



# Backcountry Review

Issue No. 8

Live Free & Transcend

*Conrad Anker comes to terms with his mortality,  
embracing fatherhood after years of cheating death.*

Izaiah Fisher's paradoxical escape  
Irene Yee puts on a new lens and defies stereotypes  
Richard Louv and Madelyn Nover discuss Nature Deficit Disorder



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Springfield High School's Miller Integrated Nature Experience (MINE) gives students a look at Oregon they may never see otherwise. The program combines nature writing, Oregon geography, leadership, and journalism while providing a foundation for environmental consciousness and stewardship.

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Yuriana Espino Sosa enjoys a spring hike at Mt. Pisgah.

# Finding A Sense Of Place

Yuriana Espino Sosa breaks out of her comfort zone through writing and creates her own narrative.



Yuriana Espino Sosa



Madison Blaine

I woke up every morning to the smell of coffee or my mom’s loud music, often hearing her jam to Vicente Fernandez on a Saturday morning, meaning she was cleaning and waiting for my brother and I to get up to go to the grocery. On our way home we stopped for ice cream, vanilla, next to the bus station. The ice cream melted instantly. We’d play outside with the neighbor kids until the sun disappeared into oblivion and only the moonlight lit the streets. It didn’t matter how late it was because I felt safe. Even when my mom asked me to go buy milk and bread to have a late-night snack, everything felt safe.

My home back in Mexico is a beautiful place, and I wish more people could see it through my eyes because nothing else compares, at least not to me. I loved the smell of humid mornings following a rain, or when the sun peaked, the sound of the traffic growing louder and louder. From time to time, I can close my eyes and hear and see it all again—the sound of birds darting across the cityscape, the smell of fresh oranges across the street, or even the vendors passing through my house trying to sell local goods. My house was on a hill so you could see the whole city, pristine at dusk. The last time I stood outside to admire the view, I grabbed a chair and sat outside. It was a little bit chilly and windy but the weather didn’t bother me. I sat there watching the city light up one last time.

As soon as I heard the words, “we’re leaving,” flashbacks from all of my nine years of life raced through my mind. It was impressive how much I could remember in just a few seconds. I was next to grandma, and when I looked at her she was trying to be strong and hold back tears. I looked at mom, she too was crying, and I soon followed. I remember spending every summer with my grandma. My mom had to work a lot so she would send me with grand-

ma every time I didn’t have school. She hated being called “grandma,” unwilling to accept any name that made her feel “old.”

Instead, I called her “Mamá Berta,” her name. At that moment what made my heart break was my mom’s look of sadness. She was leaving behind what I was taking with me. I had to go with my mother and she was leaving hers behind. She had to leave the person who cared about her the most, the one who always put food on a plate, the one who never judged, no matter what. I felt like I was taking that away from my mother because she was leaving all of that so I could have a better life.

At that point, I closed the door and opened another to a new world. I came to this country when I was 9 years old with no knowledge of the English language. I was lost in a place where no one understood me. I was living in Washington and the first couple of months were hard, new school, new people, new everything. I didn’t understand what people were saying, and they didn’t understand me either. I still remember the first day of school. The fifth-grade teacher handed me a popsicle stick and asked me to put it inside the cup that said the food I wanted for lunch. She had cups with different food labels. Of course, I didn’t understand that at that time. I didn’t speak English and she didn’t speak Spanish, nor was there anyone in the classroom that did. I was lost.

She tried to explain. I could see her frustration, but it wasn’t her fault, nor mine. It was a hard first day that turned into hard weeks, then months. People made fun of me, whispering to their friends about me, even my own kind would make fun of me for even trying to speak English. I tallied all the reasons why I wanted to leave. I remember crying to my mom: “I want to go back.”





I slowly started to accept the fact that this was my new home, then halfway through the fifth grade we moved to Oregon. Once again a new school, new people, new everything. I took it as an opportunity to start fresh. No one knew me and therefore I thought things were going to be different, but I struggled. Again, a classroom full of laughter all geared toward me. The teacher asked me to go up front and read something out loud. I tried pronouncing some of the words but they did not come out right. I cried and ran out of the classroom, thinking to myself, “you are weak.”

I hated writing and reading all the way to the middle of seventh grade because I didn’t understand what I was writing or reading. There was no Spanish translation. Adapting to a new language was a struggle, maybe one of the biggest challenges in my life, but I wasn’t going to give up. I grabbed a piece of paper and a pencil and started writing. I grabbed a book and started reading. I never liked raising my hand in class, but I started doing it. I started speaking up even when I was shut down.

I found myself writing almost every night, fighting through the cramps in my hand. I wrote until all of my thoughts were gone. Soon I realized writing was my safe space. I looked at it as a way to speak my mind. Every time I write something I put my mind and soul into it. And I feel like every word I spell is a piece of me. I found writing as a way to speak, without my mouth moving, and it saved me in a way. I think my journal knows more about me than any other person. Whenever I felt like crying I realized there was no need to cry, no need to be sad, because it was all gone and made into words on a page.

In school, when I’m assigned an essay, I feel like it’s not me writing. I think it’s a machine that’s inside of me programmed to do that job because they’re not my words, it’s research and “evidence” from some random website I found on Google. In school you are

told, “write about the book we read in class” and on my own it’s “write about the first thing that comes to your mind.” I am in control.


I always remind myself that if I had not come to this place and struggled my way to the top then I would’ve never picked up that pencil. Being bilingual means I can do it in both languages, it adds more meaning to my words, and it means that I can help people who identify with my story. Writing saved me and all the stories in this magazine make me realize I’m not alone. I am not the only person who has struggled. At first, when my adviser Ivan Miller talked to me about writing my story, I was scared, almost speechless at first, because I didn’t know how it would turn out. Then when he mentioned the story would run with some incredible personal stories—Brisa Silva exploring the western United States, Izaiah Fisher flying to New Orleans on a whim, or Madelyn Nover interviewing best-selling author Richard Louv about nature-deficit disorder—my soul felt like it left my body. Reading all of these stories made me feel part of something. I always felt alone in a way, but after meeting all of these wonderful people and reading their stories I realize I’m not alone, and I never was. This class is a safe space where I feel free. It makes me feel at home.

Sometimes my mom asks me if I want to go back to live in Mexico, but my answer is always the same, “no.” It’s not because I don’t miss it, of course I do. But I have everything here now. There are times that make me want to give up everything and go back, but experiencing the different seasonal changes helps me see the beauty of both places. I used to close my eyes everytime I missed home. Local places like Mount Pisgah help make me feel connected again, hiking all the way to the top just so I can hear the birds, the wind, the cars from far away. That is home. I no longer have to close my eyes.



# Framing Natural Perfection

Outdoor photographer Kat Carney finds her passion while exploring southwestern geography.

 Allison Martin & Lane McLaughlin

Photography can be a lot of things, from mixed media art on a website to Instagram models posing for their following. There are a million ways to take photos, and a million reasons to. Kat Carney views photography as a way to explore people's inner workings, and she uses her love of the outdoors to frame this work.

"I love nature. I love beautiful landscapes, but really capturing people within those landscapes is my favorite part of photography," says Carney.

Carney spent one of her college summers living and working in Arizona, and the other in Alaska. There she met her now husband and her love for photography grew.

"Everywhere we went, and everything we did, I took photos and I didn't know what I was going to do. I was just shooting for fun for myself because the landscapes inspired me, because I was seeing all of these new things for the first time," says Carney.

Growing up in Kansas, Carney was not exposed to the vastness and variety that the outdoors could bring. Discovering new gorgeous landscapes inspired Carney, further driving

her passion for photography.

"The first time I saw the Red Rock Desert, my eyes were just bulging because I couldn't believe this alien landscape that was so foreign to me. So I started shooting. I started shooting those things, and I wasn't really sure where it was going to lead. But eventually, it sort of built on itself," says Carney.

Throughout her college experience Carney spent hours upon hours researching photography. Eight years later Carney quit her full time job in San Diego to focus solely on her love of photography. She has opened two photography companies, Kat Carney Photography and Swell & Stone. She has seen great success, and has taken photos for clients like REI, Honda, L.L. Bean, and Hyundai.

Carney tells a story through her works, integrating both her subject and the world around them to illustrate something beyond words.

Carney hopes to show emotion and humanity in her photos, not just the sterilized perfection that photography as a whole tends towards.



All photos by Kat Carney (pictured below)













A woman with red hair, wearing a green tank top and purple pants, is rappelling down a red rock cliff. She is holding a camera in her left hand and the rope with her right. The background shows a desert landscape with a blue sky and white clouds.

# PEOPLE

# THAT

# INSPIRE

Everyone has a story to tell and every story has a lesson to teach. From all ends of the world, these outdoor adventurers inspire people everyday. From running across all seven continents to taking photos while suspended hundreds of feet in the air, these individuals are redefining what's possible and what's not.



# Relentless

Runner Michael Wardian details his experiences exploring the globe on foot.

People discover their mantra in different ways, sometimes through struggle and other times from success. Michael Wardian found his after throwing up 15 times in 2001 during his first 100K race, The Chancellor Challenge, in Boston.

A 47-year-old marathon runner, Wardian continues to rely on this slogan in every phase of his life, which has led to sev-

eral extraordinary accomplishments along the way. Wardian has won the World Marathon Challenge twice and competed for team USA in the World Championships, while also racing in about 50 races every year.

Perhaps nothing compares to running in the World Marathon Challenge, a seven-day, seven-marathon challenge on each of the seven continents, something Wardian won in 2017 and 2019. He still holds the world record with an average of 2 hours and 45 minutes.

In his first attempt, Wardian only managed a total of 15 hours of sleep within the seven days of races. "I was able to use the adrenaline from each new continent," Wardian says, "just to be able to make it through the week."

The final race was in Sydney, Australia, where he finished his biggest mileage week ever at around 183 miles. After win-

ning, he went out and ran 17 miles just to run his first ever 200-mile week.

This upcoming year Wardian plans to run 50 miles a day on average while running across America, starting in California and ending in Delaware, in less than 75 days to raise money for World Vision's clean water project. His goal is to raise \$100,000 for the developing world, primarily in Africa. According to a local news outlet in Arlington, Virginia, Wardian said, "I haven't had a great chance to explore the United States. I have raced in different states but never strung it all together."

Wardian's life does not lie solely in his running. With a wife and two sons, Wardian invests a lot of time in his family, while balancing a job as an international ship broker. His approach always stays the same—stay relentless.

— Landon Cowan

Photo by Stephen Gosling



# Artistic

Surfer Noah Beschen catches big waves and sets his own terms for success.

The North Shore of Oahu hosts some of the most dangerous waves in the world. In the winter, this reef break displays its humbling power as the swell gets pushed onshore. The wave hits the reef and slows, the force of momentum causing it to curl over itself, producing a perfect 20-foot barrel. The deep, blue water turns to white foam as air mixes with the churning water. On the wave, one wrong move could end up fatal. Pipeline is a demanding place to surf, intimidating to even the best and most ambitious surfers.

Noah Beschen began surfing on the North Shore at the age of 6. His father, Shane Beschen ranked second in the world in 1996 and became the only pro surfer in history to score a perfect 30 during a heat. Beschen found his love for surfing when his dad took him on the World Surf League tour. He learned about different cultures and the world. Most importantly, his dad taught him about how to push past his perceived limits. Beschen says, "it helped me a lot with learning how to push myself. I feel like a lot of people don't have that... they don't know how to push themselves when they are scared... I was really blessed."

Beschen didn't spend his time doing normal kid things, instead he was surfing. The North Shore is described as the mecca for surfing with legendary surf spots such as Pipeline, Sunset Beach, and Waimea Bay. These spots were basically in Beschen's backyard, offering him the opportunity to spend most of his time in the water.

Growing up, Beschen realized he wanted to take professional surfing seriously. "When I was a kid I wanted to be a pro surfer but there was always this other thing that I wanted to do," says Beschen. "I need to surf for a living and I'm living



Photo by Andy Woodward

my dream. I'm 21 now and I'm not like a child. People ask me what I do for work and I'm like 'I guess I surf for work.' That's pretty crazy."

Gaining over 98,000 followers on Instagram, and picking up sponsorships from Lost Surfboards and RVCA, has allowed Beschen to travel the world making surf videos, showing off his barrel riding skills and aerial acrobatics, making seemingly impossible tricks look effortless. He hopes to navigate the stress of the professional world by focusing more on his artistic pursuits, hoping to inspire a new generation of surfers.

"Surfers are more athletes nowadays then they are artists," he says. "I feel like I am going to be... making the culture go more into the artist vibe. I feel like a lot of my friends and people from my generation are kind of doing that, too. I feel like that's how I want to pursue my surfing career, with more of an artistic vibe."

From his humble beginnings as a grom on the North Shore, he has found success in the surfing community on his own terms. For now, Beschen will focus on producing surf videos, celebrating his creativity and building his own legacy.

— Aonghas Houston





Contributed Photo

## Ambitious

Luz Lituma creates a safe environment for people to experience the outdoors.

Founded in 2017, Latinxhikers has been a key platform in advocating for the Latino community. Between organizing community hikes and using Instagram as a platform to spread further awareness, Luz Lituma has opened the door for many.

New York, a bustling contemporary city, limited Lituma's access to the outdoors as a child and thereby fueled her desire to escape the city's limits. Lituma

developed a greater appreciation for the outdoors when visiting Ecuador. "I remember going to my parents' town and just being in shock of all the green space around me and all the mountains, the super fresh air, and I was constantly pointing it out to my cousins who are from there... and they'd be like, what's the big deal, you know? And I think that was probably like the first time I really noticed nature," says Lituma.

Lituma moved to Georgia at the age of 8 and quickly discovered her love of hiking, but noticed that something wasn't quite right. "Once I started hitting the trails in the north Georgia mountains, there was a major lack of diversity on the trails," shares Lituma.

Realizing the hiking community lacked overall diversity, Lituma was later inspired toward activism.

The Latinxhikers premise revolves around building community. Lituma says, "I think the fact that it helps bring people together is the ultimate thing. Just beyond us, it's the fact that it even just exists and helps other people realize that they're not alone out there."

Not only has Latinxhikers transformed individuals' connections to the outdoors, it has impacted Lituma's personal life as well. After seeing the positive influence her work has made and watching her organization grow, Lituma left her old life behind and is pursuing her dream, living in a camper and traveling to different locations.

"I've been living out on the road this year," says Lituma. "My main purpose is to host as many hikes around the U.S., wherever I go with my camper."

— Iris Ramirez Alvarez



Photo by Piper Sugg

## Reliable

Author William Sullivan strikes literary gold while hiking across Oregon.

As the author of over 20 books, local legend William Sullivan has educated outdoor enthusiasts about native wildlife, scenery, and history for decades. Sullivan's journey has encouraged thousands to leave home and explore Oregon.

Sullivan always knew he wanted to go into writing. Thinking freelance writing would be an easier and less stressful path, he made a deal with his wife: she would support his freelancing for seven years,

and if he was still unable to make a living from his writing he would work as a clerk at KMart. Under the threat of eternal retail clerkship, Sullivan started getting words on paper, and after about a year he completed his first publication: *The Cart Book, With Plans & Projects*. This initial attempt sold 11,000 copies but didn't quite satisfy the income requirement of the deal he made with his wife.

As the end of the seven years grew closer, Sullivan knew he had to take one last shot at his writing dreams. He decided to cover 1,361 miles, over 20 miles a day, everyday, for more than two months. He mapped out a route from Cape Blanco, in the southwest corner of Oregon, across four mountain ranges, finishing at the opposite end of the state in Hells Canyon.

