I see you coming, confused, shy, uncertain
   as to why you are here, yet you sign in, and wait.
Your name is called and hesitantly, you
   s l o w l y come over to me and sit.

I introduce myself.... and .... now.....
   we are friends, your shield is down.
You let me into your life, by giving me
   your personal information, your secrecy revealed.

We talk... like long lost friends, of
   your anxiety, your pain, your anger,
Your frustration, your questions, your hopes,
   and all is understood and heard.

I let you talk, let you release your
   nervousness, your doubts, your
Tears, your laughs, for I know you
   are going through hard times.

I learn more about you in ten minutes
   than you will ever know about me.
Let me in return give you a smile, some patience,
   an ear, understanding, kindness and friendship.

I absorb all your information
   gathering and harvesting as much from you as I can get.
I am your expertise, your confidant,
   your friend, a new piece of your community.

My world may seem very small, sitting here in my cubicle,
   but every ten minutes, with every new meeting of
A patient, now friend, my community grows also
   and I look forward to the next moment someone enters through the door.
The question of how you spent your earliest days in the throes of grief is worth answering if for no other reason than it tells you where you came from and to whom you still belong.

Heaven knows death is just an awful experience for all involved – especially for the poor old bean who is no more. And it’s awful for the loved ones, big and small, who spend their days and nights watching the front door just in case the departed swings through.

I grew up in a large Irish Catholic family in Kearny, New Jersey. At that time Kearny was home to the largest Irish Catholic population in the state.

My clan had come through World War 2 having suffered their share of death and dying. There wasn’t a family in the neighborhood who hadn’t stood silent at their front door listening to a soldier in uniform regretting to inform them. My relatives certainly knew how to cope with the absence of those they loved. This was a lesson well-taught and learned.

During the 1950’s, shortly after I was born, when a loved one died the clan would walk down to Delaney’s funeral parlor. It was a long, windowless, brick building sitting flush on Kearny Avenue. During the height of prohibition, in 1925, my great-granddad, Jamie R. Delaney, built the place to be a factory for carriage parts. “If they can’t drink,” he’d say, “at least they can go for a ride.” Well, my clan stuck to that story despite the frequent explosions inside the building and the fact that at the end of the day workers stumbled home with smiles on their faces and wads of ones and fives waving out of each pocket.

Twenty five years later, great-granddad decided to convert the building into a funeral parlor. He figured that modern medicine, still in its infancy, ensured him a good living.

Never trusting the men to clear out all the hootch, my aunts designed and furnished the parlor into a marvel. Having seen an exhibit of 18th century French furniture in New York City, they packed that place with real French flavor. It overflowed with sofas, chairs, and lounges made of curling white wood, tightly upholstered in bright blue French fabric.

My first memory of being there was when I was seven. Great Aunt Edith had died. Loved by us all, Edith, a formidable woman in her time, looked lovely and at peace resting in her coffin with her hat on. So, after prayers, after everyone settled down, the stories of Edith began. We listened and laughed and we walked home remembering.

Year after year, loss after loss, each of these stories sets like a well-loved book on the shelf of my heart. They remind me of where I came from and who, when I’m gone, will tell my tale.
I belong to an exclusive community.
I kept this a secret for some time.
I hid this from my friends, my family.

I belong to an exclusive community.
I am still not sure why I was chosen to join.
Here we all have the smoothest skin and look as if we have spent many hours at a spa receiving facials and hot wax treatments.
Membership does have its rewards!

I belong to an exclusive community.
We are make-up masters.
We can change our hair color daily if we choose.
We perform fashion magic with scarves.

I belong to an exclusive community.
You will not find one stronger, more tenacious, more forceful or more enduring.

I belong to an exclusive community.
We are all the same inner age.
We are all magnificent dreamers.

In my exclusive community I stand with my bosom and “bosom-less” buddies.
Your mothers, sisters, daughters, wives, and best friends are there too.
We are all these things, and oh yes, I almost forgot, in my exclusive community we are breast cancer survivors.
Pushed to the limits we have come back - stronger, smarter, grateful, hopeful and PROUD.
My Community
By Lauren Bozzi
Montclair State University

2nd Place: Prose

On my twenty-third birthday I did something I’ve never done before. I invited my six best friends to come together and celebrate. They are not a cohesive group of mutual friends, and one would certainly not assume so, especially at first glance.

