DEAREST READER,

When I was blessed with the opportunity to be Editor-in-Chief of Klipsun Magazine the little voice in my head whispered with glee, “Now’s your chance to inspire what others need to hear!” Living in a broken world means we are all broken people…but is that such a bad thing? We’re all a little fractured, that’s how the light gets in.

Joy: (noun) An attitude of gladness not based on circumstance; deep-rooted, inspired happiness.

This concept of joy will always receive varying responses. Some smirk at it, not fully understanding the power to be found within. Others hold onto joy with both hands and refuse to let go. I’d like to think I’m one of the latter. Everyday I work hard to wake up and choose joy. You are 100% capable of doing that too.

Choosing joy is not easy. Sometimes it is a mindset you have to fight for. But I’ll let you in on a little secret; if you want to be joyful, first you must be grateful. An attitude of gratitude allows us to deeply process what is in front of us and then respond with grace.

I want to make it perfectly clear that joy is NOT a fluffy, blissfully ignorant attitude. Joy takes your pain, sadness, heartache or anxiety and says, “Yes and…” Joy is a choice to look through the darkness surrounding you and to strive for the light that is always there, even if it is small.

One of the greatest inspirations I have found for joy is reflected through the lyrics of X-Ambassadors’ song “Joyful”

No one left, no one except my demons and I
No one to forgive me, I’m running out of time
And it’s up to me to try and meet my fate with a smile
And it might sound silly, but I still will try
To be joyful, joyful
Joyful and happy, sunny and bright
To be joyful, joyful
Joyful and happy, just being alive

As you journey through our edition of Klipsun my hope is that you are inspired to find light in a dark place just as our amazing writers have done. Keep searching for raw goodness and the glimpses of hope because they will always be there; you just have to look for them.

WITH WARM REGARDS,

VICTORIA CORKUM
Esperanza Coronado didn’t cook because she had to, or because it was a hobby; cooking was her love language, how she communicated joy.

On the rare occasion when my Abuela’s four sons, three daughter-in-laws and 12 grandchildren gathered together, we came around her food. She valued the way food brings people together, because it brought warmth that could be felt in every room; it was felt through conversations between family members around the table.

My Abuelos immigrated to southern California in the 1960s. My Abuelo worked in the Coachella and San Joaquin Valley. He later became the foreman of two egg poultry farms. My Abuela often stayed home cooking and caring for their four sons and occasionally helping on the farm.

I grew up visiting my family in Yucaipa during summers and sometimes around the holidays. All of my fondest memories with my family involve food.

Her cooking left an impression. From birthdays to family gatherings, if anyone came through my Abuela’s front door, they would instantly know they were about to be fed well.

My Abuela was more than just the food she made, you could tell because she put her whole heart into making sure everyone enjoyed a good meal. It is one thing to make food, but cooking a meal to be shared between your family is a way of expressing love in the most sincere way.

Growing up, I remember the package of tamales that would magically appear on our doorstep during the holidays. Traveling 976 miles from Yucaipa, California, the tamales would last for months in our freezer. Their flavor was rich and spicy, wrapped up in chewy masa and corn husk envelopes.

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I have many memories of eating in my Abuela’s tiny kitchen, my Abuelo somewhere out back tending to his goats, the black and white desert scenes of an old Western film playing on the TV.

When I was 15 she showed me how to make tamales.
My Abuela was known for her tamale recipe. My dad told me that it wasn’t Christmas unless she made them. She would marinate the pork and chicken, patting together masa and assembling each individual tamale by hand. They would cook for hours, the smell of smoky peppers and sweet masa filling the entire house. The enduring process of watching them come together and steam in the big, metal pot was always worth the wait.

Tamale-making is an art. Originating back to 8,000 B.C., tamales have been an important part of Mexican culinary cuisine and national identity. Passed on from each generation, traditional Mexican recipes hold a beautiful meaning and connection to a vibrant culture.

“Having those traditional kinds of meals plays an important role in our lives because it helps us remember the past,” my dad said as we reminisced about Abuela’s cooking and how much we miss her. “Those things that come and go, and meals, especially traditional meals, can help us remember those moments.”

There was always something cooking on the stove. You could peek around the kitchen counter and see Abuela’s petite figure, dark hair and delicate hands creating something that was bound to be delicious.

However, she never wrote any of her recipes down. The occasional scribble on the back of a receipt could be found around the house, but after her passing, no complete recipes were uncovered.

Meredith E. Abarca’s book, “Voices in the Kitchen,” mentions a cultural norm for Mexican women to not keep record of their recipes. She describes it as a sensory way of knowing the right taste and flavors of a recipe, a Sazón. Cooking without measurements or written instructions is common in a Mexican kitchen.

It could be because traditional recipes live through people. They are taught and remade year after year, generation after generation.

The memories outlive even the tastiest homemade tamale. Gathering around the table brings us together.

“It gives us a place to be a family,” my dad said. “That’s important not only to me but in our heritage as well.” He told me that in Mexican culture, food reflects the connection between people, especially between those who are family.

I remember arriving to Yucaipa late one night during the holidays, my dad and I exhausted from travel. My Abuela stayed up for us. She answered the door and greeted us by saying, “Are you hungry? Do you want something to eat?”
The Greatest Love of All

A letter to myself on my journey to discovering self-love (again) in the midst of darkness.

