

flow

ROOT

AUTUMN 2021



Ryerson

*Cause this is it for all we know.
So say goodnight to me.
And lose no more time, no time.
Resisting the flow.*

-Ohm, Yo La Tengo



flow

AUTUMN 2021
ROOT

what's inside?

Cover art by Gabriel Ryerson

- 4 Letter from Erin
- 7 Turning the Lens
writing prompts for reflection
- 8 From the Community
"Roots" comic by Melissa Barragan
"Root to Rise" essay by Rachael Ryerson
"Autumn, Autumn" poem by Maddie Ryerson
- 16 Things for you, for your heart
curated playlist, yoga and meditation recordings
- 17 Items of Inspiration
what I've been paying attention to...
- 18 *For the Community*
supporting each other

a zine called, FLOW is a free, seasonal, digital publication made to inspire reflection, connection and imagination

if you want to support this work and have monthly access to special Patreon perks, become a **paid subscriber** here:

www.patreon.com/erinpfaehler



Letter from Erin

As I sit here writing this to you, I notice everything has changed since the last time I wrote this intro letter for the summer issue of a zine called flow. Last season I was in a world of imagination, of future thinking, of big dreaming. This season I have been jolted into the reality of being human; facing death and mortality. To be real within this realness, the sadness has been overwhelming. It's made me feel like I'm in a dreamland of some sort, but not the kind I had imagined just months prior.

It started with the news of my best friend's kid's diagnosis of incurable cancer. How do you take that news and not cry; not wonder why? There's been a lot of that question over the past few weeks and trying to be present with whatever answer comes to me in that minute, that moment of time. Why? Why? Why? I've thought again and again that this shouldn't be able to happen to such a little person; only five years old and so full of energy. There really are no words that can be said to describe the desire or attempt to take away the pain of all that comes with news like this.

The depths of this sadness feel like roots I've connected to over time.

My dad called me on a Wednesday afternoon, just three weeks ago. He asked me if I was home and I knew whatever he was about to say wasn't going to be good. My uncle had called him that morning to tell him my cousin, Nate, died and he was the one who had to tell me. I broke down and cried while Ethan held me in his arms and wondered about all the hate in the world. It might sound weird, but I couldn't stop repeating in my head, "I hate, I hate, I hate...". I still haven't been able to clearly fill in the blank.



Letter from Erin (continued)

He was my buddy, my one cousin who'd sneak away with me at family gatherings. We'd talk about dreams, secrets and what we'd been up to. He was just a year older than me. We grew up together going on vacations, ringing in the new year at the bowling alley and staying in touch on the side. He supported me in everything I did. When I was living in Spain he sent me a package of 100 cliff bars and a zip up hoodie that I'm wearing right now. He was a member of my Patreon community for this zine that I am writing and he especially loved the playlists I sent out. The last time I saw him we were at our cousin's wedding together in August. He wore a checkered jacket and patterned bow tie; a combination that expressed who he was from the inside.

I couldn't help but wonder *why* here too. Why? Why? Why did he have to go?

The depths of this sadness, like roots we've been connected to all along.

I remember when I was young I lost my uncle to a heart attack, but it didn't sink in back then. I didn't get that I'd never get to see him again. To never be able to see the person again, this time, left me numb and led me to think differently about all of our dead; about all of our loved ones who have come and gone.

What even happens when they go? The memories of their life live on underneath, like an interconnected web of moments, snapshots and indescribable feelings that will always be there. Losing loved ones is never the end, but a transformation of who they were into what you've made from your time together in this place. This evolving collection of memory moments are rooted in their smile, their laugh, their dancing, their style or how they wore their hair.

I write this In memory of the late Nathan McCullough, Joan and Richard Pfahler, Ken Christy, Wayne McCullough and for all those we've lost along the way, but are never completely gone. Living on in prayers, meditations, wonderings and observations; in stories, in the seasons, in smells and in the wind.

I'll keep asking them all questions and inviting them on hikes. A piece of them will forever reside in my heart and in the roots that connect me while I still walk this Earth. Whether these roots are of sadness, joy or wonder, we've all felt that jolt that wakes us back up; that reminds us our day, too, will come.



Love,
Erin

Forest self- portrait of Erin on the thunder bunny trail at Strouds Run State Park in Athens, Ohio. She looks off into the distance with a look of existential wonder in her eye while squatting close to the ground in a cave-like stone formation.

Turning the lens

reflection prompts for journaling, meditation and introspection

- Write "I was born with a gift..." at the top of your page and write from there.
- Who are you if you don't know where you came from?
- If you aren't connected to your roots, what are you connected to?
- Write "I am from... " at the top of your page and write from there (create a poem by filling in the blanks with memories, places, people, experiences, lessons and whatever else comes to mind that shows where you are from)
- How does naming the past, present and future Indigenous peoples of the places we inhabit change my view? (Visit <https://native-land.ca/> to find out what Indigenous cultures once existed or still exist where you live)
- How do I view the world?
- What belief patterns have I inherited throughout my life?