Before leaving he spent three months researching plants, animals, and many historic events that took place around the hike. "The story ends up being, 'it's raining and cold.' But in my case, I was able to say, 'yeah, it's raining and cold, but so was David Douglas, the botanist who was here in 1826 looking for the sugar pine blob,'" says Sullivan.

The contents range from being held at gunpoint by a pot farmer, poisoning himself with mushrooms, and hiking 40 miles per day in the final stretch as he raced against the freezing winter. Upon completion of the journey, he wrote the book *Listening for Coyote*, which sold to a publisher for \$25,000. Sullivan recalls, "\$25,000 was unimaginable, it was more money than I had earned in my life."

The book was a finalist for the Oregon Book Award and was chosen as one of the top 100 most influential books in Oregon history. This huge victory "reset the clock" and saved him from a career at KMart, but more importantly he was branded as what he calls "the hiker guy."

These hiking guides have been Sullivan's most successful series and have sold over 500,000 thousand copies throughout Oregon, and Sullivan's work proves essential. In any case, he'll guide many readers towards their own adventure.

— Gavin Branch



# Resilient

Irene Yee defies climbing stereotypes working as an adventure photographer.

Climbing Mount Washington for the first time, Irene Yee learned a lesson about never giving up. Left alone to navigate with more weight than she could carry in her bag, she felt overwhelmed by fear. A fight commenced in her mind, presenting two options: fight through the mental barricade or give up. She sat on three separate occasions and had the same conversation with herself but everytime she decided to get up and try again. Perhaps more impressive than reaching the summit, Yee realized that fighting the urge to take the easy way out and give up was the secret to success, and now she tries to teach this lesson to everyone she meets.

Yee's adventure photography clinics allow her to do what she loves while also providing a platform to stand up for LGBTQ+, BIPOC, and women. She strives to help people find confidence by teaching resilience, encouraging risk taking, and showing the beauty of nature.

After Yee received a degree in backstage theater technology, she took a different route while looking for a job. She met some friends and was invited on an outdoor climb. She started out with a phone camera, taking pictures of her friends for fun, but this quickly ballooned into a career as a photographer. She knew what she wanted to do for the rest of her life and with the pandemic putting her previous job as a prop technician for Cirque Du Soleil to a halt, she was forced to take a risk and try photography full time.

"I think as life happens, and as you change and grow, your priorities change and grow... so it became about climbing really hard for fun," says Yee. "And [then]

just having it be a part of my artwork, rather than the focus of what I do with my life."

But Yee knew she was possibly starting in the face of failure, risking her career, her stability, and her whole life, but she found success. Now, she takes clients to Red Rock Canyon, teaching others to capture beautiful images, and sometimes helps them see a better side of themselves. She often encourages others to do what they never thought they could, while celebrating "the amazing differences that we all have."

"I think sometimes the hardest thing that you can do in life is face something that you don't want to."

—Irene Yee

Yee understands how challenging it is to reach everyone but she also understands the importance of it. Through her work, Yee focuses on the under-represented, making an effort to bring everyone together. "We can reach people by realizing that our thought processes are different, and our backgrounds are different," says Yee. "We just have to figure out how to meet in the middle so that we all can understand each other."

The climbing industry may have deeply rooted stereotypes, mainly focused on men, but Yee understands the value in representation, in and outside of the climbing world. At a young age, Yee noticed the lack of representation for Asian-American women and strives to be the representation she never had. She also understands and highlights the fact that it isn't only

important for women. "The world is so beautiful and diverse," says Yee. "There are so many folks here... And I think being able to see that represented and just opening people's minds to all the ways that you can be in this world is so important."

Knowing the world will not change overnight, Yee wants to move forward and provide inspiration. "I want people to believe in themselves. You can only hope to put something better in the world... For me, that's creating things that I didn't have when I was younger," Yee says.

Though a job like this has many rewards, it does not lack hardships, many of which offer her a chance to revisit that same conundrum she once faced on Mount Washington, modeling mental toughness and perseverance for clients, proving that mental toughness is the key aspect to success and one of the most important things in life.

"Physically, it's very demanding," says Yee. "My backpack is very heavy. And I don't think I [like] to admit how annoyed [I get] at how heavy it is. But it is. And so sometimes it's just really daunting to be like, okay, here's a two-hour hike with 40 pounds, and it's just a lot. But I know it's always worth it."

Yee adds, "mentally, emotionally it's just continuing on. I think that's sometimes the hardest thing that you can do in life is face something that you don't want to face and just be like, 'hey, we're gonna do it.'"

She fights for change in not only the climbing industry, but everywhere. Yee highlights how taking risks can make positive change in the world and our lives, and teaches people that fighting past the mental barriers that we create for ourselves is the best thing that we can do for ourselves. Yee's work has been published in *Outside* and *National Geographic*, spreading awareness and debunking stereotypes about the climbing world. Yee never stopped fighting that voice urging her to give up, and continued to climb up the mountain.

— Kayla Unrein



Photo by Irene Yee



Contributed Photo



## Innovative

Zachary Stocks highlights important history through Oregon Black Pioneers.

When the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic hit, Zachary Stocks, like many others, was laid off from his job. He quickly became worried about finding a new job in the small town of Astoria, however, a nearby nonprofit organization called Oregon Black Pioneers (OBP) had just opened applications for their first ever executive director position. “It felt like fate to me, really,” Stocks says. “I sent in my application, and I am very fortunate that they selected me.”

OBP is a Salem-based nonprofit orga-

nization dedicated to restoring, highlighting, and protecting the historical stories of African Americans. By working with museums across the Pacific Northwest to incorporate these stories into existing exhibits, or by creating new exhibits, OBP incorporates some much needed inclusivity into our historical systems. OBP offers a perfect platform for historians like Stocks to share their work and educate the public on the importance of black individuals in Oregon’s history.

As a grad student, Stocks began working for the Northwest African American Museum in Seattle, where he was introduced to the world of black history in the Pacific Northwest. Meanwhile, he continued to study black history on his own time in order to feed his passion. Stocks recently received the opportunity to speak to a group of local fourth graders about the life of Leticia Carson, a black immigrant who challenged the discriminatory land owning laws of her time. Stocks currently serves on the board for the Oregon Museums Association and also works as a volunteer at Lewis and Clark National Historical Park in Astoria.

Just one of the many stories that Stocks and his team have uncovered is the story of the Vanderpool Saloon. After working as a sailor in the West Indies, Jacob Vanderpool settled in Oregon in 1850. There, Vanderpool planned to begin his career in business, and despite being denied land ownership due to his race, Vanderpool opened his first business, the Vanderpool Saloon, restaurant, and boarding house.

Despite the success and popularity of the saloon, Vanderpool’s luck soon came to an end. Just one year after the opening of the Vanderpool Saloon, a local neighbor reported Vanderpool, claiming a violation of the Oregon Territory’s exclusion laws. This act strictly prohibited black people from owning land in the state of Oregon. Vanderpool was found guilty at trial, and therefore forced to flee the state, making him the first and only individual expelled.

Oregon Black Pioneers provide the perfect resources needed to give these historical black figures a chance at redemption, so that they may receive the credit that they truly deserve for their contributions to our history.

— Amanda Arch

## Persistent

Kate Ediger fights to protect the environment with her son Timber.

While in Nepal, 20,000 feet up at a base camp for Mt. Everest, Kate Ediger made a life-changing discovery. She found out she was pregnant with her son, Timber. Instantly, she teetered back and forth between the idea of losing her identity—professional snowboarder, environmentalist, all around badass. Yet, surrounded by Nepalese women toting their children around everywhere they went, at high elevation and in harsh climates (sometimes -20 degrees), Ediger realized she could do it, too, but with her own adventurous twist. At that moment, she decided to take Timber on crazy trips, sharing everything she enjoyed about the outdoors.

“My kid is like a spitting image of me in the fact that he just loves doing stuff outside,” says Ediger. “When I was pregnant I was freaking out because I’m like, what if my kid doesn’t even want to snowboard or what if he hates the outdoors?”

“I just took their mentality and just kept going. So anytime I was working I had my baby on my back.”

It didn’t take long for her son, Timber, to love the outdoors. Whether it’s snowboarding, hiking, or anything in between, Timber is always up for his next adventure.

“I (always) felt the most alive when I was outside,” says Ediger. “And then I noticed very quickly he craved it, too. And because it was always normal for him, he just adapted to it. He never even cared.”

Ediger is a Burton Snowboarding Ambassador, a mountain guide, and a really cool mom. Working to keep the planet healthy for future generations while raising her son, she shares the beauty of nature with all she comes into contact with. Ediger loves the outdoors, but loves it even more with Timber in tow.

Photo by Tristan Hansen



On Timber’s first big alpine climb in northern British Columbia, they camped overnight at Chico Lake. Bundled up in their bivy sacks and sleeping bags, they cuddled and watched the stars when something surreal happened. A meteor shower passed over, the reflection of the meteors and mountains lighting up the lake below. Ediger turned and saw the amazement in her child’s eye. Then the next morning they woke up around 5:30 in the morning to watch the sunrise.

Ediger wants Timber to grow up strong, to push himself, and to care about

the world just as much as she does. Ediger knows her job goes beyond enjoying the planet, but protecting it as well. That’s why she is partnered with Protect Our Winters Canada, striving to keep it beautiful.

“My son has to grow up in a world that I hope is as beautiful as we had,” says Ediger. “And I hope it’s not full of disasters and crazy things. So part of me feels this immense fear that things will go wrong for him. So I want to protect it as much as I can.”

— Kayla Unrein





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# Fighting For A Second Chance

Holden Smith finds a way to make amends by fighting fires while serving the rest of his prison sentence.



Carly Bramhall



Madison Blaine

Ontario, Oregon is quite cold in the winter. The young girl realized this while she shivered in front of Snake River Correctional Institution. As the clock struck 8:00 a.m., the crowd finally entered the somber building. Metal doors slammed and radios went off as she lined up to walk through the metal detector.

“You aren’t coming in here like that,” said the officer as she approached the front of the line in her favorite dress.

She looked around to see who he might be talking to and finally realized. Her mother pulled her out of line to walk back up the steep hill to the car. They had been here before, and knew now to always pack extra clothes. As they walked back in they could see the shaky hands and anxious glances, nerves bouncing around the bland room.

Finally, they made it through the metal detectors. It had been months since she had seen her cousin and looked forward to giving him a big hug. As another set of metal doors slammed open they saw the room of empty tables, and looked for their spot. Groups of inmates walked in as families frantically searched for their person. As the young girl’s cousin walked out, she ran up to him with that funny 5-year-old run.

For the next two hours they filled him in on all the family drama as she fidgeted in her seat. The best part of the visit: going to the vending machine. No inmates were allowed to go to the vending machines, but she always picked out his favorite, a cheese and beef stick. She was surrounded by murderers, rapists, robbers, and drug dealers, but she was more concerned about who was going to win Uno.

Every minute felt like 20. Yet, it was never enough time. A voice echoed across the room signaling that it was time to say goodbye. Tears streamed from her face. She gave him a bigger hug than the first. The family and her cousin walked in opposite directions. She blew kisses and made hearts with her hands. They

walked back through the slamming metal doors and up the hill to the car to begin their drive through onion fields and small towns to get back home.

**Holden Smith** was sentenced to 12 years in prison for armed robbery. Prior to his conviction, he seemingly succeeded at everything he did—he was funny, witty, and a star athlete. Growing up in the small coastal community of North Bend, he stopped going to school and started doing drugs. As a teenager, Smith started down an unforgiving path of substance abuse and addiction. That’s when it got dark, really dark, for everyone involved.

Smith found himself in his first treatment center at the age of 16, then again at 18, and finally right before his 21st birthday. Serenity Lane warned his family that he would have a hard time staying clean due to his age and the fact that the social pull of drugs proved too appealing. His family only allowed him to stay with them if he remained clean, so he resorted to couch hopping. Then on March 2, 2009, and again on March 26, he robbed Siu-slaw Bank with two accomplices. The police eventually located them at the Timber Inn.

A Lane County grand jury indicted the trio on 17 charges, including ten counts of second-degree robbery with a firearm, five counts of second-degree robbery, one count of first-degree theft, and one count of aggravated first-degree theft with a firearm. At just 21 years old, Smith was sent across the state to Snake River Correctional Institute, and later transferred to Shutter Creek Correctional Institute.

With four years left in his sentence, Smith became eligible to become an inmate firefighter, and he jumped at the opportunity. Smith says, “I did it because I wanted to give back to the commu-



Holden Smith breaks while fighting fires with Coos Fire Protection Association.





Writer Carly Bramhall visits the site of the Holiday Farm fire.

nity. I wanted to be out in the woods and do something that was a lot different than what I had been doing for the last eight years prior, where I was in an institution 24/7 and the only time I ever got to go outside was to a concrete yard.”

For the first time in years, Smith was given a purpose and a leadership role. He was elected squad boss for the Shutter Creek inmate fire crew which was a part of the Coos Forest Protection Association. Smith felt rewarded. He wasn’t just defending land for the state, he was protecting people’s homes, livestock, and livelihood.

In 2021 alone, wildfires scorched 826,217 acres of Oregon land, destroying 174 buildings. The wildfires across the Pacific Northwest have become increasingly more serious, massive, and destructive. Fair or not, the severity of this issue has proved to be a turning point for many men like Smith. Raging fires have created opportunities for inmates to reintegrate into the community before their release dates.

Firefighters are in high demand, and inmates are the perfect hire. The fire companies get paid, the correctional officers on site get paid, the prisons get paid, but the inmates doing the work don’t get paid much. In Oregon, inmates don’t get days off, no matter how many hours they work. Oregon inmates have been sent out to fires since 1953 as a rehabilitation opportunity. Smith and his crew mates were only paid \$3 a day. Smith says, “I would make \$3 in a few minutes on the streets.”

These programs are often praised because they can be an incredible opportunity for inmates to work outside and connect with people in the field, creating potential job offers upon release. But there is one major problem: two out of three people released from prison in the United States will go on to be repeat offenders, and over half of those will end up in prison again. The chaos and unruly nature of fires allowed Smith to find stability in a world that was otherwise daunting.

Smith has taken his experience and training from fighting fires as an inmate and made a career out of it, working on fires that pay \$1,000 a day or more. While he was fighting fires as an inmate he made connections and positive impressions that helped him get a job. Since being released, Smith has earned many certifications and has started his own tree falling business. He now travels the Pacific Northwest fighting fires and falling trees.

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Ever since my cousin was incarcerated, I promised to pick him

up on his release. The only concept of 12 years into the future for me was that I would be able to drive. In my head it was always going to be a purple truck, but my blue Kia Optima did the job.

The night before, I sat with my mom and aunt all night, anxiously talking about those past 12 years, anticipating the future and the unknown. The next morning, I picked out my favorite sweater for the occasion.

As I approached the slamming gate, an officer instructed me to park the car. Suddenly, there he was. No metal detectors or officers, just him. I ran up and gave him the biggest hug. It felt wild to be sitting in a car with him. We talked for a while, but then we just sat.

I felt anxious for him to see the rest of the family, to go to a store, to go anywhere that wasn’t a cement cell. It was overwhelming to watch him take in so much all at once. As Covid would have it, we all met at a park. I was so excited for everyone to see him step out of the car as a free man. We were all crying and laughing, trying to comprehend the fact that he was standing in front of us.

I was scared for him. With just one small mistake, he could end up back in prison, or engulfed in flames. It was hard to focus on his release when I knew that we could lose him again.

