

Milestones

Vol. 10



Mentality

MAGAZINE

Mentality

M A G A Z I N E

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

Many individuals have written about reaching goals, facing setbacks, and all other facets of milestones. Senator Bob Dole said, “I think one of life’s great milestones is when a person can look back and be almost as thankful for the setbacks as for the victories.” Yet no individual can summarize what milestones are into a single quote. This is the beauty of the pieces included in this edition of Menticity Magazine.

I am elated to present the tenth edition of Menticity Magazine entitled, “Milestones.” As Menticity celebrates our fifth year of publication, we’d be remiss not to acknowledge our past Editors-in-Chief, Anna Learis and Jenie Li; executive team members; and staff writers and designers who have paved the path forward for Menticity to grow. We are equally indebted to the multitude of mental health advocates whom we continue to learn from — and to you, our readers, who support our voices as we work to destigmatize conversations surrounding mental health. Menticity Magazine was created as a space to share one’s experiences with mental health, especially the struggles; to find a community in others with similar

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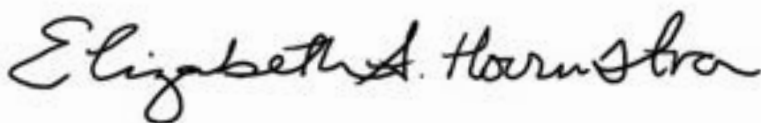
Events & Outreach Coordinator

experiences and values; and to use our platform to elevate mental health conversations so they are seen as a norm. Although Mentality has made progress towards these goals, we have also faced setbacks, many of which have been illuminated by the ongoing pandemic and racial violence in the United States. Thus, our tenth edition is not only a celebration of how far we have come but a reminder of where we can still go. Personally and collectively we have achieved many mental health milestones, some recorded in these pages, most others not. Even with these achievements, it's important not to lose sight of the milestones that await us, that we work toward today, and that we will achieve in the future.

The journey towards a milestone is easily comparable to mental wellbeing: there are high and low points, setbacks, moments of intense self-reflection, and long-periods of growth. Setbacks and growth could not have been more evident as they relate to both milestones and mental health than this past year as we faced the unexpected challenge of the pandemic. In addition to the already tumultuous time that is the four or so years spent in college, we have found ourselves having to reconceptualize how we approach life in the face of a worldwide crisis. It is easy to mourn the fact that celebrations of important milestones such as birthdays, job offers, and graduations look significantly different in this time of social-distancing and that milestones that may have easily been achieved just over a year ago are more difficult than ever. That being said, a hard lesson I learned this year is that you cannot reach a milestone without embracing change.

How I approach what to celebrate and how to handle failure has changed completely this past year — and in my opinion, in the best way possible. Without the typical opportunities (and pressure) to publicly gather and celebrate goals, I have recognized the small wins as equally deserving of celebration, and I've found time to foster connection and delight in even the most minuscule events. For example, I have made it to all early morning coffee walks with friends this semester: a feat that requires me to get out of bed before 8:30 am, leave my house, and *gasp* put on 'real' clothes. While the latter part of that example is (mostly) a joke, this practice is helping me achieve a larger goal of being more productive in my mornings. While this example is something I deeply enjoy, milestones do not always have to result in profuse joy and elation to earn the name. Despite this lighthearted anecdote, falling short of milestones, reconceptualizing future goals, and learning to embrace disappointment are situations that we've never had to face as frequently as this year. Challenges, in addition to victories, forge the path to all milestones big and small. Likewise, our mental health journeys are filled with tribulations and triumphs which look different for everyone. If it is being able to say you are not doing well, seeking out professional guidance, or just acknowledging this past year has been a tough time, the work you are doing for your mental health matters.

This tenth print edition of Mentality Magazine is a milestone that represents the continued work it takes to build a supportive community, advocate for mental wellbeing, and most importantly, take care of ourselves. This work requires vulnerability and the acceptance of the failures, not just successes — work Mentality will continue in order to elevate the voices of all those struggling with their mental health. If this Milestone edition of Mentality Magazine only conveys one point, I hope it is this: celebrate all of your milestones and appreciate your setbacks as proof of your resiliency. I am exceptionally proud of all the writers who serve as proof that a milestone can be anything and serve as inspiration to own your achievements and failures — they are what make you, you!




Liz Hoornstra, Editor-in-Chief



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disclaimer: Some of our content could be emotionally triggering to those who can relate or have experienced similar struggles. If you find yourself becoming uncomfortable while reading, please take a moment for yourself. If you would like to speak to a professional, resources are listed at the end of our magazine.



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MILESTONE: REALIZATION

Written and Designed
by Isabella Reacher

I have been drawing and writing comics for a long time. Since freshman year of high school, I had frequent periods where I wouldn't draw because I felt that I had no time—or at least, no time to make anything that looked “good.”

Towards the end of high school, my drawing style started to morph from clean lines to something more sketchy and amorphous. My comic writing instructor gave rave reviews of the new style. I began to draw more frequently, no longer feeling fixated on a nice, orderly drawing with perspective and inking.

I had another long stop period in my first year of college, taking 16 credits and working in a laboratory.

The pandemic started. I started drawing. Well, I drew, but I never finished a lot of drawings or comics. Half-way thought out plots and abandoned character designs littered many pages. A number of drawings were even complete to my satisfaction, but I never shared them with anyone because I wouldn't finish digital coloring.

