

# Twenty-six



Sunset at the top of Hawk Hill

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MARCH 23, 2021

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# Twenty-six

I've thought about turning 27 for months now. Quarantine has a weird way of bringing all markers of time into the spotlight, making them at once appear too close while also slowing time down. My first instinct was to dread it: there's a notion in my head that being 27 is truly "old" in a way that being 26 isn't, but mostly, it's hard not to feel some semblance of missing out on a year of life when the past year has been strikingly different from every other year most of us have been alive.

The blessing of time slowing down is that I've had time to reflect on being 26, and both accept and get really excited for being 27. This past year has been rich in a way that other years could never have been, and quite honestly, I feel gloriously lucky and happy in my life today and can only hope that continues.

I've started and left unfinished a few of these reports over the last year, so I'm very proud to be giving this one the light of day. I'd be remiss not to mention my inspiration for it, Mathias Jakobsen, an awesome human who has written over a decade of annual reports in this format, which I admiringly (and hopefully, respectfully) copied. He writes each with the belief that we choose our memories: what we want to remember, and how. I'm grateful to my friend Michelle for introducing his work to me, and I hope my rendition of it inspires you like it did me.

Thanks for reading,  
Jenna



Having taken 15 flights in 2019, it's safe to say that what I miss most in quarantine is travel. This safe weekend away with friends reminded me how important it is to be able to get perspective.



Life in California just doesn't feel real sometimes.

Player 1 in line for the grocery store. The pandemic has brought creativity out in people in a delightful, human way.



# On slowing down

I started my 26th year coming off of six months of unemployment. When lockdown started, I was honestly incredulous. I had just spent the past six months in solitary reflection and growth, and was so ready to be around people again. Meanwhile, most of the people around me were just starting to experience what it felt like I had *just* completed—slowing down and being forced to face the life in front of them with nowhere to run and hide.

That's the thing about being unemployed, taking a break, and slowing down: when you're on the hamster wheel, you dream of being able to get off it, have a cold drink, and lay in the sun to your heart's content. In reality, what you get is peace and quiet to hear your thoughts clearly and see yourself and your life for what it is. No more running means no more noise and distraction, but it also means no more running.

In retrospect, being nudged into a year of quarantine with my unproductive behaviors, habits, and thought patterns is the thing I am most grateful for, and what made this last year of growth and happiness what it was. A year ago, I felt "finished" with my time of reflection and uncomfortable growth, but now I can't imagine my life without it.

I will almost definitely continue to forgetfully glamorize unemployment, because that's what being human is, but in a way I also hope it never loses its dream-like shine and continues to trick me and all of us into taking a step back and slowing down. I've never been reluctant to slow down, but I've learned that what you do when you slow down really matters. Continuing to fill your time with plans, tasks, and distractions extinguishes the space for your deepest fears and thoughts to come out and reveal to you that they're much smaller and more manageable than

you've made them up to be.

It took me months to stop making to-do lists and reading books like it was a part-time job, but once I really slowed down, I realized how much more exhausting it is to try to ignore being uncomfortable than it is to just let your fears and feelings surface, tell you something, and move on.





Early pandemic vibes on a post-work sanity walk.



Now that so much of life happens through a screen, doing things with my hands has taken on new meaning. Painting my childhood bedroom myself from start to finish felt deeply gratifying.



Post-sunset gravel; Marin Headlands, CA. One of my favorite photos I took last year.



From a morning walk to the beach, I turned around to take this photo because I wanted to capture how stupidly lucky I felt in this moment to have this in my backyard.

