

Confinement during a year full of uncertainty led to self reflection and growth for me, in both a literal and figurative sense. Plants found their way in; vines began to drape down my walls and endless pots lined my waiting windowsills. My own jungle rooted in my room, reminding me of the many roots placed in me I was now revisiting. The rediscovery of my connection to plants was the grounding I needed for this year trapped in my house.

Plants have been a part of me my whole life. Grass in between my toes, I waddled around my luscious garden as a toddler. Blooming with wisteria and vibrant colors begging to be looked at, this was my beginning. My mom in her brown gardening gloves, red Felco clippers in hand. My dad in his straw hat and big brown boots caked with dirt. My parents, together, built our garden. The beauty of this duo was taken for granted and gone too soon.

The luscious, green palette of Portland quickly changed to vast, brown scenery when my family moved to Bend. A yard of vegetation was no longer a priority in this desert we now called home. As my parents split their ways, the thought of a garden became a lost cause.

My first friend in my new town was an 80-year-old woman. I admired Barbara like no other and dreamed of the independence she cultivated. She was a single, strong woman with a booming voice and unwavering opinions. Her sheer force rattled windows.

Before ALS took her body, she used her nimble, creative hands to build the greatest garden imaginable. Layers of flowers, peeking out year round when their turn came, filled her huge backyard. Cherries and apples fit for pie and deer, littered the ground. Pebbled paths wound throughout the great expanse of this wonderland. This was my safe haven. An escape from my broken home, I filled my void of a garden with Barbabra's.

This time of my life paralleled my time spent in quarantine. Throughout both, loneliness swallowed me whole. Alike in more ways than I realized at the time, Barbara and I were both

living in solitude. However, slowly, she showed me that being lonely and alone are different. She showed me the beauty of the outdoors, the mountains, rivers and trees that were the place she called home. Taking me on hikes to hidden spots, I began to also find my own home within the woods and within myself — something I was deeply missing in my life.

I never saw the strength inside Barbara die, even as her body failed her, no longer able to sip water or communicate her thoughts. Behind, she left a root planted in me. A root that reaches toward the sun everytime I feel the soil in my fingers, or take a long hike in the forest. My bold confidence to voice my mind, my desire to protect the Earth, is rooted by the town hall visits we took together. My comfort with being alone, my independence, is rooted by the long bike trips to her house. She revealed to me that I always have myself and my hands to build my own wonderland — and that is just what I did.

That is why my room became green again. Joy and calmness surfaced while connecting with the Earth. Soil in my fingernails was now comfortable, a change from my usual pristine room and anxious, overly structured life. Days in quarantine were spent repotting and nurturing my plants, with Barbara and my family in the back of my mind. That is why, when this summer I was released again from my room, I found happiness atop mountains, at waterfalls, in hammocks swinging deep in the woods, a book in my lap, my toes soaking in rivers, my feet on a trail and a voice ready to boom.

And that is why, as I move forward into my future I am fueled to continue learning about the environment and our deep relationship to it. I plan to study environmental studies, and continue the work Barbara instilled in me of protecting our natural world, and all it has to offer, for generations to come.