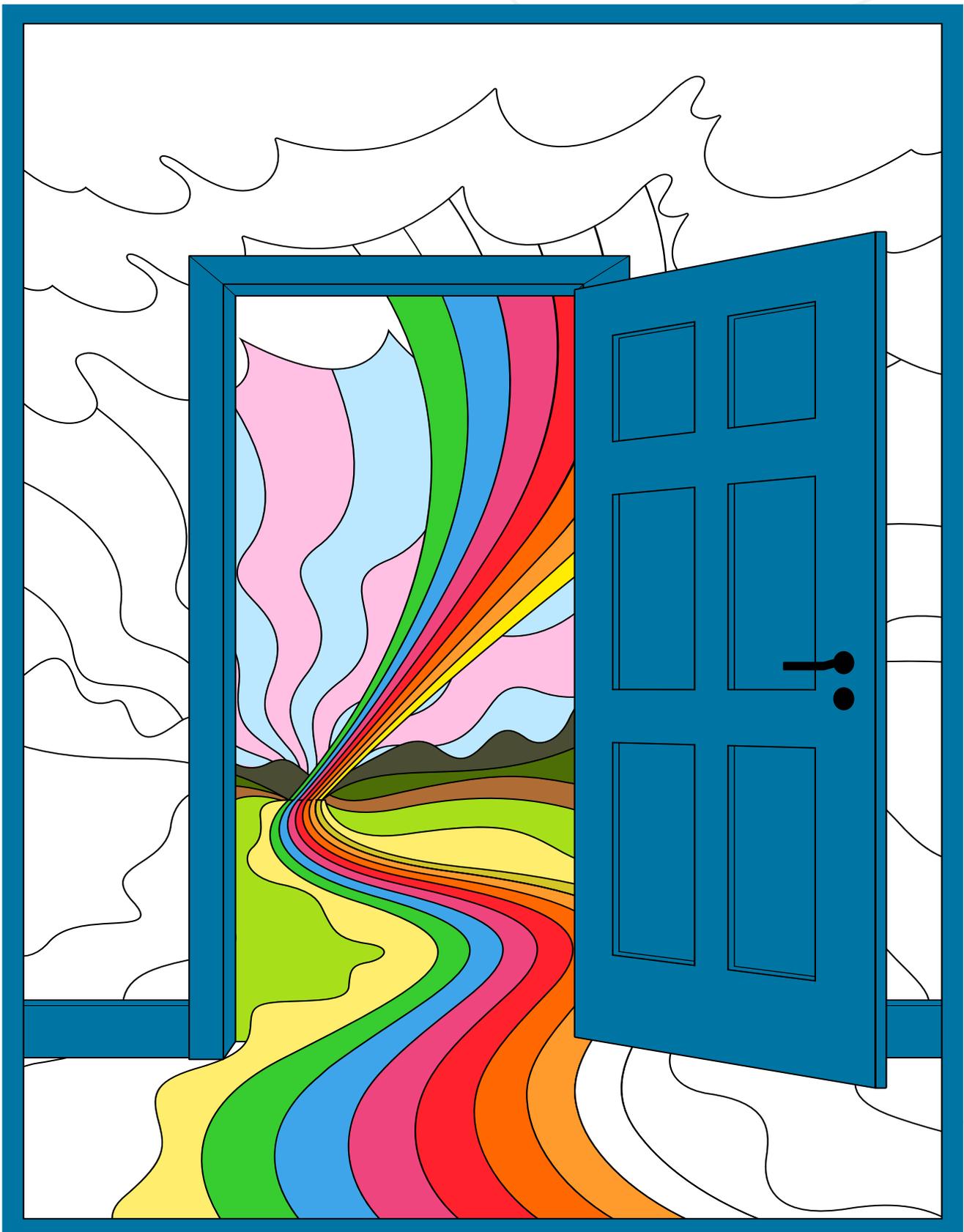


# DELTA WINDS

A Collection of Student Essays



Volume 35 | 2022<sup>1</sup>



# LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

In the fall of 1991, the first volume of Delta Winds appeared for sale for \$2.00 in the bookstore of San Joaquin Delta College. Newly-hired English faculty member Jane Dominik created the magazine with the intent of publishing student essays that “merit a wider reading audience.” Five years later, while standing in line for the commencement ceremonies, she asked Robert Bini and William Agopsowic to take over the reins of her project, which by then had become well-received in the English Department. They agreed under the condition that her biannual publication become an annual publication. They knew they could never keep up with Jane’s pace, but they figured that two of them could do half the work that she did. And even so, it would be a challenge.

Over a year period, Bob and Will continued to identify student essays deserving of a wider reading audience. Thanks to a sabbatical leave in 2000, they were able to create an online version of Delta Winds to complement the print version. In doing so, they expanded the audience from those obtaining the locally distributed 800 print copies to an unlimited number of readers on the Internet. With that came easier distribution, and in time publishing houses were regularly knocking on their door, requesting to reprint Delta Winds essays in their textbooks.

It has been a real privilege to carry on the rich tradition that Jane, Bob, and Will have passed on to us. It has also been an honor to meet some of the students who comprise this current volume (number 35) of Delta Winds, and we know many readers will find their stories heartfelt and inspirational. We hope this magazine serves as a tribute to these gifted student writers, and we hope that their work will be shared in English courses not just here at Delta but at other institutions of higher education.

Each volume of the magazine would never have been published without the help of personnel in the print shop, the backing from the administration, the cooperation from the staff and faculty in the English Department, and, of course, the courage of the numerous students who cautiously submitted their personal creations. We would also like to thank Phil Hutcheon, Jeff Pressnell, and Sarah Antinora for encouraging their students to submit their essays for publication.

Enjoy,

Kathleen Gallup and Eric MacDonald

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**DELTA WINDS  
VOLUME 35 | 2022**

# Surviving Our National Parks

Bailey Hansen

“We forget how dangerous nature can be. We want to forget, I think. We don't want to be reminded that nature is more deadly than man. Man can be cruel, but nature is indifferent. It is the unrivaled psychopath.”

– James Renner, True Crime Addict

**S**afety in the National Park system is a topic that is often overlooked. We leave for hikes always prepared to return to the safety of our cars, unknowing that in nature anything is possible. With anything ranging from a slip and fall down the side of a mountain or attempting the perfect photo opportunity, nature is waiting – the true “silent killer.” According to the Forbes article “What are the odds of dying in a National Park this summer” by Michael Goldstein, “In 2019, it was estimated that there are an average of six deaths per week in the National Park system.”



Our own local National Park, Yosemite, dominates as one of the nation's largest national parks at 1,100 square miles. At roughly the size of the state of Rhode Island, Yosemite presents the capability to be the host of the largest number of safety related deaths. In the book, *Off the Wall: Death in Yosemite* by Michael P. Ghiglieri and Charles “Butch” Farabee, we learn of the nine hundred plus deaths that have occurred within the confines of our California jewel.

