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Likeness

magazine

pushing forward



Low Entropy is headquartered in Kwikwetlem First Nation Territory of the Coast Salish people, and in the shared territory of the sə́lilwətaʔt̓ təməx̣, x̣ṃəθḳʷəỵəm, 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

I hate to be a downer, but . . .

Optimism can be in short supply sometimes, despite the messaging of those (relentless ones) who always seem to have a smile ready for broadcast. It's pressure, and it's annoying, but good for them. Good for them.

For the rest of us, lurking in the shadows, things can sometimes (most of the time? I'm so sorry) be a bit of a slog. A drag. A chore. We plow through and we get there, and we don't want to seem ungrateful, because we are, we swear — one must be vigilant in recognition and remembrance of those who have it worse; what are you, some kind of monster? — and you're right, of course, why complain about things we can't control . . . but please, just give me one more second to pretend to be ok . . .

I lied. I don't actually hate being a downer at all.

Negativity exists, life sucks sometimes, and it is a fool's errand to attempt to juke or dodge a foggy haze. Our writers for this issue of *Likeness* have been within it, and when they tell tales of having choked down its bitter mist and survived, it becomes clear that sometimes you just squint your eyes, grit your teeth, trudge on through and see what happens next. And if wallowing in the bad means I get to hear your story as you rest your weary bones on the other side, then what's a sad song between friends?

Beautiful, is what it is.

Thank you for being here.



Editor, Low Entropy

table of contents



Photo by Andy Beales

3	Foreword Simon Cheung	11	Where's mommy Kathy Woudzia	18	The Difference Between a Sledgehammer and a Feather Cristina Crescenzo	25	Bring Her Back John Diedrich
7	Untitled Document Julia Magsombol	15	Depression and Bungee Cords Cassandra Di Lalla	19	Clouds of memories Wendy Redondo	26	About Yew Trees, Hailstorms, Ice and Water Sue Turi
9	Pity Party Cristina Crescenzo	16	For Those Without Breadcrumbs Sue Turi	21	My coolness and collaging journey Kathy Woudzia	29	I persevere, though Etienne Rutkowski
10	Why I never want to give up Kanak Khatri						

“I miss my self dearly — the time I didn’t need to spend



hours in front of my laptop, typing these moments.”

JULIA MAG-SOMBOL

Julia is a Filipino-Canadian freelance journalist based in Edmonton. One of her goals is to bring comfort to people through her writing. When not writing or reading, you can catch her buying indoor plants, sewing clothes and drinking instant coffee.

Untitled Document

Julia Magsombol

September 26

It’s 4:01 a.m., and I’m sitting in front of my laptop. The only light I have is from my yellow lamp. I was editing the piece I wrote earlier for this submission — but that piece didn’t give me any feelings. I felt like it was the same stories I wrote years ago. It had the same voice. It had the same storyline as before. I was not too fond of it. That story felt fake to me. So now, I’m going to type what I truly feel in a newly open Google document. This time, it will be . . . true.

I don’t feel sad. I think . . . it only hurts. And I guess I couldn’t handle the hurt well so I’ve become numb with it.

I don’t feel anything. I don’t know what I’m supposed to feel. Is this right? Something is wrong.

But let me recall some things . . . and I may recall some feelings too.

Last month, I was published. It was my first paper publication in an actual magazine. But she ripped it out and wanted to throw it out. “It’s not important,” she said. I don’t like her. I wish she’d never had me. The honour of that publication was stolen in a second. I was mad. I was . . . sad.

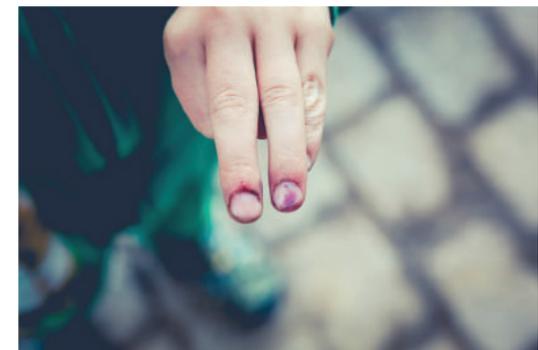


Photo by Markus Spiske

Last Thursday, I bought my 35th plant. It was a calathea. I was deciding if I should buy it as it was on sale, but the lady removed the sale tag, just before I took the plant. I was pissed and mad. I couldn’t do anything about it. I still bought it for \$15.

I had a job interview with my professor last Friday. I scratched my nails. I was nervous. I noticed that my nails were bleeding right after the interview. I know I failed the interview.

I was at a birthday party last weekend. The people at the party scared me. Socializing scares me. I didn’t know what to do. I ate alone outside while the weather was 18°C. I was scared.

I applied for another job earlier today, and I felt nothing but annoyance.

I went to sleep in the afternoon. I've only had five hours of sleep in the span of three days. I still think sleeping is a waste of time. I could've done a lot of things.

In the evening, I wrote stories again for different publications.

It's 4:01 a.m. now. And suddenly, these memories are nothing compared to the old times. I miss the old times.

I miss my grandparents, and when I used to live with them. I miss the times I would push my grandma while she sat on the office chairs. I miss every afternoon with my grandpa when he would sing "Yesterday" by the Beatles outside.

I miss the time when I could still kiss my dad on the cheeks and say, "Take care," just before he went to work. I miss the time when my mom's touch still felt so gentle. I miss being close with them, so close.

I miss the time when my friends were still friends. I miss the time when the four of us sat at the lunch table and shared our food. I miss the time we pushed each other toward the person we liked. I miss the time when we ate ice cream downtown at 9 p.m. at night. I miss them dearly.

I miss someone who made me feel alive yet dead. I miss the time when we only worried about the future, not our current relationship and feelings. I miss the times when we gave each other love letters, with our ugly handwriting on them. I missed the time when we were late, and we tried to catch the bus at the bus stop. I miss the time when we met at 7 a.m. and ate breakfast at Denny's silently. I miss the time when we laughed and did not cry to each other. I miss us.

I miss myself dearly — the time I didn't need to spend hours in front of my laptop, typing these moments.