From the community



Roots

by Melissa Barragan

Melissa Barragan is a 25 year old Athens native comic artist. Filled with gratitude from the support her friends have given her along the way, she started making small memories into reality in her vibrant cartoon style. Many fridges across Athens County can be seen hanging such comics as mementos to the small but impactful moments she and her friends have shared. In this piece, Melissa decides that creating is the best form of grounding as she sits down to construct a new comic for her friend's zine.





Root to Rise

by Rachael Ryerson



Rachael Ryerson is an Assistant Professor of English at Eastern Illinois University where she teaches writing, rhetoric, and pedagogy courses. In her free time, she enjoys being in the woods, running trails, reading (for fun), eating excellent vegan grub, and playing guitar.



Root to Rise

by Rachael Ryerson

“Root to Rise.” That’s what my yoga teacher says, but what does it mean to be rooted? What does rooted feel like?

The older I get, feeling rooted means delving deeply into the season, both physically and metaphysically. It’s always been easy to wrap autumn about me like a colorful cocoon because it’s filled with the promise of pumpkin patches, kaleidoscopic trees, warm soups and crusty sourdoughs, and hands and hearts held snug at holiday gatherings.

But this Fall is different—this season’s mantle comes with thorns. In October of 2021, we rushed my son Bear to the emergency room because he started stumbling in his kindergarten classroom and the school nurse struggled to keep him awake. What followed: an emergency room visit, a CT scan, an ambulance ride to St. Francis Children’s Hospital in Peoria, IL, a seizure, a MRI, a brain biopsy and third ventriculostomy, a week’s wait, and then a diagnosis of brain cancer. Of all the futures I’ve imagined for Bear, this was never one.

Not only does he have brain cancer, but he has the worst type: diffuse intrinsic pontine glioma, or DIPG. His cancer has taken up residence in the heart of his brain, his thalamus, and there is no cure. Surgery, radiation, chemo will not save his life. On average, most survive around a year after diagnosis. Thus, this Fall, this season of death, I’ve been forced to face my son’s likely death, to bear witness to his decline and my woe.

But perhaps that’s what it means to be rooted. Instead of fleeing, I’m to stay, ground down, and be still. Naturally, I want to run away, but I owe it to Bear and to myself as his mother, to be present, to let my life’s tendrils dive deep into this grief.

I drew the Seven of Swords the other day and this is what it means: This card speaks to avoiding what is uncomfortable and unsettling to think about. There is a potential to keep hidden what would be better revealed. Facing the matter head on, however, brings empowerment. Root to rise.

Not only do I intend to face this season, but to don it like a second skin, as if someone has turned a honey locust tree inside out and said, “Wear this. It will hurt but you’ll be grateful.”

And it certainly does hurt. How can it not? Contemplating the death of a child I’ve raised, suckled, cradled, carried, held, read to, soothed, kissed, laughed with, teased, tickled, and played with feels impossible. How can it be? How do I be? It all feels a bit absurd, like I’m living in a Dali painting and all the world is melting. Something is awry and I’m unmoored, floating in a sea of what if’s and (im)possibilities. Surprisingly, wading into the hurt has been steadyng. Soaking up the time I’ve been given with my son, and knowing that any smile, chirp, hug, bedtime story could be our last has anchored me.

If my heart is a home, I’m not only leaving the door open to this room, but I’m residing. I’m feeling out the space, even if it is a bit tortuous and masochistic to do so. The only way through is through.

So I think about my son. All the time. Everything comes back to him. I heard this Sufjan Stevens song the other day and predictably, it was sad, but in hearing these lines, I thought I might choke on my sorrow:

Should I tear my eyes out now?

Everything I see returns to you somehow.

Should I tear my heart out now?

Everything I feel returns to you somehow.

And I know I’m going to feel this way for a long time. In a meaningful card from a former professor, she realistically and wisely said, “You’ll cry for a long time.” And so I will. This is now my story, Bear’s story, your story, our story. Forever. Every morning I wake up for the rest of my life, this will be my story. But, for the foreseeable future, I will be waking up. I can’t say the same about Bear. One of the most difficult questions for me to respond to lately is one that Bear asks me every night: “We wake up in the morning?” I always say yes, but one day, it won’t be true.

That’s true for everyone. We all eventually have our last morning. As John Donne reminds us about Death, “And soonest our best men with thee do go.” Only Bear will go sooner than expected.

This is the most I've ever thought about death, and what a fitting mediation for this season. Fall is death full of splendor. Before their light goes out, it's as if trees ignite, a blaze of orange, yellow and red leaves that, like an odyssey of phoenixes, burn bright before becoming ashes. Is that what Bear is doing? Shining his light for a season, and then to ground he goes?

And what is life but death. Look at trees who die unto themselves once a year only to be reborn again in the Spring. Perhaps what's so hard about Bear's situation, his cancer, is there will be no rebirth, at least not on this plane of existence. How might he rise, however, from being grounded? How might he be more himself, more Bear, once he is beyond the confines of his body?