In Biochemistry class, we had a final project that involved drawing or taking a picture of something and explaining how it related to a concept we had learned that semester. I created a one-page comic explaining the hydrophobic effect and even digitally colored it. I felt so proud of the cute little non polar molecules and water droplets I drew, but even more, I felt tremendous relief at finally getting the digital coloring over with.

In that moment, I realized that I never finished a lot of comics because of the dread I felt about coloring them digitally. Then, I realized that there was no rule saying I had to color my comics. My drawing has increased steadily ever since.

So, I suppose a major milestone I had recently is the realization that I am not obligated to color my artwork digitally.

10 MINI-MILESTONES WORTH CELEBRATING

Written and Designed by Vaishnavi Katta

INTRODUCTION

When we think of milestones, we usually think of the big stuff. Birthdays, promotions, travel, weddings, and graduations. While these things are great, I think we as a society can get caught up in the bug stuff. We all tend to be outcome-oriented, which makes the process feel like a whole lot of drudgery. Here are 10 little things that I think we should give ourselves some more credit for. Hopefully, by giving ourselves the space to celebrate the little things, we can begin to enjoy the more mundane parts of our lives.

- 1. Finishing a Book (Willingly)** - I always derive pleasure from finishing a book that I chose to read, even if that book isn't a piece of thought-provoking literary fiction. The act of closing a physical book just brings me a sense of satisfaction.
- 2. Cooking a Meal** - I'll be honest, I'm not the best cook. If I end cooking a meal that comes out tasty (or even edible), my whole day is made.
- 3. Doing a Workout** - For some reason, my brain does an awful good job of convincing my body I don't need to work out until tomorrow, but when I finally do, I feel great. A day I work out is considered a productive day to me.
- 4. Getting up Before Your Alarm** - Some people hate this, and I get it. Sleep is a valuable commodity, but there is something so nice about naturally waking up early. Not only is your body not jolted awake by the sound of bells (or dogs barking in my case), but you have some time for yourself before having to go through the beats of the day.
- 5. Your Weekly Screen Time Report Being Less than Last Week** - If you're like me, you always tell yourself that you're going to use screens less and go outside and do other stuff more. Unfortunately, that doesn't usually happen, especially in this pandemic. That's why I celebrate whenever my weekly screen time report comes back as 10% less than the previous week's.
- 6. Performing an Act of Spontaneity** - While there is nothing wrong with a stable routine, it can sometimes leave us feeling restless or bored. That's why I think any attempt to shake our routines up is worth celebrating. Whether that's ordering something new at your favorite restaurant or taking skydiving lessons, we could all use some more spontaneity in our lives.
- 7. Catching up with Friends/Family** - This is something I struggle with on a daily basis. I am just really bad with talking to people through texting or Zoom. Unfortunately, that's the safest way to communicate nowadays. I usually have to schedule this socialization in, or else I avoid it, but when I do finally end up talking to someone, it feels quite refreshing.
- 8. Taking a Nap** - Some people are nap haters, but I have to disagree. I don't normally take naps, but sometimes I can sense my body really needs one. While some naps leave a lot to be desired, a good one can refresh you and keep you going throughout the day. Taking care of yourself and not worrying about productivity is not that easy to do, so I praise anyone who took a nap today.
- 9. Trying Something New (And Maybe Failing)** - Taking up a new skill or hobby without expecting to be good at it is a liberating experience. Just enjoying what you're doing without regards to the outcome is a wonderful feeling. Trying new things can remind us that we need to laugh at ourselves from time to time and not worry about perfection.
- 10. Finding Something That Makes You Laugh** - On days where I am feeling particularly down, just laughing is enough to make me feel good about myself and the day. It's the small things that count.



A Difficult Decision: Going Back to Therapy

Written and Designed by Katie Good

When we hear the word “milestone,” I think it can be easy to focus on large, positive events. Graduations, birthdays, and anniversaries come to mind when I think of my personal milestones. However, as I sat reflecting more on the milestones I have reached in regards to mental health, I couldn’t figure out what to write about. Nothing on my mental health journey jumped out at me as a real turning point. Yet the longer I sat, the longer I realized that milestones aren’t defined by what seems important to the general public; milestones are experiences that are important to you. For me, one of the most difficult decisions, but one of the most influential, was deciding to go back to therapy.

I first went to therapy in my junior year of high school. At the time, I felt ashamed. I was a straight-A student, a competitive athlete, and was consistently labeled as an overall super high-achieving and high-functioning teen. Yet despite all this, my demons continued to bite at my heels. I couldn’t sleep, I was breaking down every night, I wasn’t eating, and every day I felt the dark cloud floating above my head getting closer and heavier. My parents, school counselor, and I decided I should try out therapy and see if it helped clear my head. I went for about four months, and honestly, it did nothing for me. I started antidepressants without taking the time to educate myself, therapy felt like talking to a wall for an hour, and I couldn’t take the time to give myself a break from my academics and extracurriculars. I drudged through senior year, ferociously trying to climb out of the hole I had dug myself into. By the time I graduated high school, I was just relieved to have the summer to myself to relax before college.