Written by NINA CLAFLIN
Illustration by ALEXANDRA TAYLOR

Dear Nina,

Relationships come and go; that’s what people always say. You will meet a person and your whole world will stop. Eventually the relationship may come to an end, and although it’s hard, you’re meant to just soak yourself dismally in the aftermath, no matter how long it may take or how painful it may be.

Many people told you this — warned you of it, even — and it still happened. It’s inevitable, really. A relationship can simultaneously be the most wonderful yet painful experience all at the same time.

Not only were you left with the overwhelming sadness that accompanies heartbreak, but other issues as well — issues that were not tied to him as a person or how he acted around you, but issues that were a product of the relationship itself. Problems that consumed you so much that you believed there was no way you could move on.

Two years. That’s how long the relationship lasted. A year in, you were positive you were going to marry him. Two years in and you were trying to forget his name. You gave all you had to him, leaving nothing left for yourself.

When single again, you realized the extent of this damage. Putting yourself last and putting him first was what broke you.

Remember when you came home after a long day of nannying, the blisters on your feet from chasing the kids around piercing in pain, your head pounding with a migraine and your emotional energy completely drained? You could not bring yourself to say no to hanging out with him, your commitment and love so intense that you felt as if you didn’t even owe yourself a night of rest.

The other day, I read a piece from One Love Foundation. It said one of the signs of an unhealthy relationship is intensity. It described that when in a relationship, if one person is over-the-top or borderline obsessed with the other person, it can turn unhealthy and all-consuming. Your love for him was so intense and overwhelming that the relationship itself became toxic.

Alternatively, one sign of a healthy relationship is independence, the One Love Foundation also said. Being independent in a relationship means that each person lives their own life while still supporting each other in the process. Your independence was not prioritized, which made the relationship unhealthy for the both of you.

When someone is in the state of completely belonging to somebody else, nothing else matters but that person. You began taking high doses of anxiety medication to help with the pain of it all, and you became so overwhelmingly affected by it that it started to affect your friendships with people on the outside. You became a ghost of yourself.

Despite being in a relationship with a truly good person, this sense of complete loss can still happen. You began to put yourself down, telling yourself that since you had gained weight, since your personality was too much, he didn’t want you anymore.

What now?

I wish someone would have told you this sooner, my past self: It wasn’t your fault. You didn’t believe that someone could truly love you since you didn’t love yourself. You didn’t know how special you were.

I have been on the path to recovery for the past several months. I try everyday to surround myself with positive forces, from the people I spend time with to the music I cry to late at night, or the activities I occupy my time with. I try as much as possible to make every facet of my life something that makes me feel positive in some way.

I used to hate it when people said, “Just realize your self worth and you will be happy and be able to love again.”

I didn’t know how special I was. How special I am now.

How am I supposed to do that? I can’t just wake up one day and tell myself I deserve to be deeply in love with myself again and expect myself to believe it.

It takes time. It takes being patient with yourself. It takes effort, and perseverance.

Relationships are remarkable. Strong feelings of love and adoration for another person is a powerful thing. Losing yourself in the process, however, is soul-crushing — detrimental even.

Your world may stop for him again, or another person further down the line.

I used to hate it when people said, “Just realize your self worth and you will be happy and be able to love again.”

It may feel like nothing else matters, like you’ve reached the highest point in life because of how much you love them. I know you will feel like that again one day.

What I want you to remember, my past-self, is this: Please make sure you are stopping the world for yourself, too.

With love,

You, still healing.

A letter to myself on my journey to discovering self-love (again) in the midst of darkness.
Jubilation in the Jumpscare

An examination of why we love horror and why it feels so good to be so scared.

Written by EMILY BISHOP
Illustration by ALEXANDRA TAYLOR

She glances at the clock, noticing for the first time just how late it has gotten. She stands and straightens out the pillows on the couch, putting the house in order before retiring for the night. Walking down the foreboding hallway, she starts to feel uneasy, as if she is not alone. She knows it’s ridiculous, no one else is home; it’s just her nerves getting the better of her. But then the unmistakable sound of heavy breathing is heard just behind her. She turns, slowly, the anticipation building. At the end of the dark hallway is a sinister and nightmarish creature.

You jump at the reveal, some of the popcorn in your bucket spilling onto the floor. Your heart rate is now elevated from the frightening scene you just watched play out on the silver screen. The movie continues, with more moments of shock and awe sprinkled throughout. When you leave the theatre, you can’t help but have a goofy grin plastered across your face.

For how terrifying the movie was, you had fun watching it.
"I think it’s a lot of stuff we can all relate to," film director Simon Pearce said. “We’ve all seen something at the end of our bed at night and you think ‘Oh, is someone stood there?’ Oh, no, it’s just a coat on a door. We’ve all gotten ourselves a bit freaked out.”

Simon Pearce has directed multiple horror films, both short and feature-length. Pearce’s feature — “Judas Ghost” — released in 2015, follows a secret organization dispatched to investigate a sinister and haunted building. His short film “I Am the Doorway,” was adapted from the Stephen King short story of the same name released in 2018. Both the story and film follow a man who believes he has become the doorway to an alien invasion with gruesome consequences.

“Anything that kind of gets a rise or reaction from an audience, I think horror is definitely one of the more visceral genres in terms of doing that,” Pearce said. “To be sat at a festival and hear an audience around you react to something or tense up is so satisfying — to know, ‘Oh, I did that,’ Pearce said. “So, if you can make people scared or make people jump, that’s really cool.”

