

Polyphony



2026 ISSUE 7
HOMING

Letters From the Editor

Hi! I am Hana, one of Polyphony's co-editor-in-chief.

As a new Co-editor-in-chief, my first and the most important job was re-creating a Polyphony community with new members joined from this year. For me, it was an experience closely connected to this issue's theme, "Homing." Usually, it simply means the ability to return home. But in this issue, we decided to use another meaning of this word as a verb: a social process of creating "home". We took this concept from a research project about international migration, HOMInG, led by sociologist Paolo Boccagni and his research team. The research project does not understand home as just a physical place. Rather, in their idea, home also includes our "emotional and meaningful kind of relationship." It is a relationship created based on how we feel living there, like a sense of belonging, affection or feeling of confinement. So, "Homing" is a process to create somewhere that you can feel a sense of belonging, being included, or simply feel *at home*. Like the Polyphony team for me!

We thought this kind of experience would be an interesting writing theme for people around us. In our environment where people with various backgrounds come and live together, we often face questions of where to belong, how to create a home here, and so on. And the guess was right: authors had very interesting pieces reflecting how we create, question, and wonder about home! Their voices are diverse, never unified, but they create very nice places here for us to discover our "homing" experiences.

I sincerely appreciate the support and work done by our polyphony team to complete such a good issue; Kento, Ai, Aidan, Alex, Alma, Mai, Pan Pan, Aisyah, Nhi, and Xaverius. Thank you so much for helping me and Snow to resurrect Polyphony during all the chaos!

In my opinion, life itself is a continuous process of "Homing." It always happens, not only for students like us, but also for everyone. I hope this issue can connect to your unique voices and experiences of "Homing" too, beyond our differences. Because this is Polyphony, where many lives and voices including yours are entangled like beautiful music.

Hello! My name is Snow, and I am one of the co-editor-in-chief of Polyphony.

Working on this issue has been a process of learning for me. When we began, we had a possible theme, a new team, and many ideas, but we did not yet know what the finished issue would look like. We simply started talking, planning, and putting everything together one step at a time.

Through this process, I came to understand what Polyphony means to me. As its name suggests, it is a place for many different voices. They do not always have to agree or tell the same kind of story. What matters is that each voice has the space to be heard.

Bringing Polyphony back also felt connected to "Homing" in its own way. We were not only returning to something that already existed; we were also creating a new place for it within our student community.

I especially want to thank Kento, Ai, Alex, Alma, Mai, Pan Pan, Aisyah, Nhi, Aidan and Xaverius. Everyone worked incredibly hard to complete this issue while managing hectic schedules, classes, responsibilities, and many unexpected challenges. I know it was not always easy to find the time and energy, so I am truly grateful for the care and effort each of you gave to Polyphony. This issue would not have been possible without you.

This will be my last issue as co-editor-in-chief, which makes its completion especially meaningful to me. However, this is not goodbye. I still hope to remain part of Polyphony in the future, to support it and watch it continue to grow. I am excited to see how future members will shape it and make it their own.

Thank you for opening this issue and joining us at the beginning of a new chapter. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed creating it.



Warmly,
Snow and Hana
Co-Editor-in-Chief

Table of Contents

- 5-** Homing: A Conversation About Finding, Losing, and Remaking Home
GDP Students: Myo Myat Hnin(Snow), Saimon Sawai, Kotoko Hachiya, Alexsandra Ikeda, Mpaayei Joan Silole, Aisyah Shobrina, and Tomohiro Suzuki
- 9-** Poem
Maiza Aynayya
- 10-** A Return & A Discovery
Yoon Inzali Min Min
- 12-** Poem: A Ghost and Two Boxes
Yoon Inzali Min Min
- 13-** That Bush Outside Your Window Might Be Stressed, Just Like You
Puspadewi Adiseputra
- 15-** Poem: The Long Way Home
tixi
- 17-** Oru, Who Held The Valley
Myo Myat Hnin(Snow)
- 24-** Poem: 武岡のカブト虫
Kento Morita-Munnelly
- 25-** Poem: Motherland
Alexsandra Ikeda
- 26-** LIM - A Taste of Comfort
Nguyen Ngoc Dieu Anh
- 28-** Review of Nap All Day
Neo Sayavong
- 29-** Poem: 旅に出たい鼠
Miki Motohara
- 30-** Homeは変わり続ける。
Yuzuki Takahashi
- 32-** Poem
Aung Myo Myat(Andy)
- 33-** A Few Lessons From Autumn
Almathea Valezka
- 36-** To You, Our dearest
Polyphony Team and writers of messages for Anh

The Team

Editor-in-Chief:
Hana Nagatani, Myo Myat Hnin (Snow)

Layout Editor:
Pann Wut Yi Thinn (Pan Pan)

Assistant Layout Editors:
Ai Putri Fujita (Ai)
Aisyah Shobrina (Aisyah)
Alexsandra Ikeda (Alex)
Almathea Valezka (Alma)
Hana Nagatani (Hana)

Creative Editors:
Aiden James Mark
Almathea Valezka
Hana Nagatani

Photographer:
Xaverius Farrell Leinardy
(Photos on Table of Contents page and this page)

General Editors for the Issue:
Aisyah Shobrina
Alexsandra Ikeda
Hana Nagatani
Kento Morita-Munnelly
Mai Tra Nguyen
Pann Wut Yi Thinn
Tuyet Nhi Nguyen

Cover illustration and design:
Hana Nagatani

Special thanks to other contributors:

Articles:
Students who joined the discussion of “Homing”
Maiza Aynayya
Yoon Inzali Min Min
Puspadewi Adiseputra
tixi
Myo Myat Hnin(Snow)
Kento Morita-Munnelly
Alexsandra Ikeda
Nguyen Ngoc Dieu Anh
Neo Sayavong
Aisyah Shobrina
Miki Motohara
Yuzuki Takahashi
Aung Myo Myat(Andy)
Almathea Valezka
All people who wrote messages for Anh
Graduating Class of 2026 and Alumni
TEDxOkayamaUniversity Team

Visual Materials:
Pexel.com
Unsplash.com
Canva.com



The **Polyphony Student Journal** is the first student-run literary platform at Okayama University’s liberal arts program, the Discovery Program for Global Learners (GDP). This year is Polyphony’s 7th year in running.

Check out more content from us on our blog and Instagram account:

Blog
discoverypolyphony.com



Instagram
[@polyphony_gdp](https://www.instagram.com/polyphony_gdp)



If you are a student of GDP or Okayama University, feel free to submit your work to be considered for publication at polyphonygdp@gmail.com.

Homing: A Conversation About Finding, Losing, & Making Home

Transcribed by Snow (Myo Myat Hnin)

Visuals by Pan Pan

In a small circle formed inside the G-Lounge, the home of GDP students on a random Tuesday. A dialogue unfolded among the students, where each of us reflected on how we find a place where we feel like we belong to our communities...

Snow

We usually think of home as a fixed place where we belong and feel warm, but home does not have to be a solid place. It can be a friend group, a person, a routine, or a place. Some of us have spent four years in this program and are about to graduate, while others have just arrived. **When you first came to GDP or Okayama University, what felt most unfamiliar?**

Aisyah

I am trying to remember. Lately, I feel like I have started forgetting things from my first year. There was a lot of confusion. I did not really know what was going on or what was happening around me. I was just trying to think about what I was going to do personally and how I would face things. Everything was

new, and I was trying to adapt.

Snow

I remember trying very hard to fit in. I am older than many of my peers, and I wanted to belong. I did not know Japanese when I came because I had been told that this was an international program. I honestly thought my peers would be like me and would also be beginning to learn Japanese.

What shocked me was that almost everybody could speak Japanese. They were naturally more comfortable speaking Japanese with one another, so it was difficult for me to enter conversations or find a friend group. Everyone already looked as if they had their own friends, and I also wanted to be part of something.

Joan

My experience was different. Everything felt exciting. Even the unfamiliar, strange, or bad experiences felt exciting in a weird way.

I remember trying to buy tea on my second day at university. I had just moved into a shared house, and I did not know where the vending machine was. I was confused and alone, trying to text my friends, but they were not replying immediately. I came across a group of Japanese people and asked them for help. They said, "We can take you," so they took me to the vending machine and bought the tea for me.

Looking back, it feels a little embarrassing. Why was I so confused about finding a vending machine? But at that time, even ticket machines were exciting. **When the**

whole environment is new, your brain can forget that ordinary things exist. Things that should be common also feel new.

Learning to navigate Okayama by bicycle was another part of that. It was confusing, but those experiences were fun for me.

Tomohiro

One thing that felt new in GDP was that there was not much of a boundary between students from different years. I came from a typical Japanese high school. We did not take the same classes as older students, and we could not speak with them in the same way.

In GDP discussions, we can talk with students from different years. Someone can be my *senpai*, but I can also treat them as a friend. It is comfortable because I can express my opinions to older students.

Kotoko

It is also much less strict about time. Students sometimes come a few minutes late, and the teachers try to be understanding. That is very different from high school. In high school, they are teaching you discipline. At university, they expect you to be responsible already. If you are late, you are the one who has to deal with it.

