



VOLUME TWO

CHITTER CHATTAR

JEROME FRANCIS HOLT



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STANDING STILL

As we drove through the vast swathes of farmland in the Central Valley north of Bakersfield my father and I wondered whether today would be the day we would get into prison.

We arrived at SATF or rather 'California Substance Abuse Treatment Facility and State Prison' in Corcoran. Set on 280 acres with 6000 inmates, running at a cost of around \$300 million a year, considered at the time of our visit, to be 'the largest addiction treatment center in the world'.

We made our way to the visitors entrance, set behind a thirty foot wire fence patrolled by sniper's standing in turrets high above the top of the fence line. We presented our paperwork, proceeding through numerous security checks, metal detectors, double checks, before we were allowed to sit in the waiting area just inside the prison fence.

My father and I had planned to present a message of peace together, to the staff and inmates. After half an hour of waiting we were met by a member of staff who informed us that my father would be presenting to the prison staff, and I would be taken separately to present to groups of inmates.

Having only prepared my presentation the night before, drawing a one page mind map to condense my main thoughts for reference, I was glad I had spent some time preparing. However, I had not practiced my presentation out loud or in front of anyone. I thought I would be acting in a supportive role to my father, who was the visionary, passionate man behind the project.

Everything was happening so fast, and as we prepared to go our separate ways, my father looked me in the eyes and smiled,

“I trust you” he said.

As my father went one way I was directed by my prison guard chaperone to a golf cart. We hopped aboard and then drove off to our first presentation in a building not too far away.

The first presentation went well. The inmates seemed to enjoy themselves, they even told me they were very grateful that I had come. My presentation consisted of showing a few short clips of Prem Rawat talking about peace, then talking to the inmates, while answering any questions they might have.

As we moved from one yard to another, my chaperone prison guard talked to me. Who he presented himself as to the inmates, was a different man to the one he showed me while traversing the massive complex, isolated hallways, back passages, and employee rooms behind where the inmates were held. The man in the golf cart was a normal man, with a family, doing a job, with only a few years left before he could retire, collecting the prison pension he so craved, a carrot that had kept him working at the prison for twenty five years. The dark reality of being a prison guard was that he himself had spent twenty five years in prison. Yes, he could leave, but still, for four days a week, on twelve hour shifts, not including all the overtime, he had been in prison.

When it comes to the prison hierarchy, the warden is the top dog, but the prison guards are not far behind. One man can often be in charge of hundreds of inmates. He made it quite clear to me, that sometimes he had to act tough, he had to show the inmates who was boss. On a few occasions I noticed the change in his personality, like a male bird in mating season, he would flare up, spread his wings and move closer to inmates who looked like they were getting out of hand.

On the way to my second presentation, I walked past a long line of inmates, all waiting to visit a window where they were handed pills in small paper cups like the ones you often see next to water dispensers. As a so called addiction facility, I wondered whether the inmates were being sedated, maybe new drugs were being tested on them or maybe they were becoming ‘addicted’ at the addiction facility.

As the room filled with inmates for my next presentation, one of the men in the back of the room raised his hand and asked “I was told I have to come to this presentation, but I don’t want to be here, can I leave?” Before I could answer the prison guard chimed in. “I told you, you had to be here, so sit there and listen to this man. This is good stuff and you might learn something”.

I noticed the change, the power of the guard, but the inmate challenged him and spoke again “I don’t want to be here”. The guard got in his face as the inmate stood up to face him. I spoke up, to say what I had wanted to say from the beginning “It’s ok, no one is forced to be here, if you want to be here, stay, otherwise you are free to leave”

“Thank you” the inmate took his leave.

“If anyone else doesn’t want to be here you can leave too” I said. At which point two other inmates got up and left. After a few minutes, while starting my presentation the inmate that had spoken up about leaving walked back into the room and sat down. Afterwards he came up to me and told me he was glad he decided to check it out after all, he found it very soothing.

With the presentations, I would first show a short clip of Prem Rawat speaking, and then ask the inmates if they’d like to watch any more - the answer was always, yes. During the videos I became a listener just like them, sitting watching the clips as if I was watching them for the first time. The words of someone talking about the essence of life were not only soothing but in complete opposition to what I was witnessing with my eyes as I went around the prison, the oppressive scale of seeing so many people in jail, the raw energy of it all, the drugs, the tension, the violence of it all. Sitting in silence with the inmates, if only for a brief amount of time felt like I was one of them, a student of life, listening and learning, searching for a way to feel peace within myself, focusing on my breath, in a place that made a person want to scream.

The first question I would always get after we had finished watching a few clips was, “Is this a religion?” To which I would answer “No, this is not a religion. I am not asking you to join anything, this message is about you as an individual. Prem Rawat offers four techniques which help a human being go inside and experience the self, he offers this for free, there are no strings attached, because what you are looking for is already inside of you, it’s not something you have to create or join”.

One inmate went on to explain that they get visits from lots of different religious groups who often come to save them or try to get them to join their religion. Another inmate, a man that was the size of a bear, who’s massive afro touched the men who sat beside him, commented after watching a few clips, while leaning on the chair in front of him “This is really cool, this guy is dope, thank you for coming, can we watch more?”

Deaf and blind inmates have to wear yellow bibs with the words ‘deaf’ or ‘blind’ written on them, so that the prison guards don’t mistreat the inmate for not paying attention or not seeing where to go. A blind inmate attended a presentation, helped by another inmate, following behind his helper with his hand on his shoulder. At the end of our time together he asked his friend

to walk by me, he held out his hand to shake mine, and as we did he thanked me for coming and had the kind of smile you remember, a smile that is rare to see, beaming, grinning, as if it ran from one side of his face to the other. It touched me so deeply, that I still remember that smile today.

What was dynamic about being around the inmates, some of whom may have been considered very dangerous people, was how real they were. They looked me in the eyes, were completely direct in ways that I often long for in the 'real' world. It's strange to think of someone being a brother, but brothers they sometimes felt, if I was to meet them outside of prison I would relate with them in a really deep human way. They knew what it meant to be alive, what it meant to have everything taken away, they knew what it meant to be real and noticed when someone was trying to be real with them. My work there, the presentations, for me, were like food, nourishment for a life starved of sincerity, realness and meaning.

When the guard told me that the next presentation would be my final one, I sighed in relief. I had reached my limit, and was ready to leave. Up until then I had been with people in jail for petty theft, drug problems, and mostly non violent crimes, which is what most of the USA prison population is. However, for my last presentation, I was to be taken to a category four section of the jail.

Category four is for those really bad criminals, the murderer's, rapists, the drug lords. As we drove in the golf cart, towards another section of the facility, the prison guard pointed to another building just behind the one we would be entering, and with a grin said,

"That's where Charles Manson lives."

As we entered the yard, a rectangle block about the size of a basketball court with twenty-five to thirty foot high, five foot thick, solid concrete walls. I noticed what seemed like fifteen guards in the far corner of the courtyard, huddled together, smiling and chatting. Following the prison guard around the perimeter of the yard, my eyes scanned and noticed a lone inmate standing smack bang in the centre, as if he was standing on a baseball pitchers mound.

The man was wearing a black fedora rimmed hat, sunglasses, jeans and the usual grey blueish prison uniform. He stood with his feet slightly wider than hip width apart, leaning on a cane, one hand placed on top of the other, completely still, while the midday California sun blared down on us all.

