

Wyatte M.

Walnut Creek, California

skunk.

35mm film camera, bound book

These pieces are a physical representation of my homie and roommate; Liam Peternell and I experiencing some of the stranger parts of Napa, California. I took a 35mm film camera and a few rolls of black and white film with us and captured Liam experiencing the funky town. At first, we staged some photos, but shortly after I realized how inorganic they felt and began to only take photos during moments that stood out among the rest. These instantly felt natural and true to my experience.

I knew from the start that I was going to make at least one book containing the photos that I took with Liam. Instead of just making one, I made 3 identical books with the only difference being the cloth that they are bound in. When viewed together, the books form a gradient in grayscale.

To be honest, the hardest part of making these books was naming them something that I did not find corny or lame. I ended up deciding on *skunk.* because it is funny. Also, there is a photo of Liam kicking a skunk. Also, it is in black and white, like a skunk. I put the period because it makes it finite. There is an end.

My Stream of
Consciousness
Surrounding
Experiences



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There are so many existential questions.

So many.

Honestly, why do we care so much about what isn't?

We don't experience the future. We experience the present. We experience the now. Yet again, an existential question arises.

What is an experience?

I think we are made of experiences, but that doesn't answer the question. I think that experiences define how we interact with other people, with animals, with our surroundings, but that doesn't answer the question. Taking a second to think about it, I don't think there is an answer to this question. But that doesn't stop me from trying.

I have experienced a lot of things.

Everyone has.

It may be one of the only things that connects all humans.

Yeah.

Now that I think about it. It really is. What other things connect every single person on this planet?

You could say that we all have feelings, but feelings are a response to experiencing something.

We are experiences. Experiences are us. Or maybe only feelings exist and experiences don't. No.

No, that's wrong. Well it's not something that is so binary. There is no set right or wrong, but I don't think it's right. I think that wait, it's interesting how I keep saying; think.

Think.

Think. Think.

I don't know. There aren't really many things you can know. I guess you can know what two plus two is.

Knowledge is far from a substitute for experience.

It's so far from it.

Knowledge has no feeling. Knowledge has no emotion. There is no love in knowledge, or hate in knowledge. We go to school because we have to, but also because we desire to experience being smart. We desire the experience of knowing things. Not actually knowing things. We desire experiences. All elements of them. If someone wants to skydive, it's not for the act of jumping out of the plane. It's because of the fear, the rush of adrenaline, the excitement that surrounds the act of jumping out of the plane. You can describe what jumping out of a plane is like. Someone can know what jumping out of a plane is like, but unless they have experienced it, does that knowledge really matter? I don't think so. Well actually no. I do think so. It is good to know things, but again; we only desire knowledge so we can apply it during an experience. That's the whole point.

What do you desire?

What do you want to do?

Do you want to travel?

Do you have a dream job?

A dream lifestyle?

Well, whatever it is, you desire an experience.

Think about it for a second.

Even if you want a car. If it has been your dream since you were a child to have a very specific car. You don't want the car. You want the experience of owning the car; driving the car, seeing the car in your driveway or garage or wherever you may keep this hypothetical dream. Isn't that kind of crazy?

I think it is.

I think a lot of things are crazy.

Is crazy an experience?

Or is it just an adjective?

Jesus Christ I'm running in circles. I love running. I used to hate it.

Like a lot.

Like a ton.

Now I love it. There is something about the endorphins produced that I can't get enough of. Except when I want to throw up.

Honestly, it is almost a good feeling. Running is quite the experience.

I did it again.

Back in a circle.

Imagine drawing the first circle.

That would be insane.

I wonder what that would feel like.

It probably happened by accident.

I'm sure I could look that up, but I would rather just wonder.

Curiosity has led to so many new experiences.

Hah, I did it again.

But really.

Curiosity and chasing new things is incredible. It is one of the most beautiful things on this earth.

We wouldn't know anything if it wasn't for curiosity.

Oh my god.

Curiosity leads to an experience that leads to knowledge.

Oh my god.

I wonder if anyone has ever thought that before.

I know I haven't until just now.

It all clicked.

I wonder if knowledge is the end goal or the byproduct.

I think that it is the end goal in some cases.

if you were curious to know what it felt like to touch the stove while it was on, then the experience of burning yourself would teach you what it is like. In that case, the experience was not the end goal, the knowledge was.

On the other hand,

if someone wanted to experience eating a nice steak, and when they ate it they found out they don't actually like steak that much, they learned from the experience despite it not being the end goal.

Either way, both experience and knowledge play off of each other and in a sense cannot exist without the other's presence.

Everything we know was discovered during an experience.

Let's think about math for a second.

Math is factual,

That is not a debate or something to question, it is just true.

But someone had to discover that math was factual. They figured out what formulas and practices work every single time without fail. This process of discovery was an experience and still is for mathematicians today.

We learn from trial and error.

Mainly error.

It is hard to know what works when you don't know what doesn't.

