

THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

THE
Gardened Heart
GARDEN OF REFLECTION AND REMEMBRANCE
JOURNAL PROJECT



NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

When we first dreamed up the Garden of Reflection and Remembrance at the University of Maryland, we were responding to the crises of the fall of 2001. If we learned anything from the aftermath of 9/11 or a tornado that had ripped through the campus and the death of students, we learned that time in conversation and community was so critical for healing. While there were big and gracious spaces across the campus, students called for close and intimate spaces, where you could describe your fears and talk about the difficult issues inherent in our development as human beings. When we approached the TKF Foundation about applying for a grant, we did so hoping that they might help us make this dream of such a space come true.

The TKF Foundation had been funding urban green spaces and labyrinths throughout the greater Washington-Baltimore region. They had helped to prove that nature could be sacred and had the power to heal. In each of the spaces that TKF funded there was a distinctive bench, each featuring an all-weather journal in a shelf on the bottom of the bench. As we traveled from garden to garden – hospital to blighted urban neighborhoods to school yards to gardens commemorating human struggle – we noted that the journals and the benches told the story. They had invited individuals to sit, to reflect, and to write. But, they also invited others to respond to them – to offer them solace or direction, to cheer their accomplishments or reflect on their own depression or disappointment. It was a communal conversation that had the power to heal.

Every other week I go to the garden to walk through the labyrinth and/or take in the beautiful plantings. I listen to the burbling fountains and cast an eye to the towering trees. But, I am mostly there to read the journals in our two benches. I read and hear the voices of students, faculty, staff, alumni, and visitors that have let the garden enter their hearts. I am touched by the candor of each entry. There is a certain courage inherent in putting your story into this book – and when others embrace you and applaud you for that courage – you feel the power of the garden and our community.

The entries are a bold reminder of the power of words – spoken in a journal, inside of a bench, in a garden – and how our dream had come true. This truly is the Garden of Reflection and Remembrance. It is there for you – and for me – and for all of those individuals who wish a place to share a bit of their story within a caring community.

*Dr. Marsha Guenzler-Stevens
Director, Adele H. Stamp Student Union-Center for Campus Life
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“OUR LIVES BEGIN TO END THE DAY WE BECOME SILENT ABOUT
THE THINGS THAT MATTER.” – MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Garden Journal Project Team: Margaret Wadsworth, Jessica Bennett, Denise McHugh, Daniel Ostick
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Garden of Reflection and Remembrance

Ever since the Memorial Chapel at the University of Maryland opened its doors in 1952, it has offered students, faculty, staff, and the larger community a place where diverse faith traditions are expressed and celebrated. This historic facility offers space for worship, celebration, activism, intellectual stimulation, remembrance, and quiet reflection.

In the fall of 2001 the University campus was rocked by several major events, including September 11th and a tornado that came through the campus, killing two students. As members of the University community struggled to cope with these tragedies, they sought a place of quiet reflection and potential answers to that age-old question of “Why?” In

the ensuing years, those same desires for time to reflect and remember – both in times of tragedy and triumph – have been echoed by current generations of campus citizens. In a time when most people run their lives by an overcrowded calendar and the world seems a bit more fragile than ever, finding time – let alone a place – to reflect is difficult. The Garden of Reflection and Remembrance is such a place.

The garden, dedicated in 2011, features tools for the campus and broader community to use in reflection. Built in part with a grant from the TKF Foundation, the garden features a labyrinth, benches with all-weather journals, fountains, seating areas, a veterans’ memorial, wooded paths, and a lush tree canopy.



This space has become a transformative environment – evidenced by the journal entries left in the benches along the tree-lined paths. These journals are for thoughts, feelings, and observations about both the physical world and the inner spirit. They serve not only as a means of personal expression, but also exist for the community, encouraging the shared experience of writing, reading, and responding. Individuals are invited to “ignite the fire within” as they listen to both their hearts and heads, contemplate the future, and question their values and beliefs.

About the Garden Journal Project

As with many projects, this one began with a question: “What are people sharing or experiencing through the journals?” This simple question came to be answered through an engaging and eye-opening process.

A team of invested staff gathered to explore the best way to answer this question. After reviewing different qualitative research methods and software platforms, the team decided on a modified version of Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA), conducted with Dedoose, a user-friendly internet platform designed for easy data management, excerpting and coding, and analysis. A QCA process is characterized by a systematic analysis of data, wherein the data (in this case, the journal entries) are broken into smaller units (individual entries). Codes are created to define potential categories, instances of each code are counted, and comparisons and analyses are made. After conducting a pilot coding of one journal, two team members were tasked with coding the entries, engaging in member-checking to further refine codes and ensure consistency across coders.

In the end, fifteen journals were reviewed, containing 3,162 journal entries/excerpts (including drawings). Each excerpt was assigned one or more codes. With 64 codes developed, there were 7,628 codes applied across all entries.

While this report is not meant as an exhaustive review of every code, it does serve as an exploration of the most assigned or striking codes, reflecting the more common thoughts and feelings expressed through the journals, along with some unique or surprising findings. This report will focus on the themes of religion, contemplation, meditation, thoughtfulness, the garden and labyrinth, sacred places, relationships, campus experiences, suicide and depression, and encouragement and community.

Journal Entries

In the Garden of Reflection and Remembrance, journals sit on shelves under two benches, waiting for visitors to write on their blank pages. Throughout the seasons, students, staff, community members, parents, and alumni have filled these journals with quick notes, long reveries, hopes, dreams, and sorrows. The passage of time is indicated in the journals as the semester begins, midterms approach, finals come crashing down, summer nears, and graduation is celebrated.

As one writer stated, the journals may hold “the true heart of this campus—the unspoken hurts and joys.” The journals have provided us with accounts of the writers’ feelings, hopes, and dreams, and stories about heartache and falling in love, difficulties living in the United States for the first time, fear induced by natural disasters, and political events. Campus experiences, however silly, raucous, or fun, are scattered throughout the journals.

Each season brings change as various journal writers spoke of new beginnings as well as unexpected partings. Fear and anxiety about the future and moving on from the past were discussed at length. Anticipated marriages and the pains of divorce were documented on the weatherproof pages. Love of God and seeking meaning from everyday life were common themes. A significant number of entries expressed hope and encouragement as authors responded to one another, urging the desperate not to give

up, exhorting those in pain to seek help, and reminding the lonely they were not alone. Journal writers described the Garden of Reflection and Remembrance as a quiet, peaceful place where the beauty of nature can be enjoyed and the chatter of one’s mind silenced.

Writers expressed an eagerness to connect with their community on the journal pages, a yearning to be heard, and a need for their story to be recorded. Some authors simply desired to express their thoughts and feelings, however profound, insignificant, or fleeting. Overall, the tone of the journal entries is one of sharing, concern, and honest discernment.

Our report intends to convey the messages we found most significant throughout the fifteen journals written between 2011 and 2014. As the garden provides both public and private space for individuals, the journals reflect these two major thematic areas: the public life of the writer in community and relationship; and the private life of the writer focused on introspection and self-knowledge. The first half of the report focuses on space and place, the garden and labyrinth, and introspective topics including religion, seeking meaning, peaceful discovery, contemplative thoughts, and gratitude for the physical and spiritual world. The second half of the report focuses on community, relationship, and intersecting topics such as emotions, encouragement, and acceptance.