I was transfixed by this lone inmate. He had positioned himself so that he faced the sun, while the guards faced him, huddled, laughing, joking in the

shadow created by the thick yard wall. As I walked, I kept my eyes on the inmate. He never moved, not once, not one millimeter. He stood perfectly still, like the baddest mother fucker I had ever seen. Fifteen guards needed to watch this man, inside an inescapable concrete yard. I felt somewhat in awe of the man. How had it come to pass that this was real, that this experience, this whole construct, existed, the walls, the guards, the whole fucking thing. He had a presence, a stillness, seemingly in total control - although of course he was a prisoner. Yet, in one sense he was 'THE' man, he demanded respect.

I was taken out of my observation and contemplation, when the guard tapped me on the shoulder pointing to a door in the concrete wall. He opened the door, and I followed him into a small waiting room. He directed me to sit on a chair, and as I went to sit down, turning around to place my backside on the chair, I was affronted with the vision of a naked man, standing in a metal cage, only large enough for him to stand, frothing at the mouth, with his hands and feet tied together by chains.



GOMU

Attending a conference for the day at the Kyoto Conference Center in Japan, I decided to find a camping spot on the outskirts of the city, instead of bunking up in a 7eleven type parking lot within the city limits (as people in the United States might sleep in cars in Walmart parking lots), as there isn't much space to park a small van within the city limits of most Japanese cities, unless you find a parking lot either paid for or attached to a business.

On a whim, I drove the nineteen eighty-four Volkswagen camper-van, I had borrowed from a friend to tour Japan, out of the Kyoto valley, over the mountains and towards a location yet unknown, with no specific direction in mind, aimlessly driving the country roads.

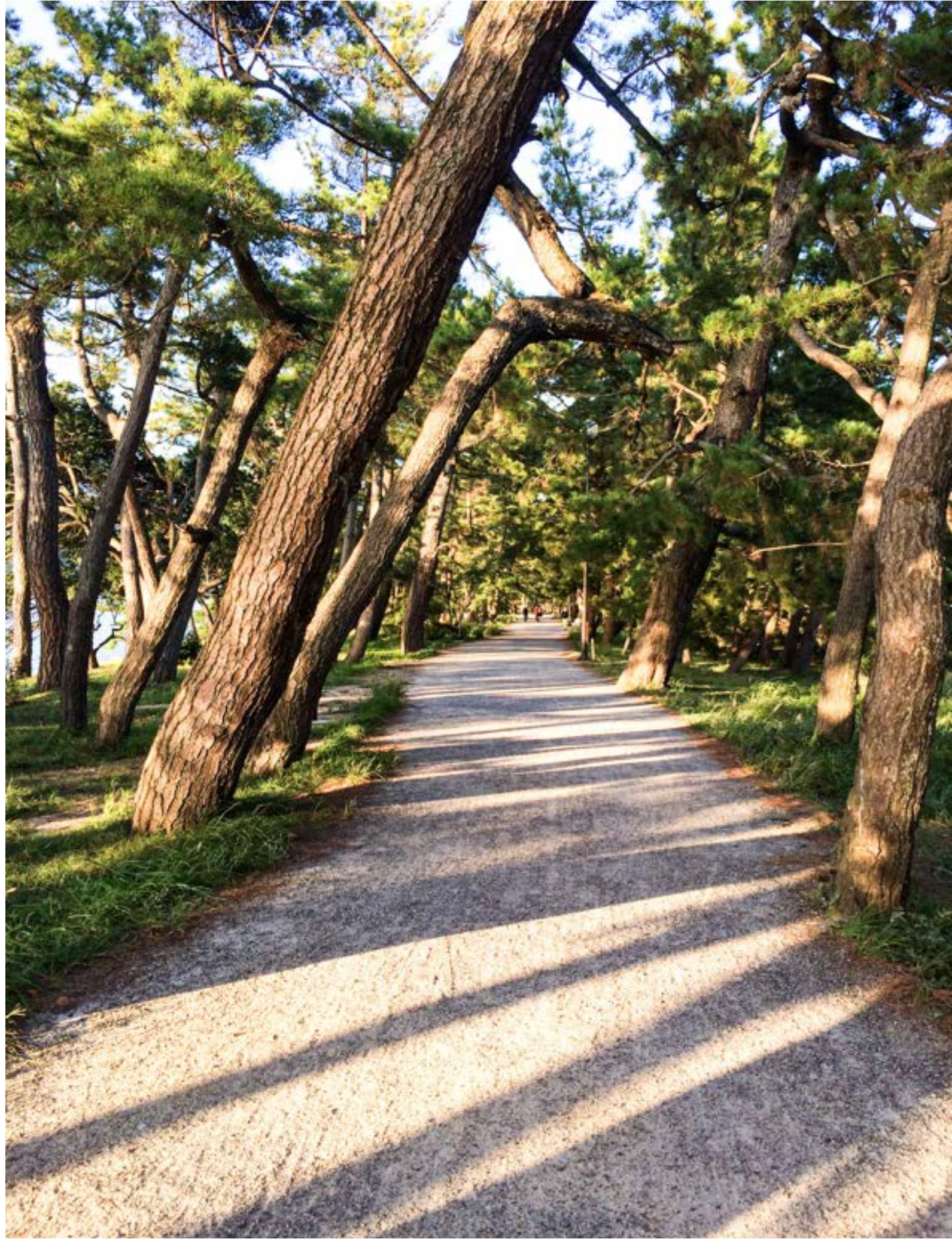
Coming around a long bend in the road, I noticed a hitchhiker with his thumb out, the first hitchhiker I'd seen in Japan, a tall white male, in his early twenties. I pulled over past where he was standing, rolled down the window, introduced myself, and asked where he was headed. He told me, in his Spanish English accent, he was trying to make it to the North Coast, to a town called Maizuru. I explained I was happy to take him, maybe not all the way, but as far as I could, he hopped aboard.

As we made our introductions, he took a Lonely Planet guide out from his bag, reading a page to me about a beautiful nature spot called Amanohashidate, a small village (near Maizuru) on the edge of a sand spit, and after listening to the description of the beautiful spot I said,

“Let's Go! It sounds like it's meant to be, I am sure we'll be able to find somewhere to camp for the night there”

I had come to Japan without a guidebook. Most of my travels around the world have never involved using a guidebook. I was curious to see whether I should get one. I tend to judge guidebooks as being things that create planned holidays to tourist destinations, causing the modern phenomenon of places overrun with millions of people snapping photos, frantically moving from one location to another in order to snap a photo of themselves in front of whatever they have read about - much like my experience visiting the Alhambra in Granada or the Sintra National Palace in Portugal.

I wondered whether I would benefit from having a guidebook, rather than the walkabout methodology I prefer, a process whereby the act of exploration is centered around just simply going on a walk, letting your feet direct you,



letting the journey itself be your guide. Many of my walkabouts have led to experiences I could not have gained from planning or reading a guidebook. Yet, I only know what I know, preparation can lead to insight, adventure and a sense of relaxation - it isn't always the best to be constantly going with the flow, sometimes you miss an opportunity to see or do something, an experience which with a little more action would have manifested a much deeper experience - of course you have to know what you want to find or what you are looking for in order to do good research.

My new hitchhiker friend, Juan, was happy and grateful for the ride. He had been in Japan for a year teaching english, with the intent of learning how to speak, read and write Japanese. After his teaching contract ran out he decided to do a hitchhiking camping tour of Japan. He purchased a tent, sleeping bag and started his tour from Tokyo. He had been on the road for three weeks when I met him.