Saimon

I also felt that GDP students liked to communicate much more than students in other Japanese schools. In middle school and high school, people usually did not raise their hands in class. In GDP, many students raise their hands and speak to the teachers.

Snow

I had a difficult time because I was trying so hard to fit in. GDP is very communicative. You see outgoing people who look as if they are having the best time of their lives at university, and you wonder, "Why am I not feeling that way?" Did you experience that? How did you deal with it?

Alex

It is partly about how you construct yourself. You need to learn how to be comfortable on your own.

I do not mean that negatively. People come and go. Some people are only there for friendly conversation. Sometimes people do not want to talk to you. Sometimes you have a conversation and can already feel that you are not going to click. You have to become comfortable with those different situations.

Joan

My previous university experience in Kenya was very different. We were all Kenyan, so I made friends immediately, even with people from different places. Coming here was strange, but I arrived with the mindset that I would not make close friends from the beginning. I would have to build those friendships.

I remember meeting one of my friends for the first time. She made a very good impression on me. I thought, "She seems nice, and she is in my class, so I should try to become friends with her." It went on from there.

As someone else said, it depends on the people with whom you feel comfortable. Not everyone became my friend, but not everyone became someone I hated either. It is not easy to hate people. I just went with the flow.

"What about those of you who have been here for only two or three months? Is it too soon to say?", Snow.

Kotoko

It is different for everyone. I had wanted to study in an English-language environment since high school. Japanese is my second language, and I had a difficult time understanding my high-school classes. I spent years waiting to enter an English-learning environment. When I finally came here, I felt less stressed for the first time in three years.

I also entered GDP with a friend I had known since high school, which was a positive thing. Everyone has been friendly, so it has been good so far.

Saimon

It has also been great for me. We have gone to different places together. Some GDP friends and I went to eat dinner at another student's part-time workplace. Everyone has been nice.

Tomohiro

I am not as communicative as some other GDP students, so I sometimes have a hard time keeping up. But everyone is nice and welcoming. I am having fun.

Learning not to take every silence personally.

Aisyah

During my first year, if someone did not talk to me, I would think, "Everyone dislikes me," or assume that something was wrong. I was trying to be nice and open.

After taking more sociology and anthropology classes, I started thinking about it differently. When people do not talk to me or disappear for a while, I think that perhaps something is happening in their lives that they cannot share with me. Maybe I am not the best person for them to share it with.

Now I try to understand the silence people give me and the spaces they open. I do not force them to tell me everything. I think, "Maybe they are going through something," and I leave room for that. In my friendships now, I really appreciate the space between friends and the things we leave unsaid.

Snow: "Have you reached a point where you feel that you have settled into GDP or **Found A Place Here?** It is also completely fine if you have not."

Joan

For me, it is half and half. I have found my place in the sense that I know how to carve out my life here. I know how to interact with my friends and other students and how to survive; although "survive" may be too strong a word.

On the other hand, I sometimes feel that I have not fully established all the connections that could have been there. But I do not have to establish every possible connection. If I do not have to, why would I force it?

When Friendships Change...

Aisyah

Being friends with older students is good, but when you become close to a *senpai*, they graduate before you. Then it feels as though something has been lost. You become sad and have to find another place or other friends.

Snow

I think I was a little immature when I entered GDP, especially because I wanted very stable friendships. I could not bear the fact that people come and go. I wanted them to stay.

Every year, things changed. I do not spend time with exactly the same people I spent time with in my first year. It is not because we fought or hated each other. We grew apart because we began taking different classes.

We also used to live near one another in the shared house, so naturally we spent more time together. After we moved into separate apartments, we met less often. Now I live farther away, so it happens even less.

I was afraid that this would make me lonely or make me feel that I did not belong anywhere. From my perspective, other people looked as if they belonged to very clear friendship groups, and I envied that. I wanted something like the friend groups we see in television dramas and sitcoms; a fixed group of people who always spend time together.

Now I am approaching my fourth year. Sometimes I am lonely, but I am also busy with part-time jobs, classes, and job hunting. I do not think about it in the same way anymore. I have friends I can talk to. I have made peace with the fact that relationships are constantly moving, changing, and adapting.

What does "home" mean to you?

Snow

Let us talk more directly about homing. Do you think home is mainly about people, places, routines, or something else? Have you felt at home somewhere that was not your parents' home?

Joan

Home is a feeling, and it is not constant. During my four years here, that feeling has changed many times. It changes with the people I am with, the places I go, and the activities I do.

I used to jog with a friend. We would talk during those runs. Sharing my thoughts and feelings, and also listening to her, made me feel at home. At that moment, home was being heard and listened to by someone I considered a friend.

It is not only about that one friendship. I feel the same with other friends I have now: people who listen when we talk and who somehow understand me. For me, that is home. I cannot really call my apartment home. It is almost too empty to be home.

Alex

Home is where you do not need to prove anything. You do not need to show people something or act like somebody else. You can be comfortable with them without expecting to receive something in return.

Tomohiro

For me, home is a place where people accept me. I still commute from my family home, so I feel a sense of belonging with my family. But I also feel that at the university, especially among

people in the student circle to which I belong. I feel that they accept me.

Saimon

I have lived in Vietnam, Mexico, the United States, and many other places. When I talk with my parents about those places, they use the word "home" a lot. Sometimes I become confused about which home they mean.

For me, home represents a place I am used to or a place where I have good memories. It is not necessarily only one place.

Aisyah

Lately, home feels more like the person I am with. As long as my mother is there, almost anywhere feels like home. Being with your parents can be annoying sometimes. But when I am with my family, especially my mother, I forget everything else. I forget a lot of my responsibilities and can simply be with them.

What will you take with you when you leave?

Snow

For those who are graduating, after four years in GDP, what are you taking with you?

Joan

I am taking the Japanese language with me. I am also taking the experience of Japan. GDP is very international, but living in Okayama still teaches you how to navigate Japanese culture.

I have worked part-time jobs, learned Japanese, and tried to find my way through everyday life here. If I move

to another country and enter another culture, I think I will be able to thrive because I already have the experience of adapting to life in Okayama.

What I take with me may not come mainly from the studies. It may come more from the life.

Still HOMING...

Snow, "When we began, we described home as something that may be a person, a friend group, a routine, or a place. After listening to everyone, it seems that home can be all of those things, but it can also be uncertain.

Some people feel at home when they are heard. Some feel it with family, even when family relationships are complicated. Some feel it among people who accept them. For others, home is a collection of places and memories. Some of us are living in a gray space where we belong in several ways but cannot call any one thing home.

Friendships also change. People come and go, older students graduate, classmates move away, and the routines that kept us close disappear. That does not necessarily mean the relationships failed. Perhaps homing is learning how to create belonging without expecting it to remain unchanged.

Those of us who are leaving will take languages, memories, questions, and the experience of making a life in Okayama. Those who have just arrived are beginning that process. They may eventually look back and find that their first year has become a blur too.

We do not have one final definition of home. We are still finding it, losing it, and making it again."

as any path
no longer leads
to the one you once lived in,
i find a sense of home
in places i feel your presense within,
though a constant is out of reach,
i settle for temporal warmth
under what the high sun has to offer
one that could resemble being held
in your arms as your daughter

once again, brightened
and young

frightened and young,
was i, as your
hand
fickle yet warm,
a soft grip, you might had
thought was strong,
pale lips with a strained
smile,
"mama gapapa,"
"iya mah, dede tay."
"we'll be home soon,
which ever home that will be."

Words and Photos
by Maiza Aynayya
Visuals by Alex

A Return & A Discovery

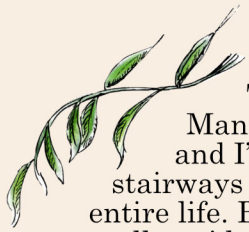
Words and Photos by Yoon Inzali Min Min
Visuals by Hana

I went home for a short visit after three and a half years of living abroad. In that time, life back home had continued without me, and it felt impossible for things to remain the same. It wasn't that I had been excluded, nor that I had forgotten my life there. Rather, my role within that social world had changed. I also noticed a shift in how I observe the world. I've become more aware of my surroundings. During a 12-hour bus ride, I didn't dare close my eyes because I didn't want to miss a single scene of my home country. The curiosity and my desire to understand my roots has grown even stronger.

Let me share a small glimpse of my visit and a discovery that stayed with me.

My family and I ended up visiting the southern side of Mandalay Hill, which is in my hometown. While climbing the stairways with my dad, I unexpectedly noticed piles of roof tiles stacked along the way. Here is the picture:





To be honest, I usually go up Mandalay Hill by car or motorbike, and I've probably walked those stairways fewer than three times in my entire life. Because of that, I had never really paid attention to these tiles or even noticed them before. I'm not sure whether they were recently removed after last year's earthquake and only stacked there now, or if they've been there for a long time.

When I looked up at the roof, I saw that about half of it had already been replaced with metal sheets.

My dad pointed to the tiles and said, "These are original historical pieces," which made me take a closer look. I noticed that they had alphabetic inscriptions. I tried to read them but couldn't, and I realized they didn't seem to be in English.