I grew up without someone I loved. I had to call when I started riding my bike without training wheels, and then again when I started driving. All people are flawed, including my cousin, but the prison system doesn’t exactly prepare inmates to reenter the world. Spending 12 years aging inside a cell, Smith was not prepared for anything that would hit him in the real world, a place he no longer recognized. He didn’t know how to work a phone or a Macbook, and he struggled to keep up with the many relationships he had been deprived of during incarceration. Nowadays most everyone communicates on social media, something he did not have to deal with for 12 years. It is true that Smith has created a family and a career, but that is not because of his time in prison, rather in spite of it.

All of the suffering my family went through during this process would be worth it if we could be a part of his life again, and be a whole family once more. I know now that even the people we idolize aren’t perfect. But every phone call from prison, every letter, and every visit felt perfect to me. Looking back now on all the letters I saved, and all the blurry holiday pictures we have in front of a cheesy background in the visiting room, I can remind myself that all of the memories don’t mean any less because of where they were made. I don’t want to be inside of a prison ever again, but I don’t resent that I had to learn that lesson.





Biologist Greg Taylor sets out to catch cutthroat trout on the Willamette River.

# Heading Downriver

Mazith Evans explores the health of Oregon's rivers with U.S. Army Corps fisheries biologist Greg Taylor.



Mazith Evans



Madison Blaine

Writing has always been a struggle for me, almost like a never ending burden throughout my education. I've never been good at it. Grammar and punctuation seem to haunt me any time I write. For the most part, I loathe writing, but I love fishing. Greg Taylor, who manages 13 dams and reservoirs as the leading fisheries biologist for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, shares this passion, so much so that he has built his whole life around it.

On March 12, I met Taylor for the first time. Loading up bags, lunches, and rods, we drove about eight miles upriver off Highway 58 and launched our boat. Rain clouds lurking in the distance, the weather started out warm, enough where I could peel off my rain jacket, the sun warming my face.

Taylor used a fly rod with a pink indicator with a double fly setup. He had me using a spinning rod with an old silver pink and yellow number 1 Vibrax Blue Fox spinner. We talked about our favorite lures. He indicated a preference for spinners, even though he usually uses fly rods. From here, we both agreed that Vibrax Blue Foxes are the best for spinners. Taylor told me that most of the steelhead he catches are from using a spinner. We went cast for cast. He would throw his fly rod and I would follow it with a spinner, talking about fishing between spots.

As we progressed down the river, the weather turned overcast and windy. Then the rain settled in. My mind started to drift.

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Some of my favorite memories are fishing with my dad, quickly learning that fishing is a good way to escape reality. Early mornings tying leads, cutting bait, checking tackle, tossing gear into my Jeep, and driving through the dark on empty roads brought me joy.

On December 26, 2014, my father died. I wasn't prepared for the way it happened. My family had not heard from him all day,

but that was considered normal in his line of work as a timber faller. After hours went by, we decided to search for him. Later we arrived at his work site, driving through the gate with someone else's truck to break the lock. We drove around in the dark until we found his truck. He was not there, so my brother and my dad's coworker tracked down the mountain searching for him. My mom stayed by the truck and I hiked down, but it was too steep for me. About 20 minutes later my brother returned, silent, but we knew what he was about to say.

Time stopped, emotions dissipated, everything just went cold. When the words finally came out, "he's dead," my mom broke down, screaming. They found him, bloodied and still curled up laying on the ground after being hit by a tree. To this day, it still feels like I'm waiting for him to come back and sit on the couch, but it never happens. Nonetheless, I sit there after school hoping it will.

We did everything together. He taught me to fish. He was my best friend.

It's been seven years and every time I drive up through the night to get to the river I still think about him, what happened. It haunts me. Yet, all these raw thoughts and emotions slowly disappear as I get closer to the river.

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Taylor and I conversed about past fishing tips and my post high school plan, both of us laughing. Our mood never changed as we chatted about fishing and the river's current. Taylor told me about a project where he caught just over 120 steelhead within a month.

Taylor's dad took him on his first fishing trip when he was six months old, in the same drift boat we sat in. Taylor and his father talk fishing every week and bring each other fishing magazines. At 9, his family moved up to Alaska, where he lived for 20 years. Taylor cherishes his time there, saying, "we got to do some amazing



things. We did all kinds of crazy fishing in places that other people never get to go.”

Taylor’s favorite adventures consist of multi-day trips in the more remote areas. For Taylor, it’s all about the experience of being on the water early in the morning and late through the afternoon. While he does not have the most expensive gear, Taylor has built his collection over the years, now owning a drift boat as well as a raft and a bigger ocean boat. Taylor has quite the assortment of tackle and fishing rods, each piece of equipment serving its own purpose. Now 50, Taylor expects to maintain his current lifestyle for as long as possible.

While his passion is fishing, his day job fits him just as well. Being one of the leading fisheries biologists in Oregon, Taylor plays a big part in finding solutions to the problems that Oregon and other states face. Oregon fishing, specifically steelhead fishing, has taken massive hits in the last couple of years, decreasing 20 to 24 percent per decade since 1980. Factors like hydroelectric damming, over-fishing, increased water temperatures, and climate change all contribute to the decline. Finding the facts and analyzing complicated situations proves the most difficult part of his job, but for Taylor the fish and the science behind them provides plenty of information, rather the hardest part of his job is dealing with people. Taylor is currently being hit with a lawsuit, which is a commonplace for him. His job is to study fish and do anything possible to aid them, which leads to conflicts with major companies and businessmen.

Taylor states, “if you get in the management side of things, it’s gonna be people. And so, you know, there can be real challenges and frustrations.”

**Taylor often ponders**, “Am I living to work, or am I working to live?” Like most people, he often finds it difficult to manage time between his priorities and hobbies. Taylor’s family consists of his partner Rose, her two sons, and his 16-year-old daughter, and his family comes first.

To complicate matters, steelhead numbers are decreasing, with a record low return in 2021. Steelhead make good indicators of the health of aquatic systems because they use all portions of the river system and require cool, clean water. There are serious problems and threats to our wildlife and rivers. For instance, the Columbia

River saw record low numbers, which led to a shutdown of all recreational steelhead fishing in the Columbia Basin for the fall season. Steelhead trout on the Columbia and Snake River have been listed as threatened. Meanwhile, dams severely disrupt steelhead and salmon habitats. Taylor is trying to find solutions.

The reality is society didn’t build the dams for fish; they serve a purpose in our society to keep floods away, to keep people safe, to supply electricity. The problems can become complicated and cost a lot of money. Taylor is going to spend an estimated one billion dollars on salmon restoration as a result of dams disrupting fish habitats. Within Taylor’s line of work there comes a lot of challenges and frustrations with people not seeing things the same way, like how to proceed with some of these complicated matters. Taylor states, “a lot of that falls on my shoulders to manage and to try to get right [for the] agency and for society.”

**Fishing has always** been a way for me to escape everything going on in the world, to distance myself from people and do something that truly makes me happy. Taylor’s lifestyle proves inspiring—simply equipped with the freedom to fish every weekend, decide where I want to go and do it. Being out on the river with Taylor really made me think about fishing in a more meaningful way. In the past, I’ve used it as a way to heal from past trauma, to distract myself so I don’t have to think about what happened.

As I was sitting on the front of the boat, I realized I could make a difference, like Taylor helping to defend the ecological community and helping others. Taylor showed me that it is possible to find a middle ground by following through on my own desires while trying to protect the rivers that mean so much to me. Oregon saw a record low number for steelhead in 2021, at 55,307, according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. This is about 4,000 less than the average over the last ten years. If we as a community want to keep fishing something has to change.

People need to act, Taylor states that “the best thing people can do is join groups that align with values that they have or things they want to promote.” Taylor understands that being aware that resources are limited and it’s going to take time and effort, along with some help from people like Taylor, but we all have to work to fix these issues.







Brisa Silva leans against her RV near Fall Creek reservoir.

# Grand Summer Road Trip

Brisa Silva travels 4,000 miles through the western United States, expanding her cultural knowledge and uncovering a love for nature.



Brisa Silva



Madison Blaine

A few minutes after crossing the border into Idaho, my family and I took a break to stretch on the side of the road when it hit: living in a bulky vehicle for two weeks and traveling over 4,000 miles with three other humans, one a troublesome younger sibling, proved challenging. The sun scorched everything in my vicinity. For every second I lingered, the sunrays fed on my blazing skin. To my surprise, the dry vegetation nearby didn't burst up into flames. I decided to stroll to the refreshing shade that my family's RV provided and with every step a cluster of beige field crickets leapt from the ground. It was plain to see that even they wanted a taste of the cool shadow. I hopped back into the RV and prepared for the lengthy journey ahead.

As much as my family and I all got on each other's nerves at times, seeing seven states was quite the learning experience, especially learning about the Lakota. The tribe call themselves Lakota because it meant "friend" or "ally." Their tribal territories were located in the northern Great Plains where they lived in homes made of wooden poles covered with buffalo hide. The Lakota were known for their strength.

This trip seemed like it was more for my 12-year-old brother who wanted to visit Sitting Bull's grave. Sitting Bull was a former chief, a political and spiritual leader who led Lakota warriors in the battle of Little Big Horn. He stood up for his people against United States policies during years of resistance. When my brother was in fourth grade, he did a research project about him and has wanted to visit South Dakota since. I didn't expect much at first.

The first stop of this grand adventure consisted of visiting a small museum by a gas station. This looks nothing like a friendly museum, I thought. The building was covered in painted metal panels with no windows on the exterior. The parking lot was empty and the only person present was an older man mowing the front lawn. The place was so empty I thought a tumbleweed might roll by.

It looked closed but apparently the man mowing the lawn was the owner and unlocked the door, leading us into a whole new world. In one room stood dozens of once wild, but now stuffed, animals made to look like they were standing. There were so

many creatures: buffalo, moose, elk, wolves, and mountain goats. On the left side of the room there was a little store that sold Native beads, dreamcatchers, T-shirts, jewelry, and geodes.

The owner walked over to turn on his speaker. The sound of Native American flute music filled the room. I strolled around and looked behind the glass case, displaying a headdress that held colorful beads and feathers. The man shared wondrous stories about his adventures.

Never judge a book by its cover.

Days later, we arrived in Grand Teton National Park, totally crowded with people, both young and old. I had never seen so many different license plates. We started off on the trail to Hidden Falls.

We walked on the rocky path that curved every once in a while. There were plants, flowers, trees, and small creatures around every bend. I paid close attention to every small detail, taking mental pictures of the immense beauty. At one point, I saw a bright orange butterfly resting on a big leaf as its wings slowly fluttered. Next to it was a smaller chocolate brown butterfly that reminded me of how brown eyes look in the sun. We continued walking in the heat and eventually my brother grew tired.

We stopped at a nearby boulder to eat fruit snacks and granola bars. I broke mine in half and shared it with my dad. I wanted to keep going. A stranger approached and asked, "Did you guys see the bear?"

We responded, "no, we didn't!"

I was more jealous than afraid. I desperately wanted to see a bear from afar. We kept going and inched closer to our destination. The view was gorgeous, pine trees everywhere, and I looked, really looked. All along the edge of the crystal, blue lake on the right side of the trail, rocky mountains seemingly stretched out forever in the distance.

Eventually, we arrived at the waterfall. The water from the top of the hill crashed down on the rocks below and flowed into a thick, rushing stream. We found a place away from the crowd to sit and eat more fruit snacks. One can never eat enough fruit snacks.



On July 15, we arrived at Mount Rushmore in the early morning, the air crisp and view mesmerizing. The sun lit up the former presidents' faces. The four presidents were picked by sculptor Gutzon Borglum who believed they represented the most important U.S. events in history. Around 400 workers contributed to the memorial in a span of 14 years, between 1927-1941. Powermen would set off dynamite of different sizes, carving about 90 percent of the monument. Each day the workers would have to climb about 700 hundred stairs. Many of the workers' names are carved on a granite display at the memorial.

It was a quick stop, and then over to the Crazy Horse Memorial. We purchased tickets to take a tour bus to get a closer view of the unfinished sculpture. My bright green ticket read "Korczak's Heritage, Inc. at Crazy Horse Memorial© \$4.00 - BUS."

I hopped on the bus and sat next to my brother, who quickly nabbed the window seat. Our tour guide was named Ash, a native storyteller who brought Crazy Horse to life. Surprisingly, for an incredibly important monument, it's unfinished. All that was visible was Crazy Horse's face and the outline of his arm pointing in the distance. Ash explained how 70 years ago they decided to build the monument to honor the Native Americans. Due to the fact that it's a private project, the owners, the Ziolkowski family, don't accept federal or state funding, relying solely on tourist funding.

When the tour ended, I took a breather outside and realized there was a small stage and a seating area meant for performances. I read a sign that said there would be a Native dance performance around noon. I sat down in the front row with my dad and saved spots for my mom and brother.

The dancers consisted of a woman and her two younger daughters, one my age and one who looked about 4. The youngest girl wore a bright teal buckskin dress decorated with colorful beads resting on her chest. She performed a Native American hoop dance and everyone cheered when she finished. The mother and the older daughter wore more complex outfits, mainly pink or red with many different shapes and patterns. Each of their ankles were covered in bells, jingling with every step. They proceeded to dance. My eyes filled with tears.

I assume many people have different notions about Native ceremonies. Many don't even think about what the Natives have lost since Europeans colonized their land. Their culture, language, history, to a large degree, have been lost. I thought of what it must've been like being a part of a ceremony practiced by the Sioux tribe. In the background, I could hear pounding drums. At that moment I realized, this is what I came for.

The Lakotas educated themselves through the real world around them. In his essay "Nature" Luther Standing Bear writes, "the world was a library and its books were the stones, leaves, grass, brooks, and the birds and animals that shared, alike with us, the storms and blessings of earth." For Standing Bear, the Lakotas connected with nature on a deeper level than most do today. He adds, "in sharing, in loving all and everything, one people naturally found a measure of the thing they sought; while, in fearing, the other found need of conquest."

He mentioned how other cultures tend to distance themselves from nature. The Lakotas, deep lovers of nature, were heavily influenced by the earth. They purposely sat in the soil to gather a deeper understanding. Now, I know why.







# Seeking Whitewater

French kayaker Nouria Newman navigates rivers around the world and the struggles that come with pursuing her passion.

 Addison Sattler

The swift current pulls the kayak down the river. Rushing water fills the void of stillness. Adrenaline fills Nouria Newman's body, quick thinking follows, the cold water almost feeling warm against her skin. Rapids approach faster now than she can think. The movement of the paddle is the only thing separating Newman from plunging into freezing water. For Newman, this moment, kayaking, is so much more than just a hobby or sport. It's an adventure.

Before becoming one of the best kayakers in the world, Newman started with inflatable tires when her parents became bored during the summer season of their winter sports business. Once everyone started goofing around on tubes, along came a kayak instructor. That connection sparked young Newman's interest in kayaking, nevertheless, there was a slight problem with her new found interest. "I was like I really want to do this and I didn't know how to swim," admits Newman. "So they're like, 'no, you can't do this until you know how to swim.' Then I really wanted to do it even more."


In her home town of La Plagne, France, kids often joined sports clubs at an early age. At the time when Newman was eager to join, there was only one other female in the kayak club, however, she was ten years older. Newman's parents weren't exactly fond of kayaking and argued that she needed to instead learn to swim. A determined 5-year-old Newman started immediately. At 6, Newman started racing. In France, kayak clubs are everywhere and though it is a smaller country, it is full of opportunities for emerging talents. Practicing intensely, she eventually saw results, quickly climbing the ranks of kayak racing, and her career took off.

In 2013, Redbull offered to sponsor Newman and support her drive as a top performance athlete. The sponsorship exponentially increased the quality and duration of her expeditions. Newman states, "they definitely support you for any sport things that you want to put together."