I asked him if Japanese people picked him up when hitchhiking? Surprisingly they did. He met a lot of nice Japanese people while hitchhiking. He was such an oddity that many Japanese felt drawn to give him a ride. In my travels I had not seen one Japanese hitchhiker, and accordingly Juan pointed out that Japanese people don't hitchhike. Finding a ride, I would imagine, would be difficult, especially if like me you could only speak ten words of Japanese. In fact, I would find this out later during my Japanese trip, when I tried to hitchhike after running out of fuel late one night in a remote mountainous area. The next morning I was unable to catch any rides, even though a few people tried to stop and talk to me, but because I couldn't communicate with them, they drove off, and in the end I decided it was easier to just walk the three hours to a gas station whereupon, somehow I managed to get one of the attendants to drive myself and a supply of fuel back to where my van had broken down.

Hitchhiking is difficult when you leave most major Japanese cities, the land



becomes mountainous, isolated and difficult to traverse. This is why before the automobile and roads, human settlements remained isolated from each other even though in today's standards they were not that far away. Many cities in Japan exist on the edge of mountain rivers, valleys and in places that by foot are difficult to access. In modern times Japanese engineers have figured out how to drill tunnels through mountains, and this is why driving in Japan today will take you through some of the most amazing tunnels built by man. Despite the hardships of hitchhiking in Japan, Juan never went a few hours before being able to catch a ride.

I enjoyed having company in the van, I had become used to traveling alone and my spirits lifted a little, having a partner in crime, even a stranger, for a few minutes felt like more adventures would be possible.

Jokingly but secretly serious, I commented that while we were together maybe he could act as my interpreter, my wing man, and chat up some nice Japanese ladies. He seemed a bit put out by this suggestion, almost annoyed, I soon discovered from observing his mannerisms, he was probably more attracted to the male of the human species, and he actually seemed disappointed that I was inclined towards women, and not men. Maybe he thought he and I would hook up, maybe that was the adventure he wished for. My secret wish seemed to put a small dampener on the vibe but I hoped we could still enjoy whatever time we had together.

After an hour of driving we arrived in Amanohashidate. Using my decent directional senses, I found a free place to park on the outskirts of the town, in a small but abandoned sandy parking lot near the water and next to a footpath that led into town.

Amanohashidate translates to 'Bridge in Heaven'. It is said when viewed from the mountains, the sand-spit resembles a meandering pathway connecting the heaven and earth, weaving a path from one side of the bay to the



other, and is considered, according to the guidebooks, one of the three most scenic views in all of Japan. The narrow sandbar, which measures as little as 20 meters across at its narrowest point, is lined with nearly 8000 pine trees.

Juan and I followed the droves of Japanese tourists who had come up on the train from Kyoto, towards the entrance of the sand spit, through the local temple, and then a small village housing coffee shops, eateries and men in windows making soba noodles. A small canal cut through the sand spit to allow industrial barges to go from the ocean side to the bay side. On arrival the draw bridge over the canal was up, so we waited for it to lower, alongside the other tourists. Once down we started our walk across the sand spit, which takes approximately forty-five minutes to walk from one end to the other.

After days of driving and being in the city it was refreshing to take a stroll across this strange, but beautiful natural wonder, admiring the well established pine trees, while watching the immaculately dressed Japanese tourists ride their rental bikes across the spit, snapping photos every few minutes with their iPads.

About half way along, I made eye contact with a Japanese women walking in the other direction. She was wearing a mask, covering her nose and mouth, similar to the kind of mask you might wear if you were to do some painting, sanding or general house work (known in the United States as a N95 mask. After the global pandemic nearly everyone on the planet should know what a mask looks like). In Japan they wear masks in the car, going for walks, and conversing in coffee shops. Sometimes it's to protect themselves from germs or to protect others from catching them, sometimes for other reasons. Many people wear them during their normal everyday lives, and there is no stigma attached to wearing a mask.

I could tell she wasn't one of the many tourists going for a day out - she was dressed in sports clothing, walking at pace, as if she was doing a workout. I



couldn't see her face because of the mask she was wearing, but I could tell that when we made eye contact she smiled. Even when you smile, wearing a mask, your cheeks lift up, moving the mask, in fact your whole face moves, unless of course you have had Botox or some other surgery which fixes your face in position only allowing your mouth to move. As we passed close to each other, we locked eyes and I felt her smile once more.

I turned around to watch her walk away from me, tapping Juan on the shoulder who was off in his own thoughts and oblivious to my flirtations

“If we see that lady again, lets ask her if she knows a good restaurant and whether she would like to join us. You up for it?”

I paused for a second while he looked at me inquisitively

“Maybe that joke I made about you being my interpreter, could come true! What do you say?”

He looked at me for a few moments and then begrudgingly agreed, shrugging his shoulders and shaking his head. As we continued to walk I could tell that he would have preferred to be with just me, and no one else. However, I wasn't prepared to let this opportunity go by, selfish I know, but in the few weeks I'd been in Japan, I'd come to see the difficulty in meeting women when I couldn't speak Japanese, it wasn't impossible but rather difficult.

We reached the far end of the sand spit, turned around and headed back the way we'd come. Half way across, almost in exactly the same location as before, the same Japanese lady was walking back in the opposite direction. I could tell from afar that she was making eye contact with me. I tapped Juan on the arm

“Here we go!” He sighed and shook his head.

As she approached, I bowed, while saying “konichiwa” Japanese for hello. I then pointed to Juan

“My friend would like to talk to you” at which point Juan graciously



took over the conversation.

While they spoke I stood close by, smiling, with no idea of what was being said. I did garner they were talking about food. Occasionally I would interject, trying to direct the conversation to my own end

“Ask her if she knows of a good Japanese Sushi restaurant?”

Giving him a few moments, before interjecting

“Ask her if she would like to join us?”

To my surprise everything seemed to be going really well, she was interested and arranged to meet the both of us an hour later for dinner. Her name was Yumiko. Juan said that Yumiko would come pick us up from where we had parked, she had noticed my van when she drove into park for her walk, such is the way of small towns.

I felt excited, as if I had manifested the whole experience by an act of intention, putting my desire out into the ether. Men are pretty simple aren't they? Show them a pretty smiling girl and they are happy (heterosexual men at least), no need to tell them what the girl does, where she comes from, who she lives with, what she eats, how much money she has - if she is pretty, smiles at you, and is interested in you, this can almost be enough for a man.

Yumiko, had long dark black hair, like the main of a wild horse, thick, lustrous, running all the way down her back to below her hips. She was small, as are most Japanese people.

An hour later Yumiko showed up at the dirt parking lot next to the water, driving a cute 4x4 three door Japanese truck, so small you could almost mistake it for a toy car. We bowed and said hello. I gave her quick tour of my van, which she seemed rather impressed by, smiling all the time but of course still wearing a mask.

If there was one word to sum up Yumiko, her car, how she dressed, everything about her, the word would be 'cute'. She had her own sense of style, I would later find out she used to work in the movie industry as a seamstress in Tokyo before moving back home to be with her parents, her father was a local fishermen.

To my surprise, Juan told me she would drive us to the restaurant in her car. We piled in, as Juan was over six feet tall, I offered him the front seat. We arrived at the restaurant, a small place, with five booths, each containing a table on tatami mats, with an area under the table to dangle your feet.

