

# Capillaries

**The Journal of Narrative Medicine**

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## Letter from the Editor

Welcome to the second edition of *Capillaries: The Journal of Narrative Medicine*! We are a publication facilitating dialogue between the sciences and the humanities and aspire to create a more empathetic community. Our chosen name *Capillaries* embodies our mission: just as capillaries are sites in the human body where the exchange of nutrients and gases takes place, our journal is a site for the exchange of stories and ideas.

The poetry, reflections, and essays presented in this edition truly exist at the interface between the arts and the sciences. The authors hail from diverse departments such as Human Centered Design & Engineering, Comparative History of Ideas, English, Biology, Microbiology, and Psychology. Even richer are the stories –vulnerable tales of love and loss, of coming to terms with one’s identity, and of understanding what it means to be a global citizen in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The messages in these stories transcend the experiences of the individual and have the power to inspire us all. But we can only grow if we are willing to listen. The ability to be receptive to stories is a necessity in today’s society. We live in an age of social and political divisiveness, where acrimonious rhetoric is the norm, and where minds shrink away in disgust and prejudice when they should be open, thinking critically and empathetically. Our staff’s hope is that this journal is one step forward in that new direction – in developing in our community a greater willingness to understand people on a fundamental human level. Only then can we begin to move forward, as Mohsin Hamid states in his novel *Exit West*, to more “plausible desirable futures.”

Sincerely,

Alice Ranjan

Maddy Bennett

Fleur Anteau

Gal Snir

Audrey Immel

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  - *Department of Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies*
- Nancy Sisko, PhD
  - *Department of English*

## **Requiem**

(Dedicated to the patients at the Oncology Ward I left behind)

*By Ai Che*

### *Symptoms and Diagnosis*

What I remember most are the bruises  
Shimmering underneath the pasty skin  
Night sweats not coming from terrors  
And joint pain burning from within

Then comes the lab works  
My white cells are too high  
They say: Leukemia I think:  
White cells on strike  
“You’re in charge of this battle  
So put up a good fight!”  
Or perhaps I’m just a soldier  
Caught up in a friendly fire  
Trying my best to make it out alive

### *Treatment*

A figure in white, stethoscope adored  
“Rare but treatable”, the Doctor put forth  
Then why didn’t you tell the same thing to the mother next door  
Who left behind a son just turned two  
She couldn’t afford treatment, unlike me and you?  
“Life happens, let it slide”

Your furtive attempt to elide  
That third-world countrymen  
Can't afford to buy their lives

*The drugs*

Are where the diseases are not  
Before you give up  
Did you give your best shot?  
Don't ask about my living will  
While spurning my will to live

*Final notes*

When Death hovering above  
To strike his final blow  
Promise me to practice your art  
And make them whole  
So we can share a 'morrow Where life ends with  
"Let's pray.."  
Not a steely ice "Who pays?"

On the Hippocratic oath, you swore  
To grace all lives, without hesitation  
As if Human lives require  
No validation

## **I don't draw trees anymore.**

*By Ragini Gupta*

Do you remember when  
we made trees together,  
I liked drawing them because

I knew where I was going next  
I knew how I was meant to start:

two parallel lines with curves  
on each end holding a circle with  
squiggle filled lines

that's your outline;

start filling it with different shades of green  
throw in a bit of yellow, but not too much:

death should be acknowledged subtly;

move to the bark,  
this wasn't as fun

leaves will fade from

green to  
yellow to  
sad beige

my boots can crumple them and  
with the wind, they'll float away

for the bark  
life is  
exhausting.

One day we stopped drawing  
circular squiggle filled lines  
they were replaced by leaves  
that had individual outlines:

I was expected to  
transition into realism

I drew too many leaves,  
I made the branches bend and

one  
day  
break.

I don't draw  
trees anymore

the squiggle filled ones are a lie  
the individually outlined ones hold  
truths I'm not old enough to face.

I liked drawing trees

but that was before you  
turned into a beige leaf:

you crumpled and  
the wind took you  
away leaving behind  
a bark with

broken  
bending  
branches.

## Living My Truth

*By Andy Lobkov*

Living your truth is living your life in the most authentic way possible, without reservation and without uncertainty and doubt of your sense of self. This, fully allowing myself to discover my truth and begin to share it with others, is something that I've found to be incredibly transformative. It's something that is a huge part of my life and something that I value very very very much, but it's also something that I was the most afraid of. I'm afraid of challenging assumptions and conceptions of me, of the image that has been constructed for me and by me for most of my life. I do the same thing - I constantly assume and construct others' identities without even realizing it. Straight and cisgender tends to be the default, unfortunately. Straight meaning being attracted to members of another gender, and cisgender meaning feeling a connection between your gender assigned at birth and your gender identity. I have learned, after a long time of unawareness, confusion, disregard, denial, anger, fear, and, finally, acceptance, that I want to live my truth wholeheartedly and with pride.

I am queer, and I am non binary. I am queer because I love a lot of different kinds of people and I am non binary because I do not fit into the binary of male or female. I am, non binary. I use they/them pronouns. Non binary means a lot of things to a lot of people, but particularly, to me, it means that I find a disconnection with my gender assigned at birth and my gender identity or my sense of my own gender. The easiest way to explain this is with this analogy - imagine putting on a sweater, and finding the perfect fit. There's no uncomfortableness and you don't even notice how it feels on your skin most of the time (apart from any good feelings), and you don't really think about how it feels on you all that much. This sweater fits well. Now, imagine putting on a scratchy, rough sweater. This sweater, you notice. You notice how your skin feels with it on, and you notice that it doesn't feel quite right. You're still able to wear the sweater and others may not notice your discomfort, but you definitely do. This is what my gender disconnection feels like, sometimes. When I hear the pronouns "she/her" used to describe me, I don't feel a strong feeling of pain or hurt, but I notice those words and they do not feel right.

