

“If I had a world of my own, everything would be nonsense. Nothing would be what it is, because everything would be what it isn't. And contrary wise, what is, it wouldn't be. And what it wouldn't be, it would. You see?”

-Lewis Carroll

Stress is a kind of thing that starts in the home and ends in wonderlands. I personally feel attached to stress, the home, and wonderlands, based on my high stress personality and self-critical lifestyle. Although some of my stress may seem superficial when compared to poverty or debt; I see my stress as fully legitimate. I feel I am capable of explaining my process, soul-searching, research, and understanding through my artwork and this paper. I am compelled to define the notion of the home because I do not feel there is an exact definition. I also feel drawn to the idea of juvenile escape, as in the idea of escaping through, ignorance, fantasy, wonderlands, and innocence. “Fantasy can be a powerful coping tool for stress... by imagining the worst in yourself (that escape hatch, leaving it all behind) you can get some despair out of your system, which better preps you to sigh and return your nose to the grindstone” (Scott, "What's Your Fantasy"). Home is stress, stress is hell, and fantasy is the wonderland to which we escape to find comfort.

My main focus being stress, “Stress (n.): a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or very demanding circumstances” (Webster Dictionary). Stress is complex it is not simply black or white but rather many shades of grey. It is our (our meaning we as humans) instinctual response to danger or a state of discomfort. In reaction to these stresses, our body releases adrenaline causing a state of emergency or panic. This panic is good in small amounts because it drives us to obtain the most important human necessities: nutrition, shelter, stability, sex, partnership, and purpose. But now there is so much more to life than simply fulfilling the need to survive. “Some situations which are not negative ones may still be perceived as stressful. This is because we think we are not completely prepared to cope with them effectively. Examples being: having a baby, moving to a nicer house, and being promoted. Having a baby is usually a wonderful thing, so is being promoted or moving to a nicer house but they cause can be perceived as stressors and create stress otherwise” (Medical News Today). But as is known, stress is much higher than it was say 100 years ago due to new demands put upon us by society and ourselves. These high amounts stress can be detrimental, not only mentally but physically as well.

Nowadays it is not only what you instinctually need to sustain life; but there is debt, the need for societal approval, pressures to be beautiful, pressures to keep up with new hypes and ideas, to listen to the right music, conform to the size zero complex, and the presence of cosmetic pressures put upon women by not only media but themselves. Society has also “rectified” the unwritten guidelines pertaining to being a certain gender properly.

These stressors are what fashion the need to extricate oneself from reality, therefore increasing the intense yearning for wonderlands and intense episodes of imagination through whimsical and youthful behaviors and spaces. A wonderland can consist of many diverse things due to its generally lax definition.

As defined by the dictionary, a “Wonderland’ is ‘(n.): a land or place full of wonderful things” (Google dictionary). Through personal inquiry and research I have begun to create a distinction between a home and a wonderland. I deem a home to be a place where there is both

positive and negative. It is a noun (literally a person, place or thing) containing accountability, consequence, stress, yet also achieves some form of [seemingly or otherwise] permanent comfort. Where as contrary to the previous, a wonderland lacks responsibility and is not necessarily permanent. In reflection I determined that it is a place or activity where a human can fully escape the unvarying strain of reality. This can consist of a sport, hobby, place, idea, or even drug. Although personally, I do not seek out my wonderlands via drugs, I have found through research many people do. This escape, addiction, and high, creates a boundary or “force field” where a person can be simply brain-dead and ecstatic. The liberation from reality and the ultimate deficiency of stress create the euphoria that many people seek when hunting for a wonderland. It is a process where there is no reality. Although the drug may have potential consequences the trip itself does not.

I find this set of inquiry relatively applicable to Lewis Carol and his story, Alice in Wonderland which was mainly written under the influence of LSD, a hallucinogenic drug. This book was and is the main inspiration of my initial aspiration to research into the topic of stress, wonderlands, and homes. You see, through Alice’s trip down the rabbit hole, she escapes a home, where responsibility, stress, and conformity are highly present, and finds a wonderland where she relieves her stress and ultimately is able to discover her true desires and understanding of life.

*Alice came to a fork in the road. "Which road do I take?" she asked.
"Where do you want to go?" responded the Cheshire Cat.
"I don't know," Alice answered.
"Then," said the Cat, "it doesn't matter." (Lewis Carol)*

Through this quote it is made observably apparent that the stress of direction does not actually matter. It is simply a false stressor in which people pretend to find stability, meaning, status, and achievement when in actuality it is likely that they are following a truly sorrowful path constructed by a system other than their own desire.

