

Edition 2: 2022-2023



Meet The Crew

Alex Nelson

Alex (He/Him) is a fourth year biology and neuroscience major at UWM. For Alex, Artifacts of Us acts as a vehicle for empathy: uniting seemingly disparate groups through shared experience. By elevating common denominators of the human condition, our “artifacts,” we give agency to the unifying characteristics that are so fundamental, yet often sidelined, in daily life. He believes that unity stems from the relentless desire to quilt our patchwork of backgrounds and beliefs into something more cohesive, and Artifacts of Us creates a fitting medium to do so.

Aleyna Karacan

Aleyna (She/Her) is a senior at UWM studying anthropology and marketing. In the future, she hopes to obtain a PhD in Anthropology. She believes that Artifacts of Us encouraged her to connect with people on a deeper level while cultivating empathy. She feels that this project has given her the opportunity to become a better anthropologist who understands that the first step of empathy is to listen to people’s stories.

Ashley Hale

Ashley (She/Her) is a third-year student at UWM majoring in Film Studies and English with a Business of Media and Film Studies Certificate. Ashley joined AoU because she loves talking with people, despite getting nervous. She knew that in AoU, she would force herself to confront this fear and have vulnerable and meaningful conversations with friends, acquaintances, and strangers. Ashley loves learning other people’s stories and believes sharing our stories and listening to other people’s stories is the key to developing empathy. She feels writing for AoU has given her a deeper understanding of how complex people are, and hopes it has the same effect on the people that read it.

Grace Wodill

Grace (She/Her) is a fourth-year student at UWM majoring in psychology with a minor in counseling. What inspired her to join Artifacts of Us was a desire to transcend the boundaries of empathy and translate it into tangible action. She believes practicing empathy is not a passive act but a conscious decision to show understanding and compassion in the midst of difference. By choosing empathy, we are able to pursue one of the most critical aspects of the human experience: connection. Through her work with Artifacts of Us, she hopes to encourage more people to make this choice.

Wren Stevens

Wren (He/Him) is a fourth year English major at UWM. Wren values AoU for fostering a space of unequivocal empathy: the deliberate choice and attempt to view a person through the lens of their humanity. In this attempt, there is always a thread of connection weaved between yourself and another person, even if its solely in the recognition of your shared vulnerability. Amid the hatred and anger present within our divisive society, we must try to recognize humanity in all people, but we must also allow people to recognize us.

Author Emeritus: Tiff Polzin

Tiff (She/Her) is a founding member of Artifacts of Us and graduated UWM in May 2022. She will be attending James Madison University in the fall to pursue a Master’s in English. She is endlessly grateful for Artifacts of Us, as it allows us to appreciate the value of people’s stories and grow in our empathy for humanity.

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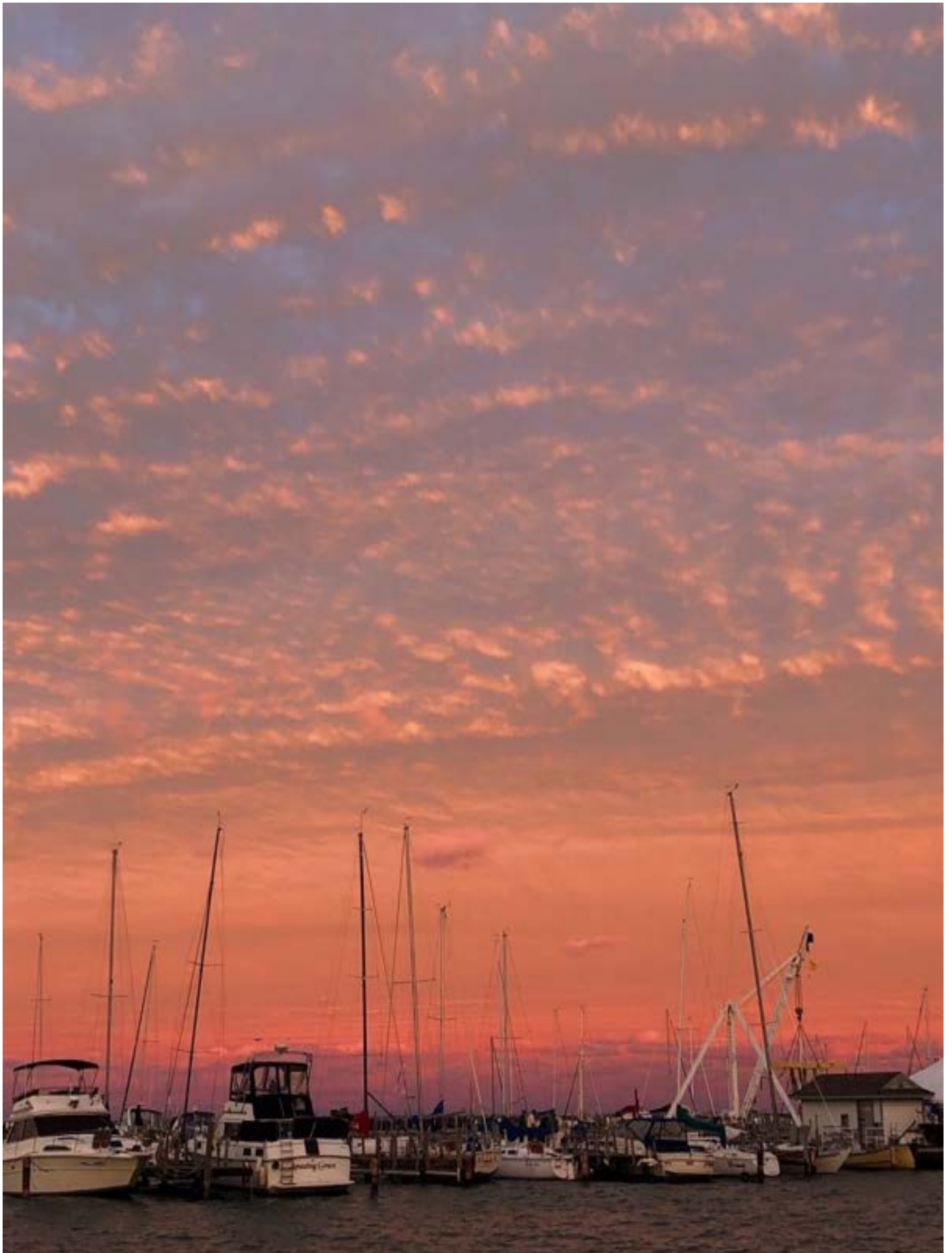
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A Note From the Authors

Formally, thank you. Your presence validates our efforts, represents the impetus of this project, and we are immensely grateful. Born out of the political turmoil of late 2020, spurred along by the lofty prospect of rekindling democracy, this project bloomed. A tall order by any measure. Latter perturbations revealed something greater, the promise of nurturing deeper human connection. Whether we recognize or not, there exists an intrinsic comfort in unity, an allure so many of us strive to mediate through our shared patchwork of identities and beliefs. Our hope is that, in reading these stories, you truly open yourselves up to the experiences of others; both those you find easy to empathize with and those you do not. Through this empathy, the bonds which connect humanity can grow in strength.

We would like to extend a special thanks to Jacqueline Stuhmiller for encouraging this project from the very beginning.

Thank you for opening yourself to the stories of *us*.



These Are Our Stories.

Are You Incapable of Complexity? - Paging Dr. Carlson

Mountains Beyond Mountains chronicles the odyssey of Dr. Paul Farmer. A father, husband, medical anthropologist and cunning epidemiologist, physician and friend, Paul was often the first to arrive and last to leave the intensive care unit at the Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. Paul's impetus? Fixing a global health care system that, for the poor and marginalized, was so utterly broken. He presented this vision with a clarity that made it persuasive, despite deep-rooted skepticism. Paul's secret? Attention, never letting anyone feel 'less than'. For many, he was their "North Star", a moral bedrock that sank deeper following his unexpected passing in February of 2022.

What do you do when the needs of people are greater than the resources available to care for them? How do you approach triage in an apathetic world? Paul reckoned with these questions up until his death, but to truly understand his selflessness and that of those following in his footsteps, we must step back to Haiti in the mid-1990s. While reporting on the country's military coup, journalist Tracy Kidder crosses paths with Paul, then a respected humanitarian and community physician. Struck by Paul's grace, he becomes Kidder's muse – he observes Paul's gifts vicariously, documenting his unusually lengthy, expeditious patient visits and interests in Haitian Voodoo practices.

Paul was raised picking fruit alongside Haitians in Florida. He was a talented student and soon garnered an interest in the culture and customs of his coworkers. With an upbringing that grounded a liberative, conscious worldview, Paul and his Harvard colleagues began a nonprofit, Partners in Health, which established a medical facility in Cange – located in the mountains outside of Port-au-Prince. This facility, Zanmi Lasante, continues to treat thousands of patients annually, nearly free of charge. To do so, Paul walked the divide between Western medicine and Haitian Voodoo culture. He made house calls, traversing miles through dense jungle vegetation to the mountain villages surrounding Cange, spending most of his day speaking individually with patients. He built trust through the individual, a costly practice by Western standards. However, in Paul's mind, cost-effectiveness is yet another baseless metric used by the rich to rationalize their own inaction.

Few embody Paul's commitment to the individual; some are convinced of its futility. Paul cared, along a spectrum of indifference, and it may just be that simple. Nevertheless, his legacy resonates worldwide. His North Star shines. Paul Farmer lives.

I am from India. My father was in the Air Force, so I wanted to be a pilot myself. However, he wanted his kids to become doctors. He fought in three wars, and maybe, whatever he'd done in those wars, whatever he found out, he wanted his children to become doctors instead. However, I developed mild polio in my leg, and because of that, my chances of joining the Air Force were nil.

So, I completed my medical school and my internal medicine boards in India. I decided to move to the UK after I finished my medicine boards to become a member of the Royal College of Physicians. From there, a sabbatical opened through the Royal College of Glasgow in Muscat, Oman. While working over there and having done quite a bit of advanced endoscopy training, I came to hear about the Milwaukee group.

Dr. Carlson wears many hats as a board-certified gastroenterologist, seeing patients through Froedtert Hospital and Zablocki VA. Aside from his academic appointments, one being a professor of gastroenterology in the Medical College's Department of Medicine, his primary clinical and research interests rest in advanced interventional endoscopy – caring for patients whose conditions may prevent them from eating, drinking, and breathing normally. The prospect of new knowledge, better outcomes, and pushing the boundaries of adequacy that define standards of care motivate many physician scientists, including Dr. Carlson.

The Milwaukee group published a New England Journal [among the nation's oldest and most prestigious medical journals] paper where they described a condition called sphincter of Oddi dysfunction, which was not universally understood at the time. So, I wrote to the division there, way back in 1990 or 1991. I came at my own expense for a couple of weeks to see how this is diagnosed and what it is all about. At the time, I had not realized that advanced GI endoscopy procedures were being done by faculty over here, one of whom had already gone into private practice, and the other one was planning to leave at some point. The Chief of GI for the group, who knew that I had trained in advanced endoscopy, asked me, "What are your plans?" I told him that I was doing the sabbatical in the Middle East and that finding a job in the UK was difficult. I thought of maybe going back to India and starting a practice there. He asked, "What about joining here?" Initially, I refused. In the US, all international physicians must repeat residency and fellowship if they are to continue to practice, and I've already done medicine twice – once in India, I took their internal medicine boards, and then in UK, where I did MRCP. I'm done with it. He responded with, "What if we grandfather you and take you on as faculty?" I didn't know there was anything of the sort, but they made it happen. I joined here in Milwaukee in 1992, and I've been here for over 30 years now. That's the story. They sponsored a visa for me and my family, and I decided to work here. I told myself that if I didn't like it, I would just move to another place in the US, but I never found a reason to leave.

Milwaukee is home. From public school through medical school, Dr. Carlson finds immense pride in his three children, whom he raised with his wife over the last three decades. Everything was for them, but as they voyage into their careers, stake out individual success, and urge their father to reduce his time, Dr. Carlson is forced to palpate the encroaching vacuum of purpose. Medical training, beginning as early as medical school, conditions its pupils to view their professional role as paramount, embracing a trajectory that pedestals work over nearly all other aspects of life. As he inches toward the precipice of retirement – a daunting prospect for many physicians, Farmer included – he readily wanders into reflection.

Didi, Paul's wife who he married while in Cange, took to studying anthropology in Paris. Together, they raised a little girl, Catherine. Alas, Paul's time was earmarked – in flux, always needed somewhere. This strained their relationship, as Paul could hardly spare a day in Paris to visit. Patients took precedent. Does such a sacrifice define the higher standard of medicine?

While retirement is a uniquely individual prospect – a recalibration of life that is distinctly appreciated in the eye of each beholder – a career upheld by selflessness regularly sours the outlook. Retirement reeks of selfishness. Here, the idea of legacy comes to mind, and the parallel realities of Drs. Paul and Carlson begin to weave.

Somewhere along the line, our main GI society, the American Society of Gastrointestinal Endoscopy [ASGE], started an ambassador program. They pick faculty from ASGE to train physicians in underserved areas across the globe. My first trip was to Ecuador. This gained traction in the group, and there was a request from Africa, Ethiopia, specifically. The ASGE organizer did not have the funds, but he sent the message to the other committee members. I volunteered, went to Ethiopia, and the African connection started.

Compared to the previous connections, where you go to the high-end meetings, where everything seems like a dog and pony show, Africa was different. In Africa, you make an impact. You train a center, that center trains others in the vicinity, and it multiplies. That caught my interest. I started doing many trips to Sudan, Nigeria, and, recently, I started a GI fellowship program in Kigali, Rwanda. After the program was approved by the Rwanda Ministry of Education, I legitimized the connection through a Memorandum of Understanding signed by their Ministry of Health and Medical College of Wisconsin. Beginning the affiliation between the two organizations, the Medical College visits Kigali one week out of each month for training and outreach, which I did during the launch. I really tried to understand Kigali.

While I was doing all of this, I caught the attention of one of the largest endoscopic organizations in the world [the WEO], and they made me the chair of their outreach committee. Now, I cover Africa, Southeast Asia, and South America. We aim to recognize facilities, like the one in Kigali, as WEO Training Centers. Then, physicians from around the globe have the opportunity to train hands-on and carry that knowledge to their country. It just multiplies. In October of 2022, two hospitals in Kigali got recognition from the WEO as international training centers. Now, we collaborate on research endeavors and deliver virtual lectures from Milwaukee. That's how the traveling circuit started, but Africa is my focus.

In 2000, Kidder finds himself alongside Paul, traversing the treacherous mountain passes outside Cange, approaching Zanmi Lasante. A medical oasis, entirely funded through Paul's Boston-based charity Partners in Health, that doesn't charge its patients for care or staff for

training. Within Zanmi Lasante's catchment area, schools and houses blossom, all the while, hundreds of children are vaccinated daily, cutting-edge antiretroviral drugs are administered to treat HIV infection, and second-line antibiotics are sourced for multi-drug resistant tuberculosis. Zanmi Lasante sets the standard for facilities, like WEO Training Centers, as a vanguard of generosity and brilliance, clinical efficacy and cultural humility, and represents the interplay of Western medicine with Haitian lifeways.

"Doktè Paul" stood as a medical iconoclast – someone indifferent to the Western dogma of cost-effectiveness. Paul was staunchly anti-imperialist and had strong opinions against the Western-propped military dictatorships that systemically oppress the economic independence of countries like Haiti. However, Paul walks the line of hypocrisy as a Western caregiver, avoiding invasiveness and forced benevolence through cultural immersion. Doktè Paul studies Voodoo, magic, and Haitian folkways methodologically.

"Are you incapable of complexity?", tells a woman in Paul's care for tuberculosis. She took her medications, understood the therapy, but affirmed that the source of her disease was the result of discord with an old friend. At the time, Paul saw science and magic as mutually exclusive – dumbfounded that his patient could believe in the efficacy of her medication while also rooting her condition in superstition.

Drs. Paul and Carlson share a clinical vision – one that caters to the complexity of the human experience. Patients do not exist in a vacuum. This brand of medicine pushes beyond the curative model, shattering the barriers that limit the overall quality of a patient's life. Examining the practitioner, we notice someone who rejects the status quo, embraces humility, and believes the rights of every patient include receiving the best care attainable. Change comes one case at a time – an opportunity to redirect a patient's life course, rebuild a community, set a precedent, and advance the science – change comes when there is a choice to be made.

For me, I have the advantage of comparing practices in different countries, not different cities in the same country. I fail to understand how the number one country of the world cannot deliver care, at an equal level, to everybody. I was coming from India and the UK, I was not used to the US billing system at all. I just couldn't fathom the model here, which is to make money, right? Especially in a profession where money should never have been part of the equation.

Take the armed forces, for example. When you go to war, if you kill 20 people, and I kill 10, do you get more money? Certain things, like education, defense, and medicine, should exist outside of market forces. Do your job and get reimbursed by the government. How can you turn down a patient who has ulcerative colitis and cannot afford medications, only to give your service and send the patient home high and dry? I fail to understand how that can happen in the number one country in the world.

The other thing I never understood is bookkeeping. I work in an academic center. I

have patients who have gone through five endoscopies and six CT scans, only to be told, “Sorry, we can’t figure you out.” It’s like you’re milking the patient. There should be accountability. For instance, the patient may have irritable bowel, which is a condition that can mimic more severe, organic problems. Therefore, you do all these tests, all of which return negative. A million dollars later, you’re sending this patient, who’s angry, to get fixed at the Medical College. They have a functional gut disorder, but they expect a miracle cure precisely because we’ve primed them to anticipate that.

Money is at the root of it. When talking to trainees, I like to ask their motivation to pursue medicine. Is it the doctors who drive Lamborghinis, those who live in mansions, or is there a human element? There are many other ways to get home at 5:00 PM and enjoy all your wealth. But this is a commitment, you’ve sworn an oath. You may, on many occasions, not be there for your daughter’s birthday, you may be coming home late. I see the commitment my father and others made in the armed forces, a commitment to die for their country. They’re not there to make money. It’s an extreme example, but medicine prioritizes a human element, a commitment toward serving.

Mountains Beyond Mountains harkens back to a timeless Haitian proverb, one Doktè Paul intimately appreciated, in that “beyond mountains, there are mountains”. The recurrence of this Sisyphean notion is a preeminent theme grounding the careers of both Drs. Paul and Carlson.

