

# A Note on Slow Growth: *Sticking with Those Who Water You*

BY CHRISTINA NAFZIGER

As this is Create! Magazine's sixth-year anniversary issue, I've done a lot of reflecting on my time with the publication. Six years ago, I was sitting at my desk in a cramped London flat. I was there to attend graduate school, and everything was so incredibly new and difficult. At the time, I loved this newness—the culture, the people, the city. Each day brought on a new challenge, forcing me to overcome my own insecurity and discomfort. As I began to settle and understand my university's theory discourse, as well as London's lingo ("You alright?" is a greeting, not a literal question), I began to feel more confident, like I was capable of anything. It was the perfect time to cold-call and email art publications that I knew and loved to see if they were in need of a writer—and I did just that. I sat at my desk and reached out to Create! Magazine, in hopes of conducting an interview with an artist I admired. To be honest, I don't know if I was even expecting a reply as I shut my computer and headed out to a local pub.

Sometimes growth looks like progress. I was a published writer and I was feeling good! Sometimes growth looks like achieving a goal. I soon earned my master's after what seemed like both the longest and shortest year of my life. Sometimes growth looks like a big move. Afterwards, I immediately moved to Chicago in hopes of finding a job in a city I've always loved from afar.

And sometimes (and this is the hard one) growth looks like nothing. It is patient and persistent, deepening its roots beneath the surface as you do the slow work. This work is not visible to the naked eye. It isn't measured in success, a change in scenery or a graduation. Once the big life changes stop, reality hits hard. We all know that working in the arts is difficult, and these past six years has been no exception. I got a full-time job in my field that I couldn't live on, then got a better job that came with a mentally toxic work environment. My growth was stifled, snuffed, stomped out. But Create! continued to water my writing, giving me fertile soil in which to cultivate my creativity. This was the place I could truly hone my skills and ideas and grow. Through this experience, I've gained an understanding—a sometimes painfully slow learning of what my labor is worth, what my words are worth and what I am worth.

Today, I am sitting at my desk in an emerald green room full of my favorite books. I am writing this essay at my home office in Chicago. I now write full-time, and I only work for folks who understand my value.

Sometimes growth looks like nothing on the outside, but on the inside, it is everything.