

September 2021

Issue 01

Li keness

m a g a z i n e

*A
Truth
About
Yourself.*



Low Entropy is headquartered in Kwikwetlem First Nation Territory of the Coast Salish people, and in the shared territory of the səliłwətaʔt təməxʷ, xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Stz'uminus, Qayqayt and S'ólh Téméxw nations.

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About Low Entropy: Founded in 2015, the Low Entropy Foundation is home to free programs and events that focus on personal and community growth through empowerment, authenticity and meaningful interpersonal connections.

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Foreword

It's all bits and pieces, isn't it?

Somewhere, intertwined and in between our responsibilities and relationships, we might find the time to wonder who we are. We'll wade through the confounding fracas of emotions and illusions, and maybe pour our hearts out to friends and family and therapists and complete strangers, just to catch ephemeral glimpses of ourselves through the tangled thicket of past, present and what we'd like to be.

Many of us will gain scraps of self-understanding through this vague process. The majority of that group will struggle mightily to knit those scraps together into a cohesive tapestry. If we're lucky, we'll find happiness regardless.

With this in mind, we kept the concept for this pilot issue of Likeness simple. I just asked some very talented people to tell me a truth about themselves. They did, and I received a bundle of wonderfully earnest writing.

Such is the privilege of being an editor. I will not gush about each individual work here - your privilege is getting to experience them on your (and the writers') terms.

But, as I have the space, I just want to be clear about one thing: there is rarity here. These scraps - if we want to understand them as such - are special, because they are glimpses of the gorgeous, messy, splendid spirit of human beings. These works are our birdsong, beauty etched into text but, in the grand scheme of things, similarly fleeting.

It is indeed all bits and pieces. But they are so, so remarkably precious.

Thank you for being here.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Simon Cheung". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of "Simon" and "Cheung" being capitalized and prominent.

Editor, Low Entropy



Photo by Ryoji
Iwata

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Photos by Andrew Woods



The Story of Our Lives

Andrew Woods

I t was late. Maybe two or three in the morning. I laid sprawled under the bed covers, my head propped up against the solid wood backboard. I had school the next day. And the day after that. And so on. It didn't make any difference. It was a cold world out there. That's what the adults were always telling me, and frankly, I agreed with them.

I hated the other kids at school. I hated that whole scene. The way I was ostracized, humiliated, degraded and bullied. And it made me angry – angry enough to want to run away. Angry enough to want to self-destruct.

I couldn't run away, though.

So, I found a different means to escape.

I stayed up late. Every night. Gently turning the pages, pausing to feel the satisfying roughness of the textured paper between my fingers, or to catch a whiff of

the familiar scent of “old book smell” - reading was my therapy, or more accurately, the stories were my therapy.

Some people have said that reading helped them make sense of the world. I couldn't relate to that . . . because as soon as I set down a book, I returned to the same disappointing world I so desperately wished to abandon. The same world that seemed like such a cold, discompassionate and pathetically meaningless place. And my love of reading didn't magically transform that reality.

Instead, my love of reading was the portal that transported me to a place far, far away. To a place that made sense. A place where fantasy and fiction superseded the mundane drivel of homework, school bullies and family arguments.

I don't know where the line got crossed, or at what stage in life I decided to abandon one escape vehi-



cle for something with a little more torque. Maybe I'd read too many of those Hunter S. Thompson essays . . . you know . . . all that "life in the fast lane" nonsense.

Regardless, my insatiable appetite for escapism would eventually lead me to a place so bleak and despairing it would have made Frodo's journey to Mordor seem like an all-inclusive Cancun getaway.

We always learn the hard way.

It's clear to me now that I had a lot of questions. Questions that needed answers.

I was searching for something.

What was it about the stories I'd read as a child that I found so fascinating? What was it that I loved so much about that late-night escapism? What was I searching for, as I allowed myself to slip, entranced, into the depths of human imagination?

Here's what I've learned about life - in the end, we all find what we're looking for. After all, that's the power of storytelling. That's the power of imagina-

tion - to engage in the act of creation, and to transform reality as we know it.

What was I searching for, through years of drug and alcohol-addled drifting? Through years of psychiatrist appointments, medications, mental health diagnoses and trips to the psych ward?

The answer is very simple.

I was searching for me.

There's a recurring phrase Kurt Vonnegut's novel Slaughterhouse-Five that fairly accurately encapsulates the bare-bones essence of this crazy thing we call life:

"So it goes."

And looking back, with the 20/20 clarity of hindsight, we become acquainted with a very peculiar universal truth - that life always goes as it was intended.

So perhaps it was a natural progression that my love of storytelling would take me beyond my own writing . . . to other mediums.

And perhaps it was simply a continuation of that progression when I later became engaged in the art of visual storytelling, through photography, filmmaking, sketching and digital artwork.

I'd always aspired to tell the kinds of stories I'd loved as a child - stories capable of touching people's lives and leaving a footprint in their hearts and minds. I knew that words were powerful. But a picture . . . a picture could tell a thousand powerful words.

Suddenly a new world of opportunities appeared before me. An entirely new dimension of imagination revealed itself, and a previously unexplored means of storytelling became possible.

People sometimes ask me what I find so appealing about storytelling, both written and visual.

"What's so great about telling stories?"

"They're just stories."

"Stories aren't gonna change the world."

I believe life is almost entirely about perspective. We see the world through different lenses, and some people can see what others cannot.

Through the lens that I've been granted, I see storytelling as an opportunity to build human connections, to share with one another, and to learn from the wisdom embedded in the stories we love to tell. Stories are unique in their ability to influence our lives, to evoke emotion, to encourage dialogue, to summon new ideas and, above all, to bring us closer together.