As they hack through the Haitian scrub brush, plunging miles into the slopes around the rural village of Morne Michel, Paul articulates the omnipotence of poverty to Kidder; a prevailing wind that has systematically destroyed the quality of Haitian life. Before the periodicity of hurricanes, and the industrial and agricultural destruction they entail, Paul describes the mass slaughter of Haitian pigs at the behest of U.S. foreign policy in the 1980s. Under the guise of prophylaxis, Haitian farmers lost their income due to American misinformation surrounding the vector of swine flu. Now overgrown, Paul identifies the pastures and grazing slopes – skeletons of industry and reminders of chauvinistic misinformation – as the duo trudge along to follow-up with a patient’s medication regimen. Kidder frames this house call to Morne Michel, one of the hundreds Paul makes weekly, against the reactions of Paul’s predecessors, those who would scoff at Paul’s efforts and the salvageability of Haitian healthcare. This logic, a narrow pattern of thought incapable of complexity, blames the patient for their physical and financial health.

When they arrive in the center of Morne Michel, Paul finds the patient he was looking for, living in his hut. Paul advises him to return to Zanmi Lasante for an updated prescription as soon as possible. As the duo treks back, Kidder’s fixation culminates with a moral appraisal. “Some people would argue this wasn’t worth a five-hour walk”, posits Paul. For every metaphorical ‘mountain’ Paul climbs, another looms in its shadow.

Was it worth it? A question that nags many of us in reflection, and an element of Paul’s story

that Kidder never seems to resolve. The argument of cost efficiency versus the value of human life transcends his story and that of others following in his footsteps. Paul Farmer was an immensely talented, selfless physician. Despite the many mountains looming ahead, Paul did the greatest possible good with what little he had in Haiti. However, an ambience prevails, nonetheless. Could his talents have been better spent elsewhere, optimizing treatment protocols over house calls? Could this have done even greater good? Could this lifestyle have kept Paul in practice longer to care for and train more? How should we evaluate Paul's good?

Sacrifice – the surrender of something valued for the sake of a higher claim, something that is typically understood in retrospect – is alive in medicine. From the very beginning, the higher standard demands it: a personal and professional devotion to the good of the patient. This living sacrifice exerts a side effect of beneficence. Medications are only given if their therapeutic benefit outweighs their potentially maladaptive side effects. Clinicians recognize this and proceed as necessary. The devotion to selfless care and treating patients as complex individuals comes with accompanying personal side effects. Alienation and apathy from oneself concoct a lethal brew. Should beneficence prevail, outweighing personal sacrifice? What if there is nothing left to give? Where do persistence, kindness, and temperance stop and sheer masochism begin? Paul Farmer made the ultimate sacrifice for his patients, but his story is a warning for those with good intentions and broken hearts.

My dad once told me something that has stuck with me throughout my career. When you become an expert in your area, there are two big mistakes you are liable to make. One is that you fail to use your expertise. Two is that you don't pass it on to others. Use your skills to the maximum, wherever you go, and leave a sustainable legacy.



Dr. Carlson performing live, advanced GI endoscopy procedures (Left: Endoscopic Ultrasound, Right: ERCP) at the University Teaching Hospitals in Kigali, Rwanda.

Who was your first love? What did you love about them?

My first love was probably Nina Marković in kindergarten. Nina had a great sense of humor and fun. After that, it was my first-grade teacher Ms. Johnson. She was also a very pretty lady, but also very nice.

When I was around 5 we would play with the kids on the street and there was this kid Matt. We would play house and he would be my husband. He was very cute and kind. We even talked about getting married, but after we started elementary school, we didn't see each other again.

My first love was a cute girl in kindergarten. I don't know, she was just beautiful. Sometimes my friends would ask me who's the prettiest girl in the class and I would always say her name.

I don't know if it was love, but there was a girl in kindergarten. I remember playing with her. She was always nice to me. She had black straight hair and kind of a masculine face.

My first love was Emma from elementary school. I liked her because she was always nice to me. I was her boyfriend for a year.

It was I think in second grade. She was beautiful and I think I fell in love with her because she was so out of reach.

My first love was Ben from first grade. We weren't in the same class, but we rode the same school bus. We always sat next to each other and sometimes he would kiss my cheek. I even introduced him to my parents one day. Then I changed schools and didn't see him for 8 years. Coincidentally, we went to the same high school and we were in the same class. Neither of us talked about first grade though!

When I was in elementary school, I remember my teacher talking about a kid in our class and she told everyone how quiet and respectful he is. That's when he caught my attention. He was my boyfriend from second grade to eighth grade. He was always nice and protective. He had a friend group and as the girlfriends of the group we would always hang out together during recess.

My first love was my high school teacher's daughter Helen. One day she called my house and asked me to go to the school dance with her. I didn't even know she was interested in me. We went to the dance together and dated for a while. She had this beautiful Greek complexion and going out with her was really a confidence boost for me. After high school, we went in

different directions.

It was in high school. She knew that I loved her, but she didn't feel the same, so she stopped talking to me. Of course, there were times where she talked to me. If you would ask her, she wasn't treating me badly, but her every move was painful to me.

My first love was a boy from my high school. I caught him looking at me a couple of times and I started liking him. One day he asked me if he could have my number. I was preparing for the SAT that year, so I told him that I don't have time. I saw him two years after that and he was with his new girlfriend.

My first puppy love, you know where you think this is the one, but you're almost too young was Betty. She was in high school and I was just out of high school. It didn't last and it broke my heart, but I was glad I did because I didn't know that it wouldn't work. It was the first contact for me. I saw her on the beach and we just hit it off. It felt like heaven for maybe a month, and it only lasted about three months. She kept talking about this other guy, and she didn't come over to help with my homework and this and that. She sent her friend over, who led me past them walking out of a theater together. I think it was a set-up to try to get me to make a decision.

"I am glad it cannot happen twice, the fever of first love. For it is a fever, and a burden, too, whatever the poets may say."

Daphne du Maurier



*This artifact is written entirely in the words of the interviewees.

We Were Not as Different as We Seemed

I desperately want everyone to like me. I know this is not possible, and I have been trying to come to terms with that idea for the past few years. Still, I often do not engage with people unless I know they will like me. I miss out on a conversation with people who have different viewpoints from me because I fear they will not like me for that reason or think that I am stupid. I wish I could explain the rationality behind these anxieties, but honestly, I can't understand why my brain is like this. I recognize that this fear is a bit preposterous (for most people do not despise those they disagree with) but I still cannot get these thoughts to completely go away. What I do understand is that I struggle with social anxiety disorder and that I am working hard to become more comfortable with myself and talking to other people.

I have always wanted to better understand the perspective of people who choose to go into the military, but I have never asked anyone about it. I was afraid they would become upset with me for questioning their career choices, since the military lifestyle seems undesirable to me, and I disagree with the notion of war. But then I met Tyler. Tyler lives on my floor and is dating one of my suitemates, so oftentimes when I hang out with her, he will be there too. He is very friendly and open, and our personalities work well together. Tyler is involved in ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) and looks like your typical military man, with his buzzcut and muscular build. When it came to Tyler, I knew that if I wanted to have an approachable conversation with someone who is choosing to go into the military, this was my chance to do so.

I went into this conversation hoping to gain more empathy for people in the military by getting a broader understanding of what military involvement is like and what the people who chose to partake in it are like. I began the interview by asking him to tell me what ROTC is. It's a program made up of classes, experiences, and training sessions designed to prepare students for military leadership. He told me "One of the big skills that they impress upon us is being able to lead others, but also be able to take orders and take leadership from above because that's going to be very important for us going into our positions."

I commented on the followership training he had talked about. I had always stereotyped military people to be individualistic, conservative, and domineering. I don't have a whole lot of experience with people in the military, and the portrayals of the military in advertisements and media did not help to subdue these stereotypes. My Grandpa was in Vietnam, but he would never discuss the horrors of it. My uncle was in the Marines, and like the boys and girls I knew from high school who went into the military, is very confident in his conservative, patriotic values. But seeing that the military values the humility of followership and teamwork was an eye-opening experience for me. Many intuitions in America champion individualism, and I never imagined the American military, one of the epitomes of American culture, could encourage putting aside your own goals to follow the plan of someone who better understood what was best for the whole group.

He also told me that one of the first lessons the cadets were taught at training was to not be ashamed to ask for help, which also went against my individualistic understanding of the military. I was beginning to realize that I had a lot of stereotyped assumptions about military people that I was not proud of.

Tyler then went on to tell me about the different components of this ROTC program. He told me that there are programs the cadets are required to attend, as well as optional social gatherings and learning opportunities. "They're not required, per se, but there is an expectation that you know, you're given opportunities to better yourself and become a better cadet, you should try and take advantage of them." I thought this was a very admirable mindset and one that I also hold. Throughout my academic career, jobs, and pursuit of my hobbies and passions, I have always tried to attend extra lessons, opportunities, and events that give me more experience and allow me to get better at what I'm working on. I found it interesting that Tyler and I both share this mindset, and that I could approach my schoolwork and passions with the same perspective that he approaches his military training.

We then went on to talk about his schedule. I get up at 5:45 for work on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, and sometimes run into Tyler getting ready in the morning, since he often sleeps over in my suitemate's room. I chose to work the morning shifts, and he chooses to get up and train in the morning. I was happy to see our connection there. I love getting up early in the morning and being the only one awake in the world, and it was sweet to know that he likes doing that too.

Tyler talked about how he trains with freshman and sophomore students and explained that once someone's sophomore year is done, the program decides whether to keep them or drop them. I asked him if he felt a lot of anxiety regarding this fate, and he told me that he did not. He had a scholarship and worked hard at training, and further added that he values the stress this impending decision brings: "being able to push through it and persevere through it now is important for our ability as future officers to be able to make tough decisions that go beyond just ourselves." I thought that was a very intelligent way of looking at his situation- that our anxieties are not totally worthless emotions, but rather can better prepare us for dealing with the stresses of our future.

Later in the conversation, Tyler talked about how he tries to wring as much purpose as he can out of everything he does. He specifically talked about choosing classes that satisfy multiple credits and multitasking often. I now see that ideology present in Tyler's perspectives on his anxieties. He doesn't allow himself to become consumed by his fear but instead tries to find a way to give it purpose. I thought that was a very interesting way of organizing one's life, and upon further reflection, realized that I often organize my life in the same manner. I am known for taking any negative situation and putting a positive spin on it. I believe that even our bad experiences in life can serve a beneficial purpose through teaching us life lessons. I was once again surprised to find that this person who wanted to go into the military, who I thought

would be very different from me, had a perspective on life organization that was nearly identical to my own.

I asked Tyler if there were any more great life lessons he had learned through his ROTC training. He told me that during one of his first weeks of training, one of his officers asked his class if they would be okay sending someone to their death. He then said, "It's not a happy thought, but it is respecting and appreciating the gravity of what we are going into." He told me he carries the gravity of that possibility with him as he trains and it puts into perspective the seriousness of what he is going into. I found this revelation very interesting. One of the reasons I am against the military is because I feel it underrates the seriousness of taking someone's life. I appreciate the fact that Tyler is aware of that possibility and takes his training seriously as a result. Sometimes I get in my head that people join the military because they like violence and power. I don't know whether or not Tyler likes those things, but I realize he is aware that the military is much more than that.

After discussing that lesson, Tyler explained how the ROTC cadets did an activity where they were given different political statements, and they had to move to signs indicating "agree", "strongly agree", "disagree", and "strongly disagree". He found that his more liberal beliefs disagreed with a lot of his peers' beliefs. I was surprised to hear his beliefs leaned liberally because I always assumed people in the military were strongly conservative. He then went on to say that despite their different beliefs, he has learned to put that aside and work together with his peers: "at earlier points in my life, I would have wanted to stand by my morals but now I see the mission is more important than disagreeing or agreeing over something that is irrelevant at the moment... I really disagree with a lot of these people about a lot of things, but I can still work with them and they can still work with me."

I also asked Tyler about the learning environment of his ROTC training. It is often stereotyped that the military is full of yelling and tough standards, and I asked him if these stereotypes are true. He replied that training is tough, but people are always willing to help each other, and no one is unnecessarily cruel. The officers' main goal is to help students improve, and that is why they may scold. He also mentioned that a stressful military environment is the kind of setting where he learns and improves the best, so he likes the way things are set up there. I could never have imagined an answer like that. I hate being yelled at and receiving sharp criticism, so it would be impossible for me to thrive in a military environment. I never thought that such a setting could be liked, let alone beneficial, to someone. I found it very insightful to learn that Tyler thrives in a military environment, and that is partially why he wants to go into it.

I was also curious to learn about what motivates Tyler, so I asked him to tell me. He responded with "the fear of disappointment and perception." He gave a few examples from his life to explain his answer. When he is at training and is tired and wants to go home, he sticks with it because he does not want to disappoint his officers. One time he had an essay due, but because he was busy that week, he was not able to work on it until the night before it was

due. He stayed up writing and crying over his paper, but he would not ask for an extension because he did not want to disappoint his professor. He said, "I'm not afraid of failing, I'm afraid of disappointing and that fear of not being able to live up to the expectations that other people set for me." I was struck deeply by how much this ideology resonated with me. Due to my social anxiety, I am constantly thinking about how other people perceive me. Often-times I am motivated to do well when completing schoolwork, doing household chores, and working out because I want to live up to others' expectations of me. This is a major mindset that drives both my and Tyler's lives. Tyler talked about how he is not particularly proud of operating this way, but he is aware that it works. I feel the same way. I wish that so much of my motivation did not hinge upon doing well for other people and instead depended upon doing well for myself. But nonetheless, like Tyler, I am aware that this mindset allows me to succeed and do well.

Tyler also talked about some of the elements of his life that have made him the person he is today. He began by telling me a story from his childhood where he ran away crying from a kickball game because he believed some of the children he was playing with were breaking the rules. Tyler values rules. "Rules are important, rules mean something." He never jaywalks, and he never cheats. Now that he is older, he realizes that some rules can be bent depending on the circumstance. He revealed that one of the reasons he wants to go into the military is because he enjoys existing within their strict, rule-following environment and knows that he will thrive under it. "There are so many rules," he says, "and I'd rather it be me than some other random person because I like how I think, I trust me." I found this perspective very interesting. I am also a general rule follower. Not necessarily because I value rules (though I do recognize many rules are important in keeping people safe) but because I am afraid of people disliking me for breaking the rules. So, while I cannot relate to Tyler's desire to exist within an environment that cherishes rule-following, I can relate to being someone that closely follows the rules.

Tyler also told me he likes to volunteer a lot, and that that passion contributed to his desire to join the military. "I enjoy it when I can make someone's day better," he says. One of his major goals in life is to die knowing that he made the world a better place than when he found it, and he believes joining the military will help him accomplish this goal. I was surprised to hear this perspective. As I mentioned previously, I have viewed the American military as one of the epitomes of American individualism, so I never could have expected that someone would want to join it because they viewed it as a tool to help other people. Like Tyler, it is also one of my life goals to help people. I find purpose in doing things that help the planet and other people. I found it fascinating that Tyler and I both deeply desire to help others, but we use different outlets to fulfill these desires.

At the end of my interview, I realized Tyler and I are not as different as I previously had thought. We both take advantage of extra opportunities, let other people's perceptions motivate us, are strong rule followers, and feel fulfilled by helping others. I had gone into this assignment expecting Tyler and I to be very different. But I see now that we have very similar

perspectives on life and even similar political opinions. Perhaps what separates me from Tyler and other military personnel like him is not a completely different perspective on life and set of values, but rather it is how we chose to act upon those perspectives and values.



51 Years of Music Camp

I went back to Michigan and continued on my Master's Program. Finished it. Was looking around for a job at that time and it was at a junior high school, teaching for the parks and recreation at Ann Arbor. Teaching at public schools, private trumpet lessons and one day Jane comes waltzing in...

Cal and Jane have been married for over 50 years. Despite coming from different backgrounds, they say they have a lot in common. Cal grew up in New Hampshire in a conservative Jewish family. His parents were constantly having these arguments which he describes as "fireworks". Her parents were married for 25 years until Cal's mother passed away.

My parents were duking it out for 25 years. My father loved her all the way through. It was not a healthy relationship at all and not good to hear because it wasn't something that gives the sense of love and family.

When Cal was in high school his music teacher suggested he attend a summer music camp, so he went. In that camp, he experienced a summer without fireworks for the first time. He didn't have to fight and scream like his parents did all the time. He went to that music camp throughout high school, looking forward to it each summer.

The house I grew up in also had "fireworks" arguments that started from little things and me being stuck in the middle of it. Seeing other kids who didn't had the responsibility of mediating between parents was often quite painful. My summer camp was my grandmother's house, and I always longed to spend the night there. Whenever my parents came to take me home, I would cry my eyes out. They were upset with me because this happened every time, but I don't remember them ever asking me why I wanted to stay.

After Cal started college and started having serious relationships, he feared that he was going to marry someone like his mother.

I had a couple of relationships, just before Jane actually where it was, I almost thought to myself, 'Oh my God, this woman, the way we fight and everything, just like my mother you know.' I knew that Jane was quite opposite of my personality in many ways...

Jane: I talk less. *They laugh*

Jane is very organized and focused, which is very unlike him, he says. From our conversation, it's apparent that Jane is more analytical and a great listener. Cal, on the other hand, is a true storyteller. Jane became much more adaptable to various situations because of Cal's spontaneity.

She grew up with all sisters.

Jane: 3 sisters.

Yes, so I thought she might use a brother. *They laugh*

Some couples become each other's everything. They become partners, families, best friends, and infinitely more. Cal and Jane's relationship was that way. It felt like they were the two main leads in a movie where the remaining world was extra. They had everything they needed, including the things they lacked as kids. Despite being opposites in nearly every regard, they shared a common ground that united them: music. Jane was an undergraduate music major when Cal started his master's degree at the same university. They were in the same circle of friends and both passionate about music.

It started out with that basically, having so much in common, friends, etc. , and it has always been that way. When I think of the arguments that were going on in my house when I was growing up, I don't think we ever had a week of that in our 51 years of being together. You know that passion, the screaming, and all that sort of thing. It didn't happen. Jane has been very objective and the passions don't go flying all over the place. *He laughs*

Cal attests that there is nothing wrong with passionate arguments, as they work for some people. Just not for him and Jane. He knew Jane was the one, but not everyone thought so. Although Cal received letters from multiple rabbis disparaging his decision to marry a Christian woman, he says that he wouldn't have had it any other way.

Looking back, so many of my friends did marry in the religion and have been divorced now and married again and been divorced again. He laughs. I end up saying that I have been blessed.

Jane: Interesting journey that's been very...rewarding and music being some of the basis of it.

Cal thinks of relationships as an instrument, specifically a horn. It is capable of doing incredible things if you give it the right input. You need to put in effort and time if you want to hear your voice. Despite having had this horn for years, Cal remains a learner. He avoids claims of greatness, saying he is still making progress.