What they do have in common is that they know me. And I mean really, really know me — my thoughts, desires, fears, passions, quirks — even the things I want to bury away and hide. They know and accept me, flaws and all, and when we hang out individually, I do the exact same for them. This allows us both to take down the shields that protect us from the judgements of the outside world. We are safe to be ourselves.

But…it’s still an unlikely group.

To provide a terribly oversimplified description, my best friends are: a free spirit hippie who would rather couch surf the globe than work a 9-5; an exotic model who steals the attention of everyone in the room by simply…existing; a biomedical engineer who doubles as killer voice impressionist and comedian; an outspoken, feminist trend-setter with a huge online following; a long-distance runner, aspiring social worker, and blonde bombshell; and an androgynous, tattooed lesbian with a crazy high IQ and even higher self-discipline.

I wondered what it would be like to finally get them all together, though. Would everyone get along? Would that openness translate in a group situation?

It did.

I spent my birthday watching these six people treat each other like old, reunited pals. Before we went out, we talked, laughed and shared stories. When we went out, we stayed together, danced, and had each others’ backs. And, when we got back to our hotel, we unanimously agreed that we had to get together again. Every single person who attended told me that it was the best group of people they’d ever gone out with. I was happy because I knew I belonged to the group, but even happier because I could tell that my friends felt the same way.

My friends are my community.

When we think of a community, we usually think of something structured, like a club or online social network. But I believe that communities can originate inside all of us when our ultimate goal is to connect with others. I watched six people of different ages, races, genders, sexual orientations, and socioeconomic backgrounds transcend the same social structures and stereotypes that usually confine them. On my twenty-third birthday, I watched a group of strangers become a community, and it was the best birthday gift I’ve ever received.
A community where diversity is its greatest strength.
A team without borders or bias.
Individuals united for a singleness of purpose.
People who abandon differences for the selfless attitude of the opportunity to be healers.

Imagine one commitment bound without effort ~
where the intensity of group focus burns in the eyes of each member;
where purity of intension sets the pace of each assemblage;
where compassion manifests into a river-momentum of supportive action.

Imagine a city filled with Batmen and Robins ~
where every device-ring is a call to duty.
Imagine flying with the eagles ~
keepers of the visage of perfect human form.
Imagine an empire of saviors ~
born with hands of healing-touch for all the nations that come in need.

Imagine the opportunity to work as a member of such community ~
twenty-four/seven, three-hundred-sixty-five days a year; The tireless energy, the interminable drive, the unbounded imagination,
the abundant grace, the remarkable wisdom ~
where joy and sorrow, ecstasy and tragedy,
the first breath and the last gasp are shared.

Imagine being a thread in the net that catches
the human race as it falls on its knees to bounce it back on its feet, able to run again or, stand for the very first time.

Imagine the community behind the scenes of everyday casual living that holds the line between the secret place of the unseen and the blatant reality of every found and every broken dream.

Imagine being a pulsating ember in this community conflagration that illuminates brighter than the whole earth burns because nothing out shines the spirit of unconditional compassion.

Imagine the gratitude, to make a difference, however small, in the saving of a life.
Imagine a position in this most benevolent community-of-giving.
Imagine the spiritual fulfillment of so many nameless acts of aid.
It is unimaginable but to walk with this community as one.
As the thirty six year old mother of four begins to sob saying “I don’t want to die I have babies to raise.” I pause and remind myself this is what we do, this is our calling, every day we have the honor and privilege of bearing witness to the suffering of another in the hopes to make their burden lighter.

Who helps those who bear witness??

Its Thursday at1:30pm and our staff meeting has begun. Someone says “get the Rock Jar” and the ritual begins. As I choose a small rough red rock from the rock box and hold it in my hand with tears in my eyes, I begin to share the story of the sweet thirty six year old. The rules are simple; as you place the rock in the jar talk from the heart and share why the situation has touched you. I express that I am feeling powerless and sad knowing that my witnessing of her suffering won’t change the ultimate outcome, her babies will grow up without her. As my team of colleagues bears witness to my sharing I deeply understand how powerful it feels to be heard without judgment just loving support. Somehow my heart feels lighter.

