

# Gentle Men

Category: Stories

written by Alan Blum | June 1, 2012

**Alan Blum**

*Editor's Note: This week, Pulse once again presents sketches by Alan Blum, a family physician who for years has been jotting down visual impressions and snippets of conversation as he cares for patients. These sketches go back as far as 35 years, representing patients who have died or with whom he lost touch because of geographic relocation. These drawings are from the recently published book [Gentle Men](#) (Firebrand Press).*

I can't stop thinking about my son.  
It was such a bad experience.  
He probably would have lived  
if it had of been different circumstances  
and different times like today.  
Always there in the back of my mind.  
I'm trying to find a place to put it.

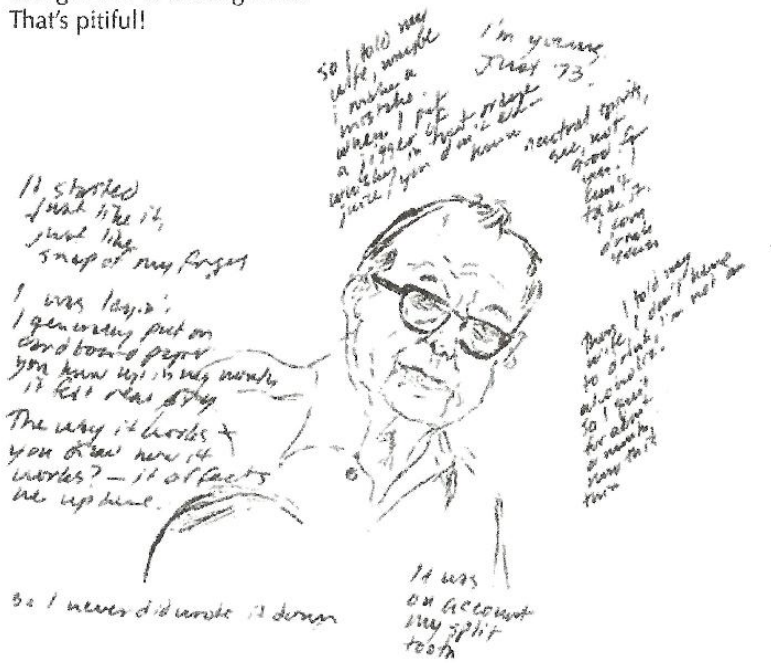


When she was eight years old,  
she asked to have a drink with me,  
and I stopped drinking.



you no friend  
no  
who do you like with?  
my aunt & uncle, why hobbies?  
you play pool?  
yeah,  
drinking too  
scotch &  
milk  
how's it taste  
bad

I don't want to go to the hospital.  
 Who would want to be in the hospital to begin with?  
 They have horrible coffee.  
 And those gowns are just pitiful.  
 Gotta tie a bunch o' strings  
 just to keep it on ya.  
 Pay what you pay for a room  
 and get one of these gowns.  
 That's pitiful!





I'm paranoid a lot.  
Somethin' come on TV  
I think I got that,  
I mean some kind of illness.

I go to thinking  
I got those symptoms.  
Whatever these people say wrong with them,  
be the same thing happening with me.

My mother's the same way.  
Every time I get a diagnosis,  
she says she thinks that's what's wrong with her.  
When the doctor called me back to tell me  
I had a prostate infection,  
she just knew she had one, too.

They gave me a CT scan.  
He said, "Oh, your brain is great."  
My daughter was there.  
She said, "That's debatable."



Your wife have a boy friend?  
No.  
But women's lib!  
Oh yeah  
I think a women's lib  
longer than a men

Doctor told me  
I needed an autopsy,  
but I said I wanted to wait.



I have no  
use for this  
foot except  
to put  
a sock on

I have no  
intention  
of ever  
running a  
100 yard dash

### **About the author:**

Alan Blum is a professor of family medicine and holds the Gerald Leon Wallace endowed chair in family medicine at the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, where he also directs the Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society. In 1977 he co-founded Doctors Ought to Care, an international physicians' organization that pushed organized medicine to become more active in combating the smoking pandemic and the tobacco industry. As a result of these efforts, Dr. Blum received the Surgeon General's Medallion from Dr. C. Everett Koop. Alan Blum's sketches and stories have been published in Literature and Medicine, The Pharos, JAMA, Hippocrates, Emory Medicine and The Color Atlas of Family Medicine.

### **About the sketches:**

"These sketches were all unplanned and were done with ballpoint pen on whatever paper I happened to have in my hand at the time, from prescription pads and paper towels to the wrappers of latex gloves or sterile gauze. As a medical student at Emory, I began adding sketches to my notes as a way to spend a bit more time with the patient, to focus more closely on the patient's expression and to try to capture the essence of our encounter. I learned the importance of listening closely to patients from my father, a general practitioner in Queens, New York. His office was in our home, where every afternoon the living room became the waiting room. A central role of a

personal physician is to identify the patient's fears and to try to allay anxiety. There's a patient in all of us, waiting to get out."