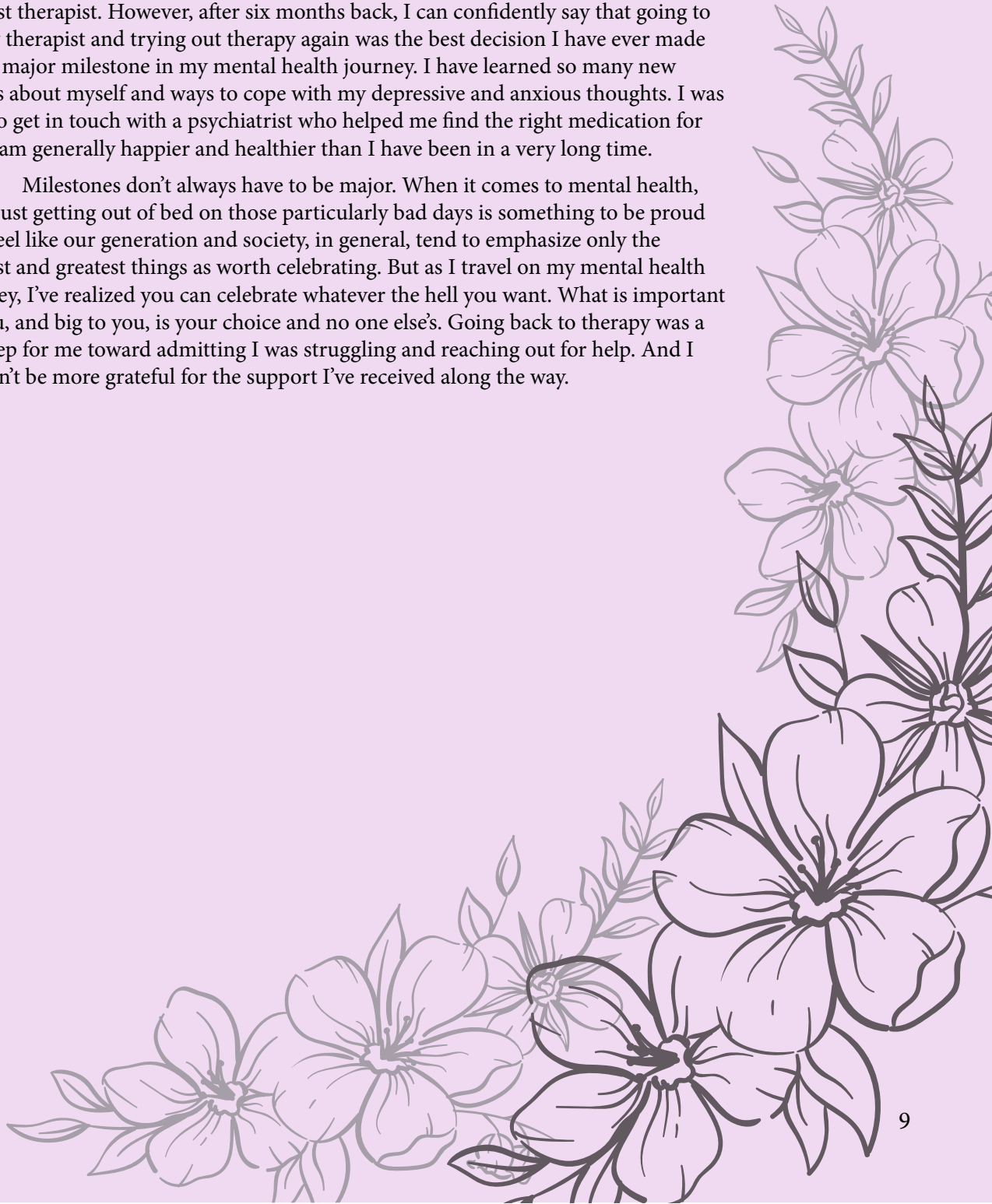
The start of freshman year was great until it wasn’t. By the winter semester, I was back to feeling heavy with dark clouds and exhaustion. The start of the pandemic did nothing to help this, and I spent the rest of the semester holed up at home alone, staring at my computer screen for hours on end. With the start of my sophomore year approaching and my mental health diminishing, I finally decided to try out therapy again with someone in Ann Arbor.

At first, I felt the same shame I did the first time. Despite becoming a large mental health advocate and deciding that a career in clinical psychology was my destiny, it was excruciating to admit to myself that I couldn’t fight my mental health battle alone. I felt like asking for help was losing.

I tried out a few therapists, worried they would be just as unhelpful as my last. Finally, after a few tries, I talked with a therapist and we clicked! I told my mom, filled out the paperwork, and scheduled my continuous appointments.

Starting therapy again was scary. The fear of opening up to someone new and putting my entire trust in them was difficult, especially after feeling let down by my last therapist. However, after six months back, I can confidently say that going to a new therapist and trying out therapy again was the best decision I have ever made and a major milestone in my mental health journey. I have learned so many new things about myself and ways to cope with my depressive and anxious thoughts. I was able to get in touch with a psychiatrist who helped me find the right medication for me. I am generally happier and healthier than I have been in a very long time.

Milestones don't always have to be major. When it comes to mental health, even just getting out of bed on those particularly bad days is something to be proud of. I feel like our generation and society, in general, tend to emphasize only the biggest and greatest things as worth celebrating. But as I travel on my mental health journey, I've realized you can celebrate whatever the hell you want. What is important to you, and big to you, is your choice and no one else's. Going back to therapy was a big step for me toward admitting I was struggling and reaching out for help. And I couldn't be more grateful for the support I've received along the way.





