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New Day

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eat away at my self-esteem, love now rushes to fill it up. I'm not the only one who notices this internal shift. Two significant changes to my life out here are just around the bend.

The first adjustment is the transfer of the program to the Oregon High Desert. This is done in late August to prepare for the coming fall and winter seasons. While I relish the rare chance to listen to music in the truck on the way, I recognize how much I've come to love these woods. However, soon after we arrive in the desert, I am "promoted" to Water Phase. This is a privilege not every participant will receive. I am granted a "crazy creek" camping chair to use around camp. Additionally, I am allowed more ownership in how the group is run. This includes leading my first hike, charting the course beforehand and navigating with a compass as we go. On this hike, or rather as we finish the hike, I see something I will carry with me forever. The golden rays of the setting sun give way to a pink splash of brilliance behind a cliff seemingly as wide as the earth itself. Overlooking a deep dried lake bed the night sky opens up with a starlight show that imprints my memory like a tattoo. Streaks of illumination tear the tapestry in two at a rate of unimaginable business. We lay down in the dirt and watch it for hours. Later, I will look back and understand this to be the annual Perseid meteor shower. That night, it was pure magic.

Nine long weeks have passed since I first arrived in the woods of Oregon. It's been almost twice as long as

I expected to be out here. While I appreciate many of the unique things I've experienced here, I'm ready to leave. Before I do, I'm "promoted" once again to Air Phase. This is rare, and it's a privilege of mine to receive this honor. I am granted an air mattress to sleep on, and given the opportunity to request one meal from base camp. Since I came out here, I have craved a Philly cheesesteak. Sloppy as possible, loaded up with mushrooms and onions, it's better than I could have possibly imagined. I don't stop licking my lips for an hour after finishing.

Finally, my time to leave has come. The best 10 weeks of my life I never want to do again has come to a close. I've spent hours preparing for altogether fifteen minutes of time on a satellite phone with my family to plan my next step. For me, this means choosing a sober house in Boulder, Colorado. Oh yeah, did I forget to mention why I went to the wild? I was arrested for DWI, but that's the least important part of this story.

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