



The Everglades National Park
[FIU IDH 4007](#)

Trashy Images?

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Spring Semester 2007

Alan O'Dowd, better known as the singer Boy George, was ordered to complete 5 days of community service in August of 2006. The punishment was to be trash pickup. The media went wild, and Boy George petitioned to spend the time helping teenagers make a public service announcement, hold a fashion or makeup workshop, serve as a DJ at an HIV/AIDS benefit, or do telephone outreach. The judge did not acquiesce and added, "It's up to you whether you make it an exercise in humiliation or in humility." Boy George, along with numerous photographers, hit the streets of New York. The images weren't pretty, as there were harsh words and scowls. An iconic trophy of the 80's was picking up trash.

When perusing the video images taken the day that our class was armed with bags and gloves picking up trash, I find no harsh words and no scowls. On the contrary, you find cooperation, laughter, smiles and volunteers! Yes, there were those who came voluntarily, and when I asked one volunteer why he had come, he answered simply that he thought it was a good idea. They say a picture is worth a thousand words, but there must be an explanation for all the good humor that is found in the images. Was it the scenery? Was it the fresh air? I don't think so. I sensed more positive interaction that day than other days we have collectively spent in the Everglades. I believe that we are becoming more aware of the park's importance and fragility, and therefore we were all motivated to actively make a difference. I say this also because studies show that knowledge of wetland issues is a strong influence in conservation behavior (Syme et al).

This supports the quote in our Everglades Handbook:

In the End, we conserve only what we love.
We love only what we understand.
We understand only what we are taught.

Baba Dioum

The [video](#) shows me that we are learning, and beginning to understand and love the Everglades. The images show me that picking up trash was not an exercise in humiliation or humility, but an exercise in pride. To us that day, the trash we disposed of was our trophy.

Reference

Syme, G. J., Beven, C. E., & Sumner, N. R. (1993). Motivation for reported involvement in local wetland preservation: The roles of knowledge, disposition, problem assessment, and arousal. *Environment and Behavior*, 25(5), 586-606. Retrieved January 30, 2007, from PsycINFO database.



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Different Seasons

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Spring Semester 2007

This past September (during the wet season) we had a pleasant walk along Anhinga trail as a class. It was quiet and desolate and we were all alone and ready to learn. I remember holding my notebook uncomfortably but writing everything Dr. Graham pointed out and sketching each thing out (because I knew I would later on forget) - I was determined to learn as much as I could during our trips to the Everglades, pen in hand, notebook in the other, binoculars around the neck, and a fresh mind. I was not surprised to see we were the only people there, but didn't think further into it because I had plants to sketch, names to write down, brand new binoculars to figure out... everything was foreign to me. I became a bit paranoid that in the middle of each sketch a new name was being said as the class kept moving forward and I would miss names trying to ingest the previous ones...(pause). The day progressed.

After ending the Anhinga trail, but before entering Gumbo-limbo trail, Dr. Graham showed us this 'tourist tree,' the tree the trail was named after; I of course wrote a few facts about it, but paused when it came to sketching its peeling bark - how do I do that? Before losing track of the class trying to figure it out, I reached over and touched its bark and felt its skin peel in tiny clusters under my fingers - I knew I would remember.

While still rustling the small leftovers of tree peelings, I felt that I had been slapped in the face as soon as I stepped inside the trail. It seemed like there was years' worth of humidity concentrated inside this place and that it had almost solidified amidst the trees. Trees whose enormity and wild life within them made this concentration even more present; I was no longer trying to reach for my pen, but trying to adapt to the sudden change. Although beautiful and rich, I could not see the end of this trail and felt an urge to float away from there - a desire that wasn't impossible to reach considering I could almost crawl up the thick air. But the trail did end, with me afoot and back in the open glades, with pieces of humidity stuck between my skin and sweat, stuck in my memory.

That day was the first and last day that I wrote or sketched anything down, because the following day I could not remember specific names nor facts, but moments of conscious contact and sensations seemed imprinted on my sensory receptors. From then on I knew I had to maybe even forget about a notebook, hope I could remember names for quizzes, but really pay attention to how I was communicating with the Everglades, and how it was communicating with me so that I could truly learn anything about it and myself.

I revisited the Anhinga trail in January, now the dry season, not with my class as scheduled, but as it turned out, with my boyfriend. My boyfriend - a man so estranged from nature that having a picnic inside is what a picnic should be. A man that does not go to the Everglades, has never been to the Everglades, and would have never gone to the Everglades.

I had gone to see the difference of the trails with the change of wet to dry season, and the first and most obvious was the amount of people present... I even had to look for parking! I

explained to Gino that it was because of the amount of birds present, but he waved me off and stared into the distance, facing what was to come, as if he was in a duel, thinking to himself how I could have talked him into this, finally muttering, "Nature...EWW!"

Ignoring Gino's lack of interest, I suddenly felt alone. Not in its physical sense as when we first came here as a class, but in a way that I had no one to instruct me when I came across new life, no one to share the excitement with. I had my bird book in hand and my binoculars, but I knew that it wasn't enough - of course names and facts can be important, but I like to know the kind of information that a bird book cannot tell you. I'd spoken to my classmate Hector about their trip as a class, and he sounded so excited about all the new things they had learned and come across; now I felt left out, with only myself to rely on amidst such a rich season.

Yet as I pulled out my binoculars to look at an anhinga, I felt them being snatched away from me. "Let me take a look," Gino said indifferently. I did. I cautiously explained to him its name and how to differentiate the male from the female, trying to keep his interest. He then shifted the binoculars to focus on an alligator that was resting under the shade, "It's...huge." I started to see a shift in the day's outlook, now the day was not going to be about trying to figure things out by myself, but to shift some knowledge acquired from previous Everglades experiences to somebody I thought would never even go there.

We came across some friendly birds/ducks that I did not remember seeing before, so I knew I had to pull out my bird book and try to identify them...just under what section? Ducks because of their webbed feet? But what about their hooked beaks? Gino pulled the bird book away from me and started looking himself, noticing their deep green eyes and hooked beaks. I took in this moment and did a mental recording of us standing together, looking at something new, in a new place, on a different season...he browsed through the pages, and I browsed through his pages, searching for this other person that was new to the both of us - "It's a cormorant," said a passerby. Indeed it was, according to the bird book. Then we walked around and saw many great blue herons, turtles, gars, little blue herons, and some others that I could not identify. I noticed many old couples enjoying themselves, giving us a smile and nod as they walked past us; I wondered if they saw their young selves reflected in us, rustling through pages and squinting for hints.