As I get ready for bed I pick up my gratitude journal. Tonight’s entry is easy because my heart is overflowing with such admiration for this amazing community of women that I get to work with every day that not only put their heart and soul into their calling of service but make the journey so much easier for each other. I feel truly blessed!

3rd Place: Prose
A home isn’t just a structure with a roof and some walls.
A friend isn’t just a person that you sometimes see, or call.
Though a job may provide security, salary and occupation,
Without purpose, community and respect, it’s just a break between vacations.

What is a team without a goal, a journey with no arrival?
No matter what you believe happens after death, life is much more than survival.
It matters how we make our way through the world, and every moment counts.
So why not count on each other, and measure success in shared amounts?

At the end of your day, your career, your life…you’ll look back and reflect,
Not on those detached moments when you worked alone, but on when you chose to connect.
What is a home away from home, an environment you constantly build?
Without people working together, work is just a place where time is occupied—not fulfilled.
According to the dictionary, a cousin is a relative with whom a person shares one or more common ancestors. In my community, my cousins are loud, crazy, and my best friends. They are more than just people I associate with on Thanksgiving, begging them to please pass the stuffing to my end of the table. They are not just people I call up when a major milestone such as a wedding or graduation is occurring. They are people I talk to about my job, my friends, and my life. They are there when I need them for favors and when I just want to vent about my day. They are older and wiser and I look to them for guidance and most importantly, laughter in tough situations.

I have a few friends who have no cousins. How is this possible you may ask? My one friend has a mother who is an only child and her father only has one brother but he has Down Syndrome and therefore he never married nor had children. She always says she wishes she had cousins because that concept is foreign to her. Two other friends of mine have parents that have no siblings. Their lives were quiet growing up but they leaned on friends for adventures, not their immediate family. I also have friends who only know their cousins through what they see on the yearly Christmas card or on their Facebook newsfeed.

Being Italian-American, I have cousins in Europe and we visit them and send letters and are close with them as well. My other cousins and I all live within 30 minutes of each other and for a long time, we all lived in the same town growing up. Sunday night spaghetti dinners at my Poppy and Granny’s house were not to be missed and I thought every family did that. It was the best time to spend the night relaxing before getting back to school and work the next day. We would all assemble at their house across town (yes, they lived in our town too) and we had designated seating and would laugh and crane our necks to hear the adult conversation at the larger, dining room table in the next room as we passed the meatballs around. After dinner ended we would play outside if the weather was pleasant or watch TV together in the living room. Then we would see each other once more during the week and before we knew it, it was Sunday night again. My life would be incomprehensible without my cousins, and our crazy talks and times are what make my life sweet and my community rich with laughter.
Welcome to Our Community!

Welcome to Our Community!
People rushing everywhere, quick HI’s …no one has time for you. 
Blaring horns, sirens too …red lights… oh my, they’re going through! 
Grab a slice if you can, let’s meet by that tree. 
Make a promise, break too, and oh tell me please, what can we do?
...love your neighbor as yourself ... WHAT?
Come with me to my favorite place … all are welcome; it’s a space of grace. 
Good morning, glad to see you … what a beautiful day! 
Hello like that color, it looks really great on you! 
People are very friendly here, this place is special, I’m feeling what your mean
...love your neighbor as yourself.
Friendships blossom genuine and true
It’s your first day, I can help you. 
What’s the name of this place?
It’s delightful, refreshing it soothes my soul. 
Look there’s a sign ahead, perhaps it’s our clue
Welcome to Our COMMUNITY!
Here everyone lives the great commandment 
…love your neighbor as yourself!
It’s about all people embracing each other’s needs…
We’re caring, consoling, sharing, supporting, and creating joyful moments too,
And afternoon delights, join us for a few.
It’s My Faith- Based Community,
No one ever says good bye, neither will you!
My Dream Community
By Donna Mason
Atlantic Health System PFS Medicare

A COMMUNITY SHOULD BE....

