

An Excursion by Alan Piowar

"Wait for me!" I screamed. Sarah and I would go on those weekend excursions, adventures, really, into the nature that surrounded our little area of life. When she wanted to escape the hustle and bustle of city life, and when I needed a getaway from my mundane life as "Alan: super-cripple extraordinaire," we would go mostly to the beaches and sand dunes of Northwest Indiana, and sometimes further. Sarah was a paralegal, and the daughter of an Irish Southern Baptist Minister Father, and a Korean dressmaker mother. I was the only son of a single-mother who tried her best, and the brother of an evil twin sister who for a while I loathed, but now love more than ever. When we took this particular adventure, we were both nearing 30 and both unaware of the changes our lives would soon take.

At 21, I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. I had to learn how to walk all over again, use a cane, and adjust to life sleeping in diapers cause my bladder all of a sudden developed a mind of its own. Sarah was a swimmer in high school and always kept herself in shape. So, there I was 50 feet behind Sarah, nearing the top of this sand dune we were climbing. We had driven this time from our south suburban area of Chicago a few hours into Michigan to Warren Dunes state park to celebrate our favorite holiday at the time: 4:20! I'd finally make it to the top of the hill, and Sarah and I rest for a minute before heading into this wooded area on top of the huge dune we just scaled.

We find a path and head into the woodsy area on top of the dune and hike on for about 200 feet when Sarah decided, "O.K., this looks like a good spot!" I look around and she is standing in a small clearing in the forest that is covered with these curious bright green vines sprouting up, across it. I take a closer look. "Sarah," I say, "didn't you ever see that episode of the Simpsons where Lisa Simpson says 'leaves of three let it be?' I'm about 95 percent sure that you are standing in the middle of a patch of poison ivy."

Sarah, being like the 2nd or 3rd in our high school graduating class, having put herself through paralegal studies at Robert Morris, and being able to type 99 words per minute accurately, responds to me – the high school dropout who went back to get his GED, but didn't finish college, "Alan – if this was poison ivy, would I do this?" Before "this" can finish on her lips. Sarah has pulled up a handful of the bright green vines, crinkled and rolled them in her hands like she was preparing to apply a lotion, and proceeded to put this lotion on the exposed skin of her body: her face, her neck, her hands, and her arms. "There," she continued, "nothing!"

"Alright," I say, "but I'm going to sit over here, outside of the poison ivy!" So she sits in her poison nest. I sit 5 or 6 feet away from it, and we pack a bowl and toké up. We sit and chat for about 4 to 5 minutes, pack another bowl, and the entire time we sit and shoot-the-shit about life, it's meaning, and where we are headed, Sarah continues to pick and dissect the leaves of this green viney plant, ruining the ground in the clearing she chose to sit in until we decide it's time to go.

We walk back in the direction from whence we came and break out of the trees and stand at the edge of the sand dune we had just climbed up an hour or so earlier, and Sarah says, "Let's roll down the hill!" The inner child in me agrees and after making sure all of our belongings are safe and secure inside our messenger bags, we throw them down the sandy hill before we throw ourselves down and begin rolling. Rolling stoned down a huge sand dune when

you're nearing 30 takes you back to being a child – if only for 5 to 6 seconds. For those of you seeking a time-traveling device, this is the closest I've ever come to it.

We reach the bottom of the sand dune, brush as much of it off of us as we can, and head toward the car to say goodbye to the Michigan shore of Lake Michigan.

On the way back home, we decide to stop at our favorite Applebee's outside of our neighborhood to eat good. Over the spinach and artichoke dip appetizer, Sarah says, "I can't wait to get home and upload these pictures." I say, "Me neither," and Sarah and I enjoy dinner and then she drops me off at home before heading back to her apartment on the North shore of the city.

I get in the house after smoking another bowl, decide a nap is in order since it could be a few hours til Sarah gets in, showers, gets ready for bed, then uploads the pictures of our excursion.

I wake up around midnight and check social media. Nothing from Sarah yet. Maybe she got side-tracked with her big friend Matt.

Still nothing from Sarah at like 3 am, so I decide to go back to bed. The next morning I wake up and check for notifications.

Sarah has posted.

"This is probably the only time I will say this, but I should have listened to Alan," her post reads. Following the post are not pictures of us at the dunes, but pictures of my best friend Sarah looking like a nightmare Tamagachi balloon at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade. Her fair complexion held out as long as it could against the "it's not poison ivy" ivy, and then not only was she itching and scratching, the poor dear had to go to the emergency room to have steroid injections to help the swelling. Sarah had once told me the terms "hobak" and "Mal-song" were very insulting to Korean people, meaning pumpkinhead and horseface, but there was Sarah, the epitome of a pumpkin head. If she ever reads this story, she will probably laugh, then want to kill me for having it published. But to this day, I've never thrown it in her face. I miss you, Sarah!