

UC Santa Barbara

Volume 4 (2023)

Title

A Life Worth Living

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/02p2n9k2>

Author

Phommasa, Ash

Publication Date

2023-10-01

A LIFE WORTH LIVING



HEALING FROM TRAUMA

art, poetry, writing; a how-to-guide

THE ZINE

The zine is curated for people who have experienced a world made unlivable for them. It stands strong for those who have faced trauma and felt shattered beyond repair. This is my message to you: Even though some parts of us are lost forever, we can still become someone even greater. We can still cultivate a life that is worth living, having a radically different outlook and appreciation for life.

THE AUTHOR

Ash Phommasa is an aspiring clinical psychologist whose work is motivated by her own personal experiences in IPV and hospitalization.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My Raab Fellows and supporters: Brea Spencer, Kiana Perez Granados, Sierra Vakili, Courtney Poon, Cassidy Miller

Mentors and Editors

Diana Raab
Ljiljana Coklin
Kenny Smith
Ashelyn Wagner
Dr. Erika Felix
Dr. Heidi Zetzer
Elana Hubert

Art Submissions

Alana Ulloa
Alexia Acevedo
E.M.S.
Meiya Sidney
Ricardo Arreola
Yasmin Briones
Zoe Witherspoon



My journey

with this zine started when I took an extensive road trip to Arizona and developed a severe infection. From the Grand Canyon all the way home to Orange County, I made several pit stops to emergency rooms. Each doctor treated me differently—some even with hostility. “I don’t need to take any tests. THAT’s herpes,” the doctor stated as if it was a God given fact. With my eyes wide, I thought: “WHAT!? You gotta be fucking kidding me.” Since my infection flared up in my private areas, doctors assumed I was a dumb college kid who caught a sexually transmitted disease. For a while, I internalized these doctors’ assumptions and started questioning everything: who I was as a person, who my partner was, why this was happening to me—“WHAT was happening to me!?” Because, it wasn’t even herpes. My skin was set to flames, broiling in bacteria and I was told I had an STD. Life sucked. I was at my all time low and didn’t know how to recover from the audacity of these doctors. But eventually, I focused more on my friends and family who were holding my hand throughout every step of my recovery, and I started to heal. I started fighting for a way out from my pain and it was this proactive effort that helped me flourish like never before. I spent all my time journaling my experience and studying the science behind it, which is what I want to share with you. I want to give you the will, the means, and the absolutely vital tools to survive this because I know you can.



INTRODUCTION

Content warning: This zine covers traumatic material in relation to resilience and recovery. Please take care of yourself and make sure you are in a strong, grounded state when reading this. Choose which sections to read based upon your own preference and digest it slowly if needed. There are three sections: 1) An introduction with a personal story on interpersonal violence, 2) Definitions and misconceptions of trauma, and 3) How to heal. If you have recently faced a traumatic event, please feel free to skip to the last section and focus on your journey of healing.

Content warning: This section presents a poem on interpersonal violence.

I am alone in a room with him.

There is a flash of rage behind his eyes,
And that's all it takes.

He swipes everything off the desk and throws it.
He pushes the dining table onto its side.
He curses in a frenzy,
punching the wall.

The room is closing in on us.
I think to myself: at any moment,
He can turn his rage onto me instead.
I can become his target.

The next day, while walking to class, I suddenly forget how to breathe. I'm hyperventilating—frozen in place because I thought I saw him from afar. My brain shuts down.

... I lift my eyes from my desk and scan my surroundings with

confusion. How did I get to class? The TA has been teaching a lesson, but I can't focus. All I see are flashbacks. All I hear is his yelling. All I feel is danger, fear, panic. It's like I'm back in that room even though I'm sitting here in class. My heart is pumping erratically. I can't breathe. I can't speak. I am hyper focused on the thumping in my ears and the wave of panic flooding my thoughts: *"He's going to see you. He's going to find you. He's here. He's there. No, you can't go there. That's his favorite restaurant. He goes to the gym everyday. Don't go there. Don't hang out with that person. That's his roommate. Don't go anywhere. Don't do anything —stay safe."*

When class is over, I motion toward the door but can't seem to make the entire trip there. I'm standing in the middle of the classroom as everyone files out one by one. Through the doorway, I can see the sun beaming over the garden hill. My favorite spot on campus. It's just a few footsteps away, but it's not enticing me. It scares me. I realize

that I'm scared of being outside. I need help. Feeling extremely exhausted, I find my way back to a chair and try to breathe. With fumbled words, I ask my TA if he can help me. He sits down next to me, and I admit: "I can't leave this room because I'm afraid of going outside. I'm afraid someone's out there." I relay the entire event to him, explaining how one of my biggest triggers is seeing anyone who resembles him in public. It takes a long time for me to talk through it. I'm scared of getting reported, and I'm scared of what will happen if the offender gets in trouble—but I know that I can't continue living like this because I'm not living at all. I continue saying, "I don't understand. What happened was nothing, and yet it's debilitating. I can't even function properly."

To this the TA replies, "I'm sincerely concerned about your well-being and safety... You know, people tend to have this extreme definition of trauma, like going to the war and losing a limb, but... you're experiencing triggers too. You're nonfunctional when you see people that even slightly resemble him. You're having flashbacks. You're scared. It might help to consider the fact that trauma is subjective, and it might just be what you're experiencing."

I was dumbfounded. Trauma? I never considered it because I always thought of it as an extreme, as a diagnosis for veterans and first responders who have suffered the most impossible circumstances. Was it really possible that I faced trauma?