I miss my old self, when I was actually with people I loved the most.

It's 4:51 a.m. now. I'm writing this because I'm starting to forget things. I'm starting to forget my feelings during these times . . . the happiness and hope I had back

then. I'm starting to forget these people. I'm scared. I'm hurt. I don't know.

The only thing I hold on to are my feelings, but they're starting to fade now. I don't feel anything. People said that you won't forget people and things if you embed them in your hearts. But they're wrong. Why am I starting to forget? Why?

I didn't have any chance to say goodbye to these memories.

I can't stand that these memories are fading away. But maybe there's a good enough reason for that. I really hope so.

Now that I have written these memories . . . and certain feelings in this paper, this will be the storage for them. Each time I forget, I'll try to still come back to this.

But for now, this document will be untitled, stuck somewhere in my files. I want to live in the present and look out for tomorrow — after all, life is too short (I think?). Maybe it's nice to forget for a while. Maybe it's okay to be sad and to be hurt. Maybe it's okay to be numb. Maybe I shouldn't recall the unlikeable things that happened last month and week. Maybe I should start living now. Maybe it's okay not to feel anything, until I can feel again.

September 27

Today, I finally repotted my calathea. I heard it isn't easy to take care of them, so I researched some tips for them to bloom in time. But I also came to see and read the symbolism of it.

CRISTINA CRESCENZO My name is Cristina Crescenzo and I am an English major and aspiring writer just hoping that my words can help someone in some way, and that I can always strive to increase awareness for mental health and the disabled community.

Pity Party

Cristina Crescenzo

- I wish I liked parties
- I wish I liked the burning taste of tequila
- I wish I liked dancing among the sweaty bodies of my peers
- Beneath the Technicolor lights
- I wish I could be one of those girls who cry in the bathroom
- Over a stranger they just met that night
- Thinking it was love
- My heels have stood on the dusty ground of a nightclub
- But only as an observer
- I wish I wasn't twenty-one
- Then I wouldn't feel like I am missing out
- I wish I felt comfortable in skintight clothes
- I know I could enjoy myself
- If my brain would let me
- I wish I were invited
- If in the small chance I am
- I wish they would stop worrying about me
- I wish for my heart to no longer splinter
- As I watch you walk out the door
- Wishing it were me
- Every weekend I am forced to throw myself a pity party

Why I never want to give up

Kanak Khatri

Photo by Jonathan Cooper

In late April this year, I injured my hand at work. It bled through to the next day, and I had a very painful birthday on the following one, because of my bandaged hand. That was when I wanted to give up on my job, but I did not. Less than a week later, I had a horrible sore throat. I was COVID-positive, honestly the only thing that was positive in my life then. At that moment, I felt like life had given up on me, rather than me giving up on it.

However, after 10 very long minutes of being sad, I realized I get to stay home, rest, and maybe do things that I like while confined to my room. And that's when it hit me, I had an injured hand, fever, sore throat and all this mental trauma from this job. I should be finding a new job. That was when I started applying to jobs, and after maybe 10 rejections, here I am in my present job, and I like it.

The whole journey that started from an accidental injury to finding a job gave me perspective on why the universe was putting me through these adversities. It made me realize that the present me is so grateful for the girl that I was in the past. Why, one might wonder? It's for all the times she didn't give up and kept going through adversities, storms and hell. Had she not kept going, the present me would not be as hopeful, with goals that she wants to achieve and a bucket list that maps out the experiences that she wants to have in life.

Speaking of a bucket list, I want to own and drive a Tesla, and I am car-illiterate. The fact that I know about even one car amazes me. That made me wonder, what if Elon Musk had given up? I would not have a dream car and would be acquainted with zero cars. If he didn't believe in his vision and did not persevere, there wouldn't be these electric vehicles that are good for the Earth's resources in the long run. And that is the power of pushing through.



Now, I am not Elon Musk, and I don't have a revolutionary idea because I do not have his entrepreneurial acumen. I do have things that I don't want to give up though, like continuing to grow in my career, my relationships, and my mental and physical health. I am sure we all have our little stories where we didn't give up, like learning how to drive, acing a test, becoming a great dancer or overcoming anxiety.

Understanding the benefits that pushing through can create in our lives, we should never give up on becoming better versions of ourselves, and never give up on our goals in life. Strive through adversity. In a way, it may become an inspiration to someone, a thing on their bucket list, and may even have a positive global impact.

Where's mommy

Kathy Woudzia

Nana, where's my mommy,
Where did she go?
Answers you don't want to know.

She's been taken by the lord
Out of my mouth, the words they poured
She's been taken by addiction
What I'm about to tell you, it's not fiction

See little one, this problem started long ago
She was only two and was starting to grow
In a hurry, up too fast
Her alcoholic dad didn't know it, but he put her last
He acted like she wasn't there
But little Jess was all too aware
Of a father she could never please
A father that would always leave
A question in her innocent mind

A question that was kind of tough
"Why am I not good enough?"

A little scar began to form
The calm before the inconceivable storm
The shit would really hit the fan
The blame, her dad, confused as a man

You see he only showed her love
With the fingers he would drunkenly shove
Around her private body part —
hopes confirmed,
Finally, daddy loves me with all of his heart

He proved to her she's only good
When she behaves the way she should
Keep her mouth shut; don't tell mom

"If I do, she'll keep me from,
ever seeing her daddy again"

Young Jessica was so confused back then,
especially when it came to men

Her daddy died at forty-one
Addiction killed his devastated mother's son
Alcohol, drugs, then death killed his pain

Closure for this little girl in vain
The cycle to be repeated again

Her father dead, that's no surprise
He was dead long ago in this girl's eyes
But scarred her he did; this is true
A life can be ruined by a father without a clue

In your abuse of a little child
You've created a girl who feels defiled

A beautiful young lady, she became,
A string of boyfriends who were lame
She chose boys who treated her bad
Her mom, confused, perplexed and sad
To see a girl with so much love to give
have it used and abused by those who live