After returning home, I did some research and found that some of the tiles were produced by French companies, while others came from India. What interested me most were the French tiles labeled "MARSEILLE ST ANDRE." These tiles were first produced sometime around 1850 or 1890 which means they are at least 130 to 170 years old. Production continued until around 1940, and they were mainly exported to Australia.

I became curious about when these tiles started being used in Mandalay, but I couldn't find much information. If they had been from an English company, it would be easier to assume they arrived before or during the colonial period. However, since they are from a French company, it's harder to determine whether they came before Mandalay fell under colonial rule. From what I could gather, these tiles were exported widely, including to European colonies, so it's possible they arrived during that time.

My dad suggested that they might have been used during the period of restoring structures along the stairways. Mandalay also suffered major destruction during World War II, and later reconstruction. Because of this, it's quite possible that old materials were reused in later repairs. Perhaps I just don't know how to research deeply enough, but there seems to be very little information available about these tiles in Myanmar or even about similar tiles elsewhere.

Returning home after several years abroad allowed me to see familiar places with new eyes. This experience reminded me that places we consider ordinary are layered with stories that are not immediately visible. I believe that is why anthropology encourages us to pay attention to these layers, to question the origins of objects around us.



A GHOST & TWO BOXES

Words by Yoon Inzali Min Min

Photo and Visuals by Pan Pan

Halbwachs once said,
"To reconstruct the past
is merely to escape from the present."
The past, it seems, shines too brightly.

Taraminway said,
"Before nights of flowers arrive,
the night haunted by ghosts
comes first."

In Halbwachs' past,
did Taraminway's ghost
escape quietly, unseen?

Someone said,
"The past and the present
are just boxes we haven't yet packed."

Without hands to place things inside,
What should I do with these boxes?

Now, every night,
I wander round and round
together with the ghost.

That bush outside might be stressed,

your window just like you



WORDS BY PUSPA, VISUALS BY ALMA



Hey there! How are you doing? Good? Perhaps a little bit stressed by the responsibilities from school or work? Don't fret, for you are not alone! The plants are here to stress with you, albeit not from the heavy responsibilities of life! — No, I am not joking. Come, take a small break with me, and hug that small pot of succulent you have resting on your desk, as we learn what kind of pressures they are experiencing in their lives for them to be stressed.

What is considered stress in plants? According to Lichtenthaler (1998), any unfavorable condition or substance that affects or blocks a plant's metabolism, growth, or development is regarded as stress. There are various stress factors acting on them, largely grouped into natural stress factors and anthropogenic stress factors. Natural stress factors include high irradiance, high or low temperatures, long rainy periods, etc., while anthropogenic stress factors include herbicides, air pollutants, increased CO₂, and many more. These stress factors may reduce a plant's survival ability and cause it to wilt.

When plants are exposed to stress, they respond in four phases: response phase, restitution phase, end phase, and regeneration phase. In response phase, plants exhibit a decline of physiological functions as a stress response. This may be a decline in photosynthesis performance, metabolites transport, and/or ions uptake and translocation. This decrease in metabolic activities causes the vitality of plants to decline. Plants which possess tolerance towards stress will move to the next phase where they activate their coping mechanisms, such as metabolic fluxes activation, repair processes activation,

and long-term metabolic and morphological adaptations. If the stress exposure continues, plants will begin to lose their vitality, marking the end phase, when they start to show exhaustion towards handling stress. In the long term, this will cause severe damage and eventually cell death in plants. But if the stressors are removed at the right time, plants will enter a regeneration phase. In this phase, they stay on a new physiological standard set during the time they are experiencing stress. However, this change of standard usually doesn't remain long. Humans and plants might be the same in this sense, we both need a little rest away from stressors to reset and refresh ourselves, setting a new standard before facing the stressors again.

If these amounts of new knowledge make you feel concerned for the pot in your arms, let's talk about how to know when a plant is stressed. They mainly respond to many stress types in a similar way. Several traits which describe a stressed plant are slow growth, low photosynthetic rate, and low capacity for nutrient uptake (Chapin, 1991). Slow growth in plants experiencing stress often happens because the plants allocate more resources to survival instead of growth, leading them to have shorter shoots and roots compared to plants living in a stress-free environment. As for decrease in photosynthetic rate, its main cause is the decline in carbon assimilation due to diversion of carbon allocation to defense molecules or changes in leaf biochemistry. This decline means fewer organic compounds are converted from inorganic carbon, which results in the photosynthesis rate decreasing (Chaves et al., 2002). However, depending on the type of stress, the photosynthesis rate

will be affected differently. Light stress, in which the light intensity gets excessive, may damage Photosystem II, which is an important protein complex involved in photosynthesis, thereby declining photosynthesis efficiency (Mathur et al., 2014). Lastly, low nutrient uptake is often seen in plants experiencing mineral stress. Mineral stress is defined as deficiency of essential nutrient elements and/or excess of toxic elements. When there is an excess of toxic elements in the environment, the toxic elements may compete with essential elements, inactivate enzymes, and displace essential elements in functional sites (Alam, 1999). Both low photosynthesis rate and nutrient uptake can cause leaf senescence (Chele et al., 2021). This means the process of aging will happen faster on the leaves. The chlorophyll will degrade faster, causing the leaves to turn yellow or red.

So, there you have it! Plants, like humans, also experience stress, though not in the way we do. Too much heat, not enough heat, too much water, not enough water, too much light, not enough light can cause plants to grow slowly, convert inorganic matters into food slower, and take less nutrients than usual. This makes them short, weak, yellow, and sad. So they have to be away from stressors to make sure they grow optimally. Just like you! Yes, you! I know life is tough and stressful, but don't forget to take breaks so you don't get sad, because sad backwards is das and das not good. Now put that pot back on the table, drink some water and take some well-deserved rest. I will be root-ing for you and I be-leaf in your ability to grow!

References

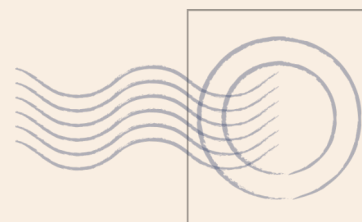
- Alam, S. M. (1999). Nutrient Uptake by Plants Under Stress Conditions. In *Handbook of plant and crop stress* (2nd ed., pp. 285–313). Marcel Dekker.
- Chapin, F. S. (1991). Integrated Responses of Plants to Stress. *BioScience*, 41(1), 29–36. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1311538>
- Chaves, M. M., Pereira, J. S., Maroco, J., Rodrigues, M. L., Ricardo, C. P. P., Osório, M. L., Carvalho, I., Faria, T., & Pinheiro, C. (2002). How plants cope with water stress in the field. *Photosynthesis and growth*. *Annals of Botany*, 89(SPEC. ISS.), 907–916. <https://doi.org/10.1093/aob/mcf105>
- Chele, K. H., Tinte, M. M., Piater, L. A., Dubery, I. A., & Tugizimana, F. (2021). Soil salinity, a serious environmental issue and plant responses: A metabolomics perspective. *Metabolites*, 11(11), 724. <https://doi.org/10.3390/metabo11110724>
- Lichtenthaler, H. K. (1998). The stress concept in plants: An introduction. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 851(1), 187–198. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-6632.1998.tb08993.x>



The Long Way Home

Words by taxi

Photos and Visuals by Ai

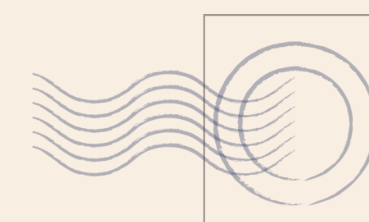


Home is where I hear a “See you later!” and “Hello!” every time I open the door.

Home is where there are pairs of shoes that lie scattered across the floor.

Home is where I can place the pots and pans with a blindfold on.

But,
home is also when I hear you ring a call and ask me how everything is going, when thousands of kilometers shrink into nothingness and I can feel the warmth of your tender voice right next to my ears, and I finally feel like I belong.



Even so, my dear,
life will go on,
for it is nothing but a succession of
fleeting moments.

But is it not precisely because of
that that I’m trying to hold on to
everything I possibly can?

Before it all breaks down, and I am
left with none?

For all things are temporary,
and I will return to Him,
ultimately.

Oru, Who Held the Valley

Words by Snow (Myo Myat Hnin)
Illustrations by Hana

On the edge of the world there was a valley, and in the middle of the valley there stood an elephant who had forgotten how to walk.

Her name was *Oru*.

No one knew if *Oru* had climbed there long ago or grown slowly out of the ground.

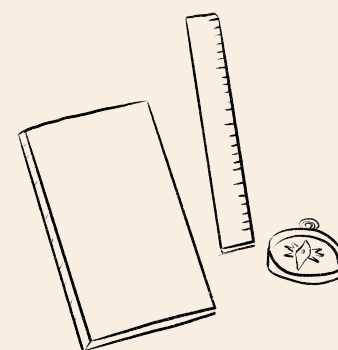
Moss cushioned her feet.
Terraces wrapped around her belly like belts.
Forests pooled in the shadow under her body.
At her toes, the valley tipped into the sea, and waves stroked her nails.

People lived everywhere on and around her, like tiny thoughts moving on the surface of a big, patient mind.