Their relationship is built on love, stability, and music. This foundation grounds them. It imparts a desire for happiness, an urge to try new things and make progress. They still learn new things about each other, traveling, and enjoying their retirement. This requires a degree of humility, a quality of healthy relationships so many of us struggle with. When we think we know all that there is to about our partners, we stop trying. One thing that Cal said during

our conversation stood out to me.

When we were together I felt like home. I felt like I'm in that summer music camp.



1973 - Jane and Cal on a mountaintop in Massachusetts.

Their Love for Others Was Passed onto Me*

When I was 10 or 11 years old, my parents brought up the possibility of moving. Since I was so young, I didn't process what that all meant. I was in a stage of denial up until the point that we actually moved.

They're technically missionaries from churches. Since knowing my parents and knowing what they actually do and the stuff they get into, I feel like it's different from typical missionaries. When I describe it to other people, I call them humanitarians because the work they're doing is humanitarian work.

They went where they thought needed a lot of help. Where they thought there was a lot of need. They also met up with other people who were already in countries before they met. They met with people who were in Indonesia, people who were in Afghanistan and Argentina and stuff. And they met with the people in Nepal and at the time they didn't have anyone there. They needed people there: "They don't have anyone there now- we might as well be the ones to go work."

I grew up in Kathmandu - the capital city of Nepal - from when I was 11 years old to when I was 18. I'm 21 now. Our parents attempted to talk to us a lot about it before we moved, like "things are gonna be different. You're gonna have to be prepared to be open to that." It was not as overwhelming because I was so young as it would be to move now. Because when I was younger, I was still learning how everything works. So instead of learning how the US works or Wisconsin works, I was also learning how Nepal works.

The school I was in was like a small private school - English speaking because my parents knew we would need it to be English speaking. When I got there, it was a really small school in the middle of Kathmandu, and it was right along this one main street that has all these tiny restaurants and food stands. There was always a guy on the side of the road making Nepali dumplings.

We didn't get a car for the first three years that we were there. But we had this scooter because that's what people have there. So, whenever we had to go to the store or anything like that with our dad, we would all just pile up. My younger sister would sit in front of my dad, I would sit behind my dad, and my older sister would sit behind me. We would scrunch up really tight and be huddled together. It was really fun.

Going back to school. The classes there - each grade is one class. There were only 23 of us in my grade. I still keep in contact with the friends I made there. We have a group chat for our entire graduating class on Facebook Messenger. If it's someone's birthday, we'll all pop in and be like "happy birthday", or if we get some sort of great news, we'll announce it, or if

someone's going through something hard, we'll all come on and give each other little life updates as time goes on.

One of my best friends I still talk to is my friend Hope. We were on the basketball team and lived on the same street. She used to come over after school, and we would play Mario Bros. We spent a lot of time having tea together. Hope and I don't necessarily talk all the time- but when we do, we still know that we're the best of friends. I don't need to be constantly talking with her to know that we're still besties.

We had a lot of variety in the nationalities. I'm gonna say we had maybe 20% British, 10% American, and the rest were a conglomerate of all other nationalities. We had a lot of people from Korea, people from Singapore, from Pakistan, people from everywhere who came to Nepal either for government reasons or for humanitarian reasons.

My parents knew all my friends' parents. It was this community that all had this same kind of heart and motivation for doing what they're doing and being where they are. Especially after the earthquakes, it really felt like we had this family we could lean on. It was like a huge support system. Everyone there was so supportive of everything that you do. It was such a warm environment. And such a close and intimate environment. When you're all in the same class for six years, you grow up with all of the same people. We all had such a love for each other just knowing how we were when we were young and seeing each other grow and progress into the people we were when we graduated.

Looking back and reflecting, there is so much in Nepal that I am grateful for. Seeing people work and come together when you're young gives you the image of unity and community. There's also an aspect of innocence growing up in Nepal. There are no guns in Nepal, and there's never a sense of any danger when you're out and about. So, when I was younger, we could just go out in the city and my parents didn't worry about us at all as long as we sent them a text. It was a lot of independence and a lot less worries. And that's probably something that's innate with childhood, but I feel like since we were in Nepal, we were able to grow up with the child-like ness until we were 18. And I feel like there's a lot of value in that.

There's a different understanding and connection to the world when you grow up somewhere different. We had a very firm view of America - because that's where I grew up when I was young - and we had such a firm view of Nepal and Thailand and everywhere else we got to see and that shaped how I view other people. There's a different level of empathy me and my sisters were able to understand and experience. I don't really know how to describe it- but it is something I noticed recently. There's just an understanding that everyone is a person - and that's the most basic level of empathy - but everyone is who they are and their own vivid individual no matter how different their lives, and they all deserve and need the same level of respect and love that we give even our closest friends.

We're like, "Of course, of course," it's the most obvious view of other people. But nowadays,

when people see someone different from themselves, they only see the differences. That's what they hone in on and catch right away- that "you're different from me". We were all from different countries and had different experiences and different backgrounds of cultures, and different histories. So instead of looking for differences- because there were so many differences - what we looked for in each other was what was the same; "what can we look for in each other that connects us- what is that thread that attaches us together as people".

I think that personality is such a fluid thing. From the way that I see it - personality is like a beautiful collage or mosaic of all the people that we're around. So, we take different pieces of others that we like or see and we wanna mimic and we make them a part of ourselves. So, I think my personality is the way it is because I was surrounded by so many people that were loving, caring, and attentive all throughout my entire childhood. Everyone that I was around was people who want to show each other love in the way they are most capable of doing so. My parents went out there and used their talents to help other people in Nepal be able to have homes and have hospitals, and to live. And that's a part of me and my personality. Their love for other people was passed onto me.

There's this whole different part of the culture that America has that is specifically individualistic, and Nepal is a very communal culture. I think there was a significant impact in growing up starting in an individualistic society and spending my adolescence in a communal society and seeing what that was like and seeing there are so many advantages to living in a communal society. And then leaving that space and still having that same mindset. Like all of your friends are a part of your community, they're a part of your family. I think that's where a lot of this culture shock came in - not moving from individual to communal but moving back from communal to individual. It feels like you're almost cut off from so many people around you.

I feel like in Nepal, you start to build relationships with everyone around you. Like the shopkeepers that were near our house, we knew their names, we'd talk with them and build relationships with them because they're around us and we see them every couple of days so why wouldn't we?

People would invite us in for tea if we were just walking around. People see you and are like "You- you're different. You're hanging around and we haven't seen you before. Come in, let's have some tea. Let's talk! I wanna get to know you." And of course, we wanna get to know them. We want to see what it's like out here where they live and learn about how people have different experiences and what those are and get to know people intimately even if we know we're only going to see them that one time. I feel like here in America, that's something that's really missing. Hardly anyone that you find nowadays is looking for that kind of connection. Even with the most mundane people that we happen to run into. In Nepal, if we're walking the same way, we start a conversation just for the walk.

I think a lot of people think they have to be these great people in order to go out and do

great things. That they have this higher mindset of altruism and all that stuff but I feel like it's not nearly as hard or as difficult as it appears to be. But you don't have to be this perfect person to go out and move your family to Nepal and start doing the best you can there for the people that are there.

Sometimes when we go out and talk to people and churches and conventions they have this awe, like "I don't know how you could go out and do that, you guys are such great people for going out and actually being out there and doing the work". Sometimes I think to myself, you know, it's not that difficult. It's really not. My parents decided one day that that's what they were going to do, so they started doing it.

I feel like also you see different leaders and you see these big CEOs. I think there's this belief that there's something about them that makes them great but that's not true. They're just regular people who decided they would be the ones to step up. All that it takes to start leading is saying "This is what I want to accomplish- I'm going to start working towards that."

If you were to take away anything from the experiences that I have: a lot of it is just initiative. It's such a valuable asset to have. Being confident enough and a little naïve enough and a little bit optimistic enough to start doing whatever I want to be doing right now. That's all it takes to get things started.

Life is learning. You're learning every day. That's what life is. I think being in Nepal and growing up living internationally, I learned that the world is a small place. It's not as inaccessible as some people may feel. Problems aren't as far away and neither are, hopefully, the solutions.



*This artifact is written entirely in the words of the interviewee.



The Flying Farmer

I asked my 87-year-old grandfather to tell me his story from the beginning.

We grew up on a farm right up the road here. I never went too far from home. I had three brothers and we all got along pretty good. We all had our chores to do. Feed calves, pitch manure, clean out the barn- by hand. We didn't have a barn cleaner then we had to do it all by hand.

He had never moved far from where he grew up. A few years before I was born, he and my grandma had built a house on a little hill down the road from his family farm. Technically, the grandpa I am talking with is my step-grandpa. He and my grandma got married a handful of years before I was born, but he is still my grandpa. He has lived with my grandma on top of a sweet country hill my entire life, surrounded by a creek, cornfields, and birdfeeders.

Even though this current home is simply down the road from where he grew up and raised his family, I can understand how he could be content there. The feeling at his home is quaint and cozy, with lots of nature to enjoy. The peace and love I have felt there has made it one of my favorite places. For the past few years, I have felt a strong itch to move, explore, and travel. But I can understand why someone would want to stay in a place like this.

He went on to tell me that he went to school at St. Peter's Catholic Church. His favorite class was agriculture, and his least favorite was English. When he came home from school, he'd do his farm chores. I asked him if, after he graduated, continuing farming seemed like the natural next step or if it seemed like an active choice he had to make.

Well- I don't know when I was young, I really didn't know what I wanted to do. My Dad wanted me to be a veterinarian. When I got into farming, I just thought they needed me there. My Dad- he had a drinking problem and things were kinda going downhill toward the end there and I just felt I had to stay there and keep it going, I guess.

Despite feeling like he needed to go into farming to help his family, he told me that "If I had to do it all over again, I would do the same." He's very proud of the farm for staying in the family name since 1893, and after our conversation showed me a plaque he had been awarded at the state fair to commemorate this feat. It seems keeping up with that title is what gives him a part of his purpose.

But before delving more into his opinions on farming- what I had intended the main focus of this conversation to be- I wanted to ask my grandpa a few more questions about his childhood. He is a polio survivor. Though I have done some reading about polio throughout my life, I feel polio is something that a lot of people my age are very ignorant about.

I think I was probably 8 or 9 years old. I got it during the summer. We was over by my uncle's house-farm. And then in the afternoon I got a headache. Then I started to get stiff muscles. There was a polio epidemic going around at that time. I was the only one in the family that got it. I ended up at the University hospital in Madison. I remember them taking me up them big steps at the hospital and they had to leave me there. I was put into a big ward. There was a couple of iron lungs in there.

He asked me if I knew what iron lungs were, to which I replied that I had seen a few of them at museums. What I did not omit was that every time I had gone to a museum that had iron lungs in it as a child, my dad would point out to me that if my grandpa's polio had gotten worse, he would have been put in one of them.

They're in this big tank with a big plunger at the end of it. It goes in and out and helps you breathe. They're huge and they're scary looking because your head sticks out of it. And I was in that room with all this going on and I probably didn't know what the heck was going on myself. The only way they could treat it at that time was with hot com-pacts or hot towels to loosen up your muscles so you didn't get stiff. They'd bring them in a couple of times a day and put them around your legs and on your back. That's the only thing they could do for it I guess.

Per my curiosity, I asked him what happened after he got out of the hospital. Were there any side effects? Did this experience with polio have a major impact on his life?

Well, I was stiff for awhile in my legs. I guess I was lucky because some people end up paralyzed for life. If I remember right- they tried to keep it from us- but I think one of those guys in the iron lung died while I was there. I remember when I got back home there was a big sign on the window "quarantined" so people couldn't come visit you. They could spread it around I suppose. School had started already when I went back. It must have been in October. I remember when I went to get a drink at the drinking fountain at school, I took a drink and a couple of the kids- well, one of them especially stood there and said "I ain't gonna drink out of there he had polio". I don't know why I remember that. I never was crippled or anything. I was lucky. Some people- they were crippled for life. They could barely walk and walked with walkers and crutches.

Since I could not convey this when writing what he said, I really want it to be noted that my grandpa was chuckling to himself throughout telling me about his polio experience. I really enjoyed that he was able to laugh when reflecting upon this experience. I want to tell you what I think this means, but I am honestly unsure how or why he was able to laugh when reflecting upon this. He seems to be able to find fondness in any memory. I hope it is something I am able to understand better as I get older, because age is what seems to be key to developing the skill of finding joy in moments of tragedy.

Furthermore, I had grown up knowing of my grandpa's experience with polio. It was one of

the major facts of his history. But two years ago, my sister and I were dancing around in my grandparent's yard on a summer night, and he casually mentioned that he had dog tags from when he was in the military. We immediately quizzed him for more information, because he had been our grandpa our entire lives and never hinted at this fact. Though he told us some information that night, I decided to use this conversation with him to draw out a more complete version of his story.

I went to a farm and industry short course and university in 1953 or 54. The Korean War had just gotten over at that time, so they were drafting people for the army. I joined The Air National Guard. It was right there in Madison at Truax Field. I spent 4 or 5 years there. We met once a month for training and then there'd be two weeks of summer camp training. I never was on active duty. I just stayed local.

He went on to tell me about how he started off as a truck driver and then moved on to becoming a firefighter who put out planes that caught fire leaving on the runway. I moved to ask him if he was disappointed that he didn't get any active service. He quickly replied "Nah, not really", and then moved the subject back to airplanes.

I think I was up in Alpena, Michigan- they were given plane rides they had propellor driven planes there and a couple of training planes. And one evening afterwards they were giving rides and I thought "well that'd be cool". Two planes took off together side by side. The pilot is sitting in the front and I'm sitting behind him. And they took off together and they flew up together. And then one of the pilots motioned to the other one and so they peeled off and went upside down.

After sharing that story, I asked him if he had any other notable memories from his experience in the military, but he brought the conversation back to airplanes again.

I was always interested in airplanes I should've been a pilot. My brother had an airplane for awhile. I went on a few rides with him. We went to visit my brother one time down in Chicago. We flew down there and we went up to farm progress days up by La Crosse.

My grandpa seemed so happy telling me about these memories. You could tell that he really cherished his memories with airplanes, but also that he deeply loved his brothers. I had always known he liked airplanes- his office is littered with models of trains and airplanes, he was infatuated with a helicopter droid he got a couple of years ago for Christmas, and he and my grandma always make room on their trips to stop by airplane and train museums- but I had never truly understood how fascinating he found them until this moment. I knew my grandpa was content with his life as a farmer, but I wonder that in another life, where the circumstances were different, if he would have become a pilot.

But I had set out this conversation to learn more about farming and being a farmer. Now that

I had learned why he became a farmer, I wanted to learn why he was still doing it today. I began by asking him why he wanted to farm and why he still does it today.

I get a kick out of it. I guess I like the different seasons, like in the spring you can get out there and till the soil and plant a seed and watch it grow. See how it matures all season long. One year I had a cornfield behind the barn and I got a long stick- or was it a fishpole or something- and every night I'd take that stick and set it out in that cornfield and I'd mark off how tall the corn was. Every day. And sometimes the corn would grow two or three inches every day! It was amazing! I thought that was cool. Put a little mark on that stick every day.

I asked him more questions about farming, like if he has ever had any interesting weather experiences or how he deals with bad crops. He touched on the fact that he likes farming because he gets to be his own boss and he appreciates how modern technology has made farming a lot easier. Though I did enjoy hearing his stories, his answers were short and almost reluctant. He seemed engaged in answering these questions, but not as passionate and excited as he had been when talking about planes.

If I had to do it all over again, I'd do it the same. Wouldn't change too much. Some people wanna get bigger and bigger all the time but I'm satisfied with what I have. Maybe I'm nuts.

My grandma, who had been sitting and reading in the living room this entire time and jutting in comments throughout our conversation, stated: "I always told Grandpa he should have been a pilot or an engineer on a train or working on a barge down the Mississippi because he's always watching that stuff on YouTube."

Grandma had turned out conversation back to airplanes. So, instead of asking my grandpa more questions about farming, I asked "Why do you like airplanes and trains so much?"

I don't know it always fascinated me. To sit in a plane and fly around. I thought "that looks like fun."

And trains? Why do you like trains so much?

I don't know. They're big! To sit in the front of that big train and pull that big load behind you- feels like power.

Do you think pulling a tractor feels the same way?

Sure. Sort of. Well, I guess I thought I'd like to fly an airplane. I always keep track of what kind of planes they have at Truax field in Madison with The Air National Guard. When I first joined it, they had F-86s. Every couple years, they'd get bigger ones. They

had F-88s and then they'd have F-89s and now they're gonna get even bigger and faster ones this year yet: F-35s.

As I sat and heard my grandpa spout on and on, I was hit with how much he loves airplanes and trains and how much he knows about them. I think it would be easy for me to get caught up in this. To question how he could be content with being a farmer his whole life when he has a great love for these vehicles. Yet, despite this, he did say to me many times throughout our conversation that he is content with the life he has led and feels he would do it all over again the same way if he was given the chance. This mindset gave me hope for my future. As a person in my early 20s, I have so many goals, and I fear that if I don't accomplish every single one of these goals, I will feel my life is incomplete and I will regret the way I lived it. My grandpa's life may not have been absolutely ideal to him, and he may not have been able to achieve all of his dreams. But that is how everyone's life is. No one is ever going to be completely satisfied with all the choices they have made and with everything they did or didn't do. However, my grandpa still loves the life he has led. From him I see that perhaps a satisfactory life cannot be achieved if you dwell on the dreams, you did not chase, but instead if you find pride and joy in what you have and have accomplished.



Beyond What You Assume Is True

I was in TV reporting for 10 years. I was a political reporter in Illinois and Wisconsin as well as an anchor in Wisconsin. And when a position opened up in the legislature, someone recruited me for the position and then your mom hired me.

I loved my job. I totally loved my job. I did that for 10 years in the assembly. My job was not only to help communicate what was happening in the assembly, in the speaker's office, and in the legislature, but also to help train and educate staff and legislators on how to be better communicators. So, I felt like even though I was providing communication support for the speaker- doing his press statements and speeches and strategy- I also was there to help a lot of other legislators in what they wanted to become- like how to tell a good story and how to do a press conference that will help a bill become law.

I chose to speak with Erin because I knew she had a story I wanted to tell. Erin is a co-worker turned close friend of my mom. They met when my Mom hired Erin to be The Director of Communications for The Speaker of the Wisconsin State Assembly.

Growing up, my family was surrounded by news about the Wisconsin State government. My grandpa would bring up recent developments at family gatherings, my dad would watch the news on the living room tv every night, and my parents would whisper about it in the kitchen when they thought my door was closed. My parents tried their best to keep any government drama away from me as a child, but as I got older and more politically conscious, I had questions about the doings of the government and the people I had met through the work activities I attended with my mom.