Graduating in a Pandemic

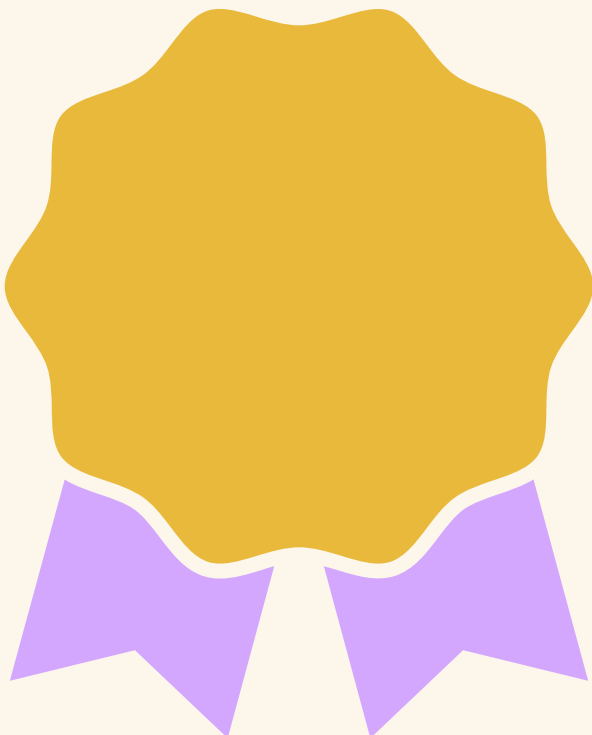
Written and Designed by Ashley Bond

Some of the major milestones in my life include learning to ride a bike, graduating from high school, getting confirmed, studying abroad, and graduating from the University of Michigan. In December of 2020, I attended my last lecture, submitted my last paper, and took my last final as an undergraduate student.

Two years prior, I was in Washington D.C. with my entire family (including my grandfather, aunt, uncle, and cousin) celebrating my older sister's graduation from Georgetown University. During the four-day celebration in the capital, my family visited the National Mall, toured the White House, explored Georgetown and the campus, and got to be a part of all the places and things my sister had been doing for the last few years. I saw the pride on my parents' faces when my sister walked across the stage to get her degree, and I saw how happy my sister was popping champagne and taking photos with her friends. I genuinely could not wait until I could walk through the Big House to get my degree with my family cheering me on.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has prevented graduation celebrations for the Fall Class of 2020, the Winter Class of 2020, and the Fall Class of 2021. Meaning, there will be no in-person ceremonies, no families coming to visit, and no gatherings to celebrate. Instead, the graduation I have always dreamed about will be replaced by online virtual celebrations and a prospective in-person graduation in a later year.

I believe I speak for many of my fellow University of Michigan graduates and current seniors when I say it is extremely saddening, disappointing, and disheartening to know that a major once-in-a-lifetime accomplishment will not be properly celebrated. To work your butt off for four years and have little to no closure leaving a place you love so much to move on with your life can have significant effects on your mental health and wellness. Personally, I have experienced changes to my mood and stability as I am constantly pondering the things I could and should have been doing and the opportunities I missed out on over the last year.



However, I would argue that this year's graduating class is in a league of their own—finishing a prestigious degree from one of the best universities in the world while completely transitioning learning modalities and lifestyles due to an ongoing global pandemic. I mean, that is pretty fucking amazing if you ask me.

Although my last few semesters did not go as planned, I will always look back at my undergraduate career at the University of Michigan with great fondness as it is where I made amazing memories, met my lifelong friends, and became an independent, professional adult. I congratulate every graduate for their immense dedication to the pursuit of knowledge in the face of hardship and I hope that the University finds a safe, practical, in-person alternative to graduation as these victors definitely deserve it.

Go Blue forever and forever Go Blue!



I thought I would have a job secured well before a month until graduation, but unfortunately that is not the case. I continue to make time to take care of myself and remind myself that I am a qualified candidate and the right position for me will eventually be found.

Liz Hoornstra

About a year ago, I thought I was going to go on my first date, but I never ended up going through with it. It actually ended up kind of being a reverse-milestone for me, because it was my first step to realizing I'm aromantic.

Diane Yu

I thought I would write a thesis but I am not and instead I am enjoying my life!

Molly Efros

When I was an Irish Dancer, I was convinced that I would win a scholarship my senior year. I didn't end up receiving the scholarship, but instead of letting myself be disappointed, I supported my mental health by focusing on all of the achievements I reached while dancing rather than those I fell short of.

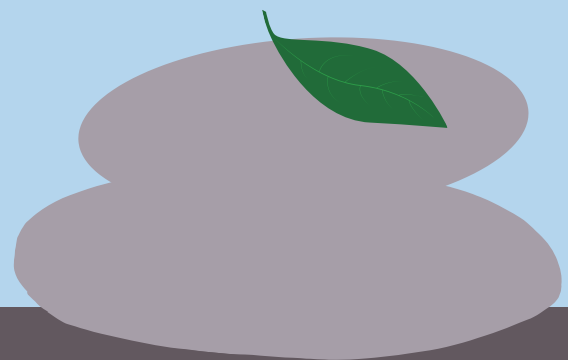
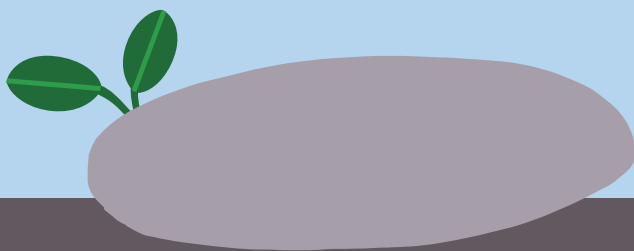
Katie Good

I think each unachieved milestone seems big even if it is not very significant in the grand scheme of things. I think the most recent one I remember is running for a position in a student organization and not receiving the position. It ended up working out for the better, but I felt crushed that day. I hung out with friends and tried to have a great time with them, which did lift my spirits.