The owners knew Yumiko and chatted to her as we sat down. Juan and Yu-

miko discussed what we should choose to eat. Collectively we decided she would do all the choosing, however she said she wasn't going to eat anything herself, which seemed a bit strange. I remonstrated, using basic hand movements to try and convince her to eat, but she shook her head at me, laughing and bowing her head.

We ordered sake, and started to chow down on some delicious fish dishes, many of them previously unknown to me before, and of course the ingredients of which were lost in translation. Everything was jovial, and Yumiko despite the allure of sushi and sake not once took off her mask during the meal to eat or drink. I found myself wondering how it was possible not to try one small portion of food or drink at this gathering, maybe she really cared about her figure, maybe she ate already, nonetheless it was quite a feat. The more sake I drink, the less I wondered why she wasn't eating and drinking.

It was an enjoyable dinner with relative strangers. The general spontaneous feeling of the evening, which for me is what traveling is all about, made the night feel special, that feeling of life in the flow.

Despite not touching any of the food or drink, Yumiko did touch one thing at the meal, her iPad. As I sat eating sushi Juan conversed as best he could with Yumiko. Sometimes she would look at her iPad punching words into Google Translate. There were some funny exchanges and misunderstandings, while Juan and myself tried to decipher what Yumiko was trying to say.

At first, the iPad seemed a bit of a joke, but as the night progressed, I realized Yumiko was genuinely interested in trying to learn english words. She spent the later part of our meal mostly looking at her iPad. I didn't mind, it was part of the whole experience of traveling, meeting strangers, observing human idiosyncrasies, eating fine Japanese food, while getting slightly merry on sake.

The more I drank, the more Yumiko and I started to converse through Google Translate, leaving Juan to look on bemused. I was becoming intrigued, I wondered if I could actually communicate with someone through Google Translate. Sort of like those movies where a human being becomes intimate with a Siri-esque computer figure. I felt the pull of using technology to further my relationship with Yumiko. I wondered, would google translate allow me to have a relationship with someone who didn't speak my language and I didn't speak theirs?

As a courtesy to Juan for setting up the meal, I put the bill on my credit card, which made Juan very happy. Understandably, being a bit of a penny



pincher, this was the first good meal he had eaten in weeks, normally living off cans of soup, other cheap fast food products and whatever else he could source along the way.

One of the reasons I came to Japan was to try the food, so for me, eating junk food and cans of soup were not in my remit. Every town I spent time in, there was always at least three or four places you could find, for reasonable price, that made wonderful Japanese soups and other local delicacies. However, after a few weeks in Japan I had to take a break from eating out so much because I found myself overeating, the desire to try all the variety of food was overwhelming.

After the meal we got in Yumiko's truck, with a full belly, and drove back to my van. I was slightly intoxicated, it doesn't take much for me to get drunk, at least I can say I am a happy drunk.

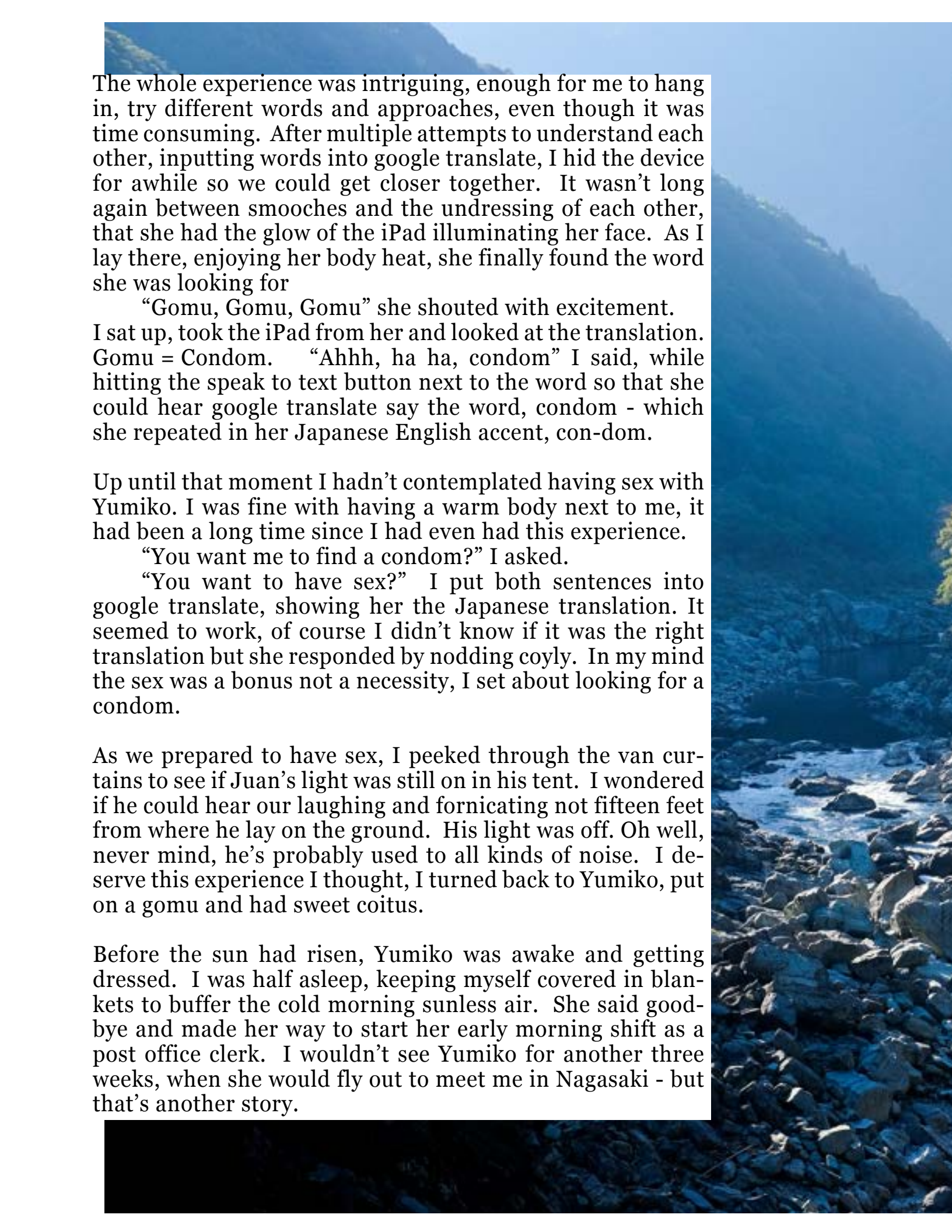
Even though it was dark, Yumiko seemed quite happy to hang around and help Juan set up his tent in the dirt beside my van. I held a flashlight and barked orders on how to erect his tent. Juan was possibly more pissed than me, and watching him spend the next hour trying to erect his tent was rather comical and provided Yumiko and I with a few laughs, laughter seems to be universal no matter the language.

When he was all set up, Yumiko and I said goodnight, she got in the van with me, closing the sliding door behind us. I didn't ask her if she wanted to get in the van with me, it just happened. Being mid September it was chilly. I made the bed and keeping our clothes on we got under the covers. As we lay next to each other, still wearing her mask, I had yet to see her face below her eyes. I took hold of her, warming our bodies against each other. I should have probably found out if she had some kind of bug, maybe that was the reason for her mask wearing. As we became closer, warmer, more intimately attached, I tried to remove her mask. At first she was coy, shaking her head, but then after a few attempts she finally did remove her mask, low and behold I discovered the real reason why she had her face covered with a mask - she was hiding the new braces she had just had put on her teeth.