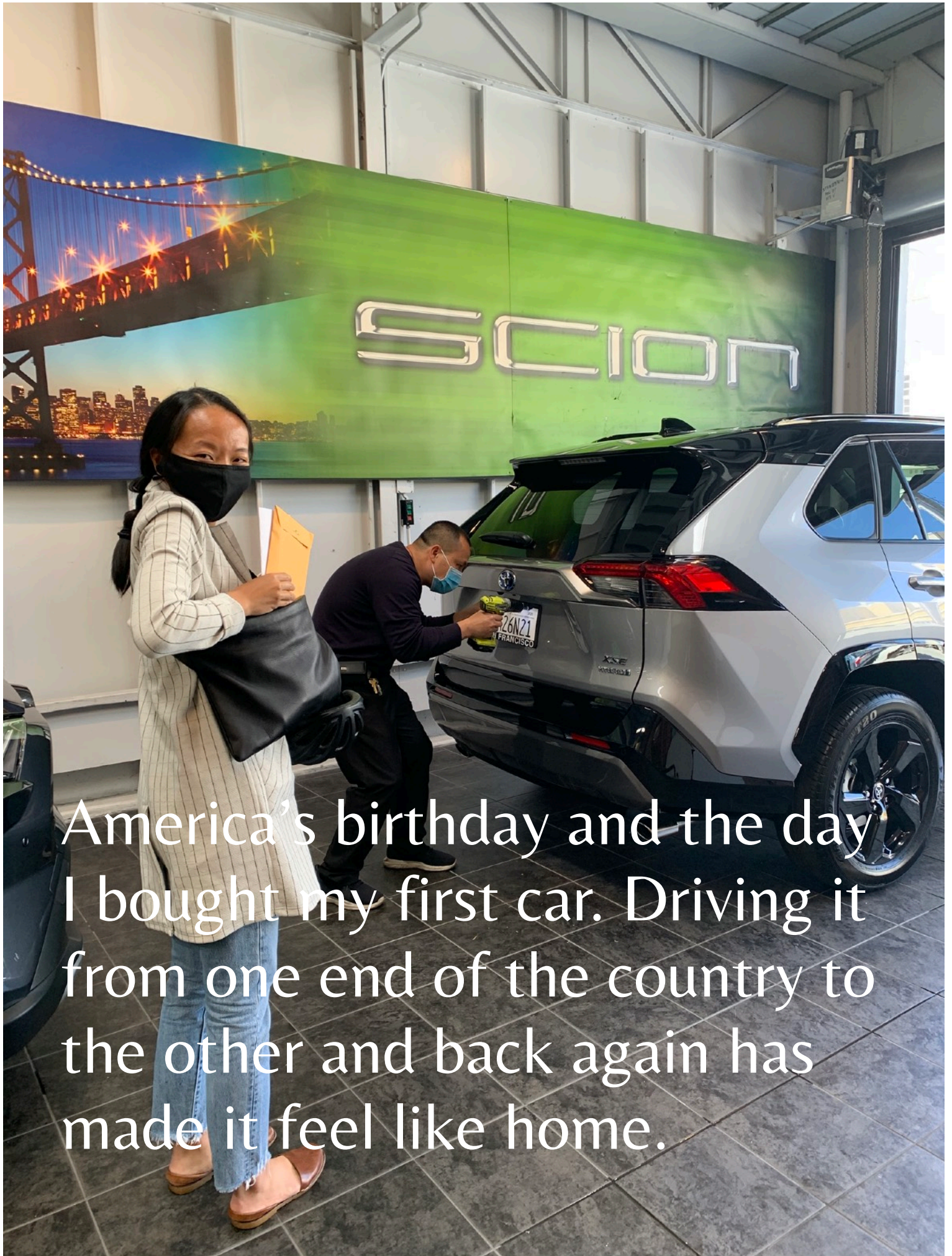
# Adventure in the everyday

This year more than ever, it's felt like a superpower to know how to vacation where you are. The trick of making the ordinary extraordinary, finding things to look forward to, and changing up routine is like the medicine of life.

