

Shelter Outside

Restoration and Respite Outdoors

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By now, you understand how important it is to have daily rituals. Governor DeWine made the order to shelter in place nearly three months ago, and you have probably had to make adjustments to your routine, if it hasn't been entirely thrown out the window. We at Cardinal have managed to adapt. I can no longer share a pot of coffee with our board members, but we are able to see each other's faces during video meetings. Still, routine and ritual play important roles in maintaining mental health, particularly in times of crisis. By the end of March, I realized how much my daily errands meant to me.



I have found comfort and ritual in the natural world. Although my partner and I live in Cincinnati, we chose to shelter with my parents, outside of the city. They have twenty-two wooded acres between Yellow Springs and Springfield that is protected by an easement held by Tecumseh Land Trust. My relationship with this place has changed since my parents made a land contract to buy it in 2004. If one is motivated to work through the fallen ash trunks, there are special places in those wooded acres. There are sinuous muscle wood trees and knee-high jack-in-the-pulpits, unembarrassed by their public contortion from one sex to another (it takes less energy for these incredible plants to be male-- they become female once they are mature enough to bear fruit.)



I decided to carve a path through the woods. Spring is a poor time to clear honeysuckle, so I have had to tread lightly. The shrubs are already bulky with leaves and the forest floor is covered with delicate native species, like mayapple, which erect umbrellas across whole acres of the understory. I prioritize invasive honeysuckle and privet that are crowding out spicebush, which give off intoxicating pepper fumes as you brush by them, or tall white oaks, which began their lives long before my ancestors came to this country on boats. Last weekend, my mother and I rediscovered a grove of sassafras trees, distinguished by their almost-purple bark and hot, tonic aroma.



I find that, not only is the endorphin rush of hard work good for fending off containment blues, but I enjoy being in this place. The woods are wet, dimpled with vernal pools and studded with erratic stones, carried to Springfield Ohio thousands of years ago by glaciers. Despite the invasive species shoving their way through the shaggy hickory and diminutive haw, there is a healthy population of native beauties. Thanks to an abiding love of land, this place has remained largely unchanged for hundreds of years. The woods are now easier to navigate.

Of course, we miss our routines. I miss leisurely conversations at the grocery store and date night at the movies, but I have found gifts in this difficult period of social distancing, too. Even if your only point of access is an apartment window, I hope that you are able to connect to the beautiful place we live. I hope that you have found consolation, as I have, in the resilience of the earth and of the people around you, even if they are six feet away. Through good times and bad, Cardinal will continue to Protect the Land You Love.