Nikki Corrunker

This semester, I haven't written as many pieces as I had hoped. It hasn't affected my mental health; in the words of the Mythbusters: "Failure is always an option."

Isabella Reacher



Getting into Notre Dame, telling myself what's meant to happen is meant to happen, I will end up where I'm meant to be and I do feel that way now :)

Alex Witkowska

I didn't get my license at 16 like most of my friends; I had to wait until I was 17. I was disappointed not to hit that milestone because it felt so important at the time, but I had friends and family to comfort me (and to give me rides lol).

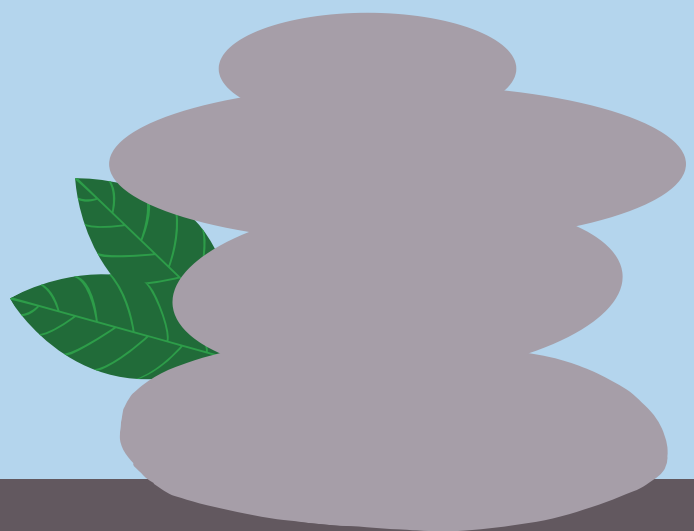
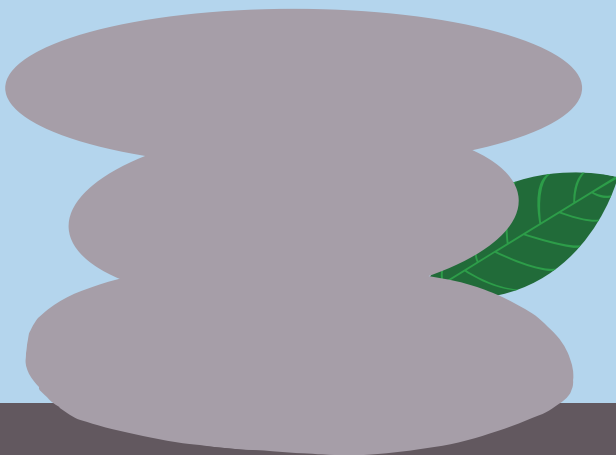
Victoria Helrigel

I wanted to do an honors thesis when I started college, but I didn't end up getting a high enough GPA in my major to do one, or to get honors in general. Coping with that mostly involved reminding myself that I did my best, and that CS is a tough enough degree as it is. (Also, I'm doing directed research this semester to get a little taste of the process I missed out on!) Ultimately what helped was focus on what I could do going forward rather than dwelling on what I wish I had done better.

Kaylina Savela

A milestone that I did not achieve that I thought I would was studying abroad and living by myself in a foreign country for a full semester. Unfortunately, the pandemic ended my study abroad experience a few months early so I did not get to see or do the things I had been planning to do while in Europe. However, I am determined to live abroad again at some point in my future!

Ashley Bond



looking back

I have had anxiety attacks for as long as I can remember — since before I could name what they were. I remember being a child and lying awake for hours at night after one of the nightmares that come when I am stressed — the same nightmares I still have. Yet, in the eight years since I have been able to put a name to the feelings of panic that well-up inside of me, that overstimulate my senses until I just need to find a space where I am alone and it is quiet, that predictably come before a big event, test, or new situation, I have found coping strategies, been able to share my story of anxiety with friends, family, and even strangers, and lived a life where I don't worry about my next panic attack all the time.

My mental health had reached an all-time high last year, a personal milestone. I assumed my final year of college wouldn't be a challenge — at least in the mental wellness department. To my surprise, this past year has been one of immense growth, pushing me to recognize I needed and to reach out for help, confront misconceptions and stereotypes I held, and reinvest in taking care of my mental wellbeing. In short, it was full of a lot of unanticipated milestones — milestones I am immensely proud to have reached.

One such milestone is admitting that I was deeply suffering and being able to share that story even if it is months later. I wrote the following unpublished piece just over six months ago.