Now 30 years old, Newman has traveled to and kayaked in 46 countries over the span of two decades. Her longer expeditions have lasted up to three months, with her team hiking from one river to another in a foreign landscape. As an adventure seeker, Newman has taken on solo trips which are as rare as free-soloing in climbing. In August 2018, deep in the Himalayas, Newman took on a solo trip paddling a 233-mile section on the Tsarap, Zaskar, and Indus Rivers in India. On her second morning on the Tsarap River, the Class III rapid she planned for, wasn't a mellow Class III, but a siphon, which kills kayakers. Though she nearly drowned on that trip it didn't strike fear in Newman, and she later went on a trip to Chilean Patagonia, full of wild rivers that have yet to be kayaked. In February 2019, Newman and two other accomplished kayakers spent two months kayaking nine rivers, including the Pasqua, one of the largest and toughest whitewater rivers in Patagonia. They accomplished more river exploration than what had been done over the past decade combined.

The trips require planning, organizing logistics, budgeting, shooting content, and more. However, unforeseen challenges occur on trips that challenge the team to strategically work to stay on track. In March 2021, Newman and two others took a trip to Iceland after a Nepal trip fell through, and they learned why extreme kayaking isn't for the weak.





Their “dream” trip taught them firsthand the difficulty of winter kayaking. Winter temperatures came sooner than expected on their month-long voyage with the temperature reaching five degrees fahrenheit. In the mornings they had to thaw their shoes on the stove since their laces were frozen. Newman soon realized that kayaking stunt videos were nothing like how it appears on YouTube. Kayaking when portrayed by professional photographers and videographers looks almost effortless, but everyone involved is skilled enough to take risks. Most waterfall jumps are planned and analyzed to avoid risks, whereas people might think one must simply know how to paddle, enjoy an extreme adrenaline rush, and simply launch themselves 50-feet into the void.

Over the years, Newman has experienced and explored much of the world. Kayaking represents the perfect excuse to go places and not just to see the popular tourist cities or sight-see, but to travel less explored dirt roads in search of something wild. Newman kayaks year-round and on her most recent trip she navigated the Rio Blanco River in Chile and considers it one of her favorite trips. Surrounded by forests and canyons, she encountered huge waterfalls and kayaked all the way to the ocean.

Newman now spends an abundance of time in the southern hemisphere during most of the European winter season. More important, Newman relishes the deep connection and reflection that can take place on the river, in calm and rough waters. “On hard

rapids you’re just focused on the moves you have to make, and either way it’s forcing you to really be in the present moment and that’s something I really like about it,” says Newman.

This intense focus has helped her in and out of the water. Newman puts every ounce of effort into kayaking. While working on a degree in political science, Newman strategically had to balance training and classwork, finding success as an athlete and student. To stay sharp, sometimes skipping class was the only way to get onto the water.

Newman finished with a masters degree in journalism at one of the top universities in France in 2018. Due to the fact that professional kayaking isn’t salary based, Newman plans another year of schooling to earn a kayak coach degree from the French federation, ensuring she will stay close to the water.

“Train, race, perform and nothing else matters,” says Newman, for she knows her work will lead to new, sometimes transcendent experiences.

“I really love going to new places, finding new rivers, meeting new people and on those travels making new friends,” says Newman. “And I hope that I can keep doing that for as long as I can, or at least for as long as I really love it and enjoy it.”

Newman realizes how lucky she is and hopes to travel the world, always searching for something deeper. “Ultimately, the goal is just to be happy, but it’s a big one,” says Newman.





# Climbing For Change

Climber Kai Lightner works to empower inner-city youth through his program Climbing For Change.



Izaiah Fisher



Andrew Kornylak

At just 7 years old, Kai Lightner looked down from the top of the 50-foot flagpole and felt nothing but pure exhilaration. He climbed up on his own accord and had no regrets while looking over the horizon from his unique perspective. The wind felt as though it was on the brink of pushing him, the birds were almost at eye-level as they soared through the sky. His mother, however, didn't share the same enthusiasm as she rushed out of work to see her son in a precarious position on top of a pole, clinging to the metal like a magnet. After convincing him to come down, a stranger offered a sticky note, unknowing that the note would change Lightner's life.

The note was short, containing only an address and "The Climbing Place" in handwritten letters. Lightner's mother, Connie, begged for her son to be let in the gym. This interaction allowed Lightner to meet his eventual climbing coach, the man who would lead him to climbing three 5.14a and one 5.14c-graded routes in a month, all at the age of 13. Lightner has won competitions and placed highly in even more, but his real passion and his most proud accomplishment has been providing an opportunity to bring diversity to the outdoor community.

There has always been a stigma around people of color being involved. There are many reasons that cause a disconnect between people of color and outdoor communities. Studies show that people of color are three times more likely than white people to live in areas with little to no access to nature. Lightner understood and experienced this, which led him on a path toward change.

Lightner describes himself as a "hyper kid," looking for a way to tame his energy before starting his time at The Climbing Place. Throughout his childhood, he often found himself unable to find an outlet for this energy. Lightner felt like he was unable to concentrate due to a constant influx of worries and pressures coming from other aspects in life, but felt as if climbing alleviated all the stress. He finally felt "in control" and able to actually focus on the task at hand. While climbing, it's essential to remain completely focused on one move at a time. Any false move can negate hours of progress. Lightner seemed to inherently understand this, and fell in love with the sport because of the process.

Lightner found The Climbing Place, but he noticed every time he looked around he thought, "there's no one else who looks like me in these spaces." By founding Climbing for Change, Lightner hoped to "bring diversity to the outdoors in every sector possible," but it grew to be so much more.

As time passed he developed a solution. His program helps youth gain affordable access to climbing gyms in cities where access to climbing would be nearly impossible, providing transportation and funding. He offers the Adventure Outside grant, providing up to \$1,000 for travel costs for any outdoor activity, and the Black Diamond Gym to Crag grant, a more specific assistance that helps BIPOC move from indoor gym climbing to outdoor mountain climbing with full funding. Lightner feels like moving to Atlanta was the "coolest thing they've done" in the Climbing for Change program.





Lightner and his team connected with the mayor of College Park, a major suburb connected to Atlanta, and created a space to help youth living in the projects discover climbing. The program connected people with a local climbing gym and recreation center, providing transportation and access for interested kids, inviting more people into the climbing community. Participants can access the climbing gym, where they helped to “foster the talent for the kids in that program.”

Their most recent endeavor involves a PBO, a Project Based Opportunity grant. The grant moves beyond just the outdoors, giving applicants the opportunity to work with large, name brand corporations in hopes of bringing more diversity into those spaces. Lightner noticed a pattern while talking to these companies—they wanted more diversity, but they complained of not getting any applicants.

From an outside view, it looked as if they just weren’t hiring any BIPOC employees, but after investigation Lightner found that it was a mutual misunderstanding. This inspired him to bring diverse applicants to the companies, allowing for more diversity in spaces where people may be in the same situation, a place where Lightner himself was in while beginning his climbing career. Given the chance, Lightner scaled unknown heights and hopes others will do the same.

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**During a spring** break, a 13-year-old Lightner found himself exhausted. That week, he climbed four routes with some of the hardest ratings in the world. But once he started climbing all the stress, all the exhaustion disappeared, and he simply climbed.

As he looked out over the Red River Gorge in Kentucky, he found himself experiencing another unique point of view. Above the birds, he saw treetops far below, providing a point of view he’d never had. He felt at peace. Now, at 22, he finds himself in his final year of college, yet another high stress situation to balance while working with Climbing for Change. But, even with the stress, his position in this organization of his creation gives him the same peace he felt on the gorge, and the same perspective as the flagpole all those years ago. His experiences with climbing and working with youth offers a point of view that allows him to spark change and “start a revolution.”



# Kickflips & Cityscapes

University of Oregon professor Ocean Howell transitions from Southern California skateboarding culture to architecture and academia.



Jay Bramhall



Michael Worful

The only way to get really good at skateboarding is to first be really bad at it. The people who roll in with bloody knees and scabbed elbows are the same ones who care enough to take the hit time and time again. Pain as a requirement of skill induced a strong group mentality amongst skateboarders, athletes whose sport was well cultivated in Southern California.

California acts as a mixing pot of cultures, something that was no less true in the 70's and 90's than it is now, and this fusion of identities gave skateboarding its start. With its initial roots in surfing, skateboarding harbors alternative and anarchist elements such as those found in punk, graffiti, and hip-hop. An entire genre of music was referred to as "skate-punk" in the 80's, involving bands such as Black Flag, Dead Kennedys, and even the Red Hot Chili Peppers before they ventured into the mainstream. These factors all came together to bring about skateboarding as an identity, while also incubating the diversity and fluidity of skating culture. A culture that retired professional skateboarder and current University of Oregon associate professor of history and architectural history Ocean Howell explains as "taking an urban and suburban environment that people feel alienated from, and repurposing it."

Howell began skateboarding at the age of 9 in Southern California, and picked up his first shop sponsor when he was only 15. A year later, he got his first true sponsor through H-Street, at which point he used up much of his time filming videos and going out with photographers. For the next couple of years, he remained an amateur skater, a designation he quickly outgrew.

Much of the skating culture was based in California. Native to California, Howell partially attributes the speed of his growth in skating to the sport's convenient location. "It was lucky in a sense. A lot of the industry was based in San Diego and LA, so I got noticed pretty quickly. There were people keeping an eye on me, then they just started taking photos of me and it kind of went on from there," he says.

At 18, Howell officially made it as a professional skateboarder, spending the next couple of years living every middle-schooler's dream—getting paid to skate and create promotional content. Eventually, Howell grew bored of waking up hours after the sun to roll out of bed and simply go film skateboarding videos with his friends. As a result, he enrolled in an undergraduate program. His education was largely funded by his skating career, a career that he ultimately decided to retire from after completing his undergrad. "I knew that if I didn't [retire], then I would stay in skateboarding forever," says Howell. "I love [skating]. I still do it now as much as my 48-year old knees will permit me, but it was always the skateboarding I loved. I was never that excited about the industry surrounding it."

Having a deep connection to a counterculture from such a young age, coupled with a profusely intellectual mind, skateboarding gave Howell more than good taste in music. It also opened his mind to the importance of architecture, and how each intricate detail has a predetermined purpose. "If you're a street skater you have to understand the way things are designed; you really become a connoisseur of the way certain spaces flow," says Howell.

The quality of construction materials and their placement dictates a skateboarder's experience and the way they go about skating. Aluminum handrails handle differently than steel ones, old heavy concrete with aggregate in it holds up much better against cracking than the more powdery constitution of newer cement, and a skatestopper does exactly what it says on the tin—prohibits the act of skateboarding in designated environments.

Skatestoppers are a common example of what is known as defensive, or hostile, architecture. The purpose of defensive architecture is to "defend" buildings and businesses from the undesirables of the world in all their forms. Many systems of defensive architecture are vocal in their hostility, the aforementioned skatestoppers studding every low wall and raised curb, spikes viciously pro-







truding from the pavement underneath bridges and business fronts, boulders dropped onto the sidewalk in a half-hearted attempt at claiming aesthetics. Others are less obvious: flower boxes pushing foot traffic into the only sheltered sections of the street, awkwardly designed benches preventing comfortable sleep, even public-space advocate Cara Chellew's dubbed "ghost amenities"—public spaces noticeably void of any structures or conveniences such as bathrooms and park benches. Each and every decision made concerning architecture is infused with intention, a statement of who is allowed in a space and how they will be directed through it. Howell stresses the importance of recognizing the intended purposes behind public environments. "When we design public spaces, we are making a statement about who's a legitimate member of the public and who's not," says Howell.

There are several reasons as to why a city would want to build a skatepark. Firstly, doing so acts as an accommodation of community demand. As skateboarding becomes more mainstream, so too does the desire for more resources aimed towards skating. Similarly, if skaters are busted skating somewhere they shouldn't be and skateboarders have a place they can legally occupy, they have less ground to argue with law enforcement. The final, and likely the driving point for many city planners, is that skateboarders can be used to push those even lower on the socioeconomic scale out of public spaces. Fundamentally, skateparks act as containment facilities.

Skateparks are rarely placed next to white picket fences and cherry-red minivans. More often, they're built next to crime-ridden districts under bridges. The undersides are commonly used for shelter, a function that cannot easily coexist in a shared space with skateboarders. If people are skating and grinding and flipping, there's no room for people who need somewhere to sleep. Using skateboarders to push homeless people out of sheltered areas is a perverse scheme in which two groups both struggling for representation are pitted against one another in a gross subversion of solidarity.

Of course not all aspects of defensive architecture are nefarious. Howell uses a hospital as an example: if there is a bench on the premises that would be enticing to skaters, designing it in such a way as to discourage skating ensures the area remains a place of practicality. Some public restrooms have begun implementing blue lighting in bathrooms, consequently impairing addicts' ability to locate their veins thereby preventing further drug usage. However, these examples further hammer the point that intentionality is key in the realm of architecture.

The function of architecture also differs regionally. Having

spent time in countries like Spain and England, Howell explains that even the landscape of urban European cities differs greatly from those of the United States. It was the practicality of the old Southern Californian schoolyards and the redeveloped downtown areas that made the development of skateboarding possible. From this initial introduction, people were able to see how to manipulate their own cities to fit their skating needs. In Spain and Southern France, hardscapes are common applications in cities, supplementing cement banks and bump-over-bar spots for the United States' haphazardly placed green spaces. The differences in land created different forms of skating that eventually came together with the introduction of digital video.

"In the case of skateboarding there are all these little variations in the tricks people would do, the way they would hold their body, what kind of style in terms of body gestures, the names of tricks, that are completely homogenized across the entire developed world," Howell says.

Video permitted people all over the world to observe skating and come to a singular consensus on its mechanics. Even the names of the tricks themselves became distinct and anglicized. Howell explains, "if you don't speak the language, you'll still know the names of the tricks."

A fascination with the strong societal influence of skating, as well as the impact of urban architecture, enticed Howell to pursue a PhD at Berkeley, which led to a career in higher education. He authored the book *Making the Mission: Planning and Ethnicity in San Francisco*, in which he explored the ethnic radicalization that occurred in the Mission District after the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. Howell then published articles on the influence of modern urban architecture, later earning a position as an associate professor at the University of Oregon. Defying the stoner-skateboarder stereotype, Howell now had an avenue to channel his passion for skateboarding into the academic sphere. He says, "I always found skating a thrilling and interesting way to experience the world."

Employing tactics learned via skateboarding and the academic world, Howell advocates for an ethnology often scorned for its anti-authoritarian nature. Using a currently mainstream culture, like skating, to pave people's path to education ensures that youth will continue to engage critically with the world around them. Understanding an individual's right to bodily autonomy and their capacity to inhabit space, while remaining aware of how space is designed and who it is designed both for and against, allows for change. A change that focuses on accommodation, not condemnation.



# Foraging For Connection

Gabrielle Cerberville gains a large social media following while reconnecting with nature.



Lane McLaughlin



Contributed



Gabrielle Cerberville made the woods behind her childhood Pennsylvania home an extension of her upbringing, growing up alongside the plant and animal life surrounding her. Nature wasn't just something to be admired outside of her bedroom window, it was and still is, a defining part of her life. Spending so many hours outside exploring led her to understand something that takes many people years to realize.

"There is always something new to learn and there are always new ways to grow to develop a better relationship with your ecosystem because that's really what it's about," says Cerberville. "It's about getting outside and realizing that you have all of these neighbors that aren't people, that don't look like you, but that you have trees, plants, fungi, and animals around you that are all coexisting with you and that there are perhaps ways that we can coexist with them better."

When Cerberville moved away to college nature was no longer at her doorstep, it was miles past cement and blacktop. She could no longer be a part of the ecosystem around her in the way she had become accustomed to, and it wore on her. Instead of giving in to the city, she sought a new way to interact with the world.

