

This

Zine

Isn't

Me.

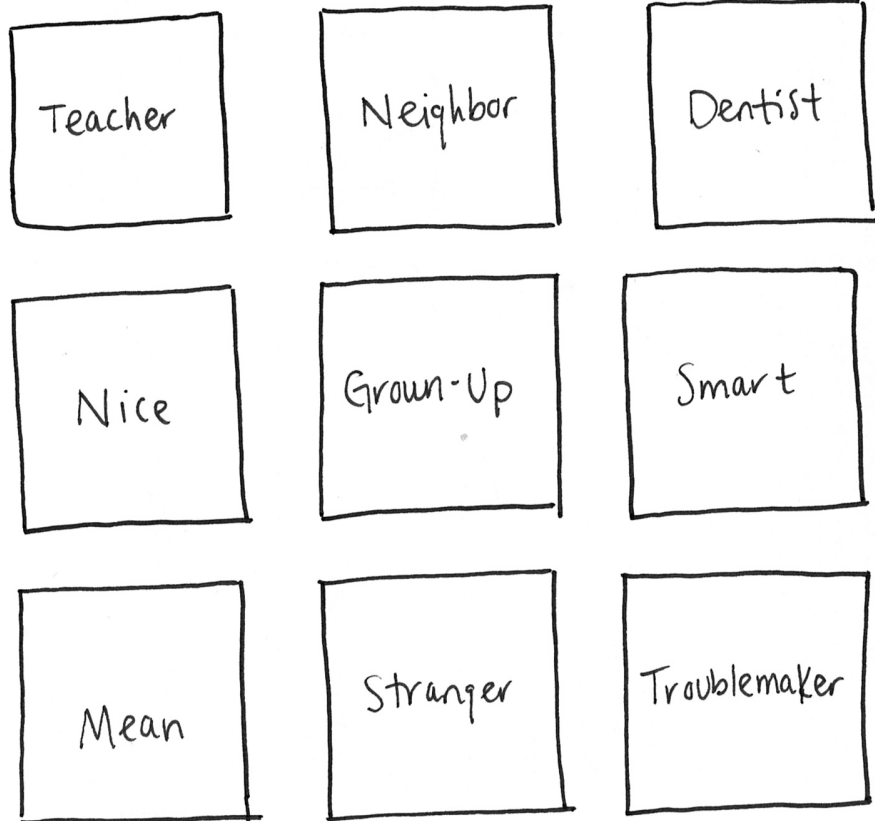
(It's a zine.)

Rebecca Roots

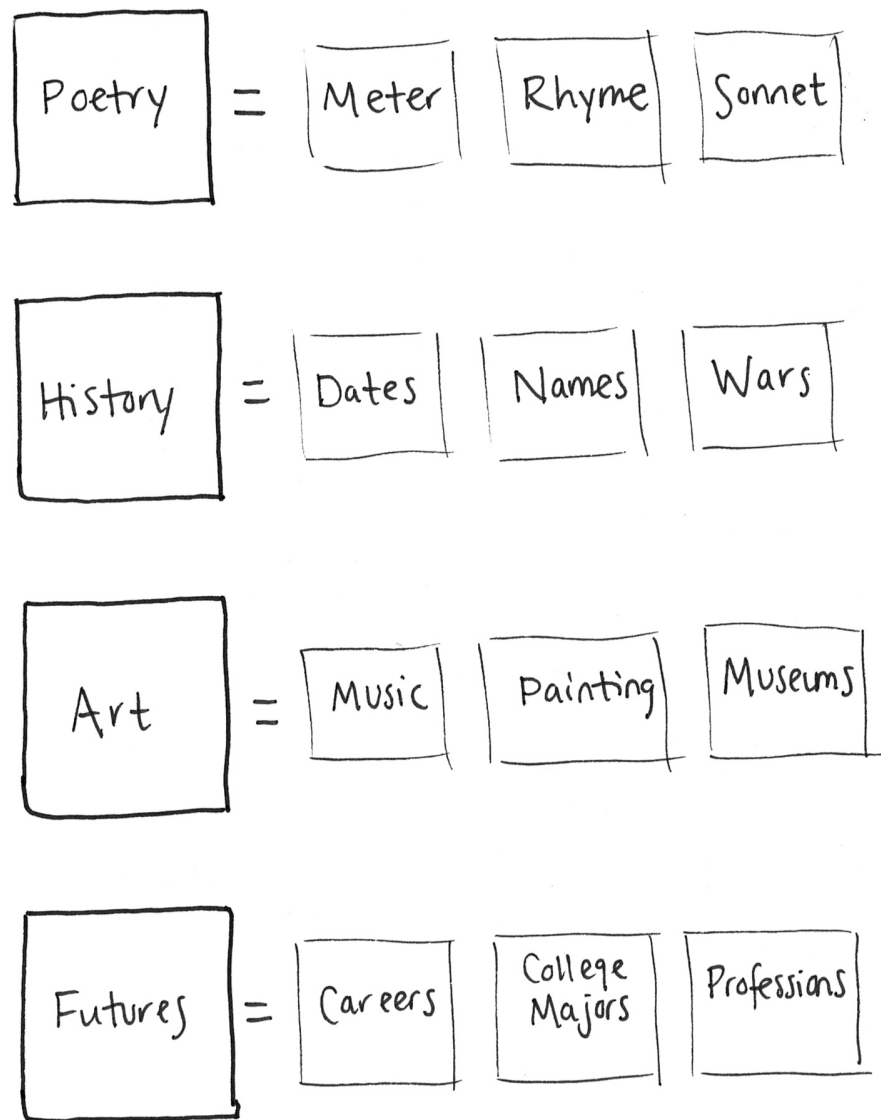
for Cathleen ♥

When I was a child,  
everything was so much  
boxier.

People had clear identities:



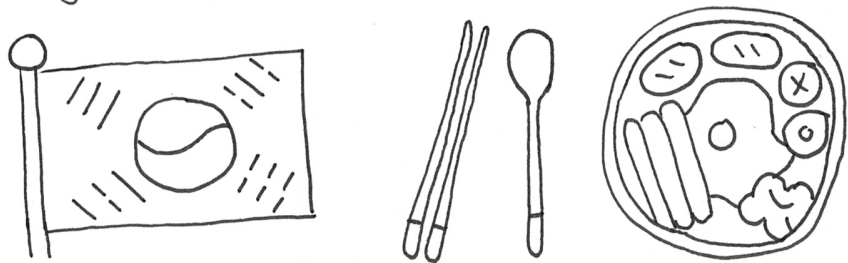
School maintained this boxy  
world as I continued to age:



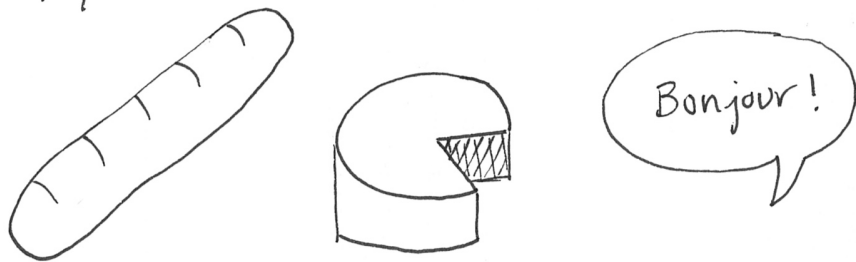
After high school I went to a 4-yr. university, studied abroad in Madrid my junior year, and returned there to teach English after graduating.\*

And so it went, my expat life.

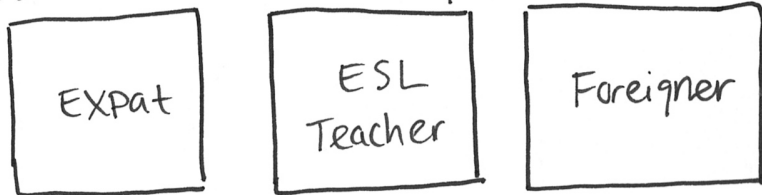
Two years later I taught English in South Korea.



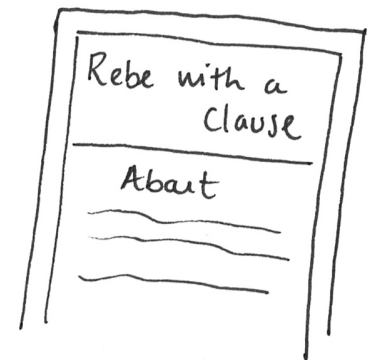
A year after that, I moved to France.



I got cozier with the labels that continued to define my life.