Code Occurrence

Listed below are all the codes used and their frequency throughout the journals.

Campus Experiences 157	Loss 155	Sacred Space/Place 87
Academics 74	Love 561	Searching/Seeking Meaning 117
Greek Life 18	Nature 141	Sex 23
Terp Pride 46	Garden/Labyrinth 287	Social Issues 48
Community 99	New Beginnings 90	War/Violence 21
Belonging 20	Non-English 87	Status (<i>when known</i>)
Connected 210	Nonsense 44	Alumnus 19
Response 479	Peace 166	Community Member 2
Contemplation/Meditation/ Thoughtfulness 342	Quotes/Lyrics (<i>non-religious</i>) 214	Faculty/Staff 4
Drawings 213	Relationships 24	Student 81
Drugs/Alcohol 54	Family 64	
Addiction 7	Parent 53	
Emotions 15	Sibling 19	
Anxiety/Stress 115	Child 27	
Fear 82	Other Family 8	
Grief 51	Friendships 188	
Gratitude 226	Romantic 257	
Happiness/Joy 260	Spouse/Marriage 32	
Homesickness 11	Religion/Faith 81	
Hope 165	Anti-Religion 15	
Sadness/Depression 188	Creator 229	
Suicide 26	Prayer 166	
Encouragement 548	Praise 66	
Acceptance 76	Religious Experience 4	
Great Quotes 150	Service 3	
Growing Up 28	Wedding 22	
Jokes/ Whimsy 228	Religious Values 28	
	Verse 51	



Garden and Labyrinth

“A friend of mine showed me this place, it’s almost out of a fairytale. Here I can talk about my insomnia, how I’m trying not to relapse, here it’s safe. I don’t have to live up to expectations, I don’t have to worry about grades that are supposed to judge and measure me. I don’t have to think about how much I’ve been mistreated. Here I can sit and relax without having to worry about everything painful.”

The Garden of Reflection and Remembrance is a special space that journal writers described as separate from the greater University of Maryland campus. Lined with curving paths that lead to wooden benches and fountains, the garden landscape interrupts the busy campus sidewalks, parking lots, and fields. University community members, including students, staff, parents, faculty, and alumni, visit the garden, some taking time to sit on the benches and write in the journals. For those who do, many described the garden as a place of refuge, apart from the commotion of everyday life.

At one edge of the garden, a path leads to a labyrinth. Composed of a singular winding path to a center, the labyrinth is commonly used for meditation and prayer. Unmoored from a particular religious tradition, the labyrinth is a shared space intended for personal use. In the journals, visitors described

the garden and labyrinth as a peaceful place of relaxation, where nature can be enjoyed, and one can find space for themselves.

Arriving in the garden, visitors take time to enjoy nature, relax, and unwind. In the journals, writers described the garden as a sanctuary or retreat, a space to disconnect from their busy lives, even for a moment. Comforted by the experience of sitting in the garden, writers commented their “problems feel far away” and “there is literally nothing to bother you here.” For many, spending time in the garden brought a sense of peace, describing it as a place to “get away” and to “relax, reflect and enjoy beauty.” Visitors also wrote of experiencing “openness” in the garden, space that allowed them to contemplate life and realize answers to personal questions. For some, the garden was a powerful place because, unlike other spaces on campus, they felt they could be themselves, without troubles and free of judgment. One author exclaimed boldly of the experience of sitting in the garden:

“Welcome surrender! With you comes sun, heat, and humidity! Ugh!! But to come sit on this bench in this beautiful garden under the shade of the old majestic trees makes it seem all alright!”

Taking time away from their lives in the spaciousness of the garden, some visitors spent a few moments reading the journal entries and were moved by their content. One writer described the journals as a “collective history,” a place where campus residents, staff, and community members documented stories of love, loss, gratitude, and celebration. As the journals filled with entries, they became a place of commonality, of sharing, and a symbol of a collective campus voice.

As an interactive space for community members, many writers indicated a hope that others would read their writing and respond. Others were simply thankful for a place to share. For some, the journals provided a comforting space to document their troubles. As if talking to a good friend, one student shared a bad experience when a romantic partner cheated on them. After sharing what had happened, the student wrote, “thanks for being here, book. It means a lot.” For writers like this one, the journals provided a comforting space to seek solace and be heard.

Throughout the journals, writers discussed their experiences walking the labyrinth. Oftentimes, those who mentioned the labyrinth noted that it was a metaphor for life.

One writer compared the winding path of the labyrinth to the journey of finding a personal center. For visitors such as this one,

walking the labyrinth was conducive to self-discovery. At times, visitors described walking the labyrinth as a physical construct where two or more lives are symbolically united on one path. Providing a personal space for quiet thoughtfulness, the labyrinth also took on individualized meaning for visitors. One writer, perhaps a student, described the labyrinth as a metaphor for his/her solitary and alienating experience on campus. This writer spoke of the campus as a place where thousands of people walk around daily, yet are separated from one another by their own personal labyrinths.

For a great number of visitors who chose to write in the journals, the Garden of Reflection and Remembrance, along with the labyrinth, stood as an important place in their lives. Certain writers expressed gratitude for finding a campus location that promoted solitude and reflection. Others shared that it was easier to enjoy and interact with the beauty of nature in this setting than in many other places in their everyday lives. The journals showed that the simple act of sitting on a bench in a garden shifted the pace of daily life for hundreds of visitors who wandered into it, whether intentionally or by chance.



Sacred Spaces

“I am thankful for finding this place – may all of you find the peace and serenity you are seeking. I will remember to come to this place to escape, breathe, and be free again. This world is beautiful and so are all of you. Keep shining!”

A number of journal writers identified the garden as a space that was sacred in their lives. These visitors described the garden as a sanctuary, a still and serene place for healing and quiet reverie. Journal writers painted an evocative picture of the garden as a peaceful and calm place, one that stood in stark contrast to the outside environment and fast pace of life. Repeatedly, journal writers revealed a deep need for this type of space in their lives.

Staff, students, parents, and community members frequently characterized the garden as sacred, describing it as a unique campus place that allows for – and even promotes – reflection: it is a structured yet natural environment where hopes and dreams can be explored. Sacredness does not just imply a religious space for formal prayer and devotion,

but rather, a distinct, protected, peaceful place conducive to meditation and inquiry. Journal writers who described the garden as a special place did not always mention visits to the Chapel or labyrinth, but rather, tended to focus on the overall peace of mind attained through their visit to the garden.

Journal writers who connected the garden space with the sacred often indicated they were first-time visitors. Expressions of gratitude for the garden, or regret for not finding it sooner, highlighted their need for the beauty and quiet space provided by this environment. One writer proclaimed, “What an absolutely beautiful day to walk this sacred space. To sit among the stillness and be open to the small voice that speaks within me!” Repeatedly, journal writers described the garden as a place where visitors can achieve clarity, reflect, or seek answers.