High on her wide shoulders, small families wandered with the seasons.
Around her middle, farmers coaxed water along shining channels.
On her back, herders walked with goats and cows between meadows.
Under her belly, people lived in and around a patchwork of forest and clearing.
At her feet, fishers rowed out into the restless water.

Everyone felt they knew what their world was like.
They didn't know that they were all right and all a little wrong.

Oru watched and listened, the way rocks listen to rain.



The Counters

One year, a group of strangers arrived, following a creased map.
They wore hard boots and carried notebooks, rulers, and little spinning instruments.
They walked in straight lines and liked questions with numbers as answers.

They scrambled up onto *Oru*'s shoulder, where the small families camped beside nut trees and tough grasses.

The strangers watched a family roasting seeds in a shallow basket.
After a few days, the family packed their baskets and moved across *Oru*'s shoulder toward a rumor of more food.

"Why don't you build one big village and stay?" a stranger asked.

The woman poked at the embers and snorted.

"Because the mountain is stingy," she said. *"This year there are nuts here. Next year, there might be none. Over there, maybe grasshoppers. If too many of us stay in one place, we all go hungry. So we walk. Our family must be small enough to move."*

She looked out across *Oru*'s shoulder, where other campfires winked alone in the distance.
"The land decides how large our group can be," she added, half to herself.

The strangers wrote in their notebooks: *Food scattered. Changes each year. Little rain, thin soil. People live in small families, moving often.*

They murmured together:

"The environment is harsh. These people have adapted. Nature sets the limits; culture is how they adjust."

In their minds, the world on *Oru*'s shoulders turned into a simple diagram:

land as a list of constraints, people as a clever machine that fits itself to those constraints.

They climbed down to *Oru's* belly, to the terraces that clung to her sides.

There they saw water caught in narrow canals, glittering like silver snakes. Farmers opened tiny gates to flood one field and shut others. Voices rose and fell: *"My turn!" "Wait your turn!" "The spring is weak this year!"*

"Why so many rules?" a stranger asked.

"Because the water is small and our mouths are many," a farmer replied. *"If everyone takes what they want when they want, someone's field stays dry. We must fit our turns to what the spring gives."*

Again, the strangers wrote: ***Water limited. People build channels and schedules. System stays balanced when rules are followed.***

Up on *Oru's* back, they counted goats and cows crossing between meadows. They traced paths with their fingers: up in summer when grass grew, down in winter when snow covered *Oru's* spine.

They rolled up their map at the end, now covered in numbers and arrows, and said:

"Good. We understand this valley. The land is one thing; human life is another. The land pushes; people respond. On to the next place!"

Not once did they look into *Oru's* eyes.

She felt their footsteps as faint raindrops on her thick skin. What they saw was true, but so flat that it might as well have been drawn on paper.

The Readers

Years passed like pages turning.

Children became elders. Goats learned new paths. The terraces crept a little higher up *Oru's* sides.

The first strangers' notebooks had become yellow in some faraway archive.

One day, another group of visitors arrived.

They walked more slowly. They stopped to stare at the way clouds snagged on *Oru's* ears.

On her shoulder, they saw the same small moving families as before.

But instead of only counting baskets, they watched what people did with their hands.

Before eating, a child carefully arranged seeds in a spiral on a flat rock.

"What are you doing?" a visitor asked.

"Feeding the mountain's memory," the child answered. *"If we don't, the wind will forget to bring rain here next year."*

The visitor looked at the seeds glowing in the light. To the first strangers, they would have been calories. To this visitor, they were also a sentence in a language of care and fear.

In her notebook she wrote:

"The mountain is not just stone and soil. For these people, it also remembers, responds, and insists. Their actions make sense not only as survival tricks but also as conversations with the land."

Down by the terraces, the visitors saw shrines at the head of each canal. Farmers placed flowers and incense before the water, murmuring as they opened the gates.

"Is this to make the water flow?" a visitor asked.

"The water flows because of the spring," an old farmer said. *"But we greet it so it knows we remember it is alive. If we treat it like dead stuff, it might leave us."*

On their pages, the visitors drew the same canals and fields. But also added small figures of spirits and gods, notes about sacred days and forbidden times.

Under *Oru's* belly, the light turned green and quiet. Small houses and gardens sat at the edge of the trees, and the oldest women in the village liked to rest there in the afternoons.

On some outsiders' maps, this whole patch was labeled "natural forest," a smooth green stain with no history.

But when the visitors sat with the old women in the speckled shade, the forest began to talk.

"My grandmother planted that mango," one woman said. *"My grandfather cleared the tall grass so these trees could grow. That dark patch is where our old village stood. The forest grows thickest on our history."*

The visitors began to see the forest as a kind of long, slow book.

Each cluster of trees and each open glade was a chapter about fire, planting, and abandonment.

Up on *Oru's* back, they ran their fingers over carved stones that marked each meadow. Herders said things like, *"This field is jealous; it never grows quite enough,"* and *"That one is generous; it feeds*

every animal."

It sounded as if the pastures themselves had moods.

They realized. Land and water are not just physical things to these people; they are also persons, signs, and archives.

What outsiders call "nature" is full of human meanings and past work.

Their map of the valley was messy and beautiful: symbols, names of spirits, and notes like *"old village here under the trees"* and *"stone that remembers who may graze."*

If the first strangers had drawn a skeleton; bones of land and lines of adaptation, these second visitors drew skin and stories.

Oru liked these visitors. Their questions tickled her more deeply. But they still mostly walked on her surface, reading what had been written there. They had not yet fully noticed how her insides were changing.



The Entanglers

The weather in the valley began to act strangely.

Rains that used to arrive like clockwork now stumbled in late, or came all at once and ran off *Oru's* sides in dirty floods.

Some springs on her slopes ran thin. The snow on her back did not linger as long.

At her feet, the sea grew warmer, as if someone far away were breathing hotly onto it.

Then the jellyfish came.

At first there were only a few translucent bells drifting in the shallows. Children poked them with sticks and ran squealing when the tentacles tingled their skin.

Then one year the bay filled with them. Nets dragged up armfuls of wobbling jelly instead of fish. Boats capsized under the weight.

Stings sent people to bed shaking with pain.

Soon after, the corals near *Oru's* toes turned ghost-white, then brittle. Fish became fewer and smaller. People began to speak quietly about stomach pains that never quite went away, about feeling tired all the time.

A third group of visitors arrived.

They carried microscopes, tiny vials, and printouts of graphs with rising lines.

They listened to fishers, who said, "*The sea is angry. We took too many fish; now it sends jellies instead.*"

They listened to shipworkers, who said, "*We take in seawater on the other side of the world and let it out here. Maybe they came with us.*"

They listened to farmers, who admitted, "*We pour more fertilizer on our fields now. The river sometimes runs green.*"

They scooped up drops of seawater and stared at the little worlds inside.

In the water, they saw that corals were not just rocks. Tiny living things inside them gave them color and strength. When the water became too warm, those tiny helpers left, and the corals turned white and weak.

They followed the river up over *Oru's* body, through terraces and pastures, past a factory pipe that leaked faintly metallic-smelling water, up into hills where forest had been cut and soil bled into the stream.

Everywhere, they saw threads:

Smoke from faraway cities thickening the air above *Oru*.

Green fertilizer grains dissolved into the river, feeding blooms that fed jellyfish.

Heat trapped by gases that no one in the valley could see, but everyone could feel.

Microbes in people's bellies reacting to new chemicals and diets.

On their maps, they didn't draw boxes at all.

They drew ***webs***.

In their webs, *Oru's* terraces, cows, forests, ships, factories, jellyfish, corals, and gut bacteria were all connected by lines.

One of them sat with her back against *Oru's* side and said quietly:

"This place is not nature over here and people over there. It is one giant tangle. Human hands change the sea; the sea stings human skin; tiny creatures in water and stomachs shift when the air warms."

Oru felt those words as a knuckle pressed lightly into her ribs.

For the first time, someone was not only walking on her or reading her, but also noticing that she herself was part of a moving, hurting, doing crowd.



When Oru Spoke

That year, the hot wind blew so long that even *Oru's* deep bones felt dry.

On her shoulder, the nut trees gave fewer seeds. Families walked farther between campfires.

On her belly, some terraces cracked, and festivals no longer matched the coming of rain. Under her belly, some forest patches dropped leaves too early; others grew dark and dense, with their canopies turning inward as if they were suffocating.

At her toes, the jellyfish came back in thick, shuddering clouds.

People argued in the flicker of lamps.

"*The land can no longer support so many of us,*" some said. "*We broke our old rituals and angered the spirits,*" others said. "*It's the factories and ships and smoke outside the valley,*" said a third group. "*We are caught in a storm made elsewhere.*"

The three kinds of visitors argued too: the counters with their numbers, the readers with their stories, the entanglers with their webs.

High on *Oru's* foot, a small girl pressed her palm against the elephant's rough skin.

"*Does it hurt?*" she whispered.

Under her hand, something old and enormous shifted.

Oru, who had not moved in living memory, drew in a breath.

Terraces trembled. Forests sighed. The sea at her toes rose in one big swell and fell again. Then *Oru* spoke.

"It hurts," *Oru* said. "It hurts... here..."