When I hear the pronouns “they/them” to describe me, I smile and I notice that in a good way, because I am not used to hearing those words and they validate my existence as a genderqueer, non binary person. Genderqueer is another term that fits under the umbrella of transgender, although not all genderqueer or non binary people necessarily define themselves as transgender. I do. Genderqueer is similar to non binary, but can mean something different to someone else. According to GLSEN, an LGBTQ+ organization working to create safe and inclusive K-12 schools, genderqueer means “a person who has a gender identity and/or gender expression that does not conform to the gender they were assigned at birth. People who identify as ‘genderqueer’ may or may not also identify as ‘transgender’”.

My point being is that all of these labels have different meanings for different individuals, and it is up to the individual to decide what labels to claim and what their identity means to them. I cannot speak for anyone else by defining what these labels mean to me specifically because my experience is individual and will never be the same as anyone else’s - just like your experience with your own identities like gender identity, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic class, religion, and others that matter to you and your humanness.

I’m sure you are familiar with the term “coming out”. GLSEN defines coming out as “the ongoing process that an LGBT person goes through, to recognize their own identities pertaining to sexual orientation and/or gender identity and gender expression, and to be open about them with others”. To me, coming out meant first coming out to myself, and accepting my identities as my truth and being able to love myself because of them, not despite them. I’m going to be truthful and tell you that this was not the case in the beginning. I had always had this feeling that I was somehow “different” growing up - maybe it was the lack of attraction to most of the boys around me growing up, the intense dislike and discomfort whenever anyone talked about sex (and the only type of sex that was ever talked about while I was growing up was heterosexual sex), feeling incredibly uneasy and uncomfortable changing out in the open in the women’s locker room. Because I

grew up in a very, very heteronormative and cisnormative space (including my family life, school life, religious life), I was never allowed the chance to question the identity that was constructed for me and maintained by myself. But I also didn't live under a rock - I was very aware of the LGBTQ+ community and was outspokenly supportive. However, because of the lack of active support from others in my life and a lack of openness about discussing and questioning dominant ideologies, I had always just had the thought that "oh, but that's not me".

When I came to college, I did have the freedom and independence to be on my own and think for myself without anyone else watching - and this is when everything hit me at once and I really let myself know. Some people will tell you they "knew" ever since they were a small child, and some will tell you they didn't figure it out until I did, or even later. None of these experiences are less valid or important than the other. There is no timeline to discover and embrace yourself for who you are. The most beautiful and surprising thing of all of this is the very evident change that I've gone through within the past two years. I began freshman year incredibly hopeful and also incredibly turbulent and uncertain. I let my doubts and fears cloud my thoughts, coupled with a lifetime of internalized homophobia that I wasn't aware was so deeply rooted in me. Before I told anyone, and even a few months after, I spent a good amount of time hating myself and alternating between wishing it could go away and ignoring that part of me. Thankfully, the first friend I made at university was also gay - after he told me, it was easier for me to accept myself because I knew I wasn't alone and I was reminded that there is a community for me here.

Coming out is still something that scares me, even after doing so slowly and now a bit faster over the course of two years. Coming out is equally terrifying, terrible, awkward, and exhilarating, relieving, and surprising. I hate it and I love it at the same time. I will always have to come out, forever. I will always have to weigh a situation and evaluate my safety, both physical and emotional. I will always have to correct someone about my pronouns, or decide not to. Both have consequences: I either have

to debate over my own humanity, or quietly accept that my identity will not be respected in that particular moment. Unfortunately, I've noticed something. We as humans really like to be certain about things. We like to organize and put things into digestible boxes that make sense in our heads - and there's nothing wrong with that, until it encroaches upon someone else. Until it steals and swallows someone's identity, someone's visibility. This is something that's so ingrained in our society - placing labels on others. This is why respecting pronouns is so incredibly important - it's a way to validate other human beings and their existence. So I encourage you to learn the most you can and try your best to acknowledge and respect individuals who choose to invite you into their truth, because it's the people closest to us who have the power to make us feel special and loved and listened to.

I'm now going to read a letter I wrote to myself, where I was about a year ago.

A letter to myself:

Hey. I know you might think things are not going to get better. I know you think that you are alone, and that you have to face this alone. For a little bit, that's true. For a little bit, you do have to do this alone. You do have to accept yourself, and learn to love yourself. Despite everything you've been told, despite everything you've been hearing and will hear. Despite everything you tell yourself. Despite all of the lies you tell yourself to try to forget that part about yourself you never want to forget. Despite growing up in a town and in a family that swept any idea of an identity that you may have into a non conversation. Despite growing up believing you were this person that you are not. Despite trying to fit into a mold that doesn't hold you. Despite trying to make everyone around you happy and comfortable and pleased, and in doing this ignoring being the person you so desperately want to be. Despite feeling utterly alone and lost and alien. Despite feeling strange, and gross, and not normal. Despite feeling that your religion does not accept you. Despite hearing homophobic comments said in front of you by people completely ignorant of the fact that those words sting and

burn and rip a part of your dignity and integrity to shreds and despite not being brave enough to stand up. Despite hearing your dad and your family whisper and degrade and sneer at human beings that will end up becoming dearer to your heart than the people who put them down. Despite sitting in silence while hearing words that you know are not meant for you, but hurt more because you chose to stay silent.