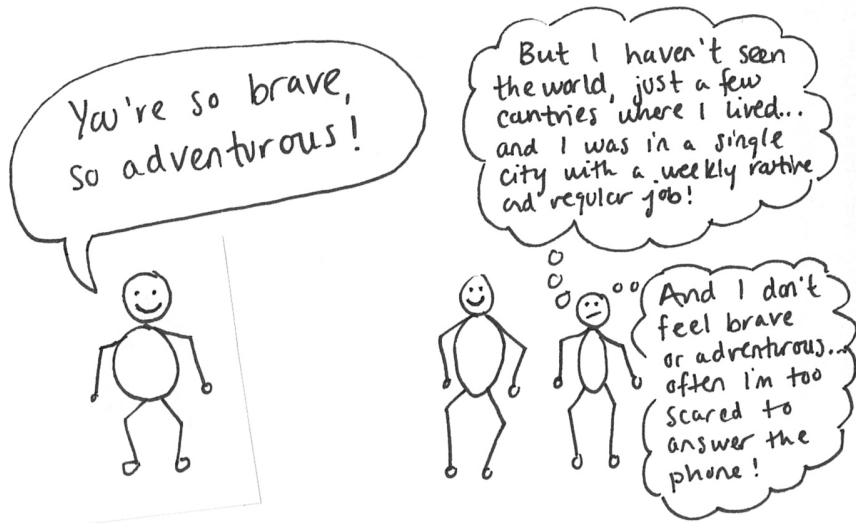


I always included my time abroad on the "About Me" pages of my blogs, as the every-other-year-abroad became my norm for eight years.



\*Note: It's exactly these brief, pack-eight-years-into-four-sentences summaries that I normally try to avoid using. The lack of detail makes it easy to forget about the depth and complex layers present during that time... but we'll get to that soon enough. In this case, I don't need to retell the ins-and-outs of eight years to show how my expat identity formed.

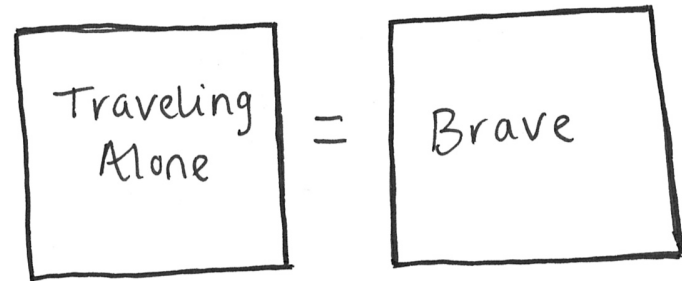
Around the second time I moved abroad, my family started to label me "the world traveler."



It made me feel uncomfortable, but I knew how they saw me had to do with how they saw themselves.

What required bravery for me wasn't what required bravery for them.

Yet often, I was sorted like this:



And then in 2016 while living in Montpellier, after two and a half years working online, I finally took notice of the stress spot on my left shoulder, which had been flaring up for months.



I noticed my lack of excitement when I woke up.

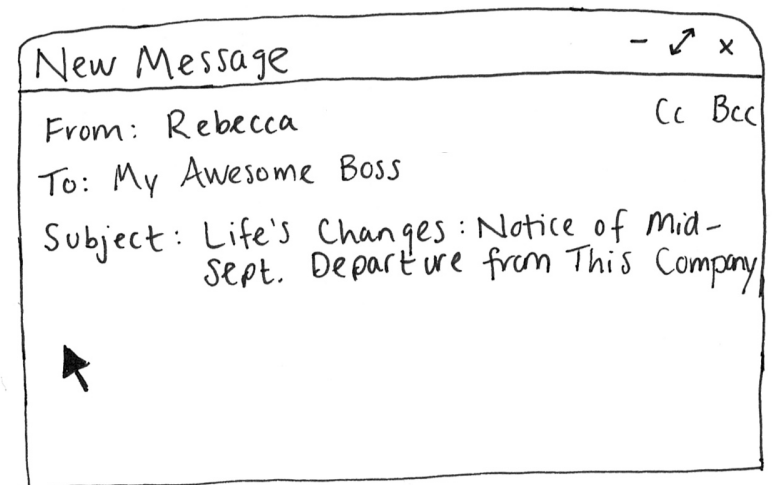
I noticed how much time I spent in front of that screen, on the clock.

I noticed that I wanted to live in a world without pop-ups and click-bait titles, but at my job I helped create them.

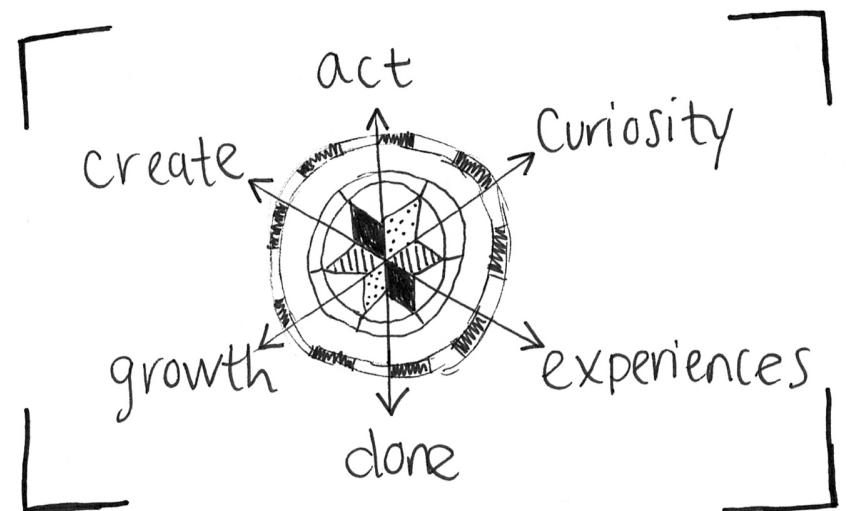
I noticed that my days lacked face-to-face interaction, which increased my worry/stress while working, as emails were never accompanied by a genuine smile, warm tone, or an understanding grin.

I noticed the dull emptiness that had clouded my days.

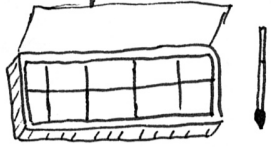
I gave notice at my job.



To help guide this unstructured Personal Sabbatical, I made a personal compass.



I bought a travel set of watercolors,



spent the holidays in Wisconsin, returned

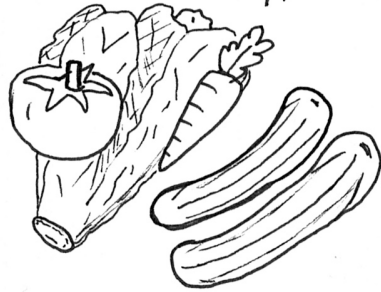
to Europe and painted around Italy,

returned to my parents' home and grew my

first garden, and

got introduced to

the zero-waste world.



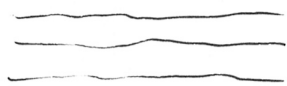
(Plus nearly a year's worth of moments, which again, there's not room for here!)

I felt notably Different from the person who had made my blogs in my early 20s.

That fall, I made a new website and blog — a new online space to match the me I had become.

Rebecca

About Blog Bit-by-Bit Projects



This time, I described myself with my values and "I believe..." statements.

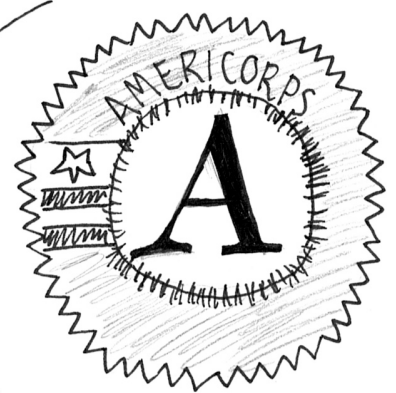
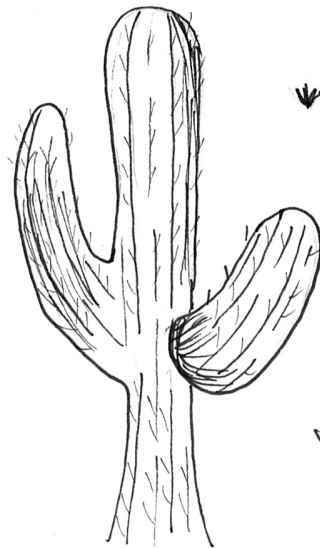
Rebecca

Values

- Growth mindset
- Mindfulness
- Creativity
- Gratitude
- Kindness

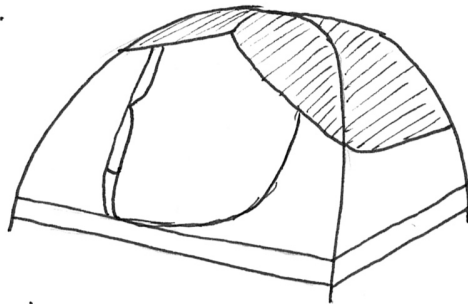
• • • •

Soon after, I moved to Arizona for six months of conservation work via Ameri Corps.