Her new connection came in the form of mushroom foraging. About once a week, Cerberville likes to take to the woods outside of the city and search for fungi to collect, cook, and document. The desire to share the life she sees with others eventually caused Cerberville to gain over 873,000 followers on TikTok under the user [@chaoticforager](#). Cerberville partially attributes her rise in fame to the COVID-19 pan-

demie. During the original two-week isolation period people were just beginning to feel the boredom that would eventually grow out of control as the quarantine continued. During the months of lockdowns people weren't sure what was safe anymore, with some fearing to even leave their homes. But as summer began they grew restless, and were directed outside. People who had never been active started to go on walks outside, and bike rides. Meanwhile, Cerberville was growing her following, steadily posting about the escape that foraging could provide.

"Once we realized that stepping outside, like it wasn't the zombie apocalypse or something, like you could go outside and take a walk—even masked up—that that was going to be okay," says Cerberville, "that became a way for people to escape the monotony of their own homes. And that was absolutely a way for me to escape the monotony of my own home."

Even when she didn't find anything, she still relished the time spent reconnecting with the world.

"Earlier this year I was having a rough week, and I drove about an hour away to a spot that I really like, where I can usually pretty reliably find mushrooms," she says. "It was raining, it was a little chilly, it was just kind of a depressy kind of day. I was foraging and I wasn't finding anything, and that happens sometimes, sometimes you don't find anything. I did not find any mushrooms that day. What I did find were just beautiful little moments. I found spiders making webs covered in rain. I found frogs in little nooks in trees. I found newts. I found all this evidence of life and I came away with





Gabrielle Cerberville



an empty basket, but with this increased awareness of how much life our ecosystems support, and that was a pretty cool moment for me.”

Mushroom foraging has so much more to offer than just a connection with the natural world. It can provide fresh ingredients to cook, eat, and share with others. Cerberville primarily uses her platform on TikTok to educate about different species of mushroom and where to find them, but her Instagram is full of recipes and directions to safely cook with the foraged goods.

“I would say that the thing that really got me cooking the way that I do is the simple fact that wild food often requires special processing,” says Cerberville. “Amanita Muscaria is a good example. It has a couple of toxins, one of which is a deliriant that can make you basically unhinged from reality in a very bad way and that can make you ill. So you have to cook that toxin out, you have to boil it in two changes of water for a certain period of time to make sure that it is safe for consumption. It’s a whole, very labor intensive process and it’s really interesting how learning how to do those things can yield some results that are pretty uncommon in the food that

we normally eat.”

Food is as much a necessary source of fuel for our bodies as it is a testament to the various cultures of our world. Food brings people together in a fascinating way, and eating together is a universal sign of peace and harmony. Bringing together her Puerto Rican heritage and her passion for foraging, Cerberville has created a recipe all her own.

“As far as recipes that have just meant a lot to me, there’s one I often refer people to and that’s my chicken of the woods, arroz con pollo,” says Cerberville. “It’s a very common dish in a lot of Spanish speaking cultures throughout Latin America, certainly where my ancestors are from in Puerto Rico. I veganized my grandmother’s arroz con pollo recipe using chicken of the woods instead. That recipe is very meaningful to me because it’s a heritage recipe, it’s something that she made, it’s a comfort food for me... it’s sort of an extension of where I come from.”

It’s these discoveries that keep Cerberville connected. She has discovered a way to be a part of nature again, and even share her lifestyle with thousands of people online, helping others to uncover their own beauty and meaning.





# Planetary Annihilation

Best-selling author Jeff VanderMeer rethinks environmentalism through New Weird fiction.

 Jay Bramhall

 Colin Hackley

A writer's greatest tool is the state of the natural world. The family of raccoons living in a neighbor's ravine, a raptor's predatory gaze through the treetops, the ever whining hum of mosquitoes flitting about delicate skin, roads that scar the countryside and skyscrapers who carve into territories of the sky—reducing animals to roadkill and decrepit petitions. Literature functions as an extension and dramatization of these preexisting conditions, and *The New York Times* bestselling author and environmental enthusiast Jeff VanderMeer is a veteran at recognizing and employing such tools in his writing.

VanderMeer is frequently affiliated with “new weird” literature, a subgenre where anarchy reigns over the typical conventions of horror, fantasy, and science fiction. More notorious, however, is his emphasis on ecology and the vital roles of wildlife throughout all his works. His Nebula Award-winning novel *Annihilation*, that has been translated into a feature film, follows a group of varied specialists whose job entails exploring Area X, a biological dome that subverts scientific speculation and rejects any and all taxonomic classification. The novel analyzes the centuries old power struggle between humanity's capitalists and nature, a battle that's scarred the natural world to inconceivable extents, rendering landscapes virtually unrecognizable.

*Annihilation* recognizes how humans have become intrinsically separated from the earth on which they operate. VanderMeer writes, “that's how the madness of the world tries to colonize you, from the outside in, forcing you to live in its reality.”

The subconscious becomes utterly disconnected from nature to serve contemporary desires and dissuade acute inconvenience. VanderMeer highlights a war fought on countless fronts, the climate crisis is an adversary overwhelming in its vastness. The ground cracking under droughts, tides rising in tandem with temperatures, and ice caps melting into obscurity are the result of a history of colonization, often misrepresented as salvation. VanderMeer recognizes the multifaceted complexity of the problem and accepts that the solution is not a simple one. It can't be easily described by an ornate metaphor or resolved by blaming a singular entity.

He says, “please don't feel guilty about it, there's only so much you can do as an individual. The burden of this should be falling on corporations, on governments, and the reason we're having to

be more proactive is they're falling behind in dealing with these things.”

The only solution comes from an admission of the barbarism that's been permitted against the planet in colonization and exploitation, and an awareness that individual action is the first step towards global change.

The path forward differs for all, twisting and turning with varying motivations and objectives. VanderMeer truly began his journey in 2016 after the election, searching for respite he began rewilding his yard in Tallahassee, Florida. Rewilding refers to the act of fostering biodiversity via the removal of invasive species and allowing space for native ones to be reintroduced. VanderMeer explained how a singular pine tree can foster two hundred species versus an invasive plant harboring only one. His own yard houses a family of raccoons who now have a very active Twitter following and enjoy the provisions of a largely left-alone ravine. Armadillos, hawks, hummingbirds, lizards, owls, turtles, and personable rabbits are other frequent visitors of the VanderMeer residence, each leaving a footprint in one way or another. Pollination, fertilization, the dispersal of seeds, all contribute to the complexity of the ecosystem. Biodiversity springs from the simplest of actions. VanderMeer explains, “if you put out wildflowers on your balcony you might actually help hummingbirds on their migration to South America, and that's not a small thing.”

Placing fresh water sources, planting native wildlife, or putting up a bird feeder to aid birds in a time of uncertainty all contribute in their own concise but nevertheless imperative manner, following in the footsteps of indigenous groups who for generations cultivated a society that worked with nature and not against it. “Using ‘us’ when thinking about the environment erases all the different versions of ‘us,’” VanderMeer writes. “Many indigenous peoples don't think this way.”

The beauty of rewilding is it takes as much time and money as a person wishes it to, making it an easily accessible act of conservation. For those who don't have abundant resources, VanderMeer suggests benign-neglect. Putting away the herbicides and recognizing the value of the life seeping from the ground is a prominent step in the journey to fostering ecological growth. Simply letting nature run its course and allowing leaves to fall—and stay fallen—permits a number of organisms to use foliage as a habitat and



personal mini fridge. “I think that doing something, even small, helps you get past the frozenness and kind of connects you to the world,” says VanderMeer.

Involvement beyond one’s backyard is as simple as looking locally. VanderMeer himself is a part of Florida’s Apalachicola Riverkeeper, a group dedicated to the advocacy for and preservation of the Apalachicola River and Bay. Their work encompasses several fields, including research, public outreach, and education. Regional conservation efforts such as the Apalachicola Riverkeeper are abundant worldwide and present an opportunity for any individual to advocate for what they feel is important. Allocating resources to preserve ecosystems, enforcing corporate accountability, or recognizing and repairing the devastation indigenous genocide is reaping on the planet, no issue is insignificant. “I do think on the local level it is incredibly important what we do individually,” VanderMeer says, “...in certain other aspects we should be going right to the source.”

Globalizing the necessity of action through advocacy proves a herculean undertaking as the vilification of protesting has led to gross increases in militarized responses towards both ecological and humanitarian protests. “You see protests dealt with very harshly... you see prison terms being given out for what is basically civil disobedience,” VanderMeer explains. “In that context I think

what you might call repressive forces have been successful in sliding the scale of what eco-activism is versus eco-terrorism toward a situation where it’s difficult to even engage in peaceful protests.”

Eco-terroism is a decisive topic explored in VanderMeer’s novel Hummingbird Salamander. A tale of government conspiracy and taxidermy, the book explores the two extremes of humanity’s dichotomous nature. The teetering balance between self preservation and exploitation, illuminated by the impending apocalypse and the flames that accompany it.

“I think one reason why I put all that in a novel is that a novel can be a laboratory that’s not reality, but allows you to talk about things that you don’t want to talk about and shouldn’t talk about,” says VanderMeer. Hummingbird Salamander’s exploration of extremist ideals gives readers the chance to understand their own stance on the climate crisis, as well as the opportunity to re-evaluate the actions they are willing to take in face of biological ruination.

Refusing to shy away from the molten pressure time has placed on climate change, Hummingbird Salamander’s summation is bleak in its admission that humanity is profoundly unprepared, but optimistic in its understanding that action is critical. VanderMeer says, “it does actually help to foresee a future where by some of our own actions we can preserve species. That actually in this

intricate web of ecosystems and earth systems we don’t know what it is that’s going to fall apart, that’s going to be the link that’s actually going to create feedback effects that affect our quality of life and make it impossible to get past the climate crisis.”

Green technology is at the frontlines of this brigade, encompassing a large scope of environmental issues as it represents the fundamental ideologies of many advocates and governmental bodies pushing for change in the United States. Unfortunately, the efforts of enacting these reconstructions have fallen short as green technology has demonstrated some unsatisfactory effects on the environment. Birds face a new predator in the substantial sprawling of wind farms as they are cut from the sky with fiberglass blades and barbecued to sweet, simmering perfection by the construction of new powerlines necessary for sustaining the rural turbines. Solar power plants are hard to recycle on a large scale and require toxic materials such as lead and cadmium for the manufacturing process of photovoltaic technology. Electric vehicles demand lithium to power their battery-operated systems, the mining of which has caused drastic unsettlement in many indigenous communities and native habitats creating droughts, water contamination, and air pollution.

Acknowledging the conundrums of green technology presents a new age of more considerate conservation. Environmentalists

have begun working with wind farm companies to install preventative measures in their designs, whether it be painting turbines ultraviolet or selecting low impact areas to build the farms, the deliberation initiated progress in one realm of preservation without damning another. The European Commission requires solar power companies to implement proper recycling methods, with other countries such as Japan and Australia following suit. People have begun recognizing and creating platforms for indigenous groups as the true voices of expertise on environmental preservation.

The progress of preservation is frustrating in that it’s not linear. VanderMeer writes, “progress: a word to choke on, a word to discard and then pick up again... I embrace it, and I repeat it, and yet I know no word I or any other human could use will ever be the right word.” There is no one company to blame, no one novel that can embody the annihilation of climate change, no one solution that acts as Earth’s salvation. There is only the competence to understand the devastation, the maturity to recognize it is self-inflicted, and the sophistication to wander back to the naked reality that humanity exists as nothing more than a cog in a machine that is much older, and much more powerful in the timeless eyes of the universe. That, and the fervor of hope found only in the most foolhardy of visionaries.



Art by Pablo Delcán



# Immaculate Mayhem

National Geographic Adventurer Mike Libecky learns to abandon societal expectations and live in the moment.



Jayden Crain



Mike Libecky

There are many different ways of finding meaning in the universe. Some make themselves unacquainted with reality through remedies, some choose to look forward to an afterlife, but others find it through experience. National Geographic Adventurer Mike Libecky has experienced the mysterious, constantly examining what it means to be truly connected to this planet. He's seen polar bears hunt in the arctic, climbed up a 2,000-foot tower in Borneo, hell, he's even snowboarded down a mountain in Afghanistan while looking out for the Taliban. Libecky has been on close to 90 expeditions through countless countries. With all of the things he has witnessed, through all the soul searching, he's noticed a common theme: immaculate mayhem, a term only understood by those who have experienced both joy and cruelty.

Libecky was a curious high schooler, enjoying math and science. Growing up in the Sierra Nevada, he was surrounded by the beauty of nature. With countless opportunities right out of his back door, he began climbing in college, always calculating formulas in his brain to reach the top of the rock face. "Living in Nevada, probably 30 miles from Yosemite, I can use the word perfect there because there's nothing to me more perfect than experiencing mother earth," says Libecky. "And climbing connects with every aspect. I lived in the valley climbing for many years, but traditional climbing, crack climbing, solo climbing, it's all math. It's like, can I solve this equation?"

Libecky's infatuation trumped all of his other desires. "It was the aha moment that changed my life forever. I mean, it was... this is what I want to do. So I dropped out of college, to the disappointment of my parents."

He adds, "my grandmother, she sat me down and said, 'don't listen to anybody, listen to your heart. If you want to climb, you need to drop out of college and you need to go climb. If you want to live in your truck and climb 300 days a year, you have to do it, go climb and follow this obsession.' So big shout out to grandma Bertha for encouraging me to not listen to the rat race of society and to pursue that exact passion."

People often follow a cycle, an endless chain toward material success, and very few break it. Humans have fear built into them, and let it control many aspects of their being, but Libecky uses his fear as a tool to explore the obscure things of this earth. Channeling his knowledge of math and science, Libecky has been studying the effects of pollution, specifically microplastics in different countries and continents.

"I just got back from a trip to Antarctica, which was a really lovely thing," says Libecky. "And we have a trip coming up to Bolivia, where we're building a couple of new schools and putting in solar energy, new computers to help these kids have a better education... a lot of these trips are focused on giving back to our planet and supporting science, and trying to bring education and information that ultimately leads to a happier, healthier planet."

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**Lao Tzu**—the oft-quoted Taoist philosopher—states, "he who knows does not speak, he who speaks does not know." By learning and absorbing knowledge the way humans were told to learn, we tend to form an understanding of simple rules and customs. But when convenience and complacency are questioned, preconceptions of the world begin to collapse, causing the once familiar world to come crumbling down. With this attachment to convenience, people inadvertently build a wall to shield themselves from learning new things. As long as the mind can rid itself of pride and ego, it can begin to understand that there must be failure at first. And perhaps with this mindset, learning truly starts.

Libecky often finds the deepest connection to what's right in front of him, and he appreciates the beauty of right now. "It's a very deep connection with this reality and a very deep understanding," he says. "I don't believe in any organized religion. I don't believe in an afterlife. I believe in energy and the earth and the universe, and I know we're going to die. And how are we living this life before that time is up? And if you find passion and enthusiasm,



Mike Libecky tries to find comfort in -67 °F weather conditions.



it's an absolute gift."

The meaning and truth that so many try to find is lost when trying to see further than the present. Finding the absolute meaning of the universe simply means opening your eyes to see what's in front of you. Connecting to the world means to live in the moment, and to appreciate the moment of now. If more people tune in to living in the moment, the world might feel like a better place.

Libecky has found a connection in a disconnected world. "It is absolutely a mystery, but there's an organic enthusiasm that is undeniably unstoppable," he says. "And when you're hanging out in these cultures and eating their food and climbing these first ascents, or a polar bear comes scratching at your tent, you're hanging out... and it makes you question this beautiful gift of life and how it all began. I mean, it's a really, really deep connection."

