

# ARCHAEOLOGY

and the

**BODY:**

A ZINE  
FOR WORKERS



This zine is for all archaeologists with a body.

In 2025, for the Williamsburg, VA meeting of the Theoretical Archaeology Group North America, we put out a call to all archaeologists asking for their scraps, their bits, their memories, their testimonies to the experience of archaeological labor on their skin and bones.

We received dozens of contributions from all around the world, from archaeologists and former archaeologists ready to speak, snapshot, and sing about their bodies in this field.

We then gathered at tables on the campus of the College of William and Mary and found the meeting points of these words and images, connecting these experiences together and finding solidarity in sunburns and spinal injuries, as well as in our shared strength.

Our goal was to create something collaborative, creative, and multisensory that could explore the impacts that participating in archaeological work has had on the body, and the ways that negotiating bodily functions affects archaeological labor.

There is so much more to challenge and to celebrate about the relationship between archaeological labor and the body. It is our hope that this project generates more: more questions, more storytelling, more documentation, more conference sessions, more articles, more zines, and most importantly, more action.

-Allison Mickel & Travis Corwin  
2025

# How it STARTED 1991



PUSH

PAUSE  
OUCH!

SOFT

KNEEL

BEND

LIFT

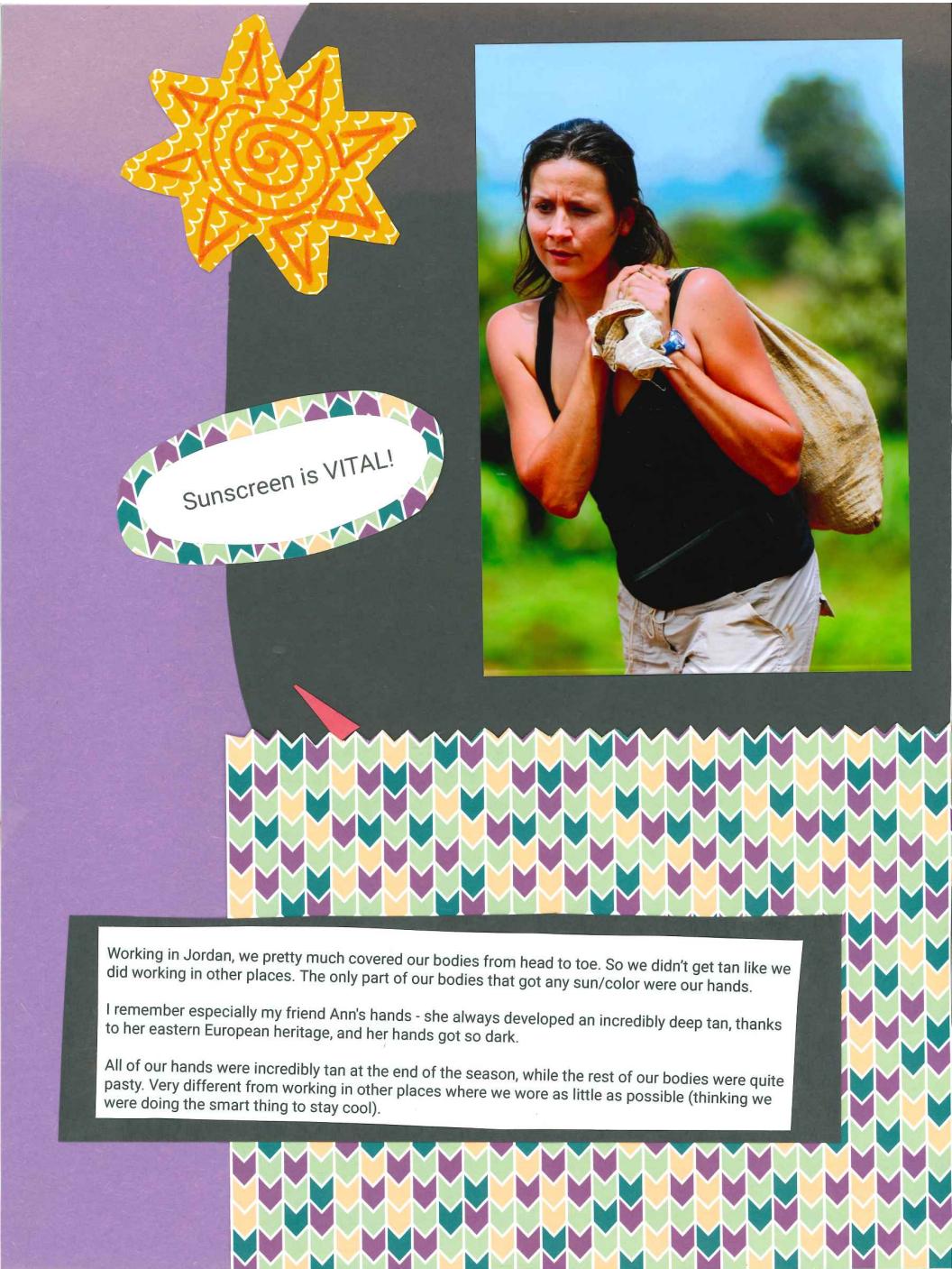
KRYSTA RYZEWSKI

# How I WOUND UP...

2025



... "but don't worry, you will feel relief when the disc is gone & L5 + S1 FUSE!" - Dr.





My Body is an Archive

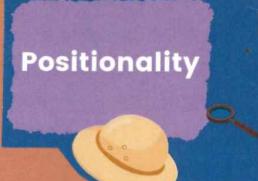
by Elizabeth Hoag

I carry an archive of more than 30 years of fieldwork on my body.

What could or would I have done differently?

Cuts and scrapes  
Sore muscles  
Blisters  
Tick bites

Mosquito bites  
Bee stings  
Poison ivy  
Salmonella



What lurks beneath my skin from the physical work of archaeology?