Pearce has been interested in film and television since he was a kid. He used to make films with his friends all in one take on the family video camera, making up stories on the spot. There was something about the process that clicked for him. By the time he was 15, he knew that directing was what he wanted to do. Pearce used to make films with his friends all in one take on the family video camera, making up stories on the spot. There was something about the process that clicked for him. By the time he was 15, he knew that directing was what he wanted to do.

Abigail Marsh, a psychology and neuroscience professor at Georgetown University, explains in Bytzer’s Science’s “The Chemistry of Fear” that fear comes from the anticipation or expectation of harm. This expectation of harm triggers reactions in your brain that cause a physical response. When experiencing fear, our bodies shift into survival mode, and we react by freezing, fleeing or fighting. Marsh said when this happens, the sympathetic nervous system — the part of your body that controls essential living functions like breathing, heart rate and sexual arousal — releases a flood of chemicals.

Adrenaline gets you physically ready to respond to a threat. It increases the blood flow to your muscles, increases your heart rate and dilates your pupils. Norepinephrine increases arousal and alertness. It makes you pay more attention to your surroundings, taking in any potential attack so you can react and escape harm. And dopamine, well, dopamine makes you feel good; it signals your brain’s reward system, which influences us to do things that feel good.

From a physiological perspective, fear is something we are hardwired to enjoy. That is the jubilation in the jump scare — a short-lasting hit of all the chemicals that make us feel good. In theory, the jump scare should be the epitome of horror. But from a psychological perspective, it’s less than effective and rarely leaves a long-lasting impact on the viewer.

“There’s a lot of reliance in horror today on jump scares, and that kind of stuff will just shock,” Pearce said. “But a lot of the scale of really good horror is just keeping you on the edge of your seat. It’s having these long, sustained periods of tension, and then you have the jump, and the reason you jump so much is because you’ve been on edge for like 10 minutes.”

And here begins the minutiae of the horror film versus the thriller.

“The horror film or slasher movie clearly falls into the category of violence or gore, while many psychological thrillers have moments of only suggest violence or show it to a minimal degree,” write professors of media studies Mary Beth Oliver and Meghan Sanders in their essay “The Appeal of Horror and Suspense.”

They distinguish horror and thriller based primarily on gore. Oliver’s research on the topic shows that psychological thrillers are generally rated as being more frightening, disturbing, scary, anxiety provoking, suspenseful and overall, more enjoyable than the traditional slasher film.

Their research found that thrillers were considered more interesting, enjoyable, absorbing and fun, while horror films were rated as predictable, silly and low quality. But those are not necessarily bad characteristics. Comedy and horror have often fused to imitate those very aspects of horror. The “Scary Movie” and “Chucky” franchises both parody and poke holes at tropes and expectations of the genre in a way that evokes fear and laughter in equal measure.

Horror and thriller are not mutually exclusive. There is often overlap between the two. “Hedestary,” “Psychos” and “Us” are certainly more psychologically driven than films like “A Nightmare on Elm Street” and “Halloween.” But all these films have moments of gore and violence as well as character-driven plot. The distinction between the thriller genre and horror is not heavily researched.

The two are similar enough that they are almost indistinguishable. They are like siblings; different, but when you look closer, you notice that they have the same nose, the same jawline, the same laugh.

At the end of the day, both genres instill dread and unease into an audience. “I think horror is definitely one of the more visceral genres in terms of doing that,” Pearce said. “To be sat at a festival and hear an audience around you react to something or tense up is so satisfying — to know, ‘Oh, I did that,’ Pearce said. “So, if you can make people scared or make people jump, that’s really cool.”

But there is a necessity factor when considering the enjoyment of fear: you need to be scared in a safe environment. You would not really want to answer the phone to find out someone is staking you and threatening to kill you. That would be terrifying, and not in a good way. But when it happens to Drew Barrymore in “Scream,” it is iconic and thrilling.

Croker said horror is appealing because it puts the viewer in the present moment. Your mind shuts off and you are just left with your basic senses.

“I think that’s what everyone’s looking for, and that’s what horror movies kind of do,” Crocker said. “There is also a relatability in horror that makes it appealing. Pearse said there is almost a cathartic satisfaction to watching horror. ‘This is happening to other people, and you get scared, but ultimately you know you’re safe,’ Pearce said.

The tension that comes from fear is only enjoyable because of the release that follows it. You can enjoy watching someone in a movie stare down a long, dark hallway and come face to face with a haunting shadow. You feel your heart race and a chill shoot through your neck, but it’s all in good fun because you are not in any real danger. Horror movies let us live vicariously with fear.

Fear can be intoxicating, but only when deep down we know we are not in any real danger. Horror movies let us live vicariously through the situation where something really is watching us from the dark. It lets us live out the “what if” fantasy of being chased by possessed dolls, serial killers or ghosts. We feel exhilaration from the adrenaline rush we get from being scared because we do not need that adrenaline to run away or fight.

Sitting in a red crushed velvet seat, eyes glued to a 30-foot screen, we aren’t in any real danger. But that doesn’t stop our bodies from reacting like we are. In a darkened room with countless strangers, we sit together on the edge of our seats. We can just enjoy the ecstasy of fear with our popcorn, soda and a scary movie.
A Scandinavian in the Woods

A First-Generation American’s Tale on Growing Up on a Pacific Northwest Logging Camp

Written by ABI HOODENPYLE
Photos sourced from EVELYN NAIMO

Evelyn sat comfortably on the white fabric couch. Her cyan, ankle-length dress cascaded down the cushions like a waterfall. Her white hair was neatly pinned up in a twist, and her piercing blue eyes shimmered as she got the opportunity to share her story.

