

## Maybe I'll Stay

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Every morning my father feeds the deer in his yard with barrels of dried corn. On the coldest days of the winter, when I am staying at my parents house in Woodstock, New York, I will open my blinds to find him spreading each barrel of corn, one-by-one in an accessible place, both for the deer to find, as well as to make sure they feel safe doing so. Not too close to where the humans reside, but close enough to acknowledge the gift that my father has provided them.

This is his form of “practice”. While some people’s mediation is found on the cushion, his practice has always been with and among nature. This has been his way of being in a deeper relationship with the earth’s offerings, offerings in the form of friendships found among the other creatures that roam the planet we all call home.

The more we take care of the earth and the creatures that exist on it, the more abundance and reciprocity we receive from the daily mundanity, which is in fact life’s riches pleasures. This is something my father has always seemed to understand.

A dear friend of mine reminded me of this the other night, as she delicately suggested that I really needed to land somewhere and grow some roots. How she expressed this was very gentle, however, the weight of what she was suggesting was heard and felt. “To really land.”

I’ve had tendencies to be a perpetual nomad, nomadic not only in my relationship to place, but relationship to self, community, friends, career, and lovers. Whether it be the unprecedented pandemic or my ripening age, cultivating roots and getting accustomed to leaning in to discover the pearls of beauty within the mundane is what my heart is quietly longing for nowadays.

Our 20’s are years of self discovery, or as someone else put it, our “walk-about” years. Our 30’s are something different. I’m still working on understanding what that might be. Maybe it is the realization that we have to truly rely on ourselves entirely, as friends build their own families and our parents at some stage will also leave us, as is the design of the cycle of life.

The adulting years of our 30s comes from having a clearer understanding of what is craving to be built by us. For myself, that is both my performance projects and an acupuncture practice. But the desire to grow roots is more than just the product we hope to sell or provide in order to exist in our economically driven society. It is in the departure from the constant newness that is frequent during extensive travel, instead exchanging those moments for the joys and support reaped through the familiar.

The same friend who suggested I grow roots also shared “you know, it is often in the little exchanges that we have with those that we live among on a daily basis that give our lives purpose.” Those that we get our eggs from at the local farm or market, the barista who hands us the piping hot coffee before we even have to make the order because we are “regulars”, or a simple conversation that is exchanged between a neighbor on a morning walk about the political climate, the weather, the kids in college, or whatever the pulse of the day might bring forth.

Moreso, what these seemingly not-so-intimate exchanges do is provide brief check-ins with one another, quietly making sure the other is okay and further, buoying each other's spirits by way of a smile or a shared moment in passing. Such idiosyncratic intimacies are much of where we garner the most satiation, often going unnoticed. Until perhaps upon further reflection later in the evening, when scanning through the day's event we suddenly acknowledge that the heart still feels fed from that brief exchange with “what's-her-name”. It's these momentary exchanges that allow us to feel seen, noticed, and a part of something larger, a piece in a greater no-so-well-defined whole.

I've lived in a lot of cities. In some ways, that could make me fortunate. I often get the question if I moved around a lot for work. Sometimes I'll give the excuse that it was because of my performance career, which has never been entirely true. In truth, my moving was always more esoteric in nature. I moved because I had the pang or urge to experience another place for more time than just being a visitor could allow. I wanted to get to know the underbelly of a different culture's people, what made them tick, what brought them joy, and also, to prevent myself from getting stuck in the confines of my own beliefs. As I was well aware that my singular experience could not possibly be everyone's. I would often get the question about money, or how I managed to move. It was always on a very low budget, \$3000 in savings max. But I had a lot of faith, a lot of trust. I was in my 20s, so my ego was not so hardened, and I was humbled by any and all job offers that came my way. And now, here I am after all these years of travel, living just miles away from where I grew up.

Sure, maybe the reason I find myself back here once again could be a product of the pandemic, and craving the nourishment of that which feels familiar. I can not deny that being closer to family right now brings my heart a sense of ease in a way that I have not experienced in a while. I acknowledge how fortunate I am to say and have such a thing. But also, maybe it is because there is a sense of community, and with that, a form of community commerce in the mountainous towns of the Hudson Valley, quite different from other places I found myself in.