A few of my favorite memories:

1. Listening to *The Daily* podcast with Alec in sync on our headphones while taking a morning walk to Baker Beach
2. Bringing a picnic dinner to the Presidio golf course to eat on the green early in the pandemic when they opened it up to the cooped-up residents to get some fresh air
3. Driving to a new grocery store in the Bay Area each week early in the pandemic when there was no traffic getting into and out of the city
4. Going for a freezing cold walk on a bluebird morning to see the Grand Tetons and pick up a breakfast sandwich before work
5. Perfecting a "weekend pancake" recipe and making a stack every Saturday morning to enjoy with an episode of the *Hills I'd Die On* podcast
6. Waking up early to drive to South San Francisco to pick up Dunkin' for a taste of the east coast before work
7. Perusing the aisles at Target for "bougie tech company snacks" for our WFH office snack stash
8. Walking along Lake Street on Halloween and seeing all the families out and the contraptions so many houses created to deliver candy safely to trick or treaters

9. Taking a day off of work to explore Saguaro National Park after seeing a sign for it on our drive into Tucson
10. Bringing camp chairs and a beer down to the beach to watch the sunset and decompress from the day in our puffer jackets



America's birthday and the day I bought my first car. Driving it from one end of the country to the other and back again has made it feel like home.



The glorious Grand Tetons.