Despite believing lies that have been fed to you from people that unfortunately also were not aware of the fact that gay people are people and not an immoral disease. Despite fearing that no one will accept you for who you are. Despite fearing that those who knew you will look at you with disgust and discomfort and disappointment. Despite fearing that you will lose those closest to you.

You will compartmentalize your identity to fit what they say you should be - and for a little while, it will work. You'll forget a bit about yourself. You will fit in. But you'll feel a little bit of loss in your stomach, knowing that you're creating a layer of protective film of a false image to stay comfortable and unchallenged, and it will hurt you. You will hurt. You will ask yourself - who am I? and you won't know how to answer because there are two glaring contradictory parts of yourself that play an endless game of tug of war and you are sick of feeling sick and guilty and false. And you want to change. And you want to be free. And you want to be freely changed and moved by the world and moved by others and moved by yourself and you no longer want to stay invisible and hidden and safe and comfortable and unchallenged and untruthful.

There will be a time when you feel so lost and alone and deeply confused and unhappy that you would rather be asleep than be awake, because at least in your dreams you can choose to do as you wish.

This will change. You will change. You will move forward. You will gain friends. You will gain friends and supporters who believe in you and who love you for your truth, who love you even more for being yourself. You will become friends with a wonderful queer person who will be your first friend at university. You will come out to this person and for the first time feel that you are not an anomaly. You will come out to more friends, more queer friends. You will make more friends, more queer friends. You will come out to those who barely know you. You will come out to those you have just met. You will come out to new friends, you will come out to old friends. You will find that with every single person who you share your truth with, they will surprise you with their love and their compassion and their willingness to understand and to learn. You will fall in love. You will tell someone about her. You will tell more friends, and soon enough you'll feel like you want to tell the whole world. You will feel butterflies and the warmth of a cotton candy sunset grin. You will cry at 3:45 in the morning in the bathroom of your dorm because you finally realized that you've made it to a place where you finally feel comfortable enough with living your truth without fear. You will thank God for the love you've been shown by every person in your communities and in your chosen family. You will endure, you will experience, you will bear, you will tolerate, you will stomach, you will stand, you will continue, you will remain, you will live, you will last. You will exist. You will thrive. You will feel pain and deep sadness and loneliness and you will feel invisible and you will feel silent. But you will also feel loved, and supported, and encouraged, and validated, and accepted, and welcomed, and embraced. You will be and feel and make your way through all of these things. You will make it. And oh my GOD, it is something worth waiting for.

## Healing starts with me: A guide to falling out of love

By Aleenah Ansari

*How do you move on?*

I wrote this question on the top of my notebook after yet another heartbreak. I've realized that we're all healing from something, whether it's societal expectations about who we're supposed to be or a relationship that changes the way we think about love. She was my best friend, confidante, study buddy, and the love of my life all at once. When she left, she took the most vulnerable parts of me, which means that I had to learn that I could be whole without her.

Now, I'm learning to find healing with myself, which is why I wrote a guide to getting over you. Ready?

Start by scrubbing them from every corner of your life. Lift up the tablecloths, grab the dustpan (maybe even a Swiffer), and remove the traces of whatever isn't yours anymore. Ask a friend to come - they'll be good for the company- and tell authentic stories of trial and tribulations. Put on some music, preferably something that feels like home or healing – and it's OK if Fall Out Boy and a couple experimental tracks from Childish Gambino make it into the mix. Sing along softly as you look around and wonder if Panic! at the Disco is still your favorite band after all these years, and try not to think too far back. Don't fall back into moments that aren't real anymore. Don't fall in love with people who don't know how to love you right or don't love you right now. Don't glorify or magnify people and make them into something they're not.

Take breaks if you need to – maybe grab a soft blanket and sit on the couch with a cup of green tea. If the hurt comes, pause and acknowledge it. Be grateful for what was yours and with the next breath, let it go. Cry if you need to, delete the photos that don't add to your life, and leave your place to go somewhere new, something free of memories except the ones you'll make today. Strike up conversation with a classmate or coworker, write in a new journal, and practice the art of smiling until it feels real again. Love deeply and be thankful for whoever stays, and remember that being in love shouldn't be synonymous with being hurt.

This is how I feel today. I find myself staring at the window and turning the phrase “I love you” to past tense and wondering why the universe ever let me lose something so precious. I think about the combination of moments that led to our downfall and try to put them back together in a way where you stick around.

But that’s not my reality. Still, what was I supposed to do? I had to be honest when it all fell apart – what else could I ask of myself? Today is tough, but I am tougher. I am grateful and resilient and heartbroken all at once, but I know that this is a part of the process. One day, this hurt will be a thing of the past. Some things, like a life as deep as yours, are a risk worth taking, and I can’t get mad at myself for feeling this so deeply. It’s the truth, after all, and I am nothing if not honest with myself.

Today, I’m hurting. But I need to take care of myself and recognize that this is a thing of the past, but I don’t have to forget what it taught me. Love feels beautiful and unconditional, but not as beautiful as you in the flesh and blood, the one who’s showing me how powerful it can be.