Farabee, a retired Park Ranger for Yosemite, details some of his most harrowing and memorable stories of those he has lost and saved over the years. One of his most memorable is the story of five-year-old Colin Neu. In November of 1977, Neu fed a spike mule deer some potato chips. He ended up spooking the creature, and it sent a five-inch long antler into Neu's side. Farabee was dispatched

to the Ranger's Office for the incident where the decision was made to meet another ambulance at a halfway point between Yosemite and Fresno Children's Hospital. Farabee detailed his harrowing ride where the boy flat-lined mid-drive, and a stranger had to take over driving the ambulance while Farabee performed CPR. Unfortunately, little Colin Neu didn't make it despite the efforts of Farabee and his crew. Neu's pulmonary artery was punctured, and the CPR that Farabee was giving only exacerbated the bleeding. Farabee reminisces, “Maybe because of my deep love for my two sons, five-year-old Colin Neu is the one death in Yosemite that bothers me the most, even to this day” (Ghiglieri & Farabee 421). Instances like the death of Colin Neu solidify the need to teach people how to be safe around wildlife.

Animal safety is a huge factor in staying alive in the wilderness. In the article “Keeping it Wild: This Wildlife Ranger's Main Task is Keeping California's Yosemite National Park Wild,” the author, Matthew Broderick, dives into the everyday activities that Ryan Leahy, a National Park Service (NPS) wildlife biologist encounters. Leahy's main job is to prevent negative human and wildlife interaction. Using a tranquilizer gun to subdue animals (typically black bears), Leahy places a GPS device on the subdued animal to track its movements. The GPS device collects data on behaviors and habits of each animal, plus guarantees that it is never too close to a human. According to *Off the Wall: Death in Yosemite*, “Not only has no visitor been killed by a bear in Yosemite, neither has anyone died because of a

puma, coyote, or any other mammalian predator” (Ghiglieri & Farabee 432). Shockingly the majority of animal related injuries in Yosemite National Park comes from horses.

**With anything ranging from a slip and fall down the side of a mountain or attempting the perfect photo opportunity, nature is waiting – the true “silent killer.”**



I was able to speak with the hosts of the podcast National Park After Dark, Cassie Rayahnian and Danielle La Rock. When I asked Ms. La Rock about what makes or breaks her feeling of safety in parks, she made sure to emphasize that knowing your own body and its limits is the most crucial factor of safety. Both women cited the importance of having good shoes, friends to hike with, researching the local weather and wildlife, and having plenty of water with you when you venture into National Parks. They also suggest the added measure of downloading the app “All Trails,” which can map out a hiking path without needing phone service. All of their advice was solidified by the journal article “Visitor Perceptions of Technology, Risk, and Rescue in Wilderness” by Kristen Pope and Steve R. Martin. The article cites statistics from NPS offices from 1992-2007:

“The most common causes for these search and rescue incidents were judgment errors (22.3%); lack of physical preparation/fatigue (16.8%); insufficient equipment, clothing, or experience (15.6%); falls (8.9%); and weather (7.4%)” (Pope & Martin 20). Pope and Martin argue that the increase in technology in society has skyrocketed the number of NPS search and rescue missions. “...Land managers feel that the average level of experience and skill among users is decreasing as more people venture into the wilderness with technology. This technology allows people with less skill to access areas that were once available only to the highly skilled” (Pope & Martin 21).

It is important to educate ourselves on ways to remain safe in our National Park system. I have narrowed down my key takeaways from my research into eight cardinal rules of safety when visiting a National Park:

1. Don't be a hero. Nature doesn't care about Good Samaritans.
2. The picture is never worth it.
3. Stay on trail and follow signs.
4. Going solo is a death sentence.
5. Tell someone where you're going.
6. Be over prepared.
7. Keep your head.
8. Wildlife is wild.

A comfortable level of uncomfortability in nature is a good thing. When we are aware of the dangers associated with going outside, we behave in ways to prevent the bad things from happening to us. As the journal “Visitor Perceptions of Technology, Risk, and Rescue in Wilderness” says, “Visitors who enter the wilderness without adequate knowledge, skill, abilities, and equipment to return from their trip safely endanger themselves and rescuers” (Pope & Martin 25).

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## ways to prevent the bad things from happening to us.

I began this project with a goal, to rid myself of my agoraphobia and finally go to Yosemite. I have a trip planned to Yosemite in March of 2022 when the snow starts to melt. By the time I have finished, I believe that I have found a new career option for myself as a National Park Ranger. Armed with the knowledge gained from this assignment, I'm excited to share what I have learned. Helping educate the public that although beautiful, nature remains as the reigning force to be reckoned with.

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# Soldiers and Athletes

Ben Alarca

Some professional sports teams liken themselves to a military style organization. Many football, baseball and hockey teams model their clubs with similar structures that can take on the appearance of a military unit. The basic configuration of many professional sports outfits consists of some of the same operational systems as an Army unit. All teams have a leader, or captain, designated to guide its members to a specified goal, or objective. In most professional team settings, a team leader is the first line director in a large group of athletes, who attempts to motivate his group towards a winning outcome. In an Army squad, the team leader is typically in charge of three to six men, and responsible for everything from their well-being, to their training readiness. Professional athletes, just like most members of the military, train very hard to keep fit, stay healthy, and remain prepared to perform at all times. Along with these similarities, differences between the two fields of endeavor can be noted as well. Typically, well known athletes, and celebrated professional sports team players, play for high wages and accolades, whereas, military members serve for honor, and commitment. It has never been a secret that the pay in the military is not what most of us would consider lavish, where conversely, prominent athletes boast of outrageously high earnings. Consequences resulting from an athletic engagement, where you might lose, but live to play again, differ greatly from a military confrontation, where the result can be lethal. For many soldiers, losing a war has far more extended ramifications than losing a soccer game. Examining some of the similarities and differences between members of the military and professional athletes, one discovers the common denominators, and the polarities of the two vocations.

**For many soldiers, losing a war has far more extended ramifications than losing a soccer game.**

One of the major similarities between a military unit and a team of professional athletes is the fact that both elements work towards achieving predetermined objectives. A Navy Seal fire team might be expected to set up an outpost to gain intelligence on a suspected enemy supply route. They will set up in a concealed position, and gather information on travel routes, times, and number of people detected, and report all findings to commanders who then make decisions based on their established intent. An infantry squad may be tasked to lead a patrol in an effort to seek out enemy positions on a battlefield. Members will perform an orchestrated reconnaissance, led by a squad leader, to make an informed verification of everything needed in the event of a conflict. An Army



platoon may be given an order to secure and defend a hilltop vital to the overall success of their operation. Although the particular objectives for a football team, professional bowler, or any other career athlete, may be different than a military force, the uniform likeness is that both professions have an end result that they are expected to accomplish. The Las Vegas Raiders are charged with scoring touchdowns in order to win their games. They execute plays designed to outsmart their opponents with the goal of being triumphant at the end of the fourth quarter. A professional bowler has an objective to topple over as many pins as possible to wind up the top scorer at the end of the tenth frame. He or she will meticulously align themselves in their respective lane

with their only concern being capturing that elusive strike. A pro golfer's aim is to score the lowest total possible to take home that trophy or win that prize. The ultimate target for Tiger Woods is to make sure he sinks that winning ball on that last hole. While the prevailing objective for the military member and the professional athlete may differ, the parallel semblance is the fact that both strive for an end result comparable to their efforts.