Some described the garden as a place distinctly different from their usual surroundings. One writer said it is a place to “take me away” for just a bit. Another writer stated, “This is the

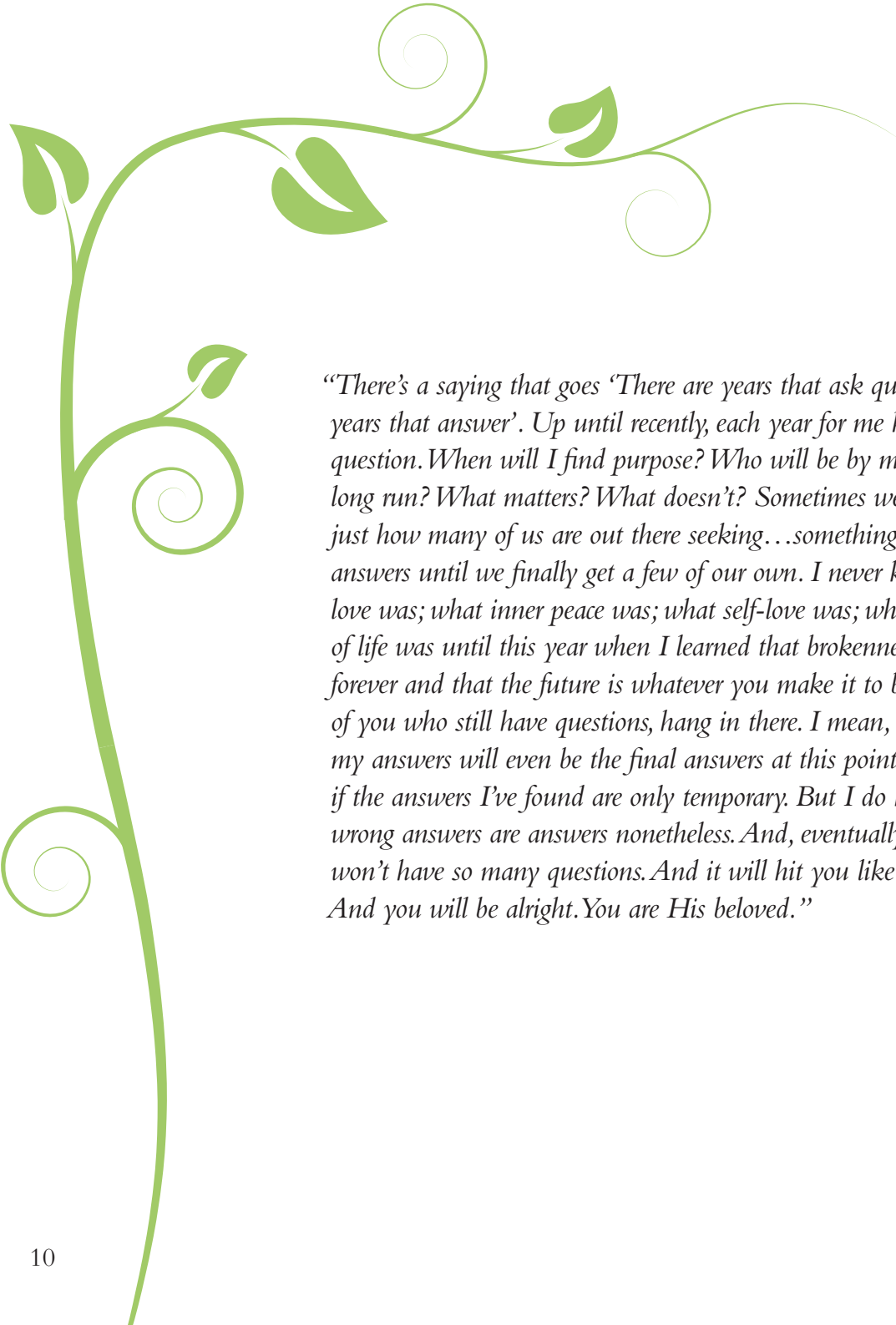
most peaceful place in my life right now.” The garden offered visitors a tranquil environment and a space of sanctuary. For one religious visitor, the garden provided space for silent reverie with the divine, stating the garden is her “place for quiet time with God.” Some of the entries expressed a desire to show others this space in hopes of contributing to a peaceful place in their lives, too. These entries show that the garden is special to visitors, providing space for silence in the midst of the hustle and bustle of the University campus.

Another writer described how the spaciousness of the garden provided an environment conducive to self-understanding:

“It’s good to know that others come searching for their own internal answers in this external place. The answers do come from inside, but I don’t think you can seek them out, but rather you must be open to them. You must put yourself in places, spacious places, where you feel the spacious inside you. In this space you receive answers eventually, but not when you want them (now).”

The open quality of the garden described throughout these journal entries emphasizes how self-understanding can be realized in nature-centered locations where quiet, solitude, and beauty abound.





“There’s a saying that goes ‘There are years that ask questions and years that answer’. Up until recently, each year for me had been a question. When will I find purpose? Who will be by my side in the long run? What matters? What doesn’t? Sometimes we don’t realize just how many of us are out there seeking...something. Seeking answers until we finally get a few of our own. I never knew what love was; what inner peace was; what self-love was; what the point of life was until this year when I learned that brokenness doesn’t last forever and that the future is whatever you make it to be. — So for all of you who still have questions, hang in there. I mean, who knows if my answers will even be the final answers at this point. Who knows if the answers I’ve found are only temporary. But I do know that even wrong answers are answers nonetheless. And, eventually one year you won’t have so many questions. And it will hit you like a light breeze. And you will be alright. You are His beloved.”

Contemplation

While sitting in the garden, journal writers took time to contemplate big questions in their lives. For some community members, especially students, the University campus felt like a crossroads, a place where multiple directions lay before them. For others, the campus was a launchpad, propelling them forwards towards their life dreams, including career, marriage, and other important goals. For a great number of visitors, the garden was a place to contemplate important questions about the morals and values that shape their lives.

Many visitors, often students, wrote about their future, weighing the option of choosing a life that will make them happy versus one that “makes everyone else happy.” At a critical juncture in their lives, community members appreciated having a space to reflect on what is important, a time of centering and looking within for answers to questions about their future. One writer said the garden is a place where they could contemplate the good things in life, the mistakes they have made, as well as times they were forgiven. Entries display how the garden and journals became a place of calm acceptance where, free from disturbance, writers made peace with current circumstances, past wrongs, losses, and longings.

Some writers said the garden was the only place they could feel alone. They relished the solitude and sought out this quiet, peaceful place to contemplate life. Some found the surroundings of the garden a powerful place to connect with nature, with God, but most of all, with themselves. Many entries implied that writers were able to hear their inner-voice or connect with an inner-compass while in the garden. Visitors came seeking a connection they felt they had lost with themselves. Writers sought the space of the garden to connect with their true nature and found answers to personal questions from within. The journals contain numerous entries about finding direction in life, making the right decisions, and seeking meaning in everyday life.