But maybe healing starts when I stop blaming yourself for things you can't control. Maybe healing is picking up some Rupi Kaur and putting down your notebook and realizing that I were was in love, but not with you. Maybe I just loved the idea that you enabled me to be vulnerable with you and honest with myself.

Maybe love is recognizing that love shouldn't hurt, shouldn't require excuses and alcohol and perfect timing and an ending that would leave you aching for days. Maybe feeling comes when I stop putting my self-worth in the hands of people who can't handle it.

Love feels like the kind of fire that keeps you warm and cozy all day, something that I want around forever. Love feels like vulnerability that stays the night and drips into the next morning because there’s no better way to be woken up than by you.

Luckily, love didn't stop with you, or anybody else who doesn't know how to love me. Love will come back to me too – maybe it's from a friend or significant other, but maybe it's an academic adviser or professor or kind cashier who say that they like my aesthetic or a friend of a friend who tells me that they feel connected to my writing. Healing can come from anywhere.

So, I guess I do want to thank you. If you hadn't left, I would have never sought solace in people who show me love every single day, not just in a moment that's confined to the past. I wouldn't have reached out to acquaintances who gave me incredibly wise advice about staying in the driver seat of my own life and remembering that not everything is my fault. I wouldn't have been as present to my other friends or jobs or responsibilities. I am lucky for these moments, and even luckier to have learned what kind of love I don't deserve.

Thanks to you, I'm on the journey to radical self-acceptance. But, I'm not thankful for you in your own right. I'm thankful for everyone after you who showed me what unconditional love should look like.

As long as there are stars above me  
it will never be the end of love.  
After all, I am made of sunshine and stardust and stories of my  
ancestors.  
Is that proof enough of my resilience?

## Chocolate colors cough-syrup

*By Ragini Gupta*

I've let parts of me slip  
out of my mouth  
into yours

you thought I was milk chocolate with caramel inside, milky ways  
are your favorite kind but it turns out I'm made of  
cough-syrup-tasting raspberry:

medication that deceives you  
by making you believe  
it will work because  
it's your favorite  
color pink

sometimes we talk and  
my layers of cacao melt away  
exposing artificially-sweetened bitterness

you do your best to not cringe  
while I stand, my essence  
dripping down my eyes  
sliding down the third  
rib of my torso to  
the tip of my  
unusually  
small,  
small  
toe

my  
favorite  
color is the blue of your eyes;  
as you drown in the flavor of me, you  
realize cough-syrup-tasting raspberry is not yours

## Field Notes from Chile

By Alice Ranjan

*The following reflections are from my time abroad in Chile, where I learned of public health issues from Chilean physicians, psychologists, and public health officials and conversed with the Quechua indigenous community about their traditional culture and medical practices.*

### I. Treating Mental Health and Drug/Alcohol Addiction

Historically, patients with psychiatric conditions were admitted to psychiatric hospitals, where they lost their ability to be part of a society and were instead treated as prisoners by the hospital personnel. To combat this practice of care, “therapeutic communities” were established. These communities are long-term residential treatment facilities, in which patients and therapists live together, partaking in daily chores (e.g. cooking, cleaning, washing) and in recreational activities.

In Santiago, Chile, we visited one such therapeutic center called *Rostros Nuevos* (“New Faces”). *Rostros Nuevos* supports psychiatric patients of low-socioeconomic status (ages 18 and up), who face barriers to education, housing, and work. One program offered by the organization is the “day program,” through which patients can work small jobs, attend educational workshops, and participate in community-building activities. For example, one group of patients received a modest amount of income for folding small origami boxes, which were sent to a local chocolate factory to be used for packaging chocolates. Another group of patients received writing lessons from a professional journalist and worked with her to create a radio show covering domestic and international news. All patients then gardened and played/listened to music together before returning home to their families in the evening. These activities are intended to teach patients how to connect with each other and to provide them with both a sense of autonomy and community.

The most immersive program is *Hogares Protegidos* (“protected homes”), in which patients live together in an official residential neighborhood –i.e. patients and community members live next door to one another. The idea is to integrate patients within a community so they are not isolated from the external world and so they can live without the fear of stigma.

The concept of a therapeutic community is used to address substance abuse as well. In Santiago, we visited *Centro Terapéutico Liwen*, a government-funded clinic that provides free alcohol and drug addiction rehabilitation services. The center’s mantra is to “treat the person and not the drug.” It is believed that people turn to alcohol/drugs as a coping mechanism for personal issues (e.g. family troubles, work problems, lack of self-esteem, etc.). The center tries to understand why patients became involved with alcohol or drugs and tries to address those issues. In fact, the center’s approach is purely psychosocial as the patients are not prescribed any medication during their rehabilitation process, unless they experience severe chemical dependence that requires medication.

*Centro Terapéutico Liwen* is open to patients aged 20 years and older and provides two programs. First is the “day program,” in which patients stay at the center during the day and return to their own homes at night. This program is best suited for those with families who can support and care for them during the therapy process. The second option is an “evening program,” in which patients work their normal job during the day and come to the treatment center in the evening. This program is suited for those who must support themselves financially. Both programs involve three phases: First, the patient and the family are interviewed by the staff and residents currently in the program. Second, a course of action (day vs. evening program) is determined for the patient, and this treatment can last anywhere from several months to two years. Lastly, the center helps to reintegrate the person into society –a process that can take up to eight months. During this last stage, the patient spends more time away from the center, working and living in their own homes.