WHAT IS TRAUMA?

What makes an event traumatic? The APA Dictionary of Psychology defines trauma as "any disturbing experience that results in significant fear, helplessness, dissociation, confusion, or other disruptive feelings intense enough to have a long-lasting negative effect on a person's attitudes, behavior, and other aspects of functioning" (American Psychological Association, 2023). This definition implies that trauma is subjective and does not require a single, uniform definition. It is up to your interpretation, and what you feel is what matters. When the

traumatic event is particularly sudden and unexpected, many people experience initial reactions of shock, disbelief, and even psychological numbness (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1995): "It was like I had been given a big shot of psychological novocaine. I couldn't feel *anything*."

Trauma originates from the Greek word for "wound" (τραύμα; Kolaitis & Olf, 2017) and that's exactly how I would like to look at it: something that injures us and leaves a scar. In my experience, trauma has been a deep, agonizing wound that scars over but reopens, exposing itself to the

world again —coming alive again and again and again. I feel it every time I talk to someone about what happened: an immediate, physiological reaction where my heart races and my cheeks burn up. It's also psychological: the fear, the panic, and the tornado of thoughts that make you lose control over what you were saying or doing in real life, in the present moment of class, during work, or even during a fun outing with friends. It's hard when thoughts, images, and recollections of that traumatic event break into consciousness.

This reaction is known as the Fight Flight Freeze (FFF; Braive, 2016) Response, which is a built-in mechanism to protect us from danger —but, our brains have been shown to set off false alarms. Even in safe situations, our brains can force us into survival mode and cause panic before we can rationally assess our circumstances. Our thoughts and actions are flooded with fear. We start taking quick, shallow breaths and our heart rate spikes which can lead to chest pains and panic attacks. The FFF Response is also marked by negative memories,

remind emotions, and flashbacks to remind us of our past dangers and their negative outcomes. This is what we must endure after facing trauma.

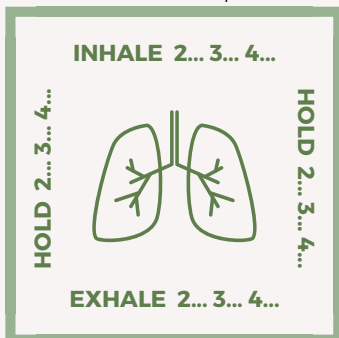
Every day, in all parts of the world, individuals face extreme adversity: a flood wipes out an entire community, a fire devastates all kinds of life, a school shooting takes young children, a friend dies by suicide, a terminal illness ends your life, a pro-athlete has a career-ending injury, a pandemic creates a sad, lonely world. It is also crucial to consider trauma that people may perceive as “less extreme” because these challenges still have a significant strain on our ability to keep going — single parents struggling to put food on the table, marginalized communities fighting for their rights, young people suffering from volatile relationships.

What all of these challenges have in common is a lack of control. We typically do not have direct control over any tragedies that befall us, which means that focusing on the event (what, why, and how it happened) isn't the best way to heal (Tedeschi, 1995). In fact, trying to “fix” it by wondering where you went wrong and placing blame on yourself and/or others can delay healing. The truth is that many of these traumatic events are uncontrollable and irreversible. You can't turn back time and erase it from ever happening. You can't go back to the person you were before.

What you can do is focus on the present and what you want for yourself in the future. Accept that pain, hurt, and powerlessness

SQUARE BREATHING

Calms the FFF Response



you felt. Accept your human experience, your authentic human emotion, your valid reactions, and your decision to pave a new path. You were once simply going about your life until you weren't. You were shaken up badly. A sudden, seismic event—an earthquake, an asteroid—

destroyed the path you walked on, and now it's time to build a new one. It's time to take what you have endured and say that you are a stronger person for it. It's easy to succumb to hopelessness, and it's tough to fight for a way out. But, I know you can do it.

HOW TO HEAL



LOVING KINDNESS

May you be safe.
May you be healthy.
May you be happy.
May you live with
ease in the world.

Researchers have been investigating a recent phenomenon known as post-traumatic growth (PTG; Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2014, p. 1): a process of radical positive psychological change in the aftermath of immense struggle. It is believed that in the face of disaster, people have the opportunity to confront and reframe their trauma. They reassess their goals, their values, and what they find brings the most meaning to their life (Schulenberg, 2022), taking on a new sense of wisdom that they would not have gained otherwise. In other words, people enduring life-threatening circumstances have this ability to not only recover but to flourish like never before.

In a study by Garbet et al. (2017), ten burn survivors wrote personal diary-type blogs whilst another three survivors made daily vlogs to foster growth. The researchers found all content creators expressed a shared experience in enhanced relationships, changed outlooks on life, and shifts in self-perception. The most prevalent shift in self perception was the survivors' feelings of personal strength from overcoming their trauma.

"I don't believe it's rendered me helpless, in fact it has made me stronger."

"When the incident happened it changed my life. It transformed me from what I could have been to what I am now as a very confident.. strong-willed person."

The bloggers/vloggers were able to confront the trauma they faced (i.e. the chronic pain, undergoing surgery, adapting to a change in appearance, and dealing with

negative social reactions) and reframe it all as catalysts for the immense strength they have found within themselves. We all have this ability to rewrite the script and take control of our own story and self identity. The burn survivors also had changed outlooks on life where they realized just how precious it is.