I know those kind of braces well, I had similar braces on my teeth when I first moved to America as a sixteen year old, and wore them for many years. I wasn't as self conscious about it at the time, I was more annoyed by the fact I had metal in my mouth rather than how I looked, but I can understand how a grown women might feel having to wear braces.

I went to kiss her but with all the metal in her mouth it didn't feel right. After attempting to kiss a few more times, I pulled back and looked at her, she covered her mouth with her hand and giggled. After more cuddling and rolling around in the back of the van she out got her iPad again. We spent the next half hour trying to decipher what she wanted to say.

The Japanese have a very different way of communicating compared to English speakers. Unlike translating English into other Germanic or Roman languages, which is a lot easier with Google Translate since they have similar roots - using google translate to convert Japanese into English is very difficult. The Japanese construct sentences with hidden meanings behind groups of words. Etiquette, also plays a role, for instance, there are many ways to ask if you can visit the bathroom in someone's home, depending on whether you know them formally or not, doing so in the wrong way could offend the person you are asking.

The background of the page is a photograph of a river flowing through a rocky landscape. The river is in the foreground, surrounded by dark, jagged rocks. In the background, there are steep, forested mountains under a clear blue sky. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

The whole experience was intriguing, enough for me to hang in, try different words and approaches, even though it was time consuming. After multiple attempts to understand each other, inputting words into google translate, I hid the device for awhile so we could get closer together. It wasn't long again between smooches and the undressing of each other, that she had the glow of the iPad illuminating her face. As I lay there, enjoying her body heat, she finally found the word she was looking for

"Gomu, Gomu, Gomu" she shouted with excitement. I sat up, took the iPad from her and looked at the translation. Gomu = Condom. "Ahhh, ha ha, condom" I said, while hitting the speak to text button next to the word so that she could hear google translate say the word, condom - which she repeated in her Japanese English accent, con-dom.

Up until that moment I hadn't contemplated having sex with Yumiko. I was fine with having a warm body next to me, it had been a long time since I had even had this experience.

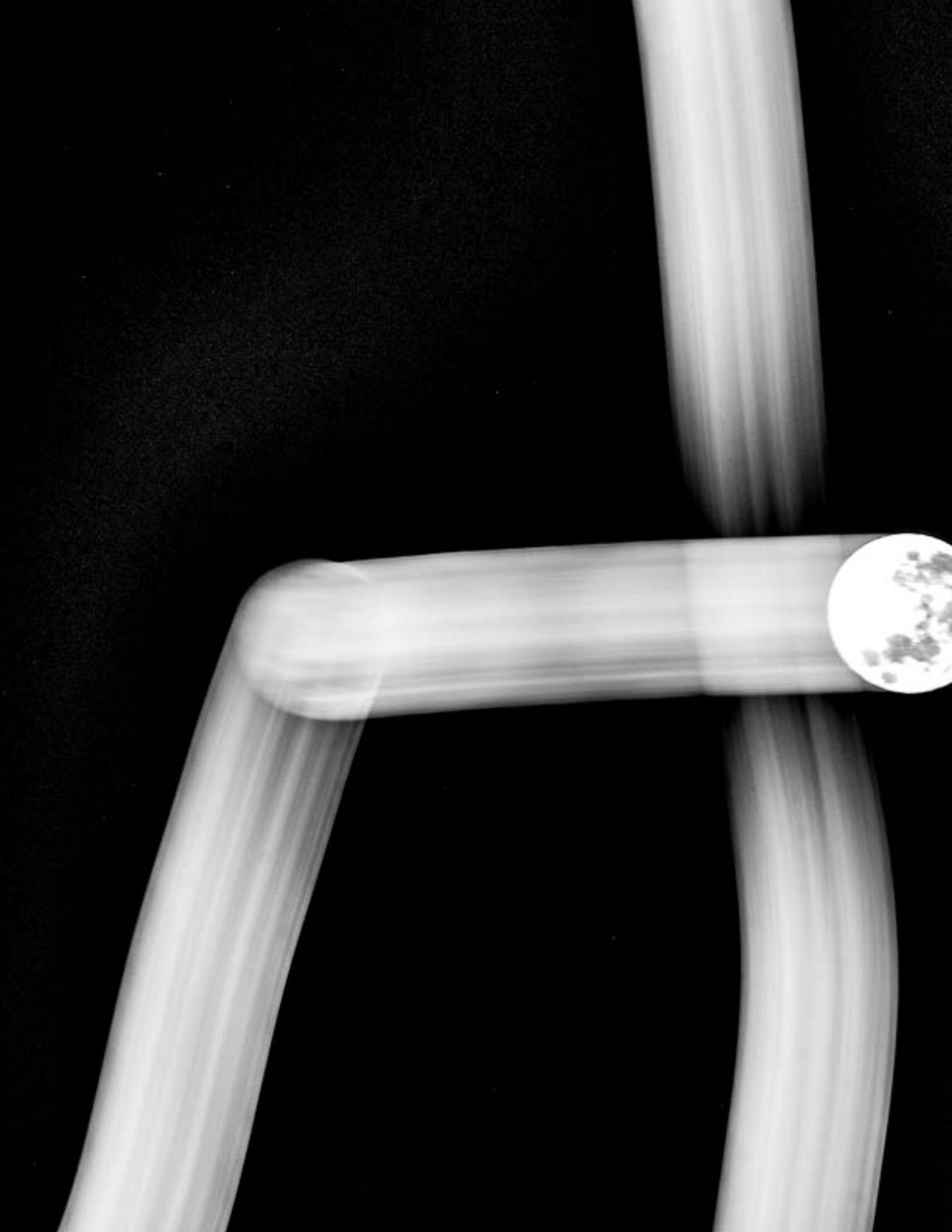
"You want me to find a condom?" I asked.

"You want to have sex?" I put both sentences into google translate, showing her the Japanese translation. It seemed to work, of course I didn't know if it was the right translation but she responded by nodding coyly. In my mind the sex was a bonus not a necessity, I set about looking for a condom.

