Blog
Spirituality



A cairn I made along my hike on the Lazy Cow trail in Franklin Mountains State Park, Texas (Celine Reinoso)



by Celine Reinoso

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Editor's note: *Notes from the Field includes reports from young people volunteering in ministries of Catholic sisters. A partnership with Catholic Volunteer Network, the project began in the summer of 2015. This is our 11th round of bloggers: Celine Reinoso is a Loretto Volunteer in El Paso, Texas, and Maria Longo is a Notre Dame AmeriCorps volunteer in the Bronx, New York.*

Like many others around the world, I am sitting at home, attempting to fulfill a sense of productivity while trying not to panic about the global pandemic we are experiencing. As someone who has been diagnosed with anxiety and depression, staying positive during this time is easier said than done.

I work at Villa Maria, a transitional homeless shelter for women along the U.S.-Mexico border. Due to COVID-19 and necessary precautions for public health, I am staying home until further notice. Since my job revolves around working with the case manager and meeting the needs of the residents at the shelter — daily activities, job and housing resources, social service accessibility — I don't have much work to do from home.

I am extremely privileged to have the support of my program and a placement to go back to when this is over, so I know staying home is the most responsible decision for me right now. However, this lack of structure and sense of purpose, on top of the anxiety circulating the world at the moment, is deeply affecting my mental health.

I am lucky enough to live in a house that has a backyard and porch, so I can safely social distance but not feel confined by the four walls of my bedroom. I can't say I've ever been in a situation like this one, so I have had to try every coping mechanism I can think of. I've tried painting, hiking, DIY projects, jewelry-making, embroidery, journaling, yoga and puzzles. I'm grateful that my bank account is limited by my program stipend, or else I would have engaged in a little retail therapy, too.

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Despite becoming an at-home craft store, I realized the greatest healer for me right now is Mother Nature.

El Paso is not called "Sun City" for nothing. At this time of the year, every morning begins with a cool spring breeze before it's basically summertime by 2 p.m. I've used this to my advantage. After completing my tasks for the day, I let myself bask in the warm sun, do a little yoga routine, listen to music, and read some poetry. The last activity has been the most helpful for me during the deepest pits of my depression.

I am currently reading *salt.* by Nayyirah Waheed. Her poems surround themes of womanhood, self-identity, language, healing and love. In my slump, I've been experiencing distance from myself and my thoughts, but Waheed's poetry has grounded me and brought me back into my body. This poem in particular spoke to my recent effort to heal and grow:

> expect sadness
>
> like
>
> you expect rain.
>
> both
>
> cleanse you.
>
> — natural



One of my COVID-19 art projects: a watercolor painting of the sun and moon (Celine Reinoso)

Comparing my sadness or depression to something as natural as rain helps me understand that this dullness is temporary, fruitful and purposeful. I am used to repressing my negative emotions and resenting them, but viewing my depression as meaningful seems slightly unrealistic yet hopeful. The way in which I can begin to understand my current low as substantial is to sit in my discomfort and pain. Practicing this outside in the presence of nature is the only setting where I am not completely consumed by my internal and irrational thoughts. I let myself instead listen to the wind blowing, the birds chirping and the trains passing.

When my short attention span begins to think my back porch is too boring, I go on a walk in my neighborhood or hike by the Franklin Mountains. My ears pay attention to the rhythm of my footsteps and sounds of gravel beneath my feet; my eyes search for desert flowers to take home and press; and my mind takes its own course, running tirelessly through irrational and negative thoughts. At the end of the path, I

realize I have successfully sat (or walked) in my depression, got my steps in, and added to my collection of dried flowers. It's not bad for a day in self-quarantine and isolation.

I can't claim that I have found the solution to depression or boredom caused by this strange time, but I can share what I've been doing to make it through. The small amount of energy I have is directed toward creating things that will withstand my depression slump, reflecting on myself to discover how I want to grow as a healthier person, and being grateful for everyone doing their part in surviving through such an uncertain moment.

By the time this is all over, I can think back to this moment when I didn't let my depression control my life; I did my part in flattening the curve by staying home; I took time to be outside and engage in nature, the greatest gift humans have ever received; and I completed enough arts and crafts projects to make up a COVID-19 collection. It might look different than my regular work routine, but that might be enough to mark productivity and purpose to me.



Me on a hike on the Franklin Mountains overlooking the poppy fields (Celine Reinoso)

[Celine Reinoso is a Loretto Volunteer in El Paso, Texas, working at Villa Maria, a transitional homeless shelter for women.]

This story appears in the **Notes from the Field** feature series. View the full series.