Training is another similarity that exists between military personnel, and professional athletes. Soldiers, and prominent sports figures alike, take great pride in the preparations they make in order to do battle in their respective arenas. I recall my training in the Army in which my cohorts and I would practice a tactical scenario for hours at a time. For days leading up to a military offensive exercise, we would rehearse the entire phase of a battle, to ensure everything goes as planned, from the start of the maneuver, to the forecasted conclusion. My fellow squad members and I would thoroughly inspect, check, and recheck, every piece of equipment to confirm its functionality and effectiveness. We would also prepare mentally as well as physically. Repeatedly running through measures in our minds so as not to forget certain procedures was not uncommon. We would get rest, if permitted, to conserve energy for any arduous mission we might be called upon to execute. Members of a military unit train hard to be a well-oiled machine. I cannot begin to remember all of the firing ranges I visited. As an infantry soldier, I faithfully tested my weapons sights, and filled targets with holes on a regular basis. I performed innumerable fitness tests to ensure I remained fit to fight at any given moment. I underwent a multitude of readiness courses and challenges to demonstrate that I was perfectly combat ready. All of these practices and drills can be comparable to the rigors that an athletic star might put themselves through. Professional athletes also train for perfection. On many occasions, they torture their bodies in an effort to gain the maximum potential from their efforts. Ironman contestants endure grueling workouts just for the chance to completely finish a course. Marathon runners trot for countless miles in practice, in the hopes that at the end of their race, they are the first to break through that ribbon. I have seen hockey players unceasingly aim shots at the net before games to establish precision prior to a match. I once practiced a particular kenpo kata for weeks preceding a martial arts tournament, examining every aspect to ascertain any variance that might improve my chances for dominance in my specific class. My dedication paid off, as I was awarded the "Grand Champion" trophy in my division. Although many similarities exist between both military members and professional athletes, there are substantial differences as well.



**While the prevailing objective for the military member and the professional athlete may differ, the parallel semblance is the fact that both strive for an end result comparable to their efforts.**

Among the numerous differences between the military member and the career athlete, a quite notable one is the compensation rate. The military pay chart operates on a tier level system. A principle salary is awarded based on rank, and years of service. Higher rank garners higher wages. Government raises were always a welcomed occurrence because it typically meant the military received a raise as well. Although all of the raises were never intended to make anyone rich beyond their wildest dreams, they were appreciated, and quite frequently, badly needed. A memorable verse I remember hearing many soldiers repeat quite often was, "You can't get rich in the Army."

Truer words have never been spoken. I would, no doubt, have lobbied for higher wages, but I suppose I could not complain too much. Although the pay was meager, we did, as military members, enjoy benefits such as health care, education, and countless other amenities that civilians pay an arm and a leg for. In contrast to the professional athlete, military members hovered near the poverty level. It is common knowledge that many professional athletes enjoy spoils to the tune of millions of dollars in pay. In regard to salaries, if you consider the fact that athletes typically participate in sports that most of them grew up playing as children, versus the military member, who is employed to defend our country, the dissimilarity hardly seems fair. Although a top notch athlete should be commended for his dedication and commitment to his sport, having played most of his life, many of their total earnings come from endorsements. Some of the world's top sports figures earn more money from companies agreeing to pay them to endorse their product or service, than they do from their respective sport. According to an article on the website, GOBankingRates.com, professional golfer Phil Mickelson, earns the majority of his income from companies willing to pay him for his name. In 2020, his total earnings were \$40,800,000, of which ninety-eight percent, or \$40,000,000, came by way of endorsement contracts (Malone). Mickelson only played in eight PGA tournaments in 2020, which amounted to the sum of \$5,1000,000 per game. At one point in my military career, I can recall earning a base salary of \$1325.00 per month. If one were to break that figure down into a typical forty-hour work week, it would only amount to an hourly wage of \$8.29. Although I did not go out hunting for endorsement contracts at the time, I am sure I would have been hard-pressed to find someone willing to pay to use my name.



The results of a military conflict, in comparison to the consequences observed in an athletic event, is another difference between the military member and the professional athlete. In a combat situation, the outcome can be deadly. One misstep could very well produce severe repercussions. In war, one must adhere to strict directives in order to survive. There is no free throw in combat. Timeouts are unheard of. Crying "foul" for a little rough contact is a joke. During Desert Storm, I served as a leader in charge of a four man fireteam. I can distinctly recount moments when I considered the consequences of my actions if I had hesitated to make a split second decision. In many instances, the lives of my men were in my hands. It was a heavy responsibility weighted on my shoulders, and the shoulders of a great number

of other soldiers in that same predicament. Unfortunately, I could not ask to go to the bench. I could not "sit this one out." I was in the thick of it, without a time clock to save me. Fortunately for me, I returned home unscathed, as did the men in my charge. Luckily, for the professional athlete, the consequences of a lost game, or defeated contest, are typically never anticipated to be that detrimental. Although a loss, or conquer could prove to be disheartening, there is seldom a risk of loss of life to the measure that a combat veteran subjects himself to on a battlefield. Dangerous and extreme sports do exist, but the ominous circumstances associated with an unyielding, tumultuous battleground, are incomparable. Most professional athletes and sports teams have the luxury of living to play another game. It is hard to imagine Michael Phelps missing a stroke and drowning in the pool. I have personally never witnessed a cross country runner step on a mine halfway through a big race. I would never downplay the significance of any athlete or team sport, and in fact, I am an avid sports fan myself, but the consequences of their losses can not measure up to the potential aftermath of combat.

**A memorable verse I remember hearing many soldiers repeat quite often was, "You can't get rich in the Army." Truer words have never been spoken.**

Probing the similarities and differences between the service member, and the professional athlete is nothing, if not revealing. Resemblances such as the quest to reach objectives, and training, prove to be convincing, while contrasts including earnings and consequences to loss, are surprising. Each profession has their goals, and work extremely hard at maintaining their vision to reach them. The duty of completing their respective assignments is their primary concern. Service members and athletes alike, devote great portions of their time to training. Rigorous workouts are common in both fields, for the purpose of being equipped for any challenge that might arise. Variations in salary between the military member and the professional athlete are obvious. Endorsement deals make being a star athlete much more lucrative. Waging war on the gridiron is nothing near enduring battle in a live combat zone. Although injuries may hinder a performance in a tennis match, or squander a win on a basketball court, the consequences of loss between the service member and the athlete can be quite different. Many service members can attest to the fact that war has changed their lives in the most drastic way. Although, as a soldier we always anticipate a return home being welcoming and productive, it does not consistently happen that way. Some service men and women return accompanied with baggage that they carry with them for the rest of their lives. In that respect, the consequences have proved destructive.

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# The Haunted Factory

Matthew Fischl

The wide-open savannah of the cattle ranch felt like it was a thousand miles away compared to the sweltering jungle of concrete that lay before me. My life was in for a substantial change, but it was a necessary one. The California drought had reached its fifth year, and with a \$30,000 annual hay expense, the boss of the cattle ranch had told me, in no uncertain terms, that I needed to find another source of income, while still completing all of the duties required of me as a cowboy, but now without pay. A small security company was the first entity to respond to my swarm of resumes, and as it offered me free training, I accepted the position. My assigned post was one of the largest citrus processing plants in the world. With over 4,000 workers swarming the massive man-made hive, it was quite a sight to see during the busy season. I felt lucky to be hired during the summer months, when most of the workers were furloughed, and only security and essential personnel were allowed on the premises. During the summer break, the billionaire-owners decided to switch the colossal facility over to solar energy, their next boredom-purchase, as they had just bought an entire airport just for the convenience of landing their private jet near the plant to check on their investment anytime they saw fit. New to the job, and with only a few weeks of work under my belt, this was the first major scenario I had to handle.