It is hard for me to reread the words I wrote so long ago. Even though I am doing much better, remembering the inability to feel like myself is terrifying. However, in a weird way, I am grateful for the growth I have experienced as a result. Concurrent to writing the above piece, I was formally diagnosed with anxiety, depression, and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Here was the first challenge I had to face. Unconsciously, I had always prided myself on only having anxiety. I wasn't that sick. I was in control or could regain control of my thoughts on a whim. Until I couldn't. I was forced to confront the bias within myself that one, I needed help, and two, those who needed help weren't broken.

Shortly thereafter, I made the decision to schedule an appointment with a physician in the hopes that I would be prescribed medication that would ease the physical symptoms associated with my diagnosis, allowing me to process my emotions/thoughts/feelings and regain a sense of self. While I was hopeful that medication would help facilitate the healing that would come along with the work I was putting in at therapy, I couldn't help but be a bit fearful. Would I still feel like me when taking medication? Would others think of me poorly? Would this even help? Each of those questions ran through my mind a million times prior to my appointment. It's not a lie to say that I wasn't thrilled walking into the doctor's office, and it's even truer that I was embarrassed to tell a trained medical professional why I had scheduled the appointment. I definitely did not feel proud of myself in that moment. Looking back though, I see I shouldn't have felt that way. This is not to say that my embarrassment, and even fear, were not valid feelings and recognizing them as such was inappropriate, but that we shouldn't have to be fearful that others will look down on us for doing one of the most courageous actions: asking for help.

Six months later, I can proudly say that I have achieved, and am continuing to work towards, many mental health milestones. I was able to reach out for help. I was able to make an informed, supported decision to go on medication. I feel like myself again. I am beginning to feel less guilty for listening to my body and taking care of it — naps aren't shameful, taking a 'mental health day' isn't weak, and announcing that I have anxiety, depression, and OCD isn't something that I feel I need to hide away from those closest to me. Of course, I still have 'bad' days. There are individuals I don't feel comfortable sharing my diagnosis with (and no one is entitled to that information). I sometimes feel guilty for sleeping in or turning in early or taking it slow. I have come to realize that these are all milestones in their own right. While I wouldn't necessarily choose to re-do the past year and this experience, I am grateful for who I have become because of it.



It's been two months to the day since I've been able to recognize myself in the mirror. Depersonalization. Derealization. Different sides of the same coin of dissociation. A feeling of detachment from my body, questioning if the world around me is real, if my thoughts are real, if I am real.

No one knows. At least no one knows in the sense of actually knowing what I am feeling. No one knows that while I was kicking off our first mass meeting of the year, when I looked down at the little square that contained my own face, I couldn't even recognize myself. That as I was introducing Mentality to potential new members — an act that I looked forward to for what felt like forever, the chance I hoped for to share the organization that saved me in a way — I didn't even feel like I was actually there.

No one knows. What it feels like to wake up in the middle of the night and have absolutely no clue who you are, and not in the sense of "What do I want to do for a career in a year?" or even the troublesome questions like "What do you want to be remembered for?" A feeling of not being in your own body or even recognizing the space you are occupying.

I went and got my hair done yesterday. Normally this would be the highlight of my week. Not for reasons of vanity, or even getting out of the house now that we are living in a pandemic, but because I can think of very few things I find more relaxing than someone washing and brushing my hair. Yesterday hurt more than I anticipated. Not as she pulled a brush through the snarls in my wet hair or wasn't mindful of the pattern of her fingers massaging my scalp. Because I can't touch my own head and feel the soothing stroking of my hair without having to tell myself "you are running your finger through your hair" or "this is your head" to recognize what my own body is doing. And even so, it still it doesn't feel like my head.

I look at my reflection in the glass window outside the cafe I sit. Who is she? I feel like she is miles and miles away from me. Not that she is me, and me is she and I am in the image I have seen for 21 years of my life and can no longer grasp.

I sit reading "Joyful Militancy," assigned reading for my social work class. Populated with ideas that are new and forceful against the society that shaped who I am. Who am I? What do I look like? What do I believe? Messages pushing against the heteropatriarchal, capitalistic, white, able-bodied narrative should make me feel. Should be a liberal arts student's familiar pattern to question how they fit into these narratives — but how do you fit into these systems if you don't even know who you are?

My friend is physically ill. Like hospital and surgery and in severe pain ill. I send her well wishes and tell her to let me know if she needs anything. How am I supposed to help if I don't even recognize the words I sent her way just hours before? How am I supposed to maintain relationships if I say something and feel as if there are inches of cotton between myself and my brain? As if the person who just empathetically shared words of comfort is not myself?

I feel like I'm wasting my senior year. I know I'm not... I don't know. I feel like....
I don't feel.

Some Things Get Better with Time

Written and Designed by Nikki Corrunker

Everyone is quick to say whether or not they support therapy. It is often a hushed conversation. When I introduced the topic to my mother, there was some hesitation. You often hear things like, “Well, why would you need that, you seem fine,” which can be both harmful and nice to hear. Hearing this can imply that this person thinks you’re put together, and while that’s pretty reassuring, it also implies that clearly you’re not okay since you’re going to therapy. Regardless, it’s an incredibly hard decision to actually start going. When I decided to start, I had made the decision, but I kept putting off contacting the office and actually setting up my new patient appointment. It took my friend bothering me day after day to actually go in.