Throughout all of this, my mom pushed the idea that there are two sides to every story and that all media has a bias. Though I know these things, I still find myself taking facts for face value, or getting wrapped in media that makes profits from pitting one side against another. I find solace in knowing that I am not the only person who does this, but also troubled by the fact that so many people consume news media in this same way. Thus, I wanted to talk with Erin due to her history of working for the state government and being a reporter to get her perspective on this problem.

This day in age you can't- what we would say in the business- "get in the weeds". It's all about what you can tweet, what you can sell, what you can explain in a short period of time to people who don't really have that attention span. It's about how you can package a bill and whether or not it garners the attention that it needs. Because sometimes you have one side saying one thing about a bill and another side saying another thing about a bill and you need to actually have the right things being said on both sides.

So, politics has really evolved into how you're going to spin things. And it's always been that way but now it's more personal, more pointed, more adversarial and people really don't want to compromise for the most part. There are some people who do. But if you compromise, you really don't want to compromise your ideals. You might want to find common ground, but you're not going to compromise your ideals. You know, 90% or more of the bills in state government are passed with bipartisan support. No one would believe it- all you usually hear about are the things that are contentious.

I was very surprised to hear a statistic like this, and it is one I can't seem to forget. I think I and many other people assume that Republicans and Democrats are constantly disagreeing and at each other's throats, but Erin's experience has shown that, most of the time, these two parties are able to find agreement. Since learning this statistic, I have questioned why I thought these two parties could not agree. Is the media more inclined to portray them as enemies? And if so, why does it do this?

Well first, as we established earlier, the media focuses on conflict and controversy so that is what you really see. There are lots of bills that get passed that people all agree on but that's boring. However, because of social media and because of our polarized society and people only listening to the people who agree with them we don't have people reaching out to the other sides of the aisle and becoming friends. It became less and less common for people to forge those bipartisan relationships to really understand where the other side was coming from and to find common ground.

There are many instances where there are great bipartisan friendships- and you see that in state government and at the national level- but it just is not as common. I recently read John Bainer's book- his autobiography- he was a former speaker of the house. He made that point frequently in his book that he was friends with Nancy Pelosi even though they could not be more opposites. They wouldn't agree on any policy and yet they had mutual respect. I think that is becoming more rare every day because you have people focusing on the AOCs and the counter on the Republican side because that's "infotainment". Has it gotten worse? Yes. Can it get any better? It's all about telling your story and listening. And hopefully, people will do more and more of that in politics.

Erin's anecdotes remind me of the stories of bipartisan friendships my mom shared with me as a child. I remember being shocked when my mom told me about her and Erin's boss being good friends with a legislator from the opposing political party. Based on the contention and fighting I had seen between political parties in the news, I assumed government officials' stark beliefs made them unable to find common ground with people from other parties. Furthermore, I wondered why news sources only focused on the party members fighting with each other and neglected to showcase these moments of genuine friendship.

While conversing with Erin, I realized how news media oftentimes neglects telling simple and

happy true stories in favor of political drama and discourse. Unfortunately, I know I am not immune to getting swept up in this drama. But despite enjoying this gossip, I know that the state government and the people who run it are more complex than that. Not only do they get along civilly most of the time, but they are even able to find a compromise with each other. Still, this is a side of government that the news media neglects to show. While talking with Erin it became clear to me that we should not fully attest our misunderstandings of the government solely on the forms of media that are available, also on the ways we assume media about the government.

Read more than one or two different sources. Don't just read what you subscribe to. Read the other side. Read something that might challenge you and what your thoughts are. And read it from an open mind and try to understand where the author is coming from. A lot of times we don't care to hear the other side but understanding the other side is important. And if you're not reading multiple sources then you're only listening to one side.

For instance: raising the minimum wage. Maybe you read the student newspaper and it's about how everyone needs a fair wage, and we need a living wage, and we need to raise the minimum wage. Now would that article have a counter perspective from a small business owner who couldn't afford to hire an extra person if the minimum wage was higher? Would they talk to the Wisconsin manufacturers and commerce organizations to find out what their perspectives are? I don't know. That's why you need to read multiple things to listen to these arguments instead of taking just what one source is giving you because there are a lot of different perspectives that hopefully can influence your opinion and help you understand what people are going through and what the whole issue is and not just what I believe it to be based on my vision of the world.

Speaking with Erin forced me to reconsider the ways I thought about and judged those with different political opinions from my own. I think it is comforting to assume that I am the smartest person in the room. To assume that I have the correct opinions, and think these opinions are correct because they are supported by the news media I consume. It is easier for me to watch media that confirms my beliefs than to seek out media that may make me question my understanding of the world. But if I never expose myself to anything different than what I already believe and know, then I will never grow as a person.

Throughout my conversation with Erin, we talked about how the opposition between political parties is heightened by their portrayal in the news media. Conversing with Erin has made me aware of how much news outlets like to pit political sides against each other, when in reality, they agree with each other a lot of the time. Erin stands firmly in her Republican beliefs, but she knows and listens to many people that are Democrats. That is something I admire about her. Furthermore, she feels the news media allows each side to generalize the other and form their party members into caricatures. She believes everyone has their own reason for voting a certain way, and we shouldn't make immediate negative assumptions

about their character simply because we disagree with how they vote.

I think it would be nice if folks didn't just accept the stereotype and got to know people as individuals. That's a mistake that we all do. When you look at a Republican, you shouldn't assume that you're a certain type of Republican- there are many types of Republicans. There are many types of Democrats. And so you might be a fiscal conservative. The economic element of it- less government, lower taxes- is what might drive someone to vote conservative. You might be a socially conservative republican who is very strongly pro-life and that is why you vote Republican. So don't assume one size fits all and I think that will help people find common ground and understanding.

It all comes down to empathy. Though it may be easier and feel better to believe you have the best opinions, that mindset hinders your ability to grow and connect with the world. Taking the time to learn about the other sides of the story and connect with people who you assume you will disagree with gives you the tools to not only examine and better understand the beliefs of those you disagree with, but your own beliefs as well.



Evelyn

For nearly two years, I have had the opportunity to work at an assisted living home and create weekly arts activities for the residents. Being in this environment has taught me a great deal about myself, the elderly population, and humanity. I share this story in hopes that you will take away something as well.

Evelyn is the first person most people see when they enter our building. Her presence is neither particularly energetic nor lackluster; she simply is, and her soft disposition is a comfort to many. She can be recognized by her nails, which are often painted a bright pink, her large, doe-eyes, partially obscured by glasses, but which contain a constant, searching look, and her voice; a tinkering one that is not at all unpleasant. Evelyn's presence at the front of the building and her dedication to welcoming every new resident earned her the title of "resident ambassador" almost a year ago. She wears her name tag and title with pride, though she tells me that doing so has its consequences, and some of the residents have become spiteful towards her in their jealousy. To avoid confrontation, she tries to be kind to everyone and stay quiet when conflict arises.

This conflict is trivial when compared to the inner battle that rages inside Evelyn's head. Over a year ago, she revealed to me that she has anxiety. Sometimes, when she comes to my activities, she is too overwhelmed to participate, and it takes all of her effort to sit and watch instead of running to her room. Once in a while, her anxiety overwhelms her to the point of tears. And yet, she still remains strong, for each time anxiety takes hold, Evelyn sits, breathes and lets the wave wash over her until she returns to the present moment. Her perseverance and courage is remarkable. I wish I had the words to articulate how much her strength has inspired me, as someone who understands the anxiety battle too well. Instead, I keep doing my job creating art with the residents. I try to pour out my love for Evelyn in each brush stroke made on canvas, colored pencil put to paper, and googly eyes glued to craft we work on together. I hope she understands.

And yet, I sense that love, something that Evelyn is always willing to give, is something she rarely receives, especially from the people she longs to have approval from. It has taken a while for me to piece together Evelyn's story, and even now, there are many things I do not know and will never be able to discover. For many months, I only knew a few snippets of her life. I knew that Evelyn had a social worker. She was not here by choice, even though she says she is happy to be here now. I knew she had a daughter who she loves more than anything in the world, and I knew she had a husband from the ring on her finger. Many months later, I learned more. On August 19, I learned it was Evelyn's birthday because she asked me to sing her favorite song, "Spoonful of Sugar" from Mary Poppins. I sang it twice for good measure. On August 20, it was her husband's birthday. We marveled together about how fascinating it was that their birthdays are so close together and how my close friend also has a birthday on

August 20. Evelyn's husband doesn't live with her, and I didn't know why. Working at an assisted living home leads to assumptions that wives and husbands who are not present have since passed on. It's a touchy subject; one that I try to avoid.

But on her husband's birthday, I realized Evelyn's husband may still be alive, through her telling me that, "it is my husband's birthday," not 'it would have been.' Not a sure sign, but an indicator.

And then, a week later, I learned more. Evelyn came up to me while we were making tie blankets for a local animal shelter. She had some bad news to share. I stopped knotting the paw-printed

felt and looked into those doe eyes. She told me that she visited her husband, who lives in a different care facility. She was excited to see him and even brought him his favorite soup. He asked if she would move in with him. She said no; not because she doesn't love him, but because he abused her throughout their marriage. For Evelyn, it wouldn't be healthy for them to live together. Because of this, he told her "we have nothing to say to each other." And that was that; he walked away, and she was left alone by the man she still desperately loves.

A while ago, she called her husband's sister to wish her a happy birthday. The woman asked who was calling, not recognizing Evelyn on the other line. When she identified herself as "Evelyn, your sister-in-law," the woman responded, "I don't have a sister-in-law named Evelyn anymore." After telling me this story, Evelyn looked up at me and said in a half-whisper, "I feel useless."

I don't know all the details to Evelyn's story, and even if I did, they would be insufficient. The phrase "there are two sides to every story" is incomplete. The truth is, there are almost endless sides to our stories, and stories of abuse are infinitesimally complicated. But I do know this. Evelyn's pain is real, and it is heartbreaking.

When we think of elderly populations, we often pacify our fear of aging by reflecting on the wisdom gained through becoming older. We herald the "wisdom of our elders," reassuring ourselves that they have had the opportunity to experience so much, and by extension, learn and grow from these experiences. In fact, this gained wisdom often becomes the reason why this population is considered to be valuable. But what happens when those elderly people have never had the opportunity to gain wisdom from painful experiences? What if they are still trapped in their pain, unlikely to ever break free? What if our elders don't always carry great wisdom...what if they are just human?

I look at Evelyn, her eyes filled with tears from years of pain, and I realize that I can't fix anything. I cannot remove 50 years of pain with an art activity. And yet, I put down the scissors in my hand and do what I can. I wrap my arms around her and tell her she is valuable and deserving of love. I hold her hand and look into her eyes as I tell her that her husband's be-

havior is a reflection of him, not her. I tell her that she was courageous to set the boundary she needed to keep herself safe and healthy. I don't know if she believes me, and I know that nothing I have said will change anything. I'm not a therapist; I don't know how to help Evelyn heal from her wounds. But I am human. And I know that often, we don't expect people to get rid of our pain. Sometimes, we just need someone to help us hold the load of our hurt for a little while. I try to do that for Evelyn.

I know that soon, she will be back outside in front of the building, greeting new residents with her soft demeanor and words of welcome.



You Never Want to Hear Those Words

You never want to hear those words ...

Was one of many reactions 36-year-old Lee had to finding out he was bipolar. He has been learning to navigate life through bouts of hypomania and depression for almost two decades, but it was only a few years ago, in 2019, that he was officially diagnosed with bipolar II disorder.

Well, it didn't really change a lot right away. Other than you had a reason for all the chaos, you know?

In those moments, there was a faint glimmer of hope he felt at finally gaining an understanding. However, it was quickly overwhelmed by the reality of what he was facing becoming all the more tangible. While the diagnosis may have answered one question, it presented Lee with a million more.

Am I going to have to take medication?

How much medication am I going to take?

Am I gonna have to take this for the rest of my life?

The answer: yes. Like other chronic conditions, the goal is not to cure, but to manage. The prospect of this presented its own uniquely daunting set of concerns for Lee.

Am I going to get better?

How much better will I get?

When am I going to be able to start getting better?

There is no clear answer to any of these questions. As a result, the first eighteen months or so after his diagnosis were uniquely hellish. There is the expectation of immediate progress. That the medicine will part the clouds and the sun will shine through. However, it is only one step of a very long and arduous process. For Lee, medication really only changed one thing.

I mean, basically the medication made me go from thinking about wanting to die every day to, like, *not*. Which was great, except for that when your life really doesn't improve much from there it's still pretty lonely and empty.

Lee sought solace from these feelings in alcohol and gambling. Addiction is a frequent co-morbidity of bipolar disorder and often is a result of self-medicating. Much of his early adulthood was spent drinking to help cope with his symptoms.

It was just trying to figure out how to get through that day. I mean, I would wake up in the morning, like in a panic, because I knew I had to go to work. And I was just so depressed and anxious. And sometimes hypomanic and just couldn't reel in my thoughts. And usually, I would drink four to six nights a week to blackout just to sleep.

Finding stability through such turbulence has been a long-fought battle. Maintaining steady work and good relationships felt unachievable in the wake of continual crisis. However, in many ways, Lee considers himself lucky; he has a strong support system that has not only been there for him when he needed it, but also held him accountable.

I'd left all of the family chats and said I'm done. I'm just gonna remove myself, I'm a pain in the ass for everybody else, I can't deal with myself, why would they want to? My sister called me and said, "You love your nephews, and they love you, too. Well, you're not going to see them, and you're not going to be close with them if this is who you are." She said, "You're better than this. We all know you are; you know you are. And you need to take accountability, you have the medication, you're not going to therapy, you're still drinking, you're still gambling. What's different other than the medication?" and she was absolutely right.

While Lee's journey to navigate bipolar disorder and addiction recovery has been full of challenges, he discovered one of the most rewarding aspects was the growth in his relationships.

They were now not being overshadowed by the late-night calls and the shitty text messages and the crisis that they need to come down and help out with. And so that's just allowed all of what were supportive, one-sided relationships in the past to become mutual relationships.

Amidst a backdrop of strengthening relationships that have proven to be a source of resilience, hope, and comfort, Lee still remains uncertain of the future that lies ahead. Yet despite this uncertainty, he continues forward one day at a time, savoring each moment as it comes. For Lee, this involves nurturing the bonds he has with his extensive family, especially his niece and three nephews, enjoying time spent with his girlfriend, continuing his career in bartending, and, most recently, embracing the role of an advocate. Less than a year ago, Lee began sharing his journey and experiences. Through blog posts and videos uploaded to his blog, Benefits of Bipolar, he aims to help demystify bipolar disorder.

Like many facets of mental health, bipolar disorder remains highly stigmatized. When he was first diagnosed, Lee struggled to find good representation. Often, the focus is on the sensationalized and dramatic aspects of bipolar disorder, such as mania/hypomania, while the less

glamorous and more pervasive depressive symptoms are ignored. Treatment and management are also commonly overlooked. Lee emphasized that while there are some examples of positive role models, they are often celebrities living in unique circumstances that don't reflect the reality of millions of Americans struggling with the condition. Moreover, within the few examples of everyday people living with bipolar, there are even fewer masculine figures.

This lack of positive representation has left a significant gap in the public's understanding of the condition and a host of misconceptions. Lee feels the effects of this keenly. Throughout the interview, he discussed the many complications and fears of having to explain his situation to people, be it family or strangers. Revealing his diagnosis means bracing himself for a shift in how people perceive him. He knows that some people may become more cautious, hesitant, or unsure around him, while others may simply struggle to understand what bipolar disorder is and what it entails. Having to advocate for himself and educate others on a daily basis necessitates him to be continuously vulnerable. Though it can be rewarding, it is also difficult and exhausting at times.

Most of my life was just really lonely. You know, I felt like nobody, because I couldn't tell anybody what was going on. I couldn't explain it. I didn't know.

You can talk about your health conditions at work. If I had a medical device where they could track my ups and downs, and they saw how hypomanic I was at times or how clinically depressed I was at times, they would have had to send me home. But there's no way of tracking it. There's no way of making it tangible for people. And so that's what makes it so difficult. I would have had no arguments in my life if I would have been able to show somebody, "Look, the doctor says right now I'm having a health crisis", not a mental health crisis, not a mental breakdown, not a panic attack. I'm having a health crisis.

When I start a new job, I'm going to have a long discussion with myself and probably those around me about when and how and will I share that? Because you are looked at differently automatically. My goal is trying to be one more face that's like, "this is what it looks like." So, you know, it's just small steps, because you're coming from a place where very few people know anything about it.

Through his advocacy, he hopes that he can lessen this stigma and bring greater awareness to the challenges of living with bipolar disorder and help others struggling with the condition lead healthy and fulfilling lives. Recently, he has been working with Nami Wisconsin. Nami, or the National Alliance on Mental Illness, is a nonprofit organization that aims to provide advocacy, education, support, and public awareness regarding mental health. They have various locations across the country and Wisconsin. It is at one of these facilities that Lee has begun sharing his experiences with different populations thanks to the encouragement of his support system. His first speech was to a crowd of nurses and those who work in primary care.

They are the first people in line who are asking, “Are you depressed? Have you been anxious about things?” I explained to them, you might not think anything of that question. But for me, that question could literally save my life. If you take it seriously.

During his latest speech, he spoke to police officers and sheriff’s deputies. A nerve-wracking experience, he recalls, but an important one, nonetheless. Having had his fair share of run-ins with law enforcement, he tried to emphasize how critical that interaction can be from his perspective.

A lot of times the police think we’re out to get them. But in reality, it’s like I was in a crisis, and it wouldn’t have mattered if you were my dad, I would have lashed out at you. I’ve called my dad the exact same horrible names you’ve heard from any number of people. It’s because we’re in crisis at that moment, and we need out. If you can somehow come at it from a place of these people just need so much more help than you understand right now at that moment and try to be genuine and kind and understanding you’re gonna get a better response most of the time.

Aside from public speaking, Lee continues sharing his story on his blog. He hopes to help break down the misconceptions surrounding bipolar disorder and provide a roadmap for those in need of support. He discusses his struggles alongside his success; the people who keep him afloat, the things he loves to do, and the hope he has for himself and others who share his diagnosis.

I’d probably fight back against “All things happen for a reason”, you know, but it all happened. And there’s something I can glean from all of it. There’s something I can learn from all of it and try and use it going forward. And I always laughed when people used bad things that happened and negativity as a motivating factor, but in a lot of ways now I do. I’ve had so many people, then and now, tell me what I can and can’t do because of my bipolar or my attitude or what have you. And so, it’s like, okay, maybe I don’t fit in in your world, but I guess I’m gonna figure out mine.