A dozen generators, each the size of a small apartment, were wheeled in on the back of semi-trucks to help alleviate the strain of the switch from municipal power to solar power. One of my tasks was to inspect the generators as I made my patrol from location to location, checking on fuel, oil, and other necessities to keep the behemoths alive. "Things don't always appear as they seem," my boss would say, and as bullet-proof as the generators looked, they failed on the first day of the power transfer. Although the generators stopped working, that didn't mean security could stop working. Patrols and perimeter checks were still required every hour, and on that hot June afternoon, my daily patrol had just begun.

Leaving the safety of the air-conditioned guard shack at the north entrance of the facility felt like walking into an oven. My polished boots felt like they were going to melt with every footstep I made away from the oasis of the raised portable trailer. Keeping my mind on the task at hand, and off of the manual breathing that had instantly started once my lungs felt the 110-degree heat that I was now immersed in, I checked my equipment. "Patrol wand, check. Emergency supply pouch, check. Everything but a damn weapon... Ugh, whatever," I thought. I wrapped the law-enforcement-style speaker coil around my torso, connecting the radio on my waist all the way up to the clip on my epaulette. The rubber coil clicked with every footstep I took, serenading my stroll. Finally reaching an entrance into the plant, I swiped my keycard over the programmed scanner. A sharp beep, followed by a flashing green light, approved my access into the cool darkness that awaited me.

The so-called "pre-sort" side of the plant was one of two halves of the massive processing facility. Cavernous and intimidating, it could easily house four football fields side-by-side, with room to spare. I made my way up the stairs to the catwalk that ran the entire length of the factory. A bright

summer afternoon was swiftly contrasted by the sheer darkness of foot-thick concrete walls and a lack of sufficient lighting. The singular source of illumination came from the spherical lights that orbited almost 50 feet above me, only activated when they sensed any motion under them. As I ascended the staircase, my route lay before me: a straight concrete path that looked to be almost 600 feet long, as wide as a man's arms outstretched, and overlooking the multi-million-dollar machinery. The lack of noise was discomfiting, as the factory usually sounded like a perpetual construction site. Missing were the sounds of forklift horns, yelling supervisors, radio chatter, and the deafening sound of machinery spooling as product moved to-and-fro. Other than the clear sound of my footsteps, the only noise the machinery made was like the dull hum of a faraway microwave. With my eyes fixed upon the neon sign at the far end of the catwalk, I started my trek towards the other door.

**Keeping my mind on the task at hand, and off of the manual breathing that had instantly started once my lungs felt the 110-degree heat that I was now immersed in, I checked my equipment.**

For every ten feet that I walked, a spotlight would suddenly kick on from high above. Lighting me up like a stoic performer on a concrete stage, the lights stayed on, leaving a trail of light behind me. The factory looked sort of like a Pac-Man game, with the trail of lights above and the darkness yet to be explored. I counted my steps, "Five, six, seven," then boom, a motion sensor would kick on another light. I could time it now, and I would even snapped my fingers just as the light would come on for dramatic effect.

I gazed out into the vast black cavern and thought of how eerie everything felt without light or noise. My mind drifted to the stories that some of the workers would tell me, about the resident ghosts of the factory: workers who met an unfortunate demise and never clocked out. Half-laughing, half serious, the night-shift supervisors would tell me that the ghosts still think they're at work, and sometimes you would see half-transparent figures walking through empty areas, before suddenly disappearing before your eyes. I felt a chill run up my spine.

I was almost halfway across the catwalk by now, with a concrete wall on one side, and a 30-foot drop overlooking the factory on the other. There was no way to go but forward, but my foot was locked in place: I couldn't move a muscle. A light at the other end of the catwalk had just lit up, but there was nobody in front of me. A second light turned on, then a third: each coming closer and closer to me. The motion sensors were turning on each respective light as if there was a person walking towards me on the raised platform, but there was nothing but cold air between my eyes and the door. Time froze as I was looked into a realm of pure, unadulterated terror: something was triggering those lights, and it was coming my way. I was already too far ahead to go back the other way, and besides, as a security officer, I should be fearless and brave.



The ghosts of the factory were real, and one was headed straight for me. My heart was beating out of my chest as the lights grew ever closer to me. It seemed like an eternity watching each light illuminate nothing but the air in front of it. The hair on my neck stood on end, as a whole-body shiver encompassed me. The air in the factory seemed to become even colder, and now I was exhaling faint wisps of fog. The next light that turned on was less than 50 feet from me. I was still paralyzed in

shock. I fully expected someone, something, to materialize before me, but at this moment the only thing visible was the ethereal mist every time I exhaled. "Is it a man? Is it a woman? Are they going to eat my soul? Are they going to levitate me off of the balcony to a fatal fall as some sort of restitution that they feel is owed to them?" I thought. Then, like a blood-curdling scream that electrifies the nervous system: I heard footsteps. My blood ran cold as I realized that this was truly happening, and that it wasn't simply a glitch in the lights. Yes, there was definitely something triggering those lights because I could now hear the sound of footsteps growing louder and louder towards me, still with no image to pair it with. My mind projected a twisted face with black eyes and a mouth agape in a shrieking scream on my breath-cloud. Only a small patch of darkness separated us, as one of the three remaining lights turned on. The darkness of only two unilluminated lights now separated me from whatever was coming for me. I grabbed the hand-rail that overlooked the factory. The sound of the footsteps shifted as I turned my body towards the rail. I then saw it, clear as day.

**I gazed out into the vast black cavern and thought of how eerie everything felt without light or noise. My mind drifted to the stories that some of the workers would tell me, about the resident ghosts of the factory: workers who met an unfortunate demise and never clocked out.**

Oblivious to the hysterical heart-attack he was causing me, a lone worker casually strolled on the bottom floor of the factory, somehow far enough away from the catwalk to still be seen by the light's motion sensors. It took every ounce of strength I had not to burst out laughing at the absurdity of the situation. "No one is going to believe this..." I chuckled to myself, as I gulped down my bruised pride. "All that hysteria, and it's just some dude probably on his way to relieve himself," I laughed. I felt relieved myself: all that fuss and panic over absolutely nothing. I started walking towards the door again, the rhythmic sound of my footsteps reminding me of the task at hand. "I can't believe that just happened," I giggled. I stopped and peered over the rail again, to see if the man had any clue of what had just occurred above him. My smile quickly faded. There was no sign of the man. There were no other footsteps echoing through the factory when mine stopped, and there were no doors that led out of that particular area. I scanned left and right, up and down, looking and listening for anything. I felt the temperature of the rail I was holding on to drop. "Nope!" I declared aloud, as I turned and marched as fast as I professionally could towards my destination door.

"Things aren't always what they seem," my boss would say, but then there are times when things are exactly what they seem to be. Needless to say, I spent the rest of my shift that day patrolling the outside of the factory.

I never saw the man again.



*I was born in Tustin California in 1990, and lived there up until 2009 when I moved up to the Central Valley to work as a cowboy. I spent the better part of 10 years on the cattle ranch, until I married the love of my life and moved back to the big city - in this case, Bakersfield. I now work as an Apprentice Diesel Technician for Quinn Caterpillar, and as a part of their "ThinkBig" program, they sponsor me for the next 4 years until I graduate and become a certified Journeyman level tech. This has become an incredible opportunity for me to learn, to grow, and to prosper, and I could not have done it without Quinn, my wife and family, and the Lord Jesus. I also thank SJDC and all of my professors and staff that helped make this dream a reality.*

*-Matthew J. Fischl*

# Introvert Building Friendships

Oscar Mercado

**F**or my self-improvement project, I have decided to write about making new connections and breaking my introverted lifestyle. Socialization tends to be an issue for many people, especially for individuals who have been through social trauma in the past. In addition, it is even more difficult for those with a neurological disorder or condition such as Autism or ADHD. I was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome in the second grade, and ever since, I have found it relatively hard to socialize with my peers and make friends at a young age. However, with time and the growing of knowledge, I learned to cope and adapt to numerous environments and learn how to initiate conversations and remain stable. I still have much to learn, but I can say I am doing much better in the present moment than I was a few years ago.