I can still remember walking out of that office after my first appointment... regretting going. Tears were still welled up in my eyes, I was exhausted, and I felt emotionally drained. I cancelled plans for my evening, and I went home to do nothing but lay down and relax. My first thought was that therapy clearly didn’t help if I walked out feeling that awful. But after all of that, I’m proud of myself for going back. The truth was that it just didn’t help yet. I think of each time I show up for therapy as a minor victory, but one of the biggest milestones I’m proud of is showing up for that second appointment. When I felt that therapy was more distressing than helpful, I still chose to go back and try again to better myself.

It’s been almost three years since that first day of therapy. I don’t regret going at all, contrary to what I felt on that first day. It took a lot to open up in those first appointments, and I think this is one of the things they don’t tell you about going to therapy. There are still days that going to therapy drains me, but there are also now days when I can feel just how much it has helped me.



-X

There are several skirts hanging in my closet, untouched. I lift the bottom hem of a purple one, admiring the row of sequins sewn on and the subtle floral pattern going across the fabric in bands. It's been hanging in my closet for years, but I've only put it on once. It only took that once to realize that no matter how much the pattern looks nice on the outside, it transforms when it touches my skin.

I've never liked the way skirts looked on me.

"See, it has shorts inside," Mom explains excitedly, showing me the exercise shorts. They have a long tube of fabric sewn around the outside—skort is probably the more accurate term for it. "It won't be uncomfortable, but it'll still be pretty."

I politely hang it in my closet next to all the other skorts she has bought me, and never touch it again except to toss it in a donation pile when we're moving away, years later.

-IX

-VIII

On the night of the eighth grade spring formal, my best friend asks her sister to style our hair for us. I get mine curled delicately and pulled into a simple ponytail. I'm not sure how much it pairs with the strapless blue dress I've bought for the occasion, but having a ponytail sits with me better than leaving it down.

I realize my mistake when I arrive and all of the other girls have their hair down. It doesn't bother me too much—this is hardly the first time I've stood out by having my hair up—but the thought is a small thorn in my side for the rest of the night. Every time another girl walks past me, I add her to my silent tally of girls with their hair down.

At some point, I end up in the girl's bathroom and spot myself in the mirror. Nothing about my reflection feels like me. None of it looks like how I expected it to look—I look like a small child playing dress up.

I turn away.

In high school, I discover the magic of plaid collared shirts.

-VII

-VI

Should I do it? I think to myself for months on end. My parents have already given the ‘okay,’ though not without a small laugh at my expense.

Either way, I refuse to go to prom and have another repeat of eighth grade formal.

I buy the suit jacket and bowtie—both the cheapest I can find, totaling around \$25, because no matter how much this tiny rebellion makes my heart beat in fear and exhilaration, I refuse to spend exorbitant amounts of money on a school dance—and carefully pull them on the night of prom. I put my hair into a bun and hold it in place with bobby pins and a hair stick, and I get one of my friends to do my makeup for me.

The entire ensemble looks ridiculous, and I still look like a small child playing dress up, but at least this time I can laugh at it.

I frown at the mirror, staring at my chest.
If only it were smaller.

-V

-IV

“She’ feels so weird to look at,” I confess over text. “Like it’s referring to someone other than myself.”


“Dude same.”

It hardly takes a moment of hesitation for me to compose my response. “Do you want me to start calling you something else? I could use they/them pronouns.” Afterward, I stare down at my phone, wondering if I’ve said the right thing.

“Sure, why not?”

In my first year of college, my best friend starts using they/them pronouns and introducing themselves by a different name.

I wish I had their courage.




“You can’t only wear pants,” Mom says snidely. “At some point, you have to wear a dress or a skirt.”

Why not, I want to scream. The idea doesn’t seem so preposterous—I just don’t wear a skirt. Simple as that. The anger bubbles up inside me, but I only let out a hum in response. I’ve learned that it’s the method that ends in the least arguments.

“What are you going to do if you have to go somewhere formal? You can’t only wear pants.”

I bite my lip and look out the car window. The anger feels like it’s building up in my chest, spreading to my nose, and if this conversation goes on, I know I’ll start tearing up.


I’ve always hated being an angry crier.



Mom asks me what I want for Christmas one year—she’s collecting my response for my aunt, who likes to spoil us with presents when she can. I send her a list of at least five different kitchen appliances that I want, carefully tailored to be within the amount of money that I know she prefers to spend, and I let myself be excited about receiving them and testing them out in my tiny apartment off campus. At the end of the text, I add an offhanded note about cheap, knee high boots on Amazon, since Mom has been urging me to get them for years. She thinks that they’re pretty (feminine, is what she really means) and is completely undeterred by my short stature and shorter legs. If she wants me to have them so badly, fine. I can get a cheap pair and have money to spare for a food processor.

To my disbelief, only a few weeks later, my aunt texts me about the \$100 boots that she has just bought me. It’s a name brand, one that even I recognize. There is no mention of any other gifts.

At that point, I’m not sure if my tears are from anger or sadness.



My parents take me out shopping at the mall, and I make it a point to wander through the aisles by myself, well used to Mom's shopping practices by now. She has never once recommended to me a piece of clothing that I like, but that has never dampened her spirits or her tenacity.

Near the end of our trip, Dad beckons me over to a rack of overall dresses and tells me to try one on. Mom concurs. "No," I tell them. "I'll never wear it." But they're insistent, and I'm their daughter, so I pull it on over my clothes and reluctantly walk in front of a mirror.

I can't quite remember what I looked like, wearing that dress and standing in front of that mirror, but I do remember the way I took it off and escaped to another part of the store, before my parents could catch the way I sobbed.

