

Reina Gonzales

Ann and Roy Hike and Bike Trail

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Morning: As we arrive at the trail I am aware that there is a large influx of people taking advantage of the public space. The energy feels a bit chaotic and crowded, everyone is eager to get in their daily regiment of exercise. The traffic on the trail is a continuous stream of runners, bikers, walkers, families, friends, cross country teams, college student powerwalkers, old men biking clubs, senior citizen walking sessions, young professional joggers, and many more who all seem to make up the trail never ending flow. As we reach the off leash portion of the trail, we come to a rocky beach where owners launch balls into the river and dogs swim out retrieve them. It is a heartwarming experience to see an eager dog watch their owners every move, carefully calculating how far the ball will end up, and how fast they can meet it with their drooly mouths. I could stay and watch all day. I consider bringing treats on my next visit so that I could maybe coax one of the cute fluffy ones away, but I decide that that is probably not the best idea since it may upset the owner.

Afternoon: This time I arrive alone. The sun is sinking lower behind the glass buildings that line the banks of the river. Giving the air a pinkish glow and even the orange gravel under my feet looks a little more pleasant in this light. The traffic has settled a bit but it is still at a pretty high flow. I follow the trail ahead of me and stop to to admire the river. Being alone allows you to concentrate and reflect in a way that being with company can not. When you are alone it is easier to notice those around. You begin to focus on the people and their stories. Where is that man coming from in his suit? How long has that couple been together? When did

that family move to austin, or have they always been here? Being alone you begin to realize that you are an individual made from life experiences, that everyone around you is an individual too, and that you can never truly know all of someone. I think in our busy lives, this is something that we forget. That we are not the only people in the world. That the person you see at the grocery store, or the person who takes your order at the drive through window, are not extras in the movie about you. They are all people too and they make up the world, your county, your city, or your neighborhood trail, just as much as you.

Night: The gravel rhythmically crunches under our feet as we walk in no apparent direction, just following the path that is in front of us. Our footsteps sound louder in the dark. This is the first time I have attended the park at night and the usual flow of energy has dulled being replaced by the increasing flow of the creatures who come alive in the night. Frogs sound as we stop to look out at the water. Their chirps soothing and constant. A lone little boat floats across the river. The light inside reflects on the protective plastic cover meant to keep its guests warm on the somewhat winter night. It looks like a glowing lamp floating on a stream. If you listen hard enough you can hear it, the water gurgles as it drives by, and the muffled laughs and conversation of the passengers fill the air. You can hear everything better at night. We continue walking listening to the accelerated crunch from the joggers steps and whoosh of the bikes as they pass by on the path. Though there is far less traffic on the trail at night, it is hardly abandoned. We make our way to the water fountain and the outdoor gym. Noting the difference in the sounds our feet give off as we step on the rubber tarmac. The usual crunch is now replaced with hollow beat. With each step the floor gives to the pressure of our movements. I find my way to the underneath of the bridge. I am drawn to the reflections of the ghostly columns and how

they sprout from the water. Little knobby roots edge along the water creating yet another intriguing reflection. The deep sound of the repetitive traffic overhead creates the slow drum beat to accompany the singing crickets. Under the bridge sound reflects and is mutated. Everything echos and our hearing is intensified. We can hear the laughter of a family playing soccer in the distant field, muffled conversation and the occasional shriek of laughter from passing hikers. In the distance we pause as a church bell chimes marking the 9 o'clock hour. I didn't know there was even a church nearby. A few young guys dressed in all black huddle under the bridge and the sudden twinge of a sour, burnt smell fills our noses. It's hard to cover my annoyance as think about the fact that they are the ones who give peaceful places such as these a bad reputation. This trail is a shared space with people and nature, with people of different backgrounds, rich, and poor. Between people who call it a home, and people who call it a park. A park is a shared space, and a shared space should be respected.

In the short time that I have studied this park I have come to understand many things. But I believe that important ideas I have taken away from the trail are to find joy in the simple things, like throwing a ball to a dog, and to remember that you are not the only person in the world and therefore respect those around you. The trail is a moving energy it ebbs and flows and it is made up of the environment and the memories of the people and animals who use it, its important to preserve this experience and ebery for everyone to have the opportunity to use this shared space.