Separating himself from all of the greed and sadness in society, often the subject of news headlines and social media posts, Libecky sees a bigger picture. "Think about our lives, especially right now, post pandemic, you know, there's anxiety, there's stress, there's society," says Libecky. "Thinking about the future. We have to make money. We have to do this. There's all these, in my opinion, really fucked up thoughts of how humans have evolved to this. And it is such a beautiful thing to be doing an activity that brings you to the present moment... If I'm on a two-month expedition, the past and future do not exist to me... and all anxiety, all stress, all worries are gone without choice. Completely."

Libecky's favorite experiences come from observing what life looks like outside of civilization, and he's unafraid to be uncomfortable. Recently through a collaboration with a few companies such as Adidas and National Geographic, Libecky's expedition to Antarctica yielded some frightening results. He took glacial samples and found something absolutely unexpected. "We were taking water samples and air samples all over the world, but specifically in Antarctica to find out everything about these microplastics that are everywhere," says Libecky. They're in our water, they're in our fish, they're in our food, they're in the air."

He adds, "You think it's the most pristine water in the world, where you could drink it. And you're going to stay young forever, like the fountain of youth. There are microplastics in the water in the most remote places in the world. And it's just, we're fucking up the planet... and it's disheartening."

"What's happening to our mother earth right now should not have happened in the evolution of nature. So it's a really sad, hopeless feeling sometimes. Humans are dumping 12 million tons of plastic in our oceans every year, if not more. And that's unfathomable. It's a fact. It's what's going into our ocean. And it just feels like we're all part of it. You're part of it. I'm part of it. We always use single use plastics... We're washing our clothes in our washing machine. The fleece fibers are going out into those waters, they're going into our ocean. It's a tough topic, but Antarctica was specifically another step forward to understand this information. And hopefully our next generations of people will make a stand and get us out of that."

Generations have come and gone, knowledge has been passed down and accepted. Technology has evolved so rapidly that life looks completely different today than 100 years ago. And perhaps the morals of society have shifted, and the rules have changed. Throughout this constant change, this mayhem, it sometimes seems harder to find the beauty in the world. Libecky actively searches for solutions to help the world stay afloat. He and his daughter run a non-profit organization to give back to the world. "My daughter and I have a 501(c)(3) nonprofit called the Joyineering Fund," says Libecky. "We build schools around the world, we do big give-back projects. I think as a human, we have a part of the responsibility to give back to our global community to try to make choices that are good for the planet."

Libecky has tried to undo some of the wrong being done to certain parts of the world. He alone can't save the world, but in essence, to change the world, the world needs to change, so perhaps we all need to embrace the moment.

— Original reporting by Sydney Sattler



A curious polar bear makes eye contact with the camera.



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# A Fighting Soul

Soul River founder Chad Brown fosters relationships between inner-city youth and veterans through fly fishing.



Slade Gilbert



Chad Brown

In 2009, Chad Brown sat along the Clackamas River, gun in hand, intent on taking his life. Before pulling the trigger, he reached out to his mother, who helped connect him with the Veteran Affairs (VA) via a suicide hotline.

After spending seven days in a psychiatric ward, Brown was released, “glassy-eyed and strung out on medication.” A friend offered to share something that helped her through a divorce, fishing, and Brown was immediately hooked.

“It made me feel alive to accomplish something that simple... it became kind of like a natural drug,” says Brown.

In 2013 Brown founded Soul River, a non-profit organization in Portland, Oregon. Soul River aims to connect inner-city kids with veterans, instilling responsibility and leadership in kids while providing an opportunity for veterans to give back to the community.

Growing up in a small town 100 miles south of Austin, Texas, Brown comes from a long line of hunters and anglers, his father a hunter and his grandfather a farmer and cowboy. His childhood was spent attending black rodeos. “I’ve got memories of them riding broncos, bulls, horses, and wrestling bulls,” says Brown.

When his parents divorced he moved to the city with his mother, leaving his childhood connection to the outdoors behind. To keep him off the streets, his mother enrolled him in a Big Brother program, but he still fell into gang life, looking for community and joining La Familia, a gang that operates throughout the United States. Immersing himself in this life, he was stabbed in the leg

twice in gang fights. His mother, a social worker, helped Brown get out. Eventually, he joined the Navy.

In 1994, Naval Combat Stevedore Chad Brown’s enlistment ended. Ready to leave the military, he stepped back into a once familiar but now foreign world. With the help of the GI Bill, Brown went back to school earning a master’s degree in communication design from Pratt Institute in New York City. Fresh out of school, Brown began designing campaigns and brands, honing his skills. Living in New York, the fast-paced life kept him moving forward. Then he took a job in Portland, a small and unfamiliar city. All his forward momentum stopped. He lost his job, was on the verge of homelessness, and began drinking heavily. Ashamed and depressed, Brown felt completely alienated, and thought about ending it all.

Brown quickly found himself addicted to fly fishing and even asked his doctor and officials at the VA to write him a prescription to fish, which they did. The more he engaged in the sport the more they decreased his medication, and he finally found community, meeting anglers, hunters, and scientists. Together, they all shared a connection with nature and Brown wanted to “kick some ass and get back into society.”

Brown shares, “I wanted to think a little different, think out of the box on how I could make a change in society, but also help myself get back into society... and that change would be coming up with Soul River.”

The program is not strictly fishing-oriented, it has helped kids



Chad Brown stands at peace with his faithful companion Axe.



with interests in music, science, and sports, as the program is meant to support the kids and veterans in all their goals. The program utilizes “deployments” (backpacking excursions) as a way to both teach conservation and instill leadership skills and responsibility. Through the help of his many sponsors—Columbia Sportswear, Patagonia, Keen Footwear, and others—Soul River’s expeditions are free to participants. Outdoor education and cultural expeditions are the frameworks for his program, with the aim of showing kids firsthand the world’s foremost threatened habitats, with the hopes that they become “ambassadors of our natural environment.” He also provides a place for veterans with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injuries (TBIs) to re-enter society.

Unfortunately, some people laughed at the notion of Soul River and Brown experienced multiple microaggressions, even threats on his life. “Not everybody wants to see a black man or a black veteran step into a white, or predominantly white, space... and do something different,” says Brown.

During the infancy phase of Soul River, Brown visited city basketball courts and put on aerial casting demonstrations. He leaned into the art of the sport, showing kids how creative fishing could be. Kids started joining the program and the organization quickly grew. As the program evolved, Brown made a clear pitch to kids: “I want you to be able to find your own soul river, and what that means to you.”

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**Shell shock, culture shock,** and battle fatigue are all layman’s terms for PTSD. Between 11 and 20 percent of veterans who served in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom suffer from PTSD. Not only do veterans face anxiety, depression, and problematic drug and alcohol use, they really struggle to find a purpose, a role, and a place in society. This is not easy for an individual who has spent the last nine months on deployment in a platoon where everyone trusted one another with their lives, literally, and prioritized the group over themselves. In a 2016 TED TALK, best-selling author Sebastian Junger suggested that “maybe what determines the rate of long-term PTSD is not what happened out there but the kind of society you come back to.”

Veterans are a tight-knit group, with different burdens, and they are often simply tossed back into society, one in which nearly everyone is alienated, with no regard for the very person standing

next to them. Many people are more concerned with the notifications on their smartphone as opposed to serving their community. A soldier, regardless of the branch they serve under, is trained to communicate, to trust other soldiers, to work in a unit. This usually results in a bond, one so strong that in times of great adversity the bond may be the only thing soldiers have to keep them going.

In his best-selling book, *Tribe*, Junger writes, “the positive effects of war on mental health were first noticed by the great sociologist Emile Durkheim, who found that when countries went to war, suicide rates dropped. Psychiatric wards in Paris were strangely empty during both world wars.” Put simply, during times of great peril people turn to each other, and their communities in a way similar to soldiers in combat. Unfortunately, these instances are few and far between. Junger believes that soldiers miss the brotherhood, a connection to other people that runs deeper than mere friendship. While no war or catastrophe is good, per se, the way people respond can be incredible. However, as quickly as these connections are formed, society’s attention span dissipates, leaving veterans to struggle with their traumas, alone.

Having been declared 50 percent mentally disabled and diagnosed with PTSD and TBI by the VA, Brown has lived through these feelings and struggles. In a study conducted by the University of California Berkeley, researchers took both at-risk, inner-city youth and combat veterans on two separate rafting excursions, finding that “a week after river-rafting, study cohorts reported, on average, a 29 percent reduction in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms, a 21 percent decrease in general stress, a 10 percent improvement in social relationships, a nine percent improvement in life satisfaction and an eight percent increase in happiness.”

Brown added veterans into his program hoping to battle PTSD and TBIs, reconnecting veterans with the community. Brown’s aim is to offer a space where veterans can find the same healing and sense of purpose that he has.

With Soul River, Brown hopes kids and veterans alike can thrive. “Everyone deserves what they want in life, to some of us it comes easy, and to some of us it comes with a fight,” says Brown, who wants everyone to know that it does not matter how you were born into the world, whether it’s the “haves” or “have-nots.” What matters is “how much fight you have within yourself.”


Brown knows that fight is what will dictate how much a person will accomplish in life.





# Calculated Risk

After experiencing great tragedy in the mountains, Conrad Anker grapples with his climbing legacy and stepping up as a father.

 Jay Bramhall

 Jimmy Chin

Every fiber of the human anatomy rebels against mountain climbing: lungs prove incompatible with extreme altitudes, skin lacks any substantial protection against frostbite or trench foot, bodies plummet far faster than they can ascend. The human mind, however, dreams of conquest often articulated in promises of devastation.

Conrad Anker's fascination with summits began as many life-long passions do, fostered in the candor and boredom of youth. Preferring scouting over high school sports, autumnal family outings spent in the woods cutting firewood and absorbing the surrounding scenery revealed Anker's penchant for the outdoors. "I just loved the shapes of nature and finding boulders and little fortresses," says Anker. "You can imagine it yourself. And so for a child with their imagination, there's a lot to be had from places like that."

Intimacy with the natural world involves a dangerous balance of reverence and bullheadedness, requiring an acceptance of the unexpected and an acknowledgment that death is natural in the wilderness, a stark reality Anker became familiar with as a mere teenager on a hike with a friend. Tromping up a snowy slope, the two hoped to encounter fresh powder in which they could ski back down. Full of excitement and devoid of experience, Anker triggered an avalanche that chased him down the hilltop. "In hindsight, everything I did that day was wrong, especially in light of what we know today," he writes in a column for *Hodinkee*.

The avalanche symbolized the episodic tragedy that followed Anker as he pursued his passion—or obsession—with the fury of the boundless peaks that made him the man he is today.

As he grew older Anker's climbing diversified, taking him across continents as he explored unknown realms of mountaineering. "I picked up [ice climbing] when I was a student at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City... starting [in] about 1981... And then Antarctica was a dream," says Anker. "So 11 years later I went down [to Antarctica] for the first time."

While studying in Salt Lake City, Anker met famed climber Terry "Mugs" Stump who would become his first and most in-

fluential climbing mentor. Stump's reputation stemmed from the perilous ice and vicious wind of the Emperor Face of Mount Robson in 1981, where he became the first to tame its peaks. Notoriety followed Stump to Antarctica where he worked with the National Scientist Foundation, honing his vision of mountaineering and growing as a climbing guide. He had frequently embarked on private climbs in the arctic, the most prominent being Mount Gardner and Mount Tyree, both individually accomplished in one day without bivy gear. He traversed the Alaskan Range, ascending the infamous Moose's Tooth, Denali, and the Moonflower Buttress, his ambition only growing. His ultimate goal evolved into climbing India's Mount Meru, the "anti-Everest," a peak not yet summited. However, in spite of multiple attempts, Stump's calloused fingertips never met the mountain's peak. Instead, the alpinist's success demonstrated itself in other areas, becoming the teacher of one of the best climbers in the world.

While attending university, Anker worked a side hustle selling bicycle parts, and first interacted with Stump when trading him a bike for mountaineering equipment. Exploring sights unseen and pushing boundaries beyond conceivable limits, they became inextricably linked. Roaming Alaska, Yosemite, and Utah, they summoned new ways to demand strength with each passing moment. Engaging in hours of silence and contemplation, Mugs understood climbing demanded a durability that was more than physical. "By being stronger in the mind, Mugs felt one would be better prepared to tackle the big climbs," Anker explains in a *Patagonia* article. The two broke speed records, made first ascents, and set a new bar for climbers worldwide.

In 1999, Anker was invited to join the Mallory and Irvine Research Expedition team, a climbing team tasked with finding the bodies of the distinguished Gregory Mallory and his climbing partner Andrew "Sandy" Irvine. In the 1920's, seduced by the unattainable Mount Everest, claiming its mere existence a challenge to mankind, Mallory attempted to climb its ridges more than once. Finding Mallory's body in 1991, Anker was thrust into the spotlight. "It was a pretty humbling moment, you have to make terms with your own mortality and death when you're on those types of



Conrad Anker summits a peak in Antarctica with climbing partner Jimmy Chin.





climbs,” says Anker. “And that’s what Mallory did as an aspiring climber, we all built upon his experience.”

Eight years later, an avalanche of tragedy found Anker again when his mentor Stump died. Guiding two clients down the South Buttress of Denali, Stump went ahead to scout a crevasse. All it took was a simple miscalculation in his rope’s slack and he was devoured by the mountain’s frigid jaws, his coffin crafted of ice and snow.

The loss established a new danger in climbing for Anker—a testimony to its volatility. He says, “it’s always good to spend time outdoors, and it’s what I do, it’s what we do. But loss becomes more intense when it’s something we choose to do by our own volition.”

**Enter Alex Lowe**—the “Lungs with Legs,” the “Mutant,” the man notorious for vivacious climbing rivaled only by an unrelenting spirit. Considered perhaps the greatest American climber of the time, traversing the rough rock of cliff sides and scaling volatile ice spires, his passion and comprehensive skill enthralled the climbing world. Marrying artist and fellow outdoor enthusiast Jennifer Daly in 1982, Lowe took a job with a steady income, his days of climbing along death’s edge on hold. The alpinist became a father to Max, the first of three boys and director of the documentary *Torn*, an exploration of his family and their resounding legacy. Eventually, the mountains drew a line in the snow between Lowe and his family, forcing him to choose between ambition and security.

Like a siren’s call, Lowe found himself drawn to Everest for a job, his guilt over leaving his family dissuaded by reasoning the work would bring large sums of money home to Montana. The decision nevertheless continued eating at Lowe, who wrote countless letters home, questioning if his family would be better off if he left their lives completely and was replaced by someone else, a fantasy that was more for his own benefit than theirs as he fought an internal battle between what he wanted for his family and what he needed for his own sanity.

The transition back into climbing was as necessary as it was natural for Lowe. “If he didn’t get his fix...he could be kind of unbearable,” said his friend and climbing partner Bill Belcourt in *Torn*, “especially if he was feeling like that caged animal.”

Climbing acted as Lowe’s one true catharsis, a fundamental part of his being that’s absence created a gap that even his family seemingly couldn’t fill. So he continued to climb, breaking speed records and honing the methodological skill that elevated him above other alpinists of the time. Scaling technical nightmares like Great Sail Peak in Baffin Island, a mountain considered to be the most remote big-wall on the planet, allowed him to do what he did best: control the risk.

Risk is a big word in the mountaineering world, the risk of falling, the risk of starving, the risk of dying, the risk of never seeing your family again. Lowe famously once said, “rather than being a risk-taker as such, I consider myself and my climbing peers to be risk-controllers, and we just enjoy being in this situation and keeping risk at a reasonable level.”