She raised her pale arms in a Y-shape, then lowered them down as she described how to hang up a dead rabbit. She moved her fingers directly down the imaginary rabbit, signifying a slice down the center.

Evelyn proceeded to explain how one must allow the rabbit’s blood to completely drain before starting the skinning process. Her soft voice did not waver as she explained once it was dry, she would reach into the rabbit’s shell of fur to remove the insides — leaving a perfectly hollow rabbit to skin.

Skinning a rabbit was one of the least shocking details about Evelyn’s life and what it was like growing up in Deep River, Washington.

Evelyn Naimo grew up in the early 1940s in the Deep River logging camp. This historical site was once a successful location in the Pacific Northwest logging industry.

“We moved from Vancouver, Washington, from the city where the ice cream truck and the milk truck came. The doughnuts and everything came by in a truck, out to the country, out to the woods,” Evelyn said.

Evelyn said the transition was not a big deal at her age. She moved in the first grade and was familiar with the luxuries of city life, but was excited to be in the woods.

The logging camp was 8 miles from the closest town. The long, gravel road wound through the dense forest leading to the quant town.

The transition from Vancouver to Deep River, Washington, was shocking. Moving from a large city with access to everything to an underdeveloped logging camp was muddling for a 6-year-old. Evelyn describes when they first moved into their house, the sight was tough to digest.

“There was a kitchen and a living room,” Evelyn said. “They were in the process of putting in two bedrooms and a bathroom and the walls were not insulated. In the winter it would be very very cold — ice on the windows, that kind of thing, but we had a wooden stove.”

Her fragmented house in Deep River was not unusual — the logging camp seemed to always be under construction. New houses were being built and renovations were constant; the logging camp was never complete.

Evelyn had an array of books, flyers and various documentation of the Deep River logging camp. The stacks were neatly aligned and she was eager to flip through the pages. Though she hasn’t lived there in over 60 years, she remains an active pseudo-historian of her childhood home.

Evelyn’s aquamarine eyes gazed down on a large, glassy coffee table book. It was titled, “When Logging Was Logging: 100 Years of Big Timber in Southwest Washington.”

She grabbed a bright pink sticky note that was intentionally slipped between the pages of the book.

“That’s my dad,” Evelyn said, pointing to a photo.

The image was a black-and-white shot of four men, including Evelyn’s father Eric Johnson. Covered in dirt and soot, the men stood tall with straight faces in the camera’s frame.

Eric was a Swedish immigrant. He left Sweden in 1929 when he was 27 years old to follow his siblings to the Pacific Northwest. He is the middle child of six.

Eric was a blacksmith at the camp — a vital role in the accumulation and transportation of lumber.
It was imperative for feeding the family and became Ila’s focus when not working in the cookhouse.

“She wasn’t much of a flower person,” Evelyn said. “She was the kind of person who grew it and ate it.”

Preparing their own meat was also standard practice in the Johnson home. Besides spinning chickens, her family raised chickens. The eggs were bountiful and they could be prepared at a moment’s notice. Outside of food self-sufficiency, Evelyn described camp life as an independent lifestyle.

“You were on your own,” Evelyn said. “While the adults were out working on the camp, the kids in the area were left to their own devices to entertain themselves.”

There were only 11 kids growing up together at Deep River. Evelyn considers herself lucky to have had kids her own age. There was a lot for a young kid to do in the woods. Without parental supervision, Evelyn became close to a girl her age named Hilda Mae, but everyone called her “Bunny.”

Evelyn Naimo stands outside childhood home in Deep River, Wash., 1952. Posed in her spring clothes, Evelyn looks out to her property, Deep River.

His top-notch work was praised in the Deep River community. As a talented blacksmith, his repairing skills were mentioned as saving the community an abundance of money during frugal times.

Evelyn closed the book and carefully placed it back in the stack on the coffee table. She reclined on the couch and adjusted her dress as she explained more of her life in the camp.

With her parents working hard to keep the camp running most of the day, Evelyn shared that they didn’t have the opportunity to go grocery shopping. The trip was too long for a quick run after a hard day’s work. Instead, the Johnson family became self-sustainable.

Evelyn described a 15 feet by 15 feet garden her mother, Ila, tended to. She recalls beans, peas, carrots, corn, radishes and more all being grown with the intention to eat or pickle. Ila’s garden was not to be touched by Evelyn or her sister Diana.

One of Evelyn’s cherished memories with Bunny is their attempt to make their own witches’ brew out of local plants.

“We’d go looking at the trees, bushes, picking huckleberries,” Evelyn said. “We were 10 and we’d pick the salmon berries and the leaves and wild cucumbers to make our witches’ brew.”

Her imagination never dwindled in Deep River. While the strenuous chores became too much, Evelyn and Bunny would dream of life in a city. They would pretend to be secretaries and bookkeepers to encapsulate their image of what a working woman looks like. Their make-believe temporarily subsided their frustrations of living in the woods.

With little parental control, kids were left to their own devices. Where Evelyn stuck around playing with Bunny, others ventured into the wilderness. With the freedom of seclusion, there also came adversity.