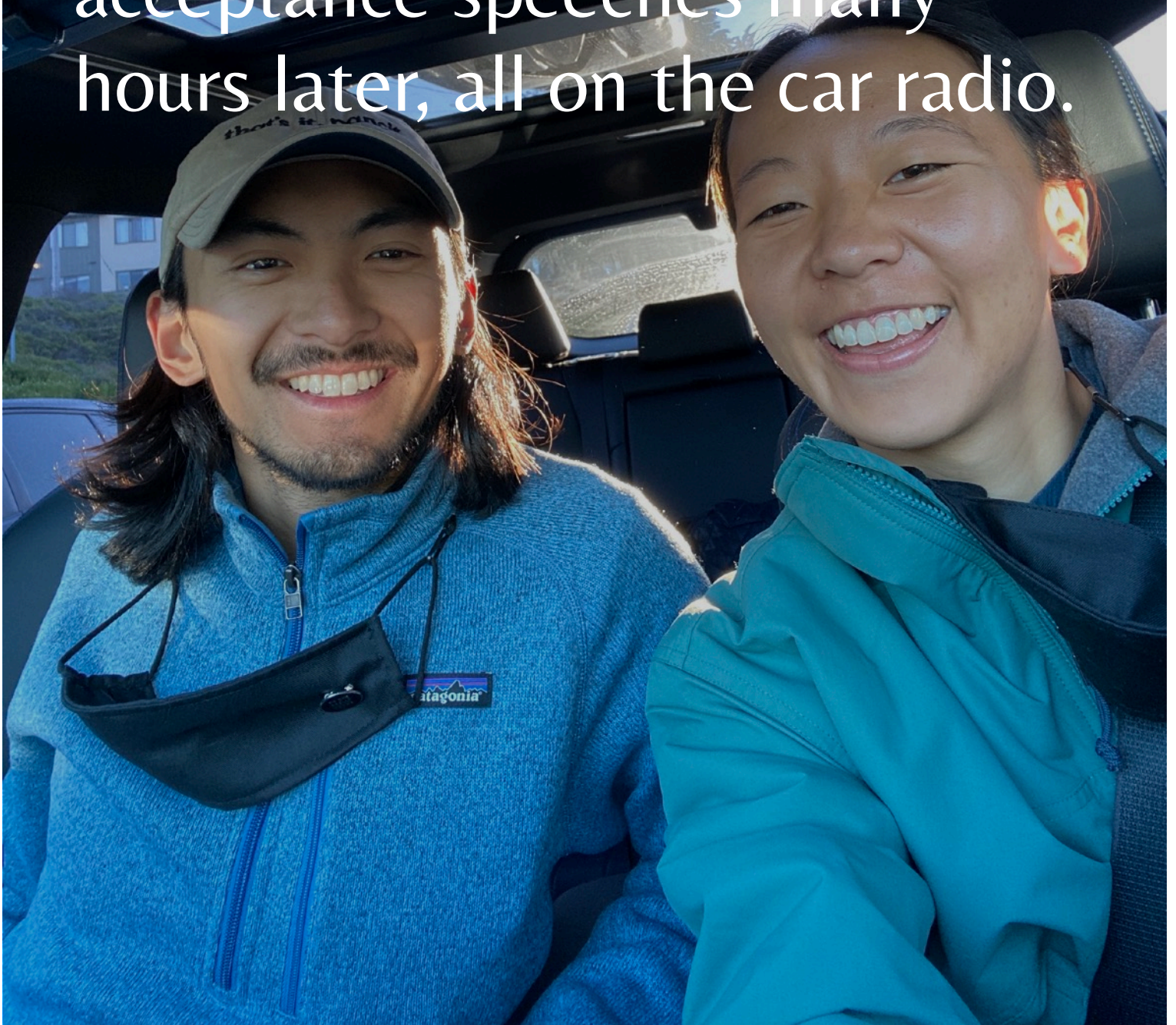


My first fall in New England since 2015. We got lucky and were in Vermont for a week during peak foliage. Getting to experience it on a bike was magical and adventurous in a nostalgic way.



Delectable, accurately-priced \$10 toast; Marfa, TX.

The start of our cross-country drive. We heard the news that Biden won the presidency, and listened to his and Kamala's acceptance speeches many hours later, all on the car radio.



# Life after coffee

It's now been over a year since I started my day with a cup of coffee. At the start of 2020, I went to see a skin care specialist in Berkeley. I've seen dermatologists on and off since high school, and I knew seeing another would lead to just another oral or topical prescription that would do virtually nothing to help my skin in the long run. I decided to do some research to see what else was out there, and came upon this practice that focused on the holistic body.

Part of the session included a deep dive into my nutrition, including energy testing, or asking my body questions to respond to non-verbally. I had just finished reading *Educated*, where I learned about muscle testing and energy work for the first time, so it all felt kind of crazy.

Modern sentiment may dismiss things like energy work as a sham, and it can certainly feel that way when you have to trust a human person and not a longstanding establishment. But I still remember standing in the BART station waiting for the train back home and thinking that despite that, my body felt heard for the first time in a very long time.

During the session, the specialist, Kristina, mentioned that my face and neck were inflamed. I asked how she could tell, and she said in a gentle, objective way that when she put her hand to my skin, it felt warm. (Duh... yikes!) It sounds so simple, because it is. And yet, little moments like this throughout my hour there became a wake-up call to how blatantly I was ignoring the 95% of my body outside of my brain.

That experience turned how I saw myself upside down. I started to notice my body telling me things rather than immediately ignoring it, invalidating it, or writing it off. I noticed how over-indexed I was on listening to the

thoughts and reason in my head, and how few of the messages my body was trying to send me were actually getting through.

During my energy test, the topic of coffee came up. The nutritionist was going through a list of foods to understand what was afflicting my body, and when she said the word “coffee,” I braced myself for what I knew would be a big “yes.” The thought of giving it up for even a day or two brought out a feeling of impossibility in me that I don’t even assign to an extremely difficult hike or bike ride. (In retrospect, that is so bizarre.)

But that day changed my perception of my body and how to take care of myself, and I was emboldened to mark that shift with a quest as bold as giving up coffee cold-turkey. I started the very next day, and after a few days of late-morning grogginess, I saw with stark clarity that for the many years I thought coffee was giving me motivation, energy, and happiness, what it was really giving me was a primer coat of nervous energy and anxiety.

I noticed right away how much more balanced my energy levels were—a leisurely train ride compared to the roller coaster I was on previously. I also really liked that I no longer depended on coffee to make me feel alive every day, and while I have yet to find a line of tea that tastes as interesting and bold as an excellent cup of black coffee, I have no plans to return to coffee despite having overshot the initial guidance to cut it out for seven weeks by almost 8x.