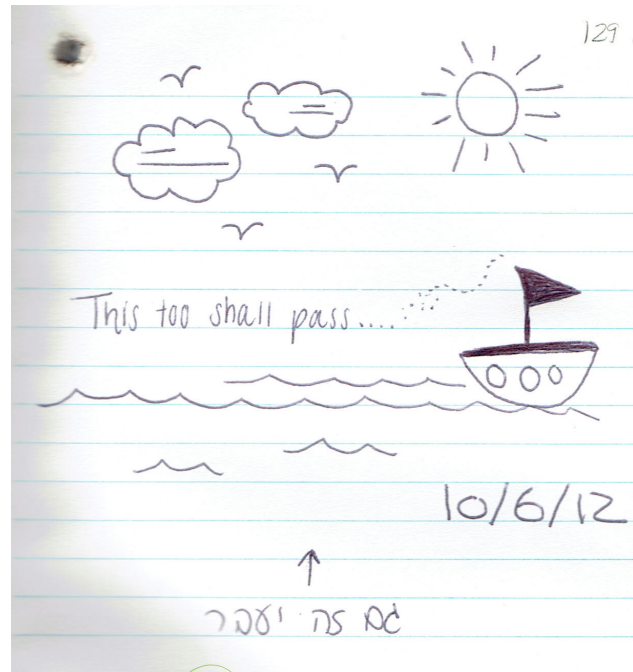
Sitting in the garden, one writer stated, “I’m trying so hard to look inward, and find out what person I want to be, but it’s so difficult.” Thoughts of confusion, frustration, and feeling overwhelmed were shared in the journals. Many writers found solace reading the journals and were comforted by knowing that others shared their experiences. In this way, the garden journals create a space where visitors grappling with difficult times no longer felt alone. For one student, choosing the right major was central to shaping a future life and career:

“Sometimes, I think about my future and all I feel is fear. I’m pre-med, so it’s not really job security that scares me. What scares me is asking myself, “Do I do what I do because I like [it] or because I haven’t been brave?” Being pre-med is really easy, in a way. You don’t even really have to make conscious decisions. Everything is pre-planned; you just have to follow it. I do love it and I do think I’d be good at it. But what if that’s just a cop-out? What if it’s just me not being brave enough to open my own bakery now instead of after retirement? How am I supposed to make such a commitment to ONE thing? For the next 4 decades?! I don’t even know how to decide between sushi and pizza for dinner...I’ve already ruined my GPA beyond repair. If I don’t get into med-school, I have no backup plan. This has always just been it. What will I do? But then I come to this place. And I remember life goes on. And I remember that stars exist and that trees are pretty and somehow (I’m not sure how) but things will be fine. I hope.”

The journals provided a place for visitors to consider deeply big life questions, to find clarity, and to forgive others in their lives. One student wrote an inspiring entry about past mistakes, concluding, “I made bad decisions, but I don’t regret them. Everything I have done has made me a better, more whole person.” The theme of finding your way through the maze of life continued throughout the journals. Sitting in the garden, journal writers talked about being open to new possibilities while facing their fears and releasing past hurts. One writer wrote that letting go of the past might “give me a clearer vision of where I want to go next...” In the space of the garden, writers arrived in confusion and, at times, left with clarity.

The process of making decisions was also discussed in the journals. For some, letting life flow naturally was the answer, as opposed to forcing outcomes in particular situations. This theme continued throughout the journals, as one writer described, “sometimes trying to plan your whole life only ruins things. Learning to let go and relax is so hard but so worth it!”

Entries that questioned the meaning of life were found throughout the four years of journal entries. Writers concluded that the meaning of life comes from within, that life is a journey, not a destination. One author suggested that enjoying the journey of life requires acceptance, “I beg you to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to love the questions themselves as if they were loaded rooms or books written in a very foreign language.” Instead of swimming upstream or fighting for clarity in every situation, journal writers suggested the path of least resistance is required in the midst of confusion. One entry stated, “The greatest joy in life does not come from going from a starting point to destination, but from what lies in between.” Contemplating life, journal writers shared their experience making meaning along a winding road, full of possibilities and questions.



Religion

“I am filled with love and joy and peace and gratitude. God is good and this life is good.”

Located next to the Memorial Chapel, the Garden of Reflection and Remembrance is an ideal location for journal writers to reflect on religious topics. The journals revealed a community in conversation about the meaning of life, religion, faith, and a creator. Within the journals, a considerable number of writers communicated with God, a creator, or an unnamed divine presence. Religious journal writers sought a creator for assistance seeking meaning in a particular situation or simply to connect with the divine. Entries addressing God transformed the journals into a vessel where prayers were delivered for the writer and kept safe for future readers.

Often times, writers mentioned a belief in God's specific plan for them. For these writers, the garden was a place to seek their life's purpose through prayer and meditation. The journals served as a place where thoughts and feelings about their life's purpose were negotiated, discussed, and shared. As a place of reflection, the garden provided a quiet space for writers to connect with the divine in hopes of gaining insight and greater meaning to illuminate their next steps. One writer shared the experience of feeling directionless and asked God directly for assistance during a difficult college experience:

“... I feel like God has a plan for me and he just won't let me see it yet. I wish he would show me. I feel so lost now. I'm trying my best to make the college thing work for me but I don't think I'm cut out for this. Everything just keeps getting worse... Please help me oh dear Lord and give me strength to be patient and watch for you to lead me down the path you have laid out for me.”

Religious entries revealed a belief that each of us has a unique purpose to fulfill in our lifetime. The journals showed that many writers believe in a greater power and felt a need to clear their minds and hearts to access this power's truth.

During times of personal struggle, community members reached out to God or a creator for support and answers. In times of duress, writers offered prayers for strength, such as, “I can slowly feel myself falling apart... God, give me the strength to fight any battles and conquer my demons. Sometimes the biggest demon is yourself. Help me know right from wrong.” Journal writers left pleas to God for guidance and assistance in alleviating their stress. In many of these entries, God was addressed specifically, but the exact religious orientation of the writer was not always revealed. In this way, the journals often read as a conversation with a universal creator as opposed to a specific religious tradition.

For garden visitors who chose to write in the journals, it was evident a great number identified as religious in some way, many expressing gratitude and thanks for God's blessings. Prayers were scattered throughout the journals such as this one related to academics, "Dear God, thank you for the sunrise and the sunset. Help me focus and do my best on my exams. Cheers to a happy semester. Thank you for never leaving me short of your blessings." Journal writers thanked God for their many blessings, whether passing a test, finding a romantic partner, or having supportive family members. One Christian writer said a prayer of thanks for the day: "Thank God for leading me here. To America, to Maryland, and to this bench. I will go to wherever you lead me to with the greatest joy from my heart. In Jesus' name."

While many entries did not include the religious orientation of the writer, a few clearly defined religious views were shared. One writer stated, "It's amazing how we spend our lives doing neither what we want to do nor what we ought to do. I say this in the fullest aspirations to not fulfill my own pleasures, but to live my life in radical abandonment to Jesus Christ. This place is beautiful." Occasionally, entries urged others to find God in their life, but most religious entries were not written with the purpose of converting others; rather, they shared the writer's personal faith perspective. When religious disagreement occurred in the journals, conversations took place on the topic, as in this discussion:

Writer 1: *"Can I just say something without 'God' being mentioned? It's intrusive to impose your beliefs on others."*

Writer 2: *"It's okay. He still believes in you."*

Writer 3: *"Depends on your religious beliefs, if you have good religious beliefs your spirituality will soar. Become a Catholic and the truth will live in your heart. God will not abandon you!"*

Interactions such as this one can be found throughout the journals. Although journal writers disagreed on some topics, the tone of the journals remained candid and open. The portions about religion show how students and visitors to the garden were able to express their thoughts about faith openly and in discussion with their community.