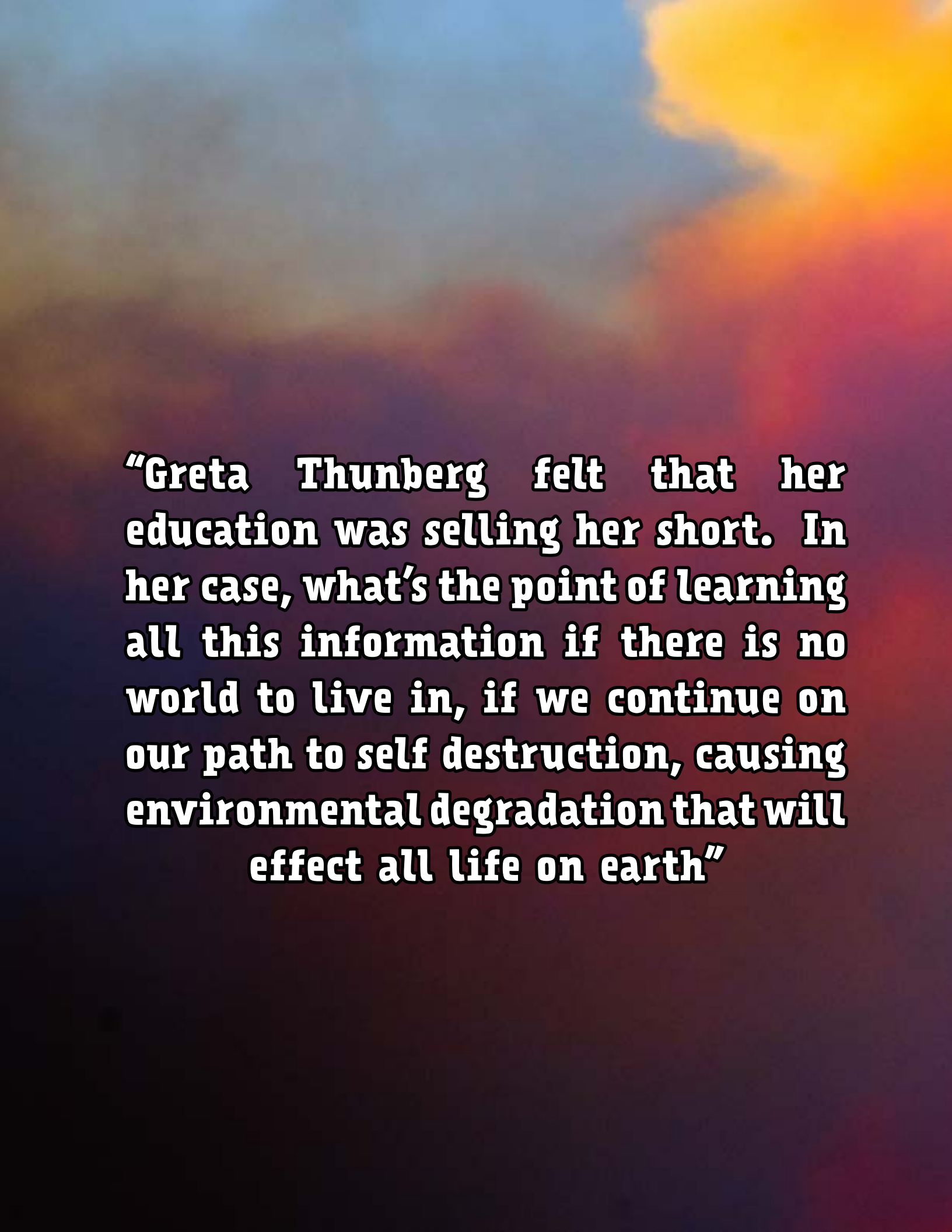
As we prepared to have sex, I peeked through the van curtains to see if Juan's light was still on in his tent. I wondered if he could hear our laughing and fornicating not fifteen feet from where he lay on the ground. His light was off. Oh well, never mind, he's probably used to all kinds of noise. I deserve this experience I thought, I turned back to Yumiko, put on a gomu and had sweet coitus.

Before the sun had risen, Yumiko was awake and getting dressed. I was half asleep, keeping myself covered in blankets to buffer the cold morning sunless air. She said goodbye and made her way to start her early morning shift as a post office clerk. I wouldn't see Yumiko for another three weeks, when she would fly out to meet me in Nagasaki - but that's another story.





"My history teacher was obsessed with the United States Constitution and basically colored all his classes with his belief that the Constitution was as he put it 'The Greatest Document Ever Written'"



"Greta Thunberg felt that her education was selling her short. In her case, what's the point of learning all this information if there is no world to live in, if we continue on our path to self destruction, causing environmental degradation that will effect all life on earth"



**"For all my education, for all my
time in the classroom – What was I
taught? What did I learn?"**



The Commander in Chief

As a kid growing up in England I was taught history from a English perspective. When you learn history in England, you learn dates, the dates of wars. Since Christ there have been endless wars involving England, between the people of Great Britain, Europe, Africa, India and in many more places around the world. Long before World War II wars raged across time between all the European countries.

As a young child the history lesson consisted of months and months of learning about all kinds of wars (If you want some idea of the history of Great Britain, Winston Churchill's four book 'A History of the English-Speaking Peoples' is a great overview of the many battles that have taken place within and surrounding the Great British Colonies). In some sense you could say that war is normal, it's been going on for so long.

As a young student, by the time our history lesson reached 1066 AD and the Battle of Hastings, in which roughly 6000 men died (famous for the beginning of the reign of the first Normandy King, William the Conqueror), I was completely exhausted. I remember shutting off my memory banks and although I was fed more dates and more wars, I remember very little history from that point on.

There were a few historical moments that stuck with me, such as the Medieval Period from the 5th to the 14th Century and the War of the Roses, which were a series of English civil wars for control of the throne of England fought between supporters of two rival cadet branches. Otherwise, every time I sat in the history class I would ask myself. What am I supposed to be getting out of these history lessons, these explorations of war?

As a twelve year old boy I concluded that nothing good comes from war. People fight, people die, people suffer. Over and over and over again. Time after time, people have been fighting for power, land, their beliefs, their religion, because they are told to, nationalism, and for many reasons or no reasons you may be able to think of.

For thousands of years people have been killing each other. Wars bring destruction. Replace the dates, replace the time, and nothing new is going on today when we look at war. It's the same thing. We create new ideas, new concepts, new philosophies but in the end, killing is killing. When Hitler and Stalin came to power they told people they were different, that they would take care of them, well, they became murdering psychopaths on a scale unimaginable, supported by others, except it actually happened, people actually followed and carried out these people's wishes, to exterminate large swathes of the population or whoever they deemed inferior in an incredibly short period of time. What have these so called leaders left us with?

When you watch those Hollywood movies, like the Marvel fantasies or some other violent power play film, the bad guy always wants the same thing, world domination, which normally involves the total annihilation of whoever currently lives on the planet. This seems to be the way of the despots, kill everything else that moves so that they can live on the planet in peace, or at least enslave a large section of the population so that they can live in style while everyone else wallows in the despots imposed substandard lifestyles.

When you look at many of the governments, many of the leaders, the track record for working as a public servant isn't good. Yes, there are those that have given it a good shot, I mean its hard not to be corrupted by power, it happens to the best of us. There seems to be a way about humans that once they come into positions of power they end up getting involved in some kind of war, some kind of altercation which leads to the death of other people.

Since World War I and further back, leaders have been sending others to do their dirty work, and those others are either forced to or willingly signed up for battle. Of course, when you're young you don't fully understand the false bill of goods you're being sold. Speak to many veterans and although they almost have to feel nationalistic about what they did during their time in service, they also will often realize that most of the reasons for the war and the war itself were based on lies.

With each President of the United States comes another war. While the President directs the executive branch of the federal government, they also concurrently Command the Army and Navy and as the commander it is their responsibility to look after the men and women of the Army and Navy. Officially, the United States has been involved in the war in Afghanistan, affectionately know as the 'War on Terror', since 2001, yet in actual reality the United States has been involved since 1978. George Bush Junior, Barack Obama, Donald Trump and now Joe Biden have all been involved in the Afghanistan war. George Bush Senior headed up the Gulf War, taking down

Saddam Husain, who at one point the United States supported. Other wars you might remember include; the Korean War from 1950 to 1953; the Vietnam War which started in 1955 and officially didn't end until 1975; involvement in the Somali Civil War since 1991, involvement in Iraq, Syria, and Libya since 2014 and numerous other wars around the world in South America, Africa, and Asia. President after President has either been forced to or chosen to be a part of War campaigns, and although they may never physically fire a bullet or even push a red button, let's be clear about this, they have blood on their hands.