Giving up coffee was certainly about the act itself, but it also marked an important moment of change in my life where I started listening to my body in addition to my head, and learned how to take care of myself by listening rather than thinking.

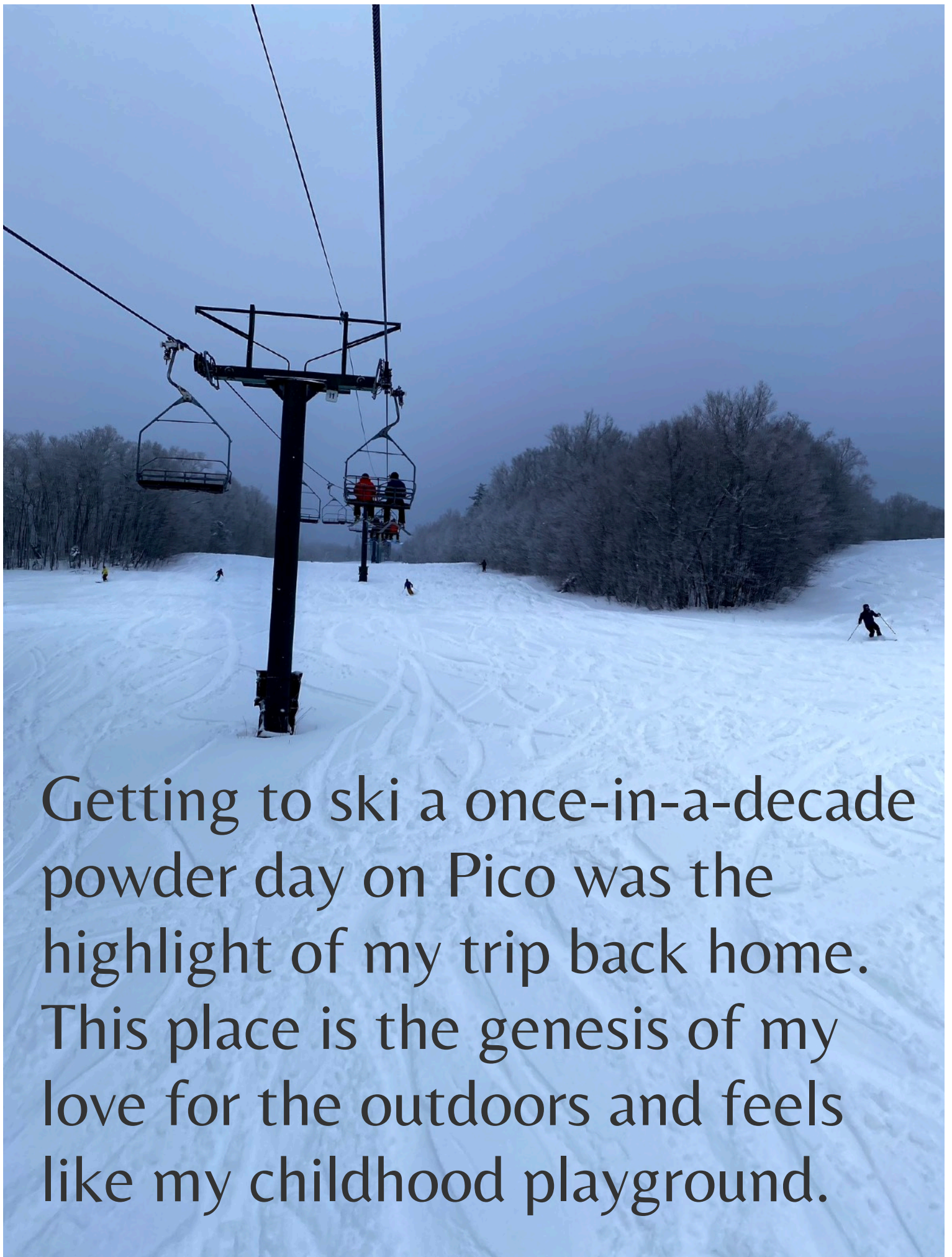
My skin and my mental health have utterly never been better, more stable, or such a source of joy, and I cherish the moment I decided to give in to a life after coffee as the start of it.