While some expressed their religious beliefs, others questioned their own. One writer was uncomfortable with religious conversations because of feeling pressured by others' views. This writer explained, "... whenever someone tries to talk to me about god it seems so forced it's such a negative experience... i'm doing just fine being spiritual without religion. my own thoughts are good enough." In this way, the journals became a place where writers expressed their feelings and opinions, even when they differed from dominant discourse in their personal lives or from the journals themselves.



Some writers shared atheist or spiritual perspectives as opposed to religious views. One writer said, “I personally don’t care for God and his existence, but I do think Life is worth enjoying in other ways, okay?” Another writer believed spirituality is a better choice by sharing the idea that “Religion kills. Spirituality saves.” The differing opinions shared in the journals shows a dynamic campus conversation about the role of religion and spirituality in the lives of our community members.

Interfaith perspectives and struggles were also represented in the journals. One student discussed struggling in an interfaith relationship, “My boyfriend cannot love me because I’m not Jewish. Ironically, part of why I love him is because of his blind faith in God. It saddens me that we believe in the same thing but because my faith isn’t associated with a religion as of now, my love goes unrequited. It shouldn’t be that way.” Such entries show how the journals serve as a place where individuals negotiated their beliefs about spiritual and religious topics. Students frequently documented how religious issues impacted their lives and relationships on a diverse college campus.

A number of entries acknowledged the validity of various religious traditions, implying a oneness in all faith traditions. The final entry in one journal stated, “There’s only 1 God loving you here Jewish, Muslim, Christian,

etc. trust God is LOVE, Love protects, keeps, comforts, strengthens [illegible] just love. God takes care of the rest. If not for love, then why?”

Another writer offered a statement of encouragement by including many faith traditions: “All humans have a light inside them given by God or The Tao or Krishna (I forget which Hindu god is the creator, my apologies) or Jesus or Allah and it is our job to take care of it and do whatever you need to do to make it flourish...”

Entries expressing the oneness of humanity and unity among diverse faith traditions created an atmosphere of religious tolerance in the journals.



Relationships

“I wish more than anything that I had someone to love. I don’t even know when I’ll get a chance. It has been a long time since I had someone to hold me. Maybe you are out there, someone. Maybe you will read this. If you do, hi.”

For those who visited the garden, the journals also served as a place to disclose fears, secrets, joys, and concerns about the relationships in their lives. The journal entries contained lamentations of lost love, odes to lovers, fears for parents and siblings, and celebrations of the friendships developed in college. These entries about relationships helped to form a picture of a community that seeks to be in relation with each other.

Entries about family seemed to revolve around two ideas: family as a source of strength and fortitude, and family as a source of heartache and past hurts. Many writers felt their families had gotten them through difficult times, and shared gratitude for their support and guidance. Far more common, however, were families who were not supportive, or whose difficult pasts made it challenging for the writers, often students, to engage fully in their academic and campus lives. For a few, their parents had outright rejected a part of them – their sexual identity, their lifestyle, their religion – and they wrote about the pain caused by this rejection. One individual wrote, “I told my mom that I was gay. She told me I was just stupid. She was

scared that my life will be harder because of this.” Negotiating how family played a role in their lives, leading them to their current path, for good or bad, was a major theme in the journals.

Other visitors were struggling with grief for the loss of family or friends. One particularly heart-rending story was told by an international student who envisioned the spirit of his deceased father embodied in a tree on campus; one day the tree was cut down, leaving him bereft again at the loss of his father. Other students wrote letters to their deceased friends or family members, sharing their memories, and taking time to regret unsaid words or expressions of love or devotion. Many writers found a sense of solace and reprieve from the burdens of their grief through the journals.

While family was mentioned on many occasions, for many students, friendships seemed to be tied closely to the experience of college. Journal entries were co-authored by friends who made regular trips to the garden to enjoy peaceful harmony, to engage in worship practice together, or to just have a destination as part of a campus stroll. One student wrote, “I am thankful for

my family and friends. It is they who give me the strength and power to want to succeed. Life is a magical journey and the journey is what you make of it.” Others reached out for friends and community as part of their entries, asking for friendship from readers of the journals or writing about their loneliness. A few entries discussed the suicide of close friends during high school or the recent past, and the struggles with guilt these individuals were facing. It seems they sought some form of peace in the garden’s sheltering shade.

The majority of the entries about relationships centered around romantic entanglements. There were several entries about unrequited love – with one best friend in love with the other, but unable or unwilling to change or risk the friendship with a direct declaration. Some entries focused on the heartache that follows from break-ups, unfaithful partners, and missed connections, including one young man who wrote: “today I found out that the girl I love cheated on me. I came here to be alone and I’m glad it’s here. I feel so wronged and worthless and played.” Some of these are written as letters to these objects of affection – a cathartic release



of emotion hidden in the anonymity of initials or with no signature at all.

Others explored their own torment and attempts to be satisfied with their current lives as single persons. One entry contemplated the loss others experience in romantic encounters: “I see a lot of people writing about broken hearts from some intimate relationship they had with someone. I can’t understand, and I wonder if they would have preferred not to have had a relationship with them. I’ve never been in one in 25 years, so these things are foreign to me.” Other writers feared they would never find love or lifelong companionship. Considering that many of the entries were likely written by college students, it is interesting to see how important finding love and companionship is to these authors, and how often a lack of this kind of partnership created feelings of depression and loneliness. One writer found solace through the

journals: “So what if we don’t find that? What if we don’t have that counterpart? But at least I know that I’m not the only one who thinks that. This book is proof that I’m not REALLY alone.” Exploring their fears, hopes, and desires through writing, garden visitors gained an understanding that their experiences were shared by other community members.

For those in relationships, the journals overflowed with declarations of love – undying, deep, and passionate. Many writers described their partners as “soul mates” or “best friends” or were celebrating milestones such as anniversaries. Others were seeking protection or blessings from God for their relationships. One couple, Sean and Celina, wrote to each other throughout several of the journals; these messages were always ones of love and caring.





Campus Experience

“It’s a beautiful day, so I should embrace it since fall is coming. I’m happy I walked through the garden today, I needed a moment of clarity. Sometimes I wonder if this is the right place for me. ‘This’ being my school, sorority, my major, or even fundamental truths about myself. I really want to be found, but maybe the best way to do that is by getting lost. –An indecisive soul”

The journals serve to create a campus community – intergenerational, supportive, and open – that counters our worst fears about living in a digital era. Students, in particular, viewed the journals, and the garden that hosts them, as a way to leave a lasting

legacy on campus. In acknowledging that their own connection to the university was fleeting and ever-changing, students often used the journals to reflect on their campus experiences with the hope that their own reflections might shape and support the experiences of other students.