We had come to *Centro Terapéutico Liwen* to learn from the therapists and residents about their practice of care. From morning to late afternoon, we interacted with the patients and staff, and after our numerous attempts of broken Spanish phrases and vivid gesticulations of the hands, we came to understand their stories. Many spoke vulnerably of a harsh journey from cocaine addiction to rehabilitation and were all determined to overcome their addiction and to support one another. I was in awe by the sense of camaraderie; here was a place where alienation did not exist. I was moreover in awe when a therapist introduced us to the *Biodanza* exercise –the act of dancing to music to release one’s inhibitions and become one with the music and with others. Through this, a person can hopefully come to terms with his/her emotions and internal conflicts and build self-esteem. As fiery Latin music boomed from the speakers, the residents, staff, and students converged in the center of the communal space to dance. At first, many of us students were too timid to dance, but upon watching the patients and therapists, it became clear that there was no requisite for moving about gracefully and aesthetically –we were to dance simply for ourselves. After eight minutes of continuous movement, I took a step back to catch my breath and was reenergized by the scene before me. Some patients swayed with the melody by themselves, others grasped hands with the students, forming pairs, and some even closed their eyes and became lost in blissful meditation. Regardless of style, there was a palpable sense of positivity emanating from all parties. Having played music for several years, I understood the ability of music to heal but this experience was beyond healing –it was empowering. It seemed to me then that there was value in this unorthodox form of therapy. While it alone would not cure addiction, it was beneficial when coupled with daily behavioral therapy, medication, and support from others, as the residents at the center had shown.

My experience at *Centro Terapéutico Liwen* and *Rostros Nuevos* taught me the importance of taking into account the psychosocial aspects of health. While health ultimately manifests itself as biological symptoms, the causes often begin with problems in the environment (e.g. sociopolitical, economic, and cultural stressors).

In public and private hospitals in Chile, addiction and mental health are treated in a medically-oriented fashion as they are in the United States. The psychiatrist will prescribe a drug for the patient, and the patient will consume the drug for a certain period of time. If the drug is not effective, the physician will adjust the dosage of the current drug or prescribe a completely new drug. It is a painful trial-and-error process that may last for years. Chile thus opened my eyes to alternative forms of treating mental health and addiction –ones that rely not only on medication but on understanding the person as a fully complex human being.

## II. A Quechua Sacred Ceremony

Northern Chile is home to the indigenous *Quechua*. We visited the Quechua community and learned of plant-based treatments for physical ailments as well as treatments for spiritual ailments. As a student of science, I was trained to dismiss concepts that lacked any rational, evidence-based explanations. I was dubious of anything “spiritual,” and thus, I was unprepared for what I experienced in a Quechua sacred ceremony.

The purpose of the ceremony was two-fold. First, it was a celebration of life and of bonding between humans, as the Quechua believe that all humans are spiritually related to one another and to Mother Earth (the common ancestor). But the ceremony was also a meditation on the self –an opportunity to release one’s inhibitions, to forgive one’s mistakes and failures, and to find peace within oneself.

It began when a shaman poured some flower-scented water onto his hands and rubbed them vigorously. He raised his hands above his head and clapped once, lowered them to his heart and clapped a second time, and placed them near his knees for the final clap. He then cupped his face in his hands, closed his eyes, and inhaled deeply. This ritual, he explained, was supposed to represent our attempt to “mend the divide between the body, spirit, and soul,” and the three claps symbolized each of these components. The shaman then brought the bottle of scented water to each person, and once we were all anointed, we stretched our hands to the sky and faced in a direction deemed as “North.”

Closing our eyes and inhaling, we mimicked his movements and turned to the West, South, and East, repeating the same motions. There was only silence as we moved, yet the silence was therapeutic. It was refreshing to “live in the moment” and focus solely on existing, rather than fretting over plans for the next day or brooding over past mistakes.

The Shaman then picked up a basket of coca leaves and selected three of them. He blew on the leaves three times and made a wish after each breath. It was our turn next: we each gathered three leaves and took turns prostrating on a sacred cloth, where we delivered our prayers. It was both a moment of privacy and of unity: while we were lost in our inner thoughts, we were simultaneously connected through our shared desire to find meaning and belonging in the world.

Following the prayers, the Shaman brought forth a black bowl with wood burning in it, and we each immersed our faces in the smoky warmth and used our hands to sweep the smoke towards our body and feet. This was the “purification ritual,” designed to cleanse us of any distress and to enable us to pursue new challenges with fresh energy. The ceremony drew to a close when we embraced one another and cried ¡Jallalla! (meaning “the good life” in the Quechua language). Laughing and embracing my classmates, I was transported back to the days of my childhood, when I had visited Buddhist temples with my mother and engaged in prayer for the very same purpose of the Quechua ritual –to come to terms with one’s human existence. I marveled then at how the ceremony had brought me spiritual consolation by connecting me with my ancestors and culture, with my fellow classmates, and ultimately with myself.

## Ten Places I Have Cried at UW, From Worst to Best

*By Maddy Bennett*

### 10. Outside the HUB

You might think that crying outside the HUB is a freshman-year move, but even veteran UW criers like me sometimes find themselves in this situation. It seems like it would be a logical place to let the tears flow, what with its proximity to Hall Health and to the wonderful and supportive people who staff the HUB (shout-out to Tony at the SORC). But these resources can't effectively be used when you're paralyzed with sad indecision about where to go—and that always happens when I'm crying outside the HUB. People are rushing past doing important Business Things and I'm just perched on one of those low brick walls like a sloppy bird. This is a bad cry.