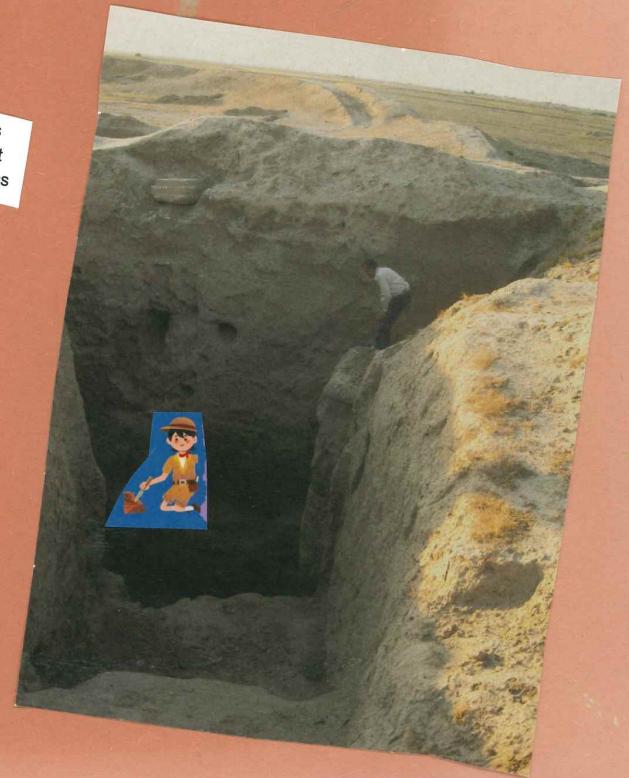
What are the ramifications of the bodily archive of my labor?

In what other ways did I put my body at risk, knowingly or not?

Sunburns  
A twisted Ankle  
Chemicals and toxins

What unknown exposure or past injury might affect my future?