So when someone tells me that stories are useless, that storytelling isn't going to make a difference in the world, I tend to dismiss those comments as unsubstantiated and misinformed.

Because if there's anything that's ever made an impact on this world, it's been our human passion for storytelling. Stories have been the transformative fuel to spark every major development over the entire course of human history.

The power of storytelling is undeniable.

But perhaps even more significant is the role that stories play in our own lives. For those who embrace their own personal stories will experience the wholeness of being human - the beauty, the pain, the laughter, the

loss, the triumph and the defeat.

In every story, there is a character development that unfolds. The story's protagonist is rarely unchanged by the final chapter.

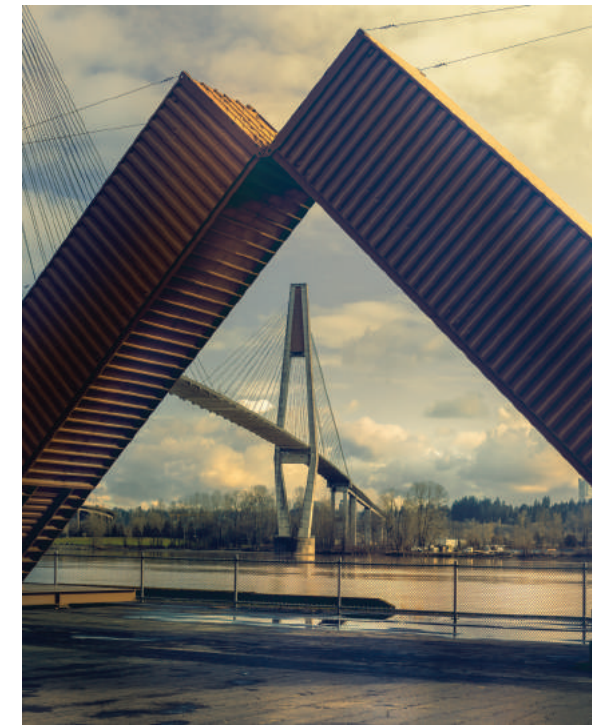
Similarly, in life, where we start is never where we end up. And who we are at the beginning is never who we are at the end.

Many of us have questions about the end. What happens when we reach the end of our story, and the final page has been turned?

I'm not sure. I don't think anyone knows.

But I find comfort in the words of the late author David Foster Wallace:

"Although of course you end up becoming yourself."



ANREW WOODS My name is Andrew,

I got into the visual arts as a therapeutic outlet several years ago. Having previously worked as a writer, I wanted to develop a new artform. I figured a combination of writing and visual art would be a more compelling way to express my ideas.

I've always loved telling stories. And my love of storytelling has carried me through some of the more difficult moments in my life.

I believe that through storytelling, maybe we can extend beyond ourselves and see what is ultimately true - that we are as unique as we are similar.

OJASSVI JOLLY Ojassvi Jolly (she/her) is a watcher of sky, writer of relentless rants. Merry by 2 a.m., merrier by the waves. She finds joy in writing on concerns that are often unspoken. She expresses herself at pictorial.home.blog with a blend of visuals and words.

Gender Drink

Ojassvi Jolly
Photo by Raphael Renter



Did patriarchy make me who I am
Is it why I sing the feminism jam?
Now I wonder why I crammed Hitler or Genghis Khan

I wear the scar of patriarchy around me
Sometimes, it is dressed in bloody red right below my knee
or breathless blue on my throat

Patriarchy changes colour like the sky,
It is widespread and vast.

Am I supposed to like pink?
or is it just the gender drink

I see y'all suffer the misogyny disease,
It's the broken societies' routine

Patriarchy sometimes conceals its own identity
in a pretend-to-be feminism look.

Still, it returns home, rinses itself to dominance

Patriarchy crimes; acid scars, me-too movement are just
some of its faces
But in all the faces, I'm finding my own traces.

I am not diminished by your presence,
I am fierce, I am free.
I am a goddamn lioness.

“Meaning, to me,
comes from experi-
encing new things and
having the ability to
help others.”

Getting to 25

Fiona Woo

At 25, it is said that your personality becomes fairly stable. Your prefrontal cortex, which plays a large part in your personality, finishes developing around this age. As I write this, I am about a month away from hitting this point, and a question recently occurred to me: Am I the person I want to be?

So I'm going to take a look at this. Firstly, what encompasses a person, what makes up a personality? We are the combination of what we were born with, what we experience throughout our lives, and then how we internalize and process these things. We have three sides: our inner selves, our external selves and our ideal selves. Over the first 25 years of our lives, we absorb and seek out an image of life for ourselves that makes sense to us. We try to find out what we believe, reject and hope for.

What do I want? I've thought about this throughout my adult life fairly consistently and critically. I've tried to build myself into a person that I can be proud of. But

have I achieved this? I want to be someone who is kind, genuine and brave. The most important things to me are taking care of myself first and foremost, then making sure those around me are loved and cared for, and finally trying to add value to this world in a way that is in line with what I have to give.

Meaning, to me, comes from experiencing new things and having the ability to help others. My goal is to turn the things that I've thought about and learned to help others live more fulfilling and meaningful lives. I want to be someone who used her life to create something. When I was younger, I was convinced that I would accomplish this goal through having a family and being a mom. As the years passed by and the right opportunity to start a family didn't present itself, I became more open to the idea that my life's purpose could include, but wasn't limited to this. This is the part I am currently exploring and discovering.