I think that is beautiful.

We learn from failure.

We grow from it.

I would say that is another thing we have universally in common with everyone. We all progress from failure.

Even way back when humans first began to grasp the concept of farming, it took us centuries to create systems that worked.

Now it did not take us that long because we were growing crops every season and managing all of our resources extremely well for that whole time?

No.

It took that long because we learn from failure.

We failed.

Over and over again. But we didn't give up, and we soaked all of the knowledge up from our experiences of failure.

Experiencing failure can be incredibly satisfying.

Definitely not in the moment though.

But after, when that failure turns into success.

There is nothing like that experience.

Well, there is nothing like any experience.

They are all truly unique.

Even if two people shared the same moment, they would not have the same experience. There are so many factors that play into an experience that I would venture to say that no two people have ever had the same experience.

Yea.

Kind of insane right? That sounds wrong at first, but take a second and really think about it. Even if you and your identical twin who was raised with all of the same beliefs, manners and opinions as you watched a show on TV, neither of you would feel the same way as the other. You would both experience it differently.

I keep saying the same things over and over again in different ways.

This is ridiculous.

Why can't I just write new things?

I am stuck in this loop.

This circle of restating the same idea over and over again.

My brain looks like a racetrack.

There are different turns, but after the first lap, it becomes more and more familiar. I guess sometimes you zone out for a bit and then one of those turns catches you off guard, but even now

I have done too many damn laps to make any of this feel new.

I guess I'll just take another lap.

What is it about new things?

They are amazing.

There is nothing like doing something for the first time, nothing compares. Think about the first time you heard that song. You know what song I'm talking about. Take a second and put yourself back in that experience. It doesn't have to be the first time you have heard that song ever. It could be the first time you heard it with someone you love, or the first time you heard it while feeling angry. Think about that first time. Now I am sure that song holds some importance to you, but it holds that importance because of the experience surrounding it.

This racetrack is driving me insane.

I am going to crash.

I am going to crash.

I didn't crash.

I took a pit stop.

Refueled.

Changed tires.

Now I am ready to keep driving.

Maybe this time I will drive the track backward.

Backward is new.

Sometimes going backward is good.

Sometimes restarting is good.

Sometimes restarting can make an old experience feel new.

I guess every experience is new.

Even if you have played soccer or basketball or football your whole life every game is a new experience.

I forget that sometimes.

We forget that sometimes.

Sometimes we forget that we can learn something new all the time. Whether it is about ourselves, our surroundings or other people, there are always new take-aways to, well take away. It blows my mind that we can always learn new things.

We can always move forward.

Sometimes you do need to take backward steps to walk forward though. Which doesn't really make sense, but it does. I think we only need to take steps back when we are walking too fast.

Sometimes we need to slow down. Sometimes we need to breathe slowly and rhythmically.

Sometimes we need to ground ourselves in the present. The more we take these slow and thoughtful steps,

the less we have to walk backward.

I wonder if we can learn anything new about walking.

I don't really know how we could.

We walk everyday, well most of us do anyway. I mean for a baby or toddler, every walking experience is an opportunity to learn. I wonder when that begins to go away, if ever? I think we feel like it goes away because we don't think about it. We don't think about what works and what doesn't when we walk like a toddler would because we feel like we have it all figured out. Maybe if you focused on making your walking better you could get really good at it. That would be funny if someone prided themselves on being the best walker on the planet.

How would you even measure that?

Maximum stride length?

Efficiency?

Speed?

Who knows?

Certainly not me.

I wonder why I think that would be funny. There is nothing funny about someone dedicating their life to achieve a goal. Or achieve an experience. In this case, the experience would be being the best walker on the planet.

That would definitely be an interesting experience.

I wonder what being the absolute best at something would be like.

Or if that is even a tangible thing to accomplish.

I guess I am the best at being me.

No one has ever experienced anything exactly like me.

That's pretty incredible.

Everyone is the best at being themselves. That might seem obvious I guess, but I think that it is a pretty powerful thought. The phrase "walk in someone else's shoes" is also pretty powerful. Although impossible to do exactly, it is the easiest way to sympathize with someone else's experience. But you aren't really sympathizing with their experience.

You are sympathizing with your perception of their experience.

I feel like the more I dive into this, the more I realize that everyone lives in their own reality. That isn't a bad thing at all.

We believe what is true to us.

Take religion for example, no matter how much evidence a scientist could give to try to persuade someone out of having a faith in a higher power, that isn't their experience. In their experience, there is a higher power, and that is what is true to them.

I firmly believe that as long as someone's behavior doesn't hurt others then it is acceptable.

Oh wow, that is a slippery slope.

I think I'll leave it at that.

But, should I even say it if I can't explain it more?

Probably not, right?

Anyway,

I take that back, or maybe I don't, who knows?

Not me.

That was an interesting experience.

I wish I could have captured how frantically I was attempting to take my words back. I guess here is a chance to be conscious about this.

What should I take away?

