

Dreamland: Essays – A creative nonfiction writing collection
Jack Tarlton, Class of 2020

This summer I worked to draft a portfolio of essays about various people and communities across California. This work is important to me as a native to the state, because I feel that most media fails to capture the diversity of California experiences. Joan Didion's *White Album* is one of the few pieces of work which looks underneath the sun-tanned Californian surface. Didion wrote about big Hollywood money and the California waterworks and the abandoned governor's mansion in Sacramento. Her work is honest and straightforward. In that spirit, I wrote to show California the way I see it. A complicated place. When people think of California, they think of Los Angeles, they think of the movies and the beaches and the sun-tanned rollerbladers in Venice Beach. Some may think of San Francisco and tech startups and real-estate prices. These stereotypes aren't wrong. They're just a tad simplistic. So, to try and throw a bit of a monkey's wrench into the popular mythos of California, I've written four essays over the course of the summer. I wrote about mental health challenges and ultradistance cycling in Oceanside California. I wrote about a documentary crew trying to capture ultradistance cycling races. I wrote about wildfires and mudslides in Santa Barbara, and I wrote about crystal people in West Hollywood.

My first two essays were written together and revolve around my father's attempt to finish the Race Across America (RAAM). The Race Across America is a 3,070 miles solo bike race which begins in Oceanside, California and ends in Annapolis, Maryland. The race must be completed within twelve days. The race is incredibly grueling. Several people have died in the attempt. Only half of all cyclist who enter are projected to finish, and those who do finish are expected to ride their bike over 250 miles a day while sleeping less than three hours a night. My father undertook RAAM, in part, as a way to conquer his depression through extreme force of will. He uses exercise as a way to fix himself. The essay then, is an exploration of the manic drive that surrounds the fight against mental health in my family and in our larger Californian community.

The documentary essay is the RAAM essay's twin. That essay looks to identify the impacts that my father's cycling has had on my mother. My father, in his fight his against his own brain, put himself in a scary and dangerous situation. People have died on RAAM. The race is a million pedal strokes long and its impossible for everything to go perfectly. My mother used the lens of a documentary camera to participate in the RAAM experience while staying removed from the chaos. It is painful to watch someone you love suffer. It is harder still to know that this what they wanted. I used this essay to capture what I see to be the consequences of my father's pursuit of his goals. Which, in turn, fits well into an exploration of the California mythos as a place where people go to pursue their dreams.

The Santa Barbara essay sought to describe the mystical reverence I feel towards rain. As the California drought lasted, wildfires raged up and down the coastline. Rains of ash became not unusual and I remember stopping classes in high school to play in the real rain when it came. However, in 2018, a storm caused mudslide in Santa Barbara which killed dozens of people. This essay explores the tense relationship I see between California and rain.

Finally, the crystal essay investigates the growing community of Los Angeles millennials who have become enchanted with the healing powers of crystals and universal energies. The essay explores the viewpoints of these crystal people and argues that their faith is not so different from the traditional religions that are so ubiquitous in western societies. An old religion with a new face.

This has been a great opportunity and a productive summer. I look forward to working this research into an honors project this coming year.

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