



The Everglades: From Beginning to End?
[FIU Honors Seminar IDH 4007](#)

First Time for This, First Time for That

Alexander Alonso
IDH 4007 Section 1
Journal Entry #1
September 25, 1997

To say that the initial Friday of our "Everglades encounter" was packed with firsts for everyone would be an understatement of immense proportions. Whether it was the first time in a class with two professors or the first time in the Everglades or the very first time ever coming face-to-face with a fifteen-foot gator, everyone was encountered with a first experience of some sort. For every person embarking upon this "Everglades encounter", the cliché took on a whole new meaning; there truly *is* a first time for everything. No matter how extraordinarily bizarre or how insignificantly routine these occurrences seemed, one thing is certain: they shall never be forgotten.

Even the most trivial of experiences might have been a memorable first for some of those involved. Several students made mention of the fact that this would be their first time in a class with field work. Others still noted that they had never taken a class that met on Fridays. Similarly, one student proclaimed this would be his first time in the Everglades much to the chagrin of both professors. For others, a relatively memorable experience regarding this class might have come when they purchased all seven books for one class in one semester for the very first time. Yet another first time was stumbled upon when our "encounter" veered off into an entirely different kind of environment: cyberspace. This too was a first for some. These minute concurrences, like so many others, filled the cracks in a day that would have otherwise been as predictably topsy-turvy as the next.

As memorable as the insignificant occurrences may have seemed to some, they are still no comparison for the extraordinarily bizarre first times that took place on that initial Friday. For example, the thrill of a first airboat ride was enough to whet the curiosity of one dedicated engineering student. For many it was the very first time they had come within an arm's length of the menacing snout of a terrifying alligator while others had never before run their smooth, pale hands across the abrasive and seemingly callous hide of a gator (while it was still alive). One student remarked that he had never heard the bone-chilling hiss of a fifteen-foot alligator. Another student was amazed to hear an awe-inspiring gator growl for the very first time. This left such an impression that he confused the growl for a lion's roar. Some students laughed at the thought of their first visit to an establishment that served "gator tail" as part of the chef's native cuisine. These peculiar happenings provided even more novelty to a day full of novel occurrences. Nonetheless, all of these bizarre experiences cannot even come close to the peculiarity of most unusual of these firsts which took place on one student's very first airboat ride. This rarity can only be worded one way: a complete role reversal.

The very first time a person rides an airboat you get an unusual sensation. You feel as though the driver is in control of something that is seemingly uncontrollable. This very thought can be unnerving at best. Commonly, airboat tours include a tumultuous ride

through sawgrass and water and swampy marshes. There you are sitting on the water-sled that twists around, turns behind, and tumbles near any and every marshy obstacle in its way. Like any novice you cringe and, the driver gets his kicks. Well, this is not the worst of it. Later on in your tour, you spot a gator in the water. All of a sudden, the driver, with a smug look on his face, stops to feed it (which is quite illegal). Now, the gator stops on the right of the boat and kind of surveys the passengers with his glassy eyes. The driver then gives the passengers instructions for estimating the length of a gator by looking at its snout. Now, to the average person this is all fine and dandy, but, to the unnerved passenger this is all too similar to a very common experience only with a slight twist. This first time on an airboat engaged with a gator is very much like a person going to the meat section of your local market and selecting the nicest, plumpest, freshest meat available. In this case, however, the driver is your butcher, the gator is the shopper, and YOU are the fresh meat! You see, the driver uses the instructions for alligator measurement as code words for "Hey, Mr. Gator, look in the middle, at the fat kid with the facial hair. He's easily 200 pounds and ready to go. He's not lean, but there's a whole lot of meat on them bones. Tell me he wouldn't be nice for your rainy season feast. Go ahead, just take'em. He's all good to go!" Now, this could just be a figment of my imagination, but, that gator did look hungry and as a two-hundred pound kid with facial hair who was quite nervous, I was not taking any chances. Both arms and both legs could not be any tighter, and I could not have avoided eye contact any better. Say what you like, but I won't ever forget my first time on an airboat tour of the Florida Everglades. This is by far my most memorable first of this initial Friday.

There is no question that this first day was filled with first times for everyone. Likewise, there is no question that these experiences are all memorable in some way for everyone. Undoubtedly, these firsts ranged from the eternally routine to the frighteningly bizarre. The routine will remain notable for some while the bizarre shall remain memorable for most; but, my experience with a hungry gator, a sardonic tour guide, and a starring role as the "tasty tourist" will forever endure in my mind as truly unforgettable.

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Who Says Humans Are Unimportant?

Alexander Alonso
IDH 4007
Section #1
Journal Entry #2

One of the most tangible values of the Everglades National Park is the rich fauna which calls it "home". The Everglades are inhabited by such a wide variety of creatures ranging from the flying mullet to the rare Florida Panther all of which augment the value of the park. This expanse of wildlife that inhabits the Everglades, whether seasonal or permanent, is comprised of such spectacular creatures that often times, such an indelible mark is made by one or two animals, and the myriad of other park denizens are left totally forgotten. Probably the most overlooked of these comes from the primate family and is known as *Homo sapiens*. Man plays three important roles in the Florida Everglades: the first of these is as the ever-present park ranger, the second role is as the awe-inspiring, nature-loving tourist, and the final and most grisly role is as the eternal "well of nourishment" for the blood-thirsty species known as *Aedes taeniorhynchus* or the mosquito. Indubitably, all three of these roles have an immeasurable impact on the park.

The first role that man plays in the Everglades National Park is that of the seemingly omnipresent and omniscient park ranger who performs two duties at the park: tour guide and protector. Essentially, the park ranger is at the disposal of any park visitors. He is their tour guide, their protection from the animals, and their sounding board. If one should devote some time to tracking a group of callow and unsuspecting tourists on a guided tour of the circuitous Anhinga Trail, they would notice that the park ranger exists as a gentle being who serves as the intermediary between other humans and nature. He patiently answers any questions one might have about the park and diligently offers up his wealth of knowledge as source for those whose interest is peaked by the Florida Everglades. Now, you are probably wondering about his role as a protector. "Does he really protect the humans from the wildlife (e.g., alligators)?" you ask. Well, no. In reality, the ranger protects the wildlife from the "wise ass" tourist that taunts or endangers animals and, consequently, the "wise ass" from the animal defending its hallowed habitat. Not only does he protect the wildlife, but he does his best to preserve it as well. Whether serving as a maintenance man for the ecosystem or as a watchdog for the stupidities of "wise asses" or as an encyclopedia for the curious tourist, the park ranger is on a constant vigil and is always up to the task at hand.

The most common role for humans in the Everglades National Park is as the awe-inspired, the nature-loving tourist. Comprised of two essential tasks, the role of tourist is one that the park could not do without. "What does the park gain from allowing visitors?" you ask. Tourists act as a source of monetary gains as well as a source of free advertising. Unfortunately, the park cannot function in the modern global environment without money. A great source of this valued community is the nature-loving tourist. Once tourists enter the park, they have already lined the coiffeurs of the Everglades National Park by paying the relatively minimal entrance fee, and almost every subsequent activity will cost the tourist something. Secondly, tourism benefits the Everglades National Park because of the "word-of-

mouth" advertising that it receives absolutely free of charge. There is no such thing as a disgruntled visitor at the Everglades National Park. Almost everyone walks out with a sense of glee for having experienced nature in that fashion. All this happiness is indubitably spread by all those who visit the Everglades to their family, their friends, and anyone who will listen. Stories of alligator holes and canoeing throughout the park like Hugh Willoughby fill the hearts of not only those who have done it but those who listen to these lucky few. Tourists and the Everglades partake in an exchange involving apital gains for the park and memories unlike any others for the tourists. This serves as yet another sign that even the most egotistical and self-centered of humans can play a crucial part in the Florida Everglades.