Perhaps it's in this sense of community commerce that I myself am ready to invest as an artist, a clinician, and an entrepreneur. In a larger way, it is the community camaraderie, a place and its people, where one feels taken care of by their local business owners, markets, doctors, and neighbors that creates a desire to want to be of service to those who have been so for them.

I now live back in a town where people know my family and ask how they are. I am no longer a singular entity traipsing the world with the identity I worked hard to establish independent of those

who raised me. I am once again an extension of a tribal unit. If I get a coffee at a bakery in town, a place where I too worked during my high school years, my coffee will often be free, as the same manager continues to bring about her cheer to the business nearly 18 years later. She will question me, with her deep blue eyes, “How are you girlfriend?” a question that goes far deeper than the transactionary “how are you doing”. Because she knows me, and now she knows I have returned.

I now live in a town where if I go to the local hardware store, the owner will greet me knowingly, asking if I want to put my purchase on my father’s account. He’s always in good spirits, he always seems to genuinely enjoy his job, his life, and his place in the world.

Going to dinner at a restaurant owned by a local woman, who my family witnessed work her way into being a business owner over the past 20 years, is like stepping into one’s favorite aunt’s homes. Bright, enthusiastic, and welcoming. We watched her perils and successes. Our dining at her restaurant is not merely for the food, but to support all she has built, as we as a community are deeply proud of her. It’s a place where having returned back, I pop in to offer my business cards for the acupuncture practice I am building, and the girl behind the counter, who I have also known for years, exclaims with her big green eyes “Are you staying this time?!”

Am I staying this time? I think to myself.

Yes, yes I believe I am. She smiles and shares that she will have everyone in the restaurant come receive treatments from me. This is community commerce. It’s not so much the practice that I provide, similarly it isn’t so much the food the restaurant offers, although I would like to think that both are of wonderful quality, but it has far more to do with our commitment to one another. I won’t be another transient transplant, I’ve returned home and here to serve. And in that, locals support locals. We are watching out for one another.

The other day I got a text “call me about your teeth”. This is how the local dentist communicates. I laughed when I saw it show up on my phone. Only in Woodstock does a dentist text on a Sunday morning, with no explicit name associated with the text, requesting me to call him. When I did, he was unabashedly noshing on his breakfast, explaining a procedure he believes would be good for me, in between taking forkfuls of what I could only assume were his morning eggs.

“Come in this week.”

“Just come in?” I ask. “No Appointment?”

“Oh yea, well you can call Bridgett, but I’ll be there.” Bridgett being the front desk receptionist, and as if him being there was an anomaly for a practice he owned.

These are how my conversations go now, now that I am back in the familiar. Is the overly familiar detrimental to growing into an adult version of myself? At times I can’t help but to say yes, a bit. I suddenly find myself relying on my parents in ways I hadn’t in years, or reverting to a self around

them that I led myself to believe no longer existed. But as the saying goes, you think you're enlightened, return to where you grew up.

So here I am, after years of ashram living, monastery frequenting, vipassana sitting, yoga teaching, personal development books and workshops, and now a healthcare practitioner myself, I am finding that there are parts of ourselves that don't just go away because we do. I think this might truly be where the real work lives: in proximity to those that we know. Not only because there are more challenges in conditioning one's "growth muscles" within familiar environments, but also because there might just be a sense of responsibility we have to take on, to look after those who have looked after our wellbeing for years. What COVID might have done is decrease the capitalist compartmentalizing between the elders and the youth, realizing that the retirement homes, much like prison system, has been in a large way built on profit driven models, verses that which is supported from a place of looking at what our human spirit is in need of at the various stages of aging.

Maybe returning to the places we have grown up to be in closer relationship to an "extended family-type" of community, or to actual family, and taking care of our elders, is a movement of resistance against the hyper-individuality the Western World has conditioned many to believe was where success lived. Which of course for some did result in great success, but for many that success came with a greater amount of burnout, isolation, and loneliness.

Being closer to elders could reduce the need for capitalism's monetization of the aging, the stripmall-like retirement homes. Perhaps returning a sense of responsibility for one another, for those who granted us our life, however hard that might be at times.

For now I will watch my father feed the deer during his 6:30am practice with appreciation. As I watch, I reflect, maybe this time I'll stay.