People thought of cracked fields, dry springs, and pale coral skeletons.

Goats stumbled on dusty slopes. Jellyfish pulsed faster against nets.

"*It hurts... there...*"

As she said "there," some imagined the smoky horizon, machines beyond their sight.

Others remembered forests cut long ago, new chemicals poured into the soil, numbers creeping up on someone's distant graph.

Counters, readers, entanglers, villagers, children, they all looked up at *Oru*.

"*You have each seen pieces of me,*" *Oru* said, her words slow and heavy as stones. "*You counted how the land keeps your families small, how the water must be shared. You listened to the stories in seeds and shrines and trees. You traced how your fields speak to the sea and how jellyfish answer back.*"

"*These are all true,*" she said. "*I am the hard things you cannot change, like stone and rain. I am also the ways you think about them, the names, and the stories you give them. And I am what happens when these two shape each other, the ways your ideas change the land, and the ways the land changes your ideas.*" She breathed again, and the valley rose and fell with her chest.

"*And you,*" she added, "*are not standing outside me, looking in. You are part of how I change. When soil washes away, when trees cast shade, when seeds blow on the wind, and when nets drag the sea, that is you as well as me. You are inside this same knot, not looking at it from far away.*" Her voice faded, like thunder rolling away behind hills no one had seen.

The night was still hot but now the heat felt shared.

The counters held their notebooks loosely.
They knew now that numbers could not capture a living knot but could still show where some threads were pulled too tight.

The readers cradled their stories; they understood that myths and meanings were also ways the knot felt itself.

The entanglers stared at their webs, seeing how all their arrows crossed Oru's deep, quiet name.

The small girl kept her hand on Oru's skin.

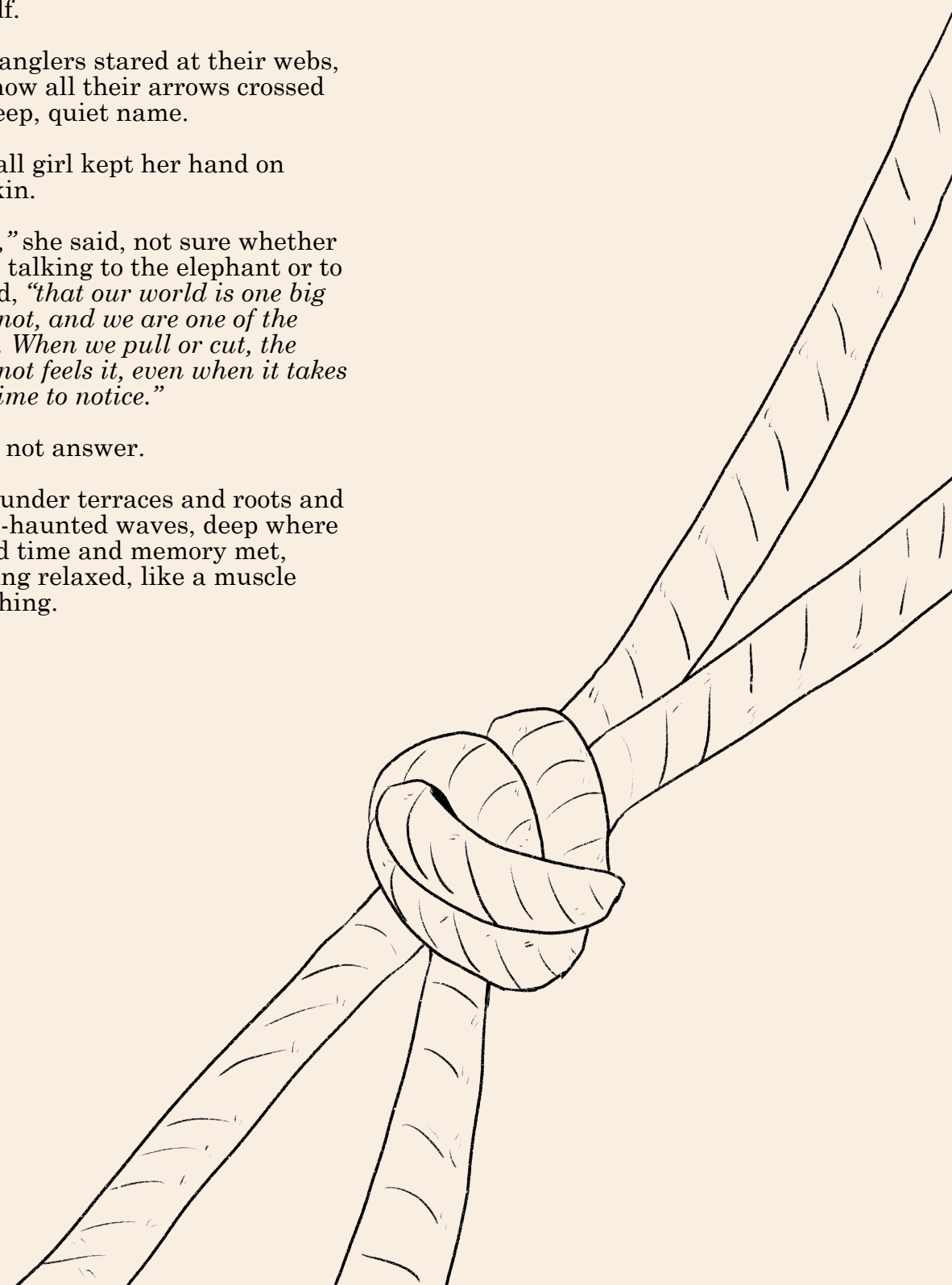
"I think," she said, not sure whether she was talking to the elephant or to the wind, "that our world is one big living knot, and we are one of the threads. When we pull or cut, the whole knot feels it, even when it takes a long time to notice."

Oru did not answer.

But far under terraces and roots and jellyfish-haunted waves, deep where rock and time and memory met, something relaxed, like a muscle unclenching.

It was not forgiveness, exactly.

It was an old being recognizing that, at last, some of the small creatures on her surface had started to hear what she had been feeling all along.



武岡のカブト虫

東の空
陽が差しちよる
青空に
トンボ飛びよる

蝉が鳴く
シンシンシン
森に入る
カブト虫を探す

虫の本
開いて見る
蜘蛛の足
塔のよう

蝶の羽
鷲のよう
でもまだ
カブトが虫いない

蝉が鳴く
シンシンシン
やっと見つけおった
角の王

網を出す
虎のように
でも飛んしもた
バレリーナみたい

次は頑張ろ
自分に言う
夕焼け空

カブト夢

執筆: 森田健斗

画像提供: Pexels

編集者: 池田アレクサンドラ



蝉が鳴く
シンシンシン
家に帰る
がつつい
わっぜくやしか



Motherland

I see another daughter leaving

I'm heartbroken,

but who am I to beg, to stop her, to cage her.

I raised her to be able,

to be smart, and to be greedier.

I gave my all and now it's time

to let her grow, to let her until she is satisfied and enough.

Come back to me to take a rest.

I will hug you before you go.

WORDS BY ALEX
VISUALS BY ALMA

LİM - A TASTE OF COMFORT

Words and Photos by
Nguyen Ngoc Dieu Anh
Visuals by Ai

Photo © Lìm Donuts Hanoi.

Source: Lìm Donuts Hanoi Facebook Page,
April 2026.



When reflecting on the word “Homing”, I wondered if it would be funny to write about a sweet treat that has just recently arrived in Vietnam. But then I realized that I think of the donuts at Lìm Donut (Hanoi, Vietnam) not just as donuts but as something more; they are a dessert that I believe nowhere else can replace.

Opened in 2023, Lìm quickly became one of the leading brands in the Vietnamese donut market. The word “Lìm” refers to a heart-melting feeling when we watch our loved ones enjoying delicious dishes that we prepare or share with them.

As a highly popular business, it has its own way to maintain the brand’s reputation, by introducing a new limited menu every two months. With each donut, Lìm offers not just familiar flavor from local, and seasonal ingredients, but also new experiences for consumers with new, trending combinations. Each ring costs around 40 to 50.000đ (about 250yen), which is an affordable price for the locals and maybe cheap for foreigners. In fact, the youth in Hanoi, my city, really enjoy this dessert; it has even become “the friend group tradition” to eat Lìm’s donuts together.





In my family, even my parents enjoyed these, and we usually ate them together as a light snack after my high school classes, which is the reason I think of this treat when it comes to “homing.”

To appeal to a broader customer base, Lim offers three distinct flavor profiles: Sweet, Savory, and Fresh fruit. Their targets are not just the younger generation but also adults who usually can't stand sweetness. To experience this variety at its best, I would like to recommend the “Big 3” from their 2026 April menu: Caramel Crack for people who love sweet and rich flavor, Truffle Bacon for those who prefer less sweetness, and Lebutties for the ones who are after fruity taste.

I am really into sweets, so my favorite one is Caramel Crack. This is the combination of saltiness and sweetness with crunchy sugar bits on top. With just one bite, you can taste the chewy, soft texture of the dough accompanied with the creamy, toasty, and rich caramel flavor.

All of my friends love it too, and the fact that this flavor is available for most of the year shows its popularity.