"I really learned about life when I had my accident and the struggles and experiences I have gone through since. We know more about what life is truly about, how hard it can be, and how precious it really is because we have been through accidents where most people haven't a clue."

"I'm going through a bit of a 'yes' phase. I think it's because I feel so lucky to be able to do things again. Even if I don't really fancy something or I would normally be too lazy to go, I'm saying yes."

Another study by Bradt et al. (2019) recruited eleven military service members to engage in music therapy and write songs, all of which expressed similar themes in moving forward and

positive support. Many service members highlighted perseverance as a common virtue in moving forward along with maintaining close relationships.

"Take it as a running back in football. He gets handled the ball and he quickly looks for the hole or gap in the defensive line and shoots for it. He may only get a couple yards, but those yards add up to getting closer to the goal... So, that's what you gotta do, if you see your opportunity to shoot the gap and make a run. Go for it! Put all your effort in and run!"

"Overtaken by the weeds, overtaken by the darkness. The flowers struggle to survive. The garden rallies to support our lives, and we bloom where we are planted."

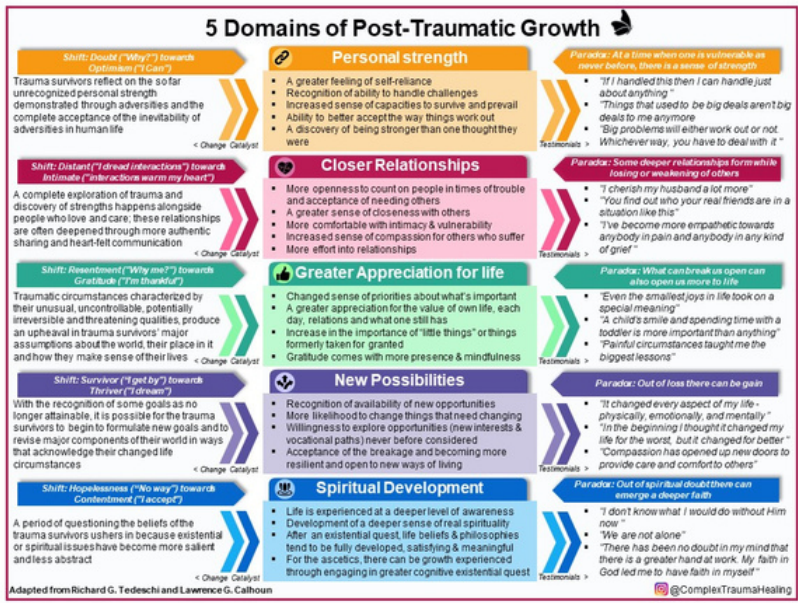
Despite their past hardships, service members were able to join and support their family, friends, and community. They were able to both give as well as receive love, which was their greatest struggle.

All of these shared experiences allowed researchers to develop



the Five Domains of Post-Traumatic Growth: Personal Strength, Close Relationships, Greater Appreciation for Life, New Possibilities, and Spiritual Development (Henson et al.,

2021). These are the five factors that foster PTG, and if we teach ourselves to know it, we can bounce back from anything. We can cultivate resilience, and we can flourish.



"Have you ever heard that the Chinese word for crisis combines two characters meaning danger and opportunity? This captures the essence of posttraumatic growth—that in traumatic experiences, as upsetting as they are, we can find opportunities for meaning and personal growth. Posttraumatic growth is not about returning to or recreating the life you had before trauma; rather, it describes the perspective shifts and choices for positive change that often come in the aftermath of significant trauma." – Lisa Danylchuk





Writing Exercise

A study conducted by Qian et al. (2021) found expressive writing to facilitate psychological rehabilitation within pregnant women who were diagnosed with a fetal abnormality that terminated their pregnancy. The women were able to disclose their experience and express their emotions through writing prompts. This study amongst many others shows that writing is a healthy coping strategy and has the potential to help survivors find strength and grow early on in their healing journey. And so, I invite you to engage with the following writing prompts once a week for at least 15 minutes each.

Week 1: Reconsideration of the self: Who am I?

Reflect on your strengths. Try to look within yourself with love and compassion. Who are you, what are your strengths, and how have they fostered your growth?

Week 2: Reordering of values: What is important to me?

Try to name your priorities and how to fulfill them within your day-to-day life. What is important to you and how can you practice those values?

Week 3: Redefinition of purpose: Where am I going?

Consider your long term goals. How can you better yourself and change the trajectory of your life?

Week 4: Reconstruction Time: What am I grateful for?

Life is short and we need to appreciate our blessings. What are you grateful for? Who can you thank for supporting you in your healing journey?

Amos (2016)

Myth Busting

Myth: The answer is time. Time heals all wounds.

Myth – Busted ✓ This is a tricky one. Yes, generally it takes time, years, and sometimes even an entire lifetime to recover from trauma because there is no standard timeline or linear way of healing. However, the other 99.9% of me is shouting, "MYTH!" Time is not the answer. Time does not heal all wounds. You may be thinking, "I experienced something so fucking brutal and I need to catch a break. Isn't time the greatest healer of all?" Again, no. Many people who are dealing with demanding life situations like saving lives at a hospital 24/7 or raising five kids all alone don't feel distressed – or should I say they aren't aware that they are distressed – because the world majority has that "life must go on" mentality. We deny our pain. We push it out of our awareness. We work and work like a dog year by year and time isn't healing our wounds because we don't feel wounded. We aren't addressing the pain. We cope by working and keeping ourselves distracted. Time itself is not the healer. An active effort and healthy coping mechanisms are the answer.