This amazing woman wants to TEACH
Troubled teens that she might reach
To all who'll listen, she gives advice
For us, she'll pay the ultimate price

She's didn't think she was worth fixing —
A victim she lives
Everything inside of her she gives,
To the lives of other victims
She can't save herself by her own convictions

She had to die so others could live
There is nothing to forgive
She did her best with what she knew
But childhood trauma could give you a clue

With the blaming and self shaming
Life can be so very draining
When you face life's ups and downs
Relationship currency keeps you sound

Cling to hopes and hug those present
Today is all we have, it's evanescent
Fleeting moments we should seize
Ahold of as if we want time to freeze
Memories are left behind
Questions linger in your mind
Between happiness and sadness, your mind will
straddle
Your mom's life, tragically ended —
She lost the battle

With the drugs, addiction's spell
That last tryst with fentanyl did not go well
It sucked the last breath out of her
No time to tell you how you were

Loved by mommy, oh so much
You became her special crutch
But sadly one can never be
An addict's excuse for recovery

See, when things in life went wrong
She couldn't cope or be that strong
In her mind the constant barter
Between the drugs and being a martyr

If she slipped on that very thin line
The cost of life could be the fine
Young daughter
Do not every ever blame yourself for this
You're most in life that mommy will miss

She tried to do it all for you
She lost herself in trying to,
Believe that she was worth the try
In the end we all just cry
She paved the path with years of grief
Few human connections for relief

Mommy's still here in her spiritual being
she's at peace; she wants you to be seeing
You should never live in victimhood
If you want your life to be good
Keep your loved ones close to you
And remember that she loves you too.

Mommy didn't get a chance to say goodbye
She didn't plan that night to die
Every tear that has been shed
Is a constant reminder that she is dead

Don't be a victim or a saint
Live your life with some restraint
Beware of vices for they're your best friend first
But then they give you an insatiable thirst

For more and more, there is never enough
Getting off of them is tough
And once you're off it's not the end
They continue to entice you like they're your best
friend

Constantly in the back of your mind
You'll go crazy before you find
Yourself back in for one more try
And that may be the day you die

Cause many things are not for certain
But for mommy's life, this was the closing curtain.

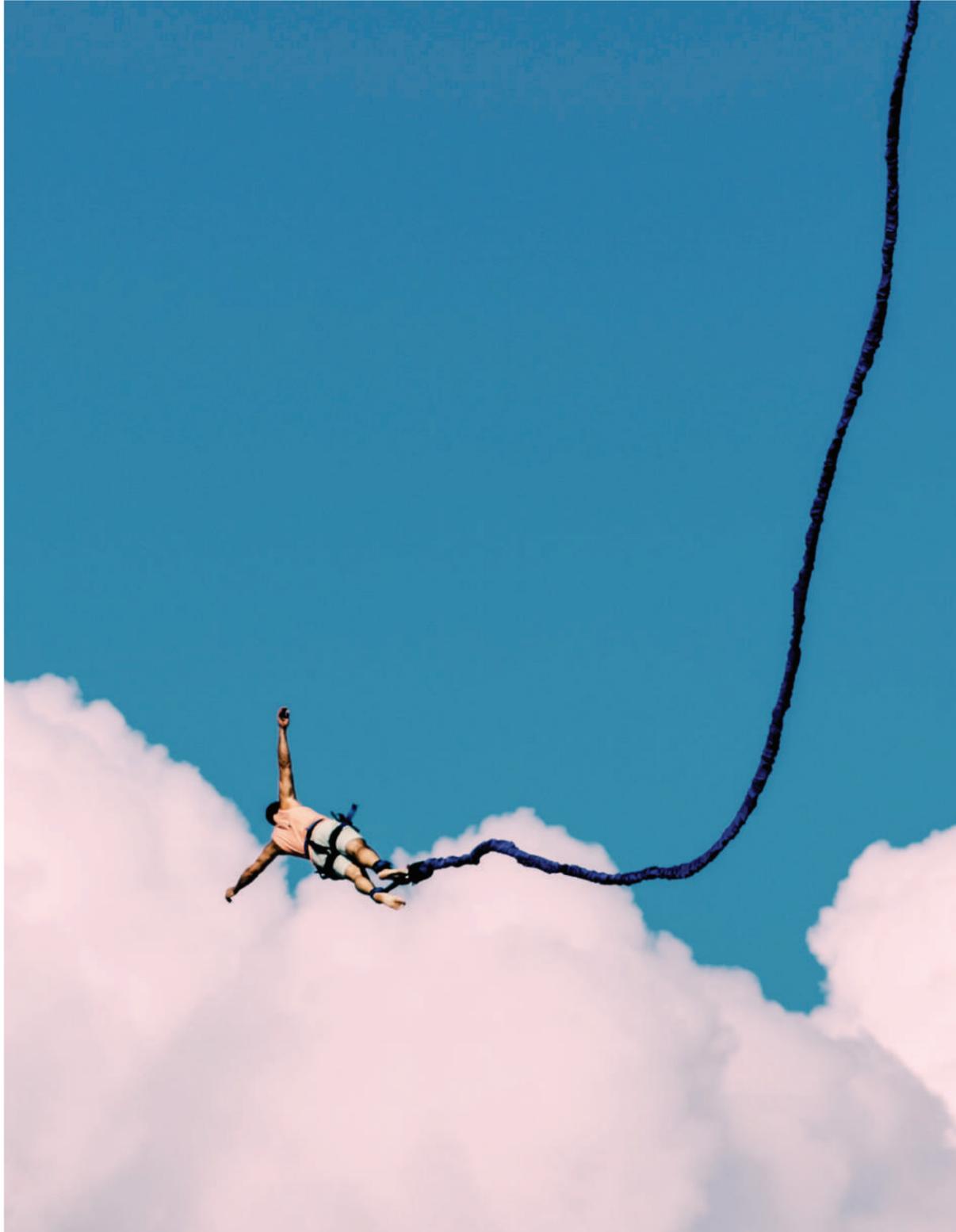


Photo by Altin Ferreira

**CASSAN-
DRA DI
LALLA** Cassandra Di Lalla lives life purposefully. She enjoys reading, writing and mental health initiatives. She's an animal lover for life and an innovative individual always finding new ways to create

Depression and Bungee Cords

Cassandra Di Lalla

How can I push forward when all I feel is the weight on my shoulders constantly pulling me back?!

