

It seems cliché to say that I went on a journey and even more abstract to say that I went on a hero's journey. A hero's journey is largely present in myth and legends and is described as a common narrative style depicting a hero called to adventure; and when I think retrospectively, it embodies my capstone and university experience. Customarily, the hero's journey is a twelve-step process and can be condensed into five steps: an implied ordinary world, a call to adventure, a crossing of a threshold, a death-and-rebirth ordeal, and a return with the elixir or reward.

Throughout my journey at the University of Minnesota Rochester (UMR), I can precisely distinguish when each of these steps in the hero's journey occurred and can identify four of them occurring during my capstone experience. When I first started at UMR, I perceived an ordinary world. I knew what I wanted to learn and specific experiences that I wanted to accomplish such as a study abroad experience. I also knew that I had one goal: to become a physician assistant which, to me, had a very direct path. I would have to achieve good grades, volunteer, have at least a 1000 hours of direct patient care hours, and diversify my resume. To build my resume, I would have to have internships and research opportunities and so that is what I did. For a time, I was happy taking this direct path, but in reality, I was simply taking an easy path.

I was called to adventure when I had an opportunity at the end of my sophomore year to go on a global seminar titled Philosophies of Wellness: Holistic Healing in Japan. In the seminar, we learned about traditional Japanese aesthetic principles which can be incorporated into the healing process; and I was enraptured by the culture of the country. Many of the aesthetic principles revolved around finding beauty in natural objects or in nature itself; and I started to look around me. I realized that the environment, nature, and the many gardens that are present in Tokyo and around Japan may have been one of the reasons for their health. Later in the trip, we traveled to a small fishing village called Otsuchi-cho which was destroyed by the 2011 Tohoku

tsunami and earthquake. The people there were resilient and had started the Sashiko Project. The Sashiko Project is a group from Otsuchi-cho that embroiders clothing and clothes with a traditional Japanese stitching technique called sashiko. The group uses this art technique to draw together the community in a healing environment as well as sell items to make an income. This visit led to a trip to the city of Hiroshima, where I connected my observations from Tokyo and Otsuchi-cho together. In Hiroshima, when I expected to feel sad visiting a site that had been completely decimated by an atomic bomb, I found myself distracted and calm in an area filled with artistic monuments and nature. From there, I realized that art and nature aid healing, and that is why I was found them where destruction had occurred. This experience sparked a passion to learn about the connection between art, nature, and the healing process and how it can be incorporated into patient care.

After this experience, when I tried to imagine my capstone, I could not picture it being focused on anything else besides art, nature, and healing. So I crossed a threshold. I wrote my capstone based around the healing aspects of art and nature. I included coursework, a study abroad experience, and two internships. Again, I thought completing my capstone was a straight path to success. I expected to come to the same conclusions that I had in Japan, and maybe gain more insight into my chosen topic. For this reason, I thought a study abroad experience and internship in an overseas hospital would only add to my resume. This was not the case though, and I started to find out very quickly that my capstone was not going to be easy.

The Whittington Hospital, where I interned, did not have an internship program. My supervisor was hands-off and assigned me to perform hand-washing audits on a regular basis which consisted of me standing in the Accident & Emergency Department observing the hospital staff. In my time observing, I saw the downfalls of medicine, an overworked system, and

professionals who had become callous to patients. I did not want to work in this environment. I became aware that being a physician assistant was not what I wanted after all and I was heartbroken. My original straightforward plan had kinked and my excitement for my capstone seemed to fizzle, both seeming to die at the same time.

I originally did not deal with the emotions related to my new found decision to not be physician assistant and instead focused less on my internship and more on my abroad coursework, a course in post-British popular culture in which we explored London. In our explorations, we went to a part of London (Shoreditch) covered in artwork. One piece in particular stood out to me, a memorial made by an artist to his son that had committed suicide and I was drawn back to my original experience in London in which art was used as a way of healing after destruction. This theme continued when I walked past a church that had been bombed during the Blitz in WWII that had been turned into a garden. These sights only seemed to confirm what I had already seen and I was excited about it, having more evidence of what I seemed to already know.

After my trip to London and the good and bad experiences, I was in the hospital for five days for health reasons. The one thing that kept me calm was a coloring book that my sister had given me for when I felt anxious as I had been having panic attacks. Even in my state of distraught, I realized that on a personal level I was implementing what I had seen in London and Japan on myself. Art heals. School started soon after my stint in the hospital and I was still having panic attacks, but was functional. I finally admitted to myself I was never going to be a physician assistant. It was not healthy for me to continue to be anxious over something I no longer wanted for myself, and I decided on a new path to be an occupational therapist. Occupational therapy offers much more time to build a relationship with a patient, something

that I value and did not observe shadowing physicians and nurse practitioners. Previous to my decision to change career paths, I did not know if it would ever be possible to combine being a physician assistant and my passion as a provider-patient relationship is not formed holistically. Being an occupational therapist will allow me time to share my passion and knowledge during the building of the provider-patient relationship. Almost immediately after making this decision to explore occupational therapy more, I felt as if I had been resurrected from the very dark place I had found myself in.

All while this was happening, I took a course called The Healing Nature of Plants and learned about the medicinal and therapeutic value of nature. I carried my learning from this course into my internship with Mayo Clinic Center for Innovation. During my internship, I had the opportunity to speak with people in the healthcare field that were designing ways to incorporate the arts and nature into the patient setting to benefit the healing process. I was also able to complete an independent study focused on art and its healing potentials. With all of these experiences and observing the effects of art and nature both first-hand and personally, I can say for ascertain that art and nature have been utilized on a community level, are being used in a healthcare setting, and can be used personally in stressful times.

The knowledge that I gained from my capstone experience makes me think about how I can incorporate both nature and art into my role as an occupational therapist while helping patients through their healing processes. From my experiences alone, I know that no path is as straightforward as it may seem and there may be twists and turns, but it will probably lead you to where you are meant to end up. It is okay for things to change, nothing is perfect and so nothing should be expected to end perfectly. After all, perfect is a relative term that we all have to define for ourselves.