



ON THE LEVEL
MAGAZINE

SUMMER 2026

SPACE DREAMS

A vestibular diagnosis changed Noor's path but it did not end her dreams.



PAGES 3-5

VEDA

A QUARTERLY MAGAZINE
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DISORDERS ASSOCIATION

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SPACE DREAMS

Noor Haj-Tamim's Vestibular Journey

When Noor Haj-Tamim talks about her life, her vestibular journey and her passion for space are deeply connected. Long before she understood what was happening in her inner ear, she was already reaching beyond Earth—studying mechanical engineering, working with NASA on technology commercialization, and training as a commercial astronaut candidate.

A LIFELONG DREAM OF SPACE

Noor's path to space started early. As a teenager, she sought out opportunities in science and technology despite facing barriers that limited her access to STEM programs. She eventually earned a space scholarship that allowed her to begin college early at just 16 years old.

Throughout college, she became involved in NASA programs, including NASA L'SPACE and NASA FedTech, where she worked on bringing emerging

technologies into the commercial world.

She also pursued astronaut training through the International Institute for Astronautical Sciences (IIAS). Her persistence paid off, and she became a commercial astronaut candidate.

Space was her dream. But behind the scenes, Noor was experiencing symptoms she could not explain.

YEARS WITHOUT ANSWERS

Noor's first memorable vertigo episode happened around age 13. Because it lasted only a few minutes, people around her assumed it was anxiety.

A few years later, she experienced another intense episode and noticed unusual eye movements. Hoping doctors would understand, she recorded her eye movements on her phone. Still, she was dismissed.



Over time, her symptoms became more severe. At 18, she experienced a drop attack in class—falling to the floor while fully aware but unable to control her body. Not only was she experiencing spinning vertigo; she experienced a terrifying loss of balance and connection to her surroundings.

This led to emergency room visits and specialist appointments, but Noor struggled to find answers. Eventually, after years of being told her symptoms were anxiety, she stopped seeking help.

ONE ATTACK THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING

While building her career in space and engineering, Noor began studying the vestibular system as part of her coursework in space medicine. As she read more about balance disorders, she started recognizing her own experiences in the descriptions of vestibular conditions.

Still, she found it hard to believe. She was young, high-achieving, and preparing for a career in space. A chronic vestibular disorder did not fit the way she saw herself.

Then came the episode that changed everything.

One day, while working as an engineer, Noor became extremely exhausted and disoriented. When she looked at her car, it appeared tilted. Turning her head



triggered intense spinning vertigo. The vertigo became so severe she had to crawl rather than walk. She was terrified.

It was this episode that finally led to the diagnosis: Ménière's Disease.

After years of having her symptoms dismissed, the diagnosis was validating—but it was also frightening. She worried that her dream of spaceflight might be over.

FINDING COMMUNITY

After her diagnosis, Noor felt isolated and uncertain about her future. She turned to online communities and eventually discovered VeDA's support groups.

What she found was different from anything she had experienced before. Instead of simply reading about symptoms, she found people sharing their stories—their fears, adaptations,

struggles, and victories.

Hearing from others with vestibular disorders helped Noor realize she was not alone. She saw how deeply these conditions can affect people's careers, independence, and daily lives. She also saw the urgent need for better awareness, support, and treatments.

Through VeDA, Noor no longer felt like an outlier with a misunderstood condition. She became part of a larger community of patients, clinicians, and advocates working toward a future with better understanding and better solutions.

TURNING EXPERIENCE INTO INNOVATION

Even before her diagnosis, Noor had been exploring ways to help people experiencing motion sickness in extreme environments like space. That work led to Avionova, a technology designed to gently cool the inner ear through a wearable earbud.

Originally created with astronauts in mind, the concept took on new meaning after Noor became a vestibular patient herself. She began adapting the technology to address conditions such as Ménière's Disease, Vestibular Neuritis, and Vestibular Migraine.

Working with Ohio State University, Noor's team developed a medical device prototype designed to help reduce

symptoms during vestibular episodes.

Her work became a powerful intersection of her two worlds: the engineer searching for solutions and the patient who understands the need firsthand.

