

Nature as a Holding Space

In reflecting on “life in the in-between”, I found myself returning to the question of what helps people remain anchored during periods of uncertainty and transition.

If there is life within the in-between, how do people learn to exist there; not merely surviving through uncertainty, but continuing to live within it? What helps us feel held, carried, accompanied, or tethered when familiar structures begin to loosen and certainty no longer feels available?

Within mental health contexts, these questions can feel especially significant. The transition from inpatient care back into the community can involve not only the movement from one place to another, but the sudden loss of containment, routine, structure, and emotional holding. Perhaps the difficulty lies not in discharge itself, but in the abrupt removal of containment - the sudden loss of the structures, rhythms, and forms of holding that once helped people feel psychologically anchored while moving through periods of change.

If the challenge lies not simply in uncertainty itself, but in the abrupt removal of containment, perhaps the question becomes how people can continue to feel accompanied while moving through transition.

The more I reflect on transitions, and the many different forms they can take throughout our lives, the more I find myself feeling that they are simply part of the human experience. They have the capacity to shape people deeply; psychologically, emotionally, relationally- and can hold profound experiences of reflection, growth, rebuilding, and becoming within them.

Perhaps the question is not how we remove the in-between altogether, but how people are held while moving through it.

What helps someone remain connected to themselves when certainty is unavailable? What allows people to feel held, supported, or tethered while rebuilding identity, meaning, and everyday life beyond the structures of the ward? Perhaps support is not always about removing uncertainty altogether, but about ensuring people are not left entirely alone within it. Continuity, emotional holding, accompaniment, and spaces that offer rhythm or grounding may all help people remain connected while life gradually unfolds around them.

In this way, transition begins to feel less like a period of waiting for life to begin again once certainty returns, and more like a meaningful part of life itself - one in which people are still living, becoming, and being held while moving through the in-between.

So how do people find comfort within the in-between?

I found myself reflecting on the kinds of spaces, rhythms, or experiences that might help people feel tethered during periods of uncertainty and change. The kinds of environments that offer grounding, continuity, containment, or gentle forms of emotional holding while life is still unfolding and certainty remains unavailable. I began to wonder whether nature itself might offer a form of holding - a kind of continuity, rhythm, or containment for those learning to exist within ambiguity.

To step into nature is to step into a different rhythm of life.

The air itself can seem to soften there. The mind begins to settle. Time no longer moves with quite the same urgency.

There is the scent of rain settling into the earth. Wind moving through leaves overhead. The quiet repetition of birdsong, changing seasons, falling leaves, and returning growth.

Nothing insists on immediate resolution.

Change unfolds gradually. Seasons turn in their own time. Dormancy exists without shame, and emergence arrives slowly, often unnoticed at first.

Within natural spaces, ambiguity does not always need to be solved in order for life to continue unfolding around it.

Perhaps part of what makes natural spaces feel so containing is that they offer forms of presence and continuity without demanding explanation or performance in return.

Nature does not ask people to justify their emotions, resolve their struggles, or become “better” before they are allowed to belong within it. There is rhythm without urgency.

Sensory connection without overwhelm. Space for stillness, reflection, and gradual rebuilding. Within natural environments, people may find themselves held not through words or solutions, but through quieter forms of accompaniment - the steady return of seasons, the repetition of familiar paths, the grounding presence of earth, wind, rain, trees, and growing things.

Life continues unfolding there without pressure to move more quickly than one is ready for.

In spaces like these, people may begin to experience something that can feel increasingly rare within modern life - the permission simply to exist without needing to explain, perform, or resolve themselves.

There can be comfort in participating gently within something larger and ongoing.

Watering, planting, noticing seasonal change, sitting quietly alongside growing things, or returning repeatedly to familiar natural spaces can all offer subtle forms of continuity during periods when other parts of life feel uncertain.

The process is rarely dramatic. More often, it unfolds slowly. A gradual rebuilding of connection; to rhythm, to environment, to other people, and sometimes, to parts of oneself that had begun to feel distant or difficult to access.

Within this, nature may not function as a solution to uncertainty, but as a space where uncertainty becomes more possible to live alongside.

Perhaps this is part of what makes nature feel so significant during periods of transition. Not because it removes uncertainty, but because it offers forms of continuity, grounding, rhythm, and quiet accompaniment while uncertainty still exists.

Within these spaces, people may not necessarily find immediate answers, certainty, or resolution. But they may begin to find moments of connection, steadiness, aliveness, and gentle rebuilding while life continues unfolding around them.

And perhaps, over time, it is not only nature itself that helps people feel held within the in-between, but the sense of connection, community, and shared experience that can begin to emerge within these spaces too.

By Tamara Batchelor, June 2026

Part three of this reflection is titled '*Community in the in-between*'