Truffle Bacon, on the other hand, stands out for its smoky aroma and cheesy, lightly creamy flavor from the sauce. This option suits people like my dad, who firmly believes that “bread should go with meat rather than cream and sugar.” For some, Truffle Bacon may not stand out, but the use of truffle mushroom gives it a “gourmet food” appeal. Lebutties can be referred to as the viral hit for Lim as the brand gained much of its popularity through this flavor. Unlike the other sweet donuts, Lebutties offers a hint of sourness and freshness. It was born for those who prefer light flavor, especially mothers and grandmothers who usually look for foods that are not too sweet, salty, or creamy.

I think a box of four donuts, “Big 3” and one limited-time flavor with a drink, will give you the best experience, especially when shared with your family as the variety of flavors makes sure there is something to suit every member.

I believe home food is not only about traditional dishes but also about the food that reminds you of your near and dear ones. And for me, it is the donuts at Lim that give me that sense of comfort.



Photo © Lim Donuts Hanoi.
Source: Lim Donuts Hanoi Facebook Page, June 2026.



Photo © Lim Donuts Hanoi.
Source: Lim Donuts Hanoi Facebook Page, April 2026.

Review of Nap All Day

Words and Photo by Neo Sayavong

Visuals by Hana

I walked into the restaurant - it nestled just on the street corner on the way to Okayama University from the 運動公園 (Undōkōen). The smell of lovingly prepared food welcomed me, along with the tunes of a calan page. Though the atmosphere is rustic, with an exposed concrete interior coupling with the metal-accented wooden furniture, it is not all industrially themed. Plants dot around the cozy restaurant, giving a degree of calm from the subtle greenery. All this is lit by huge window panes inviting in the warm sunlight, dancing with the soft tinted light bulbs hanging from above. Unsurprisingly, I recommend this

make you ponder for a moment over all the choices, speaking to your hungry heart in a way.



restaurant to those wanting to have a deep and long conversation, discussions, or to catch up with people they haven't seen in a while. One can come in a group of four or five, or as a simple class of two — the small restaurant has seating fit for the above. Once they have been seated and helped themselves to the ice water and napkins, they can find the menu written on a tablet. The price of a one-plate meal is around 1,100 yen, and adding a simple drink will set you to around 1,900 yen total. For smoothies and specific preparations of coffee, they will likely cost around 750 yen. And don't forget the dessert too! For those who want to sweeten up, that will be around 500 yen (amended from "100 yen" as typo likely). The menu may not be extensive, but it'll

After ordering, it is time to start the adventurous conversations pressing on your mind, as the wait for the food will take up several conversation topics; or in a more scientific manner, around 20 to 40 minutes. For those who have appointments or errands in a short time, be prepared accordingly. As it is being cooked and blossomed, the food will arrive passionately. The staff would bring it to you — showing such beauty in presentation and richness in its taste. Examples of dishes include keema curry with its creamy and savory flavor, the chicken over rice with its sour sauce, and the taco rice with its crispy chips. No matter what you ordered, the taste will be rich in flavor. When you also add in the side dishes of pickled carrots, tomatoes, and a potato salad, you can create a symphony of tastes in your mouth, with a balance of the savory, sweet, and sour all at once.

After finishing your meal, you can choose to pay in either cash, card, or PayPal. Overall, I really recommend this place, for both your soul and body can be filled: the latter coming from the meal, and the former from the delicious conversation.

旅に出たい鼠

Words by Miki Motohara
Visuals by Hana

煩わしい
鼠は外に行きたい
キューキューと響く説教から逃げたくて 壁を掘って
丁度良い逃げ穴ができた
そこには光がある！と
クネクネ うねうねと外へ這っていた
鼠は旅に出た

一年も経った

懸命に生きた！

壁の保護から抜けてから感じた 快樂 絶望 危うさ
誰からも口出しされない 満身創痍になってもそれで良い
鼠は自由になった 大人になったと思った
ならそろそろ
帰ろうか

鼠は帰った
久しぶりの壁に見知らぬ臭い
小さな穴だった
中を覗いてみたが何もなかった
決して見えないわけではない ただ何も見えなかっただけさ
鼠は遅すぎた
キューキューが聞こえなくなり 誰もいなかった
残っているのは空洞 後悔 懐かしさ

そして私は、穴の向こうから鼠を見ていた

Homeは変わり続ける。

Words and photos by Yuzuki Takahashi, Visuals by Ai

「あなたにとってのHomeはどこですか」と聞かれて、あなたは何を思い浮かべるだろうか。家、家族の顔、見慣れた駅前、あるいは心の奥にある大切な思い出。答えは人それぞれだ。同じ駅を想像していても、無人駅を思い浮かべる人もいれば、大きな駅を思い浮かべる人もいるだろう。どんな環境を生き、どんな景色を見てきたかによって目に浮かぶことは驚くほど異なるらしい。

私はこの夏で20歳を迎える。高校時代の1年間の留学を除くと、生まれてから19年間をここ岡山で暮らしてきた。そんな岡山市民として、先ほどの質問に対しては真っ先にここ岡山、特に多くの時間を過ごしてきた岡山駅周辺を思い出した。

19年間の私の成長とともに、この愛すべき街は少しずつ、確実に姿を変えてきた。例えば、学生なら一度は訪れたことのある、岡山駅近くの大型商業施設、イオンモール。オープン当時小学校低学年だった私にとってそこは「特別な日のお出かけ先の第一候補」だった。遊びに行くと、いつも祖父や祖母と駄菓子屋へ行った。4階のおもちゃ売り場で欲しいものを前に泣きべそをかき、母に必死でおねだりをして、やっとの思いで宝物を手に入れた思い出もある。そこは高校生になると、定期圏内の遊び場として友達と放課後に集まって課題をしたり、ただおしゃべりして過ごす場所が変わった。そして今、大学生になった私にとってその場所はアルバイトを通して仕組みを知ったり、行くたびに出くわすGDPの友人と他愛のない話をする場所になっている。

あのフードコートの席で、今の友人と話す私も、かつて同じ場所で親に怒られて泣きべそをかいていた私も、進路に頭を抱えていた高校生の私も、全て私なのに。建物そのものだって変わらないのに。見える景色に対して湧く感情は昔と大きく異なる、この感覚。思い出がたくさん詰まった岡山の土地で、変わり続ける街を歩いていると、このような過去の感情と今の感情が同時に現れ、なぜか最後には「寂しい」という感情になる。

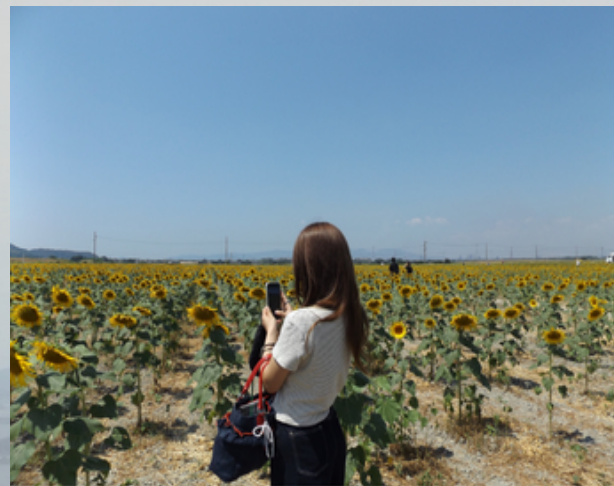
学校の先生、ダンスのインストラクター、かつての親友、英会話の講師、近所で行き違うたびに声をかけてくれたおばあちゃんたち、そしてよく通ったお店の店員さん。数え切れないほど多くの人と、私は関わり合って生きてきた。名をあげ始めたらキリのないくらい様々な人と積み重ねてきた関係性も、時間が経つと少しずつ解けていく。一番身近な別れは高校卒業だが、あれから今のこのたった数年でも、当時の友達との間には容易に心の距離が生まれてしまった。最初はこの少しずつ会話の方向性が異なっている事実戸惑ったけれど、ふと私たちを客観的に見たときに、ただお互いの変化を受け止めるしかなかった。ああ、今生きる土地ではそんな感じなんだな、あの頃の私たちを取り留めていた何か見えない結束力はいつの間にかなくなっていたんだな、と思う。

それと同時に、変わってしまった過去のつながりや昔の自分ばかりに目を向けて勝手に寂しくなっていたのは、私が偶然ずっと同じ土地に長く住み続けているからかもしれないと思う。

いま、新しくたくさんの仲間と出会い話すことができている岡山のこの場所で、昔に私が親に泣きべそをかいて怒られていたなんて、考えにも浮かばないだろう。同じ空間なのに過去を共有していない事実悲しさを覚えることもあるけれど、自分の力ではどうしようもない変化にとらわれて、今この瞬間にしか楽しめないよさや希少性を失うようでは、よく生きることができないと思うのだ。だからだろうか、最近の私は、出会った人の「ルーツ」に関して聞きたくなることが増えた。周りの友達の多くは、「ルーツ」について問いかけると、楽しそうに教えてくれる。私はこの街に残り続けているが、彼らは別の土地からここへやってきている。ここ岡山について言えば、見えている景色は違うのかもしれないけれど、住む場所や環境が変われば、誰しもが、このかつての繋がりが少しずつ遠ざかる寂しさの感情を、抱えて日々過ごしているのではないだろうか。もしもみんなが私と同じように、過去のつながりが解けていく寂しさを乗り越えて、別の土地からここに

辿り着いたのだとすれば。彼らにとって、自分の大切な思い出を、安心して打ち明けられる場所がここにあってもいいと思った。過去にとらわれて今を嘆くよりも、まずは新しくできた友達と出会えたことに感謝したい。とにかく、私の故郷であるこの街に来てくれてありがとう。

場所は変わってしまうけれど、その場その場で築く新しい結末が、また新たな「Home」になっていく。今度は私が彼らの物語に耳を傾けながら、新しい見えない結末力を、またこの場所で紡いでいけたらいいと思う。結局、この繰り返しなのだ。



The warmth that grows in your heart
when you run into your beloved ones

in the corridor
or at the traffic lights,
no matter where you are,

along with the peacefulness
of when you're lying in your bed
in your tiny apartment,
effortlessly noticing
each breath flowing
in and out ~

this is my definition of homing.