The final part is one that is performed by every man, woman, and child that ever comes into the Everglades National Park. "What else could humans possibly offer to the Everglades?" you ask. How about, being a "well of nourishment" for every form of mosquito in the entire park. When I say a "well of nourishment," I am referring to that most annoying of occurrences when a mosquito lands on your smooth, creamy skin and decides either to relieve itself in some way or to plunge its puny needle and suck the very life out of you (the sucker). Now, both of these occasions might seem innocuous but to the average person (a fictitious figure) but, to these tiny inhabitants, this is a way of life. There is no life for these mosquitoes without the blood of the unsuspecting human. Now, the crimson blood of human is not exactly "filet mignon" but for these diminutive vampires it serves as a nine course meal. Just imagine having to fight for your survival, and the only way is by drinking the blood of animals nearly half-a-million times your size. It is a miracle that these mosquitoes have not given up all hope! Nevertheless, they keep on truckin' and suckin', all of which would be impossible without the presence of man in the one, the only, the Florida Everglades. If this is not enough evidence to demonstrate the importance of man in the Everglades, I don't know what is!

To the untrained eye, man appears to be an intruder in the Florida Everglades; however, to the trained eye, man is a participant in a subtle phenomenon. Here, man is no longer an interloper but a member of the ecosystem. He participates in a variety of ways ranging from acting as the all-powerful park ranger to providing sustenance for an entire community of blood-sucking mosquitoes. Whether guarding the wildlife from the idiosyncrasies of tourists or indirectly funding the maintenance of the park, man has become an inextricable cog in the Everglades ecosystem; and, that is a bonafide phenomenon.

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Ignorance is Bliss?

Alexander Alonso
 IDH 4007 Section 1
 Journal Entry #3
 October 30, 1997

Ignorance has long been one of the universe's greatest paradoxes. For eons upon eons man has ridiculed those lacking in knowledge by referring to them as "ignoramuses". Meanwhile, others argued by labeling the state of ignorance as "blissful". For years, this duality of ignorance has persevered without any one individual ever doing a thing to resolve this discrepancy.

The following is the attempt of one man to resolve this issue once and for all:

10/09/97
 Mr. Supreme Being
 333 Heaven Lane
 Valhalla, HHG 13740

RE: Everglades National Park

Dear God,

Oh Lord, I am truly sorry to interrupt You in all Your important work in the universe. I know that You are quite busy with redemptions, salvations, and damnations, but I would like to make You aware of something awful (I know You already know, oh Omnipotent One, but I just want to remind You).

The most horrifying thing is going on at the Everglades National Park in South Florida. You see, it all started when my family and I (little Tammy, Danielito, my wife Monica, myself, and Abuelito Carlos) were down in the park on a canoeing expedition at Nine Mile Pond. There we were cutting through the mangroves, (red mostly) when a sudden gust of wind brought us an unexpected visitor. Out of nowhere came an adorable green pig frog begging us to spend time with it. After some quality time with the adorable amphibian we realized that it was with us for good. You see, it was trying to tell us that it needed to get out of the torturous prison called the Everglades. It could not bear another day in those monstrous marshes. It was trying to tell us that the Everglades were part of a huge cover-up. Imagine us. The poor, unsuspecting Perez familia, enjoying our canoe trip through the mangroves of the Nine Mile Pond when one of Your creatures jumped up and alerted us (the Perez familia) of an immense scam where the little creatures of Your kingdom were being tortured and fed to the larger animals. At first, we were stunned to hear of this diabolical scheme, but then, after careful consideration, we told the toad we'd do everything we within our power to put this hideousness to a halt. Yes, it wanted to come along, but little Tammy seemed to be allergic to it so it had to stay..."

Now, I know that you are thinking that these people are the dumbest things on the planet but hold on; it gets worse:

"...After a beautiful lunch at Flamingo (the southernmost point in the park, but You already know that), we went on our way to the Pa-hay-okee Overlook. While at the overlook, we got a magnificent idea of what an abundance of sawgrass there is in the Everglades. You can look out for miles upon miles and not see anything but sawgrass and the occasional tree islands. While in the run of things, we were approached by another of the tiny creatures in the Everglades National Park. It was a bright yellow grasshopper. Initially, we made nothing of it, but it would not leave us alone. Soon, it was jumping hysterically as if it were trying to tell us something. Apparently, it had come in contact with a huge alligator which can scare the daylights out of anyone except Yourself, Almighty One. It painted out a terrifying picture of torture, genocide (insecticide), and destruction. We told it that we were quite aware of the slaughter that was taking place in that supposed "wildlife refuge". We told it that we would do our best to try and alert the outer world of the horror. You must have heard its shrieks as we informed it that we could not let it come along as a stowaway due to an inhumane park policy of not removing anything from the park! That was so sad..."

Just when you thought it can't possibly get any worse, guess what? It did:

"...We had just pulled out of the Pa-hay-okee Overlook and were on our way to the Visitor Center when the most peculiar thing occurred. Mind You; we were definitely observing the speed limit when from the depths of Your great blue sky came one of Your more impressive aerial masterpieces, the Great Egret. But, You see, it is not like it just decided to land on our windshield; I think it was doing the unthinkable. It was trying to commit suicide. After it tried rather unsuccessfully to plunge to its glassy death, we pulled over and went to check on the bird. We got to the spot where the Egret landed and searched for any of the bird's remains. To our surprise, the bird had survived the encounter with barely even a scratch. When we got the bird to stop its weeping, we asked if its attempted suicide might be related to the horrific slaughter taking place in the park. It told us that it had had an encounter with an aggressive park ranger who was trying to force-feed it some snails and mackerel. It explained that the force-feeding was part of the "plumping" process which was employed so that the alligators could later satiate their enormous appetites. It went on to tell us about the fact that this was taking place because the gators and the humans had a pact which was entailed by a trade-off. The alligators perform, and the humans make money off the performance. It's vile! Isn't it? That was it. I could not take it anymore. We all got in the car (the bird too) and went on our way! We were on our way to tell the world of this duplicity, this chicanery.

Unfortunately, when we got to the checkout point, the park rangers asked us why it was that we were trying to transport a Great Egret out of the park. Before I knew it, we were sequestered, the bird was set free, and the cell in the corner building of the Flamingo Visitor Center now belonged to the Perez familia for the night. So, I did what I thought would work best. I wrote to You. So, if you do get this letter, please send us bail money! Oh yeah! See what You can do about the horrific things going on at the Everglades National Park.

Desperately,

Alejandro Perez
(a.k.a. Trapped in
the Everglades)

brig)

P.S. Please see if You can help my friend Lencho who seems to be having so much trouble with those leeches at the post office."