The garden seemed to serve as a pause button from the rush of campus life. As previously mentioned, many entries focused on the stillness and serenity of the garden space itself, and how writing in the journal was a way to break away from the hectic pace of student life at the university. As one student writes, “I’m laying my burden down here literally and figuratively. College is such a rush.... I can sit here in the shade and appreciate the

trees, the flowers, and the beauty they've made for us. The chapel bells just started chiming the Alma Mater. I love you Maryland!" Some students seemed to make the garden, and the time and space for reflection, a regular part of their campus rituals; one woman in particular had multiple entries in which she paused at the garden during her morning runs to offer a prayer or reflection on her life and those of her fellow students. Many students expressed a concern that the busyness, social life, and academic pressures were taking them away from themselves or their connections with their creator. Some students made resolutions in the pages of the journals to change how they lived their daily lives – either to do more meaningful activities, to take school more seriously, or to identify friends and social environments that better aligned with what they saw as their core selves.

Journal writers talked about tough decisions they were facing. Struggling with making the right choices was mentioned throughout the journals, as eloquently stated by one writer, "Every day is a struggle but offers so many possibilities. The frustration that comes with having the ability to do whatever you want and not choosing the wrong thing is overwhelming. Does the confusion ever end?" Having a plethora of options and opportunities is overwhelming to many students and these struggles are documented on the journal pages. The pressure to perform, do well in school, and balance their personal lives with their studies is consistently mentioned. One writer related, "Will my future work out the way I want it to

be? Will I be able to get myself together and study hard? Will my relationship still work out in this big setting where others can easily get in our way? Many confusion!"

Other students used the journals to examine, reflect upon, and share the more general challenges of college life. Many community members wrote about struggling to reconcile their ideals of what college would be like – full of friendship, excitement, learning, better than high school, just like high school, a place of achievement, a place of finding oneself – with their actual experiences. These entries focused on feeling lost or lonely in the unstructured social settings of college, on struggling to keep up academically, and on managing anxiety and depression. One new student wrote, "Over the past few weeks I have felt so many things in a short period of time... I've felt lost, lonely, regretful, sad, angry, questioning, scared of the recent natural disasters and everything else that is changing in my life, out of control, and deep sadness over the loss of a loved one." Some journal readers would respond to these entries, empathizing with the experience expressed, providing suggestions of resources on campus that might help, or just offering the hope that this person would come through to find the happy, or at least fulfilling, campus experience that Maryland had to offer.

Many students found the garden as part of a final tour of campus. Wandering with friends or former roommates, or on their own, they stumbled upon the garden for the first time. These students used the journals as a way

to write odes to the deep friendships and relationships they had developed throughout the years – relationships that taught them more about themselves and how to deal with love, loss, frustration, and endings. One writer said, “the past few months of my life have been the happiest I have ever been. I am so glad I chose this school. I have grown more mature and I feel like I am prepared for whatever the future will bring. I have confidence in my relationships and that will sustain me.” Some students sought to advise their younger peers – with lists of essential campus experiences, locations, or foods to eat, such as “Adele’s is incredible. Fried ravioli.” Others wanted to remind those just beginning their journeys that it gets better, that it’s all worth it, that Maryland is a fantastic place to grow up. These entries also featured meditations on the nature of the challenges of moving on after graduation – whether feeling lost after the surety of mastering life at this university, envy for others who seemed to be moving on to bigger and better things, or just a sense of gratitude for how the university had prepared them for their next steps.

A few journal writers struggled with having to leave Maryland for reasons other than graduation. Reasons included needing a healthier space for recovery from addiction, money struggles at home or inability to pay tuition, “getting kicked off” campus for various reasons, or just deciding that while Maryland was a lovely place, it was not the place for them to continue their studies. One student wrote, “I’m transferring. I love this school &

everything about it, but my life is taking me towards a different path...If by chance you’re thinking of transferring I will offer my advice. Do it if you know it’s for you.” Ambivalence, torment, fear, and peace ran through these entries as the writers sought to make sense of their need or choice to leave, and how it might affect their future lives and selves.

In sum, the journals captured the vicissitudes of campus life and the very real challenges, joys, and opportunities that college students deal with. For those who found the garden and the journals, this became a space for reflection, connection, and contemplation. This still space on campus provided respite, and perhaps room for new beginnings.

Depression and Suicide

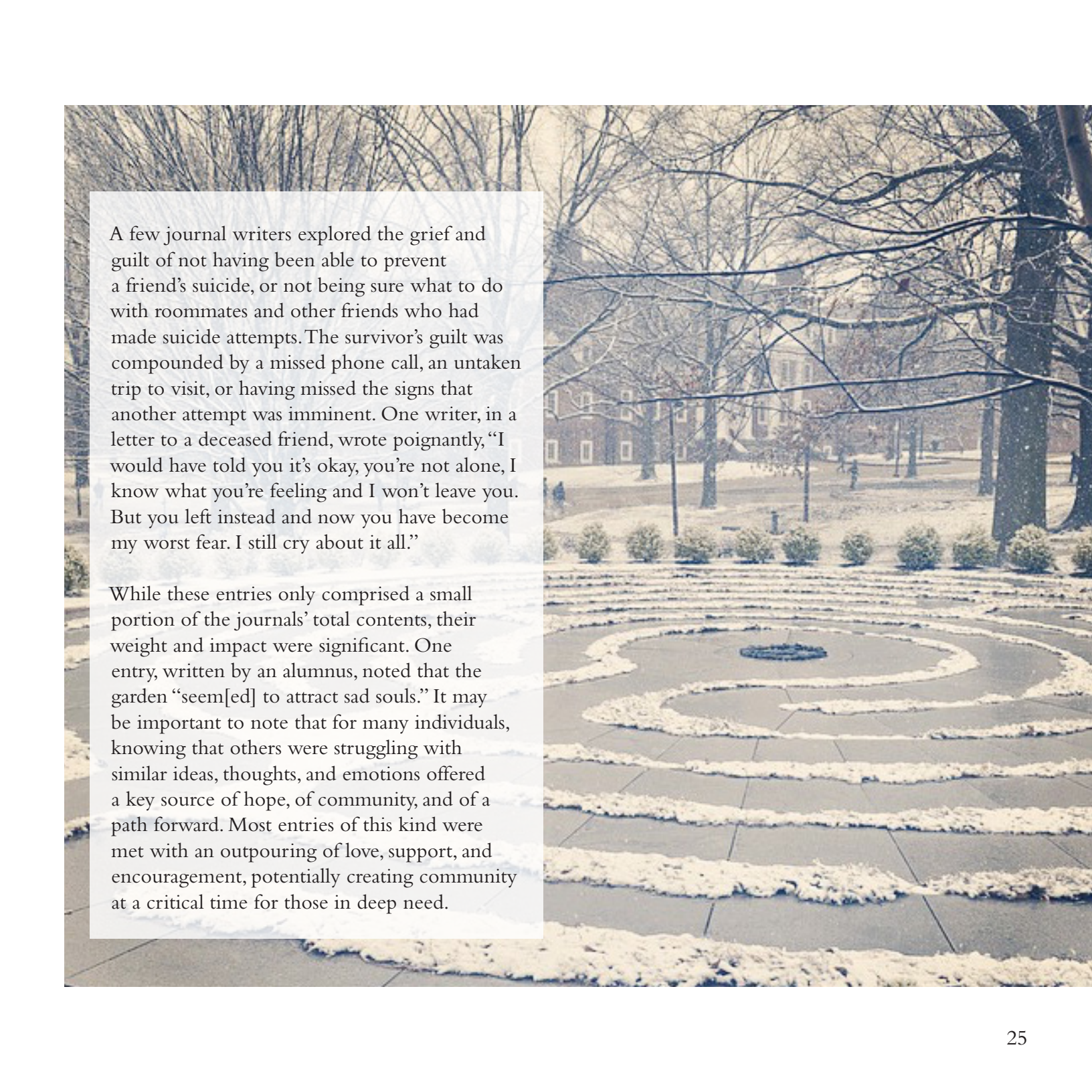
“I know I’m not okay, but I don’t know who to tell. I hope one day I will have the courage to tell someone. I hope one day someone will ask. For now I will put on a smile. My parents need that for awhile. But once they are gone, there will be no reason for me to stay.”