Going through the Gumbo-limbo trail I talked to Gino about how the strangler fig takes over and suffocates its prey. "That's the way nature works, it's murderous and suicidal, it's violent and unforgiving," he said. But right before leaving, I made him reach over and touch the peeling tourist tree, as I once did for the first time, knowing he would too remember this; also knowing that now each time he thinks of me in the Everglades on a Friday afternoon, he will rustle the peeling bark between his fingers.

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Story Within a Story

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Spring Semester 2007

On our most recent trip to the Everglades, it was evident after some time of reflection that the experience was of a story within a story. The class visited the Hole-in-the-Donut restoration project in Everglades National Park. We learned about the project's goal of eradicating the invasive Brazilian Pepper plant, which had overtaken thousands of acres of land after the area was incorporated into the national park. One of the highlights of this particular excursion was our once-in-a-lifetime chance to visit a relic of the Cold War era, and a place once armed with nuclear warheads - the U.S. Army Nike missile site. The tense ideological war between the Soviet Union and the U.S. was a critical period in history, and nearly resulted in a nuclear disaster. The sub-story that I thought would be fascinating to reflect on was the significance, from my perspective, that the Nike site had for two of my classmates, Sarah and Olga.

Although still under lock-and-key, this strategic military location in the Everglades that was once on hair-trigger alert during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 was now abandoned and in a state of disrepair. The only signs of life were spiders, lizards and a barn owl that flew out of one of the magazines as our class approached. While barren and stripped clean of Cold War artifacts, the Nike site still had a few grim reminders of what it once was. A large mural of a rocket on the outside wall of one of the missile barns; a rusted-over chain pulley system inside one of the structures, perhaps used to hoist the massive weaponry; reinforced bunkers embedded inside raised mounds. Now with cobweb interiors, the bunkers had half-peeled red and green paint on the walls, and the passageways were covered in dried blotches of mud left by generations of wasps and other insects. What was once a nuclear defense outpost for a world super power was now overrun with a variety of plant, animal and insect species.

As we explored the old missile site, I could not help thinking of my classmates, Olga and Sarah, as the place was symbolic of an important part of their family histories. Sarah's father, a veteran of the U.S. armed forces, had experience in flying in B-52 jet planes strapped with nuclear bombs. At the same time, on the opposite side of the conflict, Olga's grandfather fought in the Soviet forces. Olga, who is originally from Ukraine, told the class how her grandfather was a military man for thirty years. As an outside observer to these two family histories, I was intrigued by the irony of the situation. After the long, bitter struggle of the Cold War, the immediate descendants of those on opposite sides of the ideological war were in this class united in the common effort of Everglades restoration. In contrast to the suspicion and rivalry that once existed between the two powerful nations who would determine the fate of modern civilization, here were two classmates who got along very well

and worked together to preserve a unique, natural treasure for Americans and Ukrainians alike. Interestingly, that same day, Olga, Sarah and the rest of the class were learning new details about a common enemy that surrounded them for thousands of acres -- the invasive Brazilian Pepper.

The Brazilian Pepper is a non-native invasive tree that was likely introduced to Florida from South America in the mid-nineteenth century. Its colorful, red seeds made it a popular decorative plant, though it has since been outlawed for sale. Unfortunately, it adapted well in much of Florida, especially in the Everglades, and now thousands of acres are choked by dense groves of Brazilian Pepper. Its aggressive growth has drastically transformed eco-systems and it has been detrimental to native plant and animal species. Its eradication is currently the main concern of the Hole-in-the-Donut restoration project.

In a sense, the Hole-in-the-Donut restoration project is an initiative to reclaim lands lost in a battle against Brazilian Pepper as well and make amends for our own lack of foresight. As stewards of the environment, it appears that people made two critical mistakes in regards to this particular land area. The first mistake was when farmers began cultivating their crops on the land, completely transforming the natural eco-system. While farmers are an easy target for blame, this was a larger problem having to do with the unquestioned mindset that the Everglades ought to be made "useful". The second mistake came in the mid-1970s when the U.S. government reclaimed these farmlands to be additions to Everglades National Park, but did not do enough initially to restore the land to its natural condition. While the purchase of the land was perhaps well intentioned, waiting until the 1990s to set in motion major restoration of the area into prairie wetland, and removing the overgrowth of Brazilian Pepper that established itself throughout the abandoned farmlands, will cost an estimated \$100 million.

Olga and Sarah are now part of this battle together. While they were neither park rangers nor official volunteers with Hole-in-the-Donut, their initiative to enlist in a year-long course on the Everglades puts them at the forefront of the effort for environmental conservation and restoration. Their roles as educators also give them a position of influence over future stewards of the Everglades, since Sarah and Olga are a schoolteacher and multi-subject tutor for kids, respectively.

Visiting the Nike Missile site reminded me that my classmates and I were part of a great ideological struggle. The story in the cracked walls of the old site with its abandoned, Cold-War-era compounds was that this was a war of our fathers. The missile site was no longer in use, and passageways and storage rooms were now overrun with critters. A new story was unfolding in the area surrounding the former missile site which Olga and Sarah were a part of. The Hole-in-the-Donut restoration project was a battle against the invasive Brazilian Pepper. While generations previous were fighting on opposite sides of the Cold War between the United States and Soviet Union, Sarah and Olga were playing a small part in defending a common land in a completely different kind of war. The future of the Everglades, and the environment as a whole, hangs in the balance. Olga and Sarah hope to tip the scales in favor of conservation.

Reference

Hole-in-the-Donut Restoration Collection. Everglades Digital Library.