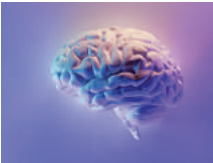


Photo by Fakuri-an Design

My goals mainly consist of learning, and working towards being someone I am proud of. I've made great progress over the years, but there is one glaring hole that is missing: commitment. I think, up to this point, it's probably been for the best that I haven't committed to anything, because it's allowed me to be more open to possibility and growth. I am more confident, now that I have tasted enough little bits from here and there, that I have a pretty good sense of what I am looking for. With that, it is time for me to learn how to dedicate myself to a more focused goal and persist through difficulties. I am a very idealistic person and tend to think too high level about things, instead of sticking to and focusing on concrete and realistic tasks. This is what I need to learn in my 25th year and to continue to carry out through early adulthood.

How am I going to accomplish this?

I'll focus on doing things that lead to a clearly defined, prioritized list of goals. My main goal up to this point has been to have children. That turned my focus towards relationships and saving money. I've had tunnel vision on this and I've had my successes and failures, but all in all I would say I've done what I intended to (other than having children). Now it is time to come at the problem from a new angle.

I've learned that the type of relationship I need for the family that I want to build will require me to be more independent and less controlling. Now that I have acquired an adequate amount of relational skills and financial stability, it is time to focus on the side I've neglected: my career. I've avoided this word and aspect of my life for a long time now, but I can avoid it no longer. It is time to face it head on. Recently I was reading a book called The Three Marriages by David Whyte and it points out the three most important relationships that we will have in our lives, which are our romantic partner, work and the relationship we have with ourselves. I've focused on the former and the latter, but not so much on the middle. The reality is that all three

of these relationships are things we will continue to work on throughout our lifetime, and they will involve constantly evolving journeys. However, I have spent disproportionate time on partners and myself, so in my 25th year, my goal is to focus more on my career.

I know that eventually, I want my career to reflect my passion toward psychology. Exactly what that means, I'm not sure. Currently I'm working towards my psychology degree, so that's a start. I also find writing very rewarding, and so continuing to work on that skill is another goal of mine. I have written a book, so finishing editing and publishing that is a huge goal of mine. I am a highly internally driven person, and that has become evident to me through some of the things I've been stubborn enough to pursue in my life thus far. Now I just need to focus that drive into something that will create meaning in and add value to my career.

Getting to this point has been a mixture of nature and nurture. I am lucky to say that I'm proud of who I've become, but that doesn't mean I don't have farther to go. I choose to live my life with intention and so I am aware of where my focus goes, and I take care to harness it for things that matter to me and make myself somebody I'm proud of.

At the end of the day, you are the only one who is going to be in your life forever, so your approval should mean the most. Nothing will ever be perfect, but remember, progress is more valuable than perfection. You're doing great wherever you are, and it's never too late to refocus or redirect your energy. Cheers to the journey.

FIONA WOOD - A long time lover of all things personal development and well-being, Fiona is a Psychology major and certified life coach. With goals to reduce anxiety and provide clarity and direction for struggling new grads, Fiona seeks to open raw and vulnerable conversations in her writing. On her personal blog at coachfionawoo.com she exposes her greatest struggles to make space for honesty during a confusing and volatile time. Other than writing and psychology, Fiona loves the ocean and you will never see a bigger smile on her face than when she's on or by the water.



Photo by Catia Dombaxe

“people will talk something or the other, it’s their job to just talk, talk and talk.”

Turning an Introvert from an Extrovert

Prateek Sur

Sharing one’s deepest personal truths is something that people usually refrain from divulging to other people. People feel shy, people feel afraid and people have the inane question in their minds, “What will people say!” Well, as a popular Hindi song goes, “Kuch toh log kahenge, logo ka kaam hai kehna,” meaning “people will talk something or the other, it’s their job to just talk, talk and talk.” So it is always good to blurt out the deepest truths about yourself, which can help you bond with friends and others who are near and dear to you.

Today, I am going to reveal one such truth about myself.

In India, there is this one habit where people will always ask new office-joiners to “sing a song.” It’s a way of breaking the ice in front of the entire office, and also a way to rag the new person in a sort of funny way. It’s harmless fun. Whenever I was subjected to this in any of my previous offices, I have always shied away at first, and then went on to sing a beautiful song.

While people always used to appreciate this and re-

mark, “You have got a hidden talent,” not many know that I actually am a trained singer. Yes, I have a third-year degree in Hindustani classical music, and I try to always hide it away from people.

I know, there isn’t anything in it to be hiding from people, but somehow this thing made me realise earlier this year that I have turned drastically from being an extrovert to being an introvert. I used to be the life of the party and talk a lot with my school and college friends, but somehow in the past 10 years of my work life, that person has gotten lost somewhere. I have turned into this quiet and calm person who is patient and, above all, very lazy.

I was the guy who used to love going out to pubs and discos and dance the night away. I was the guy who loved to meet strangers and get to know them and have conversations with them without batting an eyelid. However, that guy has gotten lost somewhere along the way. He has given way to a guy who wants to laze around in his comfortable sofa in the living room, watch some Netflix, maybe have a drink with his close buddies at home and spend some quality time with my wife. It’s not that I am complaining, but I absolutely miss that extrovert guy!