Arthritis in my fingers  
Tendonitis in my wrist  
Herniated lumbar discs

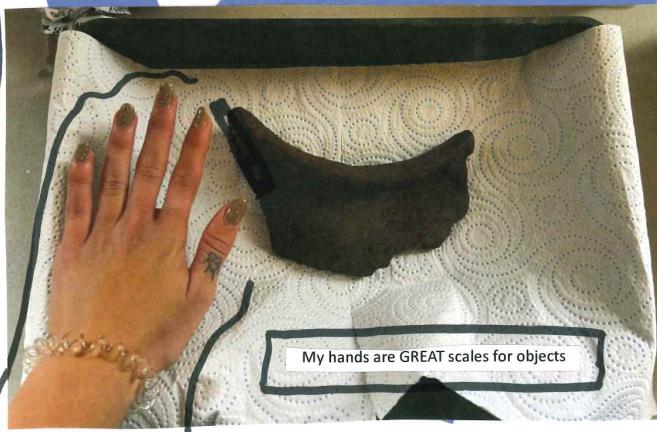






# MY HANDS

- STRONG
- TIAN
- ACHING
- HELPING
- CALLUSED
- NIMBLE

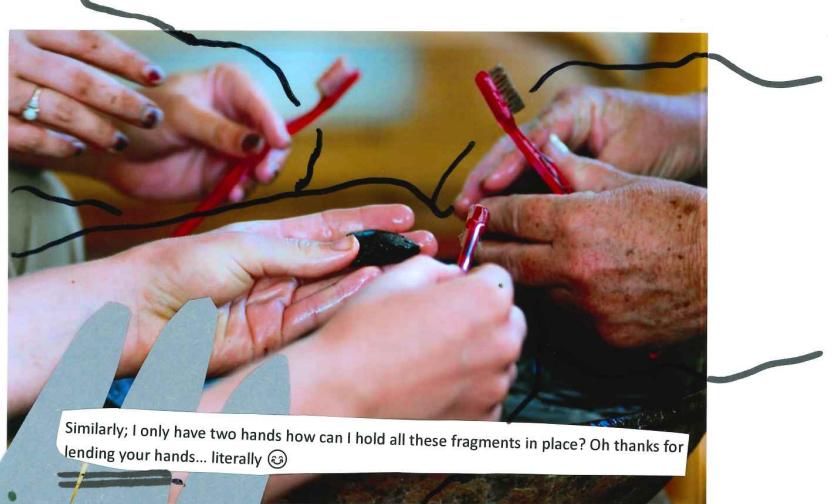


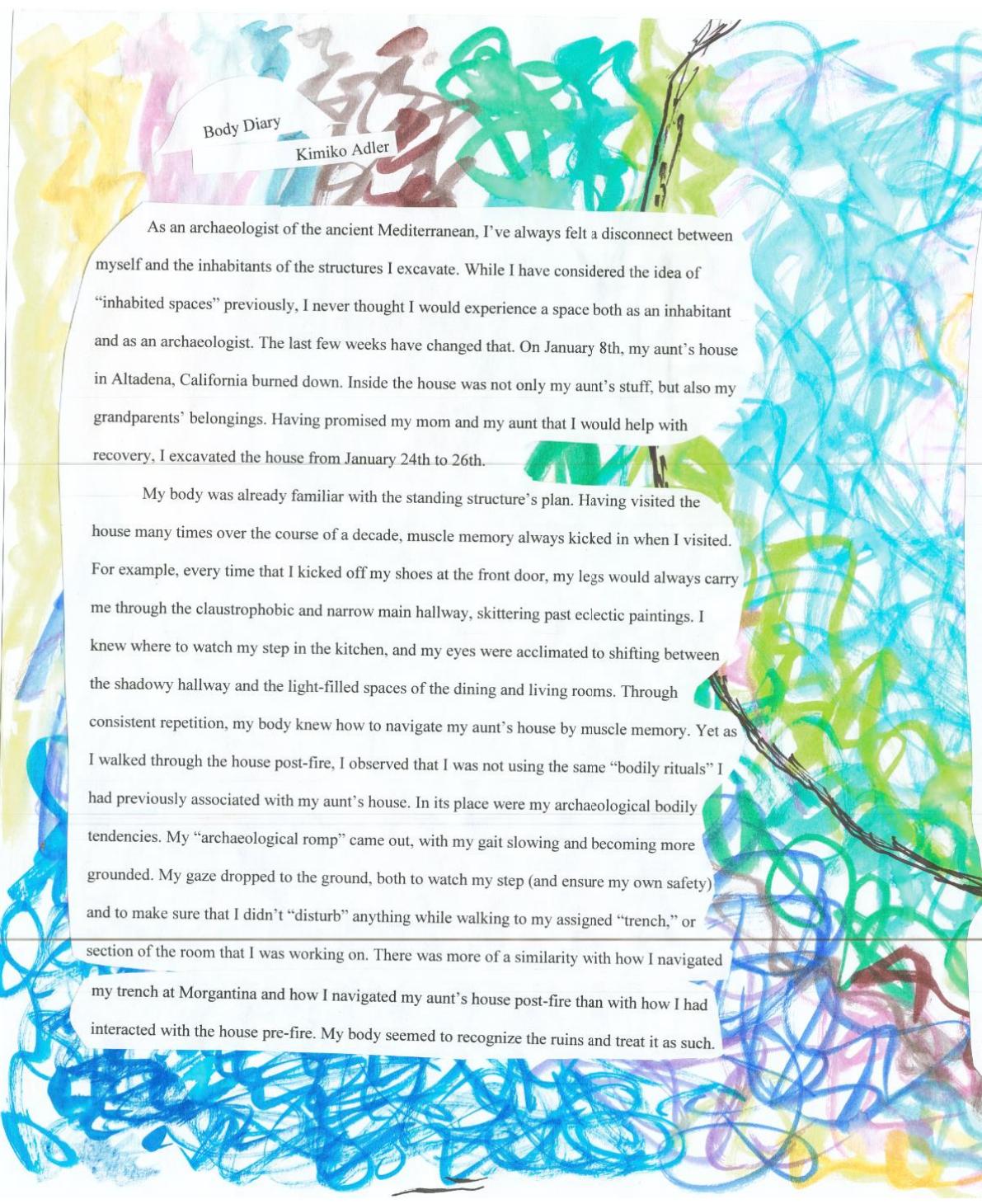
my friend Ann's hands

Working in Jordan, we pretty much covered our bodies from head to toe. So we didn't get tan like we did working in other places. The only part of our bodies that got any sun/color were our hands.

I remember especially my friend Ann's hands - she always developed an incredibly deep tan, thanks to her eastern European heritage, and her hands got so dark.

All of our hands were incredibly tan at the end of the season, while the rest of our bodies were quite pasty. Very different from working in other places where we wore as little as possible (thinking we were doing the smart thing to stay cool).