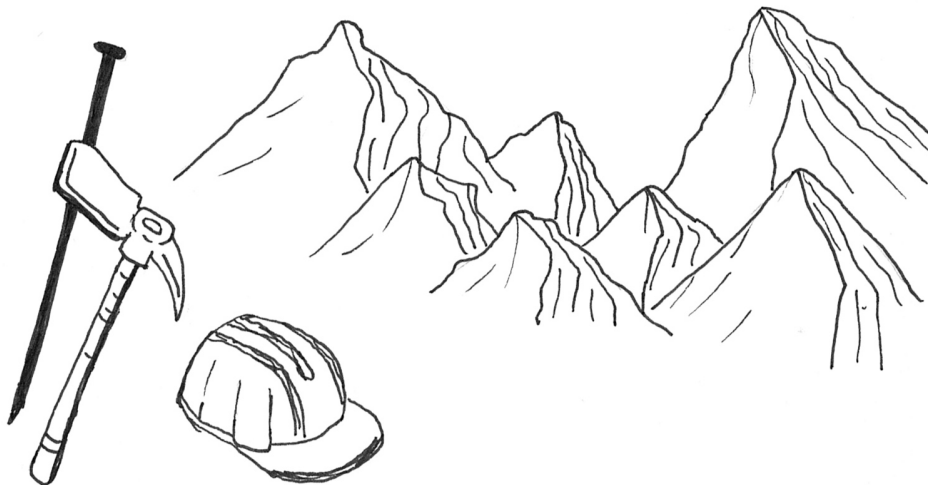


I absolutely loved it!

Hiking to work, using my body,  
seeing tangibly what work I'd completed  
each day, playing + laughing, pooping  
outside, sleeping  
in a tent —  
it nourished  
my insides  
in a way  
I never knew  
I'd been missing.



So I did it for another 6 months,  
this time with a corps based out  
of Colorado.



It was throughout this time that  
I began to develop a connection  
with the Earth.



It's hard to put  
into words — and that's sort of the  
point. I saw more clearly than ever  
the grand limitations of words/language,  
the familiar tools I had relied on  
for so long.

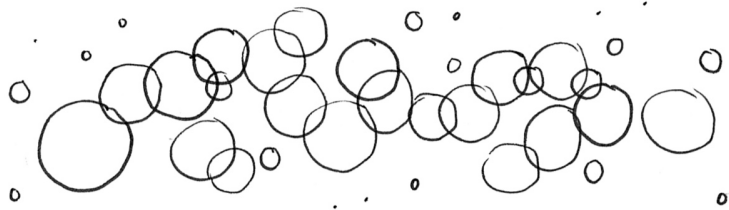
"... language is an  
arbitrary system of sounds,  
not The Truth."

— Martha Beck

I was experiencing and feeling things  
that I hadn't before — and which I  
couldn't capture on a page.

Martha Beck calls it "Oneness"  
and "Wordlessness" in her book  
Finding Your Way in a Wild New  
World, and I understood what she  
meant.

No wonder humans make art and write poetry, I thought. It's to express this — this energy and these emotions I can't put into words!



It's not merely Meter and Syllables and Rhyme, but of course!

"Self-expression" and "art" gained an entirely new dimension in my mind: the humanity that connects us all.

And as I continued to become many different people, what my thoughts returned to again and again during that summer living out of a tent in Colorado was **IDENTITY**.

Self-identity.

As in, who am I?

. . . .

Labels are laughably incomplete.

Consider these two people:

- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Unemployed</li><li>- Meditator</li><li>- Incense-burner</li><li>- Hiker</li><li>- Spiritual seeker</li></ul> |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Trilingual</li><li>- Writer</li><li>- Editor</li><li>- College-educated</li><li>- Atheist</li></ul> |
|--|--|---|

Who are you picturing for each?

They're both "me," of course.

But what all is packed into "M-E"?  
Into "I"?




There are...

- \* Things a past-me said 
- \* Things a past-me did 
- \* Things a past-me thought 
- \* Things a past-me felt 
- \* Things a past-me wrote 
- \* Things a past-me made 

Furthermore, my existence involves:


shoes. glasses. eyes. skin  
nails. teeth  
socks. height  
weight. lips  
colour. smile  
hair cut. clothing. accessories

PHYSICAL APPEARANCE



the food I eat.  
dna. cells and  
microorganisms  
living in/on me.  
movement.  
germs. fingers.  
30 trillion cells.

PHYSICAL BODY blood  
water  
weather + surroundings  
muscle. bones  
tissues. organs.  
spinal cord. nerves



## RELATIONSHIPS

romance. sex  
friends. family  
coworkers. neighbours. siblings. students. community. memories. their experience. death

parents. kids  
childhood friends  
lies. truth




worries. fears. joy. beliefs. grief  
gratitude.

thoughts. feelings. excitement. calm. peace. ideas. regret. pride. personal conflicts


INTERNAL

ego. energy. nervous. frustration. curiosities. dreams.



surroundings. weather. landscapes. tv. radio. advertising. language. chance encounters. what I see each day. with. present moment.

EXTERNAL culture. society. items purchased. books read. music. podcasts. blogs. private journals. who I interact with. animals.



Am I the presence who is aware of all these elements?

Every breath taken from April 24,  
1989 and onwards?

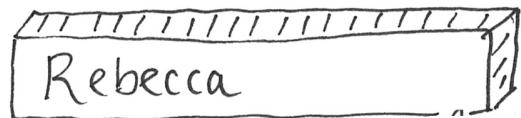
But I'm not 20-year-old me.

I'm not 29-year-old me.

I'm not the 30-year-old me who  
felt on top of the world when she  
finished thru-hiking the Arizona Trail  
six months ago.

Nor am I the me who was deep  
in a wave of grief last month.

Yet all of this (all of this!) is  
expressed in a single name?



Rebecca

Wtf! Yikes.

! ? # @

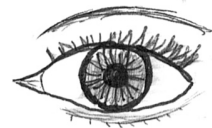
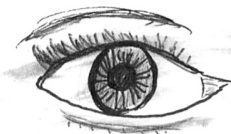
To really know me, you'd have  
to come along for 30 years of  
moments. Thirty YEARS.

Then again, I've gotten the  
insider-look for 30 years, and I'm  
not even sure how to describe  
myself.

It's too much to articulate in  
words—like drinking  
the sea in a single  
swallow.



Come spend 30 years  
in my shoes, in my  
evolving mind, in my  
growing body, looking at the world  
through my eyes, and maybe you'll  
have half of a clue.



If I can't name it, who do my friends think I am? What do they equate to this face, to this name?



And my family, what sort of past-me do they think I am? How far off are their projections?



So, identity most definitely does not fit in a box.



Nor a label.

Nor an "About me" page.

Nor an in-depth memoir.

....

“Defining yourself through thought is limiting yourself.”

- Eckhart Tolle  
Pg. 90 "A New Earth"

You see, if you hold onto that box — that cube of ice — hold it in your open hand and look at it with warmth, as you would a friend, it will melt.



It's nothing solid at all.

.....

I. Am. *Fluid!*

I am everchanging, not-a-box, not singular, not concrete, always "in progress": a human Being.

I'm alive, with new thoughts, experiences, and feelings each day — which change the very cells of my body.



