

## Griego: Small window, but a big view

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God love Gene Amole, but he ruined it for the rest of us.

"I don't think I can write for Thursday. I have a really bad cold."  
*A cold?! You have a cold. Gene Amole wrote while he was dying!*

"Yeah, but, um, my cough. No sleep. Can't breathe. Lost my voice."

*What do you need your voice for? You write two lousy columns a week. Amole wrote every day. When he was dying.*

It takes me a moment to identify this voice in my head as Viola's, the nemesis of my 12-year-old self. We rode the same school bus for 10 years. I can still see her, rising from the rear of the bus as the doors closed behind me. I swear her teeth glistened.

I - skeletal, buck-toothed, wearing glasses so thick and heavy they could anchor ships - simply waited. I could hardly blame her, so perfect a target I presented.

It has been Viola's voice goading me to write since I rolled over in bed 10 days ago and a vessel near the center of my right retina hemorrhaged.

**I saw it in** the darkness of my closed eyes, a quick burst of red, a sun imprinted on my inner eyelid. It's happened before. That's the deal when one is as blind as I am. The bad vision genes of both sides of the family decided to gather in me and have a party.

My eyes now look like something the Hubble might encounter, red and scarred, optical nerves huge and white, the hemorrhage a small, dark blossom. I have eyeball pictures, full color, 8-by-10 glossies, on my desk.

"Eew," my colleague Fernando says, when I hold one up. "Don't show me that before lunch."

Since my left eye has been similarly damaged already, I write now through eyes that offer distorted views. I expect a job offer from the White House any day now.

I've been waiting for the blood to absorb, so I can see a little better. Hasn't happened yet. The biggest drawback is that I cannot read comfortably. I must fight the text. I find that if I dart my eyes in a shifty sort of stay-away-from-the- strange-lady way I can sneak up on words and capture them before the distortion settles in

and swallows the letters.

In this manner, I read Sunday's *New York Times*, and this brings me to the belated point - a short story before I take my previously scheduled vacation. Viola be damned. Since it was Father's Day, the essays on the Op-Ed page were about our relationships with our children and parents. The piece by P.F. Thomése was so beautiful it made me weep.

**"It is liberating,** I must say, to be suddenly allowed to cast off the royal robe of self-importance," Thomése wrote of the change that greeted him with the birth of his daughter.

The writers showed, in part, how the smallest of windows can offer us a sudden, larger view. The memory that lies in a soiled necktie, in the snaps of a baby's romper. I squinted my way through the text and thought of my 6-year-old daughter's hair.

Desolina has beautiful hair. It is the hair of movie stars: luxuriant, bountiful, brown shot through with mahogany. A year or so ago, we decided to donate it to Locks of Love. The nonprofit collects hair to weave high-quality wigs for children and young people who have lost theirs to sickness.

I don't remember where the idea came from, but once expressed, Des embraced it. She often asked to look at the before and after pictures on the Locks of Love Web site. She imagined her hair would go to a girl with green eyes.

We cut it off last week. It was just brushing her waist. A stylist at LolliLocks Kids Salon wove it into a quick, single braid and lopped it off just below Desolina's chin. The salon was hosting a Locks of Love cut-a-thon. Friday and Saturday, 15 children ages 6 to 11 donated 181 inches of hair, including Desolina's 10.

**I wondered if some** of the children, including my own, would cry afterward. I wondered if they were there because they -really wanted to be, if they wanted to give hair to a child they will never meet. I underestimated them. One was making her second donation. Another little girl and her mother donated their hair in honor of a friend who died of brain cancer.

Mercedes Pinillo, almost 8, was sitting across from Des. She'd never had her hair cut. It's dark with tight curls, a doll's hair. A woman offered her \$200 for it - she wanted to use it for extensions. "She said no, she'd rather give it to a little girl who needs hair," her mom told me.

Afterward, the girls posed for photos, each of them holding their braids aloft like triumphant fishermen showing off their catch. Des gave me her picture to bring to work. I put it on my desk. And put the eyeball photos away.

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