Defined by the dictionary, a Home is, “the place where one lives permanently” (Google Dictionary). I believe a home is any place where placation is present along with responsibility. This is quite contrary to the technical definition and allows a much more personal and emotional approach. Home can consist of a person, place, thing, body, idea, etc. “ a home for me is more than a four corner space where one lingers while devouring time for self amusement, it is more than a sturdy roof that shelters me from the heat of the sun and protects me from the wrath of a the storm, a home for me simply is a sanctuary, a safe haven, a comfort zone so to speak, these words are not categorized to be common but for me it is actually simple to understand...” (Murdoc, How do you Define Home). I constantly find myself defining people as homes because the home is where one always comes back to whether it be a house or otherwise. Maintaining relationships with family, friends, and spouses can be quite comforting but can be mentally tolling creating unnecessary stress. I believe highly that stress begins in a home and is relived through whimsy.

Through my art I have decided to restrict myself to painting three places I consider homes and three places I consider wonderlands. Through this I aspire to allow people to connect themselves to my pieces and realize their own sources of stress and liberation. Although many nouns I consider homes and wonderlands are being excluded from my series, I feel the ones I chose to depict are the most relevant and relatable to others. I have decided to show

Pinecrest Lake, a softball field, my tunnel, Oxbow, my house, and myself. These places all largely in part contribute to my stress and relief of stress.

I believe I use wonderlands to escape my homes. My homes are where I unearth the most stress; yet I find myself consistently coming back to them. These homes include my house, my family, school, my body, my mind, my boyfriend and friends, and my home here at Oxbow. The intense stress of always striving for physical perfection takes a toll on my mind as well as my body due to constant UV rays, peroxide, pills, and diets. All of these things affect my health [both positively and negatively] but if I do not follow through with them I find myself stressing over how I look and what I am worth. I find stress here trying to please people through my art and I find it particularly taxing constantly trying to make friends at Oxbow. I have never had a problem making friends but I feel in this highly talented, judgmental group I find myself frequently trying to prove myself to others without coming across as aggressive, weird, competitive or mean.

When I am at my house, as well, my home, I find myself trying to appease my parents constantly without approval. My parents commonly distrust me and my grades are never “up to par”. I am always told I could do better or achieve more when in reality I put every part of my being and mind into attempting to please my parents and others. I struggle in school and have never done well on tests. Although I consider myself an intelligent person there is most certainly something wrong with my brain when it comes to taking a test. I spend hours studying only to later fail horribly. My parents blame it on lack of effort on my part when in reality I have a lack of ability to focus or express my sincere knowledge through hundreds of tiny standardized bubbles.

These homes and stresses force me to confide in wonderlands, controllers, and fantasies, ideas of an easier stress free life where I had an option whether I wanted to go to college or not or where I am appreciated by my family or where I love myself. The homes I chose I felt could be relatable to my audience as well as myself.

The first home I chose, I find the most stressful is my body and myself. Although I feel the body is a beautiful thing and is sacred yet I commonly find myself disrespecting myself and my health in order to conform to the ideas media has brainwashed me to believe are perfect. For example, although I lie to others telling them I believe I am happy with my size media has made me crave size zero. It is obsessive. I constantly restrict the foods I eat to vegetarian or vegan, raw, gluten free, fat free and other considerably healthy foods that I know will not increase my body fat and I rely heavily on exercise to maintain endorphins and a slim figure. I also find myself constantly having a love hate relationship with my face. At one moment I will consider my face as beautiful but in the next I will realize this is false due to my witch like chin or wide strangely shaped nose. Although my appearance is a constant stress, I find there is one piece of me that I consistently love. I find comforts in my eyes. This is due to their unique mutated grey/blue color and I believe they allow my soul to shine through to others even in my most catastrophic moments.

The place I consider my home in terms of the dictionary definition, is my house on Sargent Lane. I grew up here and I have not even come to terms with the fact that I will be leaving this home permanently at some point in my near future. I also consider my house a home because it is where my family is... it is also where I have been caught, disciplined, accused, disappointed, and been told to be better. Nothing in my world compares to the pressure of living up to my parents with their outstanding grades, colleges, grad schools, multi-million dollar company, retirement at 40, and expensive house. I feel I am constantly pressured to be better in

terms of my education. I feel my artistic talent is seen as impressive to them but not nearly as valued as my brothers destined success as an engineer. I constantly feel like I need to escape my home and my family, which ultimately resulted in my journey to my most recent home, Oxbow.