“It was really sad,” Evelyn said, looking toward the white carpeting. “Four boys all went swimming when they weren’t supposed to. They had apparently just eaten or something, and Butchie got cramps. They tried to save him, but couldn’t. He ended up drowning.”

This tragedy swept across the camp. The Deep River ran through the town, and many folks living in the area were comfortable with it. The following year, another tragedy struck the same group of young boys.

“One of them had appendicitis and was in the hospital,” Evelyn said. “He was in the hospital, but someone had left the window open. He got pneumonia and he died.”

The sequence of terrible events occurring with this group of kids lead some of them to be housebound. Evelyn shifted on the couch as she described the summer after.

“The two boys that were left all stayed in the house all day long,” Evelyn said. “They did not go anywhere.”

Despite the dangers that accompany life in the woods, Evelyn remained adventurous — with caution in the back of her mind. She explains that you can’t be caught up with sadness, but rather be wary of your surroundings.

Evelyn took a deep breath, and then proceeded to share the positive side of life again.

She sat up straight on the white couch, like a cherub resting on a cloud, as she described her most cherished memory of Deep River.

Evelyn’s favorite part of growing up in the woods was always spring. There was something magical after a cold, dark winter seeing the first break of sun through the trees. This was a reassuring sign that the warmth of summer was not far behind.

Evelyn described that behind Bunny’s grandfather’s house was a large grassy area. The area spanned around 75 feet until it reached the river.

She shared that in the spring, the grass would disappear. The once rolling hills transformed into a bright yellow carpet. Daffodils appeared out of nowhere, eclipsing the green grass to display that spring was here. Her eyes became teary as she shared the daffodil image. Evelyn has not experienced something quite as beautiful as this since.

The resurgence of daffodils was a gentle reminder of the good life. Winter was cold and dreary in the camp. But just as the darkness seemed too much to bear, the sun would peak through the trees. Like clockwork, the daffodils emerged to bring a breath of fresh air.

Gloom will always be a part of life, but for Evelyn, seeing flowers slowly uncover themselves in the new season meant that joy was still out there. Though it may lay dormant, life will always have spring — sometimes, you just need to wait until the first sun.

Evelyn Naimo stands with her pose as Fair Queen in childhood home in Deep River, Wash., 1957. Evelyn won the title of Fair Queen and took the title of Fair Queen in childhood home in Deep River.
A Modern Medusa
An artist who creates a connection with another survivor and finds joy in their combined strength
Story by NOAH HARPER

Aiden Smith’s north Seattle studio apartment feels more like an art studio that happens to have a bed. In the center of the living room kitchen is an easel with the newest portrait under way.

In the corner sits a cart with numerous brushes and acrylic paints of every color. It is reminiscent of an art classroom where the tools for creativity are ready to be used at a moment’s notice. Surrounding the painting space on every wall except the sink are paintings of giant naked women.

The canvases are towering in comparison to the smaller, hand-drawn pictures on the wall. “Orange Lady” hangs high on Aiden’s wall across from the window facing the city, allowing passersby to look up and catch a glimpse as they walk up the sidewalk.

“Orange Lady” is a vibrant piece, with its orange hues leaping off the canvas. The orange is complemented by its natural shadowing, invoking a very human feel. While only below the neck is visible, her hair pops into the frame and splinters off to fill the complementary white negative space. When you enter the room, it’s hard not to appreciate the beauty in “Orange Lady” and get sucked into the environment of an artist.

Aiden has been painting for most of her life, starting when she was taught by her grandmother at just 5 years old.

“My first memory painting, I was visiting my grandmother in Albuquerque,” Aiden said. “She took me to a painting class that she was doing on base.”

The smell of watercolor, a mix of musty and earthy, filled the room, recounts Aiden. As she entered the women’s art class, Aiden was instructed to paint whatever she wanted.

“I painted this face with sunflowers in it and all the old ladies were so excited,” Aiden said. “That’s what makes me happy, is to paint flowers.”

Flowers and faces make their return appearance in Aiden’s Blue People portrait series. She started the series to find more joy in painting again.

“I’m sitting there staring at this canvas thinking, just do something. And I thought, ‘Alright, you know what? I’ve never been mad about painting flowers,’” Aiden said. “I don’t feed the part of myself that needs joy enough. That series was me stepping back and saying, ‘OK, we’re just going to enjoy living life for a second.’”

Joy and painting have an interesting relationship when it comes to Aiden’s art process.

“Most of my paintings don’t start out joyful. They usually start with me really upset about something where I’m thinking, ‘OK, all I can do right now is paint.’ And then they always transform into something that I’m proud of,” Aiden said. “But it’s not a happy process.”

Often Aiden’s art comes from a place of necessity and acts almost like therapy for her, creating a very surreal experience.

“If I don’t paint, I’ll die.”

“It’s a very real feeling like, if I don’t get this out, right, if I don’t put this somewhere, then I have to deal with it.”

This was the case for the Giant Naked Ladies series, a series that Aiden started during the peak of quarantine in May 2020. “Orange Lady” is part of the Giant Naked Ladies series, all of which are finger painted. As Aiden began painting in May of 2020, a deeper story began to unfold across the portraits.