<http://everglades.fiu.edu/hid/index.htm>



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A Day at Shark Valley; A Reflection on The Year

Jonathan Cameron
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Spring Semester 2007

A day of cycling in Shark Valley was the last full class for *The Everglades: From Beginning to End?* It was a very appropriate way to close an adventure-filled year. Each class took me out of my natural element. Every other Friday, my classmates and I were transported to another world that was just under our noses. Before my senior year, I rarely took the time to notice this place. Not only was the class format a break in convention from the typical classroom setting, it was also instrumental in transforming my mindset regarding the Everglades and greatly expanding my horizon for environmental conservation. Now, in this last full day of class, it seemed like the semester was ending before it even had a chance to begin. In Shark Valley, we traveled by bicycle on a 15-mile loop that eventually brought us back to where we parked. Similarly, the Everglades experience this past academic year brought us full circle. However, I am not the same person at the end of the trip as when I started. The Shark Valley trip was a great experience and here I would like to reflect on it in its relation to a year of Everglades excursions.

Since it was the dry season, animal life appeared much more abundant and all kinds of creatures were creeping on either side of the road. Barely having begun the bicycle trip I saw my first alligator of the day, hugging the edge of the road as it sunbathed. It certainly was not the last gator I saw. These guardians of the glades were present in great numbers at Shark Valley, and a few had no qualms about crossing the road when my bicycle was near. The many close encounters with alligators on the trail constantly reminded me that I had signed a waiver relieving FIU and my professors of culpability if an accident were to happen.

Thankfully, I can report that no alligators attacked me over the past year. Most of the living organisms of the Everglades were rather accommodating, except for a bit of Muhly Grass that became well acquainted with my cornea earlier this semester. But that is better forgotten.

To be fair, the Shark Valley bicycle trip was technically not our last class meeting this semester. We would meet again to showcase our various poster projects, but Shark Valley was our last official class engaging with the River of Grass for a full day. Instead of slough slogging through wetlands, canoeing through mangroves, or hiking through rocky pinelands, we took a paved bicycle trail. The smooth trail allowed us to enjoy the scenery and take a step back to appreciate what we had accomplished over the past year. The reading also reflected a more relaxed class in that we were assigned *Skinny Dip*, by comic novelist Carl Hiaasen, instead of a more dense reading involving extensive historical facts to remember. Learning history was important and necessary, but this day there was some more time to reflect.

Ending the year by cycling through Shark Valley was a journey that prompted me to recount our first excursion to the Everglades as a class. Last semester, our first trip was an airboat ride with "Scooter". Most of us on that boat intently listened to Scooter as he told us about the River

of Grass, but at that point we could not tell if he was telling us facts, or if he was mixing in legend, or simply false information. It took a briefing by the professors at the Miccosukee Resort afterwards to separate truth from lore. I remember writing my first reaction paper on ***The Mystery of the Everglades***. While that paper made the point that this mystery was part of the attraction, it was also, of course, my initial reaction. That is, while I had good intentions about learning more about the Everglades for years previous to this, I never actively pursued this until my senior year. At that point in September 2006, my knowledge was limited.

Much has taken place since that airboat ride. The exploration of the history and politics surrounding the Everglades, and first-hand experiences with the various aspects of the River of Grass, have enriched my understanding compared to a year ago. The mystery is still present, but in a different way. Rather than primarily wondering about what is beneath the murky water, the question for me has moved in another direction: What will be the fate of the Everglades? There is still much that needs to be accomplished, yet the end-result is still unclear. Uncertainty is still a big factor.

The last end-of-class quiz in the parking lot in Shark Valley also reminded me of something else. While my classmates and I know much more about the Everglades now than the majority of South Floridians, the Boat-Tailed Grackle reminded me that there is still more to learn. The Boat-tailed Grackle was the answer to a bird identification question on the quiz that I did not answer correctly. There were other quiz questions in the past year that I could not answer, but the Boat-tailed Grackle was an important reminder to me that there was much more that I needed to find out. In particular, there were other pieces to the puzzle that were still missing from the big picture of Everglades restoration.

One thing that is certain is that I am not the same person at the end of this Everglades trip as when it started. The bicycle ride brought us through the wilderness and back out. However, on a certain level, I will not necessarily be out of the wilderness once this class is over. Delving into the heart of the Everglades this past year expanded my horizon for environmental conservation, which means my responsibility towards the River of Grass is that much greater. The last full day of class at Shark Valley enabled me to reflect on a year of mysteries being revealed, and of the seed planted in me to solve other unknowns regarding this unique environment. When it comes to Everglades conservation, I now consider myself in part responsible for making sure that my generation does not fail the quiz. While generations past failed miserably, it is not likely that nature will allow humans to retake the test indefinitely.

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From Brazilian Pepper to American Maple

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Spring Semester 2007

The sun was blinding my eyes as I lay on the soft cozy grass enjoying its fine fragrance and warmth during the last Everglades' class. For a minute, I opened my eyes and I saw a tiger butterfly flying by and heard the wind blowing and the swaying of the grass. A feeling of peace and joy came upon me. I closed my eyes again and felt sleepy. Suddenly, someone asked me "Olga, what are you thinking about?" I found it difficult to describe the whole complexity and deepness of my thoughts and I simply said: "I see the sun." In reality, I thought a little bit of everything... I thought of my home, my childhood, the days when my friend Natasha and I used to collect motherwort, mint, and coltsfoot. Back then, we just got lost in the woods and spent all day trying to get as many of these herbs as possible. I thought that grass in the Everglades smelled the same way like the one at home; the wind sounded the same way too. In several minutes, a mellow music piece came to my mind and afterwards all my memories, the smells, the whispers of the wind, and music came to one. Suddenly, my focus point changed. I found myself thinking of the Everglades, about the damage that has been done. "Wow, I thought people were trying to improve what was already perfect." Then, I thought how their sense of perfection was much different from nature's. Suddenly, the wall of useless, impassable Brazilian peppers, which we just saw on the other side of the road, stood up in front of my eyes. At first, Brazilian pepper was introduced as a Christmas decorative plant because it had red berries around Christmas time; however, it adapted very fast to the Florida climate and soon overgrew other native species of the Everglades. In fact, it was so dense; it seemed that even the Florida sun could not penetrate it. "What an uncontrollable decoration we have here," I thought. "There is a lot of work ahead."