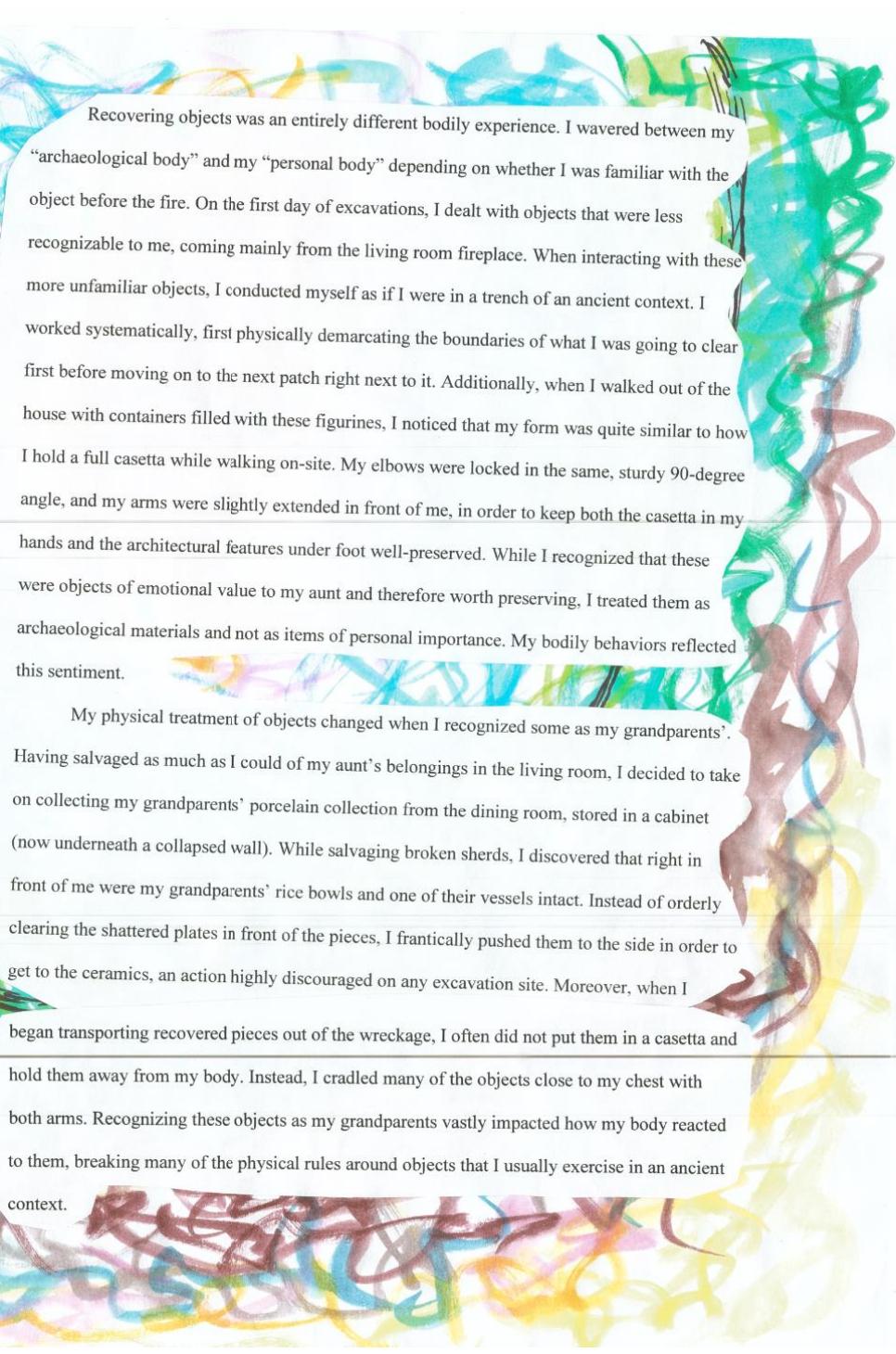




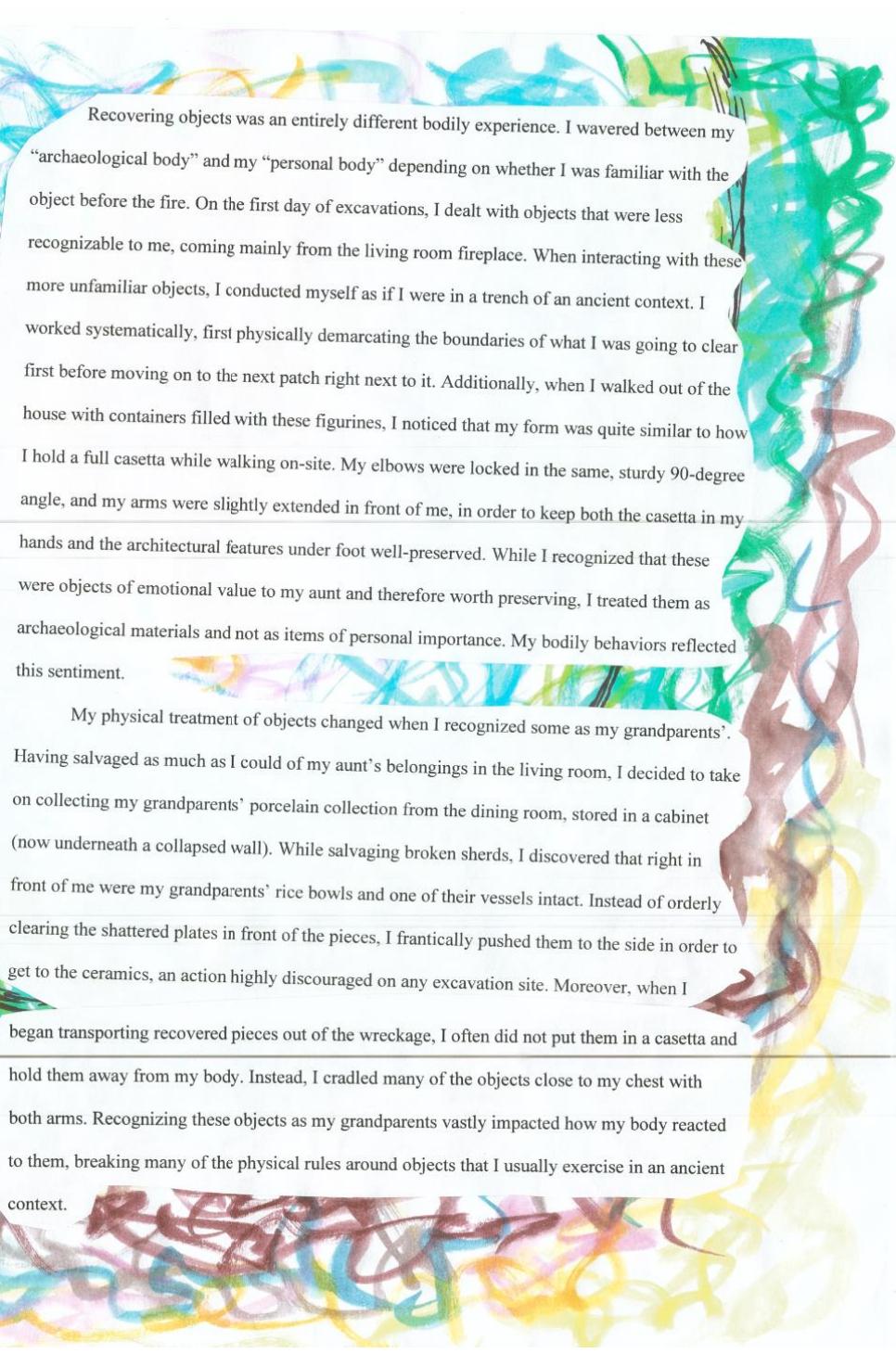
## Body Diary Kimiko Adler

As an archaeologist of the ancient Mediterranean, I've always felt a disconnect between myself and the inhabitants of the structures I excavate. While I have considered the idea of "inhabited spaces" previously, I never thought I would experience a space both as an inhabitant and as an archaeologist. The last few weeks have changed that. On January 8th, my aunt's house in Altadena, California burned down. Inside the house was not only my aunt's stuff, but also my grandparents' belongings. Having promised my mom and my aunt that I would help with recovery, I excavated the house from January 24th to 26th.