First came “Red Lady.” Aiden describes her as “bright and bold.” Next is Prudence, also known as “Blue Lady,” depicted as dark and deep. Following Prudence is Medusa, or “Green Lady” followed by “Pink Lady” and finally “Orange Lady.” It was not until later that Aiden was able to perceive and unpack the deeper meanings behind the portraits.

“The paintings tell the story of how I dealt with grief and how I dealt with coming out of sexual assault, acknowledging that this is something that has happened to me a few times and will probably happen again,” Aiden said.

Each of Aiden’s paintings came to represent a different aspect of her grief process.

“[“Red Lady”] was saying, ‘Fuck you, I’m going to do this. I’m going to finger paint giant naked ladies,’” Aiden said. “The blue lady was realizing just how in pain I was. The green lady was anger. I was so angry.”

THE MEDUSA
Paint-dipped fingers dance across the blank canvas, fueled by rage. As time passes, the shape of a woman begins to appear. Coiled and bound from the elbow down, her green, almost scaly skin pops from the white background. She is no ordinary green lady, she is Medusa.
The painting became a bond between not only two friends, but two survivors.

“It made me feel good about myself and like, ‘Yeah, I can actually go and do this and I’m totally fine. And I will be able to work through all my trauma,’” Sammie said. “It really was a way for me to heal and I didn’t even do the painting.”

Like the shields of warriors from the past, Medusa is a sign of strength and protection that shines on Sammie’s wall.

The change from Medusa being cursed to being gifted great power is not entirely new. Warriors’ shields were decorated with the gorgon’s head as a sign of power and protection, according to The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Movements like “The Medusa Movement” from Colgate University use the imagery of Medusa with their mission of bringing justice to victims and to make places like college campuses safer.

The underlying themes of empowerment and survival associated with Medusa radiate from Aiden’s painting of the Gorgon and have found their way to Sammie Smith. “She was the first person to buy a giant naked lady. She bought this painting that I was never expecting to sell,” Aiden said.

Sammie and Aiden are no strangers to each other. Starting their friendship through horseback riding as children, the pair have been friends for a long time. Sammie has also always been a fan of Aiden’s art, having bought the first painting Aiden ever listed for sale. The Medusa, however, is different.

“That painting really spoke to me,” Sammie said. “[Aiden] explained the painted ladies and how they were a way for her to reconnect with her sexual side after a sexual assault … I had my own struggles as well with sexual abuse.”

Aiden Smith chilling on her yellow comfy chairs in her Seattle, WA, apartment Friday Nov. 12. These chairs are one of the few pieces of furniture in Aiden’s apartment turned art studio, and they are her favorite. Photo by Noah Harper.
We wake up early and get ready to leave my grandma’s house. The sky is blue, the sun is out and the weather is perfect as always — not too cold and not too hot.

On the way to the airport, we pass a couple hills covered with colorful ranchos, informal houses that look like they are stacked on top of each other. A couple of minutes later, we reach the coast and the Caribbean Sea peeks in the distance. It would be nice if we were going to the beach, I think, but that wasn’t the case this time.

After 30 minutes on the road, my mom, my sister and I arrive at the Simón Bolívar International Airport, the main gate to the beautiful but troubled Venezuela. The date is Nov. 17, 2016, my last day in my home country.

We carried three suitcases, only one for each of us. Inside was mostly clothes. My mom asked us not to bring sentimental objects that might raise the suspicion that we were using our tourist visas to seek asylum. She told us not to cry for the same reason.

Some of our family and closest friends came with us to say goodbye. As we embraced each other last time in front of our gate, they couldn’t help but break my mom’s rule.

“Everyone was crying and I didn’t even feel like crying. I had cried enough,” my mom said as she remembered that day with a lump in her throat.

To be honest, I can’t really remember how I felt at that moment. I guess I was numb. All I knew is that a couple of hours later we landed at the JFK Airport. We were officially immigrants. My abuelo, who had been living in Queens for many years, was there to receive us. We spent a couple of weeks with him, but New York was not our final destination.

In January 2017, we hopped on a plane to meet my dad in Bellingham, Washington, a place I couldn’t even locate on a map. He chose Bellingham as our new home and had been making the arrangements for us to start our new life. He liked how calm the city was, and thought it would make our transition easier. To me, though, Bellingham felt too calm and too gloomy. I slowly started to miss the sun, my people and our chaos.

My head was never really quiet despite the silence. I couldn’t stop thinking of what I was missing. I had no friends, no job and no plans to continue studying. I only had my family, and even so, I felt like we were not the same. We didn’t have our spark anymore.

My mom started to have her own worries too. She and my dad were dealing with other types of challenges. For me, it was the drastic cultural and social change. For my parents, it was the English language. My dad knew enough to hold a basic conversation, but my mom knew almost nothing.

“In the beginning, there were no words,” my dad said. “It was very difficult for me because I didn’t understand anything,” my mom said. “There were things I couldn’t do, like help my younger daughter with her homework.” But she didn’t have time to focus on what she couldn’t do, she had to focus on what needed to be done. She was determined to succeed for us.

With time, everyone in my family seemed to have accepted that Bellingham was our new home. For my mom, there is not a key ingredient to magically become a successful immigrant. She says it is a process that’s unique for each person, but being flexible and resilient always helps.

“You have to adapt and know your home is not where you come from, it is where you are at the moment. You have to make that place yours,” my mom said.

Finding people you can connect and share your culture with is also important.

“It’s been helpful to have met good people throughout these years who have become friends,” my mom said.