Yes, spending those ten or fifteen minutes in the grass was great for me. I thought over a few things. For certain reasons the Brazilian pepper situation in the Everglades reminds me of a similar disaster we had back in the Ukraine. Somewhere in the mid 1980's, someone brought *Acer negundo*, a maple species native to North America as a decoration. They are also known as American maple. At first, one could see them growing in public parks and gardens. However, little by little, the American maple spread, since these carefree trees adapted very quickly to the environment and grew faster than other species. Soon, it turned into a disaster because the maple started to replace native trees such as red oak, and birch, as well as cherry, apple, apricot, and lime trees. Presently, one of my uncles works with the "American Maple Control Center." Last time I spoke with him, he told me that the company has tried many different methods to eradicate the American maple, so far nothing has been successful. So, when the rangers showed the class the progress they had achieved cleaning up the Brazilian peppers in the Everglades, I thought that they had done a great job so far. Their effort has been

enormous and there is still a lot to go. I believe that if people continue doing the right thing their efforts will be compensated. Unfortunately, it doesn't always happen that way. At this point a Laurence J. Peter's quote comes to mind: "Cleaning anything involves making something else dirty, but anything can get dirty without something else getting clean."

Another amazing thing during the last class was our visit to the military base where missiles were kept during the Cold War and the Cuban Missile Crisis. I shared a bit of my grandfather's history, having been in Germany during this period of time and working with ballistic missiles, preparing to attack the United States if necessary. In fact, these events have affected him very much. Long after the Cold War ended, and the peace treaty was signed he still imagined that danger existed. At the end of his life, he lost trust in people and the only remedy that he found was nature. After his parent's death, he moved to their house and lived there till the end of his life, spending time planting fruit gardens, growing vegetables, and taking care of birds. My grandfather's life is just one example. In reality, for some people, who went through a tragic experience in life and lost trust in other humans, nature becomes the only remedy. So, even though it is not always seen immediately, people need nature more than they realize because it cures not only physical wounds but also emotional and psychological. Michael Grunwald in his book [The Swamp](#) describes a battle between environmentalists and politicians over the construction of a jet airport in the Everglades. The author said that it was already a done deal. However, the airport was never built. So, if they could impede the airport construction, money does not always talk. Everglades's recovery still has a chance. However, people have to agree on doing the right thing because there is only one Everglades, only one nature and we do not have another.

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The "Unknown"

Aviva Rose-Avila
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Fall Semester 2006

Sitting at home, I close my eyes and listen to my surroundings. The most prominent noise is the motor of the fan, always going and never stopping. I hear music in the background and a child crying, my mother doing the laundry and an occasional car passing by in the front of my house. These noises have engulfed my ears for the majority of my life. Not only have familiar noises become a significant part of my surroundings, but also the company of man made machines. In a single day I will interact with and depend on my car, television, computer and my cell phone. Not a single day will go by that I will not have my hands on a man made machine. The absence of these familiar noises or my machines ironically makes me feel out of my natural element. I do not feel comfortable or secure without what I have become so accustomed to hearing or using as a part of every day life. These things have been so interwoven into my life that only a few hours or even an hour without them, I unconsciously begin to feel strange.

Nine Mile Pond is where we began our journey through the everglades in our canoes. Canoeing across a man made lake until we began our trail through the everglades. At every bend we would find a marker that would guide us along. Even though there were markers to point us in the right direction and a path which was created by the ones before us, I still felt as no one had been there before. At no point could I hear a man made motor or sense civilization near by. On our canoeing trip, the everglades had become another planet, far from anything I could call familiar.

This strange place, The Everglades, started to take its affect on me way before we even entered our canoes. Although I was confined to the safety of my vehicle, my surroundings quickly changed. As far as the eye can see, there are houses, stores and gas stations all along the turnpike. There are cars, people and there is pavement that never ends. Once you enter Everglades National Park this all ends abruptly. There are no buildings, no stores, and no gas stations. For an hour, while driving into the park I did not see any sign of civilization other than the paved road I was on and the car I was driving. This road quickly became my path to the unknown.

Stepping out of my car, with the sun beginning to peek out above the trees, I could smell that the air was different. I could only make an educated guess that this is what fresh air smells like, free of pollution, since the smell was not familiar to me. When do I smell air that is not a mixture of odors from carbon monoxide, food, air-conditioning, or perfume? What a contradiction, I smelled fresh air and yet my brain could not interpret what it was. As strange as the fresh air was, it was refreshing and soothing to the lungs. At that point, this strange place began to further separate itself from what I call familiar.

When I entered my canoe and pushed off from the shore, I looked back at my car. I found myself sitting on a hard seat, with no air conditioning and physically moving the canoe with my own energy, this was not normal. Looking back, even though my car sat lifeless in the parking

lot, it looked to me as if it was depressed. I believe this was a projection of my own feeling of now traveling in a mode of transportation unfamiliar to me.

My car quickly disappeared as we began to journey through the unknown. We would paddle through vast open areas and then quickly be surrounded by mangroves. This would continue for most of our exploration of what seemed to be uncharted land. When surrounded by mangroves it felt as if there should be land below my canoe. Never had I been surrounded by trees and no land in sight. This was not natural to me and only made the experience more unique.

I knew that there was something else that was different yet I could not figure it out. Not until half way through the trip did I come to realize that I could not hear anyone make noise other than the talking from my fellow classmates and the splashes in the water from the paddles. I strained my ears to hear something that I could call familiar, but there was nothing to be heard. There was not one sound of a plane in the distance, or a car honking its horn, there were only the sounds of "silence" of the Everglades. I could not comprehend that we were so secluded from civilization that we could not hear it from where we were. I began imagining the Everglades as a distant planet, far from the earth I was so used to.

As we started the third hour of my journey I was fully aware that this place was nothing that I had experienced before. My arms were beginning to hurt, since I had never used them as my source of transportation for so long. My arms became my car. The sounds I would hear quickly became a natural part of my surroundings. The mangroves that would quickly creep up on the canoe were no longer frightening and the vast open spaces quickly became peaceful. Although this land was strange, it was also one of the most beautiful things that I had ever seen.

Even though I was fully aware that the Everglades were only 30 miles down the road from my house, I believe this might be what it feels like being in space. Nothing was normal to me. I was not using things that I was used to or hearing things that were familiar. I was completely out of my element and yet I was probably in the most natural place on earth. Will the idea of natural no longer be considered normal one day? It has become much more "natural" for many of us to no longer experience nature and the out- doors. Has our man made surroundings become so familiar to us that true nature is no longer natural?