A JOURNEY STILL IN MOTION

Today, Noor continues to navigate life with Ménière's disease while pursuing her goals as an engineer, entrepreneur, astronaut candidate, and advocate. Her journey has taken her from unexplained symptoms and medical dismissal to diagnosis, innovation, and connection.



A vestibular diagnosis changed Noor's path—but it did not end her dreams. Instead, it gave her a new mission: using science, technology, and her own experience to help create a better future for others living with vestibular disorders.

VISUAL VERTIGO IN VESTIBULAR MIGRAINE

Research Summary

VISUAL VERTIGO

Dizziness or
discomfort triggered
by movement or
complex visual
scenes.

This new study by researchers at the University of California, San Francisco, takes a closer look at visual vertigo in people with Vestibular Migraine (VM).

Many people with VM say that everyday environments like grocery stores, crowded sidewalks, scrolling on a computer screen, or action-packed movies can provoke symptoms.

This study set out to measure that response in a controlled, repeatable way and compare it with responses from people without vestibular conditions.

HOW THE STUDY WORKED

The research team recruited 17 people with vestibular migraine and 19 healthy control participants. While lying inside an MRI scanner, each participant watched 20 short video clips, each 30 seconds long. These videos featured a wide range of visual motion—from calm, low-motion scenes like snorkeling, to fast visually intense scenes such as biking through city traffic or skydiving. After each clip, participants reported whether they experienced dizziness, headache, nausea, or fogginess, and rated the intensity of each symptom.

The researchers then created a composite score by summing symptom severity across all videos. They also compared these responses to well-known assessments used in dizziness and migraine research, such as the Dizziness Handicap Inventory (DHI) and the Visual Vertigo Analogue Scale (VVAS).

WHAT THEY FOUND

- **People with vestibular migraine experienced symptoms during the videos much more often**, reporting visual vertigo in 71.9% of all responses compared to 13.7% in healthy controls.
- Their composite symptom scores were nearly twice as high as those of the control group.
- **Dizziness was the most common response** in the VM group, followed by headache and nausea.
- Some videos, particularly those with very fast or complex movement, triggered symptoms in almost all VM participants. For example, the “Skydiving over Mont Blanc” and “Mountain Biking in the Woods” clips provoked symptoms in over 88-94%



of those with VM.

- Importantly, higher symptom scores strongly correlated with other measures of VM severity and disability. Among all scales tested, the Visual Vertigo Analogue Scale aligned most closely with video-provoked symptoms, reinforcing its ability to capture aspects of visual sensitivity highly relevant to VM.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Visual vertigo is a major challenge for people with vestibular migraine, affecting daily activities, confidence, and quality of life. Yet **clinicians have lacked a standardized, objective way to measure how visual motion triggers symptoms.** This study shows that:

- Short, motion-rich videos can reliably provoke symptoms in VM patients.
- These responses reflect real-world challenges patients face.
- Video-based testing could become a valuable tool for diagnosing VM, tracking progress, or tailoring vestibular rehabilitation—especially programs that focus on visual desensitization.

LOOKING AHEAD

While the study had a small sample size and was conducted in the unique environment of an MRI scanner, its findings provide strong support for developing visual-motion-based assessments in vestibular migraine. Future research may help determine the smallest, most effective set of videos needed and how these tools could be used in clinics or telehealth settings.

As understanding of vestibular migraine grows, so does the potential for more personalized and effective treatment strategies—and this study offers a significant step forward.

SOURCE

Authors: Alexandra T. Bourdillon MD1, Jason W. Allen MD PhD2, Jeremy L. Smith PhD3, Vishwadeep Ahluwalia PhD4, Russell K. Gore MD5, Jeffrey D. Sharon MD1

See full source info at [VESTIBULAR.ORG/VISUAL-VERTIGO-RESEARCH](https://vestibular.org/visual-vertigo-research)

YOUR DONATION IN ACTION

This study received the VeDA/American Neurology Society Travel Award. Funded in part by VeDA donors like you, this grant helps vestibular researchers educate other healthcare professionals on important findings like these so patients can receive better care. You can continue supporting research and all of VeDA's work at [VESTIBULAR.ORG/OTLDONATE](https://vestibular.org/OTLDONATE)

It's almost time to...