This practice of calculating what’s considered an “acceptable risk” is what creates good climbers, largely because they’re the only ones that come back from the impossible climbs.

**Anker and Lowe’s** first introductions to one another were through reputation, their individual exploits garnering attraction in all spheres of the climbing world. When Lowe moved to town, Anker was no longer the best—and he was glad for it. Combined, the two not only climbed mountains but appeared to move them, scouting the most difficult routes and dominating them. They used climbing as an avenue to learn about themselves and the world they inhabited. “I realized, one, how interconnected everything is, and two...you have to understand hardship to a certain degree to do things,” says Anker.

Leading the first ascent of Antarctica’s Rakekniven Peak, being imprisoned in an ice cave for a week, Anker and Lowe forged a bond in rock and ice that ran deeper than any arctic crevasse. Then the climbing duo aimed for Shishapangma, one of the highest mountains in the world, where they wanted to be the first Americans to ski down an 8,000 meter slope. Their basecamp’s extensive CD collection and espresso machine promised an expedition to remember, even just for the pleasures of its simplicity. Despite its height, Shishapangma held little risk for the experienced alpinists and their accompanying film crew. Lamentably, mountains have little care for humanity’s perception of “risk,” and Shishapangma would leave its mark.

October 5, 1999, 25 days into the expedition, Lowe, Anker, and their cameraman Dave Bridges set out together on what they considered a “break day.” They went to inspect the slope they had chosen for the skiing attempt, leading them across a glacial plain several hundred feet above four other expedition members. The route carried the risk of an avalanche, but they crunched the numbers and calculated it a risk worth taking. Jubilant and buoyant from the previous month’s escapades of laughter and lattes, spirits were high as they set across the mountainside. Call it a miscalculation, God’s divine will, or simply poor luck, Shishapangma released its fury upon the mountaineers. A wave of ice and snow howled down the slope, its wary cry one of devastation.

It took time for the trio to decipher the mountain’s call, realizing too late they stood directly in its path, completely vulnerable and with no choice remaining but to run. Anker dove to his left, digging his ice ax in the ground below, but Lowe and Bridges ran straight ahead. Taking one last glance backwards, Anker’s final view of his best friend alive was swallowed by the avalanche.

**The news surrounding** the tragedy of Lowe and Bridge’s death rocked the climbing community. Lowe and Anker were considered unstoppable forces in mountaineering, practically gods of the alpine—and they had turned alarmingly mortal again. Tales of calamity are commonplace in a world that prioritizes the perilous, but for it to happen to Lowe meant it could happen to anybody.

Grief consumed Lowe’s family. Jennifer became truly alone





El Capitan in Yosemite National Park

in parenting a 10-year old, Max, and two younger sons, Sam and Isaac, as they would grow up in the shadow of their father’s death and someday reckon with the legacy he left behind.

Anker likewise had to decipher what his close friend’s absence meant for him. Lowe—*Outside* magazine’s “best climber in the world,” who had kids and a wife in Montana, who wanted to surprise his boys with a trip to Disneyland when he got home—envisioned a life ahead of him not consumed with climbing and conquering but instead doing good by his family. Meanwhile, Anker—living in a van with no serious commitments or anyone to go home to, his future full of icicles and carabiners, to whom death would be understandable—had been spared.

An avalanche of survivor’s guilt buried Anker so deep he didn’t think he could dig himself out again, the flood of despair determined to claim what Shishapangma could not. Post traumatic stress disorder could have been the final nail in Anker’s coffin, suicidal ideation following him every step he took, had it not been for his unwavering sense of responsibility towards what remained of Lowe’s legacy. He promised Jennifer that he would do whatever it took to support her family, refusing to fail them the way he convinced himself he failed Lowe.

In December 1999, Anker spent Christmas with Jennifer and the boys. He accompanied the family on a trip to Disneyland, a

time void of remorse and filled with laughter and respite. Anker became a more common presence in Montana as his bond with the family grew alongside his sense of responsibility. He couldn’t replace Lowe but he became a permanent fixture in their lives.

Then three months after the disaster on Shishapangma, Max walked in on his mother and Anker kissing, the first physical symbol of their love and the beginning to a relationship that aroused attention beyond just climbers. A year after Lowe’s death, Anker moved in with the family. Two years after the disaster on Shishapangma Jennifer Lowe became Jennifer Anker-Lowe.

The marriage invited a barrage of publicity critiquing how quickly the relationship grew. *Outside* magazine’s famous 2001 May issue’s front cover announced: “Last Man Standing. His Friends are gone. His life is a soap opera. His career is in overdrive.” The two grew sick of the commentary but strode onward because their love expanded tabloid accusations, and Anker had far more to share with the world than clichés of a false affair.

**Very little** of the Earth’s natural landscape remains untouched. Meru Peak, a 21,000-foot titan of the Garhwal Himalayas, seemed

unconquerable. A 1,500-foot wall of sheer granite, the impenetrable Shark’s Fin of Meru taunted alpinists for years, including Anker’s mentor Stump. In 2008, Anker formulated a plan to tame the Shark’s Fin accompanied by prolific mountaineering photographer Jimmy Chin and young free soloist and painter Renan Ozturk. He would succeed for Stump, for Lowe, for all the people who the alpine had claimed. Anker would succeed because he couldn’t afford to fail.

The 2015 film “Meru” documents the trio’s dedication to the peak, questioning the ambition of men that encroaches on obsession. The three bested four days of storm in a portaledge, broken satellite phones, perilous ice climbing, and surviving on cheese rinds. They fought Ozturk’s inexperience, meanwhile Chin’s steadfast nature eroded against the cliffside and Anker’s knowledge that his family waited for him at home proved enough to stop. Within 100 meters of the summit, the group turned back, 19 days of relentless exertion lost to a couple hundred feet of rock and snow. Anker understood that to finish the climb would be to step beyond the line of “acceptable risk,” a comprehension only found in truly experienced mountaineers.

Anker went home while Chin and Ozturk continued doing projects together, filming their adventures as they traveled around the world. In 2011, the duo ended up in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, to film expert snowboarders Jeremy Jones and Xavier de Le Rue. More familiar with ascension with crampons than descension on skis, Ozturk hit a rough point skiing to the film site and tumbled over the edge of a cliff. The accident resulted in a severely fractured skull and a vertebral artery rupture, leaving the climber lucky to have exited the slope drawing breath—but Ozturk’s concerns lay elsewhere.

Ever obsessed, Anker, Chin, and Ozturk agreed to reattempt Meru’s Shark Fin. The reasons for returning were as multifaceted as the obstacles. “The goal for the mountain was still there,” Anker explains, “but there was certainly just trust in our partners...and that Renan had the strength to finish it up...but it was kind of...risky to do that.”

Ozturk’s accident occurred five months before they were supposed to undertake their expedition, but he heard the mountain’s calling loud and clear. His aggressive goals for recovery proved admirable to some and concerning to most. Anker visited him in the hospital and would entertain his goals of summiting the peak in a mere five months, despite his own personal thoughts that Ozturk had nowhere near enough time to recover. The presence of an injured member on the crew endangered everyone involved, and caused great debate once word got out that Ozturk would be a part of the second expedition. Jennifer took issue with the choice, knowing that if Ozturk were to get hurt, her husband and the life they had built might again face devastation. But she also knew the man she married had devoted himself to the mountains long before he did to her.

However, Anker didn’t get the final choice, Chin did. “[Renan] wanted to do it, but Jimmy was the guy that stood up for him. Jimmy guaranteed that Renan was there,” says Anker. The liability had been reckoned with, including Ozturk was deemed an acceptable risk.

Warmer sleeping bags, updated cameras, and familiarity, al-

lowed the trio to move quickly up the mountain. They took 48 hours to complete a section of the climb that before had taken them six days, repaired a snapped bar on their portaledge with athletic tape, consumed an incessant supply of couscous, weathered ferocious temperatures and wind, and avoided avalanches of rock tumbling around them. Reaching 19,000 feet, Ozturk appeared unable to speak, eyes rolling into the back of his head and falling into a state of exhaustion. Anker and Chin were left with nothing to do but wait in their portaledge, watching as their friend suffered. Whether Ozturk suffered a temporary loss of blood flow or altitude sickness was undetermined, but the next morning he made a miraculous comeback, and the climbers once again faced the feral brutality of Meru.

A force of nature himself, Anker led 16 of the 29 pitches on the infamous wall. “There was a dream I’d had going back, 2003 was the first time I’d tried [Meru]...2008 second and [then] 2011,” Anker explains, “So it was eight years over three expeditions.” For eight years he carried the legacy of his mentor up the mountain with him—continuing to retrace Stump’s footprints, then passing the torch on to Chin. “It’s your turn to take the reins,” he told Chin in Meru.

The trio forged a path up rock untouched by anything but whispers from the heavens and wails from savage elements. Twelve days after the initial ascent, Meru had been tamed.

“Meru is the culmination of all I’ve done,” says Anker in Meru. Climbing beyond the reach of death’s clammy grasp, the alpinists had done what no man had done before, but the peaks weren’t yet done with Anker.

**In 2016, Anker** suffered a widowmaker heart attack on the mountain Luang Ri at an elevation of over 20,000 feet. A piece of plaque lodged in his left anterior artery had sent him into cardiac arrest, the extreme elevation exacerbating the condition. Either he made a quick descent, or he died.

At this point, Anker associates his interactions with near death as conversations, and though the two were well acquainted, their discussions more often delved into screaming matches than introspective echanges. The heart attack’s voice differentiated itself from all the others, slower and softer in its approach. “The couple of times just were like a screaming match, you miss an avalanche or something like that...your body courses with adrenaline and all the chemicals released in such a situation,” Anker reflects, “and you get through it and you feel that sense of exaltation, but it was a slower deal with that heart attack.”

Rushing down the mountain the dialogue followed him, a nine-hour discussion of mortality and inevitability. Anker says, “it’s a very expensive way of teaching us to live in the moment.”

At 54, Anker toed the line of his body’s capabilities, and the mountains checked him, reminding him that a greater challenge awaited him at home. Anker had to rearrange his life to create room for Jennifer and the boys, his dirtbag days of living in a van retired in favor of a stable roof in Bozeman, Montana. Walking through the same hallways Lowe had, watching and aiding the kids as they grew up, battling the sensation of living another man’s life, Anker



had to learn to live with the ghost of his best friend.

His sacrifices melted into sanctification in the face of his evolving responsibilities, the defining moment of his life being “the day that Jenny and I got married. My dedication to follow through with them and to be there as a father, and to collectively be there and do so from a place of love,” he says.

Much like Anker, Max never expected to lose Lowe as early as he did. His father, whom he’d allowed himself to love freely, wouldn’t be returning home, and with him went Max’s capacity to open himself up to trusting love again. Whereas Max held dear memories of Lowe, to the younger brothers, Anker had always been “Dad,” and Lowe turned into a myth of what could have been.

The second father’s day Anker spent with the family, Max gave him a present. “I wrapped it up in six or seven layers of wrapping paper. And in the middle of it was just this little heart that said, ‘I love you,’” Max says in a *KRCW* radio article. “And to me as a kid, that was a big thing to be able to tell him that, and give him that trust that I had lost in my relationship with Alex when he was killed.”

Through the gift, Max acknowledged Anker as a mountain of support he’d become for the family. Max’s film *Torn* dissects the merciless grief and guilt of a family fighting for love in the echoes of a disaster decades old. The climax of the documentary comes in the form of two climbers, Ueli Steck and David Goettler, finding Lowe and Bridges’ bodies on Shishapangma. “It’s kind of fitting that it’s professional climbers who found him, it wasn’t a yak herder. It wasn’t a trekker. David and Ueli are both cut from the same cloth as Alex and me,” says Anker in a *Smithsonian* article.

The family—Anker, Jenni, Max, Sam, and Isaac—travel to Tibet where they hold a ceremony for Lowe and Bridges, following local burial traditions. The condition of the bodies through the camera lense creates a palpable tension, cementing Lowe as one of alpinism’s great tragedies, and granting the Anker-Lowe family space to reoccupy their own lives.

An argument can be made that mountaineers are adrenaline junkies, agitated by a lack of thrill. More likely, mountaineers are made for something harder than flesh and bone, colder than the blood running through their veins, crafted by sleet and rock and bitter wind, fashioned for the unattainable. Anker is fueled by the compulsion to climb. “[When] I wake up in the morning, I’m motivated,” he says. “I want to get out for the day and do things. That’s finding that we have off days, but you can also create positivity... when something comes at you rather than being aggressive and then sort of escalating the situation, you can be positive.”

Anker is a rare breed of climber, evolved not just for extreme elevation but also the intricacies of fatherhood. His family is carved from the rocks of Shishapangma, eroded by the waters of rumor, and strengthened by the love found exclusively in the ever-persevering.

— Original reporting by Brayden Hilderbrand



Conrad Anker scales the Pacific Ocean Wall on El Capitan.



# Dealing With Our Deficit

Author Richard Louv speaks on nature-deficit disorder and its worsening effects on younger generations.



Madelyn Nover



Chloé Heckard

Six hours and 24 minutes. A quarter of my day was spent on YouTube, sometimes capturing my full attention, sometimes just operating as background noise. The only time I spent outside consisted of going to Target to buy a notebook—maybe ten minutes out in real, natural air. There wasn't grass between my toes, no birds sang their songs, just concrete and cars in front of the store, bitterly cold wind racing past, and then back to YouTube.

I stretched my fingers across the keyboard, tapping away, at 11:34 that night. The only light emanated from the screen in front of me. Desperately trying to drill calculus into my brain, homework felt pointless at such an hour, but I wasn't tired enough to sleep.

My phone buzzed on the pillow, a text message lighting up the screen. Glancing away from my medium-sized screen down to a small screen, I fired back a text before my friend went to bed. I assured her that I would retire to my sheets sometime soon.

The show I wasn't paying attention to stopped playing.

"Are you still there?" asked Netflix.

Though not focused on the comedy, I pressed "yes" on the remote.

Then my watch vibrated against my wrist. "Time to stand!" reminding me I hadn't moved in three hours. The mini screen taunted me with the late hour. I swiped it away and rolled onto my back. The earbuds ripped out. I didn't bother to pause the video.

I closed my eyes, which were strained beyond belief. I had rotated between the four different screens relentlessly. My eyes were finally able to unfocus. The ceiling swirled in front of me, an off-white sea.

Rain pelted my window. Gusts of air pushed it onto the glass. The storm brought puddles and the smell of wet earth. I hadn't realized just how hard it had been raining. The little drizzle turned into downpour. Peeking between the blinds, I didn't see much in the dark. But the streetlights illuminated enough of the pavement to see the rain collecting in a small lake against the gutter. Leaves covered the grate, blocking drainage.

The repetitive day-to-day life I was living wasn't enough. Everything outside of my four walls suddenly seemed more exciting than what was inside them.



In the United States alone, an estimated six billion texts are sent every day. That's about 42 billion texts a week. In a study done by The Nature of Americans, the average adult reportedly spent five or less hours outdoors per week, although they all agreed that they knew the benefits of being outdoors was very important.

The environmental changes that the standard iPhone has caused creates another problem. With more than 2.2 billion iPhones ever made but only 715 million in current use, 67.5 percent of iPhones are now filling landfills, kitchen drawers, and other miscellaneous piles of junk. In fact, iPhones created 40,000 tons of waste, as reported in 2014. A few metals, including gold and palladium, can be melted down and reused, but the rest of the phone is useless and tossed away.

Landfills are growing while people are ditching the outdoors

Madelyn Nover takes a moment to notice the tree canopy at Spencer Butte.





and disconnecting from reality. The world seems like it's in more turmoil than ever before. "You can make the case that nature deficit disorder started long ago with the invention of agriculture," says author Richard Louv. "It has been with us all along."