INTERVIEW

Content Warning: EC is a survivor of sexual assault

At 3 am

I took my chance and fled
Leaving my shoes behind
at his doorstep

I raced through the streets
of IV
Feet numb to the rocks
and debris

I can't stop asking, *Why?*
Why did this happen
to me?
What more do you want?
What more can I give?

My body, my soul
Taken from me
There's nothing
Nothing more I can be

After two years of quarantining from the COVID-19 pandemic, school was finally back in session. EC was in the midst of finding her footing and learning how to socialize again when she agreed to a movie night with a date. She didn't know he had other intentions. She didn't know she would be escaping an offender that night, running home barefoot at 3 am.

EC's transition into healing started as she shared her experience with more people. EC had a lot of support from the Campus Advocacy, Resources, and Education (CARE) Office, her psychiatrist, and friends. The CARE Office helped EC file a report, her

psychiatrist provided medication for the nightmares, and friends shared their own vulnerability by telling their own stories with SA. Some insights and advice EC had was to "truly give yourself grace with everything." She tied this into the process of filing a Title IX report against the offender which was a taxing, three-hour process; demanding EC to recount the event in vivid detail. No one could ever prepare for such a thing – the consecutive, grueling questions and the physical evidence you have to present. It was retraumatizing, but EC is happy she did it.

One thing I encourage you to do is write about your trauma while it's fresh. This will be emotionally painful, but it's vital to express your emotions. It is also vital to have primary sources and evidence (e.g., journal entries, texts, photos, witnesses) if the time ever comes where you want to file a Title IX report. Write with that in mind but also know that you do not have to take it that far. You do not have to take any legal action if you are not ready and you know yourself best. You know whether it will harm you or help you.



POSITIVE PSYCH



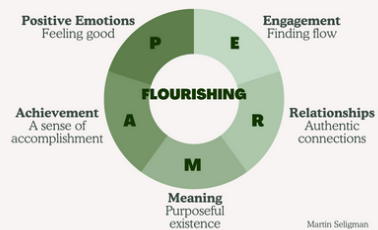
My journey with this zine started when I took an extensive road trip to Arizona and developed a severe infection...

My skin was set to flames, broiling in bacteria because the toxins were trying to break out of my skin. And, on top of that, I was being discriminated against for the assumption that it was a sexually transmitted disease. It made me question the world and everyone around me. It made me question who I was and why this was happening to me. I was experiencing such intense physical and emotional suffering that I felt life wasn't worth living anymore. The doctors didn't understand my infection, and tossed heavier and heavier pain medications my way with every visit along with pills that fought off the extreme side effects of headaches, nausea, vomiting, etc. I didn't know where my life was heading. I didn't even know if I had one in store for me. But eventually, I started focusing more on my friends and family who were caring for me, holding my hand throughout every step of my recovery, and I started to heal. I started fighting for a way out

from my pain and it was this proactive effort that helped me flourish like never before. I spent all my time journaling my experience and studying the science behind it, which is what I want to share with you. I want to give you the will, the means, and the absolutely vital tools to survive this because I know you can.

The key is finding meaning and positive change amidst your suffering. I know, easier said than done, but that's what this zine is for. I'm providing basic lessons on positive psychology to teach you how, starting with Martin Seligman's PERMA Model: Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Achievement. These are the five pillars to human flourishing; to living at your most optimal levels of happiness and content. We can dive into the PERMA model further by analyzing my own personal experience.

THE FIVE PILLARS TO HUMAN FLOURISHING



For the first week of developing my infection, I was in a lot of physical pain. I was also mentally

exhausted and feeling helpless in a world that couldn't help or understand me. I couldn't see any potential happiness in a world where I felt this pain. During my last trip to the hospital, I admitted in defeat: "If you can't take this pain away, then I don't want to live anymore." When I arrived back home, my sisters watched hopefully as I took my new medication. The pain became tolerable and I was extremely grateful, but I still caught myself questioning whether life was really worth living. It was a daily dilemma where I wondered, "What is the meaning of life?" At this point, I realized that happiness isn't simply a life without pain. I was someone who was lucky enough for the pain to go away, but I was left with ordinary unhappiness. I guess you could say that I was your average Joe, roaming this earth without any major physical or psychological pain but still unhappy. I wanted to find purpose. I wanted to prosper beyond mediocrity. I asked my sisters for ways I could distract myself from these thoughts: "With video games!" they responded in delight.

At that very moment, my sisters began crafting a comfy game room in the heart of the house: the living room. This was during my second week of recovery. It was time to continue

taking my medications and wait for my skin to heal. It was still painful, but I was always distracted from it. I was focused on the games my sisters and I played, varying from video games to our oldest board games. Every day, we would sit on our cozy couches, throw pillows and blankets, and we would laugh all night. The only pain I could feel was the aching of my stomach from laughing too hard, and the tension in my face from a constant smile. I was focused on the positive emotions surging through our home: our engagement in video games and lifting conversations, the unbreakable relationship my sisters and I had, the meaning and life purpose my family gave me, caring for them as they cared for me, and, finally, my achievement in fighting through the pain one day at a time. This is the PERMA model at work.