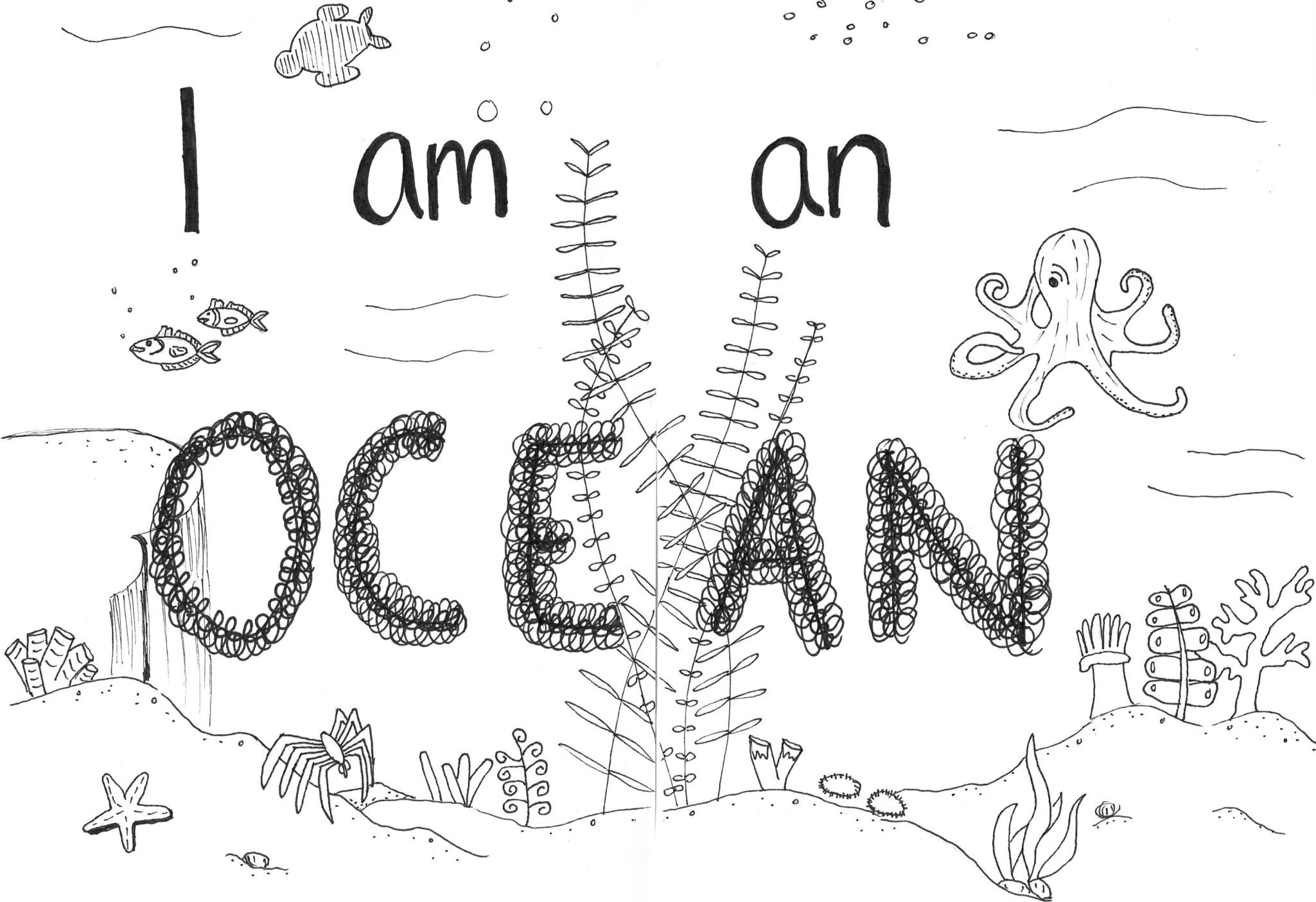
But the physical is just a part.

The consciousness is just a part.

The energy I give and feel is just a part.

I am an

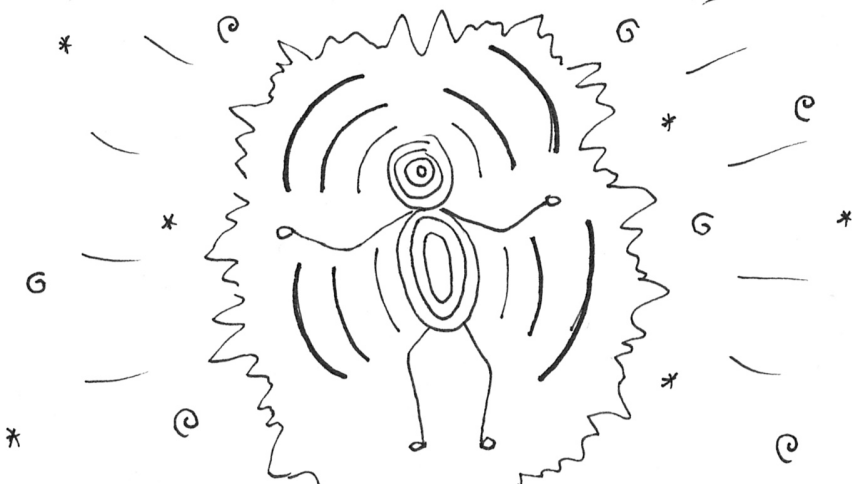
Ocean



Most people will only ever dip in their toes or admire the view from the shore, but I'm a full freakin' ocean.

If you can be absolutely comfortable with not knowing who you are, then what's left is who you are—the Being behind the human, a field of pure potentiality rather than something that is already defined.

—Eckhart Tolle  
Pg. 108 "A New Earth"



### Where I feel most boxed in:

Job Interviews

Resumes

Small Talk

About ME sections

on Screens

Family

Govt Forms

### Where I feel most fluid myself/human:

hiking

talking with close friends

playing with trail crew

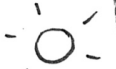
painting

dancing in the desert

singing (alone)

walking

with kids



All of this makes me, one individual.



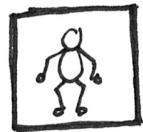
So that means any other person on this planet — a face in a catalogue, a bus passenger, the driver who just cut you off, the gardener who's always weeding, the YouTube star, a senator — behind each face is complexity as deep as the Ocean.

Pasts, childhood experiences, family "issues," societal pressures, physical health, curiosities, beliefs, emotions, mental health, relationships, growth, insecurities, pain, worries, regret, grief, pride, joy, love...



It's all in there, I guarantee.

But from the outside, it's easy to see a box.



The internet makes it easy to do this.


Headings, too. 

Labels. Quick interactions. Ego.

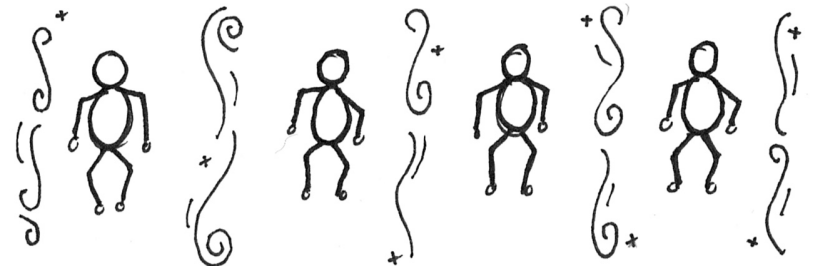
Our desire to belong, the limits of words.

Plus the fact that our minds are trying to keep us safe, and they categorize automatically.

...

But these boxes are  dangerous.

These cubes create feelings of "other," a separateness that isn't truly there.



When we see someone as a single word,

Canadian

Mom

Refugee

Pianist

Criminal

Millionaire

Gun  
Owner

Mormon

Pro  
Runner

We strip a person of their history, feelings, complexity—their **Ocean**—the humanity that connects us all.



This leaves out the beating heart, the breathing lungs, the changing emotions, the electric energy, the developing thoughts, the childhood they had no control over, the circumstances they were born into, the love they have and haven't received, the unique set of eyes through which they see the world.

When we know ourselves to be connected to all others, acting **COMPASSIONATELY** is simply the natural thing to do.

—Rachel Naomi Remen

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ATHEIST HOLDS HANDS AND  
PRAYS ALOUD WITH VENEZUELAN  
ROOMMATE'S MOTHER BECAUSE SHE'S  
TOO AFRAID TO SAY NO

---

21-YEAR-OLD TAKES SINGLE HIT  
FROM \$800 BUBBLER AND BECOMES  
SO STONED SHE CAN'T FEEL BODY

---

These headlines don't tell you anything about me - the presence writing these words today. They're hand-picked moments from a decade ago, stripped of any context.

Try it: What shocking headlines can you come up with from your own life?



See how wildly incomplete they are? That they can have nothing to do with your essence?

And if we can't pin down our identity using unlimited words, why would 10-15 tell us anything?

Sure, there's a place for headlines, but we need to be extremely careful about how we read/interpret them, and how often we see them.