In the midst of all this darkness, there is light. Love. Community. Last week, dear friends arranged a benefit for Bear, and more meaningful than the money raised is all the people, both near and far, supporting my son. Loving him. Praying for him. Crying for him. Rooting for him. We are connected, all of us, knit together in patterns unfathomable.

In one of Richard Powers' *Overstory* vignettes, Patricia Westerford explains that

When the lateral roots of two Douglas-firs run into each other underground, they fuse. Through these self-grafted knots, the two trees join their vascular systems together and become one. Networked together underground by countless thousands of miles of living fungal threads, trees feed and heal each other, keep their young and sick alive, pool their resources and metabolites into community chests.

In this case, Bear is the knot, and we connect across/through him; in so doing, we feed and heal one another. We root to rise.



Autumn, Autumn

by Maddie Ryerson



Maddie Ryerson is an 8-year-old third grader who likes Pokémon, the color blue, anime, our dog, Foxy, and her teacher, Mr. Milo.

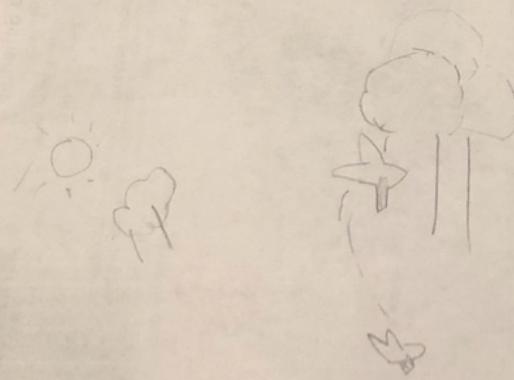


Autumn, Autumn

By Maddie Ryerson

Autumn, Autumn it's cold chilling breeze
blends with the sky as blue as the sea.
Fall, fall the leaves of the trees,
they have such color, for color of three,
for when Fall ends Winter begins.

Maddie
Autumn, Autumn it's cold chilling breeze
blends with the sky as blue as the sea
fall fall the leaves of the tree
they have such color for color of three
for when fall ends winter begins



red
orange
yellow
fall ends
Winter begins

Some things for you, for your heart:



Playlist

songs that have the power to pull you through or
pull you in to feel the feels of a difficult time,
with a few songs to just groove to, of course



Recorded Gentle Yoga Class

with live ambient music

Rooted (56 minutes)

Featuring music by Ethan Bartman



"SELF-COMPASSION IS THE
EARTH INTO WHICH THE SEEDS
OF CHANGE CAN BE PLANTED."

'Root' a guided meditation and writing recording

In this recording Erin will guide a meditation
that focuses on grounding and connecting to
your root and Earth energy. (33 minutes)

Featuring ambient music by Ethan Bartman

items of inspiration

a collection of what I've been paying attention to...

reading:

The Body Keeps the Score by Bessel Van Der Kolk; a beautifully scientifically written book about the brain and mind in the healing of trauma.

"Text Your Dead" an essay and website written and created by Eric Lemay.

The OverStory by Richard Powers, a book of fictional stories interwoven with trees, themes of activism, nature and growing roots.

Belonging a graphic memoir by Nora Krug about the reckoning of her family's history and wrestles with the idea of *Heimat*, the German word for the place that first forms us.

watching:

I have rooted myself in making my way through all the movies by one filmmaker. Over the past few months I have dove into the works of Paul Thomas Anderson including: Magnolia, The Master, Boogie Nights and There Will Be Blood. Themes of death, melancholy and trauma weave throughout all of his films. It's been inspiring and eye opening to see the threads that root one creator's works.

listening to:

Sans Soucis a London based artist who blends pop, RnB and folk to express ideas of identity and mental health with her poetic lyrics

Hanson, Snowed In a Christmas album I have listened to since I was little.

My 2021 Spotify Year Wrapped Playlist consisting of mainly ambient and experimental.

for the community

researched organizations to support



This is a new addition to the zine in hopes to spread awareness and aid in building bridges in our community through financial aid, volunteer opportunities and finding our individual roles in efforts for a more equitable world. If you have any recommended organizations to include on future lists or better ways to share, support and give please feel free to reach out to me personally.

cover art by...



Gabe Ryerson is an artist who lives in Champaign, IL with a beautiful faerie queen and two young hobbits. When he's not working on illustrations, he enjoys hiking in the woods, thinking about chakras, and talking to rabbits. He's a big fan of children's book illustrators like Mercer Mayer, Arthur Rackham, and Maurice Sendak. He's not a fan of heights, old chewing gum, or sitcoms.

Instagram: @gabrielryerson

flow

is made possible by your support, which is greatly appreciated. You can give one time through [Venmo](#) or subscribe on [Patreon](#).

Thank you all who share, give and support this project and beyond!



Erin is a writer and yoga instructor living in Athens, Ohio. She is currently working on a collaborative film project and writing her first book of essays. You can learn more about what she's all about on her [website](#).