

Just This Once, Just This Much  
—a Zen saying

The homeless shelter asked if I'd drive you to register your kids for school. I offered to buy us breakfast biscuits at Dunkin' Donuts first. Your teenage son helped the little ones with drinks and straws. Once we'd finished eating, you asked if I would take a look at your staples. You'd had back surgery just days before. Someone needed to check for signs of infection. I could have done that, Ma, your son said. You ignored him. I'm sorry. I don't remember his name or yours. Watch the kids, she told him as we left the table. The tiny bathroom stank of human waste, and the sink was dirty. You straddled the toilet backward and pulled up the back of your sweatshirt. Like a giant zipper, the staples climbed your back from waist nearly to neck. How simply some wounds are mended. No redness, no swelling. We were done. I wanted to hold you. I wanted to run.

—Judith Sornberger

Mary A. Vlooswyk - Self-Portrait