I feel as though every single step I take moving forward, there's a bungee cord pulling me back and disrupting my walkathon.

When my feet want to move ahead, that bungee cord locks my knees in place and says, "No thanks, I don't feel like snapping today." So I respond with, "You're flexible enough to go the distance without snapping . . . it just takes strength and perseverance."

I wake up everyday lacking motivation, drive and even passion now, because depression took over . . . but

it was an uninvited guest, and I never asked for depression to be present.

But then it hit me: depression is not a choice, and that's why it was never part of my guest list. I didn't choose depression over happiness; it happened because I felt powerless and defeated in that moment.

Depression has a cold soul and yet it's faceless . . . because it can appear in any form at any time, and I don't like that kind of surprise. It's not cute.

Depression has this incredibly awful way of doing business with humans. Depression's goal is not to win you over positively by any means, but to take everything you have. Like, here's one: "I'm going to make you feel your absolute worst because I don't care how horrible you already feel." And then BOOM, rude awakening . . . you realize that you don't want to get out of bed or do any of your daily tasks, you couldn't care less to talk to anyone, you have no energy to maintain your hygiene, your mind is a mess, your heart hurts,

etc. Or sometimes, just sometimes . . . you feel completely numb. And if the world hasn't ended yet, that's your cue to dim the light, call it a night and hope that sunrise doesn't show its face, because depression can turn you into a zombie.

But then, on a random day, totally out of nowhere, with nothing special about this day, you decide that you're going to attempt this thing called

life . . . give it another shot.

You thought that maybe, just maybe, you could hit the reset button and begin once again doing the things that once made you happy. You remembered that being outside in the fresh air and getting a dose of those ultraviolet rays made your soul sing, and that hearing nature's hymns, like the birds and the bees, made your heart happy. You couldn't possibly forget how unbelievably lucky you felt when mother nature showed you the way of the wild and introduced you to the beautiful animal kingdom surrounding us here on Earth.

So, you took initiative and reintroduced all these positive things in your life, and are now enjoying the beauty that life wants you to live through . . . you took one step and the bungee cord learned to follow along without snapping. And now that bungee cord understands that you've been trying to break free from pain and suffering, but that you still need something to fall back on when times are tough, and that's why the bungee cord never wanted to snap; it will always be there for support but it knows how far to go with you.

Don't let depression stop you and don't let it cut your lifeline . . . or bungee cord.

SUE TURI I am a writer, illustrator and painter living in Montreal, Canada with a degree in fine arts. I began my career as a production artist for design studios and ad agencies, before deciding to devote myself purely to self-expression through writing and painting. I am currently at Concordia University majoring in creative writing and English literature.

For Those Without Bread-crumbs

Sue Turi

This poem addresses divorce, and the necessity to have a moment of clarity and flexibility before moving on. "Climbing the tallest tree" provides a 360° bird's-eye view of one's present situation when lost on the path of a linear dependency on past regrets and future desires.

They say life is cyclical and I see why —

the moon that draws and releases the tides
the way an echo replies,
the seasonal freeze and thaw
the rabbit that, annoyingly, leaves my tree gnawed.

The way my eastern sunrise is someone else's sunset.
As in birth, growth, and death.

Then why do I feel like it's The End today,
like a funeral without goodbye words or lily bouquets?

They say marriage is not just a piece of paper.
[Something about being soulmates forever —
growing old in lakeside bungalows; warmed by
love's infinite glow; having watched one's children
grow steadily up, stumble and fall, then wish them luck . . .]

I share the same screen but in a separate box.
A moderator sits as the stone-faced, judicial watch.
We discuss who gets what, and who owes who
with 44 pages to sign and initial through; and
the inheritance money of the long deceased;
and percentages of value increase; and the sofa
that I nursed our first baby on that I'll keep,
because you say, it's ugly and worn with scuffed feet.

What happened all these thirty years alone but together
have been pressed and dried between pages, then bound in hard leather.

Some say the only way onward in life is forward —
a slate wiped clean, a page turned and
to never ask of oneself —
what did this all mean to me?

When lost in a dark forest,
you have to climb the tallest tree
if the birds have eaten your crumbs.

"my eastern sunrise is someone else's sunset."