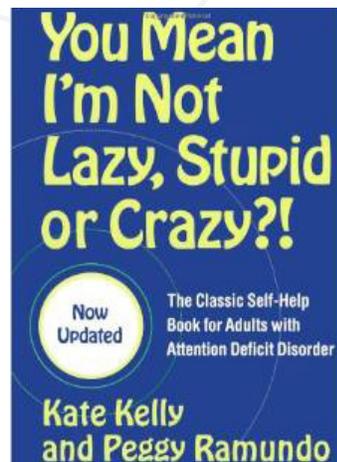


A book I read titled *Disconnected Kids: The Groundbreaking Brain Balance Program for Children with Autism, ADHD, Dyslexia and Other Neurological Disorders* by Dr. Robert Melillo, helped me understand my condition better in the scientific sense. Melillo explains that each condition reacts differently to numerous scenarios and can be an accountable factor in communication difficulty. "An extreme inability to communicate normally and develop social relationships often accomplished by behavioral challenges, such as prolonged fixation on an object or group of words, or a complete inability to talk" (Melillo 12). This caught my attention because I share a similar trait alongside others affected by a similar condition, if not the same one. Melillo also stated that certain anti-social behaviors start to develop and even take root at a very young age. "They are also antisocial. They show no interest in people and may engage in peculiar activities, such as hand flapping" (Melillo 27). It is easy to spot when a young child does not make any effort to socialize with his peers. This made me analyze my childhood and reflect on past decisions. I realized how I played a significant role in my introverted life; I did not make any effort to go outside of my comfort zone and be among my peers.

Melillo continues by making a connection between Autism and Functional Disconnection Syndrome. "A child with a right brain dysfunction may not look at you when speaking because the brain's ability to read body language is out of balance" (Melillo 7). He describes that it may not be entirely the fault of the individual victim because the brain does not recognize specific body language gestures. This also connects with learning appropriate cognitive skills, another area in which children with Autism, ADHD, and even Dyslexic people struggle. "Cognitive skills are what define a child as an individual with a unique personality. These are the skills that will carve a child's future success in life" (Melillo 46). Melillo emphasizes the importance of learning the appropriate cognitive skills, as they are the main factor in how a child will think, learn, rationalize and solve problems. Symptoms in which a child may express a lack of appropriate cognitive skills can be difficulty in expressing needs, a

preference to play alone, difficulty interacting with others, appropriate control of emotions, and avoiding eye contact. Melillo's studies and research have assisted me in learning more about the early stages of Autism and why it has been difficult for me to socialize throughout my childhood.

**I realized how I played a significant role in my introverted life; I did not make any effort to go outside of my comfort zone and be among my peers.**



Melillo provided insight on the condition and its symptoms; now, I need to learn how to cope with it. Hence, the second book, *You Mean I'm Not Lazy, Stupid or Crazy?!: The Classic Self-Help Book for Adults with Attention Deficit Disorder* by Kate Kelly and Peggy Ramundo, will provide coping techniques and strategies to better live with this condition and ultimately help me with my socialization goal. In the book, both Kelly and Ramundo emphasize the psychological pressure of ADD, in which the victims cannot keep calm or stay in a singular place for an extended period of time. When asked to explain the purpose behind such behaviors or actions, one afflicted with this condition may not describe the reason. Parents who have children affected with ADD struggle to explain the challenges regarding their behavior to others. "I have

sometimes wished that my son had a physical handicap instead of ADD. Of course, I don't really wish he had a physical disability. If he did, though, it would be easier to explain his challenges to people who don't understand" (13). Statistically, it is easier to understand a physical handicap, as one can see the consequences; in comparison, mental or psychological obstacles are not as easy to witness, thus harder to explain.

Adaptation and coping skills in the social aspect can be a challenge but not impossible. Kelly and Ramundo describe how many people with ADD struggle with learning and using social skills. "The development of social skills is more of an art than a science because we must learn to read the ever-changing reactions of others" (69). This is quite an obstacle because not everyone is the same, and people react differently to certain behaviors. An example of this could be making a joke; one could recite a joke, and someone may laugh, believing it hysterical. On the other hand, however, one can just as quickly get offended, depending on that individual's beliefs. As a result, victims who have ADD or ADHD may often reject their interests or beliefs in order to integrate themselves with the whole. "We don't want to be different and will jump through hoops to fit in and gain acceptance. So we build shields to defend ourselves against emotional harm" (71). Both Kelly and Ramundo claim that defensive mechanisms can be psychologically beneficial; however, if these are done inappropriately, the negative side-effect can be manipulative, thus undermining growth. For example, if the victim likes reading but struggles to fit in with his peers, he may reject his interest to join the whole and assimilate their interests, like sports or shopping. Instead of denying oneself, one can use appropriate coping and defensive mechanisms which inspire an adaptive and positive attitude.

For additional information, I decided to interview my mother, Blanca Mercado. I asked what her reaction was to the behavior in my childhood. "At first, I thought it was a normal reaction from a child of a few months old, but as you grew older and those behaviors remained and intensified, I knew this was not normal behavior" (Mercado). She noticed that I would not make contact with my classmates and barely start a conversation with my cousins. According to her, I distanced myself

from my peers at the beginning of the first grade. This was one of the first signs indicating the condition of Autism.

I decided to read an online article titled "The Introvert's Complete Guide to Making Friends Who 'Get' You" by Jenn Granneman, where it describes that introverts do not hate people; instead, people who happen to be introverted have limited energy in comparison to extroverted people who are used to partying and going out. "So we're looking for friends who truly 'get' us. The ultra-chatty extrovert who parties every weekend probably won't be an introvert's BFF. We're looking for people who understand our introversion, who can go deep, who run at our speed" (Granneman 3). Typically, when trying to connect with people, the best way to start is to look for common ground or interests. Granneman states that an introvert and extrovert would not make essential friends necessarily because one tends to be reserved while the other leads a more eventful life.

Another online article I decided to utilize was "Aspergers & No Friends: Reasons Why and What To Do About It" by Viktor Sander. He claims that victims with Asperberger's tend to struggle with finding people who can relate to them. "If you have AS, you may struggle with identifying, predicting, and relating to other peoples' emotions" (Sander 7). From personal experience, I find this to be relatively true, as I struggle with finding people who share similar interests, such as enjoying classical music or the subject of history and theology. This will probably be the most challenging obstacle, as many of my peers show minimal interest in these areas.

Finding the most effective friend is challenging; however, finding someone who shares similar interests and truly cares for others is possible. I have confidence that I can overcome these obstacles of the introvert life and engage in interactions of the social life. However, nothing comes for free or straightforward; therefore, I will need to work hard on my goals to see any positive results or improvements. Hopefully, I can use coping skills in social interactions, such as keeping in mind that I have nothing to lose if this particular encounter goes wrong. Despite my Asperger's, I can still establish a front where I can adequately communicate and socialize with others, including my peers, and possibly make new friends.