A PLACE WHERE ITS SAFE TO LAY DOWN YOUR HEAD AT NIGHT
AND KEEP THE DOOR UNLOCKED DURING THE DAY
A PLACE WHERE IF YOU FALL DOWN
SOMEONE WILL BE THERE TO PICK YOU UP
A PLACE WHERE FRIENDLY SMILES
OVERRIDE ANGRY TEARS
A PLACE WHERE THE YOUNG
TAKE CARE OF THE OLD
A PLACE WHERE YOU HOLD THE DOOR FOR OTHERS
DON’T SLAM IT IN THEIR FACE
A PLACE WHERE YOU KNOW YOU’RE NEIGHBORS
AND INVITE THEM IN FOR TEA
A PLACE WHEN A CHILD IS LOST
EVERYONE SEARCHES
A PLACE WHERE A STRAY DOG
WILL ALWAYS FIND A HOME
A PLACE WHERE IF THERE IS A FIRE
WE ALL BRING WATER
A PLACE WHERE IF YOU LOOSE YOUR HOME
OTHERS OPEN THEIR HOME TO YOU
A PLACE WHERE IF YOUR HUNGRY
THERES ALWAYS A PLATE SET FOR YOU
A PLACE WHERE THEIR DOORS, THEIR ARMS AND THEIR HEART ARE ALWAYS OPEN.
Union City Got Talent
By Kevin Milton
Montclair State University

Getting cheese in the winter i'm just being Frank,
Blue and gray soaring eagle you know we all do it for the people
Getting shine through that peep hole. I'm trying to help my city of new jersey
Anythings possible you heard me.
I don't see failure with my blind site crossed eyed but
my visions right.
Many gone and left but acho cause i'm feeling very blessed.
I don't have Ralph Lauren or Clavin Clein im doing this from
summit to berginline.
You don't work hard unless you put hard work in the finals we stay first
go out to recycle and some people dying of thirst.
Union city got talent and we can overcome any challenge
aye
Union city got talent and we can overcome any challenge
aye
Throw the U up if you with me throw the U up.
Throughout the past few years my community has been hit with several hardships. Within two months, two former students from Delaware Valley Regional high school passed away. A total of six students have died in three years. Although, I was not a close to either of these students, it is still hard to hear about someone’s death through social media. With every death my community has defeated all odds. Not only has the students stuck together but so have the teachers. Delaware Valley may be a small school but we all have big hearts. With that said our community started to make some changes in order to stop these teenage deaths from happening. What they did is create a smoke free school as well as added several anti-drug events for the members in our community.

Unfortunate events have brought my community even closer. We take pride in helping others out and making sure that we support those families who are in need. I could not be more proud to be a part of a community that will always feel like home even if I’m thousands of miles away. To me a true community is when individuals will go above and beyond to help their neighbors out. Regardless of what my town has been through we have managed to stick together. With each challenge we have faced we have gotten stronger. Hunterdon County is a place where I am glad to call home.
A Chaplain’s reflection from a 2am call with an expired patient, family and nurse

I embraced the sacred space
Hugs and tears flowing
Prayers freely sent to heaven.

God embraced me as I led
Prayers known and unknown
Sharing faith stories take life.

Peace is sacred, sleeping, death
Wake my soul and run
Jesus holds his arms open.

Thank you God for your passion
Loving us in Christ's name
Resurrection powerful.

Embrace sacred space within
Remembrance
Holy Eucharist shared.

Amen says community
Grief is supported
In the sacred space God gives.
Everywhere you go there is a community to be a part of. Sometimes it does not feel like we belong anywhere, like when we feel lost, when we face adversity, when we feel alone, ill, or jobless.

I am a divorced, single Mom, who has been laid-off from work ~ for about three years, now. I was dropped from a community of my workplace…or so I felt! I kept in touch with a few of my close co-workers and made periodic visits. As I clung onto the feeling of belonging and having friends, minus the work part, it just wasn’t the same. I diligently and steadily job searched to find work, meaning, earn a paycheck, a community to belong to and grow with! In this economy, it has taken a whole lot longer than I ever imagined!

