

*“Just living is not enough... one must have sunshine, freedom, and a little flower.”*

*- Hans Christian Anderson*

What does living mean? Does it mean survival, your heart beating and your lungs breathing? Does it mean sleeping each night and waking up each morning? Does it mean thinking and wondering? The term is so broad, can you really narrow it down to one simple definition?

Of course, all of the above are accurate, but there has to be more to it than that. Truth is, you're not really living if all you do is wake up, eat three meals, then go back to sleep, over and over again. Yet, if you think about it, that routine sounds pretty familiar. You know, waking up, having nowhere to go and nothing to do, just waiting for night to fall. If this empty pattern reminds you of quarantine or the pandemic, you're correct.

It's a global issue the entire world has or is dealing with: being stuck at home, no contact with anyone, the days repeating themselves for what seems like forever. Does that sound like living to you?

I, too, had to suffer through this monotony. I was living the same exact day, the stress of COVID only heightened as my little brother was in the hospital with cancer. I really only ever felt overwhelmed, bored, and often lonely, because it was usually only my older brother and I at home, and I'm not exceptionally good at maintaining contact over the phone. After a while, I needed something to do, something to focus on, and so, my father and I built a garden.

We mapped it out in our backyard, built the frames, dug out and replaced the soil, and weeded the area. After building the garden, we began to plant: flowers, tomatoes, peppers, kale, basil, rosemary, and different types of vegetables, greens, and herbs. It became something for us to do and focus on. It helped with boredom and stress, but overall, it helped me not feel lonely anymore. I had something that I could bond with my dad over while we faced the pandemic and my brother being in the hospital. It was a safe topic, something for us to talk about without feeling stressed or sad. It was a happy place. A couple of weeks later, my brother died.

The garden became a sort of safe space. It was quiet and beautiful, away from all the sadness because it wasn't something my brother had participated in. It was for me and my father, an escape from my brother's death and the stress of the pandemic.

So let me ask again, what does living mean? It's about giving your mind what it needs. Giving it a break once in a while, escaping the stress, sadness and pain we deal with on the daily. It means finding the light in the darkness, the little flower in a field of grass, and using it for your own happiness, just once in a while.