WORDS BY ANDY
VISUALS BY ALMA



a few lessons from autumn

*Words and Visuals by
 Almathea Valezka*

Moving into a country with four seasons, this is my absolute first time experiencing autumn. I've never seen the array of red, orange, and yellow trees so beautifully scattered along the streets, and even from afar I can see such color schemes carpeting the mountains. It is, in every sense, physically unfamiliar. But it was almost just as strange to feel such a deep emotional connection to autumn. Everyday I woke up to feel the tug of perfectly right weather, chilly but with gorgeous sunrays coating orange leaves, telling me to get on my bike and ride through the view. I kept anticipating the accumulation of leaves piling up on the ground, messing up the usually clean streets and sidewalks. Autumn is, in all its essence, a beautiful mess.

Autumn speaks to me. It's indifferent in the way its leaves will continue to relentlessly fall regardless of how you've taken care of its branches. It doesn't just melt away and sink into the asphalt as snow does when winter ends. It requires you to grab a rake and scoop what the tree sheds into plastic bags if you want to clean what it falls onto. If you choose not to, though, then you will have to bear with the mess that autumn brings.

I never wanted autumn to be cleaned up and reduced to tidy pedestrian sidewalks and smooth asphalt roads. I saw workers every few mornings putting leaves into giant plastic bags and wheeling them into god knows where. I kept thinking that if autumn was me, I'd tell everybody to mind their own business and let me be messy. I liked it when the sidewalks were yellow with leaves. I enjoyed the sound under my tires when I cycled over them. Autumn felt like a validation from nature telling me that I'm allowed to burst and leave my mess as it is. To live with it.

And by the way, the leafpile wasn't a problem to be resolved. I don't want to be reduced into something that requires easier understanding. I don't want to be tidied to make other people's lives easier either. I just want to be someone who's allowed to exist loudly and unevenly. I can be your problem if you think I am. I'd be grateful if you'd sit with my mess. But however you decide to view me, I want to fill up your life with my presence unapologetically, like the leaves on the ground on your commute to work.

Other than how autumn speaks for my emotions, it also taught me about change and letting go. I think when I arrived during the summertime, I was heavily anticipating the change that autumn will bring. It was an innocent and eager yearning for change. When autumn actually came, I was elated to see change. But, change isn't always pretty and exciting. I shortly realized after autumn came that I had only ever wanted change that was beautiful. I didn't want the change that felt like a rupture.

I remember before moving here, I was dreading the drastic change in my life direction. I didn't want to accept the idea of leaving the comfortable place I called home and having to make this place my new one. I wanted to stay where I was and freeze myself in time until I felt like I was ready to ride that change. But that's the

thing. Do you think the leaves wait for your permission to fall? Neither did my life, apparently.

I remember waking up and suddenly it was the day my plane ticket decided I had to go. I wasn't damn ready at all. There was no ceremony either. No celebration or some kind of parting event. Like... absolutely nothing to mark the fact that my life in my home country was ending. It kind of just went—in a blur. And suddenly I was already starting my new life. I hated it.

And yet, it's funny how in only two months, I was dreading and anticipating change. They used to feel like polar opposites, but now I think they probably come from the same place: care. You anticipate because you hope, and you dread because you're attached.

So I think of that summertime as a gray area. I was stuck somewhere between missing my hometown and wanting to build a better life in this new country. There was a strong pull to go back to what was familiar, but at the same time, I was already here. I had left it behind already. So when it came, I really felt like it did pick me up like a white knight and saved me. It was loosening the grip I had on my old life. The chill in the air and the leaves on the ground told me that life indeed is changing and will be very different from now on.

Now that autumn is coming to an end, I feel disappointed but also liberated. The season itself didn't fix anything for me, but it stayed long enough just to accompany me in processing how I felt about starting anew. The way this season operated allowed me to make connections between myself and the unfamiliar scenery. Most of the leaves have left their branches now, and the streets look bare in a way they didn't before. Together with that I think I found closure. You really can't help autumn. I think that freed me.



This is a space dedicated to cherished memories of our dear friend Pham Phuong Anh, who has departed on her journey to a better world. It's our first time doing this tribute section in Polyphony, so it's a new experience for us, with mixed feelings of both tenderness and melancholy.

We hope to make these pages a 'home' for her remembrances, to keep a piece of her with us, as a precious member of GDP (2023-2026).

Dear Pham Phuong Anh,

I will forever remember the day I first stepped into the Share-House and met you. You gifted me a beautiful notebook from Hanoi, which I still cherish to this day. My mother and grandparents were also very excited to meet you, and I'm sure they felt relieved knowing I had such a sweet and beautiful roommate. Your smile brought warmth, and you were always so positive. I have to admit that I never saw you upset or angry during all the time we spent together. You are the very first friend I made in Okayama, and I miss you tremendously. You will forever remain in my heart and in my memories.

Dear Phuong Anh,

Your Vietnamese little sisters are here. Honestly, even now, we still can't believe that we've lost someone so important to us. A part of us still hopes this is all just a dream, and that when we wake up, you'll still be here, and we can go back and enjoy our days together like we always did. To us, you were never just a friend. You were like a sister, someone we could always lean on. You were kind and always there whenever we needed you. We miss and treasure every moment we shared with you. Those memories will always remind us of you and the beautiful times we shared together.

Thank you for everything. Thank you for coming into our lives and sharing such a beautiful part of our youth with us.

May you rest peacefully now, free from all worries. You will always be loved and missed.

Hello Anh,

How are you? I'm sure you are now in a place where you can be as happy and bright as you have always been.

You were one of the sweetest and most genuine girl I have ever met. I will always treasure the fun times, laughter, and memories we shared together. These days, whenever I see someone on the street who looks like you, I find myself thinking of you and missing you so much.

I hope you are peaceful and happy wherever you are. Your pure and kind heart will always remain in my memories. You are deeply missed, Anh.

Every moment we spent together will remain as memories forever.

I hope you are reading this from somewhere far, far away.

I still remember the first moment we met, the first place we hung out together, and especially the first photo we took together, the beginning of our friendship. It was the selfie we took on the first day of school. I was very lucky to meet you and become friends with you. You were one of the loveliest girls I have ever met. Without you, I believe my student life here would not have been as precious as it was because of the days we spent together. I always thought we would take another photo with the same pose on our graduation day. I know that moment will never come, but I will treasure all the memories we created together.

Thank you so much for everything.

We will miss you forever, Anh.

In tribute to Anh's memory, we invite you to revisit a piece she originally published with our magazine. "Jhumpa Lahiri's The Namesake: Two names, two identities" was published in our Polyphony Print Issue 5, one of Anh's works over the years she spent with us in GDP, majoring in Sociology.

If you're interested, please grab the print issue in G-lounge, read her piece, and stay with it for a bit. It's not much, but would be a nice way to honor her.

This tribute section will be available on our websites later this year, and we welcome messages for Anh.

Any moment when you think of her, any piece of memories that you remember, share it with us.

Please join us in our ongoing project to keep her memories alive.

*The ones who walk too fast and suddenly stop in their tracks remind us of how
quickly our dreamworld shatter*

*It is hard to believe that the moments shared can never be re-enacted, can never be
replayed*

*The faintest smiles, the sweet and lingering eye contact, the energetic hellos and
mellow goodbyes are felt bitterly*

The pain is fresh; it's raw, and unshielded

*It is truly terrifying that every second, every minute, every hour, the days and the
nights that their presence is unfelt, the further they slip to the back of our minds,
and at last forgotten*

*It pains me that they had to leave our reality while our world was in chaos, and
that we could not cover their ears from all the noise; even the most peaceful goodbye
does no justice to kissing them goodnight*

*Dearest Anh, may this piece remind us of your brown eyes, your pink lips, your
staggering height, and your beautiful soul*

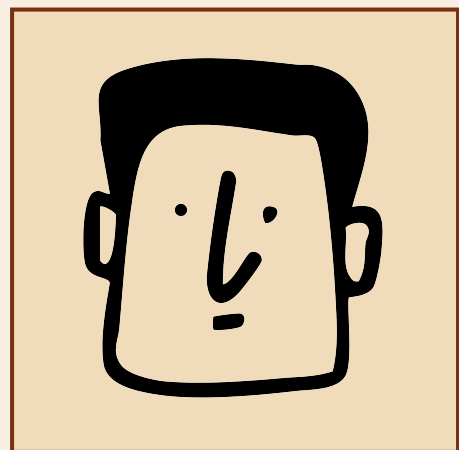
May this emotion scar our hearts and carry your memory into our next chapters

Whisper sweet nothings from above

Words by Alexandra Ikeda

Reflecting on Our Homing Here

Words and Photos by GDP's Graduating Class by 2026 and Alumni
Visuals by Hana



Kentaro Kitamura

this urgency to be fully understood or figured out. You simply need to be present, living fully to experience where you end up.