There is only one thing that can be said about this family's experience in the Florida Everglades. Ignorance is most certainly not bliss; ignorance (and ignoramuses) can only be dealt with in one fashion: ridicule. Ignoramuses do not lead blissful lives. They make life so

stressful for others. They are the "butts" of all mankind. Frankly, if ignorance is bliss, then give me misery!

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The Sawgrass is the Thing...

Alexander Alonso
IDH 4007 Section 1
Journal Entry #5

Whether you are an avid sportsman or an armchair quarterback or the boy scout from within is calling to you, one thing is certain; everyone loves recreation! Recreation is every person's chance to evade the stressors of daily life while discovering the simple joy that comes with the ability to "let go". One man's idea of recreation may be a five mile canoe trip while his neighbor's ideal recreational activity may be fishing for lint in his navel. The point is recreation comes in all forms, and everyone can partake in it. And, if there was ever a place where one could partake in a myriad of recreational activities, the Everglades National Park would without question be that place. The Everglades National Park serves as one of America's largest escapes from the real world (without having to travel an immeasurable distance).

Although most would not classify the "slough slog" as recreational, it is highly recommended for anyone who savors agony and relishes in suffering. The "slough slog" not only tortures your every muscle, tendon, and fiber; it also crushes every last bit of your frail psyche. The "slough slog" is a peculiar activity from its inception to its very end.

The recreational possibilities available at the Everglades National Park range in nature from the simple to the bizarre and, even, the masochistic. One can effortlessly partake in a simple, calm breezy boat ride out on Florida Bay or take a nice, easy bike ride down the park's main road to take in all the beauty of nature and simplicity. Likewise, one can spend a whole day at the Shark Valley Visitor Center just admiring the North American alligator as it frolics along man-made walkways and paths. Finally, if one has a deep yearning for pain and anguish, the recreational activity for that person is the "slough slog".

The "slough slog" begins in an unusual way. It begins when you arrive at the Everglades National Park. As you drive just past the Cowe Visitor Center at the park's main entrance, you begin to hear voices. "What kind of voices?" you ask. It is the voice of Marjory Stoneman Douglas. It is the exact same voice she heard when she first encountered the Florida Everglades. It is the sawgrass. It is as if the sawgrass knows that you are there, and it knows what you are there to do. The sawgrass taunts you and teases you. The sawgrass calls to you, "Come on, I dare ya! Don't worry I know you'll never make it. Why bother? You won't make it. Poor baby!" And, as you begin to wonder where that annoying gibberish is coming from, you hear it fade in a cacophonous chuckle so as to say "I'll be waiting for you, baby!" Now, you are absolutely furious so you start turning, searching for the source, when you spot it. The sawgrass is mocking you. It is seemingly waving at you while it sits in its muck. All that is enough to make this experience bizarre, but that is not the worst of it by far.

As soon as you have been briefed on the "slough slog" agenda and what dangers may be waiting for you out there, the physical woes begin. You drive out to a secluded dirt road at

the very heart of the Everglades National Park, and the sawgrass knows that you are back! So as your party begins to make its way into the wonder that is the Taylor Slough, the mental anguish continues. About ten feet into your journey, you notice that the trek is going to be difficult. You see, the sawgrass knows it has you beaten because there is no sure footing. Without sure footing you will slip and slide and sink; and, as you sink, you will grasp anything within plain view. The problem is that the sawgrass is the only thing in plain view. The sawgrass is begging you to wrap your smooth, pale fingers around its triangular body. "Why?" you ask. Because it loves the taste of blood. It is carnivorous! It is carnivorous and insatiable! The sawgrass has only one thing on its mind: oodles and oodles of blood.

The sawgrass has an uncontrollable wanton lust for blood. This blood is something it cannot do without. You see, eventually you approach a tree island and take refuge from this treacherous carnivore. You stop, have lunch, and let your body release some of the aches and pains. This is all fine and dandy; but, there is still one major problem: "How are you supposed to get back?" At this point, the sawgrass is bent over in endless laughter. It knows that it sucked almost two to three pints of blood out of you, and, now, it wants the rest! All the sawgrass wants is every last drop of the eight pints of blood in your body. Finally, you embark upon your inevitable return. And, as the sawgrass digs its little spikes into your flesh time after time, you realize that you just want to die. Luckily, however, as you get dizzy and feel like passing out, two people come to your side and vow not to leave you for dead. And, soon, the numbers expand exponentially, and, before you know it, you are back at the edge of that gorgeous dirt road. Then, as you work your way up on the shoulder of the road, a voluptuous Florida Diamondback rears its ugly (triangular) head and buries its fangs into your bruised and battered flesh. (Well, maybe that last part is a bit embellished, but it could happen!) But, the sawgrass knows that without teamwork you would be dinner! And so, it bellows with the most haughty laugh you have ever heard. It does not bother you one bit because you have been out there and come back; you have lived to "slog" another day.

There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that Marjory Stoneman Douglas was right when she said, "Everything that is the glades is the sawgrass." That sawgrass is indomitable. There is no beating the sawgrass. With the sawgrass there is only one optimistic option: a slim chance of survival. When the sawgrass wants you, it will take you! The sawgrass is everything that is the Florida Everglades.

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Ain't No Denying It!

Alexander Alonso
 IDH 4007 Section 1
 Journal Entry #6

There has never been a man who has epitomized the Ten Thousand Islands area of Florida more than Edgar J. Watson. Trying to understand the incomparable Mr. Watson is like trying to navigate through those islands in the middle of the night. There is just no way to do it. The following is one man's attempt to illustrate how E.J. Watson still plays a role in the everyday activities of the area. Here is one account of how more than just the legend of Ed Watson still lives on:

"11/22/97

Dear Old Friend,

The most peculiar thing happens to a person once they've entered the city limits of Everglade City, Florida. It is almost as if that proverbial "black cloud" just suddenly hovers over your head. Only, it is not a "black cloud"; it is more like a big black hat. Of course, only one man in Ten Thousand Island's history can ever get away with wearing that black hat. That man was Edgar J. Watson. "Who's Edgar J. Watson?" you ask. Why, he is only the most infamous man in Chokoloskee history. The oddest thing is that he has been dead since 1910 or so they say. But I'll tell ya, Mr. Watson will live on forever.

Just let me tell ya a tale of how even today in 1997, Ed Watson makes his presence felt all over these islands. It must've been about three weeks ago when these dang college kids come west from Dade to visit the Smallwood store and take a little boat tour of the islands. Well, I can tell you that ain't no college education sinking into them. They should have known that it was gonna be a bad day when all that rain come down even before nine o'clock.

It all started when they got to Ted's old store 'bout ten in the morning. You see, there they were all wet and eager to hear about Mr. Watson's life on Chatham Bend. Now, I've been in Chokoloskee all my life and, I've seen so many city slickers come in and out that there store it'll make your head spin. I am certain that old Ted must be turning in his grave as he watches all them people come in and out his store. Well, soon enough them kids sat down in the southwest corner of the store where they got all of Totch's videos playing. So, the kids sit there and listen to their guest lecturer as he starts talking about the life and times of E.J. Watson. About halfway through the lecture I meander my way through their sitting area and head out the back door. But, as I'm walking I make eye contact with one of them kids. He was a fat feller. Must have been at least two hundred plus pounds; but, that ain't the only reason I laid eyes on him. You see, I looked at him because as I strolled through I noticed that he couldn't take his slanty little eyes off of that picture of Mr. Watson and Mrs. Watson and lovely young Carrie. Right then and there, I knew. I knew he was the one!