MAKE VESTIBULAR VISIBLE

BALANCE AWARENESS WEEK: SEPT 13-19

Vestibular disorders may be invisible, but their impact is impossible to ignore. Every day, millions of people live with dizziness, vertigo, imbalance, and other symptoms that others can't see.

That's why VeDA's flock comes together each year for **Balance Awareness Week (BAW)**. This annual campaign shines a spotlight on vestibular disorders, helps people get diagnosed sooner, raises awareness, and supports better care and research. Because no one should have to lose their balance, or feel invisible.

HELP US SPREAD OUR WINGS

Every voice makes a difference! Here's how you can help:

- Share your story
- Enter the Fiona Flamingo Photo Contest
- Post using **#BalanceAwarenessWeek**
- Wear awareness gear at **VESTIBULAR.ORG/MERCH**

JOIN FIONA'S FUNDRAISING FLOCK

Join Fiona's Fundraising Flock and help people with vestibular disorders feel seen, supported, and understood. You'll receive:

- A personal fundraising page to share your story
- Easy tools to spread awareness and raise support
- A chance to join a flock of advocates making a worldwide impact

Ready to flock together for change? Sign up at **VESTIBULAR.ORG/BAW**.



**BALANCE
AWARENESS
WEEK**
SEPT 13-19, 2026



CHERYL PHILLIPS AND SUPPORT DOG, CASSIDY



KMS BALANCE & DIZZINESS REHABILITATION

FIONA FLAMINGO PHOTO CONTEST

Flamingos are famous for balancing on one leg, making Fiona the perfect mascot for Balance Awareness Week!

Each year, VeDA hosts the Fiona Flamingo Photo Contest. Visit **VESTIBULAR.ORG/FLAMINGO** to download a printable Fiona, then share your photo on social media using **#BalanceAwarenessWeek** and tagging VeDA, or email it to **FLAMINGO@VESTIBULAR.ORG**.

Last year, our community shared amazing photos. Here are the three winners!

GERMANTOWN BALANCE AND VESTIBULAR THERAPY



FINDING MY PLACE AND MAKING A DIFFERENCE

By Samantha

When my doctor first told me about VeDA, my world was a blur of Vestibular Migraine, PPPD, and recurrent BPPV. At the time, volunteering felt like a mountain I simply couldn't climb. However, after seeing VeDA Ambassadors posting online, I reached out to learn more.

GETTING INVOLVED

Since my health only allowed for small tasks, I started volunteering by reposting VeDA's information on social media. It was a tiny ripple, but it was my mark when I didn't think I had much to offer.

Eventually, I began attending VeDA's virtual support groups. There, I found something I hadn't felt in a very long time: a community of people who truly "got it." I spent months soaking in the comfort of being around others who understood the invisible burden of a balance disorder. Seeing those leaders in action planted a seed that I might one day be able to do the same for others.

As I gradually adapted to a new baseline by becoming more "stable being unstable," I accepted a volunteer role on a committee, but quickly realized the set meeting times were more than

my fluctuating health could handle. I was heartbroken and terrified that I had let people down. But the team at VeDA handled it with so much grace. They assured me that I had not failed; we just needed to find a better fit.

Months later, I partnered with a friend to co-host a support group. Taking on that shared role, even with lingering symptoms, showed me firsthand how much peer-to-peer connections complement medical treatment. While my doctors provided the essential clinical care, the people in those virtual rooms provided the shared validation that kept me from feeling isolated. I'm glad I didn't let my bad days stop me from giving to others, because I got far more in return.

If you want to volunteer but worry about your unpredictable symptoms, please know this: VeDA provided a safe space for me to find my footing again, and they can be that for you too.

Some volunteers find calm in organizing, while others have a natural gift for making an isolated soul feel seen. Once I stopped chasing what I thought a "perfect volunteer" should look like and instead leaned into my everyday skills, I actually ended up being able to give more—while still giving myself permission to rest or reset as needed.

RAISING FUNDS

Alongside my volunteering in peer support and advocacy, I have also



dedicated myself to fundraising for VeDA. I share this project as a way to show how it is possible to take the very elements of our hardships and creatively turn them into something meaningful.

For me, this took the form of partnering with the mothers in The Dizzy Moms Club, a VeDA Support Group, to turn a fresh haircut into a fundraising event. Collectively, we raised \$1,133.32 USD and I was able to donate 12 inches of hair to a Canadian children's wig charity.