So while you're here, live to your heart's content. This is a rare opportunity to simply experience with no greater meaning. Try, fail, change your mind, discover things about yourself that could never have been planned for.

When you spend time with your friends, be with them wholeheartedly. When you talk, talk to your heart's content. When you write, write to your heart's content. When you love, when you read, when you drink, do them to your heart's content. Do not be afraid of the mistakes that come with these things. For only when you make the mistakes that they entail, you learn. Experience can't be delivered through letters and messages, it should only be felt. Uniquely by you.

So don't worry too much about what comes next. Live while you're here, the rest will come eventually.

In writing this letter to you, the future students, I find myself struggling to think of anything truly relevant to tell you. I wonder whether I have done anything meaningful these past four years; whether I have done anything of purpose, anything worth passing on. The longer I sat with this thought, however, the more I realized that perhaps this uncertainty is exactly what I hope to leave you with.

We enter university with plans, with grand intentions. Imagining where we'll be four years later, what we'll accomplish, and who we'll become. But plans have an interesting way of changing... Things happen beyond our control, and the path we carefully imagine may lead us somewhere completely different. The time I have spent here has made me believe that this is not something to fear. Not everything faces

Saku's last words

My university experience was like an exponential graph: shit at first, then somehow, amazing.

When I came to Okayama University, I resented it. University felt much duller than I had imagined.

At first, I thought the solution was to leave. I went abroad, to a country where many of my high school friends were living. Seeing them again and the lives they had built was strangely reassuring. I realized that university was, honestly, kind of the same everywhere. The classes could still suck. People could still be confusing. No place was magically going to be perfect.

I kept thinking I had so much more to offer. But what did I really offer?

When I came back to Okayama, I had started meeting people who showed me an alternative version of my own university life. I stopped looking at GDP through what it lacked and started appreciating what was around me. I made friends who let me be myself, lived with four roommates and my boyfriend, tried new things, and somehow became someone who genuinely looked forward to going to school.

I still don't completely know who I am or what I offer. I'm sure that answer will keep changing. But I know I've built a life where the people around me make me happier, and I hope I do the same for them.

It's strange to leave a place I once wanted to escape. Now, all I want is to keep the people I love close, wherever I go next.



Saku



Soe Yar Zar Oo

change not only your academic perspective but also the way you see life.

For current GDP students, my advice is simple: don't worry too much about where you will be in ten or fifteen years. Instead, focus on what you can do in the next ten or fifteen days, or at most, the next month. Do your best with the opportunities and challenges in front of you. Small, consistent efforts will gradually shape the future. But, not for the final year, it is important to start planning at least one year ahead.

As for me, after graduating from GDP, I will continue my studies in law and politics at graduate school. I hope to deepen my understanding of these fields and contribute to research and discussions on important social and political issues.

Looking back, I believe the GDP program is an excellent place for anyone who wants to build a strong academic foundation.

One of the greatest strengths of GDP is its interdisciplinary nature that covers many different fields of study. Although four years in GDP may not make us experts in a particular discipline, it gives us knowledge, and a good foundation in our chosen field.

Another thing I truly appreciate about GDP is its diverse community. It is a place where you meet people from different countries, and backgrounds. You will hear opinions that may be completely different from your own, and those conversations can challenge the way you think. Sometimes these experiences

All my life, I knew what came next.

Primary school led to secondary school. Secondary school led to high school. High school led to university. Every stage had a next step, and I never really had to question what came after.

So when I started university, I thought I would eventually figure out what came next too. I thought I'd discover what I wanted to do, build a career, get married, have kids before 30. I had this picture of what my life was supposed to look like.

But now I'm turning 23, and for the first time in my life, I don't know what comes next.

And honestly, that scared me. I felt like I was falling behind, like everyone else had figured out their lives and I was somehow the only one who hadn't.

But then I started talking to people older than me. People I thought would have everything figured out. Instead, many were still changing careers, starting over, or trying to work out what they wanted from life.

I thought adults had the answers.

Then I talked to adults and realized they're figuring it out too. Maybe that's the part society doesn't show us. We're given this timeline and taught that life has a right way to happen, but no one actually follows it perfectly.

Maybe this is what living actually looks like: not knowing and figuring it out as you go. And to whoever reading this, wherever you end up, you'll be okay.



Seiko

November 2025, I packed my nearly 4-year life in Japan into two Yu-packs, two luggages, a 10L backpack, and flew home to Malaysia. There was a lot of grief, and goodbyes in November smelled like osmanthus flowers, constantly lingering around you until you finally spot them.

Re-homing looked like cramming myself in between my sisters on their queen-size bed for a whole month because I don't have a "room" in my house. It also looked like reading my gifted Japanese copy of Sayaka Murata's Konbini-Ningen to sustain the familiarity of Japanese language somewhere faraway.

Re-homing is like longing for green grass on the opposite shore while standing on grass grass; missing the ginkgo trees while I shade under dipterocarps, thinking of sakura while admiring bouganvillea.

Apart from rehousing myself between lands, I was also rehousing my love for anthropology into a profession. I got a job in marine wildlife conservation, and it was the perfect job for me to bring all my perceived embodiment of anthropological spirit—multilayered, observant, patient, and odd—to test.

And so I meander through sparsely located fishing villages and jetties along the West coast of Peninsular Malaysia, learning names of fish, fishing gears, boats, and fishermen. In a sense, I'm rehousing the concepts I've learned & applying it in conservation, and oftentimes it's a lot of questioning around the positionality of being a "researcher" in conservation, looking and speaking like an outsider when I dwell in fisherscapes. There's a lot more patient work of rehousing needed to be done!



Jia Xuan Chok



Kayla Guevara

"Home." A very weird word, if I must say. I never really thought 'home' would mean different things to me - from places I spent my childhood in, people I spent almost all of my university life with, to a country I now pay taxes to (and a horrendous amount, if you ask me) and yet struggle to see 'home' in.

Now, home is a monthly catch-up with my best friends over the dinner table. It's a 2-hour LINE phone call - discussing work woes, dissecting current experiences as adults, laughing until tears say hello. Home is a person who I spend almost 24 hours of everyday with. It's cooking a meal and sharing it with people I love.

Despite the haze surrounding this word, I'd like to say it's quite comforting. 'Home' changes, evolves, grows through time. I'm comforted by the truth that it's not

static, yet equally overwhelmed by the possibility that I may always question what / who / where is home.

But, hey! I guess that's the beauty of life. I may not feel at home in the country I have learned to be a part of, to live in, and have a love-hate relationship with, but it is a privilege to be able to find home in many experiences, spaces, and people.

TEDx

Okayama University

x = independently organized TED event

OCT 2026 *p* ISSUE 7

OCT 2026 *p* ISSUE 7

TEDxOkayamaUniversity successfully hosted its first annual event on April 20, 2025, becoming the first university-led TEDx event in the Chugoku region. The event provided a valuable opportunity for TEDx members, audience participants, speakers, and sponsors to connect, exchange ideas, and share their diverse experiences. Now, the organization is preparing for its second official event on November 8, 2026, centered on the theme “BEYOND,” carrying several meanings, representing going past one’s limits and moving beyond one’s current self. The theme encourages mindsets and actions that push past personal barriers, academic boundaries, societal expectations, failures, fears, and other limitations. “BEYOND” symbolizes breaking through present norms to pioneer a new and better world.



Organizers and volunteers at the 2024 TEDxOkayamaUniversity event

With both returning and new members bringing the team to a total of 38 people across eight distinct groups, TEDxOkayamaUniversity is hard at work to deliver an event that embodies this meaningful theme. Comprising members from over 10 different nationalities, the team aims to host a memorable event featuring TED talks from speakers with creative and intelligent ideas to share. This year’s event marks the next step in continuing the tradition of annual TEDx events at Okayama University.

With that said, TEDxOkayamaUniversity’s renewed mission for this year is to host an even more impactful event than the last—one that spreads meaningful ideas and inspires individuals across Okayama and BEYOND.



Attendees seated at the TEDx Okayama University event watching a presentation on the main stage screen.

IN COLLABORATION
WITH

Polyphony

Message / Text: Chiyu Nishizawa (President,
TEDxOkayamaUniversity 2026)
Photography: TEDxOkayamaUniversity (2025 Event
Archive)
Page Layout & Graphic Design: Aleksandra Ikeda

p