You see, every once in a while a tourist will come through Everglade City and do everything there is to do here. And, every other once in a while there is a tourist who'll come through and never leave. His body may leave but his heart and soul will be here forever. And, if you are wondering where his heart and soul will be; it'll be at that beautiful white plantation home on

Chatham Bend.

Everyone says that E.J. died that day in 1910, but I sure as heck don't believe a word they say. I've been here all my life and, I know what I've seen. I have seen (with my own two eyes) a man with auburn hair and a broad black hat covered in a dark overcoat walking through the streets and riding a skiff out in them entangled islands. Now, the funny thing is this figure always has his back to me. So, I can't tell you it is Mr. Watson for sure but, the betting man would definitely put his money on Edgar J. Watson.

The most unusual thing about the dark figure is that he only appears when some tourist has something unfortunate happen to him. I swear that I'd seen E.J. that same morning before that class come into town. I seen him out on Chokoloskee Bay grinning his way into them lush tropical islands.

Anyhow, them kids went for lunch out towards what is now the Everglades National Park Visitor Center. They all ate their lunches except for the fat feller. They ate anything from sandwiches to fruit to yogurt and not one bit of all that food touched the lips of that plump boy. You see, it had already begun. E.J. was playing with his mind. Back in the store, the kid couldn't take his eyes off of Ed because Ed wouldn't take his eyes off of him. It was as if Mr. Watson had said something to the boy that no one else heard. Well, once E.J. has got their attention he makes sure never let's it go.

About two o'clock them kids got on one of them boats and head out on the bay towards all them mysterious islands. And, yes, that kid still looked all dazed and confused. Sure enough, they docked on Sandfly Key around three o'clock and, it was then that I knew it was all over for this feller. Halfway into that deep green trail on Sandfly Key, the other kids claim they heard something like a buckshot out of a double-barrel shotgun. Now, if that wasn't enough to scare the daylights out of them, they noticed that the fat kid was gone. At first, they figured he was just pulling some wild prank but, soon enough, they began to worry that maybe he was lost out there in the wilderness. So, they set up a search party see if they could find him before dark. The only thing worse than being lost in the Ten Thousand Islands is being lost in the Ten Thousand Islands at night. Just about when they'd given up, the rangers and others heard a scream. It'd come from just about where that patch of cactus was growing. There he was! The other kids say that when they found him he was sucking on his thumb and his cap had been knocked off his head. One of the rangers told me that cap was so full of buckshot holes that it reminded him of a block of Swiss cheese. Now, I saw that fat feller as he left this place and let me assure that E.J. Watson got to him. They had to call an ambulance for that boy. One of the rangers told me that the boy was still in a catatonic phase and, the doctors said they can't tell when he come out. If you ask me, there ain't no way that boy is ever coming back out. "Why?" you ask. Well, because E.J. Watson has got his heart and soul down there on Chatham Bend.

Later that night I could have sworn I heard a deep chuckle coming from those islands and, I'll bet you anything that it was Mr. Watson laughing at his newest addition to the plantation. Now, I can't tell you why it is that Edgar J. Watson still haunts the Ten Thousand Islands area but, my guess is that he is just taking care of some unfinished business and loving every minute of it!

Please make sure that you take care of yourself and your kin if you ever come to Everglade City because Mr. Watson may just be waiting for you.

Sincerely,

"Little" Robbie Watson

P.S. I guarantee you that Grampa is just fine."

There is some question as to who the author of the letter is but, if it is the grandson of Mr. Watson it would definitely be quite a development. You see, it was believed that none of the Watson clan has ever come back to this part of the world in fear that they might be executed in the same fashion dear old Mr. Watson was. Nonetheless, it appears that one thing is certain: apparently, Mr. Watson has never left the Ten Thousand Islands. If there was ever a man who belonged in the Ten Thousand Islands, his name would have to be Watson.



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Art History

Nicola Chung

IDH 4007, Honors Seminar
October 24, 1997

My last exposure was finally finished. I knew that this was a good one, nothing had moved for the last five minutes, and the sun was coming in at an angle that gave everything a golden glow. I was tired, the tripod was digging into me, and since we were in mud, the photographer had left me here in the middle of nowhere for a number of days, (to settle the stand in the goop), but I felt good nevertheless. I had gotten the picture, and, in the past few days, had gotten to see what I now considered my best friends.

I am a very old camera by modern standards, I was assembled in the early part of this century, and more images have been captured through me than I care to remember. For the most part, it has been a good life, I have seen and photographed some of the most powerful and influential people in the country, (my first owner was a private portrait man), and, as such, seen how they live and something of their personalities. I have also taken a few pictures of crime scenes, but that didn't last long, since they wanted something faster than me. I came to my present owner not long after that, and have been happily out of city and society life for these past few decades.

It is said that the camera never lies, but that is not entirely true. In my long career I have produced images different from the objects there. No superficially or obviously different, mind you, but I have subtly changed what people see when they look at certain photographs. After all, no two prints are ever exactly alike, and although this has been explained away by differences in the timing and chemicals in the dark room, believe me, I had a hand in it as well. For example, early in my history, I had to take a portrait picture of the man running for governor at the time, a hulking beast of a man named Napoleon Bonaparte Broward, and I was supposed to give an accurate picture of him for the newspapers, who were writing about his campaign and his plans to drain the Everglades.

I, like everybody else, had heard his speeches and seen his blueprints of what South Florida would be like if he got elected, and was very impressed by them. However, Napoleon Broward was not a very handsome man, and although he was large in size, he did not really have very much of a presence, nor was he very pleasant to be around for very long. Nevertheless, I believed in his scheme, and felt that it really would be the best thing for the area if Broward's plans were made a reality, so I very subtly changed how his picture looked by giving him the air of a man who was very powerful, and had a direct, burning stare. This photograph was widely circulated around Florida, and it gave the people a lot of respect and admiration for him, especially since it appealed to their imagination of what a marvelous adventurer he must have been, and how honest and sincere he looked. This picture was very important because it helped people to make up their minds about Broward, and this led to him being elected governor.

After Broward became governor, he set about trying to drain the Everglades. He succeeded

in getting the project started, but it was a failure for a number of reasons. For one, the nutrients in the drained soil were not sufficient for farm crops to grow and stay healthy, so they died, leaving many families depending on them impoverished. Also, when it rained, the water came back, bankrupting men who put their entire fortunes into draining the Everglades. Aside from the monetary factors, the water simply would not stay out of the wetlands. Thus, the plan for draining the Everglades failed, (no thanks to me).