It's not just the blood of the victims of war campaigns that the President, as the Commander in Chief is responsible for, they are also responsible for the men and women of the military who come home post campaign. For instance if we take a look at the United States Veterans, how many veterans come back from war and take their own life? Well, depending on which report you read, somewhere in the region of twenty veterans a day take their own life, that's around 7,300 Veterans every year committing suicide.

Veterans also live with many problems from health issues to PTSD, from all kinds of traumas including sexual assault. According to the United States Department of Defense Annual report on Sexual Assault in the Military, there were around 20,500 sexual assaults in the US military in 2018. We are not just talking about men assaulting women, we are also talking about men assaulting men.

Whichever angle you want to look at it, the military produces wave after wave of destruction, and as a twelve year old boy sitting in class learning English history I made the conclusion that wars bring destruction. I was not taught this directly, I came to this conclusion myself, the fallout from war is catastrophic.

Yet, this article is not about the Culture of War, it's about Education. I know that might sound strange, but I am interested in talking about the education we give to our children.

I was taught dates in English History, dates of Wars, as some sort of example of what it means to be human - wars exist and they are going to continue, they have shaped our borders, our cultures and how we interact with each other. I wasn't taught about where these wars stem from, in terms of inside a human being. Why, for instance, do some people think that other people can be slaves? Why is it that for thousands of years certain groups of people have been subjugated based on the color of their skin? Why are their despots like Hitler, Stalin, and where do they come from?

Instead of learning the dates as if I needed to be stuffed with information, it would have been more useful to discuss principles, to discuss and share the

reasons why human beings go down the roads they do. This style of teaching would mean that the teacher themselves would need to have a certain level of understanding, and many teachers are confused, conflicted, lack real clarity and understanding - and most importantly, wish to inflict their own ideology on their students. For instance, if you repeatedly tell a child that there is a difference between people with white skin and black skin and the kid will more than likely spout this belief to their children.

When I moved to the United States as a fifteen year old boy I had to learn four years of American History in two years. My history teacher was obsessed with the United States Constitution and basically colored all his classes with his belief that the Constitution was as he put it 'The greatest document ever written'.

He went out of his way to paint a picture of perfectionism and admiration towards the Constitution, and what it brought to the country. Now this teachers trust and love for the constitution may be true, but there were massive holes in his education. I got a wholly white based positivity lecturer on the land that was made for 'We the People'. He spent very little time on the flaws of the Constitution, for which there are many.

I'm not here to say we shouldn't be using the Constitution, especially in light of the recent invasion of capital hill. At least the Constitution was able to hold up what was seen by most sensible people as a legally and democratically decided 2020 Presidential election, despite the attempts of some people in the United States to subvert, distract, and bully peoples right to vote democratically for elected officials, whether those officials fully represent them or not.

What's important to me, is to educate our youth in a big picture fashion. This wasn't done when I was growing up. I wasn't educated about the big picture, about why we are where we are today in terms of human centric ideology.

Education has become a way to inform and to color how children think, to give people a way to look at the world. My high school history professor was no different, he wanted me to believe in the Constitution as much as he did. He seemed to have an almost orgasmic fever towards what he considered the perfect document. While, the Constitution has its' merits, it also has had some major flaws. If my teacher had expressed those flaws to me, as young man, I would been much more informed and better equipped to deal with the world.

The United States was founded on a racist policy, that of slavery. The Constitution was ratified in 1788 and was used as the over arching document for government by the original 13 states when the Bill of Rights was ratified in 1789. Slavery was legal in all Thirteen Colonies at the time of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, and lasted in about half the states until 1865, when

it was prohibited nationally by the Thirteenth Amendment. The greatest document ever written, according to my history high school professor, contained; Section 9 of Article I which forbade the Federal government from preventing the importation of slaves before January 1, 1808; Section 2 of Article IV, which prohibited states from freeing slaves who fled to them from another state, and required the return of chattel property to owners; Section 2 of Article I designated “other persons” (slaves) to be added to the total of the state’s free population, at the rate of three-fifths of their total number - meaning they could count the slave population as voters even though the slaves themselves couldn’t vote (It wasn’t a one for one vote, they were considered three-fifths of a person).

Most of the Presidents and the Supreme Court Justices were Slaveholders for the first fifty years of governance after the Constitution was enacted. I’m not even going to go into the use of ‘Fancy Ladies’ here - where in early nineteenth century, owners of female slaves could freely and legally use them as sexual objects - for people they considered inferior they were still happy to have sex with them, often creating offspring for more slaves, the depravity, hypocrisy and insanity of this kind of person saddens me.

It wasn’t until nearly a hundred years after the inception of the Constitution, in 1896, that the Supreme Court upheld a decision and put into law that whites and blacks could be ‘equal but separate’. They decided, as they put it ‘Negroes were equal to whites civilly and politically, but not socially’. This meant that they could keep whites and blacks separate as long as supposedly the facilities were the same. The greatest document ever written, as I was taught, still allowed for the segregation of black people, still allowed to subject black people as inferior.

It wasn’t until 1954 in the Supreme Court case of Brown Vs Board Education, that ‘laws establishing racial segregation in public schools are unconstitutional, even if the segregated schools are otherwise equal in quality’ and thus legally ended segregation. It took the Supreme Court, a construct of the Constitution, one hundred and sixty-six years to legally end segregation between blacks and whites, and I want to mention here, if you know anything about the United States you will know that despite this ruling, segregation still exists within the United States today - for instance the last documented lynching (which does not mean it hasn’t happened since) was in 1981 in Alabama.

Later on in my life at law school, I studied Constitutional law, to a small degree. I always remember the professor commenting on numerous Supreme Court Case Decisions, with the words ‘another poor outcome’. ‘Ha ha ha’ he would laugh, ‘You can see that they were trying to make the right decisions, yet couldn’t quite get there’ adding ‘it’s still a great document though’.

Of course, if you were white for the first one hundred and sixty six years of the Constitution being enacted you were afforded more liberties than someone of color. How great was the constitution for people of color? How many decisions were made around the Constitution that were deemed constitutional correct, when in fact they continued to subjugate a whole race of people. Many many cases were brought to the Supreme Court to end segregation and were continually knocked down. Of course the Supreme Court, i.e the nine judges at the time, are the top dogs, they know what is constitutional right. Slaveowners, bigoted men, know when something is right. It only took the Supreme Court a hundred and sixty-six years to end segregation in the United States, and yet today the strands, the ideologies of the founding fathers are still inherent in large groups of people's minds. So much so, that in today's world it's not the prejudices of color that affect us all, it's the prejudices of beliefs, ideologies, fakery, lies, that we are dealing with.

Despite my high schools history professors's love for the constitution, when I look at it, I see a segregated country, allowed to be segregated legally, which is still affecting the American population today. This is a flaw, and not a small indiscriminate kind of flaw, a massive glaring one. Martin Luther King got assassinated trying to change this flaw. Nelson Mandela in a similar way spent nearly thirty years in jail disputing the same illegalities.

Now I know some of you are going to say, well because of the constitution it is much better in the U.S than many other countries, and in some ways you are right, especially if you are white, but for a long time, too long, a black person was considered a slave; women - had no rights; Native American people, the original inhabitants, were hunted and killed, for the most part all legally allowed and often encouraged. This is why, it's important to teach our youth reality. To teach history for what was, not what we think it should be or what we think it stood for.