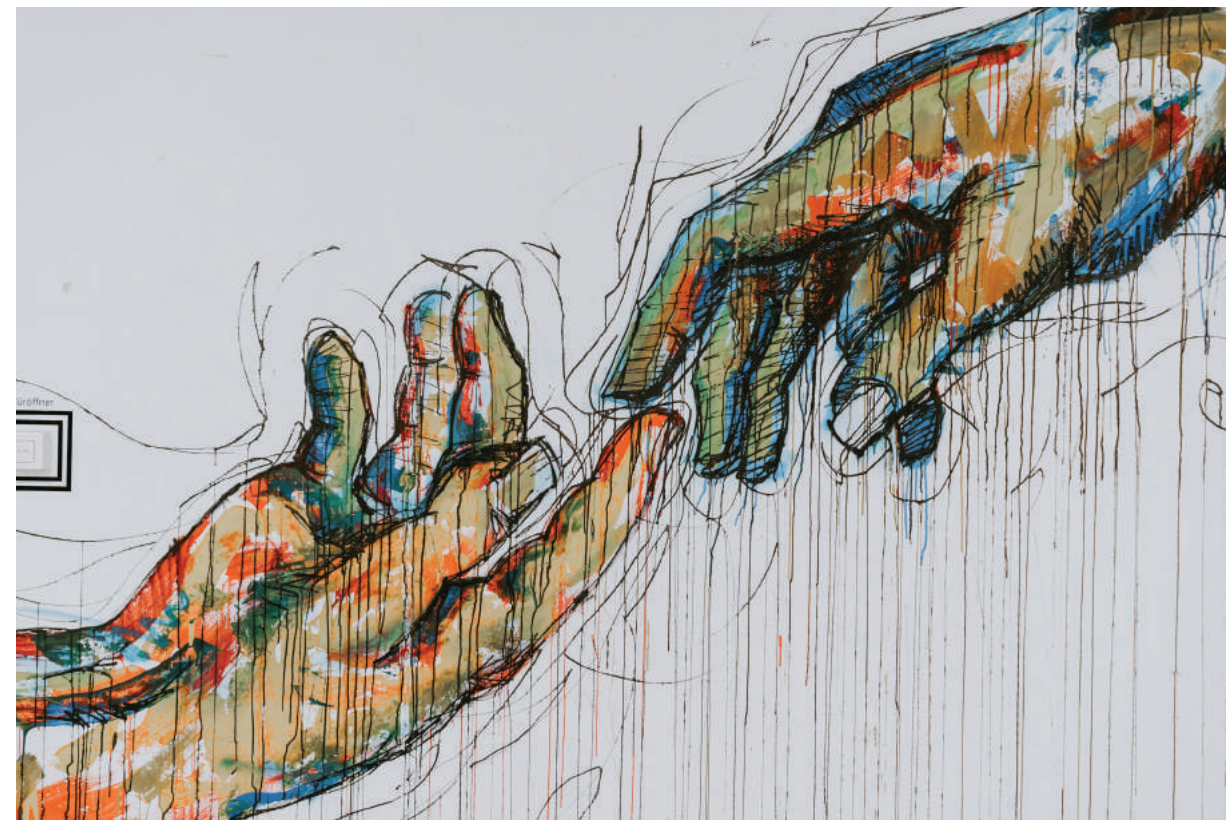


Photo by Claudio Schwarz

My friends have not noticed this that much, but I have seen this change come in me. I don’t see my friends having changed this much in the past 10-12 years of me knowing them.

But I feel now enough water has flowed under the bridge.

I want to get back to being that guy who used to be the heart of the party. I want to be that person whom everyone loved to talk to. I won’t lie, joining Low Entropy has been a great step towards that. I am trying to make new friends from a completely different country, where I am planning to move soon (Canada). I am talking and discussing things with people who are no longer strangers and have become my friends now. I might not yet be there, but I am making that effort.

I know it’s easier said than done, but yes, I hope to prove the naysayers wrong, and get the courage and strength to achieve what I have set out to do.

P.S. I hope my story about fighting my fears and trying to achieve something helps you feel motivated. If you’re also stuck in the same rut as I am, let us join hands, and break the shackles, and go ahead to achieve the impossible.

PRA-TEEK SUR A daydreamer by birth, a mechanical engineer by chance, and an idiot by choice. A hardcore movie buff working as a film critique and enjoying life as a Bollywood reporter. Helping people get through the troubles of their careers and giving advice from personal experiences. A voracious reader and a passionate singer. An extrovert at heart and an introvert at the mind. Well, that chaos is pretty much me!



Blood & Wa- ter

Carmen Khoo

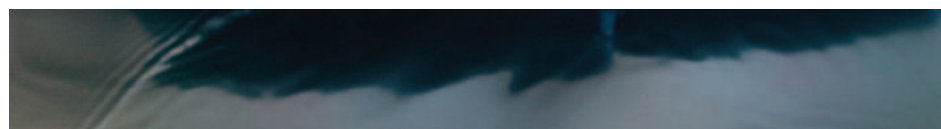
The allure of shadows drawing you in:
Soon it stifles like drowning in thin air,
And respite is but a long distant dream
Mocking the wailing of the hopeful soul.

But You burst through in a ray of Mercy,
To pull me from my wretched misery.
Who was i that You stooped so low for me?
And You whispered into my heart the truth:

It was Blood and Water that made me whole.
It was the Tree that saved me from my
death.

It was Mercy that called me by my name.
It was Love that set me free forever.

i will walk in the light of Your Wisdom
Until i behold Your Face eternally.



The Talk and the Walk

Adham El Sherbini

What's the first thing you think of when you hear the word innovation? Is it a thought, an idea, a tangible object, a service or an advancement? While the definition is broad, we can all mutually agree that the spark of any innovation is from a thought that arises in our mind. In fact, every innovation can be broken down into two components: the thought and then the action, otherwise referred to as the talk and the walk. So if these two aspects are universal to all ideas, what makes us different from each other? Specifically, what determines whether someone's idea is successful or not?

Let's use myself as a prime example. In the past year, I took on two time-consuming initiatives with the aim of bettering myself. The first was developing a NGO which works to provide a pay-what-you-can tutoring service to high school students. The proceeds would then be donated to a brain cancer research founda-

tion. This project was unsuccessful due to the lack of motivation and time I was willing to sacrifice. The second idea was to devote an hour a day to play soccer, with the aim of developing my soccer skills and physical activity. I have been fulfilling this goal since the start of 2021 and I plan to do so for the rest of the year.