So now I sit in the very swamps and marshes that I once almost helped to destroy, recording the beauty and serenity of the place, which is unlike anywhere else in the world. As I mentioned before, I am not lonely here, for I am often visited at night by the ghosts of the Indians that lived here during the wars, and they keep me company. They are much more interesting than the trees, (although they have their stories to tell as well), and since they don't know about by betrayal all those years ago, they are friendly and are comfortable telling their stories around me. I would like to think that if they knew what I have done, they would understand that I was only doing what I thought was best for everybody, but, I'd rather not find out. As it is, I am an intrusion on their land and a machine of the white man. I would not like to be seen as another lying white man's tool of destruction. So, I'll probably spend the rest of my life taking pictures of the Everglades, and to made up for the folly of my youth, I will gently alter the landscape to make it even more beautiful, so that people will learn to appreciate and love it, and with any luck, never try to destroy it again.

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The Everglades: From Beginning to End?
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Halloween Horror Hike

Nicola Chung

IDH 4007, Honors Seminar
November 7, 1997

As the caravan of cars snaked along the narrow road, the atmosphere was cheerful as the hikers chatted about what they expected on the slog. I did not feel the anticipation that the others seemed to, instead I felt an underlying tension, and was sure that I was not the only one that noticed it. The chatter suddenly ceased when we came to a stop at an iron gate blocking our way onto the path. The guide in the front car got out and swung it open, telling those in the last car to close it as they went through. The brave adventurers forced themselves to continue their light banter, but, now, I could see that everybody was pondering the significance of the gate, which now caged us in, and permitted anyone else from coming through.

We crept a short distance along the narrow, dusty road (that we were later told was the old highway that the outlaws and murderers used to use), and then abruptly pulled off onto the side in the grass. We all got out of our cars and surveyed the scene. It was a dismal one. The normally sunny, blue sky was an ashy grey, and for as far as the eye could see, we were the only living creatures around. The forced smiles that were on our faces died as we took it all in. The sawgrass spread before us in a great, waving mass, as if trying to entice us to come in. It bent and bowed before us, looking for all the world like it was submitting to us, and taking us in as welcome guests, but we all knew that it was merely mocking us, and our apprehension grew. Once, the wind let out a lonesome moan as it blew past, but then all was still again, a deathly quiet.

We shook off our fear as we listened to our guide tell us some of the dangers to look out for while walking through the swampy prairie - snakes, alligators, deep depressions in the ground that we could fall into, and quicksand. An undercurrent of fear ran through us, but we looked at each other and plucked up our courage. After all, we thought, there's safety in numbers. The guide chose that moment to tell us that we were not allowed to walk together, that we had to spread out and make our own way. The tension rippled through the group again, and we all sucked in our collective breath and stepped off the road and into the wet wilderness.

As we gingerly put our feet into the cold water, we were surprised by the feel of something slippery under the surface. The gunk was soft and squishy, and more than a few of us slipped and almost fell. As we walked slowly into the slough, the strange, unseen ground under our feet sank and pulled at us. With each step we took, we were taken a little further away from the relative safety of the old highway, and our only means of transportation out of the sawgrass prairie, and the water got deeper and deeper, gradually climbing up over the tops of our sneakers and filling them.

As the water got deeper, it got murkier, so that we could not see where we were putting our feet, and all that could be heard was the wet sucking sound of the muck as it pulled at us and tried to hold us. The dead, organic slime we were walking on alternately slipped and

held us, making our progress treacherous. Whenever we stopped to get a better look at something, or to catch our breath, the sludge would slowly collapse under us, making us sink into it. The deeper we sunk, the harder it was to get free and to keep slogging, since it seemed to be sucking the very energy and will out of us.

More frightening even than the sucking, pulling, rotted sludge, was the sudden dips and holes in the underlying limestone, which would make the ground seemingly disappear from under us, until we fell in, and had the slimy muck grab at us again. Periodic shouts and screams would shatter the stillness as someone else found a hole and sank a few feet down. The poles that a few of us carried had at first seemed like tools to help guide our steps, but it was rapidly becoming evident that their real purpose was to fight the wild forces that had surrounded us, or to be more accurate, that we had intruded on. A few times, a fallen adventurer would try to use a pole to try to pull free, only to have the pole itself become stuck too, as the slime grabbed hold of it, willing to put up a fight for the prize.

The sawgrass, too was a malignant force to be reckoned with. It had seemed so gentle and welcoming in the beginning, but we quickly learned that it had a hidden dark side. As we brushed past the slender, flexible strands, the razor edges cut into our flesh, often drawing blood. In the water, too, the blades of grass would tangle and wrap around our ankles, both holding and sawing into us. It was like being shackled with living barbed wire.

As we continued on our sojourn, a few of the explorers fell behind, and when we finally stopped to rest, it was realized that they hadn't followed us. When we could wait no longer, we decided to go on, so that we, at least, would survive. We fought our way back through the wilderness, the landscape never seeming to change, until we made it back to the waiting cars. As we stood on the dry land of the road, we looked back on the undulating sea of grass that we had traversed, and were thankful that we had made it out to the other side. We waited for our lost friends for a while more, but when it became evident that they were not coming back, we all said a prayer for them, and silently accepted the fact that the everglades had claimed victory over another pair of humans foolish enough to try to conquer it. The two that were left behind were never heard from again, although it has been rumored that if you go out slogging on a dark, overcast day, you will see two figures slowly struggling along, never looking up or calling out, but always trying to get back to that old abandoned highway.

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The Everglades: From Beginning to End?
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The Truth Behind the Flamingo's Smile

Connie Colbert
IDH 4007
Professor Machonis
September 19, 1997

The day began perfectly. I arrived at the visitor center right on time. It was a relief because for a short time I thought I was not going in the right direction. Until you enter the park entrance, it feels as if you are driving through farmlands of some other state. The sun was low in the sky and the air was cool. It was cloudy, so it looked like the day would be perfect for hiking around in the Everglades, the slowest river in the world. That was the day I was going to become a bird watcher.

After I finally learned how to use binoculars (there is only supposed to be one field of vision when looking through--a circle in the middle!), I was ready to go. My first target was a rare speed limit sign, which, incidentally, is most often spotted along the main highway going through the Everglades National Park.

The next stop, Royal Palm Visitor Center was no different. Nothing escaped being captured by my binocular lenses: tops of trees, blackbirds, woodpecker nests, butterflies, grasshoppers, tourists. Of course, these things were all just practice; previews to the main attraction--the Great Blue Heron.

"What a huge bird," I thought as my eyes took in the image for the very first time. He stood about 4 feet tall. He was tucked up against a tree--hiding, but not well enough. There was mad scramble from everyone nearby to get a good look. My binoculars shot up to my face. I was eager to view it up close--I kept focusing the binoculars the wrong way, causing my now single image to be a big blurry circle. Finally, my work paid off and the giant Blue Heron came into focus. The Heron, based on the way he stood there nonchalantly, was at a comfortable distance from his spectators. The reading and the lecture popped into my head: "this is a ferocious creature." Using the lenses, my eyes studied his dagger-beak, while I made note of the convenience of standing so far away and being able to see so clearly. Suddenly it dawned on me that had I been standing closer, my towering 5'1" stature would make me prime candidate for having my eye plucked out. Scary!

However, for a minute, the idea of walking off, arm-in-wing, with this huge, misunderstood bird entertained me. Then, something very strange happened. He extended his left wing and motioned for me to come to him. Naturally, I was in disbelief, but found myself walking toward the bird, half reluctantly, half willing. A few yards from the Anhinga Trail, he introduced me to his other Great Blue heron friends, his relatives the Great White Herons, and his coastal friends--the Ospreys. They each took a particular part of my body ("because my bones are not as light as bird bones," he told me) and flew, with me, away to the most splendid parts of the Everglades.