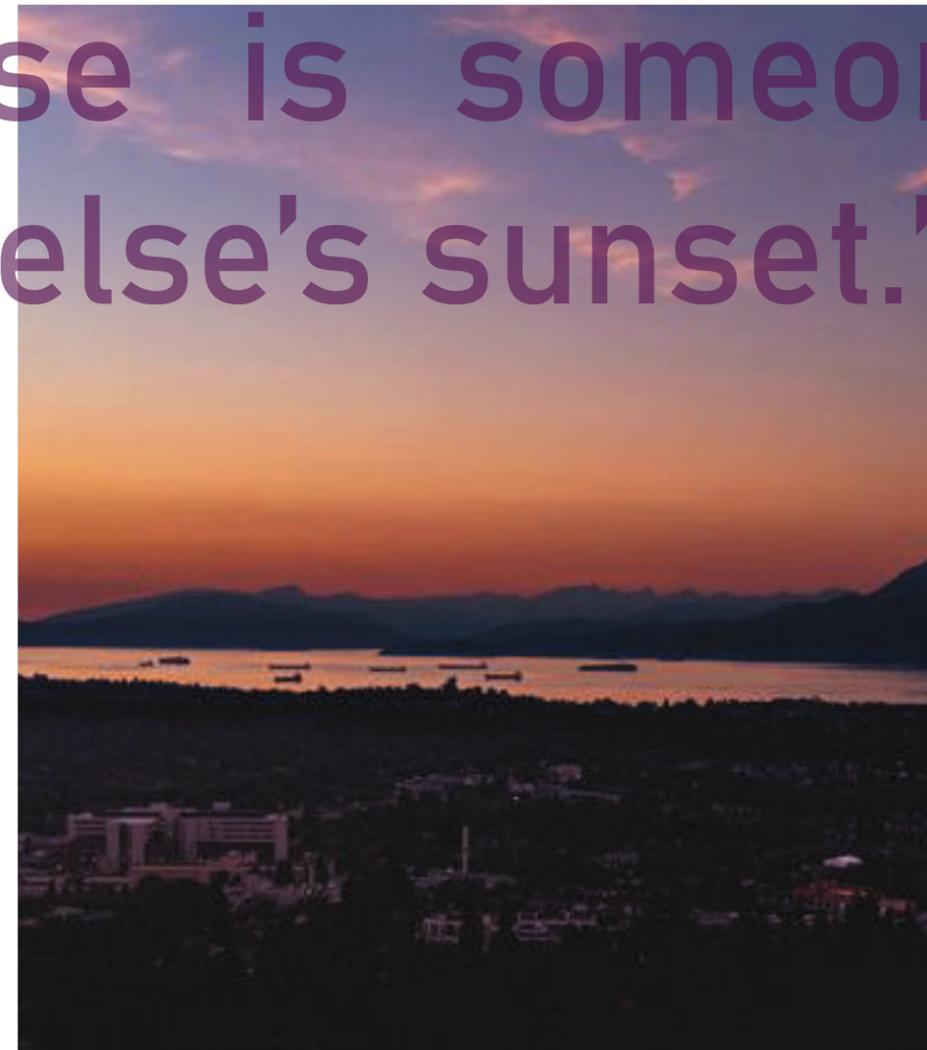


Photo by Naga Natarrajan

The Difference Between a Sledgehammer and a Feather

Cristina Crescenzo

Photo by
Rayson Tan

I don't have an exact date for when everything started to change, but I know now that life requires effort. I can no longer glide through life, disregarding the fact that everything I say or do has an impact. That's why, I think, people often use the term "pushing forward" instead of glide, because life erects walls around you. As a result, you constantly have to take on the full weight of a sledgehammer to knock them down, and that can be exhausting. That is why you can't blame people who feel like giving up, because as you age you gain the wisdom you wanted so badly as a child.

We learn from the moment that we are born that we are constantly taking tests for what comes after, and what's not fair is that nobody knows what does, and on top of that, we have to make up the rules as we go along. So the big question is, what are we doing this for? Why push forward time and time again? Sometimes I think it's a fool's errand.

Some may say it's not all that complicated, but I think that if it weren't so complicated I wouldn't be asking myself every day, "How did I get here?" Why do we experience everything so extremely, and how does it all lead us to where we are in the present moment? The answers should be as clear as day, but they are all foggy in my memory.

I guess what I am trying to say is that there is no way we don't go through all we do as human beings to end up with no reward. That is why I choose to keep pushing forward against the obstacles, despite the many times I have almost shattered myself.

When I take a second to step back and examine my path, I could easily complain about the things that

have happened to me that I never asked for, like being born with a disability, losing a parent so young, and struggling with my mental health. However, I have to try to remember that even though every individual has their own journey that matters, some have had harder roads to tread than me. I don't know if it would work in the same way for someone else, but I think that's a reality check I really need in order to stay grounded and to get back up, time and time again. It makes me think of this quotation from my favorite book of all time, *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath, about a young woman in the 50s who becomes disillusioned with the world. She says, "The floor seemed comfortably solid. It was comforting to know that I had fallen and could fall no farther."



It makes me recognize that I have surpassed my own pain threshold many times and I have lived through it, and I know I can manage it if I put in the effort. At the end of the day, I know some people may only

want to focus on the times I have fallen, as if every mistake outweighs every success, but I have to learn to forget all that, and instead be proud of myself for beating the odds. Life doesn't have to be a game of win or lose if we choose to not let it be that way. Nothing good can come from being your own referee, because then every foul you call on yourself stings twice as much. As such, I will fire myself from that duty and implore you all to do the same, because the world is heavy enough on its own without having you take on extra weight. I truly believe that if we try our best every day in pursuit of growing our own strengths and happiness, and do it for our own peace of mind, it can mean needing only a feather to break down our walls, instead of a sledgehammer.

WENDY REDONDO Wendy is the general director of the Revista Letras Vivas in Caracolí, Colombia, and has had poetry previously published by a journal in Lima, Peru.

Clouds of memories

Wendy Redondo

The dark night heralded its end;
the twinkling moon struggled to wait.
In silence the stars faded
and wandered the horizon.

Bitter black clouds of memories,
they are heaped in my soul,
how dew in the morning
pervades the dark whispering mirrors.

Nights drenched in pain
when the terrifying rain falls,
bitter oblivion floods the streets
as he breathes his last.

“they all knew I was secretly hiding other addictions.”



Photo by Nani Chavez

KATHY WOUNDZIA

Kathy is from Vancouver, BC, a freelance writer, a mom to four children, and a nana to two beautiful grandchildren. She speaks fluent Slovenian — her first language — and has published works in various journals and websites. Kathy's most recent work is an award-winning CBC news story detailing how her eldest daughter passed away, titled “Jessica's Secret.”

My coolness and collaging journey

Kathy Woudzia

Please note that this article discusses a variety of addictions (including eating disorders and substance use) and suicide, and contains one instance of strong language.

I'd like to share some experiences with you guys that cover my struggles with addiction to collaging (among other activities/substances) and the need to be cool, which began in early childhood.

I have spent a disproportionate amount of time, our most valuable resource, on trying, and perpetually failing, to be “cool,” something I have coveted most of my life. To help cope with my addictions to coolness and collaging, I used the following: food (too much or too little in the form of eating disorders), exercise, antidepressants and shopping.

Since I had maxed out on the first three, the first manic episode I suffered in mid-2019 came out in the form of shopping. I spent more money in one month than most people earn in five years, which needed to be covered by the profit on the sale of my townhome and, partly, my inheritance. Once my son, a stickler for money, asked to see my bank account. I was not concerned about it, because it was money I felt was well-spent, but it was also money I didn't have. His concerns led me to a relatively short hospital visit.