My body was already familiar with the standing structure's plan. Having visited the house many times over the course of a decade, muscle memory always kicked in when I visited. For example, every time that I kicked off my shoes at the front door, my legs would always carry me through the claustrophobic and narrow main hallway, skittering past eclectic paintings. I knew where to watch my step in the kitchen, and my eyes were acclimated to shifting between the shadowy hallway and the light-filled spaces of the dining and living rooms. Through consistent repetition, my body knew how to navigate my aunt's house by muscle memory. Yet as I walked through the house post-fire, I observed that I was not using the same "bodily rituals" I had previously associated with my aunt's house. In its place were my archaeological bodily tendencies. My "archaeological romp" came out, with my gait slowing and becoming more grounded. My gaze dropped to the ground, both to watch my step (and ensure my own safety) and to make sure that I didn't "disturb" anything while walking to my assigned "trench," or section of the room that I was working on. There was more of a similarity with how I navigated my trench at Morgantina and how I navigated my aunt's house post-fire than with how I had interacted with the house pre-fire. My body seemed to recognize the ruins and treat it as such.



Recovering objects was an entirely different bodily experience. I wavered between my "archaeological body" and my "personal body" depending on whether I was familiar with the object before the fire. On the first day of excavations, I dealt with objects that were less recognizable to me, coming mainly from the living room fireplace. When interacting with these more unfamiliar objects, I conducted myself as if I were in a trench of an ancient context. I worked systematically, first physically demarcating the boundaries of what I was going to clear first before moving on to the next patch right next to it. Additionally, when I walked out of the house with containers filled with these figurines, I noticed that my form was quite similar to how I hold a full cassetta while walking on-site. My elbows were locked in the same, sturdy 90-degree angle, and my arms were slightly extended in front of me, in order to keep both the cassetta in my hands and the architectural features under foot well-preserved. While I recognized that these were objects of emotional value to my aunt and therefore worth preserving, I treated them as archaeological materials and not as items of personal importance. My bodily behaviors reflected this sentiment.



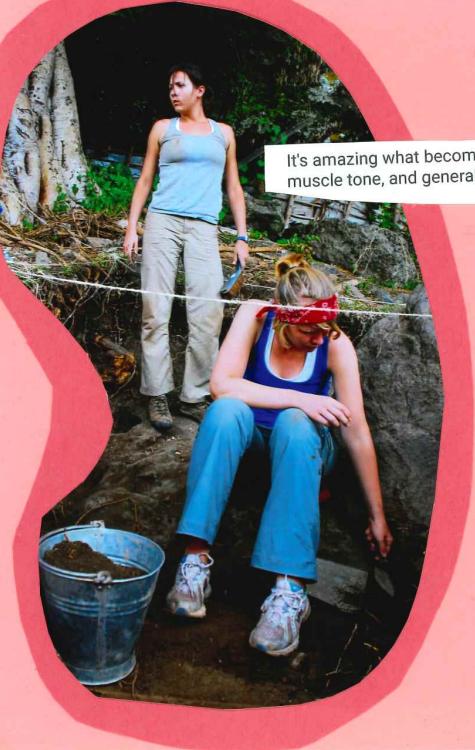
My physical treatment of objects changed when I recognized some as my grandparents'. Having salvaged as much as I could of my aunt's belongings in the living room, I decided to take on collecting my grandparents' porcelain collection from the dining room, stored in a cabinet (now underneath a collapsed wall). While salvaging broken sherds, I discovered that right in front of me were my grandparents' rice bowls and one of their vessels intact. Instead of orderly clearing the shattered plates in front of the pieces, I frantically pushed them to the side in order to get to the ceramics, an action highly discouraged on any excavation site. Moreover, when I began transporting recovered pieces out of the wreckage, I often did not put them in a cassetta and hold them away from my body. Instead, I cradled many of the objects close to my chest with both arms. Recognizing these objects as my grandparents vastly impacted how my body reacted to them, breaking many of the physical rules around objects that I usually exercise in an ancient context.

### We Use the Big Pick

When I excavated at Mycenae many years ago, I was one of a number of smaller women who didn't necessarily pride ourselves on our big muscles or massive strength. We had been trained to carefully reveal a whole pot, or detect subtle changes in soil layers while searching for a structure's floor. That's what we were good at.

But as the season went on, and we saw the workmen wielding "the Big Pick" (instead of the smaller picks meant for more delicate work) quite effectively, we began to gravitate towards these larger tools. And we got stronger, more powerful, and more confident. Our arms, shoulders, and backs were more and more able to bear the weight of the larger, much heavier pick. It was like working out in a lovely outdoor gym nearly every day for a couple months.

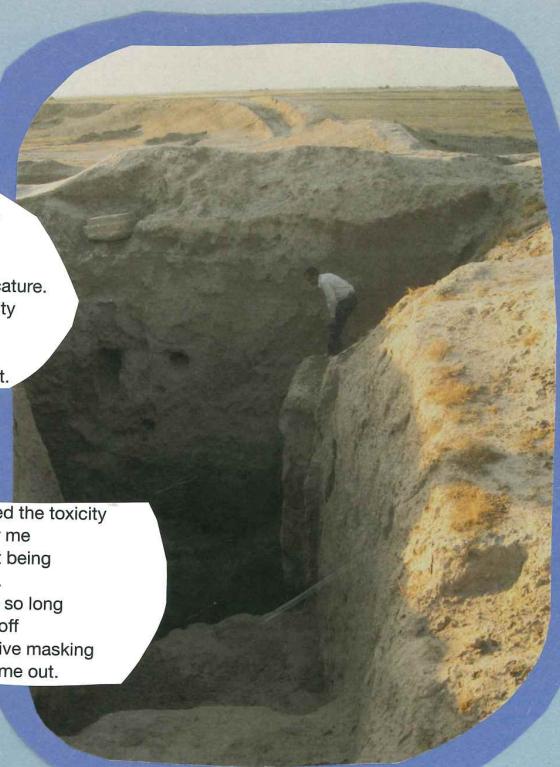
By the end of the summer, after many hot days of practice, we could heft and excavate with that big pick quite adeptly and precisely. Hoisting it up on our shoulders made us feel - for lack of a better term - badass. It became our motto, in a sense: "We use the Big Pick." It was a statement about what we could do, how good we were, and how much more capable we'd become.