Much has been written about the struggles with mental health that face members of campus communities. These issues have been most often documented in terms of students’ lives, but more recent writing and research has included the struggles of academics and other campus employees. The dark thoughts that reside in the corners of some minds also found their way to the pages of these garden journals.

Journal writers shared the aching, searing pain that accompanied grief for departed friends and family, the loss of love or friendships, or their own attempts to reconcile their identities with their beliefs. For some, it seemed that these feelings would never end and that their days would extend into perpetuity, shaded with pain, grief, and loss. One writer shared, “I don’t know how to get out of this. I haven’t felt so lonely in so long. I am literally deconstructing

myself brick by brick. Someone help me. Please.” Others were slowly making their way back to a more positive world view, and used the journals to document that progress. A few wanted someone to know that they had passed through the dark place they had been while writing a previous entry.

Others were struggling with finding the will to keep going. Several entries explored the writers’ desires to end their lives, or for their lives just to stop. They wrote in their entries about the things that kept them here. For one person, it was not wanting to inflict the pain and work of dealing with suicide on campus workers. For another it was knowing that other writers had gotten through a similar experience. Some weren’t sure what kept them with us, and were ambivalent about changing their view. One writer had shared concerns, and romantic feelings, with a friend, “I told him everything. He told me to get over it and get help.” This friend’s response added to the writer’s anxiety and despair. Others numbed their pain through substances, dulling the aching pain with alcohol and other drugs.

A photograph of a spiral garden in winter. The garden is a large, circular, paved area with a spiral pattern of light-colored material, possibly snow or a decorative border, winding outwards from a central point. The garden is surrounded by a lawn and several bare trees. In the background, there are brick buildings, likely part of a university campus. The sky is overcast and grey.

A few journal writers explored the grief and guilt of not having been able to prevent a friend's suicide, or not being sure what to do with roommates and other friends who had made suicide attempts. The survivor's guilt was compounded by a missed phone call, an untaken trip to visit, or having missed the signs that another attempt was imminent. One writer, in a letter to a deceased friend, wrote poignantly, "I would have told you it's okay, you're not alone, I know what you're feeling and I won't leave you. But you left instead and now you have become my worst fear. I still cry about it all."

While these entries only comprised a small portion of the journals' total contents, their weight and impact were significant. One entry, written by an alumnus, noted that the garden "seem[ed] to attract sad souls." It may be important to note that for many individuals, knowing that others were struggling with similar ideas, thoughts, and emotions offered a key source of hope, of community, and of a path forward. Most entries of this kind were met with an outpouring of love, support, and encouragement, potentially creating community at a critical time for those in deep need.

Encouragement and Community

“The moment you realize that your bones are made of the same dust as the planets, your lungs are breathing the same air as the migrating butterflies, and your blood is pumping because of the love and care of thousands, is when you realize that you are not as broken as you think you are. You are full of the world.”

While garden visitors used the journals to communicate a variety of feelings and perspectives, encouragement was the sentiment that pervaded the vast majority of entries. Words of encouragement varied from well-worn sayings to sweet balms for the heart to ardent expressions of support and love to perfect strangers whose pain, discomfort, loss, or confusion were recorded in the journals. These entries, in particular, highlighted how well-aware visitors were to the public nature of the journals. Their thoughts were shared with the express purpose of communicating to an unknown reader, connecting with that person, and trying to lift them up.

Many entries were focused on responding to the thoughts of others. Journal writers gave words of advice; some shared that they had experienced similar trials or feelings and offered hope to anyone currently suffering under that particular weight. Others just shared expressions of love, caring, hope, and acceptance, without knowing

whether their entry would ever be read by the intended target. The following interchange occurred between four people, unknown to each other:

Writer 1: *“There are some days where I’m simply unsure of myself. What I should do and where I should go about with my life. I fear of the future and what it might bring and I’m scared of taking the wrong path. Everyday I worry that I’m making a huge and irreversible mistake. I’m worried that if I don’t follow what my heart really wants, I will live the rest of my life in utter misery. And if I do follow my dreams, I will certainly be a disappointment to my parents and all other family that expect so much of me. Do I take the path I’ve never really wanted or do I follow my dreams only to disappoint everyone? Everyday is a dilemma and every day I wake up hoping I will find the answer to what I should do. Should I make others happy at the expense of my own happiness? Or do I seek happiness while others are stripped of it. I just hope to find out/decide soon. [...]*”

Writer 2: *“Do what makes you happy, because your family wants you to be happy. Easier said than done, but you’ve already written it here. I believe in you and pray for you.”*

Writer 1: *“My dear stranger, Thank you for your kind words of encouragement. Embarrassingly enough, I teared up reading your unexpected response. I will take everything into consideration. I wish you the best with everything as well.”*

Writer 3: *“And I came here sad and crying and now you made me happier again. Thank you!”*

Writer 4: *“I try to remember that I have only been given one life. I do not want to waste it. I seek God’s will which will bring the greatest fulfillment.”*

Some entries were more like messages in a bottle for others in the world, asking their readers to have hope, to live well, or to make life meaningful. These missives were ebullient with the life, energy, optimism, and the unique mixture of wisdom, naivete, and positivity that often pervades student life on a college campus. The opposite of cynical, these words of encouragement were meant to help others find lost joy, to reconnect with themselves or family members, and to relish campus life.

“We, the readers of the journals, are exhorted to examine our lives and live them better: Don’t just accept things. Question things. Realize the mistakes others make & learn from them. Realize the mistakes you make & forgive yourself. You’re not perfect, they’re not perfect. Enjoy the little things. Fill your life with big important [sic] first so the small worthless things don’t get in [the] way. Thank your mom & dad. It might be hard to see but they do love you. Listen to them. They’ve already grown up & made many

mistakes & they’re just trying to stop you from repeating theirs. Love your brothers & sisters. They were with you in the beginning & they’ll be with you ‘til the end. If your family doesn’t accept you for who you are, make another one. Don’t be afraid of changing yourself. Because if you know who you truly are you’ll never forget. EVERYONE IS FIGHTING THEIR OWN BATTLES! So help them, because they might just save you.”