After spending the better part of my life in a constant struggle to feel “normal,” I have just recently been



Photo by Matteo Badini

partially properly medicated for one condition I was born with, but only came out in the form of mania after the loss of my 34-year-old daughter in early 2018 and, subsequently, my 55-year-old brother in early 2019, both of whom struggled with substance abuse. That condition is bipolar I disorder. The condition I am waiting on for a proper diagnosis is attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD.

The first time around, I was put on the wrong meds, which put me in a manic-depressive state so deep, the only reason I didn't die by suicide was to protect my

kids from another sudden death. The docs took me off the meds and didn't bother prescribing anything else. I managed to get myself better by abusing cannabis.

For me, bipolar I and ADHD present themselves in a variety of ways that work against me, such as the fact I talk non-stop. I came out of my mom's womb speaking fluent Slovenian. Because I talk 100% and listen 0%, no one listens to me after the first minute. I tend to veer off during the conversation, much like a tree branches out, and when I forget the point I was trying to make and ask what I was talking about, others can't answer because their minds and eyes were on the closest escape route, and I don't take the hint. I waste even more of my time, and worse, theirs, on trying to remember my point. I can't remember what I was talking about, so I have even stopped listening to myself!

Worse, because of this problem, people avoid conversations with me like the plague, which makes me think that I am misunderstood 100% of the time.

In grade 3, I began using food to cope with parents who loved me so much, they never wanted to see me anything other than happy, and so neglected my other emotions. They also, for some crazy reason, saw something special in me, and decided they knew what was best for me rather than allowing me to make my own decisions, like playing accordion instead of piano, and if that's not uncool, then I don't know what is. I coped like many children do

when they are controlled and they are not allowed to share their emotions: I overate.

Perceptions of ideal bodies being what they were, it was another strike against me in terms of striving to be considered cool. It wasn't until I turned 16 that I literally grew out of my larger figure because of puberty — I still had a chance to be cool, and for the last two years of high school, I was. Coincidentally, I also began abusing cannabis for coping with my emotions around that time, and it worked for that purpose but gave me the munchies as well, which caused the weight to start creeping back up again.

To ease my highly academic course load in grade 12, I was introduced to the power of exercise from a physical education teacher. I was able to better handle my emotions and weight gain by taking up and enjoying distance running, which is why I am not overweight today. Exercise was the primary and most consistent coping mechanism I used almost my entire life for coping with undiagnosed, untreated bipolar I.

The only coping mechanism I wanted my loved ones to see was my addiction to exercising because it was the healthiest of the lot, but they all knew I was secretly hiding other addictions.

If you've been living with an undiagnosed illness your entire life, and you lack insight — as I did — it leaves you feeling helpless, because if you know there's a problem,

but you don't know what it is and can't fix it, and that was very frustrating for not only me, but my loved ones as well.

Food works in this way. When you are "hangry," you become irritable and lose focus quicker than normal because you lack nourishment. Left unnourished long enough, you will stop functioning cognitively and your behaviours become impulsive in an effort to "feel better".

ADHD presents itself in this way as well. A lack of the chemical dopamine is the cause for impulsive behaviours — striving for balance is the most basic human level of functioning.

The problem with food is an easy one to solve as long as it's available and you know that's what the problem is, and the problem is only hunger and not an underlying need for a chemical your body isn't producing enough of. The latter leads to impulsive actions which can risk your life and the lives of others all in an effort to achieve enough of the "feel good" or "feel balanced" drug, dopamine.

You spend a lifetime feeling ashamed, wondering why you crave stimulation while others seem so balanced in their lives, not knowing that your brain is no longer functioning at a cognitive level, but at a primal level because of your biological inability to produce an adequate amount of the dopamine you are missing. If we have been living with the condition undiagnosed and lack insight, we seek out stimulation by acting impulsively to attain a level of a chemical commensurate to what would be produced in "normal," "balanced" people.

Now you know why I felt a need to be cool — I just wanted to be loved and accepted. The story below gives a humorous account of one of my many coping strategies I used over the years in search of balance.

My struggles with collaging came early in life. I think I must have been four when I made my first one. By around grade 3 I came up with the idea that I would



Photo by Tom Patmore

write and mail letters to all of the 52 U.S. states' travel centres listed on the back pages of the only magazine my dad subscribed to, *National Geographic*, asking for any and all state brochures.

I would then use the pictures to create collages, and I also figured out I could use them for social studies projects. Do you know any other 11-year-old kid who would submit a 100-page social studies report on Kentucky (among other states and countries), 99% of which was photos cut out of *National Geographic*, that the teacher didn't give a shit about?

When I accepted the *National Geographic* challenge (i.e. making someone believe I was old enough to travel alone), I took time to prepare, which involved research using my dad's *Encyclopedia Britannicas*. Since I was a perfectionist who was never able to prioritize time, and therefore spent a lot of it wasting it, this led to weeks of preparation before even beginning the actual letter writing. I had to convince a secretary that my letter was legit, even though it looked like it had been written by a kindergartener. What I lacked in intelligence, I gained in hope.

After I mailed my first letter, I began obsessing over the mailman. The second he made the delivery, I was at the postal box, front and centre. The first time I opened the mailbox and found a thick 8.5 x 11-inch manilla envelope addressed to me, I felt a rush I'll never forget. I was addicted, hook, line and sinker. Once I had exhausted all 52 states (and probably their secretaries), I moved on to international countries. In no time, I got my younger brother addicted.

Fast-forward to this summer, when the six-month abuse of cannabis gave way to my childhood collaging addiction rearing its ugly head as a perpetual time-waster.

Unmedicated for bipolar I and ADHD and high on cannabis to help cope, my eye caught a collage I made up of a 2018 family trip to Tofino. Three photos in the collage depicted my youngest daughter, my son and myself surfing. I noticed that, while my daughter and son looked loose and natural on their surfboards, I looked as stiff as a mannequin. In addition, you would have needed binoculars to spot any wave behind me. I looked more like a stand up paddle boarder than a surfer.