I want people to have to rethink everything.



The Stars Aligned

In turbulent times, where do we turn? Family, friends, coworkers, religion, money, alcohol? The response changes from person to person, and there may be no clear choice. However, for others, the answer is simple: their hairstylist. Within her 25 years as a hairstylist, Rachel has been a trusted confidant to many of her clients.

Clients share everything with me, the good, the bad, the ugly, the amazing. It's been really interesting to build those relationships over time.

The relationship between stylists and their clients is hardly one-sided. Rachel's clients are more than just people who come in for a trim; they are her confidantes, her sounding boards, and her friends. Through their conversations, she gains new perspectives and insights into the world and is constantly challenged to grow and evolve as a person and a mother. The deep connections and therapeutic qualities of her relationships with clients inspired her to return to college, nearly two decades after she first made the decision to take a break, to pursue what she feels she's been doing all along.

I finally realized that I've just really been an unlicensed therapist for 25 years

Rachel currently majors in psychology with a minor in counseling, and she plans to eventually go on to graduate school. Though, she is not certain exactly what she wants to study, she feels passionately about working towards a role that would allow her to practice advocacy and connect with others. More than anything, Rachel is excited to continue her education.

One thing Rachel consistently expressed was her love of academia. When she originally went to school right out of high school, she was studying microbiology at UW La Crosse. She loved it, even now, she is still fascinated by the neuroscience and pathological aspects of psychology. However, there was one major issue. She had no idea what she would do with this passion. Though she loved the material, she never felt drawn to any of the career prospects within the field.

I always kind of now look back and joke a little bit that when my advisor asked me what I wanted to do with it, I'm like, "You know what, I think I'll try med school." Like, nobody wants to hear a doctor say I think I'm going to try med school. So, it kind of occurred to me at that point that I just really had no idea what I wanted to do.

Her indecision about her future and career prospects led her to take a break from college, but she found her passion in cosmetology. It allowed her to find a new way to connect with people, and to build a community of support and encouragement that she never knew existed. Eventually, she started her own business as a hairstylist. Along the way, she met her now

husband. When they married, she gained a stepson and went on to have two more boys with her husband. Both her family and career as a stylist are very important to Rachel and consume much of her time. However, this presented a roadblock to her plan to return to college. In that sense, Rachel considers the pandemic a blessing in some ways. Due to Covid-19 her business came to a halt. Additionally, many universities adopted a primarily online or hybrid format which allowed her the flexibility she needed. She decided to utilize this opportunity to return to school with a desire to connect with and guide people that was cultivated in her current profession.

Her return to higher education in an online format was more than just convenient; it allowed her a new way to be a role model for her two younger sons who were also completing school at home. In many ways throughout this experience, she felt that she has helped her children in their educational goals by modeling important behaviors: keeping up on homework and taking time to study for exams. It is clear that her sons deeply admire her, as they eagerly await her graduation.

He's like, "But I want to see it. Because I know you've worked really hard." And I'm like, that is like, the best thing I can hear is that they're proud of me. They're like, super engaged in my accomplishments. And I feel like I'm just setting a really good example for them.

My conversation with Rachel affirmed that she was a very compassionate person. Not just toward her family, but toward everyone. Her unwavering desire to connect with others was the driving force behind her decision to go back to school. Through academia, she believes she can learn more ways to help others. However, she has not confined herself to a single method of achieving this desire.

Rachel considers herself a passionate learner, always in search of new knowledge. In her pursuit of gaining deeper introspection, she discovered astrology. She quickly found it could be a powerful tool for both personal development and aiding others. It was Rachel's knowledge of astrology that connected us. We shared a psychology course in which one of the assignments allowed students to present on a topic of their choice. During Rachel's, she discussed astrology. Her presentation was nothing short of captivating, as she illuminated the subject in a way that I had never encountered.

Astrology is a field of study that has a very tumultuous image. While it has remained popular, especially among younger generations, it has always been the subject of intense scrutiny—especially within the scientific community. Many in academia are quick to dismiss it as pseudoscience due to its lack of empirical scientific evidence, and its perceived failure to adhere to the scientific method. Consequently, astrology is often overlooked as a practical field of study. Rachel is no stranger to this criticism. Yet, in response to such pervasive skepticism, she aims to challenge the tendency to dismiss astrology without due consideration.

I got into like, a good discussion with my research methods professor about astro psychology and about pseudoscience. And I'm like, but you know what, you can call things pseudoscience if you want, it's fine. It's just that we don't know enough about it yet to make it a science. And it's the same thing as philosophy. You know, if you don't believe in philosophy, you're never going to push the envelope of what we already know, sticking within what we already know, limits us to not pushing further into what we don't know. And I feel like one of the reasons astrology has been so dismissed is because it's so vast, and it's so expansive, I can study it for 2000 years, and I'll never get to the end of knowing.

Astrology's longevity has been reflected in its profound and enduring impact on Rachel's own life, manifesting before she even had the vocabulary to describe her experiences. She has always felt a deep sense of connectedness and understanding, which she now recognizes as being deeply rooted in the tenets of astrology.

My biological dad actually passed away when my mom was eight months pregnant with me. In the weirdest of ways, ever since I was a little girl, I've had this difference. I know this is gonna sound weird, maybe a cliché, but I've had this different, like, knowing. I've had a very devout gift of being able to be connected to him. I've always had this kind of different energetic connection to things. Not always that I could comfortably state out loud. Because most people would think I was completely nuts. Yet again, as I've gotten older, and some of those gifts have become stronger, it was something that I actually started doing a lot more personal reading and research on. And then by a perfect, beautiful happenstance, I was introduced to an evolutionary astrologer who's been studying it for 15 years.

She started teaching me how to specifically look at the constant rotation and alignment of the planets, and how that aligns with birth charts. And again, the fact that it's just all based on thousands of years of watching and understanding patterns of energy. It's all based on energy. It's connected to science in so many ways. I mean, astronomy and astrology are so close. And we can get people to truly believe in astronomy, but then you kind of try and segway into astrology and they're like "hang on".

Rachel challenges the notion that traditional fields of science and astrology must be viewed as separate entities. Instead, she advocates for a holistic approach that leverages the unique strengths of both fields to inform one's thoughts and behaviors. By doing so, she confronts common misunderstandings surrounding the practical applications of astrology and the ways in which its insights can be utilized for personal growth and development.

The beautiful thing about it is it's not solely predictive. There's nothing about saying, "Next Tuesday, you're gonna, you know, whatever." It is about understanding waves of energy and how we can be most productive. I use this as an analogy: it is like looking at the weather forecast, you know if we can look at the weather forecast—which really,

what is weather? Weather is all energetically based—you can really make a pretty good plan for your week as to how you're going to operate. If there's a big snowstorm coming in, or if there's downpouring rain, or it's going to be gorgeous and sunny, you kind of construct your week around what you can get done at the most productive times and looking at astrology is the same thing.

Rachel posits astrology not as a predetermined fate, but rather a tool to identify and optimize one's strengths and weaknesses in both the present and the future. Consistent with her analogy, she describes this knowledge as your "energetic forecast". It is a means of understanding when certain actions and behaviors may be more favorable. To find out what your energetic forecast is, you can consult your natal birth chart, a map of the alignment of celestial bodies at the time and location of their birth. These charts offer insights into the distinct energies that shape an individual's character and experiences and are essential to the practice of astrology. By leveraging this knowledge, individuals can gain a deeper understanding of themselves and make more informed choices to optimize their lives.

Looking at birth charts is so beneficial when you really want to understand things like, what direction am I moving in? What are some of my intrinsic gifts that are just going to make things easier for me? Where if this feels challenging to me, why does it feel challenging to me? And how could I make it seem less challenging for me?

Similar to a doctor who carefully examines a patient's medical history to determine the most effective treatment, Rachel is learning from her mentor how to decipher birth charts to help individuals better understand themselves and others. Although astrology lacks the empirical evidence and recognition that modern medicine possesses, this should not diminish its potential to facilitate positive transformation. Rachel feels strongly in the beneficial capabilities of astrology as someone who has experienced it firsthand. It was a crucial tool in helping her find a way to support her son during a troubling time.

In fourth grade, he had started having panic attacks in school. Like never had panic attacks before and all of a sudden he literally can't get through a day without having a panic attack. So I got him into pediatric behavioral health, but it felt like three steps forward, five steps back. We weren't really getting anywhere. I started meeting with my mentor, and his birth chart came up for him.

And she says—she knew nothing of any of this, she didn't even know my kids' names—but she immediately said, "Wow, look at all of this. And look at all of this in this alignment and how this is connecting to this. This kid is going to have a high propensity at a young age for some anxiety and panic attacks."

I started bawling. She said, "It's okay. It's okay. It's okay, we can work with it. Why is this so emotional for you?"

And I said “You have never even met my kid. And you just nailed him”

“Right, because it’s all right here, I can see it. Talk to me about what you’re doing in pediatric behavioral health, like, what are they telling you?”

I’m telling her all the things which are very normal constructs of psychology, right?

Like, “Okay, let’s calm down. Let’s take five deep breaths.”

She kind of started laughing and she said, “How’s that working?”

“Not great.”

“Do you feel like you’re clashing with him every single time you make him do that?”

“Kind of, it almost makes it worse.”

“All I’m going to tell you is his energy does not respond to that, given his alignment of energy, it’s like hitting a wild stallion on the butt, and it’s going to take off running. Tell me how you’re going to stand in front of a wild stallion and tell it to slow down and take five deep breaths. What you’re going to have to do is get on a horse, slap it on the butt, and take off and you’re going to have to catch up to that stallion and ride along with it before you can get something around its neck and start drawing it back. The next time he starts having a panic attack. I want you to look at him and be like, ‘Okay! All right! Yes, you got this! You’re thinking about this, thinking about that.’ Start connecting all these dots. So, he sees that you see him at this moment. And once he’s going, ‘Okay, yeah, mom, Yeah, yeah.’ Then start walking him backward.”

So, I did all this and all of a sudden, it’s like a whole new kid. So, here’s where Astro psychology comes into this. If we can actually use blueprints of people’s energy, their natal birth chart, and actually see how their energy has its greatest propensity to behave, then how much more beneficial does Western psychology become?

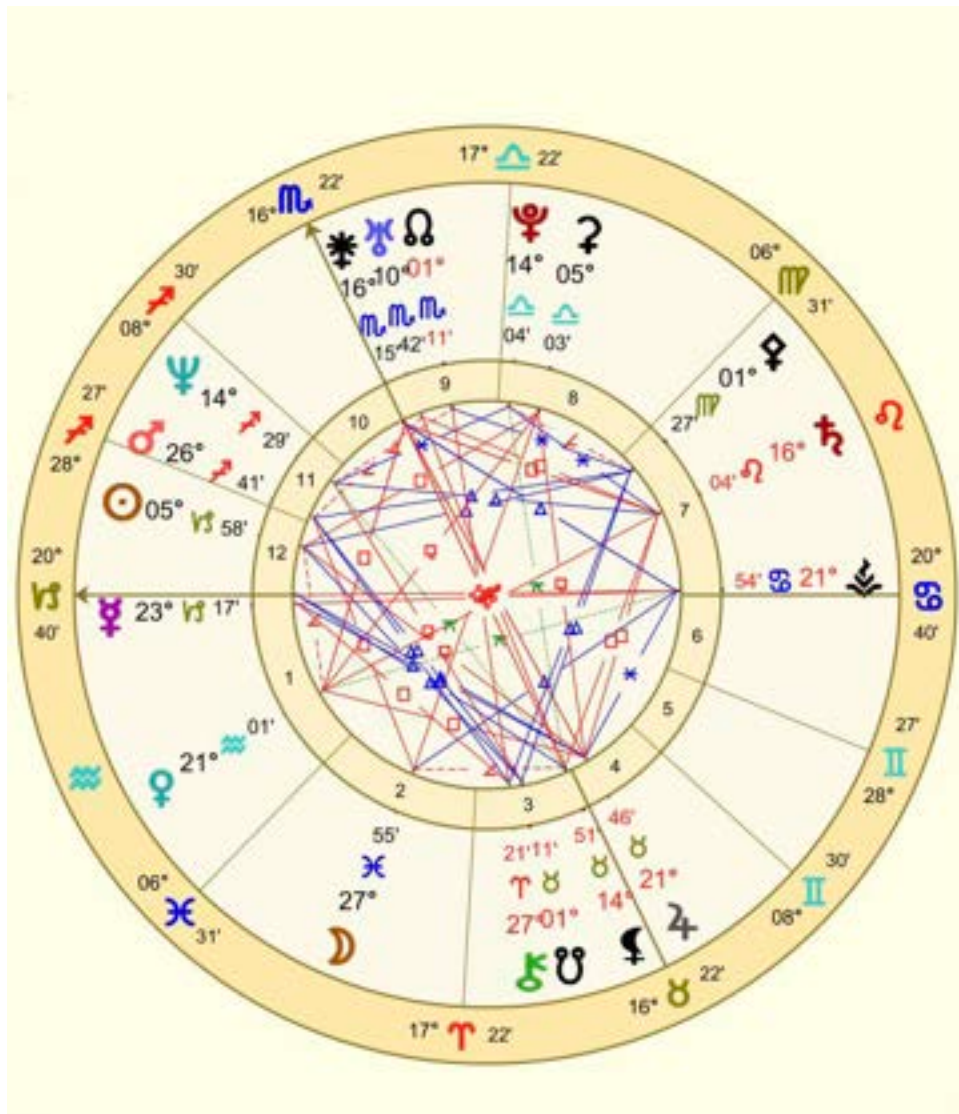
This is the crux of Rachel’s beliefs: how can we use astrology to fill the gaps left by more traditionally academic fields of study such as microbiology and psychology? Adopting a more holistic approach, which incorporates all available resources, can enhance our ability to improve people’s lives beyond what academically sanctioned forms of treatment can achieve alone. Rachel believes that astrology is just one of many tools that can be used alongside modern treatments to improve our wellbeing, not only on a personal level but interpersonally as well.

Like other therapeutic practices, helping others through astrology requires a level of empathy and connection. Therefore, it can not only be a means of personal growth but also a way of deepening connections with others. Throughout her career, Rachel has fostered and built connections, recognizing the importance of these bonds. She sees astrology as a way

to enrich our lives and relationships and hopes that more individuals will give it a chance to positively impact their lives, as it has done for her.

She expressed hope and appreciation for the openness of younger generations. As she continues furthering her education in both psychology and astronomy, she aspires to use her knowledge to guide people of all ages to a world of greater opportunity.

It's all about just your own inner wisdom. If you can unlock your inner wisdom sooner, you'll know how much more you are available to listen to your own instincts, trust your own instincts, and really navigate your own path in a much more constructed way. I think if I would have looked at my birth chart, when I was your age, oh my gosh, game changer. But now, I get to help other people do it.



I Can Be That Messenger

Hello and welcome. My name is Shelly Murphy.

I am an Ojibwe or Chippewa warrior woman.

I belong to the Bear Clan, and I'm very glad that you're all here today.

Originally spoken in Chippewa, these few short sentences are the only ones that Shelly Murphy can say in the language her ancestors, spanning untold generations, once spoke every day. Twenty-eight years ago, Shelly began her teaching career working in a community school for indigenous children. Here, 20-something-year-old Shelly was able to connect unabashedly to her native identity for the first time. Shelly remembers her grandma pulling her aside when she was nine years old on a trip to Niagara Falls and asking her in a hushed tone, "Do you know you're Indian?" Shelly did not know, but it was important that she did. Her father, Artie, was a man clouded by shame. When Artie was a young boy, his father, upon discovering his wife dancing with another man, sent Artie to live with his aunt. Artie's aunt believed Indians were very dirty and abused Artie throughout his childhood, instilling a great sense of shame in him. After the Niagara Falls trip, Shelly remembers asking her father about being Indian. He said, "Well, we are but that isn't something we focus on." To this day, Artie is not proud to be native, but Shelly wants to break this cycle. Twenty-eight years ago, at the community school for indigenous children, Shelly was inspired to find her native identity.

It comes down to wanting to be a teacher, and I am trying to teach the population that is in front of me. In order to do that and do it well, it means that I have to be proud that I'm indigenous. I cannot be ashamed and teach indigenous children.

Shelly spent weeks practicing her opening speech for the school's graduation. She enlisted the help of a fluent Chippewa speaker she met through the community school and learned the few lines she needed to introduce herself. She repeats it often to remember it. And she repeats it to me. She first speaks the lines in Chippewa, then in English. I do not understand the Chippewa, but I can tell she is proud.

I first asked Shelly about loss. What has been lost, and what can be recovered in native communities? Shelly responded:

We've lost the elders. So now we're going to do the best we can do, right? The fact that I can speak five sentences in the language I belong to is pitiful and yet strong. I don't know how many people that are my age that are even card-carrying members can do that. And it's hard to stay on the reservation because there are no jobs. So many of our indigenous people end up in cities where they can get work, but then they don't get access to the language unless they go back to the reservation. So that part is lost and continues to be lost. But there are warriors that are word gatherers and they're collect-

ing language. And there are some that are putting it into systems that are online.

What is lost can be recovered, at least in some capacity. It might not look the same. Shelly talks about boarding school stories she heard at a family friend's dinner. She listened as elders recounted tying sheets to radiators so they could hang out the windows at night and talk to each other in their native language. Listened to their stories of being forced to kneel on granular salt for fourteen hours as punishment.

It makes sense why there's a Bud Light in front of every single one of them. Again, it's horrible. It's sad, but they weren't sad.

Why?

None of them wanted to be pitied.

They were telling me the story of what had happened to them, of no fault of their own, but they got out, and they raised children, they got married, and they didn't commit suicide. I do think storytelling has always kept our history going, and I think that's important, especially for our youth to hear. But I think the bigger part of it is that storytelling is part of the healing circle. My father is stuck in a situation where bad things happened. And he isn't able to heal past that. He's moved beyond it and ignored it, which isn't the same as healing. When you're telling your stories, when you're sharing the fact that you had to hang out a window on a sheet tied to a heat register, not in pity, but in fact, this is what happened, and this is how we survived, and we are still here, that's a story of strength and that's part of the healing.

I was struck by this story and the advice I gleaned from it. I think our broader culture views strength differently; to be strong is to be stoic and invulnerable and to maintain a convenient façade for other people. But I think people need to be vulnerable to really connect with another person. Healing cannot happen alone, but pity is easy. I had to stop myself from defaulting to pity while hearing these stories. What was the use in my pity? What would have been the use in the native elders pitying themselves? I think pity is convenient because it does not necessitate much thought or effort. I can pity someone without ever talking to them. Pity does not offer any way forward because it exists upon the assumption of disconnection between people. I might not think I can do anything to help, so I offer pity to recognize both of our perceived weaknesses. So how do we break out of this cycle? The strength of the native elders comes from their ongoing storytelling. I believe anyone can be a storyteller. There is strength in truly being known by others and in knowing others—of being vulnerable together and facing our humanity, no matter how messy or uncomfortable.