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Love Comes from Knowledge

Olga Santiago
IDH 4007
Fall Semester 2006

When I first came to Miami, the Everglades did not interest me very much. In fact, I was even depressed because no longer could I see birch trees, maples, and poplars around me; instead I noticed only palm trees. No longer could I hear the singing of a nightingale from my home country but just its imitation by a mocking bird. With time, little by little my views started to change. Of course, I still do not know much about the Everglades but after studying some of its history, a very interesting image comes to mind. In the book, [The Swamp](#) Michael Grunwald describes the reclamation of the land, and the drainage of the Everglades that started in the late 1800's, and still is an issue today. People believed that by controlling the water level in Lake Okeechobee and cultivating the land they could use it for farming or turn it into a tourists' paradise. Yes, these plans came true; however, all this development has greatly changed the ecosystem and the Everglades will never be the same. For some reason, this reminds me of one event that happened to me when I was around eleven or twelve years old. As a child every summer I would go to my grandparents' house in the country. Right above the front door of the house there was a little nest where each spring the swallows came and laid their eggs. One day a cousin of mine got curious and decided to see what was inside. He got a ladder and climbed to where the nest was. When he was high enough, he looked inside and saw a couple of eggs, very quickly he took them in his hands and showed them to me. Instead of putting them back, we decided to keep them. After this incident, the swallows stopped nesting there. Year after year the nest was empty until two or three years ago my grandmother noticed swallows coming back. This childhood memory reminds me to some extent of the history of the Everglades, where the same type of ignorance and greed ruined the harmony created by nature and which takes years to recover or overcome.

A couple of days before the Everglades class, I called my uncle in the Ukraine and told him that I was going to the slough slog in the Everglades. He said that he was happy for me and wished he could go with me. My uncle has always loved nature and often together we went on boat trips or spent some nights in a forest by the fire. I was curious and at the same time afraid to go to the slough slog but his positive attitude gave me courage and made me excited. So, on Friday morning while sitting in the Coe Visitor Center with the rest of the class I thought: "Finally the Everglades, the real Everglades!" Slough slogging is nothing like an airboat ride where everything goes by so fast and a driver makes only a few stops and explains some facts, nor is it like canoeing where attention is mostly concentrated on paddling and it is difficult to pay attention to the details. As a matter of fact, slough slogging gives one a chance to get more "intimate" with nature, watch it, study it, and learn to appreciate it.

When I took the first step in the water I was surprised to see how clean it was. At first I saw only the sawgrass, which was not very tall and dense. However, in a while I started noticing different types of flowers. They were everywhere. To my surprise some of them resembled the flowers I used to see back home in my native county. I saw tiny violet and pink flowers that resembled bluebells, little pale flowers reminded me of the apple tree blossoms and the tall white ones looked a bit like an herb called yarrow. Soon I found myself falling behind

everybody. I walked so slowly because I wanted to look closely at each flower, touch it and smell it. One time while I was trying to catch up with everyone, I did not notice a water snake right in front of me. Thanks to one of my classmates, who warned me about the snake, I stopped just in time avoiding stepping on it. I am not afraid of snakes but I never feel comfortable around them; however, at that moment I just stayed and watched it. I did not feel apprehension towards it but rather curiosity and admiration. Another species that interested me was the mosquito fish. Since this fish is so small nobody noticed it until Alan, our ranger pointed them out. Once he started talking about them, I put my hand in the water and in about ten seconds I saw many fish around it and I felt little bites. It was very unusual for me to see fish that did not consider me as a threat.

In the novel [Their Eyes Were Watching God](#), Zora Neale Hurston wrote that life and dreams of men go around just as ships do. When I think of the Everglades I see that the history was also a round trip. Since the end of the 1800's men wanted to drain the Everglades and turn the land into a "paradise" and because of their ignorance and greed they started destroying the harmony that existed there for many years. Today, views have been changed. Some people realize how important it is to save the remaining Everglades from being completely destroyed by getting to know it and by learning to appreciate it. So, for me knowledge is a beginning of devotion. The slough slog gave me a chance to explore the Everglades on a deeper level and I went from tolerating it to loving it.

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My Return to the Everglades

Isabel M Sanchez
IDH 4007
Fall Semester 2006

My parents divorced when I was about eleven years old. My father would get visitation rights every other weekend, and he would usually take my siblings and me to tourist attractions, since he lived in a very small apartment. We spent weekends at the Miami Science Museum, the Miami Seaquarium, and various parks around Florida. Unfortunately, being children, we became bored.

My siblings and I had memorized the exhibits at the Museum, had seen every animal show offered at the Seaquarium, and yawned at the aspect of playing on one more metallic play set. My father was running out of places to take us. It got to the point that we would spend weekends with him deteriorating in front of the TV set. Thankfully, one day he decided to take us to the Everglades.

My father is very big on tourist attractions. For example, on our way to the Grand Canyon, we stopped at a meteor crash site, a dinosaur bone yard, and at the site of the world's largest metal roadrunner. I suppose he wanted to show his children as much of our country as possible. After scouring several Miami brochures, he decided that the Everglades would be a good place to take us that wouldn't include a million gift shops, or sleazy tour guides. One would think he would have taken alligators and rabid raccoons into consideration, but thankfully he didn't.

I believe we spent months exploring every aspect of it, never getting bored. We explored the Gumbo Limbo Trail, the Anhinga Trail, and even camped out in Shark Valley. I can still remember the smells of the Everglades, as well as the sounds, and the scary stories my grandmother would tell us as we were camping about how zombie soldiers who died conquering the land were going to climb up through the ground and eat our brains.

All this flew through my mind as I jumped off the airboat last Friday, into the Everglades. As many times as I had visited with my father, I had never left his side, or ventured off the trails. In fact, I had always been in awe of the Everglades, so to actually step foot into it was a little frightening. As I watched the professor and my classmates jump in, I realized that if an alligator or any other carnivorous creature were to come near us, I would probably not be the first person bit, and the screams of my classmates would give me enough warning to jump back in the boat. With my new found confidence, I stepped off into the unknown.

At first the ground felt mushy, and a little disgusting. Then, as I took in the beauty of the Everglades, I forgot about my disgust, and fell in love all over again with the River of Grass. I felt completeness with nature that I had never felt before. Standing there, getting slowly sucked down into the limestone, I realized that all of us were connected, and I had nothing to fear.