I've used both of these ideas to try to understand what actually goes behind a successful and unsuccessful project, and how I can predict the outcome. It's quite obvious that, though these ideas arise in our mind, they are actually founded by our surroundings. The friends, classmates and parents who surround us daily are likely to impact both our actions and thoughts. To test this, I tried to connect both of my ideas back to someone. I easily found that my idea to start an NGO was fueled by a classmate who had done a similar service not too long



Photo by cotton-
bro on Pexels

ago. However, the only correlation I could find to my soccer-related goal was being introduced to the sport by my friends a couple years back.

So what does this mean? It's the difference between an introduction and influence. When we are only introduced to something, we are given space and time to develop our own thoughts and feelings towards this introduction. An introduction to soccer allowed me to develop an opinion on whether I enjoyed it or not.

A thought that is sparked by an introduction is bound to be successful because we would only act upon it if it were in our interests.

On the other hand, when we are influenced by those who are around us, we limit the space we have to judge it. Rather than focusing on how it makes us feel, we look at how it impacts the person we are comparing ourselves to. Similarly, the unsuccess of my non-profit was driven by how the idea was portrayed by my classmate.

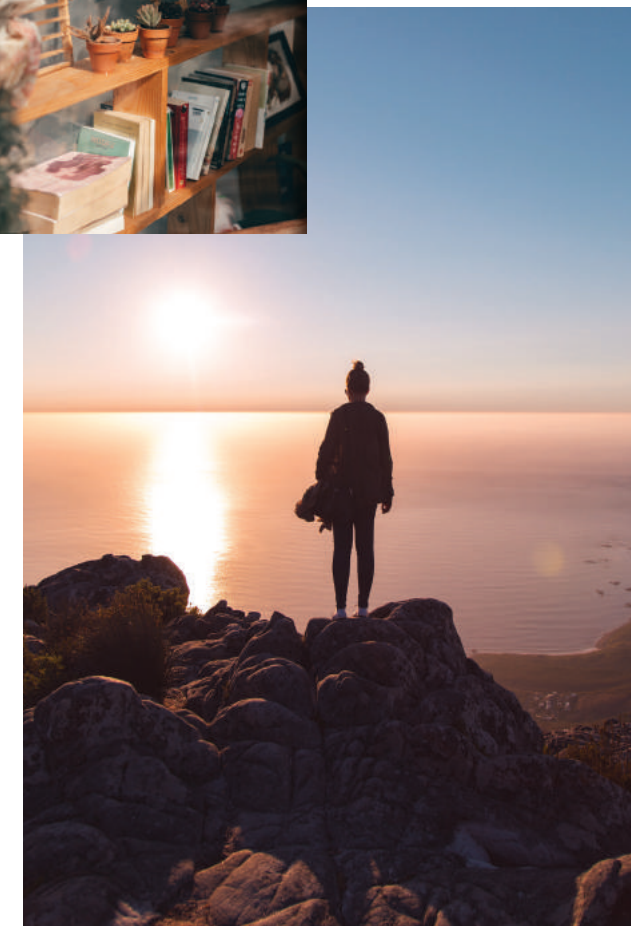
Growing up in a competitive environment, I've only ever compared myself to those who achieved more. Not only do I get influenced by ideas that are not suited to my interests, but I also develop bad motivation. Bad motivation is endless because regardless how much I am capable of achieving, my mind always ranks me second. When you are continuously influenced by those surrounding you, you can be victim to imposter syndrome, alongside depression, anxiety and other common mental health issues.

So is there a way to stop comparing yourself? There are probably multiple solutions, but what worked for me was to value myself. To value yourself means to appreciate and accept what you enjoy doing, even if it doesn't feel like it's enough for those around you. This would automatically eliminate influenced ideas arising in your head, as there is no need to compare yourself. Instead, your time would be better spent introducing yourself to new ideas and projects that you can test out. However, valuing yourself is easier said than done for the overwhelming majority of people. It took me months of reflection and under-

standing to learn to value myself, and I still compare myself to those around me.

Although I've explained the underlying determinants of my successful and unsuccessful initiatives, I have yet to explain why I wasn't able to follow through with the influenced idea. If I'm being honest, I still don't think I have truly found the true reason, but rather bits and pieces of myself that stopped me from putting in the work. Thought and action are connected, similar to a marriage. For the thought to be actioned, the reasoning behind must be worth the work. When introduced to an idea, the action barely feels like work, since you enjoy it and thus it's much easier to complete. However, when you are pursuing an idea that is influenced upon you, the determination and effort required is much higher, even if the outcome is the same.

As I continue to work on this, I urge you to do the same. Every time your mind thinks of an idea, whether personal or professional, write it down and attempt to connect it back to someone. If it's apparent that the majority of your list is sparked by influence and comparison, try to value yourself through different methods, such as journaling, blogging and placing yourself in different settings. Once you're capable of achieving this, you will be excited by the following ideas that may rise in your head.



Top Photo by Huynh Dat
Bottom Photo by Arthur Brognoli

JIHU LEE My name is Jihu, and I'm from Salt Lake City, Utah! I will be a second-year college student in fall 2021. I've been with Low Entropy since May 2021. Some of the things I love are reading, writing, listening to music, playing with my dogs and spending time with my sister. I'm grateful to be a part of the blog writing team here at Low Entropy because it allows me to keep up my passion for writing while exercising personal growth and making connections.

The Childhood Restaurant

Jihu Lee

I t's the same when you drive by in broad daylight and in the dark of the night. The barren exterior with its fading paint job. The black shutters shielding the abandoned interior.

The darkness of the shutters melts into the night, such that an unsuspecting passerby might believe the building to be temporarily dormant and set to come alive again the next day.