To an outsider, this was just a haircut. But to me, it was a profound way to rewrite a tough memory.

MORE THAN JUST A HAIRCUT

A few years ago, when my world was spinning out of control, caring for my long hair became impossible. I was forced to cut it short and was completely devastated. Fast forward to this fundraiser for Steps-2-Balance in May 2026, and it brought immense healing to watch that difficult memory transform



into something full of purpose.

That is the beauty of fundraising here—it offers an opportunity to rewrite our stories. There is no single blueprint to follow; your approach can be as unique as your own lived experience. Whether you choose to give financially, through your time, or your own original ideas, these ripples keep the vital supports of VeDA alive, helping move people away from isolation and toward a community that truly understands.

Looking back on the past few years, volunteering with VeDA has shown me that my challenges aren't just a painful chapter, they are a contribution. By stepping forward exactly as I am, I never have to walk this path alone. If you are looking for a place to share your own unique gifts, I invite you to come alongside me on this path, precisely as you are today, and at whatever pace works best for you.

Learn more and get started with VeDA at [VESTIBULAR.ORG/VOLUNTEER](https://vestibular.org/volunteer)

REBUILDING A SENSE OF PURPOSE AFTER MEDICAL RETIREMENT

By Karen R Mizrach

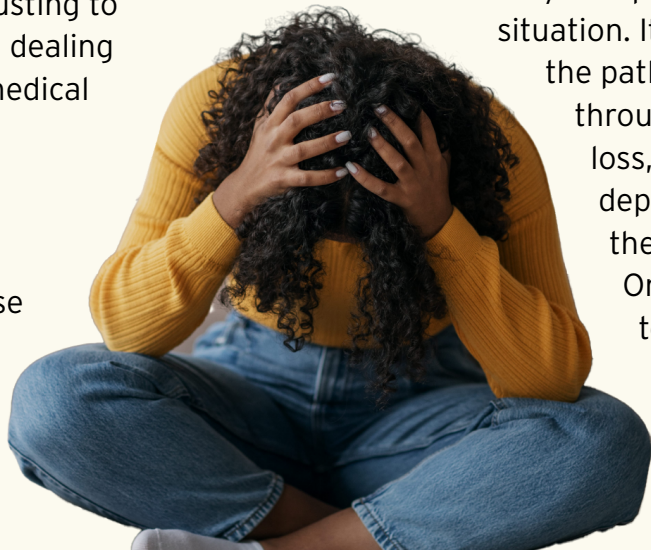
SUDDEN RETIREMENT

“I felt an immense loss—loss of daily interaction with colleagues, feeling guilty that I was sitting at home, it was all very real.

- Paul Burnside, vestibular warrior”

It’s like a kick to the stomach to have to leave one’s job or career earlier than wanted. Over our lives we often have to step back, regroup and reset for different reasons. We know life is not a straight path forward. It wobbles around (no pun) and can dump us into unplanned territory. Yet when we have to leave a loved or needed job for medical reasons, we have the double duty of adjusting to that loss as well as dealing with our difficult medical symptoms.

The journey of adjusting and rebuilding our sense of purpose is a challenging, but doable process.



GRIEVING

“We must accept that the grief, loss (of identity, money, relationships, etc), guilt and fear are real and important stages of adjusting to sudden retirement.

- Mary Ziegler, vestibular warrior”

Many of us had a vague sense of what our retirement years would be like. We imagined working well into our 60s or 70s, before announcing our exit, to the celebration and well wishes of colleagues and family. It should be a joyous time as we enter a more relaxed and less scheduled time of life. But sometimes retirement comes early, suddenly, and unwanted. And we are unable to experience the adventures and joys this time of life usually offers.

As with any abrupt life change, we go through a series of emotions and phases trying to cope with the trauma. Mary Ziegler explains that in order to move on and build a new kind of life we have to go through these phases to finally accept the reality of our situation. It is not easy, but it is the path to rebuilding. We go through anger, denial, fear, loss, sadness and often depression, much like the response to a death. Once we emerge, ready to rethink our future options, then it is time to plan and embrace the next steps.