Through the process, my mom constantly encouraged me to open up and move forward.

“I needed you to understand that you couldn’t miss your friends and your country forever,” she told me as we remembered the many difficult conversations we had. “Even if you decided to return, you were not going to find the same people and the country was no longer the same.”

I decided to sign up for clubs, I took a new job and forced myself to become more social. It took me a while to let people in, but my mindset started to switch. I understood I didn’t need to change who I was. I just needed to be with myself, with my accent, my Venezuelaness and all.

“You suddenly had all the positivism that we all need to face adversity,” my mom said, a smile on her face.

As I write this, it’s October 2021, almost exactly five years since we moved to the U.S.

There are some things we cannot change. We are still far from many of our loved ones and our home country is still a mess.

There are also some things we’ve earned and gained. We have new loved ones, I will be graduating soon and my mom’s English is getting better every day.

We’re a little different, but the spark is still there. We might have left Venezuela, but Venezuela never left us.

The Spark is Still There

The story of my Venezuelan immigrant family living in Bellingham.

Written by ELISA ESPINOZA

Photos by SAWYER MOSS

“Everyday encouragement was both of you,” Mom said, referring to my sister and I. “I tried to see the positive in everything and focused on knowing that being here would allow me to help our family that was still in Venezuela.”

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But adapting to a new reality was a little harder for me than it was for her. I started studying and gained a little sense of security and confidence, yet I still couldn’t connect with anyone. I had been isolated for so long that I had convinced myself I had nothing in common with people in Bellingham.

My mind and my heart were closed. I knew something had to change.

“Everything is getting better every day.”
Love is a Many-Splendored Thing

A celebration of the diverse spectrum of love

Written by SADIE FICK

Sierra Andersen and Talia Demich are lifelong partners, best friends, soulmates.

“It’s as if God had one little glob of human cells and accidentally cut it into two,” Talia said.

The pair met at 16, and now they are spending their 20s traveling in a van, never staying anywhere past a few months. The two write poetry together, go to raves and longboard for miles on end.

“I absolutely love longboarding,” Sierra said. “It’s exhilarating. I get to practice pacing myself and taking time to feel the wind go through every crevice of my body. It stimulates my brain at the perfect pace.”

Love is a core part of the human experience: love for a romantic partner, a child’s love for a parent, self-love, love of a beautiful sunrise. For millennia, humans have labeled different types of love and valued some types over others. Mainstream American culture prioritizes romantic and sexual love.

From ancient history to modern times, people have pushed back against mainstream narratives and found joy and meaning in every kind of love. Like everything else about gender and sexuality, love is on a spectrum.

WESTERN PHILOSOPHY OF LOVE

Type “Greek types of love” into a search engine and hundreds of articles come up, listing up to nine different types. However, the ancient Greeks only really split love into two: eros and philia.

“[Eros] is sexy,” said Melissa Funke, an assistant professor of classics at the University of Winnipeg who has auburn curls and a love for teaching about love. “It’s the emotion you feel when you want to be with someone.”

Conversely, philia is about mutual protection and care. “You can have philia between city-states … but it’s also the kind of feeling you have between a parent and a child, or friend to friend,” Melissa said.

Other words from those lists came from Christianity. “That doesn’t mean they’re not historical, and that doesn’t mean they’re not Greek,” Melissa said, but words like storge, familial love or loyalty, and agape, selfless love, were uncommon before the New Testament was written in Greek.

Agape is the most important, aspirational form of love in Christian philosophy, according to the collected essay in Bernard V. Brady’s book “Christian Love.”

In contrast, more secular thinkers like the notorious Sigmund Freud said sexual desire was the primary form of love.

For him, all love, including love between parents and children and love of objects and abstract entities, was about sexual pleasure and reproduction, wrote Gerasimos Santas in his book “Plato and Freud: Two Theories of Love.”

Modern psychology has a more complex model of love. Love is about reproduction, but also belonging and helping each other survive, according to the book “Social Psychology and Human Nature” by Roy Baumeister and Brad Bushman.

Still, romantic-sexual love is often thought to be what determines who a person loves most and who they will live their lives with.

LOVE AND ATTRACTION

However, not everyone experiences romantic and sexual attraction.

In the early 2000s, the asexual and aromantic community, also known as the a-spec community, created a framework to talk about their experiences with love and attraction more accurately.

Currently, this framework names roughly five basic types of attraction: platonic, romantic, sexual, aesthetic and sensual. Other types, like queerplatonic and alterous attraction, are sometimes included.
"The a-spec community is very good about minute labels because we understand how complicated attraction is. To make ourselves understand it better and make things feel better, we label it," said Kayla Kaszycyka, one half of the duo behind the podcast "Sounds Fake But Okay."

College friends Kayla Kaszycyka and Sarah Costello started the podcast to discuss the questions Sarah texted Kayla about things she didn’t understand as an asexual and aromantic person, like why people like dick pics. "Sounds Fake But Okay" now has over 200 episodes and discusses love, relationships, and sexuality from an a-spec point of view.

Some people think the spectrum of attraction is too complicated, but Sarah said people can use it if it helps them and leave it alone if it doesn’t. Sarah works as an assistant in Hollywood with dreams to go into TV writing.

Kayla started identifying as demisexual during the early days of the podcast. "Questioning really sucks," said Kayla, who has a partner, two cats named Gnocchi and Bille, and likes Dungeons and Dragons.