While the disorder is nothing new, the ways we are seeing it are much more evident.

Louv coined the term nature deficit disorder in his book *The Last Child in the Woods* in response to humans spending less time outdoors than they have in the past, suggesting this change results in behavioral changes, which include diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties, and higher rates of physical and emotional illness.

*The Last Child in the Woods* was released in 2005 and received immense popularity, earning a spot on *The New York Times* best selling list. Louv was awarded the Audubon Medal for raising awareness about the present issues in our world. The rise of a digital world has only accelerated the pace of the disconnect.

"A lot of people came up to me and started saying 'okay, Rich, there should be a movement. So what are you doing about it? And what do we do about it?'" says Louv. The Children in Nature Network was created a year later, the mission to educate and inform parents, teachers, and communities about the importance of nature and encouraging the younger generations to get outside.

Louv is the council chair and one of the founding members of the network, and continues to publish articles on how and why to get children outdoors. His most recent article published to the website is "10 Nature Activities to Help Get Your Family Through the Coronavirus Pandemic," published in March of 2020. In the article, he recommends hiking or exercising outdoors, backyard camping, digging in the dirt, even wildlife watching from indoors.

"If we can put soccer on the calendar [then] we can put nature on the calendar," Louv says, showing that the conscious act of venturing outdoors shouldn't be a complicated one.



A few months into the Covid 19 pandemic, children began experiencing the new world of the virtual classroom. From kindergarten to university, nearly every student went to screens for their education, and 72 percent of parents saw their children's digital use increase, whether for recreational or school purposes.

"People, when they're forced to be indoors and when they were excluded from parks and hiking and all those other things, suddenly you don't know what you had till it's gone," says Louv. "I start-





ed to hear from people... during their seclusion, they had looked out their window for the first time and noticed there were birds.”

The things that had been overlooked and “taken for granted” were now something people saw great importance in. “Isolated in their houses, they started to feel a certain kind of relationship with those birds or the opossum that walks through their yard or the coyote they made eye contact with that crosses the street in front of their house,” Louv says.

Louv adds, “when I wrote *Last Child*, I could find about 60 studies that I could cite. Some of them about the disconnect between people and nature. Since *Last Child* was published... there [have been] abstracts independently written to well over 1,000 studies.”

Those who spend just two or three hours outside a week have a 60 percent higher chance of being and staying healthy. The vitamin D that the body can absorb in 15-20 minutes strengthens bones, improves mood, and helps fight cancers. Outdoor activities also decrease obesity rates and promote creativity.

A study led by Ming Kuo of the University of Illinois showed that children who were taught biology outside with hands-on experience were more engaged than those taught in traditional school buildings. In addition, they were less distracted during the lessons and paid better attention.

“We can’t just expect people to go to Yosemite,” says Louv. “We actually have to change the cities in which we live. As urbanization increases either human beings will lose whatever connection they still have with the natural world, if we continue with the same development patterns. Or it means the beginning of a new kind of city.”

Louv continues, “The old suburbs of the 50s and 60s had big yards, and they were created, ironically, to connect people with nature.” With people now living in condos and apartment complexes, not every child has access to a backyard. And densely packed cities could have the nearest park a mile away.

With more people disconnected from nature, the world may fall into anarchy. “I often talk about the four horsemen of the apocalypse,” Louv says. “One of them is the climate emergency, the second one is biodiversity will collapse, third is pandemics related to environmental concerns, and the fourth is human loneliness—our disconnection from nature and from each other.”

A 2018 study showed that 72 percent of teenagers used Instagram, 62 percent used Snapchat, 51 percent used Facebook, 31 percent used Twitter, and only 3 percent admitted to using no social media platforms.

Social media isn’t evil nor is it destroying the world, but it is

dangerous. Once something goes on the internet, it becomes immortal. The photos, words, and opinions never die. And the effects on mental health have been evident since the beginning, especially in teen girls. Girls who use social media are two to three times more likely to be depressed than those who don’t use social media regularly.

People see these “perfect” pictures projected on their screens and immediately wish it was them, but what we see on Instagram and Facebook isn’t real. What’s real is what we find in our homes, with our friends and family or what we find amongst the trees in solitude. The real is what we can’t capture in a photo or a post.



**I decided** to pull my car off the road, a small gravel patch beckoning me, almost like it knew my plans. The sun was setting behind the hill, casting light across the surface of the river and filtering through the leaves of the trees. The colors were more vibrant and clear than anything I had seen in a long time.

Retrieving my phone from my pocket, I attempted to capture the moment. I messed with the settings, but no matter how I played with the filters nothing could capture the true beauty. I clicked the button anyway, adding it to my stack of photos. Typing a message about how pretty it all looked, I almost sent the message to my mom.

If I would have sent that photo it wouldn’t have been perfect anymore. The pixels didn’t capture the true feeling. My camera is good, but it’s not reality. The photo didn’t capture the stillness and serenity of the real thing. Everything went away at that moment. It was just me, the trees, the dirt, and the river.

My phone vibrated in my back pocket. An unimportant email ruined the stillness. I remembered a line from Pico Iyer’s book *The Art of Stillness*: “more and more of us feel like emergency-room physicians, permanently on call, required to heal ourselves but unable to find the prescription for all the clutter on our desk.”

Starting the car back up, the music returned to its normal volume. But I decided to turn it off altogether. And I remembered the street from the drive out here so I could turn the GPS off. I rolled the windows down before pulling back onto the road.

The wind ripped through my hair and I regretted changing into a T-shirt earlier, but I wanted to feel what I had on the side of the road. The raw wind and cold made its way into the car. It wasn’t the same, but it was more than I had felt in a long time.





# A Paradoxical Escape

Izaiah Fisher investigates deep environmental issues while visiting New Orleans.

 Izaiah Fisher

The Baby Boyz Brass Band performs on Frenchman Street in New Orleans.

I woke up to five alarms at 8 in the morning and rolled out of bed, literally. After falling on my face, the real alarm for the morning, I hopped in the shower, threw on clothes, and walked to school. I numbly floated through my classes before going home for 20 minutes. In 20 minutes, I scarfed down an egg sandwich and changed again for a nine-hour shift at McDonald's. From 4 in the afternoon till 1 am I had the pleasure of spending my whole shift as the manager, where I ran the floor, counted the deposits, and bounced around every position in the store. Between the five night shift managers, I did these things the most often, and perhaps efficiently, making sure everything I did in my underpaid position was done to perfection. After closing the computer system for the night, I walked a mile home at 1 in the morning, only to wake up the next day and hit the repeat button. That means, in a week, I dealt with 40-45 hours of work and 15-20 hours of classes.

After living through this for almost a year, I needed an escape. Then one day I stumbled into the Miller Integrated Nature Experience (MINE), Ivan Miller's senior journalism class, and it hit me. I could use this class, this program, as an excuse to make this escape have meaning.

I quickly earned the title of managing editor, which has meant a whole lot more than the fast food job. I found something that felt like purpose in a way, outside of the regular work and school drawn zombie-like state I normally find myself in. After interviewing the Oregon Ducks men's basketball head coach, I wanted to take it to another level. I really wanted to get a taste for what a professional journalist would do, so I pitched a narrative on New Orleans. Having absolutely no idea what I was getting myself into, I planned my "vacation" also as a research trip, where I'd explore the culture of New Orleans, as well as the city's deep ecological issues.

Before visiting New Orleans, I'd never been on a plane and had only left Oregon twice, meaning I had absolutely no idea what I was doing or where I was going. When my plane took off from Eugene, I was terrified, unable to move until the ground was out of sight beneath the clouds. After some initial ear-popping, the fear dissipated. At first, I made a plane out to be super special when in reality it's just a flying bus. Just like a bus, there were cramped, uncomfortable seats and loud passengers, the only difference being a free glass of apple juice and pretzels shortly after takeoff. The entire cabin smelt of synthetic leather and an unpleasant concoction of each passenger's aroma. The fan overhead blew directly into my eyes and I, unaware that you could just move it, dealt with wind in my eyes half the flight. After the person next to me decided he would move his fan and hit me in the head with his elbow, I learned two lessons: 1. I

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don't like planes and 2. I can just shut off the fan.

I arrived in New Orleans, and having heard of the exotic food. I decided that I was going to eat alligator. A souvenir shop offered smoked gator jerky as a gag gift, not necessarily meant for ingestion. So the first attempt ended terribly, something like eating seasoned cardboard. Shortly after leaving the small, clustered shop, I then made my way to dinner. Here, I saw (edible) fried gator listed under the hors d'oeuvres in the boujie Landry's Seafood House, and after one bite I was surprised to find out that it tasted exactly like chicken. This made it real. I was experiencing something new.

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**It was around 10** in the morning on an overcast morning on January 5, and I found myself standing near an abandoned hospital coated in graffiti, towering over every other building, but before I could really take in the cityscape I noticed a random bug I couldn't recognize was chasing me. Fun. Here, at Lafitte Greenway, I met with writer and Loyola University New Orleans English professor, Christopher Schaberg, who published *Pedagogy of the Depressed*, a book on mental health. Schaberg grew up in a rural part of Michigan, before moving around from Wyoming to Montana, then California, eventually landing in New Orleans out of luck. After applying to "at least 80" universities as a professor, Loyola ended up calling him back. Between teaching writing classes and working in the Big Easy, it all seems like a dream come true. I watched as he pulled out his fly-fishing rod and began to cast into the water. I asked him why he would cast into the water with no bait, no lure, and he chuckled. At first, I was confused as to why he reacted the way he did, but after walking with him for some time I started to understand.

Schaberg thoroughly enjoys fly-fishing, describing it as a "paradoxical escape," meaning that even within his escape from daily routine, his thoughts can't help but drift towards his career and the same stress he fished to escape. Here on Bayou St. John, though, he seemed at peace, happy with his bait-less rod. He continued to cast in the water for a few minutes, enjoying the moment of fish-less fishing.

After a moment, though, he remembered his reason for meeting with me—to discuss the pollution that has ravaged the local waterways near his home in New Orleans. Every day, he goes on walks with his fishing pole down Bayou St. John, which lies west of the Mississippi River and runs out of Lake Pontchartrain. The lake then drains into the bayou, which has caused a sort of funnel for trash to build up and pour in the waterway. After hurricanes especially, the pollution and water quality drops so dramatically that it's practically impossible to catch anything, as there isn't anything to catch. He describes the city as a "giant bowl," meaning that the dams around the city make up the walls, and the city's drop in sea level towards the middle creates a concavity resembling a bowl that can easily fill during the flooding that comes from hurricanes. This misshapen landscape also creates several natural swamp and stream areas within the city. Normally, Schaberg described Bayou St. John as "teaming with life," with darters, bass, cichlids, and even a local turtle. But now, the canal seems bare of life. Instead, it's shallow and almost pond-like in its stagnance. A murky, un-

moving stream littered with used needles, pill containers, empty liquor bottles, plastic bags, and other various bits of debris and waste. This bayou, sadly, looks much like most waterways in New Orleans and the Louisiana area in general, even the largest ones.

The Gulf of Mexico, the area where the majority of New Orleans' shrimp comes from, is now in a "dead zone," an area of the ocean suffering from hypoxia, or lowered levels of oxygen in water. Hypoxia can occur naturally, but scientists believe that the Gulf of Mexico's issue stems from human activity. Excess waste being dumped into rivers creates an excess of nutrients, which then flows towards the gulf where they then stimulate an overgrowth of algae. This algae, in turn, sinks to the ocean floor and decomposes, consuming massive amounts of oxygen. The northern Gulf of Mexico holds the world's second largest dead zone behind the Arabian Sea. The lower amounts of oxygen mean that immobile life dies off and mobile life, such as fish, leave the area. This leaves the lower areas of the ocean where shrimp often reside almost lifeless and uninhabitable, causing the shrimp population to dwindle and the supply for local restaurants to run low.

Much of New Orleans sits around one to three meters below sea level, according to a 2003 study. However, the city wasn't always this way. The land New Orleans was built on was originally a deposit of sediment that would grow yearly when the Mississippi River would flood. At this point in the 1800's, 100 percent of the land was above sea level, but problems arose when the heavily favored dry areas became overcrowded, and the area surrounding was nothing but swamp.

Engineers at the time developed a solution involving pumping water out of the swamps, which seemed like a great idea, getting rid of the swamp lands as well as protecting the city from the floods that came with hurricanes. Removing this water not only got rid of the surface water, but also water built up in pockets below the sediment. These pockets were then left full of air below the surface, before building occurred on top. By 1895, five percent of the city was below sea level and 40 years later, in 1935, it reached nearly 30 percent. Over time, the organic matter such as dead plants decayed, causing even more pockets than before, which in turn caused even further sinking. The sediment deposit mentioned previously doesn't exist today. Along with global warming raising the sea level, is causing a two-inch drop in the elevation of New Orleans annually.

It gets worse. Since 1988, Louisiana ranks second in toxic emissions almost yearly. In 2002, they featured an 87 percent drop in emissions, but still held the number two spot in pollution. Then, 15 years later in 2017, toxic chemical release levels jumped 17 percent from the low point reached in 2009, marking a boom in the industrial world as several plants began construction and operation.

With damage still taking place and no feasible solution to reverse the issue, it looks as if New Orleans could be completely underwater by 2050. Realistic plans to stop or reverse the sinking city don't exist, and the plans that are presented are unrealistic and too expensive for government officials to fund. The main solution currently being presented is a 50-year long project that would cost \$3.2 billion to elevate the levees, which would help prevent flooding more than solving the sea level issue. Movie-like ideas of an







underwater city are more likely than actually solving the problem, meaning it's very likely that New Orleans is beyond repair and we're seeing its final days.

**I can't help** but linger on NOLA Poboy's, a popular sandwich shop/convenience store combo, that sells the "Who Dat" po' boy, easily one of the best foods I've had in my entire life. The sandwich featured warm, crispy-crusted bread along with regular sandwich toppings of lettuce, mayo, and tomato paired with the specialty topping of bisque-covered fried shrimp. The way the soup mixed with the mayo created an oddly perfect sauce to compliment the bread and the shrimp. After visiting this place four times in five days, I also tried fried crawfish and gumbo po' boys, both of which wowed me in an oddly comforting way, almost like I was eating a home cooked meal.

Today, I find myself back home, back in the same routine of waking up, going to school, working, sleeping, and repeating it all again. That said, I have a newfound appreciation for the life I lead as well as the environment I find myself surrounded in. I used to take the air I breathe daily for granted, the rivers I see as pointless bodies of water. Now I see pristine, life-giving water systems meandering through the city of Springfield.

New Orleans, the Big Easy, is the symbol of living life to the fullest, in some ways. It's easy to ignore the deep-rooted environmental problems and get lost in the beautiful cityscape and amazing food. It's easy to live life without knowledge of the problems around you, or maybe living without caring about these problems. I know that I can be found guilty of this. After all the grinding, all the hard work put into possibly being considered a real journalist, I remember finding myself at lunch lost in thought. I couldn't help but wonder: What is a real journalist?

I thought about all the hard work I'd put into previously written pieces as well as this piece specifically, all the sit-down edits, countless days of brainstorming ideas and structure, flow and research, all just to write a story, and I realized that I loved it all. As I reached the final few pieces of my Po'boy, I realized this was real journalism. Simply put, a journalist is someone who writes for a publication, not necessarily some best-selling author or fancy news anchor. As I boarded my final plane, I considered myself a journalist, wanting to help spread awareness, still hungry for more.

Bourbon Street sits empty during a Covid-19 lockdown.





Ciaran Heurteau / Red Bull Content Pool