Besides being scared of alligators and zombie soldiers, I was also scared of harming the Everglades. I know the fundamental rules of every national park, no touching or feeding the animals, so to actually be allowed to touch the saw grass, and step foot into the actual

Everglades was a little jarring. What if the sun tan lotion from my legs killed some saw grass, which in turn ruined the habitat of a purple gallinule, which would leave the alligator with nothing to eat? What if I stepped on and killed an underwater creature?

I knew that our professors would never do anything to harm the environment, and that put me somewhat at ease. My brain has been imprinted with facts concerning how fragile the Everglades is and how vital it is to South Florida, so I believe it's going to take me some time to be comfortable with gallivanting through the saw grass and eating our surroundings. I suppose being told by my father not to touch anything, in case it is poisonous or in case it will turn into an alligator and eat you, has stayed imprinted in my mind. That is why I found it so terrible and cruel that the airboat operators possibly still feed the animals marshmallows.

Every park ranger I met when I would come to the Everglades with my father would tell us the same thing; please do not feed the animals, because then they will lose their instincts to hunt and might attack humans. So to hear that a person who basically lives off of the Everglades was doing that was shocking. Don't they realize that they are hurting these animals? Of course, they are helping their business, but at what price?

Everyone I mentioned this to was horrified. My father and siblings were appalled to hear that the animals we would spend so many weekends with were being fed rubbish and trained to hang about one particular spot, all for the amusement of tourists. Here we are, expecting to find nature at its finest, when instead we are presented with trained animals.

That was the only negative aspect of my return. When I got home, I called my father immediately and told him how I frolicked in the muck. Naturally, he was a little worried, but when I told him, "All the kids were doing it, Dad", he calmed down. In fact, I think I told everyone that I came across that day that I had been cavorting through the Everglades. Some people could not believe that our professors had actually sanctioned that activity, and that they actually joined in. Others asked how they could join the class.

I will not let marshmallows ruin my return to the Everglades. The feel of the dirt and the slight pull of the current is something that I will not soon forget. Even though it took me four washes to get the smell out of my sneakers, I will treasure that moment forever. Although it bothers me immensely that some of the animals I basically grew up with are being harmed, I know that the rest of them are in good hands. I also know that I plan on dragging everyone that I know onto some sort of an airboat, and coercing them into jumping off with me. I think that is an experience that everyone should go through. I cannot wait to see what future classes hold for me. Hopefully they will not include rabid raccoons, hungry alligators, or zombie soldiers.

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Row, Row, Row Your Boat Right into a Mangrove Tree...

Rossana Wasfia Gomez
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 Fall Semester 2006

I have always been proud of the fact that, while I'm rarely exposed to it, I am not afraid of hard work. I could count on one hand every time someone gave me a chance to prove myself, every time I was given the chance to show my own steel. Friday afternoon I drove home with my windows down, feeling great. True, 90% of my upper body was cursing at me with the fluency of a sailor-but I was buoyed by a small bubble of pride. I canoed!

Before that Friday I knew next to nothing about canoeing. In fact, I think it's safe to say that I knew more about the digestive system of a worm than I did about canoeing. But Friday brought me face to face with my very first canoe-and, of course, the paddle. Despite my ineptitude, my partner took a good-natured view of my mistakes and laughed a lot. So did the rest of my classmates-even when it was their canoe that we were bumping into! There was of course a drawback to all this...

When offered the chance to write a haiku based on our canoeing experience, mine had more to do with-well you can judge for yourselves...here it is.

Look left, A marker!

No, I said Left! Quick left! UGH!

Pardon us mangrove.

I don't think my poem reflected much more than a funny anecdote of the whole experience-that I'm simply a terrible driver. My almost complete hopelessness left me with little attention to spare for my surroundings. It has little to do with the gorgeous environment that I was paddling through. While on shore, the mangrove trees were mysterious and fascinating-while in the canoe, they were obstacles. While the water never ceased to be clear, cool, and inviting-it became an increasingly stubborn medium that I had to paddle through. I didn't see much in the way of wildlife. Beside tiny fish, lots of large spiders, a frog and one bird (that I was too tired to even attempt to try and identify) nothing was seen-but plenty was heard. The plants, however, put on a great show. Cattails, spike rush, buttonwood-and of course the ever present Red Mangrove.

But even through the haze of pain and frustration The Everglades left its mark on me. It was the mark of the Bladderwort. You see I've always loved biology and I've read more than my fair share of biology texts, and any general biology book will feature at least a footnote on the Bladderwort. That little carnivorous plant always had its place right between the Venus flytrap and the Pitcher plant. But something odd happens to your way of thinking when you read about something long enough and often enough and never actually **see** it. It sort of becomes unreal.

Legendary, even. That's what happened to the Bladderwort. I've seen Pitcher plants and Venus flytraps before, but for all I knew, or even cared to know, the Bladderwort wasn't really real. Even if it was, it was most likely found only in a place that I was never going to be in-like East Africa or South Asia.

I saw it early on in the trip (when I still had energy to look around). "Look! How pretty!" I said to my canoe partner, "It looks like a tiny green forest down there!" When Dr. Graham lifted a piece out of the water and called it "Bladderwort" the whole world did a complete 180°. I wanted to shout, "What! You mean it exits?" When a piece got passed around towards me I didn't want to touch it. I was afraid of what touching it would do to my state of mind. Would it all turn out to be some elaborate joke? Or worse, was this whole scene being played in my imagination and I wasn't really in a canoe but in my own padded room, giggling quietly to myself? The pressure of my partner's extended hand forced me to reach out and touch the plant that I'd known about since grade school but never given any more credence to than the Tooth Fairy. "Yes, you exist," I told it.

Not too long ago I was given a survey on the everglades to collect data with. I chose to limit my population to education majors since I thought it might be interesting to see what future educators knew about their closest National Park. I found two strong tendencies: most were long time residents of South Florida-and most knew little about this precious place. It's right there! It's been there for years, and so have they! They've heard about it, some even think its important...but they have never taken the effort to know it.

Many of them know more about The Grand Canyon than about the Everglades. I actually find this depressing. I can hear them now, "That what? Oh the **Everglades!** It's..." waves hand vaguely in some direction, "...that place. Isn't it endangered or something?" This inspires real confidence in the educational system. What are they going to say to their students? Will they say anything at all? I'm not sure whether I want them to even bother to mention the park. Who knows what they might say, "The Everglades is a swamp in Homestead where alligators and many types of birds and fish live."