“For Shelly's father, this progression towards vulnerability has been slow, but she is hopeful. A painting of a wooden canoe hangs on the wall of Shelly's living room. It is one of the only expressions of native identity Shelly has ever seen from her father. Shelly credits her aunt

Nancy for this development. Nancy has been trying to get her brother to enroll at the reservation to no avail, but a conversation has been started because of this. Artie gets quiet when discussions of registration and reservations come up, but there have been some strides in his artwork. The wooden canoe is sitting on a pristine river in the middle of an untouched forest. There is nobody in it.

The importance of registering and enrolling in a specific tribe is that it unequivocally proves that you are native. Her father Artie never enrolled, and probably never will, leaving Shelly unable to enroll herself. It differs between each tribe, but to enroll in Shelly's tribe, you must have an actively enrolled blood relative or documents to prove a relation to someone enrolled. Because of this requirement, the process has been extremely difficult for her. She still hasn't achieved it. However, Shelly knows this is her final step in reclaiming her history and native identity.

I think that 80% of it is for my dad. I think the other 20% is for me, because it's who I am, right? And to have been denied who I am, like when you're struggling with who you are as an individual, you go through all kinds of soul searching and changes. I had to do that for being a lesbian. [...] And I didn't let being lesbian stop me from acknowledging and being proud of who I am. And I sure as hell I'm not going to have the fact that I'm indigenous stop me from being proud of who I am.

In 2016, Shelly discovered her aunt Nancy, who she knew as her father's half-sister, was her father's full sister. A birth certificate was found to be falsified after a messy divorce, but Shelly got the original, proving Aunt Nancy was her full aunt. At last, Shelly could officially join her tribe, but more roadblocks came up.

It may be 12 more years before they open adult enrollment. That's been a surprise, right? Like talk about a privileged mindset where it's like, oh, well, I'll fill out the paperwork. And as soon as it gets past, I'll be in. That isn't how this works in indigenous worlds. It's like, well, "when it's time". But when is it time? Could you tell me what day so I can make sure I take time off work? No, that isn't how it works. When it's time. You'll see it in the newspaper. Could you send me an email? No, when it's time. Right. There's a different idea about how things should happen. And I have to be patient. So that has been surprising and disappointing because I was so excited.

To this day, Shelly continues to wait for her turn. In the meantime, she has had a lot of time to reflect on what future enrollment will mean for her. It may be the culmination of many years of cultivating her native identity. I asked Shelly if she ever had any doubts or struggles with this.

I find myself fighting some parts of my identity because I wasn't raised on a reservation. I haven't had those experiences that I know other people have had. And yet, I am Chippewa. At some point, I will have a card saying I'm a card-carrying member, but

I've started to try to wear that skin more and say it and announce it. We had an eighth-grade retreat, and I said to the person who was running it, "I'd like to start with the land recognition." And she said, "what is that?" So, I explained what it was. And she said, "well, that sounds fun." Which is a start. And so, I started, and I spoke the language. And I explained to them why it's important to hear the language, "because it's one of the original languages on the land in which you stand. This is what the people who stood here spoke fluently to each other and everybody understood. That is important to know."

I say those things when I do a land recognition. I do it because we need to, but I still sometimes feel like a poser. I don't mean to. I know that there are people whose experiences are different than mine. But in the gay community, there are also people whose experiences are different than mine. And if I continue to say, "well, I'm not 100% Chippewa", "I'm not 100% indigenous", then no one's doing it, right? Because there are not many 100% indigenous people left. And if we continue to wait for someone who is 100%, we're going to lose stuff. If I can speak the language while I'm standing on the land and get everybody else to understand that the people who lived here are still here, and they are still alive, they are still caring for the water, they are still caring for the land, and they are still caring for the animals, I can be that messenger.

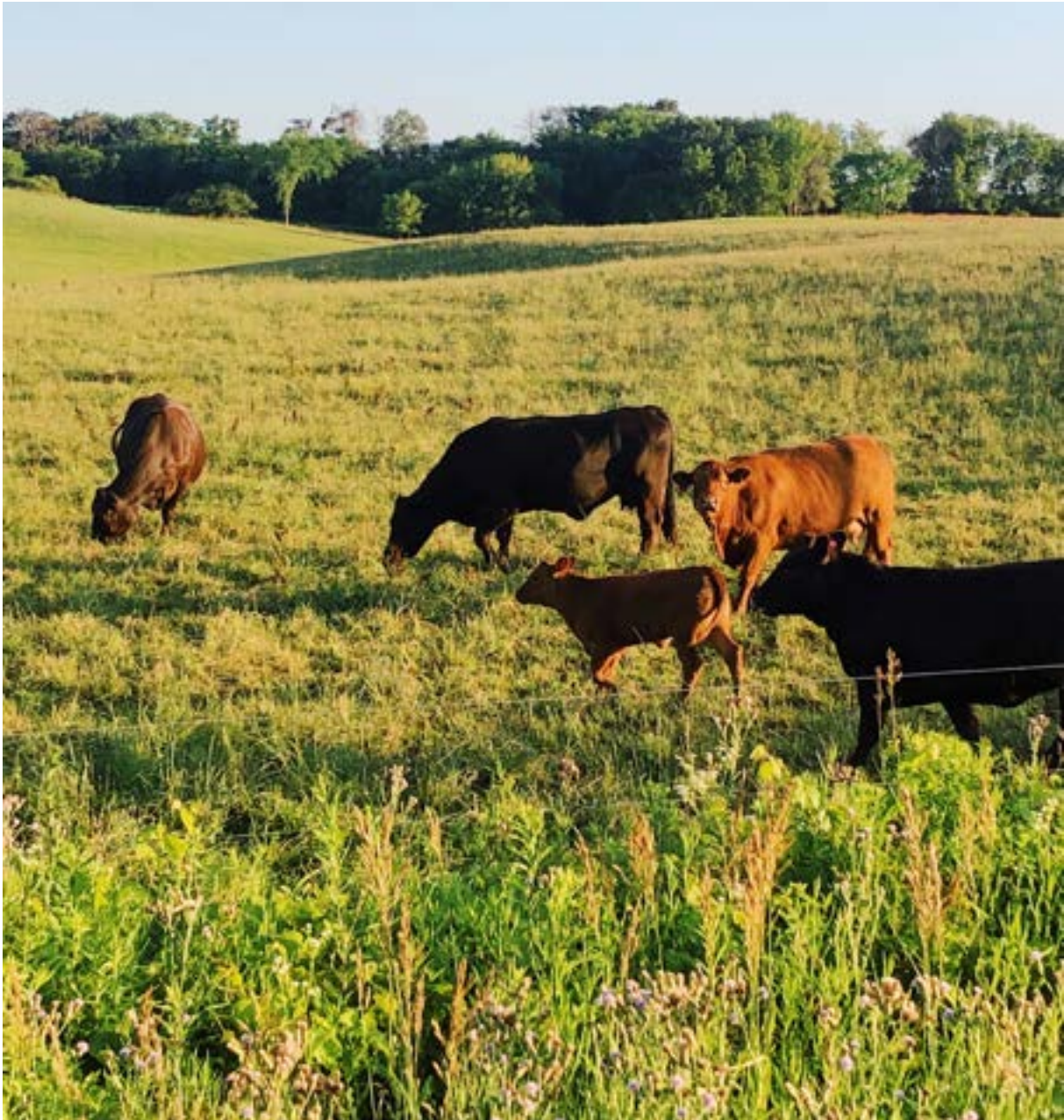
Shelly's expression of her native identity is closely linked to her career as an educator. A veteran public-school teacher, Shelly has spent over twenty-eight years advocating for native history curriculums and being an openly native role model for students across many different schools. In the spirit of this, the final question I asked touched on education and growth. What are some conversations people should be having about native communities? What should happen next? What is your hope for the future?

We're still here. But let's not write us off as the headdress wearing, you know, Indian from the movies. We're still here. We're still fighting and we're still trying to save the planet. We're still trying to save the animals, and we're still trying to save each other. And I think that's important for people to know.

Another thing is that white culture tries hard not to embarrass themselves. And I know that's a very hard general statement to make. And I know that I am part white, I get that, but when I think about spearfishing, how it was part of a treaty, but then people started destroying the canoes of native people because they wanted more fish for themselves. And people who are making and perpetuating stereotypes. And teachers, and I can say this from being in the field of education for twenty-eight years now, who are afraid to teach. And it's often because they don't want to do any disservice, but I need our teachers to have a little chutzpah, because they have a responsibility.

We need to do a better job of thinking about not only our world globally, but our world here—where you are standing and where you are. And don't be embarrassed that it's

possible your distant relative was part of taking this land away. Don't be embarrassed, so embarrassed that you don't talk about it, or that you hide it. Hiding it does nothing.



You Take Me the Way I Am

Her friends call her Cookie, but this demure-sounding nickname belongs to a woman who knows what she wants. Ever since my best friend introduced me to her nearly eight years ago, I've known her as Grandma Purple. Despite seeing her often, I never quite got to know her--especially because she is very extroverted, and I am not. She isn't afraid to say what she wants to say, and this intimidated me, but I also admired this attitude. My friend told me that her grandma had some struggles growing up. Her bad legs are a lifelong consequence of the Polio she contracted as a baby. I had never heard this story and immediately was curious. I wanted to know what it was like growing up with a visible disability, but I also wanted to know where she got her power from. I have oftentimes felt as though my own visible differences were a weakness, something I needed to hold close to my chest and mourn. Grandma Purple sees no need for pity.

She begins her story with a blasé sense of humor. I can tell she is having fun telling it. "I was sleeping in my bed at six months old. This *damn* Winter fly came and bit me and gave me Polio." By the morning she was paralyzed in both legs and her right arm. This would begin decades of treatment and surgeries that would eventually restore her ability to walk, albeit with a visible limp that she would require a cane for. At the outset of her diagnosis, doctors treated her as though she was brain-damaged, as was the case for many people with disabilities regardless of whether their disability actually affected their brain. As a result, she never received a full education at school and was separated from other students in the classroom, "no matter what I did I passed."

I didn't know how to respond to this nonchalant way of talking about hardships. I tried to make it known that I sympathized with her, and she recognized this on my face. She interjected "don't pity me." It was a little embarrassing, but I needed to hear it. She is not sad about her life, so why should I be on her behalf? Why should I mourn her accomplishments, all that she's gone through to be sitting here with me? Going forward in our conversation, I saw positivity, humor, and strength in moments I was not expecting. The doctor told her mother to "just treat her like any other kid." So, they did. She added, "except [my mom] wouldn't let me iron because I might fall onto the iron [and burn myself]. Then, when I got old enough to iron, she sat there laughing at me because I didn't know how to iron. I was putting more wrinkles in the clothes."

She didn't get much extra help or special treatment due to her disability, but in hindsight, she wouldn't have wanted it. This surprised me. She was okay with some things being harder because she didn't see them as obstacles. I asked about her teen years, she said, "I would go off dancing and guys would know that I had a bad leg. Yeah, I walked home." I asked if anyone treated her negatively because of her legs. "See? I didn't worry about it. Just didn't worry about it. I just did not care. My brother went to school before that. He quitted his freshman

year, so I was just Jack's sister all the way through school." She was Jack's sister, not the girl with a limp.

Unexpectedly, Grandma Purple got pregnant in her early twenties. Nobody could talk her into getting an abortion. I asked her if it was hard raising kids with her disability, she said "I had good friends then." I stopped asking questions about whether things were hard or not, I realized that Grandma Purple was not afraid of asking for help. While Grandma Purple is strong-willed and independent, this does not mean that she does not ask for help when she needs it. To her, these are not contradictions. In fact, asking for help is an important aspect of her strength. To me, she commands help more than she asks for it—there is no shame or awkwardness about it. She jokes that, "you get a lot of help when you are pretty," and adds that most people are nice. On a practical level, handicap parking spots and getting assistance with stairs, when necessary, allow her to stay independent. She isn't ashamed of her limitations and isn't ashamed of needing help. According to her, these traits are not born from weakness.

Grandma Purple is retired now, but she was a secretary and helped schools with data entry for twenty years. She tells a story of how she walked down a hallway each day in front of students, "I did it without my cane. You can imagine what they said to me." They'd sometimes make fun of her, jesting at the way she walked. I asked her what she thought of that, and she laughed, "I'd just play with them right back." I asked how she maintained such a positive attitude, in light of the seemingly endless harassment, she simply responded, "you take me the way I am. I mean, you aren't ashamed of being in your community, right?"

She related her story to mine, as someone openly trans, well before I did. For once, I said no and really meant it.



Seeing Poppy

When I asked Poppy to introduce herself, she thought about it for a while and said, “I am an artist, and I’m a budding biologist, and I like mushrooms a lot, nature, and hiking...and I like sewing and knitting and fiber art. Yeah, I’m pretty much never bored!”

She had different shades of brown on her. She was wearing a brown turtleneck sweatshirt with a warmer shade of brown sweater. Autumn would look exactly like her if it was a person, I thought. The enthusiasm in her voice, when she talked about nature, biology, and mushrooms, was the kind that would make people jealous. Even though I didn’t tell her that, it was refreshing to see someone so passionate about the things they’re doing.

Talking to her and seeing how she’s passionate about what she’s doing, made me think of myself. If I met Poppy four years ago, I would feel jealous. I would be mad at myself that I don’t have anything to be this passionate about. I would think that I will grow old and die before being able to want “something.” I just never knew what I wanted as a child. People would ask me “What do you want to be when you grow up?” I never knew the answer. In some situations, I knew what I wanted, but couldn’t say it out loud. Picking up new shoes for me as a kid was my biggest nightmare. My dad would ask if I liked something, and I would just say “I don’t know.” It wouldn’t matter if I loved the shoes or hated them so much. That’s why I wore the dark brown boots that I hated for a year. It took me a long time to actually want something and claim it. I was glad that I met Poppy and heard her story without feeling bad about myself.

Born in Wisconsin in 1993, she’s lived in places like North Carolina and Colorado. She left Wisconsin because she thought she’d find happiness somewhere else. “I left Milwaukee thinking this place was the problem. Once I moved around I realized that I had a lot to work on personally, I decided to come back and comfort my past.” We start talking about the traumas that made her feel unhappy in this place. She explains to me that she has complex PTSD which causes her to have many vivid memories related to her traumas.

When I ask about the first thing that comes to her mind from her childhood, she tells me it’s the smell of her mother’s leather jacket. “Sitting in my mom’s car. She would smoke cigarettes and she would drive me to the school in the morning and she had this leather jacket that she would wear. We would just sit in her Lincoln Continental and wait until it was time for me to go to school. It was nice.” It’s such a small and pure moment for a child, I think. Being alone and spending time with someone you love, without trying to do anything. Just being.

Even people with terrible childhoods have memories they can never forget. My dad’s two-piece outfit with a BMW logo that he had for over 40 years, and my mom’s floor cushion in the corner of their house that she loved when she was a child. My memory of staying up until

midnight and my mom boiling us potatoes, salting them, and feeding me when my dad was away. Maybe that was the last time I felt like I was her child. My memory of the smell of the leather pouf that my dad brought from Morocco.

I asked Poppy what the happiest moments in her life were, and she tells me that her current life is the happiest she's been. "I think some of my happiest moments happened with my partners, like people that I had relationships with. Also, the best I have ever been was honestly pretty alone." This was the first time Poppy mentioned being alone. After talking to her for over an hour, this word would become the focus of our little chat.

This wasn't something that I relate to. I tried to think back before becoming a sister. I was usually in my room, playing with my toys and drawing. My room was safe and quiet. There is a vivid memory that I have. I remember looking at the moon that was visible from my Disney princess curtains - such a cliché - and praying that I would have a sister. Four days after my sixth birthday, I was lucky to get one, and another one when I was twelve. I never wanted to be alone after that. I miss the quiet times, and the quirks of being an only child, but not the loneliness. If I wanted to escape, I would take my sisters with me. Being alone to feel peaceful with my thoughts, like Poppy does, often yields the darkest moments for me, a fact that is hard for me to accept. I think one should be able to feel happy when alone, but truth be told, my happiest moments are when I'm with those I love.

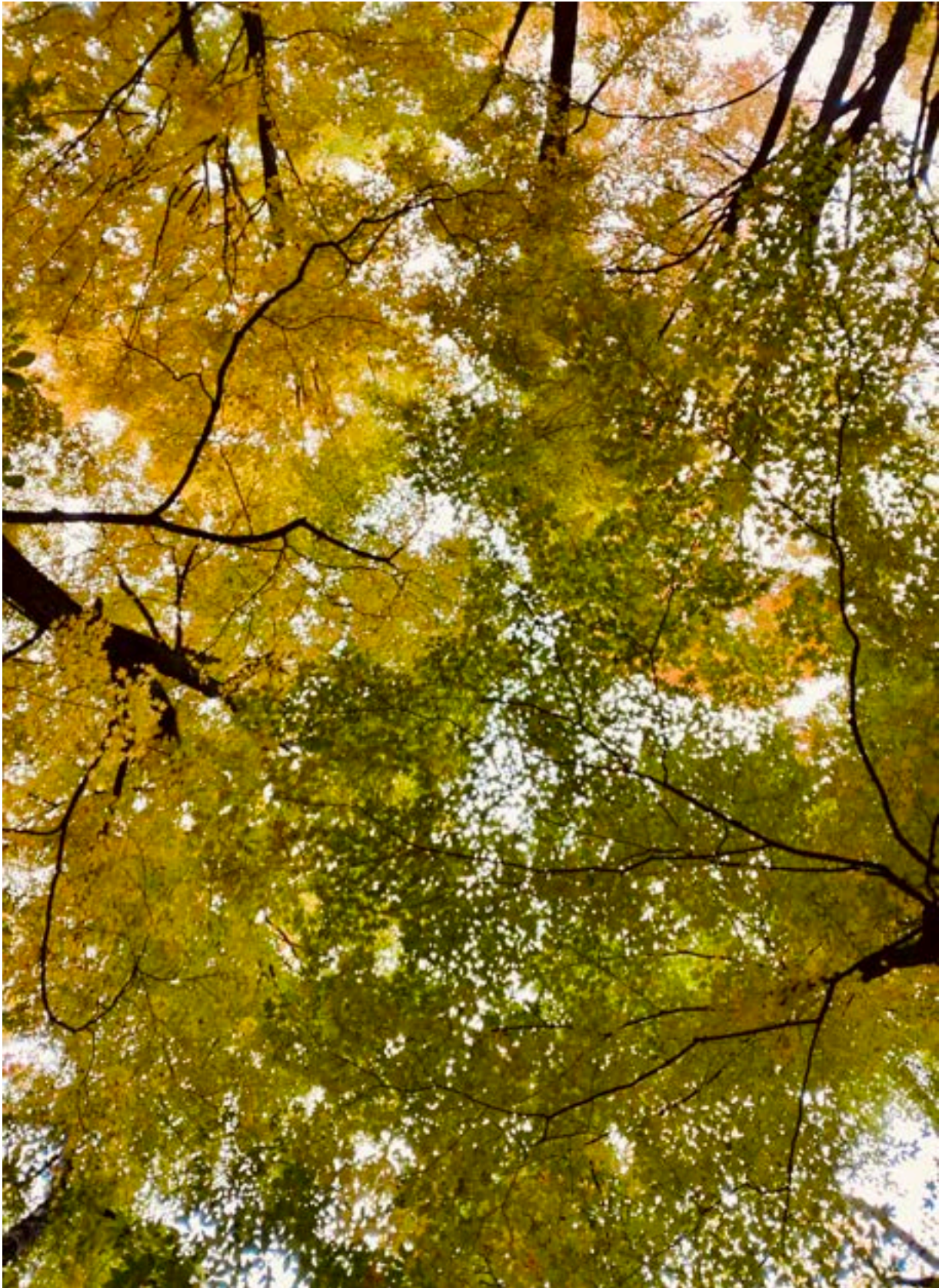
Poppy was working in the medical field before losing her mom. She says her mom has been a stay-at-home mom for most of her life and raised six kids. After Poppy moved out, she started working as an industrial dishwasher to get away from her partner, who was a terrible man in Poppy's eyes. "She was working when she died." Seeing her elderly mom working opened Poppy's eyes and pushed her into doing something she loved. "I wrote down the things that made me happy as a kid and I thought if I can make a career out of these, I will be a successful person."