They flew me to mangrove islands in the bay, freshwater marshes, and hardwood hammocks in the deepest parts of the Everglades. They took me to places that no person has ever been! Can you imagine the sights I saw? I felt like Charles Darwin, landing on the Galapagos. I experienced pure, undisturbed nature (at least undisturbed directly--there was the matter of man-made dikes diverting water that disturbed the whole ecosystem). The Herons told me of their paradise lost. They have heard the stories from the elders. The stories about how they used to be able to fly from coast to coast and look down at their land.

Then, they took me to a very special place. It was their prized spot because of the hope that it represents for them. I must admit, it was a gruesome scene. However, the more I thought about it, the more sense it made. The place was littered with human bones. They explained to me that the bones were the remains of some unlucky plume hunters. They excitedly explained how back in the early 20th century, the birds banded together to try to stop the extensive invasions into rookeries that resulted in feather theft (not to mention the loss of lives of these delicate birds and their future generations).

Somehow, the bigger birds--the Great Herons, Egrets, Wood storks, Greater Flamingos, and even Marbled Godwits allied and used their beaks as weapons against lone plume hunters. They were not always successful, but they felt they put up a good fight-- and that was important to them.

The birds even joked about the situation. They explained to me that the upturned beak of the Marbled Godwit was the remnant smile of appreciation and satisfaction left over from the time of plume hunting. Also, because all the birds did not want to be too obvious in their smugness, they developed a certain tendency to disguise their smile. For example, the down-turned beaks of Ibis and Greater Flamingos were really upside down smiles. At least, I believed they were joking about that!?

I wished that I could stay there longer with them, but our time together had to end. They invited me back to bird watch again. In fact, they said they knew that their only hope for saving their habitat was to wade around and perform for the tourists because being seen is what keeps them remembered. Of course, there were just a few birds that volunteer for this task. There are several hundred that live deep within the Everglades and live as normal a life as their ancestors did.

The great birds dropped me off in the parking lot of Royal Palm visitor center, where my adventure began. At first I thought it was my imagination, because it felt as if no time had actually passed when I was standing back in the parking lot with all the other students. However, later in the day, they flew past the tour boat, or hid in the mangroves, or waved to me from the mud flats. Some of them were smiling that disguised smile that said 'we will be victorious...because this is our land, and our history, and our piece of heaven. We have managed through many things, including hurricanes, and it can't get much worse!'

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The Everglades: From Beginning to End?
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Naturally Canoeing

Daniel Decespedes
IDH 4007
Professor Machonis

Last week, we went on a bit of an expedition. It was an experience that most of us had never been exposed to, and one that many of us probably feared. Many a mind probably thought, "We're going to canoe Nine Mile Pond?" Most had probably never been on a canoe before, much less travel for nine miles without an engine of some kind! You could sense this feeling in the air, as we seized our canoes, two by two.

I, on the other hand, felt at ease, confident and excited awaiting the challenge ahead. I had the good fortune of having been canoeing before, and for about the same distance as our impending adventure. And, after some precautionary instructions, we shoved off. The following occurrence made me laugh and think about our human nature as native city dwellers. Who could have predicted that we would have brought our traffic nightmares to this other world! As the class approached the first mangrove tunnel, our road rage and our rush-hour driver's instincts kicked in. We all knew that thirteen canoes could not pass through five feet of water, but we tried it anyway. What ensued was our first lesson on the canoe. Canoeing is not for the sake of transportation; we are not canoeing to get somewhere. We are canoeing to enjoy what is around us, what we couldn't have otherwise seen unless we were sloughing. It's funny how this happened at almost every pass. We are conditioned to take every trip as a race; if we are going somewhere, we better get their fuss. It's a good thing we had stops on our trail, otherwise we might have been done an hour early.

As I learned on our expedition, canoeing is completely a team sport. I thought, "I've canoed before, this should be a breeze." I didn't expect to spend the first two hours of the trip trying to train my partner. I spent the morning yelling "Paddle on the other side! Faster! Slower! Back on the other side! Backwards! Slow down!" By the end of the trip it wasn't my arms that were tired, but my throat. I'm glad I wasn't on the front of the canoe, otherwise I would have gotten a taste of the everglades - literally - as my partner did. It was quite humorous to see my partner ferociously paddling directly into small mangrove islands, watching him realize that he was going headfirst into the branches. After twenty or so occurrences, he was conditioned to slow down and look where he's paddling. When we finally got in sync, canoeing became a breeze.

As we began to grasp a mastery of the art of team canoeing, our adventurer's side crept out. As we began to lead the pack, we approached two openings ahead; one with a trail marker, another barren and open. As the little Indiana Jones inside of me began to yell, I told my partner, "head for the right!" Apparently the same Indiana Jones was inside my partner, because without further discussion we were alone and off of the trail. In hindsight, it was very funny to hear the others behind us call out, "Where are you going?" And our reply must have been even funnier, as we cried out, "Don't worry about us, we'll be fine! Just stick to the trail!"

Our egos must have gotten just a little bigger, as we tried to cut through the loop created by the trail. What we didn't think about, was that others before us had gone through this trail, many times and for many years. If the trail markers take you left, there is probably an excellent reason. We discovered this reason quite quickly, as two minutes into our trailblazing course led us to a cove of spike rush, impenetrable mangrove, and the happy voices of the rest of our class just beyond the wall of roots. Desperately, we searched for a little opening to attack, in order to return to our group. From behind, we could hear our professors, calling out to us, "Are you guys o.k.?" The Jones's inside of us got out again, as they yelled, "Yeah! We're fine! Just go ahead!" Finally, we found our opening, just about a foot wide, and still thick, but at least we could see our group beyond it. As we backed up to get impulse into the opening, we preparing to launch ourselves into imminent attack from branches and grass. Lurching into it, we learned first hand why the markers existed, and the great wisdom contained in numbered P.V.C. pipes. Finally, we returned to our expedition group, and found our way to the lead of the pack again. Our next mishap was finding ourselves so far ahead, that we didn't see our leaders anywhere. But this time, behind us we had three other canoes that thought we were the leaders. As sacred as Guy Rule # 2 is, we could not admit to our unknowingly rebellious faction that we were lost. Finding ahead nothing but openings without markers, we decided to go forward. Finally, we found an opening to a pond. We said to ourselves, "This is it! We've made it!" As it turned out, it was not our entrance pond, so we paddled ahead as our worry built. Along the way, we encountered an alligator, but he offered us no help as he went under upon our approach. Finally, another opening appeared at the end of the pond. And, as we advanced through it, we finally found the row of concrete and cars where our adventure began. We made it, and thanked the powers that be that we didn't find ourselves alone in the everglades today because of those pesky Indiana Jones's inside of us.

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Artist Statement

Susanne Diaz-Loar
IDH 4007

Painting in the Everglades has been a wonderful opportunity for me. For me it is of primary importance to draw and paint directly what I see, I never work from photographs or memory.