LETTING GO

“When you are forced to make a change, take control and think about what you want that change to do for you. Your life may have changed forever, but that doesn’t mean you can’t continue to live a happy, productive, busy life.”

- Paul Burnside”

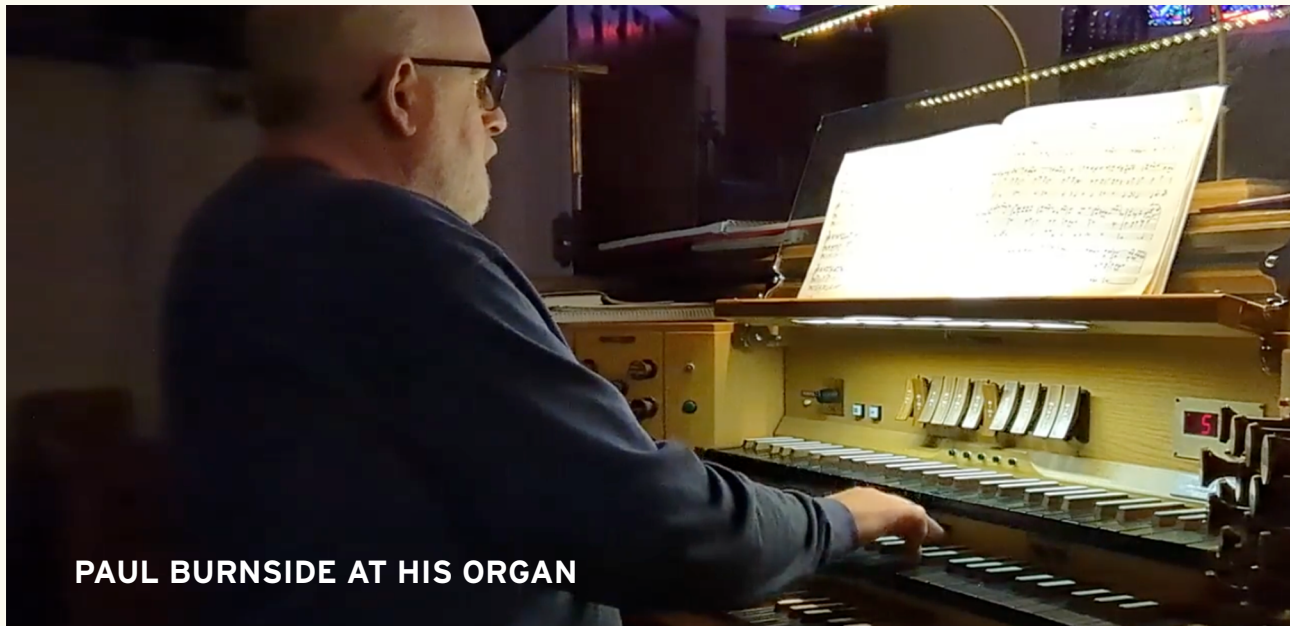
One of the first steps toward rebuilding is letting go of prior plans and goals. You may find a version of those plans that fits with your new reality, but usually the old dream needs to be ditched. Start with a blank slate so you can reevaluate and redefine who you will become. Don’t forget who you’ve been and what you’ve done in your life, but allow for the possibility that there can be new, different ways to move ahead.

REBUILDING A MEANINGFUL LIFE - Thoughts from Tracey Franklin:

Tracey Franklin, a Vestibular Warrior and VeDA member, worked in publishing for over 30 years and was in shock when that suddenly came to an end. Since then, she has developed strategies to rebuild her life and lifestyle. These are her suggestions:

- 1. Consider what you loved about your past identity and job.** Find ways to insert those skills and interests into your new life. It may look different and be on a smaller scale, but it can provide that same sense of accomplishment. Tracey channeled her love for writing, her commitment to her faith, and her need for connection into new activities.
- 2. Pace yourself and identify a focus for each day.** Tracey might decide one day is for writing and another for home administrative tasks. Maybe another day will be for connecting with fellow vesties in a support group, and she’ll also find a day to simply care for herself. The trick is to keep it manageable and yet enjoyable.
- 3. Make connections with people in a similar situation.** This way, you find support, give support, and learn new strategies. Tracey attends a VeDA Support Group for the last few years and considers the group members important people in her life.
- 4. Consider mental health counseling.** The opportunity to get feedback, learn to cope, and accept your new situation is important. Tracey found that accepting life as a chronically ill person, learning to pace herself, and reframe her situation in a more positive light was an enormous help.
- 5. Use a calendar to keep track of your days and activities.** It’s a visual aid to help you pace yourself and see your accomplishments. Even though you’re not working, you can keep your life organized and maintain a sense of involvement in the world.