"My favorite thing to do was being in the woods." Growing up with her grandparents in rural Wisconsin, where there were trees, a pond, and a creek, she had lots of memories of nature. "My grandpa was an awful person and there were a lot of dysfunctions in my house, so even in winter I would try to be outside as much as possible. I felt the safest outside."

Every time we meet with Poppy we make plans on going places, but after we go back to our homes, we don't see each other for weeks or months. So, for a long time, I thought Poppy didn't like me and was trying to be nice.

Hearing her story, I started to understand why it's hard for me to get closer to Poppy. Her past is full of trauma and family dysfunction, like abuse and addiction, that pushed her into feeling safest when alone. Leaving behind everyone that holds you back must have been difficult. I understood that it wasn't that she dislikes me or doesn't like to spend time with me ... but there is a part of her world where only Poppy is welcome - no one else.

"The most emotionally regulated I ever was, was not this summer, but the summer before when I was living in a tent, in New York. Alone."



Stronger Together

I had never spoken to Lee before this interview, but I have known of her for many years. My sister became friends with a group of mostly Hmong girls around her sophomore year of high school, including Lee, through a shared interest in K-pop music. Lee was a mutual friend of this group who became a close friend to my sister over time. After graduation, they decided to room together at UW-Madison.

During high school, Lee never came over to the house much. The only facts I knew about her were that she was Hmong and that she had immigrated to America early in life. I knew a lot more about my sister's other friends, but Lee was a bit of a mystery to me. Namely, because I had never heard of Hmong people before—despite Milwaukee being home to one of the largest Hmong communities in America.

To start things off, could you give a basic overview of who you are?

My name is Lee. I'm 18 years old and a freshman at UW-Madison. I'm currently undecided for my major, but I am leaning towards business because growing up my family was very business oriented. When they first got to America, they couldn't speak any English. There was a lot of emphasis on "fending for yourself" and making money so we could be successful here.

In a way I imagine many Wisconsinites can relate to, I had no prior knowledge of Hmong history or culture—much less what led so many Hmong people to come to Wisconsin. This lack of understanding has led to increasing tension between the Hmong community and those outside of it. Specifically, many Wisconsinites have felt suspicion towards large groups of Hmong living in their community because they represent an unknown. Hmong immigrants have subsequently faced unwarranted struggles in securing housing, employment, and education, and many other difficulties due to this lack of trust and fear.

Understanding Hmong American History

The Hmong are an ethnic group with origins in China. In the early 1800's, many Hmong left China to live in Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and Burma due to conflict with the Chinese government. In the early 1960's, the U.S. CIA recruited the Hmong people to fight a "secret war" against the communists in Laos. While the Hmong wanted to remain independent and saw communism as a threat to their autonomy, the American government was concerned that communism would spread throughout Asia and saw the Hmong as potential allies. The Hmong people and the American military agreed to help one another: the American military would provide weapons and the Hmong would provide intelligence and soldiers.

The war went on for over a decade and was brutal. Of the 300,000 Hmong people living in Laos, 19,000 men were recruited to fight that first year. At the height of the war between 1968-1969, nearly 18,000 Hmong soldiers were killed in combat. Hundreds of villages were destroyed, and around 50,000 Hmong civilians were killed in total. By the end of the war, the average age of a Hmong recruit was 15 years old. When the Vietnam War began in 1964, Americans further relied on Hmong soldiers for intelligence about enemy operations. Hmong soldiers also guarded U.S. strategic military installations and rescued downed American pilots. The Hmong people had an important, but often forgotten, role as an ally to the Americans during the Vietnam War. Despite this, Hmong Americans who fought in the war are not considered to be U.S. veterans and do not receive any official benefits or recognition.

After the Vietnam War ended in 1973, the Hmong were persecuted by the communist governments of Laos and Vietnam. Hmong villages were sprayed with chemical weapons and bombed with napalm. Those who survived these attacks were hunted down and forced to work in labor camps. It is estimated that more than 10% of the entire Hmong population in Laos died during this period of persecution. Because of this, Hmong people had to flee for their lives. Hmong refugees initially settled in Thailand, but many eventually decided to resettle in America starting in 1975. This history is a part of Lee's story as well; the reason her family came to America is because of the long-term effects of this war. Her family was forced to leave their home and start over in a new country.

Lee's History

Could you tell me about you and your family's journey to America? How did they come to that decision to leave their original country?

I was born in a refugee camp in Thailand. I forgot which one, it has a very long name. My parents were able to get citizenship due to the war and immigrate to America when I was two years old. I don't remember it very well because I was very young. My grandma actually crossed the Mekong River to Thailand due to the war. She was from Laos originally. My grandfather helped her cross, but the deal was that she would marry him in exchange. They got married and had my mom—she is the youngest kid in the family. She grew up in a refugee camp, but they were able to get out and bring me to America.

Lee recounts her family's history in a very matter-of-fact way, likely in a similar way to how she was told it. Her grandpa died fighting in the war. Her grandma escaped from Laos and nearly died crossing the Mekong River to get to Thailand. Her grandma gave birth to Lee's mom in a Thai refugee camp, where she then grew up and married Lee's dad. Lee was then born in the same crowded refugee camp in Thailand. Her parents, wanting a better life for Lee, were able to immigrate to America due to their status as war refugees.

I wondered if anyone in her family ever got emotional speaking about their experiences during and after the war. Lee told me that her family does talk often about their experienc-

es, but they don't show emotion--there is a lot of unspoken generational trauma in Hmong communities. Many Hmong elders prefer not to talk about their emotions, because it is hard to be vulnerable when you are looked upon as a leader. Her family tells these stories because the stories are a part of Hmong history and culture. If the stories are not told to younger generations, then Hmong culture will be forgotten.

The Power and Importance of Family

The Hmong people are very family oriented. In Hmong culture, the family and the broader community are more important than the individual. So, self-sacrifice for the sake of one's family is a common theme in Lee's family and is considered highly important. When asked who she admired the most in her family, Lee recounts her grandmother's story of surviving persecution and escaping to Thailand. In doing so, Lee's grandma had to sacrifice her home, move to a Thailand refugee camp, and marry a stranger for the sake of her children.

Hmong people, just like everyone else, rely on family for support. That is the reason there are often large communities of Hmong in one city. That is also the reason Lee's family chose Milwaukee as their new home- much of their family was already there. Hmong people have historically been extremely self-reliant. They do not like asking for help even when they need it. Before the war, the Hmong people lived in very insular communities where everyone took care of one another. Traditionally, Hmong self-reliance has meant having strong connections with family. There was no need for outside help. The strive for self-reliance is why many Hmong American immigrants chose to live in large, insular communities. Many Hmong people would rather solely rely on family than be a "burden" on strangers.

When we got here it was mostly our extended family helping us. My parents didn't know how to drive. My dad didn't understand what a permit was or how to get one. Also, things like getting citizenship, filling out a job application, or getting a house were all very new. My extended family introduced us to all these things, and we eventually congregated to one house soon after we got here. Our extended family helped my parents get a license and all those other things.

Lee's mom and dad learned the basics of being an American from extended family. However, this tendency for Hmong refugees to live with and rely solely on family can make them more vulnerable to being taken advantage of. For example, when Lee left her family to study at UW-Madison she wanted to prove to them that she was capable of being alone. She ended up getting scammed by an online job posting and lost over a thousand dollars. Another time, her family's car broke down on the side of the road and they didn't know how to call a tow truck or a mechanic. Lee called my sister for help, and my dad ended up calling a tow truck for them. In response to these stories my first impulse was to judge. I wondered how Lee and her family could fall for scams so easily, or not know how to do basic things like call a mechanic.

Apathy is just as damaging to misunderstood groups as fear is. For me, apathy has often been a block to my empathy: simply not caring enough to confirm the initial assumptions I have made about someone and thus never giving myself the opportunity to understand them. I assumed that Lee and her family knew the same things I did and had similar experiences to me having been in America for over a decade. If I did not know how to call a tow truck, my first impulse would be to look online for instructions. However, in the typical Hmong tradition, if parents needed help to call a tow truck, they preferred to ask an experienced family member to do it for them. This pool of knowledge is reciprocal. For example, anytime a member of Lee's extended family needs help in navigating higher education, Lee's mom (a college graduate) is the first person they will approach. Lee's family is stronger together because their collective knowledge can be pooled to create a network of resources. Individually, they are much more vulnerable because of the benefits of collective knowledge in their communities.

Hmong culture encourages strong family connection and reliance, but maintaining this tradition is complicated in America. For many Americans, including me, the focus is on improving oneself. I love my family, but the expectation that I would be expected to give up some of my own success for the sake of my family would be hard to accept. I have typically measured my degree of success based on how independent I am from others. I am successful if I can live alone, or if I can buy my own food. Relying on family into adulthood feels like a failure to me. But in traditional Hmong culture, the ability to rely heavily on family is the marker of achievement—it means you have worked hard and sacrificed enough for your family to be successful and be able to take care of you in return.

Navigating American and Hmong Culture

Lee had to grapple with her desire to be more independent while maintaining a connection to her family. Lee, being the eldest daughter, was expected to be a leader for other women and girls in her family. Traditional Hmong culture has strict gender roles. Hmong women and girls are valued in their families for being hardworking and quiet—there is an expectation of sacrifice. Lee's mom grappled with these gender norms after arriving in America, but eventually did expect her daughter to take on the role of caretaker for the family.

My mom does love Hmong culture. She wants me to learn about it but to also “keep an open mind” because of the way Hmong girls are expected to behave. She really pushed back against that. But when she first got here, she was still very into Hmong culture. She taught me to clean the whole house. I was cooking for the whole family at age nine.

Lee's family role, and connection to her culture, has evolved as she has gotten older. For most of her life, she was expected to sacrifice all her time for her family. Both of her parents worked full-time jobs with late hours. Lee, being the eldest daughter, was tasked with taking care of her siblings while her parents were away. Lee's transition to university was especially difficult because, for the first time, she was only responsible for taking care of herself. Today,

she worries that her family will fall apart in her absence.

Lee doesn't hold any contempt towards her parents over the amount of work she had to do, but she did express a certain amount of jealousy towards her siblings. Lee's siblings had more free time, more freedom to explore their interests and develop hobbies. Being younger and less connected to Hmong culture, Lee's siblings often have tension with their mom. Lee is in a unique position to mediate between her younger, more American, siblings and her more traditionally Hmong mom—she understands where both are coming from.

Part of it is that my mom doesn't understand the age gap. My siblings don't understand her way of doing things because they've lived in America their entire life. They've done all these things; they've seen their American friends do this. So, whenever they look towards her, they ask themselves, "why don't you do this" and "why don't you do that." They want her to be more American, but she is very Hmong oriented. [...] When they need help, they won't ask her because she is speaking Hmong very aggressively. That language sounds aggressive to them. That barrier causes them to not be as close, and so I'm kind of like the connector between the two cultures. Sometimes I have to go to [my mom] and be like "you can't say that to them. You could have said that when you were in Thailand, but you can't say it here."

Lee's family struggles with the same problems that many families do: lack of understanding and miscommunication. Though I didn't think we would have many similarities, I see myself in Lee, despite our many outward differences. The way Lee's family operates felt foreign to me. I couldn't imagine willingly sacrificing so much time and energy for my family, or even being expected to do so. In my family, the goal is for children to become self-reliant once they become adults. Relying on others in the family is seen as a marker of weakness, financial or otherwise. This has created a lot of anxiety for me. I worry about not being self-sufficient. Similarly, Lee worries that she won't succeed away from her family. She also worries that her family will not succeed without her. This reciprocal reliance is something that I initially judged, but this judgement was born from my own insecurity. While we both are the eldest siblings, I don't have a distinct role in my family like Lee does. There is less connection; my family could all live alone and be successful without me. Before I would have described Lee and her family as being reliant on each other, but now I see Lee and her family as being highly connected and interdependent. There is a strength in this that I did not recognize before.

Paging Dr. Knauss

Call it morbid curiosity or the displacement of negative emotions, but many of us can attest to that familiar, shameful interest in the tragedies of others. Picture this: you are stuck in traffic during your morning commute – the same route, going on 15 years. It's the first snowfall of the year, so you expect this. Up ahead, you notice the throbbing lights of police, fire, and EMS. As you creep along, your mind jumps out of autopilot, and you begin to rifle through scenarios. This is a welcomed disruption in the face of monotony. Now, you're curious. How bad is it? Here, that gnawing feeling emerges. An infinitesimally small part of you, but a part, nonetheless, seeks carnage. As you near the accident, a twinge of frustration. Your view is obstructed by the brake lights ahead. Soon, it's upon you – a rat's nest of metallic destruction illuminated by strobes of red and blue light. As you pass, a wave of guilt laps the shores of your mind. You feel perverted for cranking your head 90 degrees, gawking at another's misfortune, but you also notice that these thoughts aren't uniquely yours. The accident was confined to the shoulder, and the road was passable. You, along with everyone else, fell victim to that gnawing feeling, that morbid curiosity, and depressed their brake pedals as they passed.

Whether tragedy strikes your morning commute or violence floods your social feeds, it's hard to tear your eyes away. In the face of unadulterated destruction, we feel compelled to ask, how bad can it really get? Whether or not we recognize it, finding that answer tugs at our attention. For A. J. Knauss, a Milwaukee-based emergency medicine physician and Lieutenant Colonel in the Army Reserves, that answer is not just a means to an end, but a proposition that defines her worldview.

I started college not really knowing what I wanted to do. I switched from psychology to more of a hard science. I wanted, I don't know, meat and potatoes. I got my EMT license, and I asked myself, "What is the most direct way you can provide medical care?" You stop bleeding. That's a very concrete thing.

Amid chaos, our minds evaluate the situation and determine the relevancy of its threat. Are we in immediate danger? Or are we able to use the turmoil in front of us to confront our fears of death, pain, annihilation, and despair from the safety of our vehicle? Compared to positive circumstances, we tend to bias our attention to, and retain more information from, negative situations. With over 20 years confronting tragedy in the heart of downtown Milwaukee and on the battlefield under her belt, Dr. Knauss is closely acquainted with this nebulous, innate fascination with turmoil that so touches so many of us.

I've worked at a few different places around Milwaukee, from Froedtert to groups affiliated with St. Mary's, St. Joe's. Now, they're all merged. I worked in Fond du Lac, moonlighting up at St. Agnes, and in flight for life for two years, all the while kind of keeping a foot-in-the-door with the Army. When I left the Joe's group, I ended up working in

for a contracting group working with five different ERs. I liked it for a while, but I enjoy knowing who's on the team. I like knowing the nurses, the surgeons, everybody. And after a year of that, I'm like, I don't even know these people. So, when I was called by Aurora and kind of recruited, I said, "Yeah, this sounds good. I'm gonna homestead again."

In Knauss' world, now built around her kinship ties to the Aurora-Siani community, decisiveness can make the difference between life and death or, more accurately, degrees of tragedy. However, for Knauss, the self-confidence required to be decisional did not come naturally. It was cultivated, iterated, and refined through experience. Reckoning with an unsteady self-concept, bending to the whim of naivety and catastrophizing thought, Knauss' discernment journey began in undergrad, the day she enlisted.

In high school, I was a talented student or whatever. I could write, I got fairly good grades, except when I didn't. When I didn't, I'm told myself, "Oh, I guess I'm not good at math." That was it, I was done with math. It all seemed like a crapshoot.

26 years ago, when I was still in college, I knew some random person in a class that said, "You know, I do this thing, where one weekend a month I go to drill, and they pay me, like, \$115." Like, that's great. I'll sign up for that. I had no idea what I was doing, not certainly thinking it would become a career, but it remodeled my mindset.

Some things were easy for me, like running. Some things we're not. I'm a terrible marksman, and instead of the drill sergeants just saying, "Oh, you get a D for this class," so to speak, they're like, "No, you're gonna stay here, and we're gonna do this until you figure this out." Instead of getting mad at the time, I saw it as an opportunity. I can take 270 tries to get this thing, and that's what it'll take. I came back to college with a very different approach of, "Yeah, I'm going to try science," and I switched to pre-med very late in the game. I began to throw myself into other stuff. I may or may not have been any good at it, but I gave it all a whirl.

The anthology of medicine and warfare root their interplay deep in Greek mythology. Athena, the goddess of war, gave Asclepius, god of medicine, two vials of Medusa's blood. The blood of the Gorgon, the ichor, came from two very different veins. The blood from Medusa's left side could raise the dead, while the blood from her right could kill instantly. Knauss, a descendant of Asclepius, bearer of his crest, and of Athena, shouldering an M16 rifle, reckons with the paradox of combat medicine – an intimate space where the elixirs of life and death muddle. However, the poetic clarity emerging from Knauss' lived oxymoron comes by way of civil affairs – a stale, bureaucratic phrase underlying true beneficence. For Knauss, extending an olive branch to those simply caught in the crossfire defines the ethos of her Hippocratic Oath.