But the shutters remain in place when the sunrise rolls away the blanket of darkness. And the wall that used to bear a sign stays stripped of what once was the beacon of active hours.

Not even a whisper of life lingers, such that it remains in impossibly deep slumber even when the night is alive with streetlights and passing cars.

Then the sun's rays strike the windows, teasing its way through the cracks in the shutters and willing your eyes to snatch a glimpse of what is left inside. Perhaps you caught the silhouettes of the dessert bar?



Photo by Orlova Maria

Or the booths lining the walls and flanking the aisle - the one you could find with your eyes closed - leading to the buffet?

If you search deep enough in your memory vault, you could even see the ghosts of customers who had come and gone, having enjoyed their fill.

Look a little closer, the sun's rays are urging.

You can't pull yourself away. Nostalgia has unlocked a flood of memories, flashing past your eyes like apparitions, or montages rolling by.

Gradually, a scene settles still, forming figures that grab your singular attention like a music box dancer.

A couple exasperatedly convince their little girl, perhaps no more than five years old, to take one more bite of vegetables. You can almost taste the horrid combination of beans, raw carrots, and lettuce in your own mouth. Surely a feat such as that would warrant some ice cream as a reward. But you don't find out because the memories are whirring by, almost overlaying.

A friendly waitress stops by the same family's table and gives out chocolate chip cookies with a warm smile and a greeting that sounds as though she were seeing old friends again. It must have been some time later because the child, while still a child, is eating without supervision. *She takes three bites of salad in what couldn't have been more than fifteen seconds.* Clearly much has changed.

You blink several times, nearly overcome with the ghosts of innocence and childhood flashing before your eyes. The sun's rays fix their gleaming spotlight on this family of three. *The girl helps herself to a bowl of ice cream and goes back for - two more??*

The memories sail past once more. When they settle again, the family of three is now four. *The girl and the baby sister - with an age difference large enough that you'd expect the girl to be mistaken as the mother in a few years - playfully blow shreds of napkins at each other through straws.*

The baby places her food on the table rather than in her mouth, forming a smiley face with peas for eyes and carrots for hair, a shaky but wholesome execution of a child's creativity. Ask yourself, how long has

it been since you dared to innovate? How ironic it is that with age and wisdom, we feel more of a need to hide ourselves from judgment rather than grow bolder . . .

The cityscape around you dissolves out of focus until you seem to float right inside the building. Your breath, the only sign of life since forever ago, disturbs the silence and creeps through the walls, so as to become yet another ghost to haunt the establishment.

The walls begin distorting and the interior design shifts. The drink bar is angled the other direction. *The girl's mother nearly pushes open the door to the men's room before darting back out confusedly.* The men's and women's restrooms have swapped places.

It's almost the same, but different enough. As if the flashbacks have relocated to a version of the restaurant someone had tried to draw from memory.

The interior ripples back into its original formation, perhaps determined to dance between floorplans at whim. *In the next instant, the girl and her family seem to come and go multiple times in one fluid motion, their clothes changing as often as if they'd come to eat every week.*

Sometimes you see them with new people. One girl wearing spectacles and the brightest smile remained an unusually longer time than the others with the family but then disappeared again, reminding you of how even the longest of times are actually so fleeting.

The father has traded his usual coupon on paper for the one accessible on a mobile phone. When the memories shift again, there is a chill in the air, like the

calm before a storm.

A white car pulls up, the only one in the parking lot. The girl is leaning against the headrest of the passenger seat, her teary eyes staring blankly out the window. Is she crying because of a burden she harbors privately? Or perhaps because her father just came back to the car bearing the news written on a note taped to the locked doors? News of the restaurant having gone out of business in the state . . .

The air remains heavy for the next several moments, the space around you eerily threatening without the family's presence. You want them to come back, as if they're the closest thing that can fill the void of what you miss most.

The memories flood back once more. Could that possibly be the same family? The baby seems older than the girl was when you first saw her.

And the girl.

Her eyes see the world differently. Like she was three times her actual age.

They say eyes are the window to the soul. But they never talk about how, if you look deeply enough, all you might find is the ghost of a child trapped in a soul that was forced to grow up.

The interiors shift again as the entire location wavers between the sunny paradise of Anaheim, California and the vibrant oblivion of Las Vegas strip. Why did you end up here?

You just want to go home. But you are home. And yet you've never felt more suffocated in a place that is supposed to be your refuge.

The restaurant isn't the only thing devoid of life. All around you, the world has fallen into despair, isolation, paranoia, and grief. Vice and animosity cling to citizens like a sickness that you constantly breathe in and out, unable to escape it, claiming skyrocketing numbers of lives . . . The restaurant chain goes bankrupt nationwide like Christmas light bulbs flickering out simultaneously. How did it predict - when it went bankrupt locally - that its kin across the country would follow suit

years later?

Anger claws at your throat as you stand in the empty, dusty space before settling into dreary acceptance. So that's that then. There's no coming back, ever.

You'd come here so often as a child that you even got to see the green paint added to the exterior where it was previously only red. And every time you left, the walls kept a piece of your burdens from going home with you.

Now the shutters block your view inside just like usual. The sun's rays bathe you and wrap you in a golden hug as if sending an apology on behalf of the restaurant you grew up with. It's time to free the girl, your inner child, and leave her behind with your memories where she is

happiest, while accepting the black shutters closing a chapter of your life.

It's the same when you drive by in broad daylight and in the dark of the night.

But while the building is empty and unchanging, you're finely layered with the laughter and anguish of the past. The walls may not have changed in fifty years, save for a bit of discoloration, but one day you will meet the ghost of yourself a thousand souls ago and hardly recognize her.