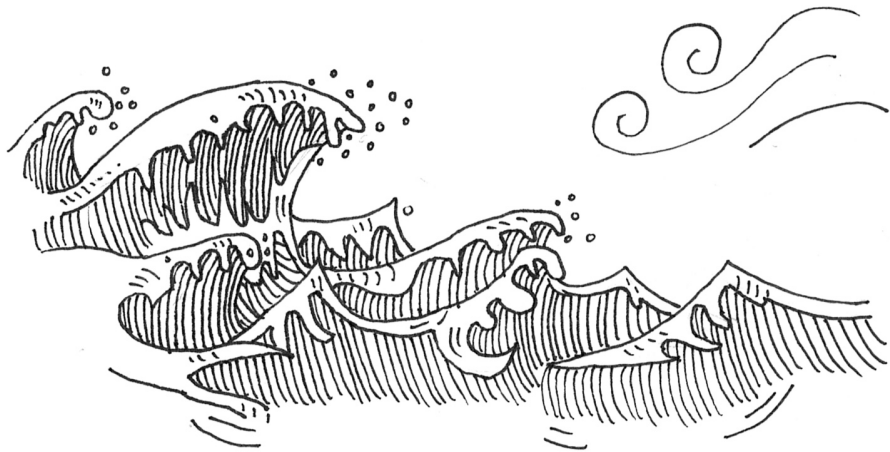
How much importance do you give a single moment from someone's past? How are headlines molding your ideas?

The past is merely a  
thought we have. It is  
literally all in our  
minds.

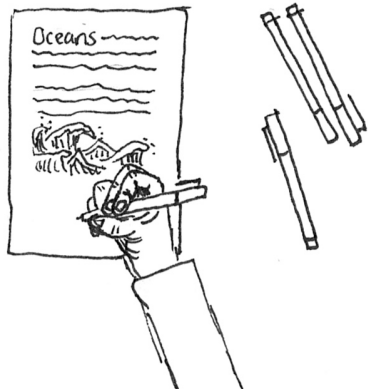
- Marianne Williamson  
"A Return to Love"

Oceans do not sit still. They can't be captured in an article, a zine, a book, an interview.

The ocean may make a wave this way today, or send the winds westward in ten minutes, but that's not the Ocean.



I'm writing these words with my hand right now, but they are not me.



They were my thoughts and my hand and the space and the emotions at that time of writing. Watch yourself. Every minute we change.

-Natalie Goldberg

So, how can we do the things we need to do, with all of this depth and impermanence surrounding every single person on Earth?



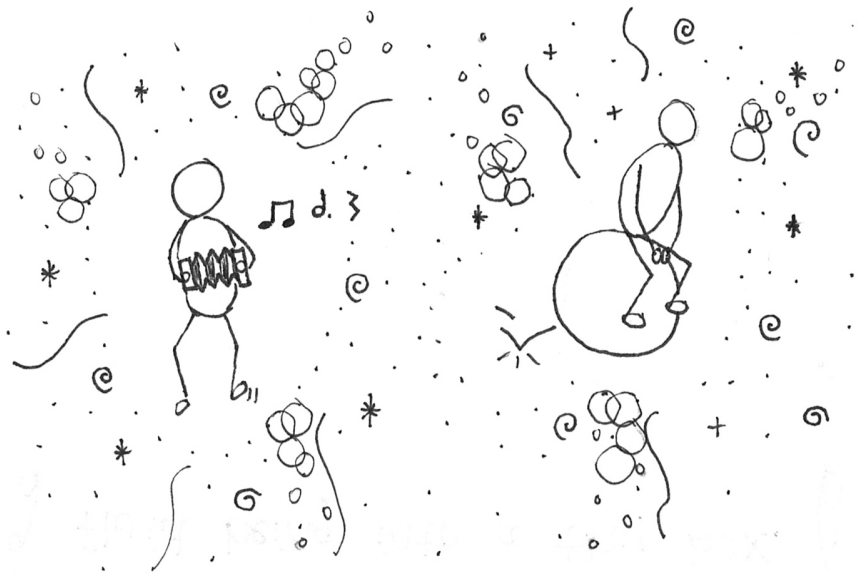
We need nuance.

We need space to be humans.

We need to give others the space to learn and play and grow and become.

We need to view people as the *living presence/spirit/being/soul* they are right now, in this moment — not your past idea of who they are or things they've written or said — and know that even then, our view is not the Truth.

We need to self-express without fear that words, songs, play, or creations made in one moment will be taken out of their context and used to freeze our oceanic, fluid identity into a tiny box.

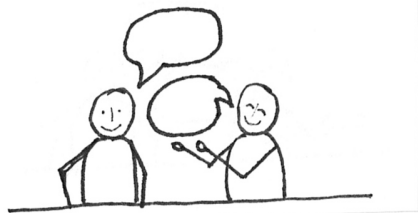


← (How we see others has everything to do with how we see ourselves — and how we've learned to see)

The rest of this zine is full of specific ways we can create room for nuance and self-expression, but first I want to share a quick story.

It illustrates a general way to see more of an individual's Ocean: spending time together.

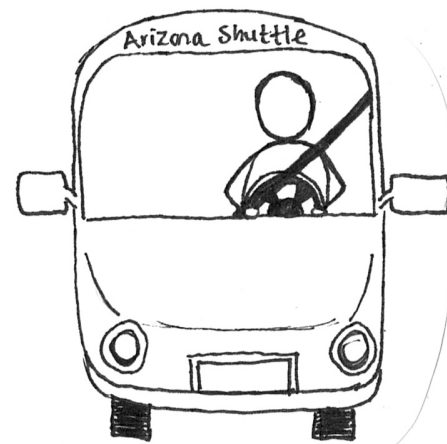
I've noticed the boxes almost always disappear when I become friends with someone. When I see a person repeatedly and talk to them, asking questions with compassion and curiosity.



Once, it only took a second interaction with someone to completely change my perception of them.

The woman's name was Diane, and our first encounter took place when I moved to Arizona. She was my shuttle driver from the Phoenix airport to Flagstaff.

Diane didn't talk much during the 3-hour ride, and did her best to handle the situation when our shuttle suddenly smelled strongly of gasoline.



What I remembered most, though, is that she had scolded a friendly Canadian woman twice that ride: once for walking off into the desert when we were pulled over, and once for going across the street to Subway during our 10-minute rest break.

I didn't have the highest opinion of Diane. She'd gotten us to Flagstaff safely, but I thought she'd been

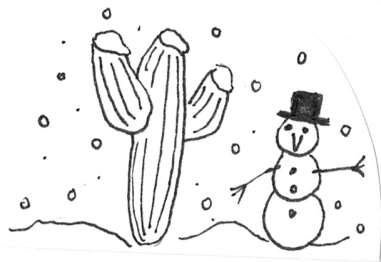
too harsh with the Canadian woman. My mind categorized Diane:

Mean

Unfriendly

Then I arrived at my new home, got started doing trail work, and quickly forgot that trip on <sup>the</sup> shuttle.

Three months later, I was headed back to the Phoenix airport to fly home for the holidays.



And my shuttle driver?

Diane.

This time, we were a smaller group of passengers, and we conversed throughout the ride.



It came out that Diane had left the Mormon church after her young daughter was sexually abused by a member. Everyone had turned their backs on her, more focused on forgiving the abuser than anything else.

How difficult, to know your young child suffered something so traumatic, all your friends are determined to help the one who caused this suffering, and you have to cut yourself off from your entire community + begin from scratch.

I felt compassion for Diane.



Further into the conversation, I learned Diane keeps a notebook and pen between the front seats. It's a place to jot down notes about the interesting people she meets and the topics she learns about while working.

Often passengers will write notes to her there, too.



I loved the idea of this notebook! (Can you tell I'm a fan of handwriting? Hah!)

I especially admired how Diane recognized the importance of each passenger she met, and had a place to collect the knowledge, stories, and memories.

So here I was, admiring and learning from the very woman I'd written off as "mean" months earlier.

And of course there was more to her than what I'd seen that first shuttle ride. Of course!

But I'd had to experience it to be reminded.



This change in perception requires time.

But many people will only be in our lives for a fleeting moment, a 30-second purchase at the cash register.

And in these daily happenings, we don't have time to sit and watch an ice cube melt.

I understand. We won't become deep friends with everyone we meet.

So how can we treat others as friends when we don't know them?

How can we learn to see the **Oceans** when our minds are often molded to see others as small ice cubes?



It requires conscious thought.

Awareness.

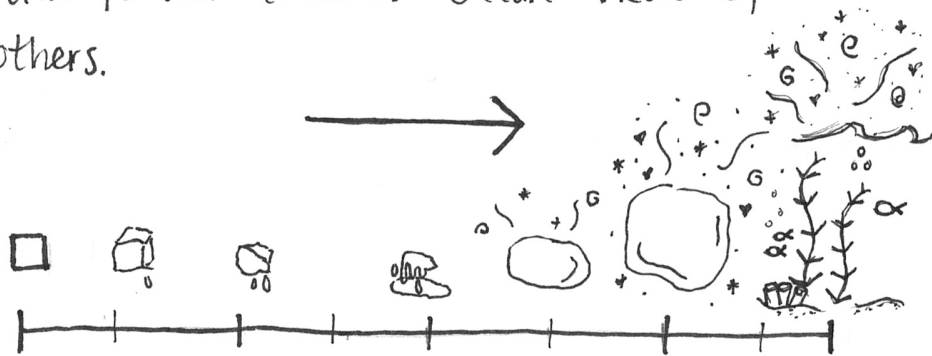
Patience.

