

# Going to Alaska

Johanna Shapiro, PhD

When he was three, our son  
always beat me when we played  
When he was five, he got mad that  
he was white

and didn't have a name  
like Kareem or Magic,  
a name that could soar  
and slam dunk

At fourteen, he was voted  
best all-around player  
Next year, best defensive player  
He was good

But he hurt all over  
back, hips, neck  
Our family doctor said  
pains, strains, sprains

After each practice  
he lay on the floor  
he couldn't climb stairs  
Sometimes he cried.

We wanted a cure.  
We got x-rays, blood tests  
We got ankylosing  
spondylitis

The rheumatologist prescribed  
NSAIDs with names that rhymed  
but ate our son's gut; then came  
scarier drugs

Finally he quit the game he loved  
After school he lay on the floor

He watched cartoons, never  
basketball

He seems depressed,  
said our family doctor  
Try talking to him . . . but  
he didn't talk.

Then one day, our son said  
I'm going to Alaska  
Hiking, camping in the  
great outdoors

Alaska? Aren't there  
grizzly bears up there?  
Brown bears, he said, Don't worry,  
you'll see

I'll be the last one eaten,  
I'm a fast runner  
Although he had not run  
in a year

The rheumatologist frowned,  
suggested yoga, biking  
Those are for old people,  
our son said

We asked our family doctor  
He looked carefully at our son  
Casually, as though it was  
no big deal,

he started to check off  
questions on the health form  
I'm envious, he said  
You haven't lived

till you've seen Alaska  
It's God's country

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