



Chippewa River Parallel

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On the surface, nothing seemed to change. Days were spent drifting lazily by, with the occasional dark branches stirring ripples in my calm demeanor. But underneath it all was a roiling mass of anxiety, heartache, and fear. I found parallels and companionship in the Chippewa River, which runs through the campus at which I work.

Everyone had different experiences through the pandemic. As a self-proclaimed recluse, I was hardly impacted; my lifestyle and routine barely changed. But as an HSP – a highly sensitive person – the extreme changes for my family and friends began to deteriorate my façade. The physical mask struggled to hide the emotional one, and I felt things tenfold. When winter gave way to spring in 2020, the winter melt of everyone's stress sent flood waters and life became a turbulent mess of emotional upheaval. I found myself dependent on solitude for my mental health.

By summer I felt haggard, the eroded remains of spring thaw floating through me and bacteria seeping along the edge of my thoughts. But I persisted, believing the sea of hope was before me. Much like the creatures who gather to drink at water's edge, many sought me as a source of healing. My affection was steady and reliable as someone who desires to provide support for all humanity, even if just behind the scenes. I was up-in-arms with my fellow Korean pop music enthusiasts as we supported Black Lives Matter and the other voices crying out for equity, doing what I could monetarily for support groups even though I was already a low-income household before the pandemic.

Fall and winter brought the cold again, and I hunkered down for respite. I sought dependable friends to join me on the quiet trek towards that hopeful sea. In that latter part of the year, one such friend invited me to experience a soul journey. At first, I thought I needed to find my fire again, the passion that had dwindled over the past year, to bring warmth back into my life. By the end of that journey, it was about new growth: trees growing at the river's side to protect it from mud and debris, and the river providing water to help them stay strong. A river gives life, and a river can take life. I lost loved ones and mourned. I gained stronger friendships and celebrated.

Spring is here again, and the prospect of the vaccine brings new hope growing among the muck of an emotional tragedy created this last season of change. And with that, I close thinking of a quote from Heraclitus: "No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man." After COVID, no one will be the same.

**Artist: Jill Olm, Associate Professor
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View all the pieces in the *Healing Reflections* [online gallery](#).