"If being ordinary could get me a trophy, I would be the greatest champion in the history of mankind"

This Is Me

Kyoson Liu

I am a bookworm, so much so that I can spend my days off just reading, without talking to anyone. Yet, I am a hip hop dancer. So much so that I can dance in front of massive audiences without feeling even a bit nervous . . . okay, maybe slightly.

As I started to write a brief reflection about myself, I was kind of lost. Should I craft my first paragraph by hooking you up with a story about how I became a book addict, or should I follow some academic structure to express myself? Realizing that either might bore you to death, I decided to just go straight forward with two of my most distinctive characteristics so that, at least hopefully, before your concentration fades out, you will still have a snapshot of who I am.

This is me, Kyoson, whose introverted soul meets his extroverted personality.

Growing up in a middle-class family in Guangzhou, China, I was a not-special, overly-mediocre kid. Nothing about me really stood out; I did a great job playing a normal person. I was born with a superpower that allowed me to blend in any peer group without anyone noticing me. I was an ordinary kid among oth-

er children, I was a somewhat okay student in my teachers' eyes, my grades were fine compared to my peers and even my appearance was so common that even when I appeared in the campus magazine, my friends didn't notice.

However, this did not mean I was not a nerd.

"You are just different, though I can't really tell what it is," said my first girlfriend.

Her name was Yun. At that time she was 16 years old, walking alongside me on the school track under the autumn sun.

"If being ordinary could get me a trophy, I would be the greatest champion in the history of mankind," I said.

I don't know why this was funny, but I still remember she laughed, and we continued to wander casually, leaving withered leaves behind. It was a wonderful autumn.

Maybe Yun was right, and there was something special beneath my ordinary persona. It may have been

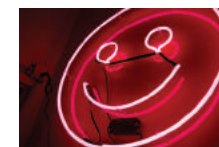


Photo by Jason Leung

“something” deep inside that I couldn’t fully fathom, but as I aged, it became clearer, and more and more condensed. Sometimes I feel I am so close to it, to a sense that I can almost touch or smell it. It is no doubt that this “something” - some unfathomable force - led me to who I am today.

After high school, I moved to Toronto to pursue my post-secondary education. Apparently, many Chinese teens get caught up in the fantasy of studying overseas - no matter how ordinary one is - and how it is a golden opportunity to expand one’s horizon. So when my mum presented me with this chance and sufficient financial aid, the joy in my heart almost shot me to the moon and I accepted her offer immediately.

During my first few months in Toronto, everything looked fresh to my eyes. The diversity of culture and the vibrancy of the city was just so good. Even the sky was much bluer than the one in my hometown, though, in reality, I couldn’t pinpoint the difference in detail.

Every day, after I finished language school, just like any other international student, I explored every inch of the city with full curiosity. But no matter how hard I tried to keep the freshness alive, over time, it naturally slipped away, just like the finest sand through my fingers. It faded away almost completely by the time I had to choose my major. The stress started to build up; I didn’t know what I wanted to do in the future. Deep in my heart, I was compelled to learn psychology, visual art, philosophy . . . but none of these majors aligned with my Chinese parents’ positions on job security. What they wanted for me was to become a lawyer, doctor or engineer, not someone painting on the street somewhere in North America and questioning the meaning of human existence.

So, unsurprisingly, I didn’t pick any of the majors that lay in my heart - partly because I knew my mum controlled my financial supply. Instead, I chose a major that ensured employment opportunities: architecture technician.

My three years of studies were fine. I enjoyed school and made friends from around the world. But as graduation day approached, I felt strongly that something was missing about my life purpose. Once again, the feeling was so close that I could even hear someone whisper, “I don’t want to work in this field my whole life.”

Though I tried to ignore the voice, a few years down the road, it proved its validity.

After graduation, I worked in Toronto for a few months and was then relocated to Winnipeg, where I lived for two years. Unlike Toronto, Winnipeg is a pretty small city located in the center of Canada. In winter its temperature can drop to -40 C. While I managed to survive in the cold, the flame in my heart gradually died out. I lost my passion for life. Not long after I moved to Winnipeg, depression hit me badly. For more than half a year, I didn’t want to see anyone and was afraid of stepping out of my apartment.

My financial state was fine because I had my job, but on weekends I lived almost like a zombie. Opening the curtain to get some sunlight was the last thing I would do. I couldn’t sleep well at night and I even questioned my own existence: how had I ended up like this at a young age? And of course, except the midnight ticking of the clock and the sound of my own breathing, nobody ever answered.

But as the old saying goes, It was at my lowest point that an idea struck me hard: If you keep living this way, you will end your life this way. This message hit me like a strong beam of sunlight slicing through the darkness of my mental abyss.

“It’s always darkest before the dawn.”

Yes, I admit I don’t like my job. Yes, I admit I don’t want to work in this field for my whole life. Yes, I admit I like psychology, stories, philosophy and questioning human existence. I admit that this is who I really am.

I summoned the courage to face these facts, because I knew it didn’t matter how many times I ran away from them, they would trail me like my shadow. I would not try to escape this time, and I would, from the bottom of my heart, embrace and accept myself completely.

Two days later, I handed my boss my resignation letter and drove 22 hours westward. I believed the new me deserved a new place to thrive. I moved to Vancouver in 2018. During the first few months, I still worked in architecture, But this time, with a clearer vision of what I wanted to do: working in that field was only a make-shift way to cover my daily expenses. The real goal was to go back to university to study psychology.

I got my permanent resident status in Canada (because the tuition fees for non-PRs was way too expensive), and in my spare time, I read books avidly in both

Chinese and English. Fiction, non-fiction, self-help, philosophy, psychology, etc. Why? Because reading was the most affordable source of education: all you had to do was just go to any library and borrow the materials you wanted. And, spiritually speaking, I believed that, through text, I could find a way to unlock certain invisible gates that would allow me to take a glimpse of the unfathomable force within me.