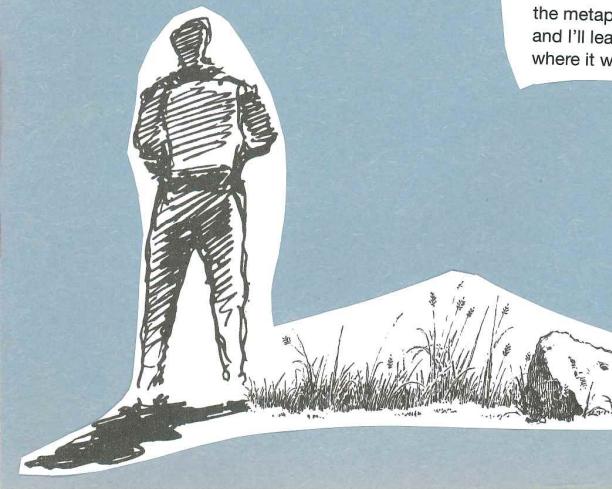
It's amazing what becoming proficient with a simple tool can do for a person's attitude, stance, muscle tone, and general outlook on life.

### Keeping up with the Jones's

I just want to feel safe in embodying myself instead of cosplaying some Hollywood caricature. Compulsory masculinity a forced upon identity this field persona has never fit quite right.



I once allowed the toxicity to wash over me resigned to it being just how it is. It's taken me so long to rinse it all off this compulsive masking that hollows me out.



So I'll no longer acquiesce to be complicity misgendered in an effort to blend in to appease other's preconceptions. So I'm tossing away this costume the metaphorical fedora and I'll leave my whip at home where it will get better use anyway.

Guy S. Duke  
Associate Professor, Anthropology  
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Finally, women's clothing with pockets!!!

## My Boobs at Archaeological Sites

By Sarah Rowe

In February 2017, I got the amazing news that I was selected for a Fulbright Scholar Award to Ecuador. Cue the rejoicing, right? I was due that March with my second child, who I hoped would be a VBAC. Where I lived had higher than a 50% C-section rate and only one doctor willing to let me make the attempt, so hope was the operative word. I asked Fulbright about the possibility of deferring, but they said I would have to reapply and start the process over next year, so I accepted the award and crossed my fingers. One week past my due date, after 30 hours of labor, L was born. I was minutes from being moved to the OR by my doctors. I came home and immediately went back to teaching (couldn't afford the FMLA pay cut) as well as nursing a ravenous newborn.

We left for Ecuador hoping that we had everything we would need for fieldwork with a two-month-old. I remember running through the Miami airport to make our connecting flight. My foot caught on the wheel of the stroller, but instead of falling down, I just wet myself because I was still so recently postpartum.



Volunteer Erin McCormick from left.

We got to Ecuador and the reality of fieldwork set in, as did all the ways, big and small, that things had to be done differently with an infant in tow. The running joke became "Sarah's Boobs at Archaeological Sites" because of how often this kid wanted to nurse. My field bag included

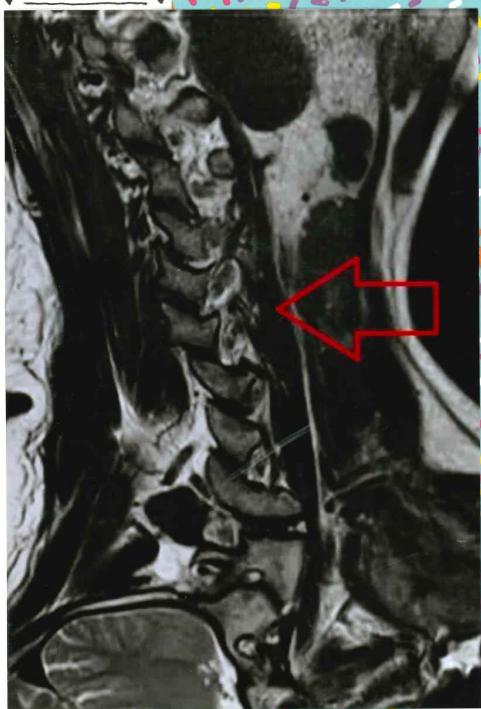
diapers, baby wipes, and changes of clothes for the inevitable blowout, alongside my Munsell book and trowel. My fieldwork clothes were carefully selected - outdoor pants with enough forgiveness that they could accommodate my postpartum body, no matter how it needed to recover itself, and on top a stretchy tank and lightweight button up long sleeve shirt to allow easy access for nursing, but also still provide protection from the sun and insects.

It was a very wet year in 2017, and the coastal mist that we were accustomed to also resulted in the formation of a small pool of water forming inside L's tent, so then a new pattern started. I, the field director, could no longer be on site all day. Once it got too wet, I took L back to the field house and spent the rest of the day washing artifacts.

We made it through that season and through the next with relatively minor mishaps, but I do have to wonder how many of the four herniated discs in my lower back are due to pregnancy and childbirth or to trying to do fieldwork so soon after giving birth. I'm fortunate to be able to take L with me on my field projects, but I can only imagine what it would've been like if I was a grad student working on someone else's project. I can use this experience to make space for others, but this field still isn't made for mothers.

Ah but they are too tight, they don't open wide enough to store things, not comfy etc.

Juão Luis  
Sequeira



Layout by  
Esther Read

*My Body is an Archive*

I carry an archive of more than 30 years of fieldwork on my body.  
Elizabeth Hoag

Cuts and scrapes  
Sore muscles  
Blisters  
Tick bites

What lurks beneath my skin from the physical work of archaeology?

In what other ways did I put my body at risk, knowingly or not?

Sunburns  
A twisted Ankle  
Chemicals and toxins

Mosquito bites  
Bee stings  
Poison Ivy  
Salmonella

What unknown exposure or past injury might affect my future?