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# Heteronormative Biases

Emma K. Glanville

A queer person, regardless of the specifics of their sexuality, should never have their queerness measured by the ideals of a straight person. In today's society we have progressed a bit past the LGBTQ-phobia that was present in our countries past, but we still haven't been able to tear down some of the ideas that leave many queer people confused with themselves and push false narratives to those who are already ignorant about the subject. As a queer identifying woman I have seen first-hand examples of how men and sometimes even non-men believe that they get to measure my attraction to women. Heteronormative standards that have been implicated into the American society throughout years and years of oppression and patriarchal uprising. This does not mean that these behaviors and ideals are not to be addressed and evaluated in an effective and educating way. When I was only 16-years old and still on the way of understanding my sexuality, I experienced many straight people who thought they had figured it out for me and held their standards against me in order to make me question my identity. It left me questioning myself and the way I had viewed my sexuality.



Many say that the teenage years are the years of development and learning about and exploring oneself. For as long as I could comprehend the difference between straight and gay, I knew I wasn't straight, or gay. I knew that I was not only attracted to boys, but my attraction to girls always came in different forms because of the way society pushes heteronormativity onto children. When I was in about eighth grade I would say, I began to learn the terms pansexual, bisexual, queer, etc. and I really tried to understand what they meant for me and who I knew and felt that I was. When I hit the beginning of my sophomore year I was sure that I had to fall into one of those categories as my feelings for men and women were becoming a bit more similar and regulated, the more I understood the feelings I couldn't share before. In the middle of my sophomore year, I dated a boy for about a year and a half, and ended things with him in June of 2020. Now thus far I had never dated a woman officially, but I was open and out about my sexuality. When I ended the relationship, I decided I needed to spend some time with some friends so I texted a couple of friends and discussed days to get together. One of these days I hung out with a man, who I used to call a friend, with plans to go get coffee. A while into our long-winded conversation the topic of my sexuality comes up. In all honesty, I couldn't pinpoint how or why but I am a very open person when it comes to talking about my identity. I was explaining that I was attracted to men, women, and gender non-conforming people. At one point he interrupts me and asks, 'But have you ever even dated a woman?', to which I replied, "No, but I have had feelings for them." This led him to say "But how do you actually know you are attracted to them then?" This question kind of took me back because no one had ever asked me this before. He also followed it up with a comment that was rather inappropriate in stating that you "Can't actually lose your virginity to a woman." Now, this really made me get into my own head and at first it may not seem like a bias but the after effects and the social standing of this belief really affect the community.

**When I was only 16-years old and still on the way of understanding my sexuality, I experienced many straight people who thought they had figured it out for me and held their standards against me in order to make me question my identity.**

After this interaction, I never spoke to this person again, and ignored all their texts because I felt as though he was not entitled to that information and he was making comments that made me uncomfortable. Discomfort was not the only thing I was feeling though. As I returned home from this horrendous interaction I began to question myself, and if I did truly know my sexuality. What if I just convinced myself I'm bisexual but I'm not actually? What if I'm lying to people unintentionally? Do people think I'm lying since I've never dated a woman? These were all questions I was left to ponder myself.

I have since come to the realization that the patriarchy within our society upholds this very heteronormative idea of queerness revolving around men. Why is my sexuality determined by the number of women I have been with rather than how I have felt about them? This is because when these heteronormative standards are pushed onto people their whole life they begin to view all aspects of queerness through heterosexual glasses. It would be the same thing as me asking my straight male friend "Well how do you know you don't like men if you've never dated one?" But those aren't questions that are asked because misogyny perpetuates this idea that all things centralize around men. In his question he assumed that I, along with all other women, are straight until we get with a woman to discover our sexuality which is just not the reality of the situation. I assume that in this scenario his biases came from being surrounded and also forced into heterosexual. Normalcy and not taking the time to understand that queerness is not something that someone decided one day after choosing to try out being with a woman, man, or gender non-conforming person, it is something that someone knows. There is this continual idea that everyone is straight and if you aren't the only way you know that is through having a physical relationship with someone of the same gender or someone who doesn't fit the gender binary. Rather than the real case which is queer people know that they are queer the same way that straight people know they are straight. It just takes some people longer to discover these things about themselves because of the standard they have lived under and around- the heterosexual standard they have been taught.

I feel as though the representation of queer people within the media really effects the way that people process queer feeling and relationships. Mahzarin R. Banaji and Anthony G. Greenwald describe availability heuristics in their book *Blindspot*. They describe that when there is "...greater ease of availability to the mind doesn't mean greater frequency of occurrence in the world" (12). In media, and in uneducated households we always see queer relationships either being underrepresented and when they are represented they aren't always done so accurately. Coming to terms with it, accepting it and yourself, and learning how to express those feelings. Many people who don't go through the experiences that those in the LGBTQ community do don't really have the education or representation of queer people discovering themselves, so they assume that they have to experiment to know that they are. Many people know before they even date or are intimate with someone of the same gender, yet the stereotypes implicated by society continue to push people into groups. In the essay, *Stereotype Dynamics: Language-Based Approaches to the*



Formation, Maintenance, and Transformation of Stereotypes, compiled by Yoshihisa Kashima, Klaus Fiedler, and Peter Freytag, they explain that “Historically, its roots are often traced back to Lippman’s (1922) famous ‘picture in the head’ metaphor. This metaphor drew attention to the perilous discrepancy between mental pictures and the reality to which they were supposed to refer.

**I have since come to the realization that the patriarchy within our society upholds this very heteronormative idea of queerness revolving around men.**

Struggling with my own sexuality was a very big part of my developing life and years and having someone who I trusted and felt like was a good friend, questioning the person I knew I was really getting back. It set me back in coming to terms with my feelings as well as setting me back in how I even define my sexuality. At the end of the day, when you are struggling to come to terms with yourself it can be hard to break away from those norms that have been pushed on you your whole life. It can be even more difficult when people without understanding of your journey take their own assumptions and use them as a bias against you. Biases that queer people can only be queer if they’ve experimented even though heterosexual people don’t do the same. This affects queer people and communities daily and also reflects onto trans communities as well. Because of this instance I was able to reflect only my sexuality and learn to understand that my queerness is not measured by what straight people believe it to be; it is what I believe it to be and I am the only person who has experienced my journey and feelings. Although at the time it was a rough thing to go through and have to sit with, it has helped me become more confident and comfortable in how I view my sexuality.

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# Ray Bradbury and The Consequences of Mechanization

Thuy-Tien Le

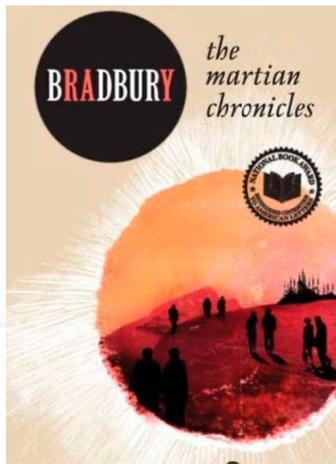
Ray Bradbury is likely one of the most well-known science fiction authors of the modern day. In his lifetime, he has published a multitude of short stories and novels that cover a diverse set of subjects. One story in particular exemplifies the essence of Bradbury's work; this being "There Will Come Soft Rains" published in the short story collection *The Martian Chronicles* (Unger). Through his clever use of symbolism, character development, setting, and allusion in this depiction of an apocalyptic future, Ray Bradbury provides a cynical commentary on the possibly destructive repercussions of mankind's attempt to interfere with the natural world.



