

Self-care has always been a challenge for me – it’s so much easier, in many ways, for those of us who identify as helpers to pay less attention to our own needs than those of others. Yet it is by taking this time for self-care that we can anchor ourselves in a place of replenishment, enthusiasm, and joy for what we do in every aspect of our lives, including academics and/or career. I have dabbled in photography for perhaps a decade now, and I have found it to be a form of self-care that is enduring as well as calming – getting out and actively seeking beauty shifts me into a more positive, grateful state of mind, but the benefits don’t end once the moment has been captured. Even going through photographs and doing technical adjustments can be strangely meditative, with its repetition and focus; the end product is something that (hopefully) can bring pleasure and peace for years to come.

I was given a great opportunity over the winter to showcase my photography and paintings at a local agency that I volunteer with; not only was I able to see my images as part of a larger whole, but I was able to turn something that I usually see as a solitary activity into something I could share with friends and family. In a similar vein, I have taken portraits (both as staff and as a volunteer) at a local retirement residence, of the older adults who live there. These portraits are some of my favourite work, partially because my elegant and kind models made it easy for me, and partially because photography can be a way of drawing attention to someone, connecting with them, and hopefully reflecting something about them – whether it’s joy, loss, or pride in a life well lived.

One doesn’t need to sell photographs or work professionally as a photographer to achieve these kinds of connection or gratitude – simply pick up your smartphone with camera app and spend some time with a loved one or a friend. Get to know them through portraiture; to see them fully, instead of in glimpses in your busy days. OR turn the camera on yourself, and see what you may find in your own eyes that you’ve never seen before. Or, on a bad day when nothing goes right, see what beauty you can find in the world – on your own terms, through your own eyes as well as your camera lens.

- Jessica Bauer-McLure