Yes, the Constitution has some good parts, but it also allowed for the segregation and slavery of Black people. It allowed for the mass incarceration of Native Americans, imprisoning them in reservations. It allows for private prisons to exist - for profit institutions making billions of dollars by keeping people in jail, most of the people going to jail for petty and non violent crimes. It allows under the Second Amendment for 'A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed'. A law which has allowed nearly every year a young human to find a gun, normally in their home, go into a school, and then shoot and kill people. Just like that twelve year old boy that saw the destruction of war, guns always bring destruction, despite the argument that guns don't kill people, people do, the guns bloody well help! Regardless of people's belief systems

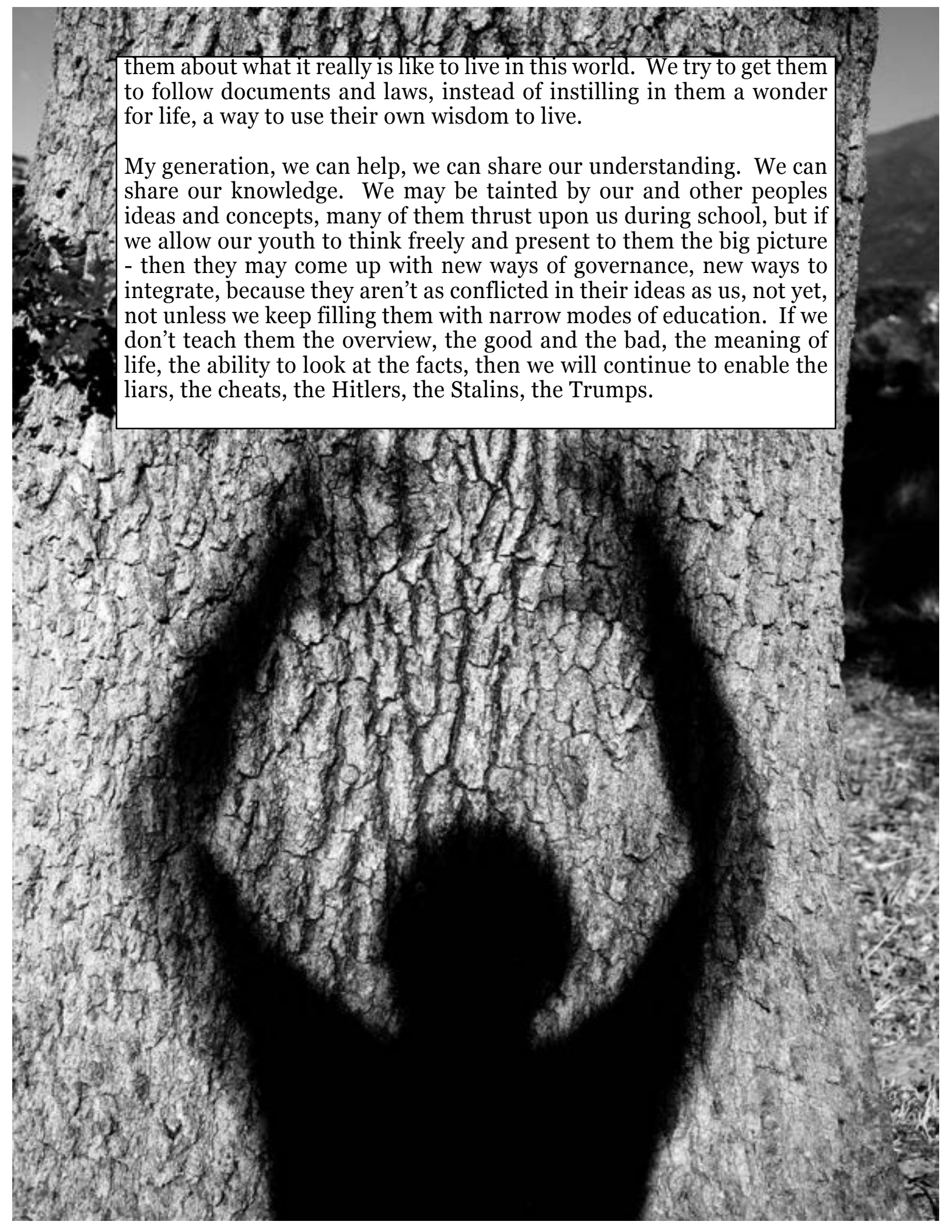
around guns and their right to own them under a document, these are flaws of the Constitutional document, it is by no way the perfect document. How can a document manage the ever changing reality of change. How can it keep up with our evolution, our much needed evolution towards consciousness. Why is this even important to understand?

If I had been taught the flaws inherent in our legal system, as a young man, I would have been much better prepared to exist on this planet. Let's teach our youth the whole picture. If we want real solutions (of course there are those who wish to carry on the ideals of the past), we must start to allow our children to see things for how they really are. I'm not saying stop kids from having a good time, playing, fantasizing, running around in the playground and generally enjoying being a kid. No, don't stop that, but when the time comes to share information about life, about history, we have to open it up. Let's admit to our youth, we don't have all the answers. Let's admit, there's still a lot of work to be done. Let's admit, we made a crap load of mistakes as a race of people. Then, maybe, the next generation can help us figure out how we can work together, because for all my education, for all my time in the classroom - what was I taught? What did I learn?

I was not taught about the native peoples of the Americas. I was not taught about the French influence on the slave trade in Louisiana. I was not taught about the Spanish missionaries in California and their influence on the world, and don't say, oh that's because you didn't have a good teacher, which may be true - many of these lessons have not been taught because its a systemic issue. It's a fundamental approach to education to paint a certain picture, for the educators to instill their own belief systems on the next generation as parents do on their kids.

Take Greta Thunberg for example, who said after her trip across the Atlantic Ocean on a boat "Before I started school striking I had no energy, no friends and I didn't speak to anyone. I just sat alone at home, with an eating disorder. All of that is gone now, since I have found a meaning, in a world that sometimes seems meaningless to so many people." Greta Thunberg felt that her education was selling her short. In her case, what's the point of learning all this information if there is no world to live in, if we continue on our path to self destruction, causing environmental degradation that will effect all life on earth, and I couldn't agree with her more.

The youth don't need our tainted history lessons. They need reality. In fact if you look at the recent climate strike, in which many children took part, they need the truth, the whole picture. They are starting to demand it. We teach them history lessons in which we don't give them the whole story. We lie to

A black and white photograph of a tree trunk with a shadow of a face cast upon it. The shadow is dark and appears to be a stylized or naturalistic representation of a human face, with a prominent nose and a wide, open mouth. The tree bark is rough and textured, with deep grooves and ridges. The background is slightly out of focus, showing more of the tree and some foliage.

them about what it really is like to live in this world. We try to get them to follow documents and laws, instead of instilling in them a wonder for life, a way to use their own wisdom to live.

My generation, we can help, we can share our understanding. We can share our knowledge. We may be tainted by our and other peoples ideas and concepts, many of them thrust upon us during school, but if we allow our youth to think freely and present to them the big picture - then they may come up with new ways of governance, new ways to integrate, because they aren't as conflicted in their ideas as us, not yet, not unless we keep filling them with narrow modes of education. If we don't teach them the overview, the good and the bad, the meaning of life, the ability to look at the facts, then we will continue to enable the liars, the cheats, the Hitlers, the Stalins, the Trumps.



A photograph of a waterfall in a forest. The water is white and foamy as it falls over dark, moss-covered rocks. The surrounding area is covered in green moss and ferns. The background is a dense forest with more trees and foliage.

THANK YOU FOR READING.

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