For me, the scientifically established PERMA model was playing out in real life. I experienced positive emotions, engagement in video games, enhanced relationships, meaning in life, and achievement in the face of adversity. I was content and at my happiest in life because I started believing in myself. I believed in my strengths and my resilience. As my TA, Anthony Greco, once said, "Don't



focus on what you cannot change. Focus on moving forward because I know that, eventually, you will get there. Believe that you will get there. That's all that matters." Greco entrusted me with his own story, being diagnosed with dyslexia among other learning disabilities that made him think he would always be at a disadvantage —that he would always have to work harder than the average person. But, Greco realized that it made him resilient. No matter his "flaws" or failures, he chose to believe in

himself and his immense strength. My positive psychology professor, Dr. Heidi Zetzer expanded upon this by saying, "A big part of positive psychology is hope; a belief that what I'm doing now will contribute to the future in a good way. We have no knowledge of the future, but we have hope." And so, I didn't focus on my trauma or "fixing" what was "broken" in my life. I didn't wait to "find" a life worth living. I was determined to move forward and make a proactive effort in starting a better life —and you can too.

GRATITUDE JAR

- 1 Time required: 10 minutes each day for one week
- 2 Title a piece of paper with something you're grateful for
- 3 Explain in detail what happened, how it made you feel, and why you value it. Try to write three a day

Take a moment to come up with something you are grateful for, today. Write about it on a piece of scratch paper for a gratitude jar or write in a journal.

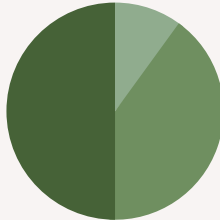
Questions to consider:
 What am I grateful for, today?
 What made this possible?

I'd say that I am super grateful for the warm, cozy soup I had for lunch today. And, what made this possible was the chefs who made it for everyone at work which I am so grateful for. I love my work family 😊

WHAT DETERMINES HAPPINESS?

Sonja Lyubomirsky

- Life Circumstances
- Intentional Activity
- Biology/Genetics



"Lyubomirsky is well known for her thought experiment about what affects our happiness, which she expresses in a pie chart: She proposes that roughly 50 percent of happiness is determined by genes (i.e., totally out of your control), roughly 10 percent is determined by circumstance

(i.e., somewhat out of your control), and the final 40 percent is determined by your thoughts, actions, and attitudes (i.e., entirely within your control)." —Adam Sterngergh



INTERVIEW

Content Warning: KP is a survivor of intimate partner violence

When KP was just 15 years old, they were in their first romantic relationship with someone three years older. For almost a year, this manipulative partner would emotionally abuse KP, saying things to separate KP from their family, friends, and everyone they ever knew. This ensured KP had no one to turn to. KP was stuck with their abuser.

As a young 15 year old, KP was mentally destroyed. The abuser would say things like, "You aren't worth it. I can leave you any day now —whenever I want and you would have no one. I'm only with you because I pity you. You don't matter. You're nothing. You're worthless." KP only had their abuser at the time, so they experienced a constant fear of being alone. They were stuck. This changed the way KP thought as they were broken down every single day. The abuser became a negative voice in their head that KP still struggles with til this day. It completely altered KP's way of thinking.

"It changed how my mind works, like walking on eggshells so I don't anger anyone and having a habit of not poking the bear — leaving it alone. It took a while to get out of these habits and rewire my brain and thought processes that they instilled in me. I

still feel the effects of how my mind was wired at such a young age."

The moment KP transitioned onto a path of healing was when they finally reconnect with a friend. They were wishing a dear friend a good summer after a year of lost contact and they immediately started hugging and crying. This was the one moment in months where KP had someone on their side. They had someone by their side who was listening to their experience, providing love and understanding. This made it a lot easier for KP to stop listening to their abuser and start seeing things more clearly. KP was finally able to say that they were done. They didn't deserve the way they were being treated.

KP also gained an immense sense of self worth after their experience of ipv: "I realized I am worth it —without anyone else's approval. Sometimes it's hard because I don't believe it, but it helps to look back at what happened and say, "I went through that." I got out of that and I'm stronger for it. I am someone who is worth celebrating and loving. Being able to truly truly love myself and my existence is the biggest thing that came out of it."

"Apparently, all your cells have died and regenerated every seven years, so this year marks the last time I had physical contact with that person. So, I am now in a body that they have never touched. This is the first time in my life that I am 100% me. I have never been touched by that person. This is my fresh start. This is all for me and no one else."



ART SUBMISSIONS
ART SUBMISSIONS
ART SUBMISSIONS
ART SUBMISSIONS
ART SUBMISSIONS
ART SUBMISSIONS

Est. 2023



Feeling trapped Caged away
From everyone who flies freely
No one understands The pain
The deprivation This Diagnosis

– Yasmin Briones



"A different day is a different set of words with the same meaning."

– Ricardo Arreola

coping skills

take a walk

paint! (color by number, your favorite flower, or just some squiggles!)

listen to music

take a bath or shower

burn incense/light a candle

watch a comfort show/movie

baking

cooking your favorite meal

cuddle with puppy or kitty

clean out/ organize your drawers, closet, etc. to reset!

video games

dance party!!

fresh air! open a window or go outside and breathe it in :)

yoga

deep breathing

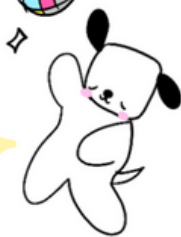
meditate

call a friend or family member that makes you feel loved

rip a paper into itty bitty pieces!

scribble alllll over a piece of paper

collage! you can use receipts, trash, leaves, magazine clippings, or anything else you have lying around



write a letter to mail to a long-distance friend

make hot chocolate, milkshake, smoothie, or

any fun drink to sip on
go for a nice drive

journal

draw or doodle!

ask for a hug or give yourself a hug!

make a list of everything you are grateful for
today

write down a list of your strengths

try a new hobby!

crochet or knit!

practice a new makeup look or hair style

think of fun new outfits to wear!

make a plan with a friend :)

update your bucket list!

read a book

play a sport

look at the clouds, do you see any fun shapes?

what does the air smell like?

find 5 things around you that are in your

favorite color, How does that color makes you

feel? What else do you like about that color?

play a board game with some people you care
about

complete that one project that you have been
wanting to finish! you got this!!



hello friend,

right now
you are standing here
feet rooted solidly into the earth
i invite you to join me in breathing

in
1... 2... 3... 4...

and out
1... 2... 3... 4...

in
1... 2... 3... 4...

and out
1... 2... 3... 4...