As a truth-seeker and truth-teller, I thought that in order for the collage to represent itself in a fair manner, the order of the photos needed to go in order of coolness – and I came in DEAD LAST.

Before going through the trouble of rearranging the order where my photo was, which would only have taken five minutes, I considered that perhaps I had missed a photo where I did look cool the first time around, and so I wasted an otherwise productive morning searching in vain for a photo of me that simply did not exist. I had lots of hope going in, but after two hours of searching through hundreds of loose photos, I finally accepted reality — there was no better photo. In fact, the one I chose was the only good one.

I was hospitalized one week later after a hypomanic episode. During my hospital stay, there were plenty of activities lined up, and one was, of all things, making a collage. Did I dare?

Medicated (at least, for the mental component of my illness) this time around, I not only created a meaningful collage depicting my roots, hobbies and dreams, but did it all in under an hour. I had broken

the cycle of perpetual time-wasting and had come to a place where I was not abusing collaging.

I am so grateful for my hospital stay, for many reasons but am disappointed that they lacked insight into the physical component of my illness, a lack of dopamine production. I am hoping my psychiatrist will help with this, and if she doesn't, I'll find someone who will. In this day and age, why does it need to be so hard to receive a proper diagnosis?

Now, on to repairing the damage I did to my relationship with loved ones who had to clean up my messes, and being formally tested for — I've already done the research and it fits — ADHD. And because I no longer waste time either, these two challenges are on the imminent horizon.

JOHN DIEDRICH I find that writing and visual art help me to process emotions like grief and have helped me to enjoy life, even in hard times. I love the Low Entropy Foundation and its goals, and wanted to share this poem with the community.

Bring Her Back

John Diedrich

This is a poem I wrote a year or so after my mother died. It is written from the perspective of a sort of ancient religious figure who has approached a young man who wants to bring a loved one back to life. The older man represents a role model that I wish I had when I was dealing with the loss of my mom.

Bring her back?
You ask such things of this old man?
You ask this after seeing I can hardly stand?
The thing you have asked, it cannot be done,
Life, the intricate web, is already spun.
It is so in the corpses' bones,
It is etched in her graves' stones.
You must honor the peace of the dead.
I find it to be confusing, the grief-ridden head.
You have asked me to undo absolute reality
For you, to deconstruct that which is objective totality.
Ah, but you are by no means the first,
And, I'll be damned if the last,
I can see you believe. I see the love, the hope.
But for her, for you, the die has been cast.
The answer is no, go home, and let yourself feel,
But do not be ashamed that you asked.

About Yew Trees, Hailstorms, Ice and Water

Sue Turi

“Water to Landfolk,
Seems tedious,
If they venture forth in an unsteady boat,
The sea waves will foam
And the sea-horse heeds
Not the bridle”
— Runic poem for lagu (Thomas Howard translation)

One of my most reassuring comforts in difficult times is to consult my bag of runes for answers to things. Runes are a collection of 24 stones with ancient symbols carved into them which, depending on how they are selected, can give different answers to personal questions. Runes were used by ancient Norse tribes in times of uncertainty to understand predicaments and foretell possible outcomes, whether it was the right time to plant crops or if a battle would secure victory.

My runes sit in a little threadbare pouch made from sacking, pulled taut with a drawstring. I keep them safely in the top drawer of my vanity. They are made of red stone-baked clay shaped into slightly different forms, each one engraved with a different stick-like

symbol, reminiscent of pagan times when people relied on nature and myth to guide them.

There are many complicated ways to read the runes when asking a question. But I usually resort to the simple selection of three runes — signifying past, present and future, after laying them face down on a favourite scarf of mine.

I am no shaman or expert in analyzing tarot cards, crystal balls or rune readings — I sometimes doubt their hocus-pocus analysis of a situation, especially when the answer is not what I want. But the symbolism of each rune resonates with me despite my distrust of chance, and provides me with intriguing clues about my current circumstances, how I got there, and possible developments. They give me that much distance from myself,

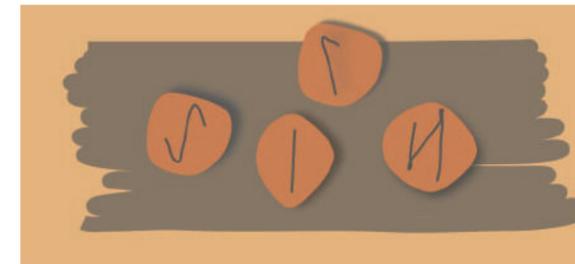
**allowing me to feel part of a bigger
cosmic context**

even if for only half an hour.

I have a few favourite runes which I hope to get with the luck of the draw about a particular dilemma. I want all outcomes to be rosy, of course. And on the flip side, there are those that I dread getting. But they are all significant in themselves in that they

never tell a black-and-white story. Some selected runes may advise you to take the reins and push forward on a project, and others may tell you to hesitate and take precautions, and depending on the combination of the chosen three, the answer can be quite nuanced, as is life.

Take for example the “Yew” rune or “Yr.” The yew tree is one of the oldest trees on Earth and is referenced in ancient scripture and Celtic history. It has immense spiritual value, as it was often used to make staffs, symbolic of spiritual guidance. Yr looks like a lightning bolt, and other than meaning a potential delay in a plan, it has a mostly positive meaning. With Yew



The Yr, Is and Lagu Runes

in one’s reading, the inferences are strong — having pushed forward, one may have been or are in striking distance of the desired goal. But this is only its superficial meaning, as on a more mystical level, one’s strike is only as good as one’s aim and steady hand. Advancing into undiscovered territory requires inner strength to clear a path, and can be supported or undermined by one’s social landscape.

We are often told that moving on in life without looking back is necessary, even heroic, in order to survive. The rune “Hagal,” which means “hail,” suggests this. In ancient times, lives were dictated by the weather. If crops failed after a hailstorm, then only stoic endurance could get one through the harsh winter. To get Hagal in a rune reading may seem negative — it can suggest limitations or setbacks — yet it is a stark reminder of our resilience and preparedness, and that spiritual growth can only happen through hardship.