I quietly type in a website's address into Google, something that feels like a secret even from myself. I've bought binders from this company before—for my friend, not for myself—but this time it feels different, scrolling through the options and knowing that one of them could be for me.

I carefully measure myself, tape measure pressed against my skin, and double—triple—check all of the numbers. There's a spark of disappointment when I have to fill out the box asking for my email address so that I can be reminded of when their products are back in stock, but it's covered by the excitement of making that commitment.

Soon, I promise myself. Soon.

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WRITTEN AND DESIGNED BY DIANE YU

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LSA STUDENT GOVERNMENT
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M | UNIVERSITY UNIONS

CAMPUS RESOURCES

STUDENT SERVICES

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

3100 Michigan Union

Hours: Mon-Thurs: 8am - 7pm, Fri: 8am - 5pm
(734) 764-8312

(Press 0 for After Hours Urgent Support)

<https://caps.umich.edu>

Provides free, confidential services for U of M students including: counseling for individuals or couples, workshops and groups for support and changing patterns, Assessment of Substance Abuse Patterns (ASAP), online screening for mental health concerns.

MiTALK ("My Talk")

<https://caps.umich.edu/mitalk>

Offers online screenings for depression and anxiety, skill-building tools, and recorded workshops, lectures and relaxation exercises.

Campus Mind Works

<http://campusmindworks.org>

Provides resources for students who have been diagnosed with a mental health disorder.

Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Center (SAPAC)

551 Michigan Union

Hours: Mon-Fri: 9am - 5pm

Office Phone: (734) 764-7771

24-hour Crisis Line: (734) 936-3333

<https://sapac.umich.edu>

Provides free confidential crisis intervention, advocacy, and support for survivors of sexual assault, sexual harassment, intimate partner violence, and stalking.

Spectrum Center

3200 Michigan Union

Hours: Mon-Fri: 9am - 6pm

(734) 763-4186

<https://spectrumcenter.umich.edu>

Provides a range of education and advocacy services that work to make campus a safe and inclusive environment for LGBTQA students and staff. Also offers on-campus HIV rapid testing.

U-M University Health Service (UHS)

207 Fletcher St.

Hours: Mon-Wed: 8am-5pm, Thu: 9am-5pm,

Fri: 8am-4:30pm, Sat: 9am-12pm

(734) 764-8320

www.uhs.umich.edu/mentalhealthsvcs

Provides medication and management of common mental health concerns.

U-M Psychological Clinic

500 E. Washington St., Suite 100

(734) 764-3471

<http://mari.umich.edu/psych-clinic/>

Offers assessment, counseling, and treatment for adults in the U-M community, including: anxiety, depression, couples issues, and problems with work and study.

EMPLOYEE SERVICES

U-M Faculty and Staff Assistance Program

1009 Greene St.

(734) 936-8660

Provides short-term counseling and coaching for staff, faculty and their immediate family members.

CAMPUS SAFETY

Division of Public Safety and Security

Emergencies: Dial 9-1-1

Non-emergencies: (734) 763-1131

Tip line: (734) 763-9180

NATIONAL 24-HR HOTLINES

National Suicide Prevention Hotline

1 (800) 273-8255

The Trevor Lifeline

Trevor Lifeline: 1 (866) 488-7386

TrevorChat (available 7 days a week 3pm-9pm ET):

<http://www.thetrevorproject.org/pages/get-help-now>

TrevorText (Thursdays and Fridays 4pm-8pm ET):

Text the word "Trevor" to 1 (202) 304-1200

Provides suicide prevention and crisis intervention to LGBTQ young people ages 13-24.

Veterans Crisis Line

Hotline: Call 1 (800) 273-8255 and Press 1

Online chat: <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net>

Text: 838255

Connects Veterans in crisis and their loved ones with qualified, Department of Veterans Affairs responders.

U-M HEALTH SYSTEM

Note: Services at the U-M Health System are not covered by students' health service fee.

U-M Depression Center

(734) 936-4400

Dedicated to research, education, and treatment of depressive and bipolar illnesses.

U-M Collegiate Sleep Disorder Clinic

(734) 936-9068

Helps improve your sleep, daytime function and, hopefully, academic performance.

U-M Anxiety Disorders Treatment Clinic

(734) 764-0231

Offers treatment of problematic anxiety and stress.

U-M Ambulatory (Outpatient) Psychiatry Services

1 (800) 525-5188 or (734) 764-0231

Provides comprehensive evaluation and treatment for patients and families affected by mental illness.

UM Psychiatric Emergency Services

Crisis Line: (734) 936-5900 or (734) 996-4747

**University Hospital, 1500 East Medical Center Dr.
Emergency Medicine Reception**

Emergency walk-in consultation and phone service available 24 hours per day, seven days per week.

U-M Neuropsychology Clinic

(734) 763-9259

Performs psychological evaluation to differentiate cognitive functioning.

U-M Preventive Cardiology

(734) 998-7400

Offers a "Power of Relaxation" program, as well as nutrition, weight management, exercise, smoking cessation and stress management programs.

**If you or someone
you know struggles
with mental health,
there are ways
to get help. Use
these resources to
find help for yourself
or a loved one.**



"...as I travel on my mental health journey, I've realized you can celebrate whatever the hell you want. What is important to you, and big to you, is your choice and no one else's."

Katie O'good, pg. 9