Tracey says, “I can’t do what I used to do and get paid, but I can still use my skills in another capacity. If you can’t have ‘A,’ you can have something similar to ‘A.’”



PAUL BURNSIDE AT HIS ORGAN

THE UPSHOT

Do you see recurring themes in our vestibular experiences?

Healing is hard, but possible. There is bad news, and also good news. There is no magic bullet, but there is some magic to be had. Acceptance, resetting, rewiring, and moving. Moving the body, but also moving forward. In other words, vestibular disorders are a roller coaster ride.

After having to leave a job that gave you purpose and identity, there is hope. You can find a new purpose. You can reinvent yourself. You say goodbye to one way and search for the next.

GET THE SUPPORT YOU NEED

If you've had to retire early from your job due to your vestibular condition, consider participating in the VeDA Medically Retired Support Group.

[VESTIBULAR.ORG/SUPPORT](https://vestibular.org/support) ■

“As I needed to keep busy, I taught myself to play the organ and piano again, using different skill sets, relying more on innate ability, memory, and intense (and fatiguing) concentration.”
- Paul Burnside

HONORING THE IMPACT OF
BALANCE BENEFACTORS

MS. GAIL WALLER

MS. AMY LOUIS

MS. MARGARET STACK

Like the generous supporters listed above, you can help people who are in crisis because of dizziness, vertigo, and imbalance get an accurate diagnosis and effective treatment and save them from their spinning nightmare.

Visit [VESTIBULAR.ORG/OTLDONATE](https://vestibular.org/otldonate) to make a difference today.
Your gift matters!

LEAVE YOUR
Legacy IN BALANCE

Create hope for future generations living with vestibular disorders.



WHAT IS LEGACY GIVING?

A legacy gift (also called a planned gift) is a way to support VeDA through your estate plan. It allows you to make a lasting impact, often without affecting your finances today.

WHY IT MATTERS

Vestibular disorders are often invisible, misunderstood, and life-changing. Your legacy can help ensure that future patients have:

- Earlier diagnosis
- Trusted education
- Better-trained healthcare providers
- Support during their journey
- Hope through research

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE WEALTHY

Many people think planned giving is only for millionaires.

The truth:

- Gifts of any size matter.
- You can still provide for loved ones first.
- A simple percentage of your estate can create lasting change.

JOIN THOSE WHO BELIEVE BALANCE MATTERS

By remembering VeDA in your estate plans, you can help ensure no one has to face vestibular disorders alone.

Learn more and pledge your legacy gift at [VESTIBULAR.ORG/LEGACY](https://vestibular.org/legacy)



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**POETRY 4
BALANCE**
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THE UNSTEADY LOOP

By Samantha H.

The concussion was a mountain I learned
how to climb,
Regaining my language, one word at a time.
I fought for my footing, how to read,
how to write,
To process the world and move towards light.

But then came the thunder, strikes two and
strikes three,
New shadows of impact that took hold of me.
The weight of the migraine, a crushing
head pain,
Slowly began shifting inside of my brain.

Hope disappeared in a shadow of gray,
When the stillness of healing just drifted away.
The attacks became movement, a tilt,
and a sway,
The room couldn't settle by the end
of the day.

It planted a seed that I didn't invite—
A fear with deep roots when the spin hits
its height.
It grows uncontrollably, ruthless and fast,
Choking the progress I thought meant to last.

The BPPV triggers, the PPPD stays,
Leaving me lost in a vestibular haze.
I am caught in this loop, in the stuck,
in the spin,
Searching for stillness - I'm told it's within?

It is a lonely dark cycle, a life on delay,
While my body refuses to join in the day.
The floor doesn't settle, the haze
doesn't thin—
Now I'm left waiting for the solid to win.

And as I wait here, I reach through the gray,
Trusting this loop finds its ending one day.