But sometimes one needs to pause and wait — process past steps and contemplate future ones. The rune “Is” or “Ice” is symbolized as one stark line. On the surface, being warned about something may seem forbidding — ice is hard and unforgiving, as well as dangerous. Yet putting something “on ice” — not tak-

ing any action — can be protective, for financial or career reasons, for instance. But having Ice in rune readings concerning marital issues or relationships is an ominous sign. On a deeper level, Is can symbolize a growth stunted or dormant: a relationship degraded or gone on for too long. In this situation, stopping to process past mistakes and take inventory can make the difference between success and stagnancy.

To this day, I don’t know if rune-reading has acted as a self-fulfilling prophecy for me or as a helpful, protective guide. But every time I take my runes out of their pouch, I feel intensely meditative — as if my life has so much more weight to it than fleeting day-to-day emotions. Society’s continual push onward is inherited from our ancient ancestors — fear of starvation, stagnancy, or depression and financial ruin. But every society needs meditative moments, especially during periods of frugality and societal upheavals like pandemics.

The rune “Lagu” is indicative of the introspection that these moments encourage. Lagu means “water” in Norse mythology and is symbolic of the moon and tidal flow.

**Sometimes the answer to one’s worries
may not be inaction.**

A present concern may not signal a stormy setback. Being driven onward like a lightning bolt may work to seize an opportunity, but won’t work with affairs of the heart. Going with the flow of the river — in whichever direction it takes you — is sometimes the better, if not the only option.

I have never had Lagu yet in a rune reading so far, but I hope I will someday, as it is reassuring to note that a river usually reaches the sea, evaporates to form clouds and returns as rain. Runic wisdom may not hold all the answers to my worries, but it gives value to the idea that pushing forward on an issue requires exploring its tributaries, as there may be more than one right answer to one’s problems.

Illustration
by Sue Turi

“avoiding the edge, and falling off of



Photo by Cristian Palmer

it, has become a critical focus”

ETIENNE
RUTKOW-
SKI

Etienne is a freelance writer living in Kelowna, British Columbia. Etienne is a student at the University of British Columbia, where he studies international relations and economics. Etienne has an interest in migration and refugees, specifically how they will be further challenged by climate change and the global political system.

I persevere, though

Etienne Rutkowski

I set my alarm to rise before the sun and pull myself out of bed before drowsiness can catch me. I step under the freezing water before my resolve can waver. Day after day, I fall into rhythm. I start these days early, to dive in and to lean into the waves of life.

I aspire to embody unflinching resilience to the immense weight of responsibility. I dream that I will come to experience some great sense of satisfaction, enlightenment, success, comfort.

These ambitions, though — selfish and antithetical, perhaps — constantly threaten to pull the rug out from beneath me; doubt lies in waiting, looking to consume me. I am faced with laying myself bare to the uncertainty of a precarious world, and I want nothing more than to hide behind my pessimism. I don’t want to feel vulnerable and exposed when I am inevitably confronted with failure — with reality.

How could everything not be in vain? Bad luck stabs effort in the back. The innocent childhood fantasies of adult life are the faintest whisper: avoiding the edge, and falling off it, has become a critical focus. I was born into a world built on the foundation of intense competition, demanding a desperate scramble to impossible heights of success and excellence.

What has been left behind?

How can I be optimistic when striving to reach “the top” has led to critical environmental damage and inexorable global warming? The planet promises to entangle war, famine, disease, migration and climate with

apocalyptic consequences, and the possibility of my experiencing these realities grows ever more likely.

What of the great majority of global leaders? The same individuals and organizations that push our species forward will offer nothing more than symbolic acknowledgement of the destruction of this planet.

More and more, I feel utterly dejected about my future — and our future.

I persevere, though, because there doesn’t seem to be another option.

I’ll reluctantly admit that perseverance, for me, is clearly informed by the game of capitalist structures and “western,” Judeo-Christian societal values. Truly, I am unimaginably privileged that this is the case.

The goals that I am motivated to reach reflect a system where I have access to the basic human rights and needs that many people don’t. When billions struggle to feed themselves, my pessimism is exposed as being firmly instructed by the system that I claim to struggle within and rail against.

Shouldn’t the quality of every human life and the health of our planet be paramount? If they aren’t, then we’re all persevering to get somewhere that other people might not. Indeed, we will continue to base the pursuit of our lives on getting to places that others cannot.

If success is always entrenched in deeply rooted inequality, perseverance will continue to be useless against bad luck, like when, where and how you're born — who you are, in the sense of the attributes that you cannot control, not what you can make of your life.

Despite my insecurity, my uncertainty and my pessimism, I am incredibly lucky. I have opportunities in life that most human beings will only dream of. My own success has to reckon with perpetuating a vast and growing expanse of inequality in the world.

I persevere, though. Why?

I persevere because I am lucky. I persevere because I feel that my humanity owes it, to every person that was born into a position of lower privilege than me, that I stand up for my community and my species. I persevere because if I don't persist in advocating for environmental sustainability, I might not have the time or ability to push forward towards anything else.

I persevere because it will take an immense effort to see the innovation of thought and understanding supplant the tournament of industry. I persevere because it will take many more people to make the rights and dignity of all people a priority — I do it to be part of that push for change.

I persevere — further into adulthood, with all the associated challenges — despite often struggling to find hope for the future. Selfishly, I endure because

I want to survive; biology has ingrained that instinct into people throughout evolution.

I do hope to fulfill my goals, and I do hope to find a deeper meaning within that process. Working towards those goals is how I persist, though — not why.

I persevere because the best thing I can do in the face of my pessimism is to remain dedicated to the things that I truly care about: my family, my community, my world, and myself.

I persevere because I hope that other people will as well, and I persist because it won't hurt to try.

If there is anything any of us can do, it is to push forward to a better future, not a future judged to be better by unimaginable technology, intergalactic colonialism and extended lifespans — I am sure those things will come in time. If we continue to push forward in the ways that we do now, we might not have that time.

Instead, we need to push forward, by conscious choice, towards a better future for everyone.