The Everglades is beautiful, true. The Everglades is wild, true too. Endangered, Rare, Precious, the home of a wide variety of endangered and/or fascinating plants and animals-all true. But most importantly, The Everglades is REAL! How do you raise awareness for something when the people who have hold of the minds of the future are ignorant of it? To these young teachers the Everglades is their "Bladderwort", and that is the "kiss of death" for any cause. They need to see it, touch it, drink it, work and **sweat** in it. I would like to take all these Future Educators of America on a canoe trip-for all our own good.

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What Have We Done?

Rossana Wasfia Gomez
 IDH 4007
 Fall Semester 2006

Today I went downtown with my mom. She drove-I haven't been *driven* anywhere in a long time-which meant that I had nothing to do. I tried reading at first but my mom's driving (typical of someone who's driven in Miami as long as she has) was too-distracting. Looking out the front was terrifying, so I looked out the side of my window at the cars that we passed. Unabashed I stared at the other drivers; I counted males vs. females, tried to create a correlation between the driver's gender and the type/color of cars, but I gave that up after a while and just looked. I noticed that but for the one driver, most cars were empty. And many of them had huge cars. My mom for example drives a white Honda Odyssey (I like to call it Moby) normally alone. As I was looking out the window I thought to myself, "So many people...so many cars...so much street to make for the cars..." my thoughts ran on and on and on.

Later on, looking out the window of the 21st floor of a building, I stared. If I looked directly down I saw individual people walking across the street. I saw cars cross red-lights and change lanes inappropriately (which is basically in Miami the *only* way to do things appropriately). The further out I looked...Buildings. Construction. Cars. Concrete and steel everywhere. It all eventually faded away into the smog of the city. The more I stared the more convinced I was-"It's Ugly" I told my mother. "What is?" she asked. I waved my hand at the view, "All of it. The expressways, streets, traffic lights, cars, trucks, buildings, construction, cement, steel, toll booths, AC vents, telephone poles, street lights, vendors...people. The people. It's all ugly."

Last Friday I went slough slogging. In the end I was exhausted, my forearms had scattered saw grass scratches, I had a mosquito bite just under my eye-the most sensitive area of skin on my body-my feet and legs hurt, I was soaked, cold, and despite my big lunch-starving. But out there, in thigh high water, sweat dripping down my face and back, I saw something completely different from what I saw, comfortably, from the climate controlled conditions of the front passenger seat of my mom's car and the 21st floor of a modern building. From the seat of comfort I saw the hideous creations of humanity. In the Everglades I saw beauty-untouched, unspoiled, tranquil-yet fragile, threatened, and struggling to exist. But definitely beauty.

For a very long time-before the Americas were even discovered by the white man we've had this idea, "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every little thing that moveth upon the earth" (Genesis, 1, 28). I'm not suicidal enough to question Christianity. But Christianity and other religions aside, this is a very common human idea that has reared its ugly head repeatedly all over the globe in almost every society. The idea that we are supreme. That we have every right to "be fruitful, and multiply", that we should "subdue" the earth and "have dominion" over everything. Because we are perfect, we are wonderful, we can do no wrong, because we are everything.

We want everything to be easy. We want the temperature *just right*. We don't want to walk. We want to go faster. We want more food, more water, more fat, more money, more flavor,

more cars, more fun, more houses, more room, more time, more **Everything**. Everything has to be ours, it has to be ours **now**, and it has to be done the way we want it. Most of us would smack our child silly if s/he acted this way. Sadly, the human race is a **spoiled** race.

Looking out those windows I felt a strong sense of helplessness. All this was once Everglades. All this was once beautiful. And now.... The humans saw it and decided that they didn't want all that water, and they used their grubby hands to dig canals and build levees and dikes drying out the world and leaving the fish and birds thirsty and homeless. The humans saw the pine rock lands and decided that they wanted it for paper and buildings so once again they lifted their grubby hands and with razor sharp axes and saws separated the slash pine from the earth it loved. The humans saw the rich soil of the Pond apple forest and decide that they wanted it for themselves, so once again they lifted their grubby hands and evicted the trees and shrubbery from its own home.

When we want wood or space, even endangered trees and the animals that depend on them have no protection from us. When we want water we take it. Feathers and fur, vital to the animal that grew it, can be snatched away on the whim of a temporary fashion. A pretty plant from another land can be brought in to decorate our lawns-and within a few years-can take over and crowd everything else out. When it rains too much, water can be sent downstream at an incredible pace, drowning an entire generation of snails, starving the animals that eat them-for what? Sugar that we sell abroad. We don't even grow it for ourselves.

Greedy, grubby, lazy, stupid, impulsive, selfish, and careless. It makes me ashamed. Right now I sit in my own room. In front of a computer. The AC is on. I look out my window I see my mother's car. I see my car. I see the houses of my neighbors, and their cars. I see light posts. I see mailboxes. I see fences. I see streets. I see **more** cars going by at a fast clip. I see the windows of my neighbors. If I look carefully I see them. I wonder if they are looking out the window. I wonder if they are thinking the same thing I'm thinking-or have ever thought what I'm thinking. "What have we done?"

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"Playing"

Erin Dominguez
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Spring Semester 2006

I think I have a fear of growing up. Even though 21 is still considered young, it's not the same as being young at the age of 5. Sometimes it's hard for me to fall asleep at night. There's so much worrying to be done. Sometimes I jump up from a deep sleep and run to my desk because I just remembered something that I forgot to do. I worry about getting rejected from grad school, my family, my friends, bills, and yes, even world hunger. Sometimes it's difficult to just put those thoughts out of my head in order to catch some shut-eye. Other times, however, I can't sleep because of a particular noise. This noise starts right on schedule too. Anywhere between 11pm and 1am, I start to hear the sound of metal clanking and a little rumble. It lasts for about three hours and then stops until 7am when it starts up again. That's my little Kirchoff, a little Russian dwarf hamster. The metal clanking comes from his little nibbles on the side of his cage and the rumbling comes from his wheel spinning. I'm 21 years old and I have the same pet as my 6-year-old neighbor, that's almost pathetic. I really am hanging onto my childhood.

