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Advanced Writing  
This I Believe

### Therapy Plants

Life is hard, but everyone has their thing, their little hobby that they do to make life feel bearable. That self-care activity they use to destress, to make themselves feel better, or to come home to after a long day at work or class and do to just be happy. It may be knitting or baking or yoga or painting or just watching Netflix. For me, this activity is gardening.

My gardening journey began on my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday at my local farmer's market. My parents had bought me a small succulent I had my eye on as a gift. I had always wanted a plant of my own, but I was afraid to fail. I was notorious for killing most of our other house plants, like our family orange tree when I was three. But I wanted to challenge myself to do better, not just with the gardening but also with my own life. For many years prior to this, I had suffered from severe clinical depression. Sitting in my room under the covers with my blinds down, in complete darkness, was a typical day for me. But after I got my succulent (who I named Lilith), I was forced to open my blinds and let the sun in, both for my plant and for me. I had never thought of myself having a green thumb in the slightest, but somehow, I didn't kill Lilith within the first few weeks. I was overjoyed that I could keep something alive. Together, my plant and I began to grow. Lilith had not only become my responsibility, but also my friend.

After the success with Lilith, I took over caring for my family's Thanksgiving cactus which had been neglected for years. Next, I bought a tiny bromeliad in a pink self-watering pot, then another Thanksgiving cactus with pink flowers and purple leaves, and an African Violet I bought with my girlfriend to match her own. I began collecting plants, growing a small forest on my window sill to water every Sunday. They all have their own names and unique quirks. There is Ester the Gerber Daisy who always looks half-dead, Dirty Dan the unknown seedling whose pot always leaks muddy water into his tray, and Luna the Moon Cactus who I think was actually fake. My plants were almost like people to me and I had formed bond with them. My life felt truly brighter because of them. I didn't even realize how attached I was to them until I was crying in my therapist's office before my trip to Europe because I was afraid my plants were going to die without me. But I was also afraid how I would fare without them there for me.

Taking care of my plants gave me purpose, something to look forward to in the morning, a reason to get out of bed, a reason to step into the sun so I wouldn't end up in the dark again. As they grew and blossomed, so did I into the person am today. I started gardening in high school; now I'm in college and my plants live on campus with me, so we can continue to grow together, even if my dorm window doesn't get enough direct sunlight. Sometimes, we go through cloudy days, but we keep going.

So, I believe in gardening. I believe in knitting and baking and yoga and painting and watching Netflix. I believe in stepping back from the world and having a hobby that makes you happy.