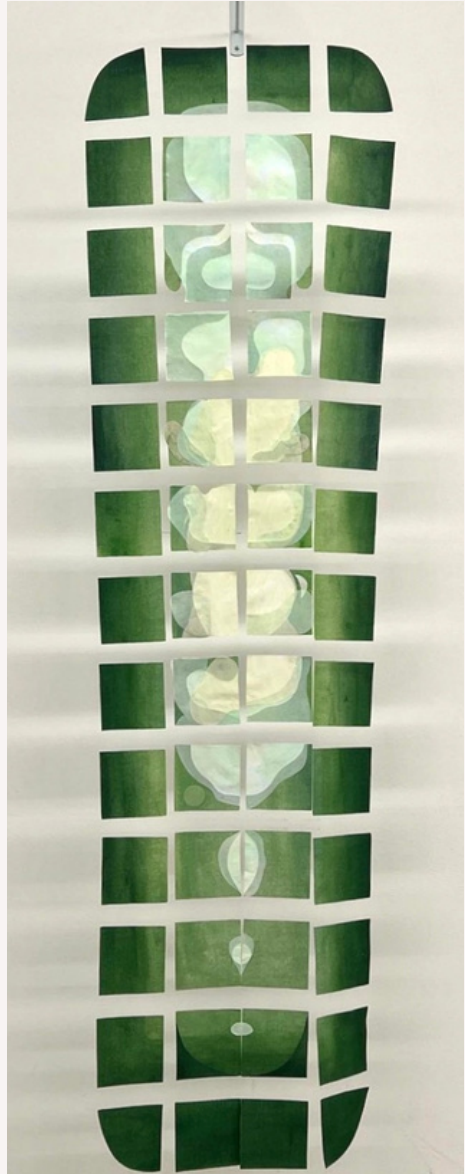
and continue...

thank you for enjoying me
find me anytime you need
i am always rising within
i thank you for arriving
in this moment

– your breath

this is an invitation to hold
space for the breath to
rise, to be aware of
breathing in and breathing
out. our breath is a way to
come back to our bodies,
to hold space for emotions
and reactions that arise,
and to calm ourselves. it is
available to us always :) 氣
Qi is the life force that
flows through all things,
like the air flows spaces.
standing and breathing, we
remember that the air
flowing in between is as
much the fabric as the
cotton and canvas itself ~

– Meiya Sidney



May 10, 2023

There is a certain kind of melancholy that I am filled with when graduation season rolls around. Although I am proud of my peers who have accomplished this feat, I cannot help but feel left behind. Because of this, I start to blame myself for not being “enough”.

First it starts with blaming high school me for not focusing well enough to get the grades that could have gotten me a scholarship. Then it transforms into something else entirely where I am putting myself down for every reason under the sun. “I’m not smart enough, I’m not nice enough, I have not tried hard enough” and the list goes on.

However, after a while, I have to tell myself that I am doing the best that I can. Maybe I’m not exactly where I wanted to be at this point in my life, but I think that’s okay. I have done what I could with the circumstances I’ve been given. Some people will just always have it easier and it may not be fair, but that’s just the way it is.

Like I mentioned, I tend to blame high school me for not being the smartest person in the room, but I owe who I am to her. She stood tough through events that I wouldn’t be able to handle today as an adult. She cried everyday walking onto campus and still found the strength to go to class. If I could, I would go back in time and give her a hug because God knows she needed it.