"For some people, the way out of that is knowing exactly what you are and finding really specific labels. For other people, it’s just leaving it super vague.”

"Everyone could use these words and these terms if they wanted," Sarah said. "The reason that they’re so prevalent in our community is because we’re forced to think about these things.

Having a model separating types of attraction is important for many, but it’s not necessarily the same thing as love.

“I wouldn’t say [attraction] equals fulfillment in the way that love does," said Nik Hampshire, a straight, aromantic, cisgender man, who has a series on YouTube called “Being Aromantic (while not asexual).”

Nik described himself as a 35-year-old Black kid and a creative type. It shows in his artfully wild curls and the tattoos decorating most of his body, including a Mjolnir tattoo on his right hand. To him, love is about connection.

"Attraction is like ‘Oh, there’s something I would like to have, or like to connect with,'” Nik said. "Once that connection has been established, it could be love depending on... how fulfilling you find that experience, connection, person.”

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Lessons from Coyote

Learning to love myself through meditation

Written by TYLER BROWN

Meditation was never something that I took seriously; it was always something that was more of a joke than it was a practice. But one day, during the end of my senior year of high school, I joined a group of students who were led by a friend of mine into guided meditation, and it gave me a calmness within the storms of my soul.

With meditation, I learned to love myself.

Something strange happened between the calming flute music and the feeling of being surrounded by a crowd of people that made me feel connected to everyone and everything all at once. I found my way into a mental state that I didn’t know existed.

Because I have ADHD, it can be challenging for me to maintain focus on something for very long. I often distract myself with some other means of stimulation, but this time was different.

My friend who led the class, Lindsey, starts off by having us all close our eyes and calm ourselves, really allowing ourselves to become open to the events about to transpire in our minds.

She describes centering yourself as if you are extending energy, like roots down into the earth, then extending energy upwards to the zenith in the sky. In my mind, I see gold streams of light pouring out of me in opposing directions.

She tells us to envision a tree with a large hole in it, a hole so deep and so big you might fall into it.

Then she tells us to do just that.

Falling through the darkness in my mind, I find myself tumbling like Alice down the rabbit hole, falling deeper and deeper into the absence of light.

Through my mind’s eye, I find a lush, green forest on a warm autumn day. The air smells fresh, as if it had just rained.

I hear Lindsey’s voice telling us — telling me — that this is what our mind tells us is our place of comfort, the place we envision ourselves most at peace with. How fitting that I should picture a rainforest in the Pacific Northwest.

Lindsey speaks again, telling us to turn and find an animal that is there only for us, a spirit guide.

A coyote jaunts towards me from around a tree. It has a mischievous look in its eye, and my mind tells me it is smirking. The coyote leans towards me as if it wants to be touched but pulls away. It then playfully circles back to me.

What Lindsey said next will live in my mind forever.

“This animal is here for a reason,” she says. “It has a message for you. Hear its message now.”

The coyote and I make eye contact and I hear a voice in my mind.

“Love yourself.”

I am overwhelmed with emotion, and my awareness of presence in space and time is a forgotten dream.

After the meditation, I wait patiently for the rest of the group to disperse and ask Lindsey their questions so I may ask mine as well. She is sitting on a table at the front of the classroom with legs crossed and wondrous, inviting eyes. I feel as though I were speaking to a guru.

My left hand sits on my chest as I ask her, “What does the spirit animal mean? Does it have a purpose?”

She explains to me its purpose is to tell us exactly what we need to hear.

I do not believe in the supernatural whatsoever. I believe there is a logical and scientific explanation for everything.

I do not believe in the magical healing properties of crystals, nor do I believe that our birth signs dictate any degree of destiny in our lives.

But in that moment, as I was coming out of guided meditation, I remember feeling a sense of calm I didn’t know I could have.

After some extensive research, I found that the coyote is best represented in spiritual books as a trickster or joker and that the god Coyote is a popularly-shared legend in many indigenous tribes across North America, according to the Journal of American Folklore.

Coyote is a paradoxical entity who finds pleasure in tricks and mischief but is also known for being the shaper of the world. He is responsible for the deep magic of life and creation itself.

The coyote totem is meant to represent finding wisdom in every corner of life. It represents the truth behind chaos and illusion. He often upsets others for revealing absolute truths behind the masks we all wear.

Coyote is a trickster indeed, but one who does not have malicious intent nor a desire to harm. Instead, he finds the world to be too serious a place, laughing in the face of life.

Taking this journey at the end of my high school years was cathartic for me in many ways. I would turn 18 just a month later and graduate the month after that. I was on my way to discovering adulthood and finding out all of the complications that come along with it.

I like to think that the journey I took was one that anyone can take. After all, the mind provides for us in ways that we may not even realize.

Allowing myself to open up to something new gave me a kind of inner peace. Perhaps the deepest recesses of my mind kept it locked away, simply waiting to find a door to walk through.

Today I remember the message the coyote had for me every day and remember that I deserve love. I deserve to love myself. Our minds, hearts and bodies can work in synchronicity, like cogs in a machine, moving us forward one step at a time.

Thinking of that meditation session always brings a smirk to my face, not unlike the expression of the coyote peeking out from behind the tree. It will be one memory I’m certain I won’t soon forget.
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The pain and pleasure of eating alone
Written by TAYLER ROBERTSON

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Risking a comfortable life in search of the unknown
Written by JORDAN OLSON

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