Arthritis in my fingers  
Tendonitis in my wrist  
Herniated lumbar discs

What could or would I have done differently?  
What are the ramifications of the bodily archive of my labor?

Phosphate Mine or

The body as a  
receptacle of  
violent labor

As I was surveying the pines and the grass,  
a scrub jay called and a deer swiftly passed  
by me and my partner, who turned and opined  
"what this place needs is a phosphate mine!"

A phosphate mine, a phosphate mine,  
what this place needs is a phosphate mine!

BY TAREN KODY,  
SONGWRITER.

Oh lovely Mosaic, I trust you completely.  
Our beautiful roads are glowing so sweetly!  
Bone Valley is barren, Arcadia's paved,  
Tallahassee's paid off, and your profits are saved.  
A phosphate mine, a phosphate mine,  
thank G-d that you're digging more phosphate mines!

We spent 2 weeks by that doomed green lake,  
laying the boundaries of where you could take.  
The day I got home was the day rent was due -  
please dig up more phosphate so I'll have work to do!

A phosphate mine, a phosphate mine,  
what my landlord needs is more phosphate mines!

Mosaic Company, I love you so well!  
You'll still make payroll when we're burning in Hell.  
You say we need phosphate to keep us all fed -  
how did they eat before the forests were dead?

A phosphate mine, a phosphate mine,  
what the ancestors needed was a phosphate mine!

How Can Archaeology Be of and for Environmental  
Justice?  
Development - the very bread and butter of our professional  
existence - is quickly destroying the natural environment  
that existed in this country for the entire history  
of the aborigines we study. Native American rights are  
still ignored by our government and archaeologists feel  
that they are antagonistic toward our aims -  
well what have you done for them lately?

The Underground

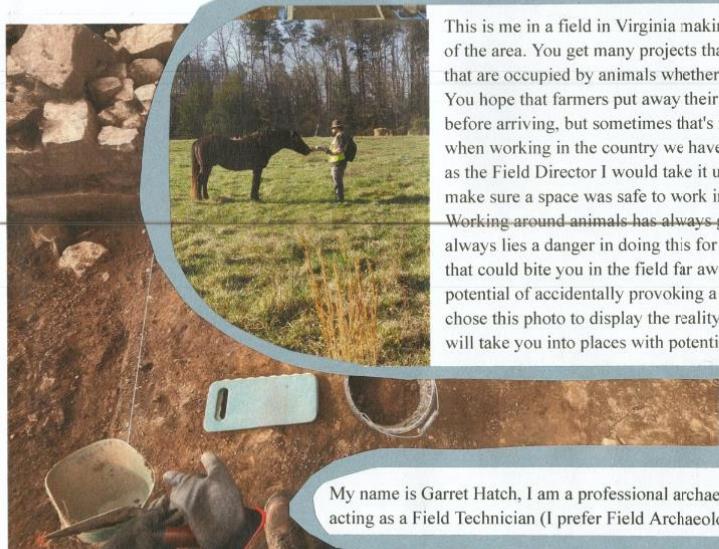
DOCUMENTING  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
APOCALYPSE



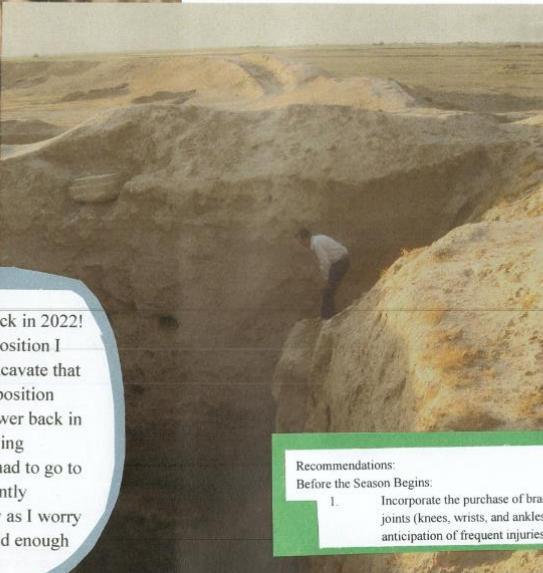
Figure 1. Current excavation of a 3.75-acre parcel (split between two addresses, 77 SE 5th Street and 444 Brickell Avenue) on the south bank of the Miami River approximately 200 m west of the Miami Circle. Photo by Matias Ochnio, Miami Herald, used with permission.



That's me in a 1m by 2m phase 2 test pit in New Jersey back in 2021! I chose this photo specifically to emphasize the physical position I am in. You can't quite see it but I am using a pickaxe to excavate that test pit at that time and doing so involves getting into the position you see me in where you have to constantly strain your lower back in order to properly do the job. I hurt my back while performing archaeology in the field in the late summer of 2024 and I had to go to physical therapy to recover for a week after that. I'm currently pursuing a Master's as a means to pivot out of archaeology as I worry about my long term back health. We certainly don't get paid enough to deal with the lifestyle this industry demands.



My name is Garret Hatch, I am a professional archaeologist and have been in the industry for 3 years now acting as a Field Technician (I prefer Field Archaeologist) and as a Field Director.



Recommendations:  
Before the Season Begins:

1. Incorporate the purchase of braces for major joints (knees, wrists, and ankles) in anticipation of frequent injuries
2. Empower archaeologists managing short-term disabilities with knowledge of their archaeological and living environment before arrival.  
If there is an archaeologist coming to the site with a short-term disability, senior staff should have a Zoom conversation with them prior to their arrival onsite. Discuss factors that could potentially impact site accessibility for an archaeologist with impaired mobility, especially the topography of the site and town and living arrangement (whether their living residence requires walking up stairs or has an elevator accessible).  
If there is an excavator who has recovered from an injury from a previous setting, staff should have a conversation with the person prior to their arrival onsite. Staff and the excavator should discuss their current physical limitations and any challenges the excavator foresees. Just because an excavator is medically fully recovered does not always mean that their short-term disability does not still impact their movements or limitations.
3. Prepare a plan in the case of a non life-threatening injury. Take account of the staff members conducting work in the lab and consider the amount of archaeological material needed to be processed. In both instances, where an excavator with a short-term disability needs to stop fieldwork half-way through the season or an excavator acquires an injury and must stop fieldwork, the work the excavator does in the lab should not be completely random and should align with their own research interests.