### 9. Bagley Hall

As we've seen in the previous example, sometimes you don't choose the crying location. It chooses you. Bagley is a terrible place to experience a mental health episode. For one thing, the building is an actual labyrinth. Those beige Soviet-esque corridors all look the same and start to become claustrophobic, adding to the original trigger. As I discovered (you're welcome), there is a nice little courtyard that you can get to from inside the building and not too easily from the outside, so at least there's privacy and fresh air. Although I'm pretty sure you can only reach that courtyard in a delusional, tear-streaked state, and it's not worth starting to cry in Bagley in order to find it.

### 8. Padelford

This is fundamentally similar to Bagley, but slightly better because this building houses the English Department instead of Chemistry. So, it's somewhat likely that a supportive writerly type who likes talking about feelings may emerge from the woodwork and comfort you if you happen to cry in Padelford. This building is also a maze, so be careful that you don't accidentally end up in the Math department—at least if you're like me and STEM gives you one more reason to cry. There's a little more privacy here than some other areas on campus, and it's still close to Hall Health. If you're in the area of North Campus and are at all able to choose where the dams break, try slumping toward Padelford.

## 7. Local Point

Casually known as “Local Disappoint”, this is a fitting place to cry on West Campus. Whether the thing that sets you off is how bland and expensive the food is, or a more serious trouble, Local Point has a variety of chair styles and locations in which to let it all out. There is also space for group cries at longer tables and couch areas. It’s a little too well-lit for me to really achieve catharsis, but it can hold me over during a lunchtime cry between classes. Make sure to compost your napkin when you’re done; they really care about that.

## 6. Grieg Garden

Sometimes a more obscure cry is a better cry. Greig Garden is located right across from one of the main entrances of Thomson Hall, and is known for a creepy bust, squirrels, and cute elderly people. All of these entities will watch if you cry there and be slightly concerned but know with an ancient certainty that everything you’re experiencing will sort itself out. This would be a better cry than it is, but sometimes the benches are a bit wet and soggy and so your best option is to pace around or kind of squat. Also, it’s close to a heavily used pedestrian path, so it doesn’t quite take you away from it all. You can just emit haunting wails and have people not know from whence they came.

## 5. Odegaard

Here we have a solid, middle-of-the road cry. I have only cried here a couple times, but various sources have informed me that the sweet embrace of Mother Ode can be very comforting. More than other places on this list, you’re likely to find a large number of people who understand on some level how you’re feeling. There are also comfy chairs and quiet rooms. If you’re a real crying pro, you can schedule a crying session in advance by reserving an Odegaard study room online. Some of them are surprisingly soundproof. This is a thing I have done.

## 4. Coffee Shop

If you’re like me and the aesthetic helps take the pain away, consider softly weeping in a coffee shop. They are all basically the same, as far as crying goes. On campus, there’s Parnassus, Suzzallo Café, and even Husky Grind. Off campus, you could try Café Solstice, Sure Shot, or Ugly Mug. I’ve definitely stormed into Ugly Mug, thought the store’s name was insulting my face, and then cried into a turmeric latte that tasted like acrid sand. At least in a coffee shop off-campus you can feel like a real adult, living life in the big city. What a rush.

### 3. Mary Gates

Sure, the lobby of Mary Gates is a standard cry. But you can take it to another level by going to the second or even third floor. There are some truly stunning views of Drumheller fountain to look at as you try to suppress sobs. Many of the classrooms are often unoccupied for long periods of the day and have whiteboards you could use to diagram your sadness. I haven't quite done that yet, but I can say that I've cried on every floor of Mary Gates. There has to be some kind of merit badge for that, or at least an EDM song about it.

### 2. My Room

No, I don't mean that you could cry in my room. A room of one's own is an excellent place to cry. It's got privacy, a pillow to scream into, and childhood mementos that could either exacerbate or totally stop the crying, depending on where you are in the process. Some days we need to get back into bed halfway through the day, and that's totally okay. Whether it's on campus or not, home can certainly be one of the top crying spots of any respectable UW crier.

### 1. Sylvan Grove

Wow. If you thought the coffee shop cry was aesthetic, get ready to ascend. Crying in Sylvan Grove for me was a downright spiritual experience. You're totally alone yet supported by the soft curve of the grass. The sky rolls on above you like the serene surface of a cerulean marble. The pillars hold it up, the letter each pillar represents spelling the word LIFE. You're here, you survived, and the haunting memories can't get you. You run your fingers through the dirt and it's real and the fact that you're perceiving this transcends any list or book and you just...

## **My Chest**

*By Gage Anderson*

My chest is a wooden box.  
Oak.

My chest has trouble holding in what I give to it.  
And the only way my chest will contain everything is if I shove  
more inside.

My chest houses the photos from our vacations.  
California.  
Utah.

These are the moments that took my breath away so effectively  
I needed medical assistance to get it back.

My chest is a harbor  
For boats that only travel by wind power.  
When there is no air there are no ships.  
When there are no ships  
The harbor becomes a ghost town.

An empty chest.

My chest is a theatre.  
It's uncomfortable without applause.  
My chest is a theatre  
After the lights go down but  
Before the curtain falls shut.  
My chest is a room full of people sitting in the dark.

Someone once asked me what it's like to grow up with asthma.  
It's not so bad.  
Sometimes I just can't breathe.

My chest is casket.  
Which is to say  
My chest is a wooden box.  
Coffin.

