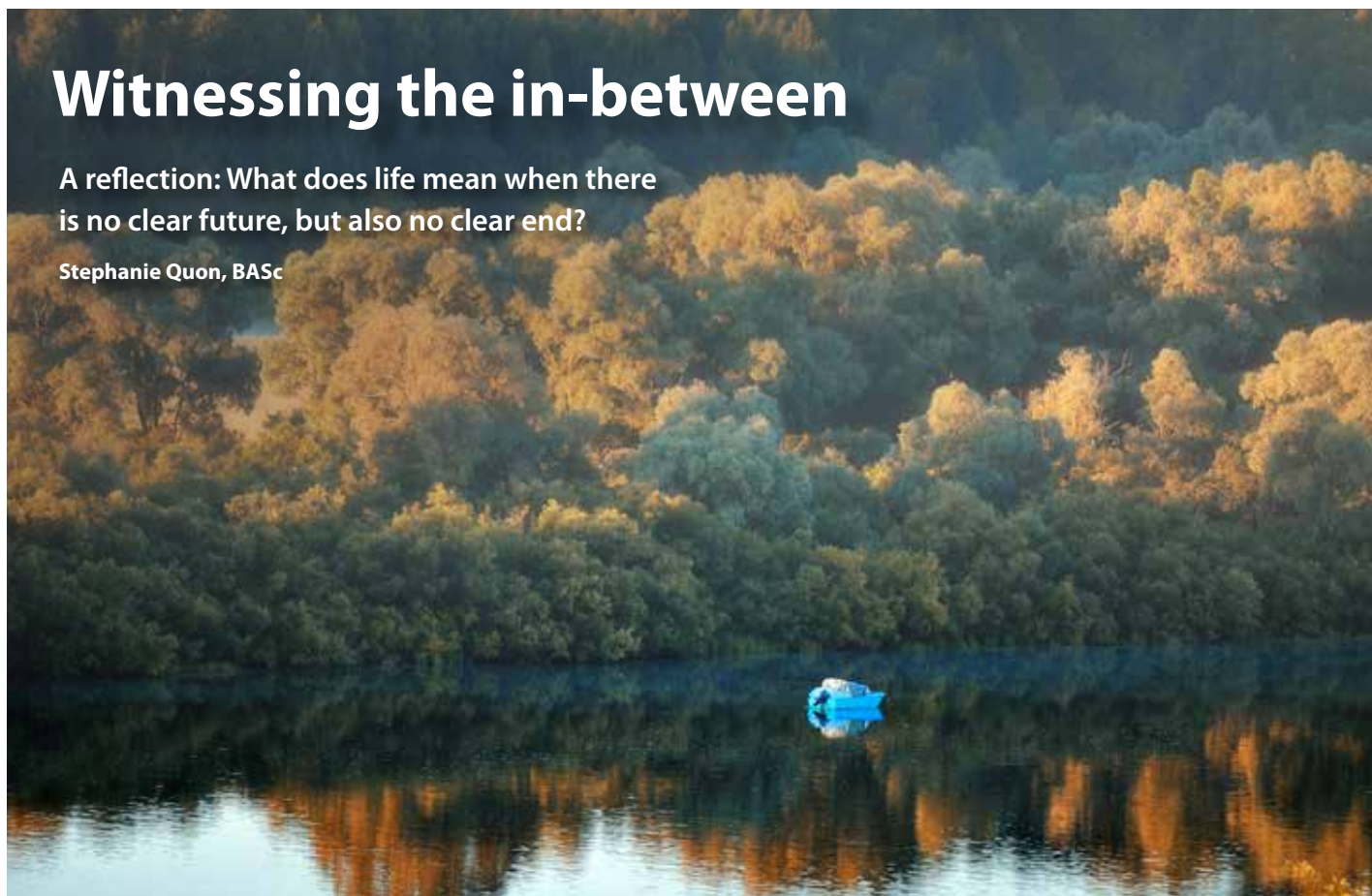


# Witnessing the in-between

A reflection: What does life mean when there is no clear future, but also no clear end?

Stephanie Quon, BASc



When I met Robert,\* most of the people around him had already said their goodbyes. He had been admitted to hospice after being told he had weeks to live, but by the time we spoke, 4 months after his discharge from a 3-month-long hospice stay, he was still alive. He was stable, and very much still here and waiting.

I was paired with Robert for the Legacy Project, where UBC medical students are paired with someone at the end of life to create a legacy piece. We made a spiral-bound booklet about Robert's life and his reflections.

Robert was 55. He had worked as a teacher in multiple countries, traveled

extensively, and built a vibrant life full of adventure. He had written poetry, learned five languages, and built his own sailboat. His bright, dynamic history stood in stark contrast to the stillness of his current life.

Robert described feeling stuck in limbo, waiting to die. What does life mean when there is no clear future, but also no clear end? He shared that when someone tells you it is the end, you start to let go. You stop making plans. You say your goodbyes. You brace for closure. But then the days keep coming, slowly and quietly, with no script to follow.

For him, outliving his prognosis felt more like disorientation than grace. His plan was built around a timeline that had already ended, and he wondered how long he could keep affording the care he required. Through Robert, I witnessed what it means to live beyond a terminal prognosis: not dying, not recovering, but continuing in a quiet, heavy in-between.

The more I listened to Robert, the more I realized that the in-between is something we all experience. His version of it was shaped by age and illness, a terminal prognosis, and the anticipation of death. But in truth, we all live in some version of it. We live in the space between diagnosis and outcome, between certainty and change, between who we were and who we are becoming. We wait for results, for answers, for clarity. We make plans knowing they might fall apart. And even in perfect health, we carry a quiet awareness of the fact that life has no guaranteed trajectory. We all live between hope and fear. ■

*\*The name and identifying details in this reflection have been changed for privacy. Robert granted permission to share this story.*

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