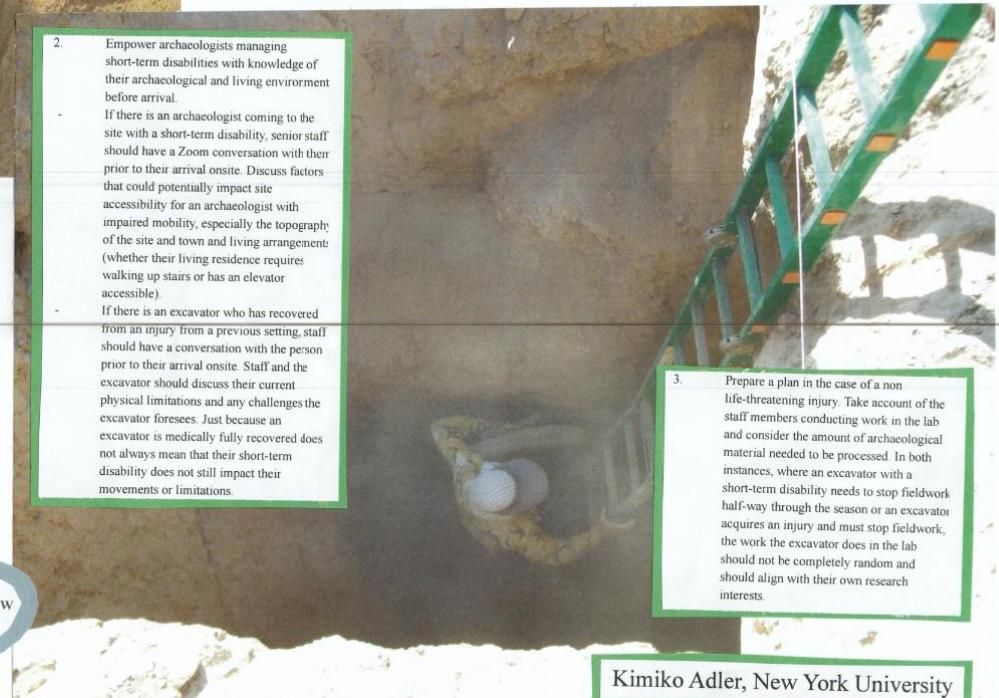
"How much?!" > firstly, as a student having to pay for the fieldwork experience essential to me getting a job after is a lot... and then to pay for all the appropriate PPE, yikes! It's a tough start.

"Is my foot just cold or is my sock wet? – yep, as suspected, I've got a hole in my shoe" > well firstly, need to carry on the rest of the day because it's not like anyone has spare steelys lying around! Secondly, damn now I have to fork out money to buy some new ones. I mean I've only had these for... 8 years.

A problem shared is a problem halved > grateful to the other bodies and mates this body has found in the depths of trenches. That wooden plank was a lot lighter with your hands pulling the other side of it <3



Contributions from Brodgie M. I. Molloy (University of Leicester)



Kimiko Adler, New York University

Integrating Mental and Physical Stresses in Prehistoric Archaeology, and Why I'm Still in the "Field"

Gary Rollefson

My first experience with prehistoric archaeology was at 6-7 years old, picking up arrowheads from the turned dirt as my father plowed the fields of our little Iowa farm, but real training didn't begin until graduate school at the University of Arizona. In the first three years (1970-72) I worked on the Tabun Cave (Lower/Middle Paleolithic) project in Israel, and inside a cave there's no danger of severe sunburn. One thing to know in an archaeologist: if a dead tree, whose bark has disappeared, leans over to project in the shore of the Sea of Galilee, don't try climbing along the trunk; if your feet get wet, all 175 pounds of me crashed on top of my chin onto the eucalyptus corpse, and I had around 10 stitches to close the gaping wound.

This was followed more digging in 1976 and 1978 at Iron Age Tell Jemmeh, just outside of Gaza, where solar crisping was always at work. Ah, to be young again – I managed to develop the sturdiness and strength to carry four gufas of excavated sediment, which, I guess, was deeply appreciated by the project director.

During the 1990s, one unfortunate development for me was the increasing discomfort caused by my Army boots that had been issued to me in 1969. Over the succeeding 32 years the leather had dried out considerably, so that at the end of an excavation in Azraq in 1997, I simply buried them in the back dirt. The bunion continues to bother me now in 2025.

Age certainly has set the current scene in brilliant view. In 2021, at 79 years old, I was at one of our Black Desert sites (Wisad Pools) with a colleague checking on looted buildings. Walking from one damaged building back to the truck I suddenly ended up face-first in the basalt-strewn ground. And it happened a second time. Whatever caused this surprising development, certainly one factor was a unexpected lack of balance, and although the collapse hasn't recurred so far in the following four years, there are still strong signs in my gait and the occasional shuffling in my steps that show the condition remains, albeit less dramatic.

Even so, I am still drawn to visit the splendid stark beauty of the Black Desert, although since 2021, I no longer engage in field work. Instead, I use my presence in Jordan to examine all the chipped stone materials the people bring back from the field. So far, I haven't fallen out of the chair.

My Body is an Archive

I carry an archive of more than 30 years of fieldwork on my body.

Burn Hand



Thank you to all of the bodies who  
contributed to this project,  
including anonymous submitters and zine crafters.

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