My chest was built to be buried.  
My chest is a coffin  
coughing from the smoke.

My chest is a coffin  
My lungs are the body, buried before dying.  
My lungs would beat my chest to splinters if it meant  
Finding fresh air again.  
My chest is a cage made of more than ribs.  
Adamant to keep my lungs from breaking free.

My chest is a graveyard.

My chest is the Pompeii to my throat's Vesuvius.  
The photos are burning.  
The harbor is abandoned, the ships evacuated and took the air with  
them.  
The theatre is filling with smoke and the people are being buried  
under the ash.

It's not so bad.  
Sometimes I just can't  
breathe.

## Nature Experiences: Our Loss through Progress

By Honson Ling

True nature—a wild nature that is self-organizing, free of human mastery and dominance (Turner, 2013)—was rare during my childhood in Hong Kong. Growing up in one of the densest cities in the world, I was surrounded by skyscrapers, indoor malls with air-conditioning, street markets with the smell of fish and garbage, and the constant sound of ambulances, traffic, and construction. My concept of wilderness was associated with long bus rides, car sickness, plastic bags, puking, and annoying bug bites. I was a living example of what Professor Peter Kahn has coined, *environmental generational amnesia*, the idea that each generation perceives the environment into which it's born, no matter how developed, urbanized or polluted, as the norm (Kahn, 2002). Despite the lack of *true wilderness* experience in my childhood, there was one place that was nevertheless wild and sacred in my own eyes. These were the memories of my visits to the once-rural island of Ma Wan, a fishing village where my mother grew up.

The rural island lifestyle was rarely romanticized. After her mother had passed away from cancer, my mom took up most of the household responsibilities at the age of 15. She would occasionally tell me stories from her youth, like how her dog, Bobby, would wait on the side of the Ma Wan dock or how my father would wait for her with flowers on the side of the city dock. One day, Bobby went missing and my mom searched the entire island but he was nowhere to be found. It turned out that the government animal control had mistaken Bobby as a stray and euthanized him for rabies prevention. It was a devastating story that she had often told when I was young.

As she began to pursue her own career in graphic design, she was torn, like many others, between staying on the island and building a better life for her own future family in the city. After moving into the city, it was hard to say if life had gotten any better. She worked longer hours and opened her own advertisement design company, while having to take care of me and my sister.

Despite all of these burdens, she, nonetheless, brought me and my sister to the island of Ma Wan every Sunday for church and to visit my grandpa and the ancient convenience store that he owned. My grandpa was a gentle and respectable man on the island, with many untold stories of his past because of his humility. As he grew older and older, his actions became slow and his words became incomprehensible to my impatient ears. Nevertheless, his presence was always soothing, and I have always felt his love despite our inability to understand one another. To me, the essence of the island was very similar to the essence of my grandpa. It was filled with mysterious trails and abandoned buildings whose stories no one knew. The once-flourishing fishing village has descended into old age and quietness. The essence of the island was still lively, but incomprehensible to most of its visitors or newcomers.

Like Bobby the dog, the wilderness and the culture of Ma Wan had been euthanized for the sake of *progress*. The lifestyle of the fisherman village had remained unchanged during the British and the Japanese colonial periods, but the temptation for modern lifestyle was hard to turn down. As more and more of the younger generation left to start their own life outside of the island, the old fisherman port had transformed into an ancient Roman ruin, visited only by photographers and tourists. Baskets that were once used to sun-dry shrimp paste became nothing but a prop, exactly like those in a history museum. The suffocating, pungent smell of shrimp paste no longer drifts through the air like it once was (the smell always drove me nuts). Eventually, contractors saw the possibility of building expensive residential skyscrapers on this “undeveloped” island. They even built a Noah’s Ark museum in an attempt to attract more tourists. New roads, new ports, and new buildings began to sweep the island. The once mysterious trails were replaced by concrete, angular roads. Gone were my grandpa’s ancient convenience store, my grandpa, and the fishermen. Most of the village was claimed by the government for “preservation purposes.” Ironically, this very attempt for preservation was the final blow to the tradition and old way of living itself.

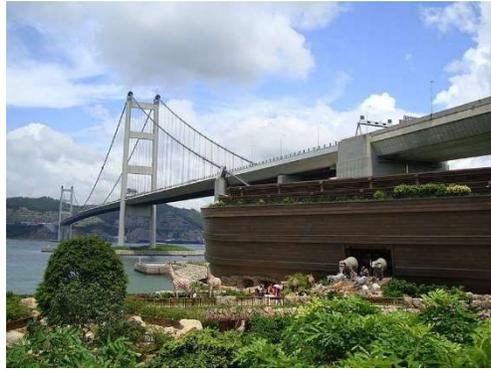


Grundy, T.  
(2013, July 3).  
*My grandpa's store is on the right side of this street, fenced.*

Grundy, T.  
(2013, July 3).



Grundy, T. (2013, July 3).



HK Arun (2011, January).  
*The Noah's Ark Museum*

Upon reflecting on my memories with the Ma Wan island, this experience was perhaps the longest-lasting and most impactful relationship with nature during my childhood. At the scene of a dying village, the presence of nature slowly manifested itself and take over paths and abandoned structures. But not for very long, as ambitious expansion of society gave nature no edge in reorganizing itself to the ruins that the previous civilization had just left behind. It makes me wonder if nature and human civilization can truly coexist in balance. It made me dissatisfied that contractors, government, and residents had chosen to “make progress” with nature and its lands.