Practice.

Compassion— with others and with ourselves.

A re-training of the brain, of the body.

Here are some techniques I use to slide further towards Ocean-views of others.



# Orienting

To change anything, the first step is awareness. To start viewing people as fluid oceans, we must first become aware of when we freeze them into single labels or boxes.

Often this freezing happens automatically, though. It's not a conscious thought-choice we're making; it's been learned in our physiology.

So to truly transform — to change fear-based judgements and survival reactions (which operate automatically for all of us, this is absolutely human!) from the roots — we must remember how to listen to our body's sensations and knowings.

Wonderfully, there is a simple practice you can engage in anywhere, anytime.

In fact, it's so simple, many of you might experience resistance to it, at first.

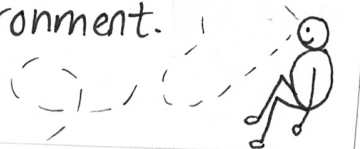
Yet integrating this practice into your days — alongside nervous system education\* — can have profound long-term effects.

## The Practice:

Orienting is the practice of consciously connecting with our external environment in an exploratory way.

Try It: Let your eyes slowly take in your current environment.

Even slower.



Engage with curiosity, as if this were the first time you've been here.

Notice what your eyes are drawn to, what feels neutral-to-pleasant to look at.

Let your eyes slowly scan & pause for several minutes, soaking in the details.

(Often I'll surprise myself and notice new things in rooms I'm in every day!)

\* To safely gain awareness of our bodies. My recommendation for this education: Irene Lyon. Generous wealth of free teachings on YouTube & blog, plus robust paid programs I have benefited from immensely.

It's also possible to orient with **additional senses**. Consider slowly weaving them in as you explore this practice:

- What sounds can you hear?
- What textures can you reach out and feel?
- Can you feel where your body is making contact with a surface?
- What scents can you smell?
- What does your mouth taste like today?

**Prefer to be guided through an audio?**

- [irenelyon.com/20-min-exercise](https://www.irenelyon.com/20-min-exercise)
- [youtube.com/watch?v=RoPOMAb108w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RoPOMAb108w)

**Want to learn more?**

- [irenelyon.com/2024/04/05/orienting-its-simplicity-and-complexity-explained/](https://www.irenelyon.com/2024/04/05/orienting-its-simplicity-and-complexity-explained/)

Note: While meditation (often stripped from its cultural/spiritual context) has become a tool used by folks in the West to develop "mindfulness," there is reason to be cautious. Not only can it keep folks operating from the neck-up — in a culture that's already dangerously imbalanced towards mind-based living — but bodies with certain physiology can be terribly harmed by "suddenly being in a silent meditative stillness." Read Irene Lyon's article on the "mindfulness bubble," which explains the necessity of nervous system knowledge in healing spaces.

- [irenelyon.com/2025/01/19/wellness-industry-collapse/](https://www.irenelyon.com/2025/01/19/wellness-industry-collapse/)
- [irenelyon.com/2020/02/14/is-there-a-mindfulness-bubble-waiting-to-burst/](https://www.irenelyon.com/2020/02/14/is-there-a-mindfulness-bubble-waiting-to-burst/)

Also, hundreds of years ago we did not need to practice orienting. It was our natural state, relaxed and attuned. Separation from the natural world and from our own bodies — in societies built for minds in the colonial capitalist patriarchy — has grave consequences. As mammals, listening to our bodies' communications is vital.

Take a breath.  
Imagine a friend.

When I worked in Grand Teton National Park, we would often see herds of people — usually with large photography equipment — chasing after moose.

My crew and I were used to these creature sightings, since we worked and slept outside each day, so we'd often roll our eyes and comment on the silly tourists who wanted their shot.



I needed a familiar face to help me to stop reducing these humans down to Tourist.

I thought of my friend Brent, who is a nature photographer.

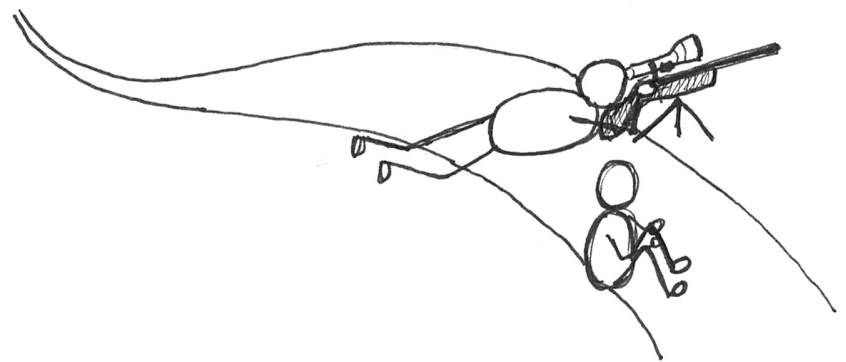
He's serious about his craft, absolutely loves the full process, and is a proud member of Nature First.



(He's also in a power metal band; meditates regularly; reads; thinks; is into computers; weight lifts; is a husband, friend, dog owner; and on and on — you know, the full human thing.)

o o o o

When thru-hiking the Arizona Trail, one day I came across two hunters who were set up on trail.



I no longer eat animals — just plants for me — and I noticed my wall go up a bit as I approached.

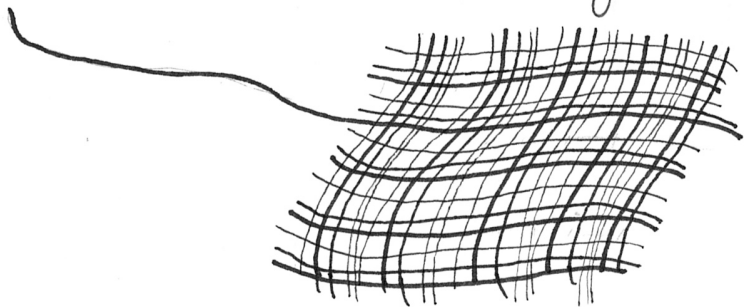
Catching myself, I paused and thought of my friend Chad.

He has been a close friend for over a decade. He's kind, thoughtful, involved, caring, funny, and dependable.

And he also hunts deer every winter.

These are amazing people, I reminded myself.

Do not trap someone into one thread of their tapestry.



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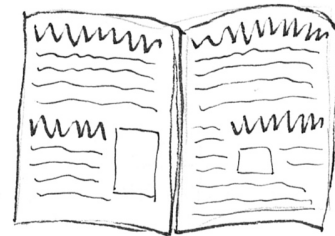
## Turn down sources that feed off the boxes

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Once you start to become aware of the fluidity of human identity, you'll notice places where people are boxed in.

I've noticed this in

- gossip magazines
- headlines
- social media
- tv & internet news
- certain people's conversations



Pay attention to where you notice the frozen cubes, and spend less time around those people/sources.\*

This will look different for everyone.

\*Note: Please do continue to engage with folks who have different perspectives and life experiences than your own. We need this! I simply encourage you to do so in a face-to-face conversation, at a table over a meal, or in any other context where there is space for each human to be their full, Ocean-Selves.

# Turn up sources/content that allow space for nuance and humanity

The great news is that there are so many fellow humans creating things and spaces which hold this view of fluid humanity, — people who dive deep into the oceans and try to see them fully, as they are.

Here are a few from my world:

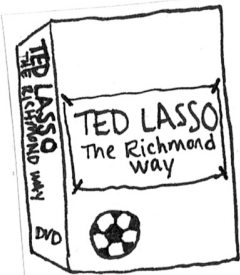


Story +  
Somatics  
Workshops  
or Substack  
pieces by  
Molly Caro May

any interview with  
or piece of writing by  
the stellar



The TV show  
Ted  
Lasso



with a  
cup of tea

Writing  
letters to  
my friends



- See No Stranger  
- by Valarie Kaur
- Body Full of Stars  
- by Molly Caro May
- The Dance of the Dissident Daughter  
- by Sue Monk Kidd
- Wild Mercy  
- by mirabai starf

long conversations  
face to face



o Beautiful Stories  
from  
Anonymous  
People



- o How to Survive the End of the World - by adrienne mreee braun + Autumn Brown
- o Medicine Stories - by Amber Magnolia Hill
- o Bliss and Grit - by Vanessa Scott + Brooke Thomas
- o Finding Our Way - by Prentis Hemphill



# Be Vulnerable

The summer I co-lead a conservation corps crew began with three weeks of leadership training. We spent one of those afternoons



at a horse ranch, to learn about body language and how it relates to leadership.