"There Will Come Soft Rains" is told through the perspective of a personified automated house. This house, and all of its advanced features, acts as the protagonist of the story whose purpose as the central focus helps to establish the image of a society dependent on its technology. As the driving force of the story, the house serves as both a sign and a symbol of humanity's growing indifference toward the natural world. The difference between a sign and a symbol, as explained by Weller Embler, is that a sign has no ambiguity. What a sign represents is clear with no room for debate. On the other hand, a symbol is typically open to multiple interpretations (48). Often, these two elements intertwine, as they do with the automated house. As a sign, the house serves as the direct representation of technology as it has already become integrated into society. As a symbol, the house serves as an implied representation of society's shift away from the organic. This shift is particularly evident in the house's interactions with life. For example, despite there being no sign of the McClellans, the house continues with its day-to-day functions as if they were there. "Outside, the garage chimed and lifted its door to reveal the waiting car.

**As a sign, the house serves as the direct representation of technology as it has already become integrated into society. As a symbol, the house serves as an implied representation of society's shift away from the organic.**

After a long wait, the door swung down again" (Bradbury, 1). The house's indifference towards the lack of any present life paints a somber image of a society dominated by technology. This image is reinforced with the reappearance of the McClellan's dog and the mistreatment it receives at the



hands of these automated machines. "The dog, once huge and fleshy, but now gone to bone and covered with sores, moved in and through the house, tracking mud. Behind it whirred angry mice, angry at having to pick up mud, angry at inconvenience" (Bradbury, 2). This excerpt emphasizes the indifference the house feels towards life. The dog, despite being reduced to bone, is simply an inconvenience to the cleaning mice. The mice's only concern is being able to complete its job. The house, as a product of technological advancement, serves as a representation of mankind's own disregard for the natural world.

Every protagonist needs its antagonist. The entire basis of the antagonist is to obstruct the protagonist, helping to drive the story's plot. In "There Will Come Soft Rains", nature and its representations fulfill that role. The sole purpose of the automated house is to serve and protect the McClellans. It serves as the only barrier between the McClellans, although no longer present, and the outside world, in which it does so in a manner that "bordered on a mechanical paranoia" (Bradbury, 2). Yet the house still fails in this role, evident from the description, "The entire west face of the house was black, save for five places... The five spots of paint - the man, the woman, the children, the ball - remained. The rest was a thin charcoaled layer" (Bradbury, 2). From this, it is implied that the McClellans had fallen victim to some sort of nuclear disaster, a representation of the force of nature, after leaving the confines of the house's protection. Eventually, the house itself falls victim to nature's wrath. The manner in which the house burns to ashes in an instant, in a way, alludes to the implied instantaneous loss of the McClellans. All that is left of the house at the end of the story is a single wall amidst the rubble and ashes, similar to how all that is left of the McClellans is their imprint on the house's west face. Like how the house as a protagonist symbolizes humanity's growing neglect of the natural world, the story's antagonistic depiction of nature serves to symbolize the negative repercussions of humanity's attempt to put themselves above the natural.

### **The house, as a product of technological advancement, serves as a representation of mankind's own disregard for the natural world.**

To support the central conflict between the house and the forces of nature, Bradbury uses an apocalyptic setting to isolate these two forces and highlight the consequences of their interaction. "There Will Come Soft Rains" is depicted to have taken place in Allendale, California after some sort of nuclear disaster has taken place. This is evident from the following excerpt: "At night the ruined city gave off a radioactive glow which could be seen for miles." This imagery is reinforced by the shadows of the McClellans that were left behind, reminiscent of the same ones left behind after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. The story's central focus, the automated house, is depicted to be "stood alone in a city of rubble and ashes. This was the one house left standing." These two images help to create a sense of isolation for the story's events. The house is on its own. There are no humans for it to serve and it is implied that it is the only machine left. This helps to highlight how the negative consequences the house is experiencing is because of the forces of nature and not some other source.

Although more subtle, the apocalyptic setting additionally highlights the actual consequence of interfering with the natural world. The eradication of mankind is implied to have been the result of nuclear fallout through the use of words like "radioactive glow" and "charred", and the previously

mentioned shadow imprints left behind by the McClellans. Additionally, the dates Bradbury chose to use, August 4 and August 5, are in reference to the atomic bombing of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 ("Featured document display: The atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki"). Overall, the description of the world in "There Will Come Soft Rains" is largely reminiscent of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the aftermath of their respective bombings. With these details, Bradbury establishes a direct connection to the concept of nuclear weaponry which, from conception to creation, is entirely man-made. In this sense, mankind fell victim to its own creation, while nature continues to function with no regard for what has occurred.

In addition to the geographical setting, the temporal setting of "There Will Come Soft Rains" conveys the concept of nature being an unstoppable force through the symbol of time itself. The story begins with the automated house stating, "Today is August 4, 2026". This initial statement of the date acts as an important element of storytelling. It establishes a starting point for the story and also foreshadows its ending. The automated house's repetition of "Today is August 5, 2026, today is August 5, 2026..." amidst its destruction harkens back to its first statement of the date at the story's beginning events. Despite what the house itself has been through, the date still changes. It is still the next day. The importance of this repetition is to highlight how time still goes on, the same way nature is unstoppable. No matter what happens to humanity or to its inventions, nature will still take its course.

"There Will Come Soft Rains" is filled with numerous symbols, some clearly stated and others more subtly implied. The inclusion of Sara Teasdale's poem is likely the most important and the most obvious of these symbols. The brief re-telling of Mrs. McClellan's favorite poem highlights the central theme of the story. As explained by Melissa Girard, Teasdale's poem contrasts the image of a paradise "with the reality of a natural world dominated by indifference, motivated only by its own survival, and oblivious to the existence or extinction of man." This allusion to the original poem helps to solidify the story's main message to the reader. All of the story's events are centered around the house's indifference towards its missing human owners. The circumstances surrounding the poem's re-telling illustrate this concept perfectly. "A voice spoke from the study ceiling: 'Mrs. McClellan, which poem would you like this evening?' The house was silent. The voice said at last, 'Since you express no preference, I shall select a poem at random.'" The house is oblivious to the fact that Mrs. McClellan isn't present. It continues its function like how nature, as stated in Teasdale's poem, "Would scarcely know that [mankind] were gone." Once again, the concept of nature being unstoppable even with the absence of mankind is reinforced.

"There Will Come Soft Rains" by Ray Bradbury is a short story that outlines the consequences of humanity's interference with the natural world. He cleverly uses an automated house to act as the protagonist of his story to portray an obsolete technologically-dependent society. Through the symbolic use of nature as an antagonist, he foreshadows the harmful ramifications of humanity's actions. Both the physical and temporal setting of the story add to the concept of nature being an unstoppable force, unfortunate for mankind. Lastly, Bradbury's usage of Sara Teasdale's poem with the same name as an overarching symbol of the story's theme, in tangent with all of the previously stated elements, effectively conveys a warning for the reader to keep in mind. All of which is in hopes of avoiding the same bleak future.