I must then ask the question of what is human progress and why do we pursue it?

Beginning with the evolutionary biological perspective, Dawkins (1976) proposes that all living things are survival machines controlled by our genes to further propagate themselves. Under this biological explanation, the evolutionary progress of humans, as well as all animals and living things, would be defined by the number of DNA copies in the world. Many problems can quickly arise with this particular view. If we look at modern domesticated animals, such as the vast numbers of chickens in an overcrowded chicken farm, they would be considered extremely successful under this particular theory. However, if we imagine

that humans are to live in the relative condition of a chicken farm, it would be considered a violation of human rights.

The inconsistencies of the evolutionary biological perspective go on. Why do people of certain religions deliberately choose to be celibate and give up their rights to reproduce? Why do humans adopt children who are not related to themselves? Although genetic determinism provides a good starting point for the investigation on human progress, the pure evolutionary explanation seems inefficient in explaining human behavior -- especially our relationship with nature and progress.

This leads us to E.O. Wilson's *The Biophilia Hypothesis* (1993), which proposes that humans have "the innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes" (p. 1). Wilson's hypothesis uses Dawkin's "selfish gene" theory to construct a set of anthropocentric, biocultural environmental ethics. In other words, he claims that our concerns with the environment only extend as far as it jeopardizes the preservation of our species and personal genes, as well as the "the protection of the human spirit" (p. 140).

What I took away from Wilson's idea, strangely, was his mentioning of the *human spirit*, an elusive concept that somehow feels more settling than all the genetic and evolutionary theories provide. Of course, an academic could ground such concept of *human spirit* as the interplay between psychological phenomenon or a socially constructed meme. But such a deterministic move takes away the meaning of such experience, which feels like the opposite of what the *human spirit* truly is. Looking at today's world, many people will believe that technology has brought happiness in the form of convenience and access to many things that are considered valuable to our well-being, such as healthcare, education, social connections, as well as entertainment and materialistic resources. But have we realized things that are lost in the process of such progress --damage that has been done to the human spirit?

*“Man was made to do his daily work with his muscles; but see him now, like a fly on flypaper, seated for eight hours, motionless at a desk. Fifteen minutes of exercise cannot make up for eight hours of absence. The human being was made to breathe the good air of nature, but what he breathes is an obscure compound of acids and coal tars. He was created for a living environment, but he dwells in a lunar world of stone, cement, asphalt, glass, cast iron, and steel.”* (p. 321, Ellul)

The pessimistic view on the progress of society by Ellul (1954) captures the essence of dissatisfaction within our human spirit. This element of dissatisfaction might be the driving factors of both our human spirit and the direction which we must build our spirit upon. *This criticism of the present is critical for the growth, degrowth, and regrowth for the progression of the human spirit*, something that an evolutionary explanation, or other deterministic explanation don't do quite so well on.

Let's assume that one day in the not-so-distant future, human technology would bring upon infinite gadgets and entertainment, their physical and mental suffering would be minimized to almost non-existent due to medicines and the manipulation of neural circuitry. Would that be enough to satisfy the human spirit? Is that all it takes to stop a species from synthesizing and evolving? The “no” answer from an evolutionary perspective might postulate that the danger of pure satisfaction in life threatens the propagation of genes against the dynamic, ever-changing environment. However, the humanistic “no” offers a more productive perspective. The humanistic “no” claims that the human spirit and the way in which we derive meanings are perhaps infinitely more complex than can be explained by neurological stimulations or the propagation of genes. Just as one cannot truly comprehend the meaning of a book by inspecting the individual letters through a reductionist method, understanding the *human spirit* and the *desire for progress* requires a more complex explanation than the mere “replication of genes” offered by the evolutionary model.

The beginning of this essay describes my personal experience with the “wilderness,” a place of mystery and sacrality. Its meaning was derived from not just my own experience, but the amalgamation of experiences from my mother, my grandfather, the animals, plants, and even the land itself. This wilderness is disappearing around the world, and many are oblivious to the loss of what once was and what one could experience. This experience led me to ponder the progress of modern society. Upon theories from Dawkins and Wilson, I ultimately found that a humanistic aspect of progress might be the most suitable tool in recognizing what true progress is in regards to our relationship between nature and our way of living.

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## Bios

Alice Ranjan is a junior studying Microbiology and Molecular/Cellular/Developmental Biology with a minor in English. She aspires to become a physician and to pursue both clinical work and research. When she is not peering at cells under a microscope, she can be found reading classics and modern short stories, writing, and listening to Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2 on repeat.

Maddy Bennett is a junior studying Psychology and International Studies. She aspires to work in conservation and looks forward to participating in the environmental education Alternative Spring Break this year. Aside from listening to electronic music, Maddy also enjoys stand-up comedy, knitting, and chilling with friends.

Fleur Anteau is a junior studying Biology with a focus on Ecology. She is minoring in Environmental Science and History. Passionate about foraminifera (which no one has ever heard of!), she can often be located behind a microscope. When not in the lab she loves to read, garden and be nerdy with friends.

Gal Snir is a junior studying biology and dance. Through the lens of movement, she loves to study how folks connect with each other. She hopes that this second issue of *Capillaries*, with all its wonderful submissions, sparks greater understanding amongst its readers.

Audrey Immel is a professional student and hopes to keep it that way. While majoring in Public Health and Spanish, her interests range from literature to Chopin to cooking fancy things. Her dream is to be an epidemiologist by day and a stellar Salsa dancer by night.