The sketchbook I have prepared this semester is going to be a helpful guide and reference book in the future. I have entangled myself in the environment out there and it shows especially in the first illustration. In this aquarell the process was more important than the end result: We had been "slough slogging" for hours only to arrive at a cypress stand that seemed wetter than the very wet surroundings. Fallen trees at least gave us the possibility to sit - crouched - for a little while and this is where I started painting the water, the trees, the reflections.

My paper had fallen in the water a couple of times and it was thoroughly wet. Naturally halfway into the project it started raining. When I got home not much of the image had remained, but I find that it shows the feeling and the crampedness of quarter.

The second illustration is aquarell and ink drawing and I think shows the variety of color and form that one encounters in the Everglades. It shows a palm tree engulfed by air plants and vines and in the background a tree eaten by a banyan ficus. All this drama is topped by a South Florida blue sky. I like the contrast that is visually given in this painting. It gives a good idea of what the Everglades are like when one is emersed in them.



Illustration 1



Illustration 4

Click on the thumbnail versions above to view the Illustrations along with the artist's annotations.

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Beyond the City

Michelle Marie Odio
IDH 4007
Professor Machonis
September 12, 1997

The Everglades possesses an "other-wordly" quality that is difficult both to explain and understand. It is one of those places that reminds those of us who live in the "civilized" world that we are only a paved road away from a harsher way of life. In the modern world, we humans mark our achievements and successes according to what we can make and build, like skyscrapers and airplanes. The Everglades has similar achievements: its buildings are the trees that dot the landscape, its airplanes are dragonflies, birds and the other creatures that freely dominate the skies.

I find it amazing that one street, if followed in one direction for enough time, will take you from a bustling, modern city and university to an ancient and solitary wilderness. It is this contrast that most fascinated me during our last meeting. Furthermore, it is this and other contradictions that capture the spirit of the Everglades and, ultimately, ourselves.

Initially, I was intrigued at the thought of enrolling for a class that takes place outside, be it out in the sun and/or out of the classroom. A good friend of mine had spent a summer collecting snails in the Everglades, and though that was not my particular interest, I enjoyed hearing the stories about traipsing through sludge and treating hairline sunburns in the middle of the night. When I learned about this course, I thought I might be able to create similar stories. I was also drawn to the notion of working with my hands and getting physically involved in my work.

The first and last time I went to the Everglades was over fifteen years ago. A vague memory of grass and water was the sum total of my recollections. I figured I was, in some sense, familiar with the terrain. However, nothing could have prepared me for the vastness of it, the way the "River of Grass" fully envelops you and makes you realize that your immediate presence has not truly made any difference. You become merely one of the many living things that daily makes its way through the hammocks. You cannot forget this place, and it does not care to remember you.

Furthermore, it is as though being so far away from daily life and civilization allows you to put aside, and perhaps forget, the conditions that society usually places upon us. While we were riding on the airboat, rain continued to fall at a relatively steady pace. Had I been walking in FIU's parking lot at the time, my thoughts and behavior would have been different. I would have pulled out an umbrella. I would have started walking faster and avoiding the puddles. I would have cursed the gods for not granting me a parking space near the school grounds. I most certainly would not have sat in one of those puddles, tilted my head back, and let the rain fall onto my face and into my mouth. It was as though, at that moment, there was nothing more natural than to enjoy the feel of the water that was falling from the skies.

Additionally, it was also spellbinding to learn about the diversity of the Everglades. Sometimes, we tend to have preconceived notions about something, and no matter how much evidence exists to the contrary, we cannot disprove them to ourselves. I believe that this is true of the Everglades. The two words, "Everglades" and "swamp", were synonymous. I thought of the area as a huge region of mostly mud and nothing else. However, once you actually get there, you see that it is actually bursting with life. If you look at it from afar, it is a landscape dotted with trees; if you study it closely, you find that what was once seemed to be a mere clump of mud is now a thriving plant and animal community.

These are some of the aspects of the Everglades that left real impressions on me. The thought of forming a

part of such a place is extremely enticing. It is an area that helps us understand that the words "nature" and "civilization" do not necessarily stand in contradiction to each other.

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The Everglades: From Beginning to End?
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Thy Fanciful Symmetry

Michelle Marie Odio
IDH 4007
Professor Machonis
September 26, 1997

The concept of balance, of symmetry and compatibility, is found everywhere in our daily lives. We like to know that actions have reactions, that left is accompanied by right, and that death is tempered by life. While we were on the Anhinga Trail last Friday, we took notice of one of these royal birds, perched in her dramatic, though unmistakable, pose. She regarded us casually, but was not as fascinated by us as we were by her. Not a feather moved out of place, not a muscle strained as she continued to sun herself, basking in the warm light of the Florida sun.

One moment later, we saw the anhinga spear a fish with her beak. I shuddered upon realizing how ineffectual my own skin would have been if I had been on the receiving end of that piercing stab. As crimson-tinted blood poured out of the fish, the anhinga ate it, taking that life and making it into her own. This give and take appeared to be present everywhere, and we had wandered through only a relatively small area of the Everglades. At all times, and without cessation, a new entity arose to replace one that was on its way out. Even as one leaf falls off of a branch, another grows in its place; as the bark of a tree peels away, new bark emerges from beneath.

Audubon himself, in one of the first readings for this class, was described as a man who was forced to find, within himself, a balance. Perhaps it was his own need to create a symmetry among the varying aspects of his life that made him so well-suited to the Everglades. Audubon was always caught in a struggle to find a niche that incorporated his many identities as an explorer in The 'Glades. He was often, though not exclusively, a hunter, an artist, a nature lover, and a scientist. Similarly, much of the wildlife that we came across during our last outing was also caught in a balancing act, as though it were trying to discover its true nature. Is the Everglades wildlife best described as a place of hunters or an area of art? Like Audubon, it is an amalgam of all of the four previously mentioned characteristics.

Indeed, the aforementioned encounter between the anhinga and the fish, or the predatory flight of a pelican swooping into the water to capture its meal depicts the Everglades as an exhibition of the relations between a hunter and its prey. Furthermore, it is equally impressive to view the absolute grace, beauty, and accuracy of a flock of birds involved in a seemingly impossible aerial maneuver. We may marvel at humanity's aerial accomplishments, but nothing comes close to the accomplishments wrought by the hand of nature. Watching these winged creatures create invisible patterns in the air with their wings is akin to watching an artist's paintbrush stroke over the bare face of a blank canvas.

Perhaps, to complete this fragile balance, and to extend our description and perception of "nature," we must also realize that it is humans who comprise the other two categories. It is we who are the nature lovers: we create and buy books and binoculars to gaze at and study wildlife; we do what we can to protect the wilderness that surrounds us. Additionally, it is we who are the scientists, seeing true potential in lifeforms that appear so utterly different from our own. We realize that by learning more about the wild we will also undoubtedly recognize something within and about ourselves. As such, the Everglades is not solely a place where the wildlife dominates and humans must take a secondary role.

The four aforementioned characteristics, or "people" inhabited Audubon. He was at all times either exclusively or combined, a hunter, an artist, a scientist, or a nature lover. These aspects represent not only the conflictive, though complementary aspects of one man, but rather the qualities that make up these Everglades and, ultimately, life.

