1995) and a second volume, [\*Intensive Care\*](#) (University of Iowa Press, 2003). She has been published in *Academic Medicine*, *American Journal of Nursing* and *The Lancet*. Her most recent book is [\*Wild Onion Nurse: A Collection of 25 Years of the Poetry of Nursing in a College of Medicine Literary Journal\*](#) (Radcliffe, 2010).

**About the poem:**

“After gastrointestinal surgery, although appearing alert, I felt gauzy in my head, without a sense of myself. My identity as a poet, as a stacker of words on top of each other to create a poem, had vanished into the fog of general anesthesia. Dreams and fairy tales swirled in my mind, inspired by the odor of pine cleaning solution; whether this odor was imagined or real, I’m not sure. My fellow nurses and other staff members were my gradual reality-orientation guides. The smiles of the supportive staff, such as housekeeping, dietary and volunteers, were more meaningful than one might imagine. Each and every person who entered and exited my room played a role in pulling me out

of that foggy forest of surgical amnesia. It will surprise no one that I, a retired RN, relish my 'job' as a hospital volunteer."

**Poetry editors:**

Johanna Shapiro and Judy Schaefer