Nature & Wellbeing

*“My own prescription for health is less paperwork and more running barefoot through the grass” – Leslie Grimutter.*

This quote aptly summarizes the truth of daily life for so many Americans. Commuting, working long hours, working multiple jobs, going to school while working, the typical American lifestyle is riddled with anxiety caused by an overload of activity. This is the inspiration for my video art and something I experience personally. I travel five hours a day in total to commute to school. I experience fourteen to sixteen-hour days, four days a week. Taking time out to visit nature is an essential part of my self-care.

“Spending time in nature can help relieve stress and anxiety, improve your mood, and boost feelings of happiness and wellbeing. Whatever you call it – forest bathing, ecotherapy, mindfulness in nature, green time, or the wilderness cure -- humans evolved in the great outdoors, and your brain benefits from a journey back to nature.” This quote comes directly from www.heart.org, which cites ten valid sources regarding the same subject. But you don’t need academic articles to know that this is true. Being in nature provides you with a perspective you cannot experience anywhere else. Being around trees that are hundreds, maybe even thousands of years old, has a way of focusing life through a proper lens.

From a broad perspective, for the first time in human history, we are spending much of our time in urban environments. As a result, we suffer detrimental effects on our emotional and mental wellness. Studies have shown that people with a higher level of nature connectedness tend to be more conscientious, extraverted, agreeable, and open. We evolved in a world where it was most beneficial for survival to be conscious and aware of our natural environment to obtain food and avoid danger. This sort of evolutionary conditioning is not easily left behind just because modern society defines itself in urban terms.

Another aspect of the possible origins of this connection with nature may lie in childhood experiences or culture. Having positive experiences in nature may work to reinforce an already evolutionarily innate sense of connection to the natural world. These experiences could develop feelings, beliefs, and tendencies that follow us into adulthood, just as negative experiences with trauma or abuse can follow us. Culturally, certain groups such as Native Americans are more likely to view others as a part of nature and to feel a sense of belonging to the natural world. Notwithstanding, this is all just written words. The only thing you need to do to form an opinion about this matter is to take a walk in the woods, or on the beach for yourself and then ask...Do I feel more at peace?