At lunch, the man hosting the retreat talked about positivity, gratitude, taking charge of our lives, changing ourselves, etc. Afterwards, he opened it up for questions.

I'd been struggling with a personal matter relevant to his talk, so I raised my hand - with courage - and asked a question.



I teared up as I listened to his response, the pain of this wound still fresh in my heart.

That evening, some of us leaders were discussing the day's training.

"It was good -" said Nate, the crew lead I'd been paired with, "until it turned into a huge therapy session after lunch."

I froze.

I was surprised he'd called me out so openly, and immediately felt embarrassed. My mind categorized Nate as "not-a-feelings-person."

And then we began the season together, leading our crew of eight members. Slowly we got to know each other, conversation by conversation.



About a month into our season — after we'd already broken down many barriers — we were reminiscing on first impressions.

"Remember back at training, the day with the horses?" I opened. "I was kind of scared of you after you dissed the 'therapy session' at lunch."

"What do you mean?" Nate asked.

"You'd said the training was good, until it turned into a therapy session at lunch," I explained.

"Oh, yeah, don't you remember that woman?"

"What woman?"

"The lady in the back of the room who went on and on about how she could never leave her job, could never get out of her terrible situation."

I did remember her!

She'd asked a question after me, and I had felt annoyed at her responses. She'd irritated me too!

"So that's what you were referring to?"

"Yeah!"

All this time, I'd thought he'd meant the question I'd asked and my tearful reaction.

I learned again and again that summer to ask for clarification in the moment, to practice being vulnerable and direct. I noticed being open provides space for others to more fully be their Oceanic selves, and helps me to do less boxing-in. For more on vulnerability, check out Brené Brown's work.

# Ask open-ended questions

This past summer while grocery shopping with my mom in our small hometown, she introduced me as one of her daughters to the cashier.

"Nice to meet you," the woman greeted me pleasantly. "So do you study or work?" she asked as an either/or.

"No..."

She was perplexed.

It had almost been a decade since I'd been out of college (though I very well could have not gone to school in the first place), and I hadn't had a job in almost a year.

The woman meant no harm; she was being friendly in the way she knew how.



But I'd been getting these closed getting-to-know-you questions for years and felt boxed in each time. These questions sought to identify me by my job, "career"—a word I generally stay away from—or college education.

...

In my past month on the road, I've been asked many times "What did you study?"

"Spanish," I say. "But it hasn't dictated what I've done since," I usually add—because I don't want to be put in the

Spanish

box, a language that had a starring role in my early 20s, but not now.

(You'll notice, I have this fear of being put in boxes by others, which I'm working to let go of.)

I cannot control how others see me. I can only control how I see others. And, as you know, I'm working to see others as Oceans. As love. As fluid humans.)

"Give up defining yourself - to yourself or to others. You won't die. You will come to life. And don't be concerned with how others define you. When they define you, they are limiting themselves, so it's their problem."

- Eckhart Tolle  
pg. 109 "A New Earth"

↑ I'm trying to internalize these words...

One of my least favorite questions is "What do you do?," so here are a bunch of alternatives which I find more open-ended and interesting:

\* How are you (actually) feeling right now?

- \* What's been on your mind lately?
- \* What does your current life-season feel like?
- \* What's something you've been really great at lately, something going well?
- \* Who/what has your attention these days?
- \* What's something you're curious about?
- \* What's something you're looking forward to?
- \* Have you eaten/drank/made/baked something delicious lately?
- \* What's something you've learned today/this week?

I invite you to join me in using that awareness we're cultivating to examine our everyday language and look for where our questions are assuming something or boxing others in.

# Identify where you need reminders the most

I don't see the Ocean in each encounter with individuals on my given day—but I'm trying to see it more often.

Two places where I need reminders the most are (1) online and (2) with family.

## Online

At this point in time I'm not on social media (it's been a long journey of trial, error, + experimentation; what feels right has changed with time), and the house I just moved into doesn't have Wifi—but I still use the internet.



And online, when I see a beautiful website or cool creation and start having thoughts of comparison, that's when awareness kicks in. (If I've been practicing.)

The talk in my head goes something like this:

This person is not a website. They're an Ocean!

Oh yeah, I forgot about all the things I can't see on this page.

That's right. You can't know their Ocean, but you know it's there.

And I have no idea what this person is feeling or experiencing in this moment, during these days.

Exactly! Just like your site looked the same as always when you were deep in grief this year.

Not to mention, you've had such different lives, different circumstances, why would it ever be logical to compare the two of you?

Oh yeah, we're on completely different playing fields. Thanks for the reminder!

No problem!

And aren't you glad they're bringing this work into the world?

Yes, it's wonderful. I am grateful they've brought this work to life.

You're capable of many wonderful things, too, you know. And you bring great things into the world as well!

Aw, thanks Rebecca.

You're the best!

Right back at ya!

It takes effort and awareness to catch yourself in the moment, so visuals can help. (in addition to distancing yourself from spaces that tend to freeze/box in.)

You can put up post-its in your bedroom, office, bathroom — whatever makes sense for you.

You don't know anyone's full story

Behind every face is an Ocean

Good morning, world,  
Today please help me see the Oceans in the faces around me.

Use whatever phrases or words feel right for you.

### Family

The second area where I need extra reminders of the Oceans are before family gatherings.

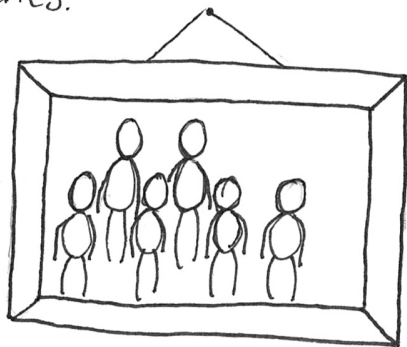
With people who only see me once a year at best, they certainly can't see the inner depth of my Being — nor can I see theirs.

And when I'm with family members I've "known" my whole life, I'm now

trying to leave space for who they are in this moment, rather than pinning them to past versions of who they once were, or projecting forward based on past events.

It's tough and I'm still trying to develop strategies for this (lots of "try"s on this page!),

but it mainly looks like asking open-ended questions instead of assuming, and being as present as I can be.



"The more shared past there is in a relationship, the more present you need to be; otherwise, you will be forced to relive the past again and again."

- Eckhart Tolle  
Pg. 101 "A New Earth"

Where would reminders be most helpful for you? Put 'em up!

## Dip into shadow work

Several months ago I learned of shadow work, and it has been fascinating to explore.

The process involves Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung's concept of **the shadow**: the parts of ourselves that we don't like, which we repress or hide.

His concept is based on the premise that humans have the capacity to feel all emotions/qualities — those praised in our society and those looked down upon (and everything in between).

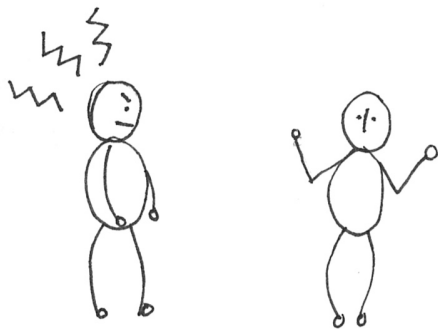
Because of events in our formative childhoods, we may subconsciously suppress an emotion/quality that we deem "bad."

But let's not label emotions into boxes either, okay? Emotions are.

To do this work, you explore those qualities and let them surface.

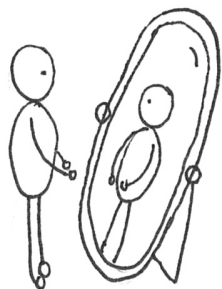
How can we identify and release certain qualities if they're being repressed subconsciously?

By paying attention to the people who bother us.



Who really irritates you? Why?  
What traits do you like least about them?

Then use that person as a mirror. Look for where/how you possess those traits, or have displayed those qualities in certain situations.



Befriend the qualities/traits and you'll release their subconscious hold on you.

The book I read which introduced me to this topic was Debbie Ford's The Dark Side of the Light Chasers.

“The particular egoic patterns that you react to more strongly in others and misperceive as their identity tend to be the same patterns that are also in you, but that you are unable or unwilling to detect within yourself.”

- Eckhart Tolle  
Pg. 74 "A New Earth"

When we can see ourselves in others — especially in those we like least — the Ocean becomes clearer.