Outpourings of love and connection were threaded throughout the journals, evoking a visceral sense of communion and community among those who chose to visit the garden and engage with the journals. Rarely were negative words directed at other journal users; despite the journals’ public and anonymous nature, those who read and wrote in the pages treated each other with respect, kindness, and caring. Despite the searching and seeking for meaning, love, relationships, kindness, friendship, or community that may have been the reality for our writers in their everyday lives, the garden journals served as a respite from that seeking, where community was readily offered and often gratefully accepted by people in awe of the space and who recognized how special this experience was.



Final Reflections

The Garden of Reflection and Remembrance has surely provided a space of reflection, contemplation, and consideration for those who have entered its cloistering embrace. A campus visitor wandering, or being part of a campus tour, may never witness the strikingly different sides of campus life that are evident in the journals.

For those who lament the fast pace of life that dominates our society, and particularly the lives of young people, the entries in the journal highlight important stories – that many struggle to find inner peace, guidance, and balance; that real connection and community still matter; that spaces intended for reflection are treated reverently and serve their purpose; that when given an opportunity for kind, authentic engagement, the majority of us will choose it.

Garden visitors and journal writers used the anonymity of the space to be open, authentic, and vulnerable.

The journals, and people's engagement with them, are evidence of the very best in us and the community at the University of Maryland: that which is true, and in search of communion and connection.





Great Quotes

The journals were filled with amazing stories and quotes that could not be fully captured in this report. Here are just some that touched our hearts.

The explorer: Today I come to this garden looking for an answer. Am I on the right path? Is this what God wants from me? I have never been the best Christian but I have always known deep within my heart that God is real. Sometimes obstacles are put in my way that make me question whether he forgot about me or I forgot about him, but ultimately I know he is there. What I can't figure out is what he wants from me. Here I am in my last year at the school thinking I had everything figured out only to be thrown another curveball. I'm ready to start my life outside of school but I want to make sure it's a life with purpose at least in his eyes. So all I ask is for a road map. I'm ready for the journey – just need to know the path

*We came as two,
Just me and you,
And walked the garden through
We followed the maze
Under peaceful rays,
Stone in hand and love in heart.
Though we are two,
And days are few,
We carry each other
And never will part.
Codi & Aimee*

*I'm grateful for this bench – my favorite place on campus. I've cried here, laughed here, and most importantly, been at peace here. The world is full of love.
15 minutes in the garden did more for one person than 50 min of therapy!*

Well, the Chapel was here when I came to school here in 1984, but the garden was not. I'm making myself sound old – I'm 46 and sit here on campus reflecting on all the time that has gone by – all the moves, traumas, losses, now on the edge of a divorce. I return here to get my bearing, see my patterns and I see how things change. Life moves quick and slow at the same time. I never did march in my graduation ceremony here and have always regretted it – so any student who reads this my advice is to mark that passage and attend it. I'm in grad school now (finally) on the Eastern Shore and tho I don't miss the traffic and congestion here in this area, I am jealous of all the choices this campus has to offer. I took it for granted at the time. So easy to take things for granted.

First entry of the year, clean page, no fear. Sitting in this garden, in the moonlight, my thoughts go out to my companions, who through this book are peering in, by every glance and noble grin, to view my life in honest norm, presented here in solid form.

*And you I know, by happenstance, have wandered here by phrenic chance,
and by your still unbeaten glance, have made these letters spin and dance.
So now inside your head they swirl, between your bike, the maze, your girl;
and as they pass more thoughts unfurl.*

No feel them! Grasp them! Cast them away! Shake them to dust. Watch the trees gaily sway. And if you think now, what you did in the Day. Then you and me reader both found our way.

I just walked through the maze and couldn't help but compare it to life. I'm always winding back and forth trying so hard to get to a certain destiny (the center). After walking the maze realize I'm not even sure what that place (the center) represents to me. Happiness? What is that exactly...

Then as I got closer I realized I was slowing down because I didn't want to reach the middle and the journey to end. Maybe the journey is happiness. I seek out places like this on campus to clear my head, find balance and peace, in order to leave with an opened mind.

You know that feeling, that feeling you get when you're on the verge of something great? That's how I feel, these years have been a blessing. When I realized how I was lucky to have the wonderful people in my life that I do, I cried. Wealth, real wealth, is kept with loving & supportive friends & family.

I learned this here at the Garden.

I just finished working on my facilitator's guide for my training and developmental class. I'm going to spend the rest of the day with my sweetheart. I can't wait to marry him. He's the love of my life. I'm the luckiest girl to be with him. It's always important to realize the blessings in your life even if you're going through a difficult time in your life. I'm happy about the opportunity to maybe work for the university and quit my current job. I love you Sean! Love, Your princess

The three years I have spent here have been nothing short of remarkable. I have learned so many things, the most important of which didn't happen within the confines of a classroom. I've learned the value of friendship, the importance of truth and the beauty behind pain and hardship. I've also learned that nothing lasts forever. I am blessed to be alive and understand that every moment is important. Life has taught me to try harder, smile brighter, cry freely, and love deeply. Everything works out for the best in the end, and if it doesn't it's not the end. Remember that you matter and that what you have to say is important. Don't be ashamed to cry, let go, and move onward. Thank you, Maryland, for making me realize how blessed I am!

Use the lessons those have taught you. Cherish the gifts that life has brought you.

Day by day we ask why we're here. The answer forms more every year.

Our life is a book and chapters have to end before others begin.

YOU, whether here by choice or by fate, you're right on time, not late. This time capsule you're reading is meant to rest in your hands, so sit in stillness and remember: you're not here by chance.





If This Bench Could Talk

This story was printed on the back of each journal.

I come from long ago. I'm not sure how old I am. I remember Indian campus, dusty roads, ox-carts, horses, wagons, stagecoaches, and travelers on foot. About 1890 or so it was, so I am told, when I was cut down at last – “virgin timber,” they called me. Seemed to prize me greatly, declaring me “just right.” Not until later did I learn that only certain extremely tight grain trees – such as fir, cypress, redwood, and pine – were considered good enough for pickle barrels. They put me to work in a pickle factory, filled with pickles and pickle brine. You'd be amazed how popular I was! Time passed and I was emptied, dried out, and rudely left to rot. But I didn't. Horseless carriages chugged by, cars whizzed by, and much later, jet planes screamed far overhead, leaving cloudy trails behind.

I truly thought my life was done, but not so – about a hundred years after I was first filled with pickles, I was picked up and hauled in a truck to a small carpentry shop. This time my destiny was to become a bench. But not just any bench – no indeed! But rather one lovingly created by my craftsman and an architect, of all things! I was intended to retain the natural roundness of the barrel I had been so long. Even the staves came along; they were fashioned into legs.

So here I am, in this beautiful place. Serene, isn't it? A place in which to dream, to meditate, to recover from stress and trauma, a place in which to reconnect. Lean back, Stranger, and rest. In me is the strength of half a millennium; permit me to share it with you. But in me too is peace and tranquility. Do not leave me until that strength and peace comes to you. And when you do leave me, don't stay away long. I'll be here, waiting for you – in this sacred place.



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Nature Sacred
Helping communities heal from the outside.



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