I had no idea how much I'd  
enjoy waking up at sunrise  
to drive through prairie land.



Taking my mountain bike home!  
Riding dirt teaches me to let go,  
not sweat the small stuff, and  
trust myself. I hate that it makes  
me uncomfortable, but I love that  
it makes me uncomfortable.





Getting to ski a once-in-a-decade powder day on Pico was the highlight of my trip back home. This place is the genesis of my love for the outdoors and feels like my childhood playground.



# Why stop when you can keep going?

If there's a theme to my growth and experiences in my last year, it is without a doubt: getting out of my own way. It's scary to recognize and vulnerable to accept the things in life that are in your control. I left my previous job because I was deeply unhappy, but more than that, because I had an inkling that *I* was ultimately the reason why. It's so easy and fleetingly fulfilling to blame your stress and circumstances on your boss, the culture of the company you work for, or your partner. Or in a different situation, on your exercise-induced asthma, the air quality, or the constant possibility of having COVID. The former were reasons I thought I was unhappy while I was at my last job, and the latter are the reasons I thought I was slow at riding a bike.

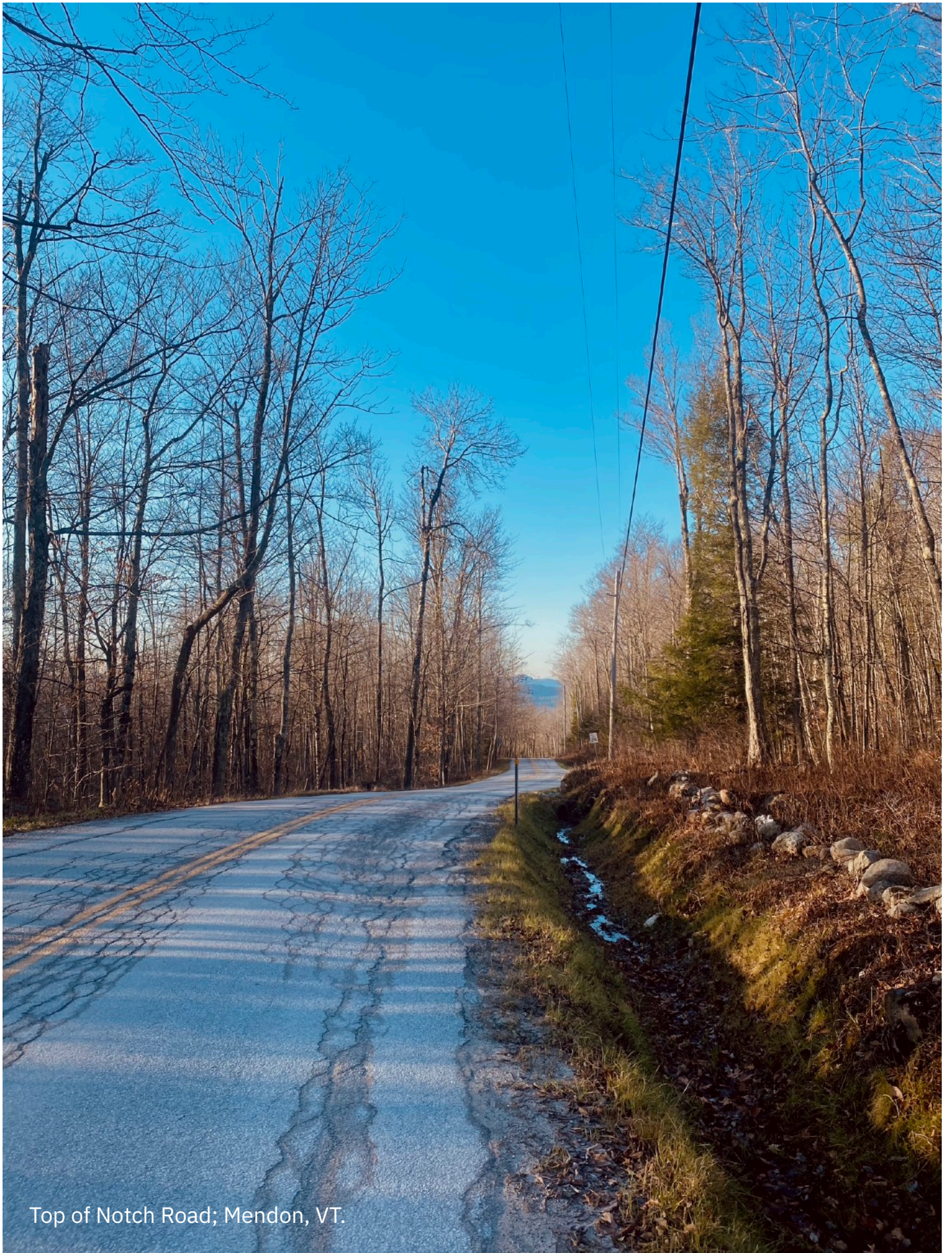
Facing the fact that you can at any time choose to take ownership over your life is scary. I'm too existential for realizations like that to stay buried for long, but I'm grateful because I've learned how satisfying it is to challenge your assumptions and blow your own mind.