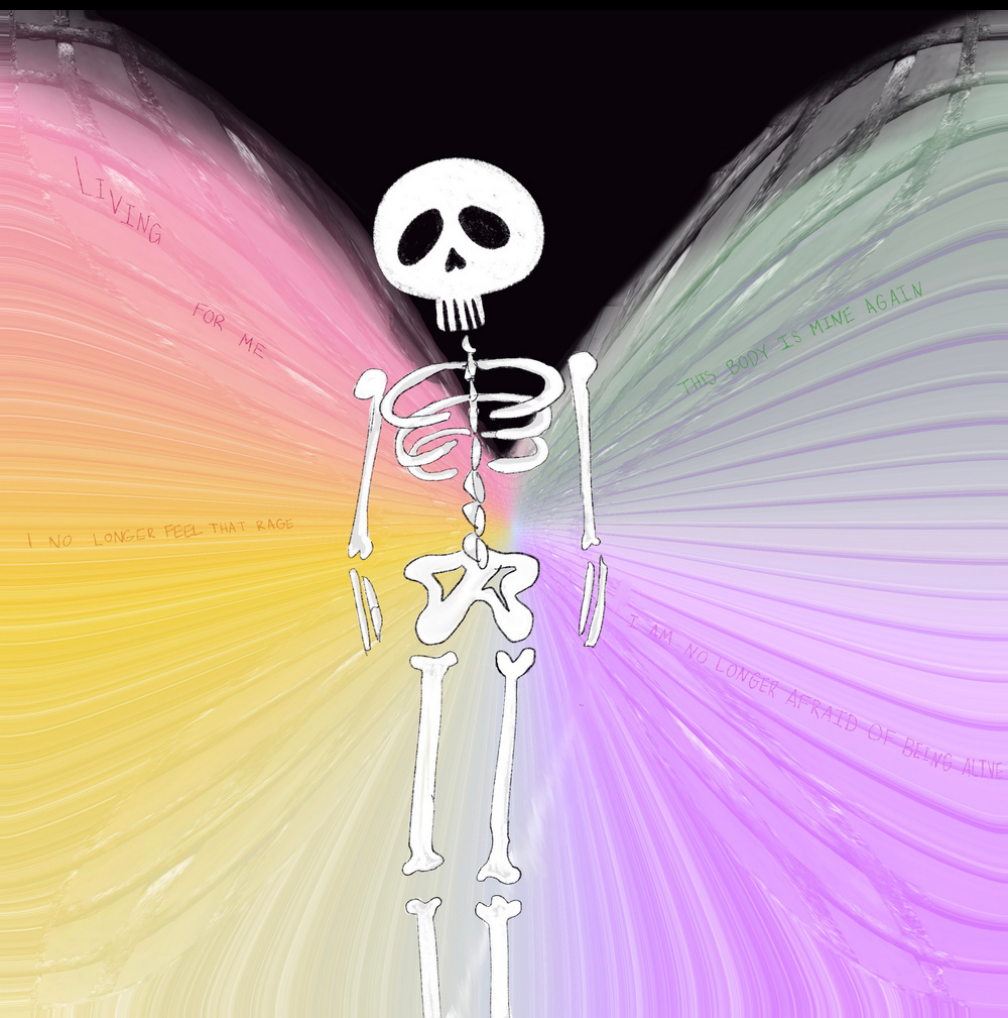
I may not be where I would like to be at this point in my life right now, but I’m still proud of myself. Despite the depression and the anxiety and the goddamn global pandemic, I have found it in myself to just keep trying. Time is going to keep moving forward anyways, so I might as well.













– Alexia Acevedo



“Living for me. This body is mine again. I no longer feel that rage. I am no longer afraid of being alive.”

– Alana Ulloa



-  **Rosyln**
Bon Iver, St. Vincent
silence
can be
lonely
-  **Euphor**
Novo Amor, Ed Tullett, Lowswimmer
-  **Je te laisserai des mots**
Patrick Watson
-  **The Night We Met**
Lord Huron
-  **Apocalypse**
Cigarettes After Sex
-  **Sparks**
Coldplay
-  **Yellow**
Coldplay
-  **In My Place**
Coldplay
-  **Somewhere Only We Know**
Keane
-  **The Reason**
Hoobastank
-  **Cigarette Daydreams**
Cage The Elephant
-  **Tongue Tied**
GROUPLOVE

[comfort
songs
gathered
from UCSB
students]



Drown

Finally reaching my head above water for the first time in years, I look inside myself and see that death is not the answer but the self perpetuating sickness of misery itself.

The devil tells me to sink, to give in, that the crashing waves of depression are unbeatable, that running out of air is a blessing.

His forked tongue in my reflection moves my lips and tells me I would finally be happy if I let myself drown.

The devil is silenced when I turn to him and tell myself that I want to live.

A drowning victim taught how to swim, given the desire to live once more, to burst through the surface, given hope that there is no grim reaper to blot out the sun above the surf, and the water is only as deep as I let myself fall.

The sun had been hidden by darkened waters for so long i felt it had ceased to exist.

The sky is beautiful, the sea sparkles in the sunlight and I can finally tread water.

I will leave the devil to sink and never be seen again, I will swim and be engulfed in sunlight.

– E.M.S.