I think I should slow down, and think, and be more careful and thorough with what I say.

Woah.

Look at that.

I just practiced what I've been preaching.

Like for real.

Wow, that is a good feeling.

It's like brain yoga.

Yoga is really cool in that way.

The way that it connects you to the world around you I should say.

The way that it centers you.

I definitely wish I could be centered more of the time.

It is so peaceful when you are content. I almost listed specific things to be content with, but being content in its entirety is really what matters. I definitely chase that experience. I have tasted bits and pieces of it before. You could compare it to watching movie trailers. You get a feel for everything, but it's just a preview, there's more to be desired. There is an experience to chase after.

I think that everyone's life goals are tied to experiences.

I think I said that already.

But I'll say it again because I think it's important.

If one of someone's life goals is to be in a committed and loving relationship, it is because they want to experience that love and commitment.

It looks like we are back on the racetrack.

For a second I thought I had ventured off track and was driving aimlessly through the desert or forest or hills that surrounded this track.

But that was an illusion.

Although, it definitely was an enjoyable experience.

It felt free.

I could go as fast or slow as I wanted.

It felt real.

It felt unstructured.

And maybe most importantly,

It felt like something I wanted to experience again.

Feeling no restraints is incredible.

I guess you only know how good it feels to ride a bike without a helmet once you've ridden one with a helmet on.

You know?

Only once that leash has been put on do you truly love and desire the feeling of being able to run free.

I want to try and live more in the moment for this reason. I want to appreciate freedom as it is present. Once you appreciate an experience in the moment, you will never feel disappointed when

you look back. You won't feel disappointed, because you already expressed that gratitude and joy and appreciation or whatever else you were feeling.

I think when we are angry we tend to be very present.

You are most definitely not grounded when you are angry.

Well at least most of us aren't.

When we experience anger it tends to come in the moment, and we sit in that moment.

We lay in that anger for as long as we can.

We get tunnel vision, but instead of having a focused view on the future. We have a focused view on the now.

We close our minds,
and often our hearts.

We shut down.

Yet we are also so expressive.

I think when these experiences happen we especially have to ground ourselves. We have to look at everything.

We have to experience life as it exists around us.

Once we close our minds and hearts, it also feels like we close our eyes.

And our ears,

I can't forget about our ears.

We shut down, and let our destructive thoughts, feelings, and actions bounce around inside our brains.

Only when we open up, do those things have an escape route.

We effectively turn off the lights and all of the exit signs and yell fire in a crowded movie theater when we shut down. I assure you that if that situation existed, we would not be thinking about how fantastic our lives are or how much love we feel for people.

We would be

(excuse my language)

trying to get the fuck out.

Oh my god that would be a scary experience.

You would never be able to watch a movie in the theaters the same way ever again.

You could get close.

But it would never be the same.

That is how impactful experiences are. They can really change us. I would say our experiences are our most defining aspects in terms of creating who we are.

I guess that is obvious.

Everything is an experience.

Jesus Christ how many times have I said that.

I guess I keep saying it because I feel like it is important.

What else do I feel right now?

I feel excited.

I feel a little bit annoyed.

I feel a little bit tired.

I feel like I am enjoying writing this.

That is such a good feeling,

the last one I mean.

It feels good to enjoy work.

Actually I think I do enjoy most work.

There is something about gaining that knowledge from experiencing a hard day's work that is incredibly satisfying. The experience of exhaustion after being productive is great. I am so overwhelmed with the sense of accomplishment in those moments. It makes the sore muscles, or tired eyes and brain all worth it. I would be a much dumber person without my experience working.

I shouldn't call my hypothetical self dumb,

but it is true.

Experience working has made me who I am.

Some of my first memories are with my Dad working in our garage. Having what I would call a pretty decent work ethic since a young age has led me to accomplish so many things.

I can only attribute my accomplishments to my previous experiences.

In my perfect world; I keep building upon those experiences and continue to grow, change and progress as a person, and I believe that this is all sparked by the same cycle of

curiosity,

experience,

and then knowledge.

I think I am back on the racetrack,

but it feels right this time for some reason.

Maybe I had the seat in a weird position,

maybe I was too close to the pedals and the wheel,

or

maybe I'm driving a whole new car in general.

I am going to reflect on the experience of writing this now and try to appreciate it as it is going on.

I am grateful for how much effort I have put into this.

I am proud of myself for writing so much

and I am also proud that I haven't lost interest.

I am excited to continue on with this project.

Yet, I am also nervous.

That is good though.

I enjoy feeling nervous sometimes.

The experience of pushing through nerves, fear, and general animosity towards something is so important to growth.

Or at least mine.

Actually,

I would say it is pretty important to everyone.

So don't forget to look back.

Don't forget to stop and with an open heart, mind, and soul take in what you are experiencing in the moment.

Don't forget to seek out challenges.

Don't forget to grow.

Don't forget to learn.

And lastly, don't forget to be yourself.

Thank you

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