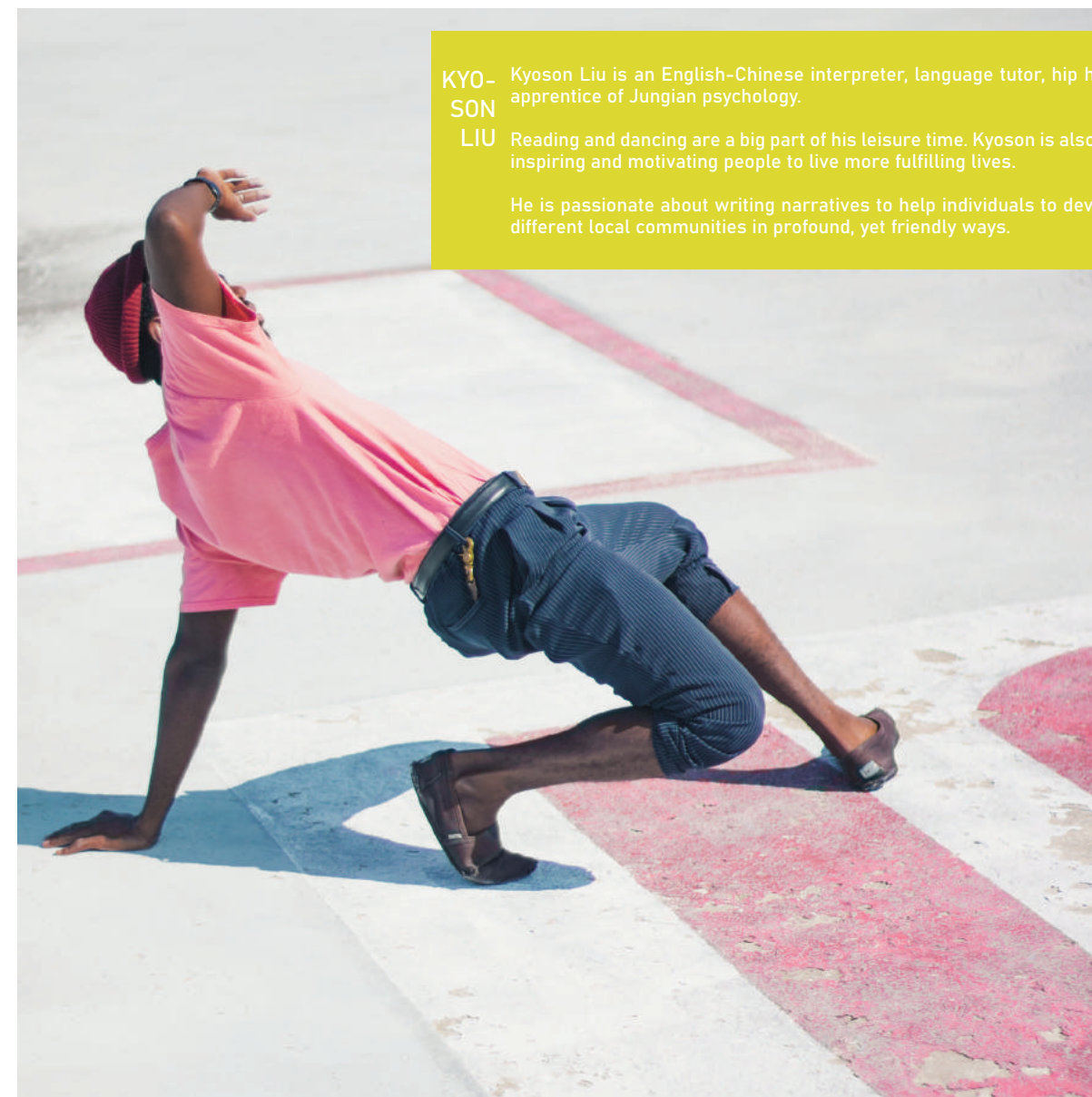
When you change your inner attitude, the outside environment will magically follow. One day, I felt like dancing. I have danced hip hop since I was 17, but I stopped after entering college. That day I felt like picking up my old hobby again.

In a sense, dancing is a form of self-discovery: by merging yourself into the music, you get a different form of communication with your existence. I am glad that I

have rejoined the dance community, and it was through dancing that I became a bit more outgoing.

On the quest to understand my unfathomable force, I believe reading and dancing are the paths that led me closer to it. The essence of this force might be beyond what I can explain verbally, at least for the moment. However, I am living a more fulfilling and meaningful life today, and I believe I will uncover its secret in the near future.

Photo by Joseph Frank



KYO-
SON
LIU

Kyoson Liu is an English-Chinese interpreter, language tutor, hip hop dancer, philosophy student and apprentice of Jungian psychology.

Reading and dancing are a big part of his leisure time. Kyoson is also a freelance copywriter who enjoys inspiring and motivating people to live more fulfilling lives.

He is passionate about writing narratives to help individuals to develop meaningful relationships with different local communities in profound, yet friendly ways.

ANAS-
TASIA
LEE

My name is Anastasia. I am 22 years old, and I am from California. Ever since I was a kid, writing has been my passion because it is a channel of self-expression. With every piece of writing, I hope to build a collected masterpiece of art to share with the world.

La Luna

Anastasia Lee

La Luna is my best friend
I shall gaze upon her beauty
Til the end
She's always there during the day
When I shine bright in the sunlight
And even through
The darkest of nights
Like death and rebirth
She renews herself in every cycle
Rotating around the Earth
Her radiance shines when she is full
Even through all of her phases
She is always whole.



Photo by Anastasia Lee