I reflected, feeling very alone, frustrated, and not belonging anywhere. With one child now away at college and the other working post-college graduation, the house was very quiet. And although I needed an income and knew that a job would give me a sense of community again, I wanted to be of use, to “fit in” somewhere, to make connections (personally and professionally), and to learn new things. I decided to volunteer at Overlook Medical Center, a nearby hospital where my children were born, where I felt it a familiar place. It was a start to get out of the house, to feel a sense of belonging, become a team-player, and quite possibly be “recruited”. It was a process to get involved, but I persisted. I started off in the Messenger Room three days a week. I volunteered with several groups of volunteers, running errands and discharges for the hospital. I valued the feeling of helping make the hospital a bit more efficient, discharging patients to their family members for their healing journey home. I made friends with my fellow volunteer groups, which made the time even more enjoyable. The variety of fellow volunteers had interesting stories to share. I felt I belonged…it was my new community, it gave me a sense of enjoyment and hope that I would work again. Then, I was selected to do the Consumer Library Information Program (C.L.I.P.), visiting patient rooms, offering patients medical information. Soon after, I applied to a position in Medical Records and shifted to volunteering two days in that department, to learn new skills and meet more people. Everyone has been very nice and helpful. I feel that they are rooting for me to get that paid position. I feel that I have a sense of community at Overlook Medical Center. I hope to get hired!

There are micro and macro communities all around us. My family is my most important community. I belong to my neighborhood and town, my book club, dinner club, and now my OMC volunteer departments. Volunteering provided meaningful “work”, new friends, and boosted my self-esteem. Volunteering has proven very valuable to me and to the hospital community.
Community is like a circle of unity. It includes you and I. The company involved makes a space for you. You carry on, knowing, feeling you belong here. Here, is where you are a cog in the wheel, a part of, going forward, with kindred spirits. You begin to know and become known. Communities can be steadfast or continually change. Keep up with the pace or you can lose your space.
The first time I realized the importance of community, I no longer had it. I was a recent college graduate and had moved to a strange city on my own. I spent my days looking for work and trying to get my bearings. I needed a job, place to live, group of friends. This was before GPS, and I often got lost in a maze of hilly streets, some of which ended at the Pacific. Not a bad fate. But still, I’d walk on the beach and doubt my decision to uproot myself. I had spent my whole life in insta-communities with everything laid out – structure, purpose, friendships. College and high school were like my teenage-self’s favorite food, Cup O’ Noodles: a meal-in-one, packaged in a tidy container, noodles for sustenance, carrots for good health, broth for warmth. (I ate around the peas.) All you had to do was add hot water! Similarly, all I had to do was put in a little effort. I longed for that security.

That period in my life gave me a decent eye for spotting strong communities. Today I am a social work intern in a place where work and community jell. There are the building blocks that create community, such as the way the social workers eat lunch together, grab coffee, bake for each other, celebrate birthdays, and encourage self-care through yoga or walking breaks. But there is also more. Community grows out of relationships, and at its best morphs into something larger and less tangible, a certain web of reciprocity, an unspoken knowledge of caring. It’s subtle and powerful and not unlike love: you can’t hold it or smell it or see it, but you know when it’s there as surely as you know when it’s not.

Like many hospital employees, these social workers face constant loss. Yet the team finds ways – serious and silly – to hold each other up during dark times. They might call a Code Lavender for a team member having a rough day, effectively saying “Leave. Take care of yourself.” They value humor and can be downright funny. On a recent February morning, I got Tropicana sunscreen sprayed on my hands – a little aromatherapy, a mental beach break. They create sacred spaces to process loss through rituals honoring those who have passed. This extends beyond the professional. A social worker’s parent dies and it’s a no-brainer to attend the funeral. Those who can’t go write their colleague-friend messages, collect them in a box and present it to her when she returns. This is hope and light, community at its best.

Of course it’s not perfect – personalities sometimes clash, work styles can differ; to say otherwise wouldn’t be real. But that’s the thing about strong communities: they’re flexible, they allow space for imperfections and differences. In fact, they celebrate such diversity. One person’s peas are another’s carrots. That’s what nurtures true sustenance – when there is space for everyone and everyone gets celebrated, held up, and encouraged to grow.
Strangers in a room,
Heavy words fall like rain drops;
Unity is found.
I love to read. It is one of my favorite pastimes. I never regret the quiet time I spend reading on a favorite couch in the early morning or late at night.