We have all heard expressions regarding "nature's delicate balance." We may disregard it as merely a saying, but it does not change the fact that it is stating a fact that is generally true. However, it does not apply solely to cycles of life and death. It encompasses aspects of beauty and of curiosity as well. Perhaps more importantly, it makes room for people, who often appear to forget that they too are parts of and play roles in nature.

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One Step Forward, Two Back

Michelle Marie Odio
IDH 4007
Professor Machonis
11/7/97

The Everglades area is a lonely one. For every person you meet, there are scores of plants and animals to help you remember that you are not the sole proprietor of the River of Grass. However, as far as people go, their presence within the Everglades is a true rarity. For those who must remain here, but also need human contact this place can be hell: nothing but miles upon miles of water and sawgrass as company. Everything around you can become a threat to your existence: every sway of the sawgrass, every sound made by a bird as it calls to its own, is an attempt to wrest you from your safety. Yet, for those who seek to flee the trouble and rigors of "civilized" life, these threats are more than simply a tolerable burden. They would rather be surrounded by the screeching of birds, by the roar of the wind, than the hustle and bustle of a city.

The history of the Everglades is fraught with stories of men who sought refuge within the cypress trees and palm fronds of the River of Grass. The area was populated by a curious mix of Indians, black ex-slaves, and white men. The Indians were seeking to maintain their culture intact from the encroachment of the white men, and moved into the Everglades: they were initially the only people who knew the secrets of the area and the secrets to life there. Runaway slaves, who had fled their imprisoned lives, went to the Everglades searching for a freedom that had always been denied them. Oddly, there were also white men in the Everglades: their rejection of society and its rules had driven them to the area. Outcasts in another world, in the Everglades they were just another group of people seeking to live out their lives in the way that they wished to do so.

Living in an area so obviously hostile to human life must ingrain certain attitudes, beliefs, and fears into those who attempted to do so. For men who had so much to run from, having others surrounding them, whether or not they were in similar circumstances, was threatening. People who exist in vulnerable circumstances are constantly on the lookout for situations that could become menacing to them. For the characters in *Killing Mr. Watson*, Mr. Watson himself was a living embodiment of those threats that left them feeling vulnerable. He was everything that they feared. His presence, though one much like their own, imperiled their lives. His life, though innocuous in and of itself, seemed to hold them back. Despite the fact that they generally tended to like him, every step he took forward made those who surrounded him feel as though they were being pushed further back. For those of us who travelled across Taylor Slough last Friday, it is easy to understand how situations that are beyond our control can drastically affect our own situations.

Every step taken through the muck is an exercise in which someone must become aware of his or her own body. Every step takes on more meaning than simply away by which to propel yourself forward. For every step, you must acquire balance and strength in order to avoid toppling over into the water. However, time is against you, since the longer you stay rooted in one position, the more difficult it is to extricate yourself from the mire that closes in around your feet and ankles. The footsteps of those who trudged ahead of you beat a path for you to follow, but they also leave indentations in the soft ground beneath which further hinder your efforts to move ahead. This is what Mr. Watson represented to his neighbors: he blazed a path that many were eager and willing to follow, but with someone that they were not sure they wanted to become seriously entangled with. The fact that he aided them and allowed them to move forward was counterbalanced by their fear of him, and their belief that he could permanently stop their efforts to survive in this wilderness. Out in the wild, the presence of one man was more of a threat to their existence than the unknown shadows that surrounded their lives in the Everglades.

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The Everglades: From Beginning to End?
[FIU Honors Seminar IDH 4007](#)

An in Depth Look at Taylor Slough, About One Foot in Depth!!!

Ryon Plancer

IDH 4007: Intruccion to the Everglades
Due Date: 11-7-97

I was looking forward to October 31, not only because it was Halloween, but also because I was going slough slogging through Taylor slough with my everglades class. I was not sure what to expect slough slogging to be, I only knew that it sounded like alot of fun. Upon arrival at the Main Visitor Center an unexpected guest showed up, so I knew I was in for an adventure. I had thought that Mr. Watson was killed some time ago, but he was standing right in the center of the room, knife in hand prepared for anything. After piling into a few cars we drove a half a mile through a dirt road to our entering point on Taylor Slough. I felt privileged to be able to slough slog through Taylor slough after the ranger had informed us that very few visitors get to do this. My journey into the slough is one I will not soon forget, vivid pictures of the following still race through my head: the scenery; the struggle; my yearning for dry land.

As we submerged into the slough I quickly noticed the many vast mats of periphyton lying on the water, they almost seemed to be giving a resting place for the abundance of sawgrass growing about. As we started our trek through the muck and water I began to pity those few students who did not heed the warning and wore shorts into the slough.

Slogging through dense algae, water, and mud starts to take its toll after a while. Between the water and algae my feet felt as if they weighed a ton. While slogging through the huge plain of sawgrass and periphyton I began gasping for air as my feet were giving in. Finally I decided to wallow in the periphyton ridden waters for a few minutes to rest up, oddly enough I think I was the only one to take a seat on the mats of algae. I guess no one wanted to get wet and mucky, the laugh was on them though. Upon entering a hammock for lunch just about every student fell into the water hole in front of the trees, I even had to help a few people out of the hole. By the time we arrived in the hammock, however, we had already lost one or two students who decided they couldn't make it and turned back.

My lunch consisted of sitting on a fallen cypress log eating some fruits. The first log I sat on was quite unsteady, in fact it cracked a few times as Prof. Machonis moved about along its length trying to find a good seat. Although I didn't have much to eat, I relished every bit of my food as I shuddered to think about the trek back. The scenery was actually breathe taking as I began to notice it. This hammock reminded me of some of the paintings of Prof. James Couper, and even of some of the precious photographs from Clyde Butcher. Its fascinating how these huge Cypress trees flourished in the pool of water below. As lunch came to an end my much dreaded journey back to land was about to take place.

From the onset of the way back I was scoping out my car like sea explorers searching for land. The terrain was not consistent, some spots were deep with water and others where high in sawgrass. The only thing that remained consistent was that every step began to be a struggle. Once my car was finally in my vision a silent sigh of relief passed through me as I whispered 'Car Sweet Car.' As I stepped out of the slough I ran for the cooler to drink some much needed water. My 'in depth' exploration of the everglades and Taylor Slough in particular is a memory that will stay with me for quite some time.

One thing I realized during this expedition was that slough slogging was not for me. I felt like I had lost 20 pounds when the journey was complete. My hands were lacerated in several different areas from that horrendous sawgrass. The various little creatures lurking about such as water spiders and crayfish were

easy to ignore, I left them alone and they left me alone. I guess the reason that this event became so treacherous for me is because of my bronchial condition, I was gasping for air so much that I wasn't able to fully enjoy the surrounding beauty. I won't forget the swamp like hammock that we ate lunch in though, that was a beautiful site to behold. I even had a snail trek across my leg on its way across one of the logs. Although I was truly relieved when the day was over I was happy to be able to accomplish something that very few visitors do, the ranger said that maybe one in a thousand visitors get to slog across the everglades like we did. I wonder if Mr. Watson is going to show up again next class session, we are going to meet in Chokoloskee and the 10,000 islands, a place Mr. Watson should be quite familiar with. I know that it will definitely not be as physical and exhilarating as my slough slogging adventure, but when I think about it maybe that is a good thing.

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