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# Shape Shift: The Ebb and Flow of Time

Tyson Ranalli

“So, Tyson, you can see yourself working here for the next thirty years, right?” Quipped my former boss with a slight smirk on his face, the owner of a welding company I was working for. If it wasn't frightening enough to imagine myself working in an occupation I wasn't passionate about, it was even more terrifying to continue to indulge in the countless volatile fixes that came with the job. This job and those joneses would continue to steal my soul. As an adolescent developing in a small diverse community, attentiveness towards rank and education was diminished by the mind set of achieving a job, whether lawful or unlawful, that would support the ones you love. Exposure to these surroundings would ultimately lead me to a career in a field illustrated by back breaking labor, long hours and eventually, drug addiction; with my escape revealing itself in receiving an education.

After the numerous kicks and pushes on my skateboard, I found myself exhausted and at the tip of the main overpass that overlooked my hometown, Oakley, CA. As I stood there, catching my breath, I saw a barren wasteland, train tracks and empty fields. My friends waited at the bottom of the overpass at our local meet up point, Yogurt Island. In Oakley, people are diverse, agriculture is a main commodity and blue-collar jobs are a way of life. My best friend, Matthew, looked at me as he licked the top swirl of his cookie dough ice cream cone, “do you think it'll be easy scoring a gig when we get out of school? Maybe I can get a job with my dad at the Budweiser plant.” Evaluating my future internally and somberly grasping the thought that there were no graduates in my family timeline, I looked at the options that readily surrounded me, wretchedly holding my ice cream cone. To me, going to school wasn't even a thought. My friends and I perceived school as unattainable and for “yuppies”. Soon enough I would construct a defensive and somewhat aggressive mindset that school wasn't for me. In fact, it's for privileged people with parents who had the money to spend on their spoiled children to experience the “college life” and drive around in their new Range Rovers. Yuck.

My sister was a secretary for a local boiler making company looking for welders. She had told me that if I wanted a job when I got out of school, they were looking to hire. In the quiet moments of my



life, I began to evaluate what would ultimately be the “best” for me. Internally, I felt like I was lying to myself, basing what I wanted to do for a profession on how others perceive it, rather than sculpting my own individuality and passion. Fyodor Dostoyevsky wrote, “there are things which a man is afraid to tell even to himself, and every decent man has a number of such things stored away in his mind.” (Banaji and Greenwald, 24) I too, had ideas brewing in my mind, but when does one finally express those emotions, not for the better of your surrounding friends and family, but for yourself? How many “colorless lies” would I continue to tell myself, just to satisfy those around me? No one in my family ever considered college. I truthfully felt that if I told my parents that I wanted to go to college,

it would be more of a burden and a financial deficit on their bank account, which would outweigh my future and passion. Reluctantly I accepted the job with the boiler company.



“Dude, trust me, you’re going to need this to stay awake, we have a twelve hour shift ahead of us.” Uppers, downers and anything in between seemed to be the social norm in this unfamiliar “profession” of mine. Upon stepping into the boiler industry, I was what veterans in the trade called “green” and highly suggestible. If this trade was a “college” to learn welding, I was enrolled. Unbeknownst to me the curriculum included a variety of drugs, long hours and physical labor in the pursuit of, as my older co-workers put it, achieving “manhood.” The crew I worked with was lean, only seven of us worked for the company, providing a “family” type of atmosphere with a tightly knit group of people, implementing a feeling of belonging. “Social mindbugs can give us both false feelings of faith in people we perhaps shouldn’t trust and the opposite.” (Banaji, Greenwald, 16) In the book *Blind Spot*, an example used is that of one, Bernard Madoff, who was instrumental in the grandest investment fraud scheme in U.S. History. Madoff befriended others who had similar religious backgrounds in order to gain their investment. Although no one at this boiler company were Ponzi-scheme millionaires, we all shared a common thread, desperate young adults scouring for our own crack at the “American Dream.” It became clear to me that the faith and trust I had placed in my peers, like that of Madoff, had preyed upon my susceptibility. Every time I accepted what was given to me to “get me by” the smallest voice inside myself reminded me it was wrong, but the volume of the external influence was louder.

**Evaluating my future internally and somberly grasping the thought that there were no graduates in my family timeline, I looked at the options that readily surrounded me, wretchedly holding my ice cream cone.**

Years of this lifestyle took its toll and through rediscovering what was important to me, I gained clarity and realized I expected more out of myself. Climactically, I checked into rehab. After completing the program and attending group meetings on a routine basis, I looked to avert my attention away from addiction, realizing I wanted to be a voice for those similarly situated. I thought about the therapists and psychologists who helped me navigate through the maze that became my life. After conducting an experiment, Claude M. Steele resulted that, “by explaining the experiment to them after it was over-debriefing them-we might help them better cope with these pressure in their own lives.”(Steele, 34) This idea struck me, in the same way the researchers informed the participants by debriefing and empowering them, in turn it equipped them with knowledge and more improved ways to manage life’s hurdles. I too gained tools that shielded me, like an invisible cloak, that I can now use to stand firm against personal mutinies. The idea of a psychologist becoming an overpass, like the one I crossed over daily as a child in my hometown, was a way for me to escape addiction and, in other words, “get my ice cream”. This cross over to my individuality was mind-blowing, and I knew that I needed to apart of it.

“Tyson, it’s like walking on eggshells around you, I don’t know how you’re going to act anymore,” cried my mother the night before I checked into rehab. I realized that all the stereotypes and judgments people placed on addicts were exactly how my family and friends viewed me. Sneaky,

shifty and untrustworthy, nothing mattered anymore besides the fulfillment of my own agenda. Although leaving the boiler company was a huge financial risk, I liberated myself from all the negative qualities that came with it. More clearly, it funneled my thoughts into helping people and eventually thrust me towards school. Enrolling in school went against my working-class mentality I had as a younger man. All the misconceptions that I previously had regarding school were shattered in the days and months leading up to enrollment. It became clear that there are people that work incredibly hard to put themselves through school without the financial support from their family. The most interesting part about this realization is that my two worlds, blue collar and academia, co-exist. A physical job is tolling on your body and I'm starting to learn that mental fatigue from school can be just as tiring, if not more. My goal regarding school is to become a substance abuse counselor with the hopes that I can become the "overpass" for someone fighting a similar battle. Not knowing the road ahead of me is daunting yet understanding that I genuinely have a passion for helping people, is comforting.

**If this trade was a "college" to learn welding, I was enrolled. Unbeknownst to me the curriculum included a variety of drugs, long hours and physical labor in the pursuit of, as my older co-workers put it, achieving "manhood."**

Finally, yet importantly, a quote that centers the book *Whistling Vivaldi* screeches out at me. Claude M. Steele writes about social threats and states, "I hope to convince you that ignoring it...to push it into the shadows-is costly, to our own personal success and development, to the quality of life in an identity-diverse society and world, and to our ability to fix some of the bad ways that identity still influences the distribution of outcomes in society." (Steele, 4) As a young adult, exposure to my surroundings led me down a path that will forever be memorialized in every aspect of my life. Moving on from it, but never forgetting the values inherited. As Steele wrote, pushing these issues into dark corners where these threats are only strengthened, shedding light on them is imperative, and in doing so conquering the three segments of my identity that had previously dominated my life. Moving forward, I hope to continue to value these experiences and in turn use them to forge not only my path but also to help people fight stigmas relating to addiction, education and the surroundings that shaped them.

## Works Cited

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*Tyson Ranalli was born in Oakley, California in 1990. After graduating high school, Tyson spent seven years as a boilermaker and pipe welder, before ultimately deciding to follow his dream of becoming a clinical psychologist with a focus on substance abuse recovery. Tyson draws his influence from punk rock and the DIY ethic therein, where you work to build the world you want to see.*