On Thursdays, I try to sleep in because I don't have class until 2pm. Last Thursday, I received a 7:30am wake-up call. To my surprise, I wasn't tired when I answered the phone. Kirchoff didn't keep me awake that night. I couldn't even remember if he made any noise. I got out of bed, still talking on the phone, and opened my bedroom door. For the past month I had kept his cage in the hallway at night because his nocturnal activities were not doing my beauty sleep any favors. I grabbed the bag of hamster food to feed him and tapped on the side of the cage.

"Hey Kirchoff...good morning, baby. Hey, wake up. Yo... Kirchoff?"

He was curled up by his little igloo. I started to bang the side of the cage. He didn't budge.

"Oh NO." I whined into the phone.

"What? What's Kirchoff doing?" The voice from the phone asked.

"He's DEAD!" Then I felt the tears coming. All this over a hamster? I really am a child.

My roommate Jess, my friend Rachel, and I went to a nearby park and buried the little guy under a tree and carved the initial K into the tree with a butter knife. Coincidentally, the next day I'd find myself digging in the dirt once again.

I had class in the Everglades the next day. We were going to pull up some invasive exotics and we were told that if we brought some friends along to help, we would get extra credit. I didn't want to pass up the opportunity for extra credit, but I had to figure out a way to convince a friend that we were going to have fun digging in the dirt. A majority of my friends are afraid of getting a little dirt under their nails.

"WOW! This is crazy! A person could get so lost out here!" I brought my friend Rachel with me to class because she's one of the few of my friends that can appreciate nature. She was very impressed with the car ride. Cruising down Krome Avenue was like entering a time warp. We had just left the busy commercial traffic of Kendall and entered an area of plant nurseries and fields of crops and tractors all around. It was a big contrast.

The point of class that day was to pick exotic plants and throw them into trash bags because they're not beneficial to the Everglades. They were not meant to be there anyways. Not only did we just have to pick them, we had to make sure we pulled up all the roots. These exotics proved to be quite evasive and hardy. I felt like I was back at home with my mom. Every morning Ma gets up right before sunrise and pulls up weeds in the front yard. This is a part of Ma's morning rituals. As Dr. Graham said, weeding can be therapeutic. Ma probably tries to get me outside to help her for that reason. She can never get me to help her though. I'm terrified of the snakes that we find in the yard and I always manage to suffer from some allergic reaction to the weeds. These exotics that we were plucking were just weeds to the Everglades. Great, I thought, I'm turning into my mother. I know that I'm getting older, but do I have to turn into my mother?

Perhaps it was the extravagant breakfast that I *didn't* eat that morning or the allergic reaction I had to those exotics that made me feel faint. I went to take a break for a minute to grab some water and once I started to feel better, I walked back to where the rest of my class was, and that's when I noticed that it looked like an Easter egg hunt. When I was a kid, the adults would put money in one of the little plastic eggs and the kids would go crazy and totally neglect the rest of the eggs and they just looked for that one special egg. We were picking around the native plants, making sure to only pull out the exotics. Everyone was searching and digging and holding bags like a bunch of kids. They even brought out an axe to cut down tree branches; it was like they were desperately seeking some special plastic egg.

This is what I love about this place and this class. We get to play. That day everything reminded me of what it was like when I was 5 years old in South Carolina. My family lived in an area that didn't have much to do, it was just a military town. There were a bunch of trees in the playground that I played in. All the kids just played in the dirt and climbed trees. That isn't much different from what we do in the Everglades.

Even previous classes seemed similar to how things used to be when I was a kid. All the times we were in the water reminded me of the summertime when my childhood best friend's family and my family would cram into one car and drive to a place called Kiawah Island. I remember my friend and her brother would throw me into a fresh water lake despite my lack of swimming skills. Ma and their mother would panic and start screaming at them and I'd just surface to the top of the water. I'd always watch them play in a canoe from the picnic table because my mom wouldn't let me go with them. Now I was finally able to get into a canoe-TWICE. It was also very nice that my classmates never threw me in the water unexpectedly.

Hiking through areas that were affected by the series of hurricanes last year reminded me too much of the

aftermath of hurricane Hugo. The barren areas where the winds blew down trees looked like my backyard after Hugo hit Charleston. Walking through hammocks reminded me of the times my friends and I would go into the woods (because that's all there is in Charleston!) looking for old cemeteries and trying to scare each other. Throwing periphyton at my classmates is kind of like the times we threw play-dough at each other and it would get stuck in our hair and on our shirts, much like the *many* times I've gone home from class with periphyton stuck in my hair.

"It's really relaxing out here. No wonder you like it so much." I was glad that Rachel got a chance to go out there. She said she had a lot of fun talking to my classmates and spending time outdoors. She was reading through my journals about two previous classes and she asked me what I was going to write about in this one. I couldn't really decide. It was the last class time spent out there in the hot sun and I was feeling nostalgic. Then I started to think about the past four years of my life in college. It all seemed so serious, with long nights of studying, exams, and a lot of equations and formulas that I can't even remember. This class was a drastic change from my regularly scheduled program, but it was exactly what I needed. Monday thru Thursday, I had to study my butt off and go to class and work, but Friday, I could go out and play. I guess that's really important to a 21-year-old girl who needs to grow up eventually.

Even though the theme of the course is "Looking Toward the Future," I took it in as looking into the past. I'm generally a girly-girl, I like make-up and fear spiders, so I couldn't figure out why I enjoyed being in the Everglades for two semesters. During this time in my life I'm supposed to be looking to the future, but I find myself wanting to be a kid again, but there was never any time for that during the last four years. I've gotten the chance to go outside and play again one last time before I have to go into the "real world." We've been learning about restoring the Everglades and looking into their future, but really, the Everglades restored us, at least I feel that way. Sometimes it's a good thing to go back into the past and relive moments because the future is too unpredictable and scary to think about.

Kirchoff isn't around to keep me awake anymore. It was a little pathetic how emotional I got over his death, but he was a pet that I had for two years. I even called my mommy and she felt sorry for me so she sent me a package of candies. I realize I can't blame a little hamster for my lack of sleep anymore. I need to stop worrying about the future and just shut my eyes. At least when I wake up in the mornings, I know for sure that I can just go outside and pull up weeds or exotics to release the stress.

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