



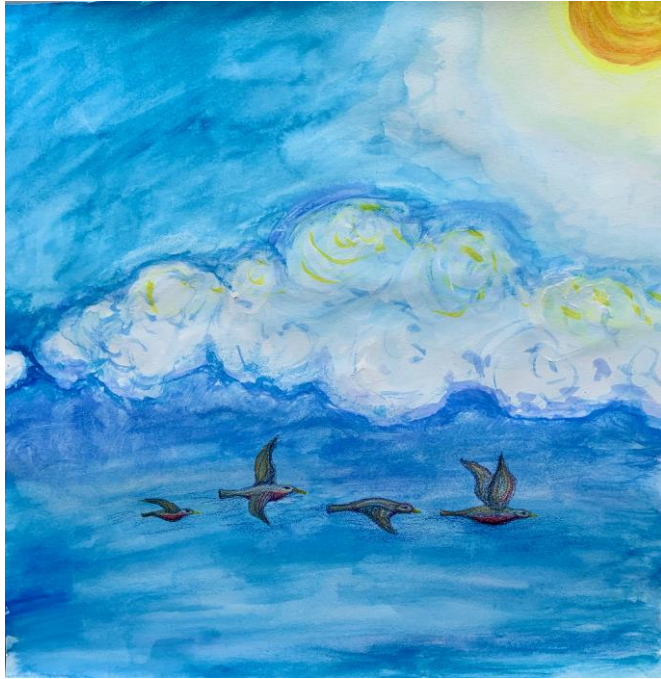
Once upon a time, there was a turtle named Hope, a smallish turtle, in an otherwise rather large world.

Hope did its best to venture out daily in order to see new things.

Today was lovely at the lake near Hope's home;

the waves rolled and lolled lazily along the banks while the sun beamed warmly down, heating the top of the small turtle's shell.

Hope had a comfortable spot on top of a hill to absorb the warmness and to watch for any changes in the weather. There was a white puffy cloud hovering in the sky above. The turtle worried, really worried about the one white puffy cloud in the sky.



Hope often sought the opinions of other creatures that might be better acquainted with the patterns of the sky. Birds were the experts after all.

The turtle saw the robins flying close to the white puffy cloud and asked

politely (but loudly) if they could spare a moment to give a weather report.

Thoughtfully, the robins consulted one another and agreed that though there was one puffy cloud in the sky, it seemed like an altogether perfectly sunny day.

Hope took their report into consideration, but the little turtle still had doubts....

Since robins are the first sign of spring, maybe they were too optimistic about summer being near. What if the robins did not see the white puffy cloud for what it truly was...



A storm approaching. Clouds were notorious for inviting their friends to join them, and Hope knew what this could mean.

Storms meant danger and reminded Hope of some of the pain of the past. The small creature was well acquainted with the

dances of the lightning bolts, the clashing cymbals of thunder, and the pelting raindrops that could quickly create floods and destroy homes.

The turtle was scared and tried to envision the sky as the robins had forecasted; however, as hard as it tried to focus on the sunniness of the day, it could not and decided to head for shelter.



Hope trundled across the path that wound between the lightness and the darkness. The well-packed soil felt calming; the turtle's footfalls were rhythmic and soothing.

The little turtle knew the way as this was the path that all of the turtle's family had taken through the years to get to their home.

The light from the sun slowly transitioned to moonglow as home became closer.

"Nighttime," thought Hope, "This is not good."

Though its shell protected the soft body cradled inside, the turtle wanted to find the treehouse in the forest that offered greater shelter and protection.



As the turtle neared, it heard the owl who served both as greeter and as alarm system.

There was relief in coming home and being out of the elementsbut with coming back, there was always a flood of memories, taking Hope

to a time that did not feel safe.

Home always evoked mixed emotions...happy flickers of remembrance interspersed with fear and sadness for so many different reasons.

Though the branches were curved, beautiful, and adorned with leaves of every shade of green, the turtle's mind kept playing tricks.



The welcoming tree with limbs outstretched in greeting was replaced by bare, spiderlike branches...

And an eery sensation that something was watching and following Hope with its eyes.

“Breathe,” whispered the turtle, “Just breathe. This is shelter from the storm.”

Hope was not always aware of what caused the fear; it sometimes felt silly for retreating into its shell or hiding camouflaged amongst the leaves and under logs.



The turtle continued determinedly, marching forward in a steady manner.... “Just get through the door, that’s all you have to do”, reminded Hope. “Count your steps and focus on inhaling, exhaling, inhaling, exhaling.”

The turtle made it through the creaky, heavy wooden door, flipped on the lights, and locked the many locks.

The warm light from the fixture above gave the room a lovely glow; Hope fixed a cup of peppermint tea and was welcomed by its favorite slouchy and well-worn soft sofa.

Though the smell of the tea and familiarity of the room felt comforting, Turtle was still consumed by thoughts of the creatures outside...a possible thunderstorm ...flashbacks of the past.



Hope felt its body, soul, brain, and heart struggling to get on the same page. Though the turtle was perfectly still and safe in the living room, its heart couldn't stop racing. Its thoughts were cycling around like wheels on a very fast car.

The turtle wanted to connect to calm areas in its body, but so much of the pain had been held there. Hope's body remembered even though sometimes the brain could not.

The turtle's soul ached. "Why can't I just feel normal? Why do I have to experience this?"

From the back room came a sound, then several sounds...

Tick Tock, Tick Tock, Tick Tock

And then music.



“What is that? Is someone in the house?”, thought Hope, withdrawing into its shell as it listened. Creeping carefully and quietly, the turtle became aware that the *Tick Tock* was from the old clock of its grandmother’s.

And the music was coming from the radio that Hope left playing in case it come home feeling exactly as it did today.

Breathing came more easily as Hope inhaled and exhaled in rhythm with the clock. The music seemed to be helping. The turtle snuggled in the soft cushions, gazing up at the painting of the stream near the turtle’s tree. Hope painted to feel calmer and made images that reminded the turtle of times of feeling safe and calm in its shell.



The turtle remembered the day that inspired the painting. It was spring, and the dazzling sun was directly overhead.

Hope's favorite rock was open and available. The turtle swam out and pulled itself up on the smooth surface, enjoying

the sun warming its shell and listening to the waves lapping at the edges of the rock.

These were the kinds of days that the turtle loved—quiet, calm, beautiful.



Hope knew that it needed many of these kinds of days and experiences to help with the hole that the past had left in its heart.

It is not an easy task to bring healing to a heart, body, and soul that have been through so much.

The turtle felt that its time “just surviving” had made it difficult to connect with the other turtles, places, things, and experiences that could bring healing...but it sure wanted to try.

The piece of the heart that had gone missing was Hope’s namesake. The turtle needed to restore hope.



The only way to restore hope was to learn to play, to imagine, and to wish again—to trust that the universe had something better in mind for the present and the future than what was in the past.

Hope had a snow globe that it loved to look at; the snow globe offered the turtle a place to

believe in good again. It turned the globe upside down and then flipped it right side up; the glitter snowed down around the tree inside, catching the light as it drifted towards the bottom.

The world inside the globe had to be turned upside down in order to then see the brilliance that waited when it was restored to right side up.



The turtle recognized this and to want to try to connect with others in order to repair and to heal.

The turtle knew that it could build relationship slowly, just one turtle at a time. Trust was earned and earned gradually.

The best thing about turtles is that they are patient. They would wait. Hope knew that time and love, validation and understanding were paths to restore hope.

In the morning, the turtle reemerged from its tree and walked to the pond where unbeknownst to Hope, the other turtles had been waiting...



And in this circle, the turtle's heart began to fill again.