Oxbow is home. I live breath and eat art but with this is, a tight nit community, a lack of privacy, and the pressure to be a brilliant artist which is accompanied by stress. I am constantly finding myself looking for forms of escape or wonder at Oxbow but without privacy my only outlet is exercise and self-criticism, which ultimately leads to more stress and self-destruction. Therefore I feel Oxbow is suiting for my final depiction of one a home that not only I but also, my peers can relate to.

I uncover wonderlands in places like my secret tunnel near my home and Pinecrest Lake. The feeling of the cool fresh lake water on my skin and the sun shimmering of my pale vulnerable skin as I swim in pure bliss with friends, whom I consider siblings, is particularly tranquil. The lake is a pure form of escape. It has creates a sense of baptism and purity to it. It is a wonderland where I feel temporarily reborn and happy. I look forward every year to leaving my reality to immerse myself in an alternate universe where I have friends who I feel are my home and a lake where I can tan my pale Irish skin. It is my wonderland because it is here I feel my appearance no longer is a matter. Not only that but I do not feel judged by the other paradise seekers.

The ecstasy of painting in my secret tunnel, which exists under the highway bridge, is predominantly uplifting as well. It's a place in which I pretend is only known by myself, where pure silence is allowed, cherished and valued by my tiny blue-bellied lizard companion and myself. I generally sit on a rotten plank that smells of the forest and is dank to the point of obtaining the ability to leave stains on my torn, paint covered jeans. I find the lizards that skid around on the soft dust, dirt of my tunnel. I first discovered this boxy artificial cave when I was ten. It didn't truly become a precious wonderland to me until I was 15 and I began to appreciate the noise of silence in a particular relation to my creativity and idea development. I commonly find myself hiding in the comfort of this cave. The walls are covered in other wonderland seeker's art and music and the sun peeks through a small metallic grid fashioned to the top of the picturesque rust-stained concrete. When I sit in this strangely striking cave I feel my childhood rush over me. The sensation and memory of playing in the large box the TV came in is overwhelming. Imagination once again becomes relevant in this much-favored wonderland and I suddenly feel exuberant, carefree, and hopeful. It is here where I can be myself. I can wear sweatpants, vandalize, be creative, relate to strangers art through their graffiti, and forget the pressures of my parents, media, society, and me. I have only taken one person to my tunnel. I brought my boyfriend. It was wonderful because I was able to share my wonderland with him but I made the common mistake of bringing a home (my boyfriend) into a wonderland (the tunnel) therefore threatening the legitimacy of my wonderland by involving the responsibility to maintain its secrecy and sticking him with the liability.

I also find comfort and stability in playing sports, especially Softball. "one of the quickest, most effective ways to reduce stress is to exercise. You've heard of a runner's high? The "high" comes from the endorphins that our brains produce when we get our heart pumping. Low impact exercises — walking, swimming, biking, weight lifting, yoga or Pilates — are just as effective when it comes to boosting your mood, too"(P&G Everyday). The alternate false stress and adrenaline rush of needing to play well creates a good distraction for the legitimate stressors that eat away at me both mentally and physically. I find Softball especially essential to my general mental health. I resolve many of my issues through healthy aggression and the rush

of adrenaline this way. The sensation of pure focus standing in the batters box snarling at the pitcher allows me to resort to my purely animalistic form. The pure rush of accomplishment when the ball smacks off the bat in a perfect balance of cushion and brutal force creates a rush of delight that distracts myself from the legitimate pressures of the world.

Stress is the ultimate form of pressure but without it there would be no reason to escape therefore eliminating the concept of a wonderland. Society is constantly pushing the people of my generation to attend college and to know what is to be done with our lives all by the time we are 18. This usually consists of college, a job in a cubicle, marriage and kids, taxes, and ultimately death. This life is perfectly acceptable to someone who truthfully desires this path; but for the majority, this uncreative prearranged course is forced upon them by the stress created by society, parents, religion, and the government. This puts colossal amounts of stress on teens and students of today when in veracity it is not actually necessary to know the path in which is to be taken; personally I feel knowing anything certain vastly in advance is rather lackluster and unsatisfactory. This is due to the fact that it does not actually matter which way we go, but rather how the short life we obtain is spent before we deteriorate. But artificial stress and organic stress, I believe, always begin and are present in a home. Eliminating stress completely would ultimately be detrimental leading to a bland life of nothingness and inevitable death, lacking all joy or fantasy. Although my views on the home, wonderlands, and stress come across as potentially negative I believe this can be avoided through brilliant ignorance, fantasy, and escape. And although I have focused this paper on my personal stress, soul searching, and research stress is relevant to every being that lingers upon the earth. Therefore stress is necessary for us to experience bliss, happiness and the feelings of confidence and success.

“Reality is the leading cause of stress among those in touch with it.”

–Lily Tomlin

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