There's a quote I saw sometime in the last year that continues to stick with me: "I've never seen any life transformation that didn't begin with the person in question finally getting tired of their own bullshit." It was during the months after leaving my last job that I opened my mind to the reality that I was actually bringing a lot of the bullshit to the table of my unhappiness. One morning many months later, I went on a bike ride that was the final straw.

I was riding with Alec before work in Marin, slogging along and letting

myself get dropped because my muscles were tired. I don't remember exactly what hit me, but suddenly there was a moment when I realized I didn't have to stop pushing myself the moment I felt tired, and I was assuming any type of pain or discomfort was a signal of my limits. I was excusing myself from the discomfort of growing in the name of any and every blame-able circumstance around me. In that moment, I questioned my knee-jerk reaction of stopping myself whenever I reached a moment of discomfort I had never before passed. I started getting real with myself in future, similar moments, asking myself if I was stopping because I was actually at my limits, or because I wanted to excuse myself from the discomfort of improvement and growth. Instead of asking myself when to stop, I started wondering, "what if I kept going?"

Cycling has been a respite for me this year in uncountable ways, and one of the greatest lessons it's taught me is just how wrong we are when we try to estimate what we are capable of. So many rides, runs, and hikes, work conflicts, and new experiences later, I continue to surprise myself daily by what I am capable of.



Top of Notch Road; Mendon, VT.



Quarantine really tested our love for our apartment, SF, and the Presidio. Over four years here and it is still one of my favorite places in the world. The views and the light don't get old, and even just looking at this photo brings me peace.



The most tranquil, “welcome back to the West” sunset; Willcox, AZ.

# Thank you

It feels particularly futile and unimaginative to try to speculate anything about the year to come. Maybe it's having seen so many of the pictures in my head about what certain moments and experiences would be like come crashing down over the past year, but I think more than that, I expect and want what I think and feel now to change many times over in the next year.

So instead of setting goals or making plans, I'll say thank you. Thank you for reading my words, hearing my thoughts, and taking in the snapshots of my 26th year. Thank you for conversing with me, teaching me, inspiring me, spending time with me, riding bikes with me, being in nature with me, experiencing the world with me, laughing with me, eating with me, and seeing me.