REFERENCES

- American Psychological Association (2023). APA Dictionary of Psychology. <https://dictionary.apa.org/trauma>
- Amos, I. A. (2015). What is known about the post-traumatic growth experiences among people diagnosed with HIV/AIDS? A systematic review and thematic synthesis of the qualitative literature. *Counseling Psychology Review*, 30(3), 47–56.
- Bradt, J., Biondo, J., & Vaudreuil, R. (2019). Songs created by military service members in music therapy: A retrospective analysis. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 62, 19–27.
- Braive. 2016, March 16. The Fight Flight Freeze Response [Video]. Youtube. <https://www.scribbr.com/apa-examples/youtube/#:~:text=To%20cite%20a%20YouTube%20video%20in%20APA%20Style%2C%20you%20include,a%20link%20to%20the%20video.>
- Calhoun, L. G., & Tedeschi, R. G. (1995). Trauma and transformation: Growing in the aftermath of suffering.
- Calhoun, L. G., & Tedeschi, R. G. (Eds.). (2014). *Handbook of posttraumatic growth: Research and practice*. Routledge.
- Clay, R. A. (2013, July 1). Psychology student among Boston terrorism's victims. *Monitor on Psychology*, 44(7). <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2013/07-08/victims>
- Collier, & Lorde, A. (2019). *The Audre Lorde harm reduction workbook*. Diasporan Savant Press.
- Crockett, & Beatitudes, A. (2017). 11 things appropriate to say when someone discloses rape/abuse. [Golden Kitten Pyramid].
- Danylchuk, L. (2017, June 30). These 5 domains of posttraumatic growth can help you thrive - GoodTherapy.org Therapy Blog. <https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/these-5-domains-of-posttraumatic-growth-can-help-you-thrive-0611155>
- Garbett, K., Harcourt, D., & Buchanan, H. (2017). Using online blogs to explore positive outcomes after burn injuries. *Journal of health psychology*, 22(13), 1755–1766.
- Harper. (2018). *Unfuck your consent: a history and how-to for claiming your sexual autonomy, personal boundaries, and political freedom*. Microcosm Publishing.
- Henson, C., Truchot, D., & Canevello, A. (2021). What promotes post traumatic growth? A systematic review. *European Journal of Trauma & Dissociation*, 5(4), 100195.
- Kolaitis, G., & Olf, M. (2017). Psychotraumatology in Greece. *European journal of psychotraumatology*, 8(sup4), 135175. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20008198.2017.1351757>
- Novotney, A. (2018, September 1). Intervention for first responders shows promise. *Monitor on Psychology*, 49(8). <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2018/09/survivors-intervention>
- Sapp, Scott, B., & Harper, F. G. (2017). STI FAQ: keep calm and learn real facts about sexually transmitted diseases. Microcosm. Pub.
- Schulenberg, S. E. (Ed.). (2020). *Positive psychological approaches to disaster: Meaning, resilience, and posttraumatic growth*. Springer Nature.
- Sternbergh, A., & Nickelsberg, Z. L. R. (2018, May 29). Read This Story and Get Happier. *The Cut*. <https://www.thecut.com/2018/05/how-to-be-happy.html>
- Tedeschi. (1995). *Trauma & transformation: growing in the aftermath of suffering*. Sage Publications.
- Qian, J., Sun, S., Zhou, X., Wu, M., & Yu, X. (2021). Effects of an expressive writing intervention in Chinese women undergoing pregnancy termination for fetal abnormality: a randomized controlled trial. *Midwifery*, 103, 103104.

RESOURCES

The Student Mental Health Coordination Services (SMHCS) office provides coordination of care, interventions, social support, and follow-up services from a network of UCSB campus resources. The SMHCS provides a comprehensive Distressed Students Guide found on the Internet at <http://www.sa.ucsb.edu/respondingto-distressed-students/welcome> and can be contacted by phone at (805) 893-3030 during regular work hours or at (805) 893-4411 (CAPS; after hours).

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) are available to help if you are dealing with personal, family, and/or academic stress. See <https://caps.sa.ucsb.edu/> for more information. They can be reached at (805) 893-4411.

If you would like confidential support, the CARE: Campus Advocacy, Resources, and Education program can provide confidential emotional support, connect you with medical care, give you options for filing a report, help you understand your legal rights, facilitate housing needs, and connect survivors to campus and community funding sources. CARE provides prevention education and response services for all forms of physical, sexual, and emotional violence – stalking, sexual assault, domestic abuse. CARE is located at the Student Resource Building 2145. Resources can be found at: <http://wgse.sa.ucsb.edu/care/home> and can be reached at (805) 893-4613.

The Title IX Compliance and Sexual Harassment Policy Compliance Office (TIX/SHPC) provides assistance in preventing and resolving & investigating complaints of sexual harassment/sexual violence and gender discrimination. It is also illegal to discriminate against a woman because of pregnancy, childbirth, or a medical condition related to pregnancy or childbirth. If you believe you may be experiencing discrimination, exclusion from or denial of benefits of any program at UCSB, on the basis of your sex, gender or gender presentation, the TIX/SHPC is available at: <https://titleix.ucsb.edu/> (805) 893-2701

Here is a list of various student services available on campus. We encourage you to make use of them:

- Campus Learning Assistance Services (CLAS) <http://clas.sa.ucsb.edu>
- Disabled Students Program <http://dsp.sa.ucsb.edu/>
- Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) <http://eop.sa.ucsb.edu>
- Health and Wellness <http://wellness.sa.ucsb.edu>
- Little Big Engineer <https://orgsync.com/129034/chapter>
- MultiCultural Center <http://mcc.sa.ucsb.edu/>
- Non-Traditional Student Resource Center <http://wgse.sa.ucsb.edu/nontrad/>
- Office of International Students and Scholars <http://oiss.sa.ucsb.edu/>
- Office of the Ombuds <https://ombuds.ucsb.edu/>
- Office of Student Life (OSL) <http://osl.sa.ucsb.edu/>
- Opening New Doors to Accelerating Success (ONDAS) Center <http://www.ondas.ucsb.edu/home>
- Resource Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity: <http://wgse.sa.ucsb.edu/RCSGD/home>
- Transfer Student Center (TSC) <http://transfercenter.ucsb.edu>
- UCSB Alcohol and Drug Program <https://alcohol.sa.ucsb.edu/>
- UCSB Social Work Services <http://studenthealth.sa.ucsb.edu/behavioral-health/social-work>
- UCSB Student Health Services <http://studenthealth.sa.ucsb.edu/>
- Undergraduate Mentorship Program <http://duels.ucsb.edu/academics/academic-success/mentor>
- Undocumented Student Services <http://www.sa.ucsb.edu/dreamscholars/home>
- Veterans' Resource Center <http://www.sa.ucsb.edu/veterans/home>
- Women's Center <http://wgse.sa.ucsb.edu/WomensCenter/home>
- AS Food Bank <https://foodbank.as.ucsb.edu>