My first mobilization was to Kosovo, from 2007 to 2008. Former Yugoslavia, Kosovo

declared independence while I was there, and there was ongoing conflict. On my plane ride there, I read a book about its history, but that was kind of my first view as like a relatively naive, brand-new physician, brand-new captain, being in a room with a bunch of NATO officials who wanted the opinion of the American doctor. I'm looking over my shoulder, like, where's the American doctor? It's me, oh no. I am. You must know your limitations, but at the same time, rise to that occasion. We had about 16,000 people on base, with about 20 different languages being spoken. And, you know, stuff happens. People get fractures, people get appendicitis, and you're trying to interpret patients. The interpretation didn't always have the medical knowledge, and those who had the medical knowledge may not quite know the interpretation. That was part of the mission, and we were out in the community as interfaces, doing civil affairs and outreach.

For instance, when I arrived, the doctor I was replacing said, "Oh, this family might come to the gate, so here are some X rays. If they do, here's the story." The gate was a football field of concrete barriers and concertina wire. It was very intimidating. Their kid had severe scoliosis, to the point where she was bending forward and having lung capacity issues. So, a month goes by and my local phone rings. I go down, and sure enough, here is this mom, dad, and a nice little girl who has this curvature. Alright, I'll see what I can do [to schedule correctional surgery]. I reached out to neighboring children's hospitals; I reached out to a friend of mine who's a surgeon in England. All the doctors said, "Yes, of course," but the hospitals denied her case because of various bureaucratic reasons. We even looked into bringing a surgeon into Kosovo, but at that time, sterility was not a thing. You don't want to be implanting a massive amount of hardware in that setting. Unfortunately, it fell through Children's [Hospital] locally because they couldn't get a visa for Mom. This family had been through enough, and we were not gonna have this kid travel alone. It ended up being the Italian Civil Affairs who pushed this case forward, and somebody had a connection at Johns Hopkins. She was seen two years later.

I learned a lesson in the slow wheels of bureaucracy, dealing with charities, and determining if people know what they're talking about, or not – good intentions versus "get this done".

The next one was to Kuwait. We have a very established base there. It's a place where we come and go. The next was to El Salvador, that was a shorter mission. And then Honduras, probably my favorite, just because we were in the community so much. I went from Guatemala to Nicaragua, and everywhere in between. There were a lot of civilian clothes and public health affairs. We were not there to tell people how to do things. We were more interested to see how they do things, maybe augment a bit with an ultrasound or some point of care labs, and simply enjoy meeting people. I mean, people were fascinating. You learn how different communities cope, if you will. Honduras has an excellent public health system, possibly better than ours. Little shoebox clinics have excellent vaccination records and have it together for the basic stuff. You can also give

pretty good care for single event, trauma type situations if the timing is right, if you can get someone evacuated to the right place. The stuff in the middle is frustrating. Complicated chronic care is difficult. Like, your follow-up stroke care is not great, not because you're in Honduras, but because you're poor. That's not unique to you. That being said, families cope in amazing ways. I would be in some little place, and someone would bring me a cup of coffee.

Do you see your career trending toward more global health work, like Doctors Without Borders?

Yeah, I have a friend who runs a clinic in in Haiti. We sort of joke back and forth, like, "I can't believe you go places without any weapons." And she's like, "I can't believe you go places with all those weapons around." Different perspectives, but same mindset. At this point, I look at retirement from the Army, which is not too far off, to work with established organizations that have a good footprint.

Different perspectives, but same mindset. Duty beckons Knauss stateside, and for now, her theater remains southeastern Wisconsin. Despite cramming thousands of miles between herself and a deep intimacy with violence, the macabre shrouds Knauss in a reality she can't seem to shake. 2022 was the deadliest year on record for Milwaukee, shattering the 2021 homicide record. With 2023 poised to eclipse the metro's dismal dataset, the notion of trauma-informed care frames Knauss' practice in perpetuity. Knauss sits at the crux of care delivery. At the gate, she is no stranger. Her face may be the first patients see of a medical system, so the brand of medicine entitled to them must be conscious, open-minded, and compassionate. Here lies a moment of clarity – the elixirs of life and death, once muddled by violence abroad, clarified by its grim ambience at home. No longer required to coexist, Asclepius' staff replaces Athena's M16, and civil affairs become domestic affairs. *Different perspectives, but same mindset?*

It influences your whole life, from how you approach healthcare to how you handle stress. People deal with so many things, 'My cousin died, I lost my job, and I'm caring for my disabled family member', but we may not see them because we're all so used to being in survival mode.

[Considering this mindset], What challenges you in your career? When does this [mindset] possibly cause you to struggle? What breaks the sort-of, stoic façade that you're almost forced to adopt?

If you know someone, someone caught truly in the crossfire, truly innocent, some kid in their own home or whatever, where the gunshot comes through the window. Bridging the gap between the parents who tell me, "I did everything right. I protected my kid. They were inside, they were watching TV, they were asleep in their bed", you know, whatever it was. What on earth do I say? I can't say it's going to be okay. I can hear

you. In the best case, I can tell you your kid's gonna be fine, but their world is forever changed. There's nothing you can say that's gonna restore their sense of security when something like that happens, and there's been an uptick in things like that. The collateral... I do think there's an element of arrogance in medicine, the way doctors talk to people. Like, the way you make an appointment, and your doctor is an hour late to see you. It's no problem. You're busy, but I'm more important. I'm busier. The house of medicine has needed to be better for people for a long time... I think as I've gotten older, though, looking at 20 years in emergency medicine, I had a bit of a chip on my shoulder. I wanted to prove that I was tough and that I was this badass or something. Now, I'm closer to 50, and my joints hurt. I'm more comfortable being a little bit more real with patients.

Any final thoughts you care to share? Any broad-spectrum advice you care to share with those looking to follow in your footsteps or anyone on the outside looking in?

[For those in training] Take your time. There's a zen to it. Coping with success and failure come from having a beginner's mind. I still learn stuff on the job, and I go home and read about it. The only students that I've failed on rotations, and I can count them on one hand, were people that were incredibly arrogant, and myself and my colleagues felt they were unteachable. So, stay humble. I guess that's it.

[For everyone else] Ah, life is short. Whether you live a month or 100 years, it's not enough time. It's not worth it to sweat the small stuff.

"Without question or pause, to be willing to march into hell for a heavenly cause" – a timeless adage and one poetically tied to the story of A. J. Knauss. In turbulence, she reminds us to proceed with grace, for humility is a virtue, honed through experience – a fragment of time so utterly dependent on moments of change. Many dance along the cusp of realization, but the moment the dust settles retains the hallmark of perspective. This moment, only appreciated in retrospect, is where you come to terms with the fact that you may never know hopelessness like the mother who carries her son, shot while watching cartoons, into the emergency department, or agony like the parents pleading against concertina-draped barricades for their daughter's health, or pain like a young man's father who answers the phone to learn that his son died in a motor vehicle accident. As perspectives mold to accommodate new knowledge and experience, we become better equipped to meet others where they are. Yet, in vain, we work toward a destination that will never truly arrive. But we try, and that may be what matters.



Kathrine's Children

On a quiet afternoon, sunlight filters in through thin window blinds. Its soft, warm glow suggests spring is on the horizon. A time of new beginnings and reawakening. For Penny and Cinder, this is perhaps the most exciting time of year for one very important reason. Squirrels.

With the snow melted and hopefully gone for good, they begin leaving their dens and enter the yard. Scampering, foraging, and running amuck across the property. Penny and Cinder can't let that stand. They do their best to hunt them down: sniffing along the perimeter of the fence, guarding the lone maple tree, and chasing them across the yard when spotted.

For now, however, the girls lay sprawled out on the quilt-covered sofa. Tired not only from their daily walk but from a certain somebody who goes by the name of Teddy. His unusually rambunctious behavior in the early hours of the morning is responsible for the lethargic atmosphere of the house today. The culprit, a victim of his own antics, lies curled up atop his cat tower. He was busy scaling it up and down a moment ago. You would never guess he was missing his hind leg. Finally content, he dozes along with his animal companions.

This peace is temporary. In a moment, Penny will crack her eye open and spot a bushy tail skittering up the tree. She will bellow a howl that echoes throughout the house making sure everyone is alerted before bounding over to the patio door. Cinder will be quick to follow. Cautious but eager, she lets Penny set the pace and trails diligently behind her. Teddy will hardly be phased by the commotion. His slight shift in position and outstretched leg will be the only indication he heard the noise. Kathrine will walk over to open the door, somewhat exasperated that the conversation has been interrupted, but this feeling will be overshadowed by her compassion for them. She knows they are just trying to help keep the house safe and in order. Having spent a lifetime helping others, she can understand.

Beginning from an early age, she has been learning to handle the responsibilities of not only caring for others but also helping to maintain her household.

I grew up in the country setting on a 360-acre farm. I was the second oldest and my oldest brother was a boy, of course. And so all the responsibilities as the older child, oldest girl, were quite a bit. We ended up with a family of six children. And when you're living on a farm, everybody has to work. It's just part of growing up in my years.

Although life on the farm could prove challenging at times, she found solace in spending quality time with her younger siblings. When the opportunity presented itself, they would play in spirited games of baseball or kickball during quiet evenings, watching as the sun descended into the horizon. Even when the icy temperatures descended and snow blanketed the ground, they were undeterred in their determination to enjoy the outdoors, diving head-

first into towering snowdrifts and making dozens of snow angels. She looks back on those moments with a wistful affection, cherishing the times spent playing with her siblings as much as those devoted to caring for them. Reflecting on her affinity for nurturing, Kathrine muses that perhaps it was innate, as she has always taken immense joy in tending to their needs.

So when she married her husband, Bob, at 18, she was excited at the prospect of beginning her own family. However, this excitement was short-lived following the birth of her first son, a harrowing experience that left her in excruciating pain. Despite this setback, they still tried for another child. Sadly, the birth of their second child, a daughter, proved to be an even more perilous ordeal, prompting the doctor to issue a stern warning against future pregnancies due to the potential risk to her life. This news was an overwhelming blow to Kathrine, leaving her devastated.

It broke my heart. I came from a larger family, and I felt that I really wanted to have a bigger family and Bob did too!

With an undeterred desire to expand their family, Kathrine and her husband embarked on a journey to explore the options available to them. After careful consideration and much contemplation, they arrived at the decision to pursue adoption. The arduous path to parenthood, laden with uncertainty and hope, led them to welcome not one, but two beautiful babies, another boy and girl, into their home. The memories of those treasured moments, when Kathrine first cradled her beloved babies in her arms, remain etched in her mind as precious and life changing.

To me, it was the biggest thrill in the whole world every time we got one of our kids. No matter how we got to have our children, they were all my children. When they put them in my arms, they were my children. I didn't care how they got to us. It was the Lord's will however it was supposed to be.

Kathrine's heart swells with fond memories as she recalls her children growing up, reminiscing about the cherished moments they shared as a family. She relished the feeling of being able to love and help guide her children. Yet, Kathrine's drive to provide care and support extended far beyond her immediate family, permeating every aspect of her professional life. Having worked a variety of jobs throughout her lifetime, she and her husband had finally amassed enough funds to allow her to pursue her long-held dream of obtaining higher education.

I treasured the fact that I could go back to school. The first time I went back to school, I was age 40. And very nervous. I had not had any classes since high school. So I was working at this factory building tractors and I talked one of my workmates into going with me to take a sign language class to start with. And from that point, I decided to try to take an anatomy physiology course in the evenings. And I found I loved it, I abso-

lutely loved it. Well, [my friend] dropped out after the first couple days, she didn't care for it. But I stayed with it. And I found—oh my goodness, it was just like a piece of cake. For me, I didn't have any troubles at all. And I was just shocked because I thought how I didn't realize I could do this. So it's a confidence builder—if you do it when you get a little older. And that was the start of my journey for continuing education.

Kathrine went on to become a licensed practical nurse (LPN) and worked in a hospital in Green Bay for several years before there was a layoff, forcing her to resign. That didn't stop her, however.

I love the medical field. I love the people that I've worked with, and I love helping people. That's why after they had the layoffs of us, I decided I wanted to still stay in the medical field. I returned to school after a short period of time and became an ultrasound technologist.

Although Kathrine loved her work as a nurse and in ultrasound, it was far from simple or effortless, and it was often fraught with challenging and demanding moments.

I particularly remember one couple. They were not a young couple. I mean, as far as having children, they were more, you know, getting to be a little older parents. And they had other children. But then they had a stillborn. And I remember we would put them in a more private room so that they wouldn't have to deal with the population of young moms. And I remember that she came out onto the floor, as we would call it, from the delivery room. And I had her as a patient and I remember sitting in that room with her and her husband as much as I could that night and sharing with them the entire night because it was such, such grief they were in. I was able to be with them and they thanked me so much for taking the time to spend with them during their hardship.

Death is an all too frequent experience for those who work in the medical field. Kathrine knows this well.

If people were going to die, they would die at night. And we were on the night shift. So we did lose people. It not only affected the families, it affected our staff. It would be tough on all of us.

But Kathrine and her fellow staff found ways to help each other process the grief that both they and their patients felt.

Sharing with others was a big thing. We would share our feelings together as nurses. Everyone was real open about how we felt. We did have tears, hugs, for not only each other but for the family members.

In her personal life, Kathrine has experienced death intimately. Her husband Bob developed Parkinson's disease in his later years and passed away in 2014. She spent those final years diligently caring for him at their home. Her daughter, Lindy, also passed away a few short years later as a result of disease. Through it all, Kathrine has shown incredible strength and perseverance.

It's never easy when you lose someone. But I have a faith in the Lord and that strength comes from him. That's what gets me through hard times. And you never really get over the loss of someone, you just learn how to keep it in your life in a way that's useful for yourself and others.

True to her words, Kathrine continues to utilize the wealth of experiences she has gained throughout her life to this very day. Although retired from her medical profession, she remains passionately involved in her community by working as an aide at a nearby elementary school. Her unwavering dedication to helping children is nothing short of remarkable, as she supports hundreds of kids who may be struggling with a multitude of issues.

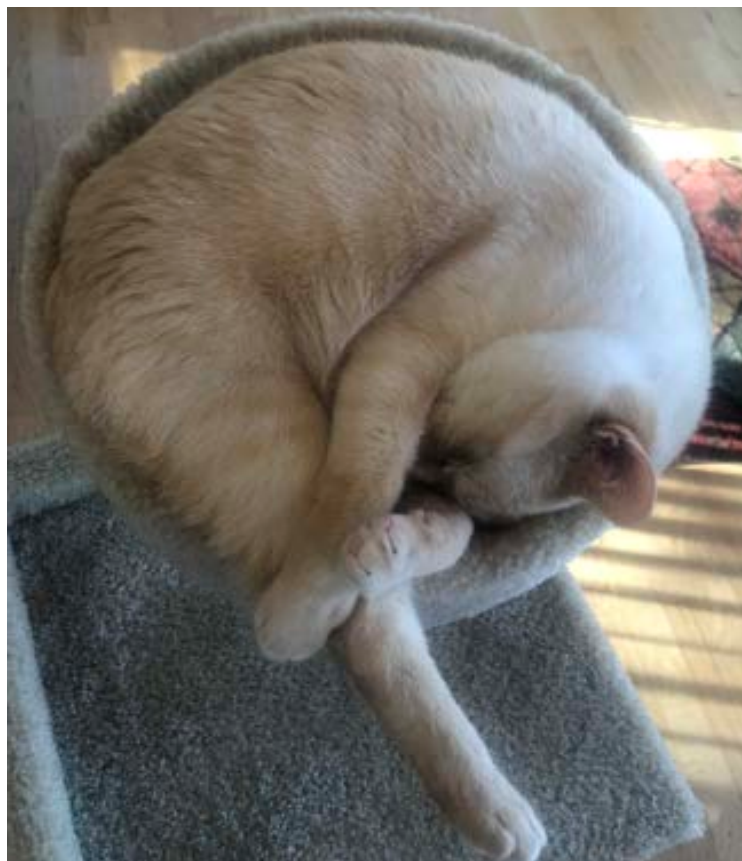
I've learned that I can take my feelings, and I can use them in positive ways, especially like working in the schools. Now that sounds like kind of a simple job. And it basically is supposed to be, but when I'm dealing outside with all different ages, all different issues arise. Sometimes it's disagreements, sometimes it's injuries, sometimes it's loneliness. It's so nice to be able, from my past, to share with them my feelings as far as "I'm here for you", "we can talk about this", "how can we make this better?" And that type of thing. So, I kind of carried it through my life, I think.

As she tells me more about her story, there is a faint scratching at the door. Penny and Cinder sit sheepishly on the other side with no squirrel to show for all their ruckus. Although, that's fine by Kathrine. Recalling the time she had to wrangle one out of their jaws, she's more than happy that they've been outsmarted this time. However, she consoles the girls all the same when she lets them in. They eagerly follow her back to the kitchen, fighting to see who can get the most attention. It isn't long before Teddy leaps off his cat tower to join in the battle.

Although they may seem pampered now, Penny, Cinder, and Teddy, much like Kathrine, have all experienced their share of hardship and loss, having come from animal shelters. Their past experiences are evident in the way Cinder tucks her tail at loud noises or Teddy's missing appendage, but their remarkable progress and current life far surpass their former struggles. Kathrine couldn't be more proud of them and their resilience in overcoming their adversity. They are just a few of many that she has helped over the years.

Amidst the seemingly disparate group of old shelter mutts, grieving hospital patients, and hundreds of energetic children, there lies a unifying factor that binds them together: the need for compassion and nurturing. Kathrine takes joy in fulfilling this role, treating each one of them with unwavering tenderness. For her, they are all on equal footing, deserving of her

care and comfort as though they were her own children.



Artifacts of Us Mission

We are an interview-based student organization structured around the creation of a yearly publication to promote empathy and understanding in the larger Wisconsin community. Our goal is to interview and tell the stories of a truly diverse group of people: rural and urban, conservative and progressive, of all ages, all educational levels, and all walks of life. Fundamentally, the project itself is designed to be a sustainable, long-term means of fostering outreach and understanding among divided social groups and to promote a more tolerant, humane way of life.

If you or someone you know has a story that should be shared, we would like to talk with you! Please contact Wren Stevens at steve324@uwm.edu.

If you are interested in being a member of Artifacts of Us and gathering stories, please contact Grace Wodill at gawodill@uwm.edu.

Thank you.