I hate book clubs. Or at least used to. The first book club I joined was the Literature and Medicine group at Morristown Medical Center. It is run by a great thinker and moderator and has been a stimulating and comforting community of which I am proud to be a current member. For six months a year, on a monthly basis, we come together to discuss an assigned piece of work from different genres - memoir, fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and even film. Twice we were honored to have featured authors join our nightly discussions.

Each work is thoughtfully chosen and focuses on health, disease, medical ethics, patient/family /health care workers' experiences, and most recently religion. Some of the literature has been distressing and difficult to finish, others very illuminating and empowering. The discussions which ensue resonate with me. Within this group, there is a level of acceptance that allows us to discuss anything. I particularly look forward to listening to certain people's reactions who I know will bring a different angle and who are exquisitely insightful.

Last month I arrived extremely late. I attempted to blend into the back of the room when I was asked what I thought about the work in question. What a shock and yet exactly what I had hoped for! This gift of inquiry moved me, making me feel very important.

Being a part of a community is about feeling safe, growing together' and sometimes just having a good laugh. It is about deepening commitment, personal growth and betterment for all members. Having the ability to read is a gift, yet it becomes extraordinarily special when literature is shared and discussed among fellow healthcare workers. This club's honest exchanges, personal reflections, and history have made it a very special community. It has taught me to be more tolerant, a broader thinker, a better nurse, and to live more consciously.

Every now and then I’ll pass a fellow member in the hospital and we nod in acknowledgement. It feels like we share this secret bond - that we are a group of alternating mentors and students, a band of thoughtful brothers and sisters.
Community is everything. Community is an important aspect that depicts how one can live or behave in. I am a part of multiple communities that have changed me for the better and made me who I am today. Being a part of a community is so much more than just where we live. I am fortunate enough to say that I am a part of communities including my family, my dance studio, and a sorority.

Sororities have been given stereotypes for years now on what they really do. There has been accusations on how all they do is party and pay for their friends. This couldn’t be more false in any way. During recruitment, I knew from the moment I stepped into Sigma Delta Tau’s door that one day I could call this place a home. Hearing all the people talk about how sorority changed their life in so many amazing ways, it was hard for me to imagine how true this could be. Getting a bid from Sigma Delta Tau will be a memory I will cherish for a lifetime.

They say with sororities first it becomes a part of you, then you become a part of it. This statement couldn’t be anymore true. Being in the sorority for over a year has been a life changing experience. I can honestly say that it has changed me for the better. I have been a part of so many volunteering and activities that help children as well as give back to the community. On top of helping numerous philanthropy events I am lucky enough to participate in, I have also met the girls who will one day become my bridesmaids.

A sorority is more than just four years, it is for a lifetime. This sorority has opened up doors for me later in the future. My Grand-big teaches at an elementary school which is one day what I would love to become my career. She has offered me a internship there for next semester. Once you join a sorority it opens up so many doors and can help you in so many aspects. Being a part of a sorority is a life changing experience. It is hard to describe to one who is an outsider because they may not understand how it necessarily works. But if you ask anyone in my greek community, they will simply say greek life is the best thing thats ever happened to them.
Growing up in Bridgewater, New Jersey, I played baseball and unknowingly became a part of a community. The community was made up of Bridgewater Baseball players and families. My community was connected by a passion for sports. Playing sports brought many families and friends together and everyone had a good time. During baseball season, my community would volunteer time to clean up the baseball fields and facilities and helping with the concession stand. This brought everyone together and made it fun because you always knew the people that were there for you, like an extended family.

My Bridgewater Baseball community was expanded to include families from Glen Allen, Virginia. When I was 14 years old, my Bridgewater Panthers 14U baseball team won the state tournament, the regional tournament and then went on to play in the 14U World Series in Glen Allen, Virginia. The tightly knit community of Glen Allen had host families who welcomed each of the players from all over the United States into their homes for the week. These families treated us like our own families, fed us, took us to games, and cheered us on just like our own community. Our communities merged and we have developed lifelong relationships with the members of our community, old and new alike.

I hope everyone has the opportunity to experience community and the comfort of spending time and sharing experiences with those with similar interests.