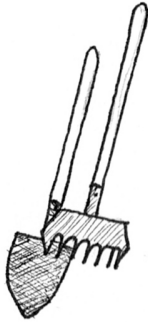
For exquisite examples of what it looks like to befriend the shadow in daily life, listen to Kelly Brogan's interview on "The Way Forward with Alec Zeck" podcast, episode 101: Reclaim All the Parts of You.

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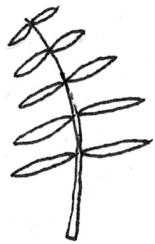
# Go outside, be with nature

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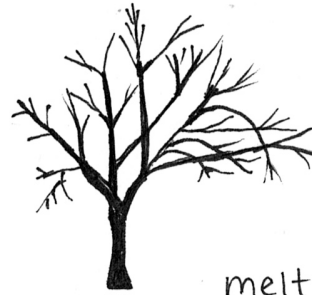
I've spent a lot of time outside since joining my first conservation corps in the fall of 2017.



It might not seem obvious at first — that spending time in nature helps make space for nuance — but the two are so undeniably connected.



This huge increase in time with plants, elements, and creatures has made me more aware of both the present moment (like meditation does) and our connection to life.



When I'm among nature, I feel calmer and more patient. The boxes melt away quickly, and I return to my essential self with ease. Mother Earth feeds my creativity, too, giving birth to new energy again and again.

Looking at a rock or a bird or a leaf helps to distance my mind from society's + culture's strong pulls, which feels refreshing.



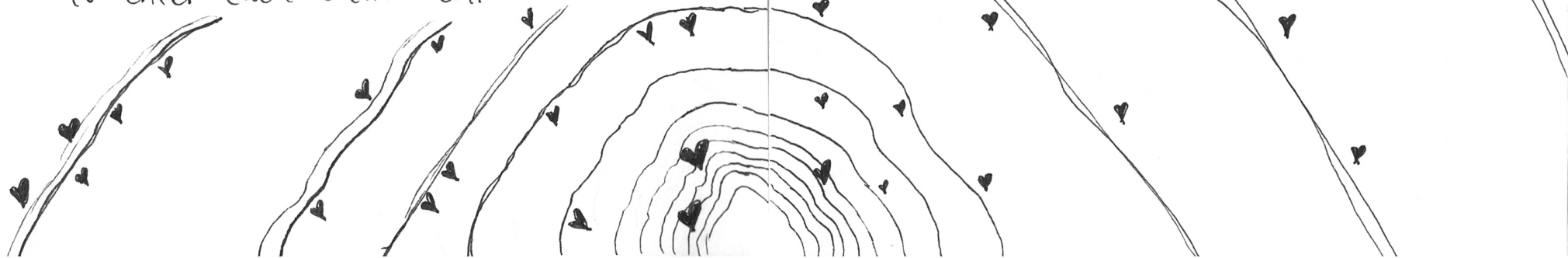
Looking around, I'm reminded  
that we're all beautifully  
connected in life.



How I treat you is how I treat  
myself.

Helping and encouraging someone  
brings more love into our connected  
world, rippling out exponentially.

There's enough love and joy for  
all to experience. Someone else's  
success is not taking anything  
from me. We have every reason  
to cheer each other on.



You don't need to join a  
conservation corps or buy a tent  
to be in nature.

Start where you are. Go outside  
for five minutes with no agenda.  
Look for trees, plants, insects, birds—  
whatever grabs your attention.

Or take a walk. Or sit on  
a bench and watch the squirrels.  
Observe ants for a bit.

Or close your eyes and breathe.  
Listen to the sounds and feel  
sensations on your skin—sun's  
warmth, wind's whispers.

Leave your phone inside.

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## Create for the sake of creating (Play)

---

One day I was working on trail with fellow corps member Steve. I don't remember how we got started, but soon I had a British accent and we were both playing two TV personalities, hosting our made-up show that taught people how to brush trails.



I was so in character and having a blast.

No one was watching us.

No one else experienced it except for Steve and I.

In fact, I've never written or spoken about that afternoon until now — and hesitated to include the story — because the magic of that experience was being there, being a part of it.

Being entirely in the moment, light and free and laughing.

You might say I was connected with my "inner child" that afternoon.

• • • •

Another day while hiking to work on a trail, a friend and I started to rap. (Again, I couldn't tell you how it started.)

Soon people around us were taking turns, jumping in with a line here, a line there.

The rhymes were funny and clever, about our trail work and friends.

Nothing was written down, none of it was recorded. But it flowed out beautifully, incredibly, because it was just us.

And my, what an energy we all felt!



Create for the sake of creating.

Feel the energy in the moment.

Experience that you are not this thing you've produced.

Notice the magic of this play — that it can never be reproduced.

A few ideas to get you started:



Host a variety show with friends.

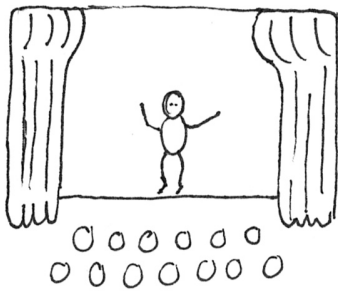
No phones allowed.

(Note: Not a talent show, **variety!** Anything is welcome.)

Turn on some music that gets you moving and **DANCE!**

No one's watching; let loose.





Enjoy live music,  
theater, improv,  
street performances.  
Be fully present.

Come up with a  
haiku (5-7-5) or poetic  
line about something  
you see.



Poetry requires creative thinking - freedom  
to be nonsensical and unwatched.



Start singing about  
a simple household task  
or what you see around  
you.

Laugh at the silliness  
of it all.

Have fun!

# Smile

Finally, the simplest way I've found  
to convey "I'm a fluid human Being and  
I see you, a fellow human Being" is  
with a smile.

When others smile at me, I feel more at ease, I feel welcome. I feel seen. *shing*. Keep me going. *ooh*

While deep in grief, a smile from a stranger would crack me open and

We can give this gift to others any day, any

moment provide: comfort, ease, and belonging

smile smile smile smile  
smile smile smile smile smile  
smile smile smile smile smile  
smile smile smile smile smile  
smile smile smile smile

NO Dec. 25, 2019

Thanks for joining me on this journey - I appreciate your attention.

Remember how my tendency is to provide lots of context and details? It was a challenge to leave out so much in this creation, so I've made a page with links and additional thoughts:

[www.rebeccaroots.love/oceans](http://www.rebeccaroots.love/oceans)

Lastly, as a human Being with an Ocean, I would absolutely love to hear from you. Did this zine stir up any thoughts, or feelings?

✉ rebeccaroots@proton.me

✉ My current snail mail address can be found on the "say hello" page of my website

I wish you much joy and curiosity as you explore your own ocean and experience the fluidity of those around you.

Warmly, Rebecca

Feb. 13, 2025

Hello dear reader,

It's been over 5 years now since writing this zine. I wrote it on lands ancestral to Southern Paiute and Ancestral Puebloan peoples, while working at what the U.S. govt calls 'Zion National Park' in Utah. I am writing to you today on traditional homelands of the Sokwakiak (Sokoki Abenaki), in southern Vermont.

I made a mistake in my original layout assembly, which felt too cumbersome to redo at the time of discovery. So I let it be, and would simply glue each center page together when I assembled a zine, as the two center-most pages were blank.



This winter I decided to take apart the original (ripping out 40+ glued pages) to fix this. While restructuring, I had capacity for minimal updates: I replaced a section called "meditating" with "orienting," necessary given the nervous system education/journey I've been on since 2021. And, I changed a few of the nuance/humanity sources to reflect a more current-me.

The new layout moved those two blank pages to the end - where we find ourselves now. I'll use the rest to share two quotes from interviews with Sophie Strand, which weave beautifully into our exploration of 'identity.'

I still wish you much delight and curiosity as you explore the fluidity of our Oceans, and I thank you for your attention.

Warmly,  
Rebecca

[Host Luis asks Sophie to introduce herself on his podcast]

"Very simply I'm a writer. I call myself a compost heap because I'm always stirring between the ripe and the rot, and I'm also a combination of the microbes, the thinkers, the poets, the mistakes I've made, that is, you know, a a, a - melting, changing, shifting patch of soil."

Ep. 163 Identity Is Such a Drag:  
Letting ourselves Compost w/ Sophie Strand

- ⓐ [In her intro of "Healing: A Ghost Story" on YouTube]
- ⓐ "... those are things, those are costumes I could wear, boxes I could step into, but I like to be adjacent to them, I like to stand kind of to the side a bit, looking at them but not quite fully entering them... to live the question rather than try to answer it..."
- ⓐ - Sophie Strand

Highly recommend this short story!