

4-30-2019

An Odd Fear of Wind

Rachael Seymour

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/oval>

Recommended Citation

Seymour, Rachael (2019) "An Odd Fear of Wind," *The Oval*: Vol. 12 : Iss. 2 , Article 25.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/oval/vol12/iss2/25>

This Prose is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Oval by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.

AN ODD FEAR OF WIND

Rachael Seymour

Growing up in the shadow of Glacier National Park, I've become familiar with the different regions and hiking paths and, despite its popularity, the trail to Avalanche Lake has always been an old favorite. Simple and quick, the majority of the walk is completely shaded in pines and cedars, the floor carpeted in moss and with rivers and streams running down the mountains. I've been up there enough times that most of the trips blend together, save for one trip a few years ago. When my family heard an avalanche had knocked down some trees along the path during the winter, me, my dad and brother Luke decided to check it out later that spring.

We got out of the car and were instantly greeted by gusts of unusually strong wind. I looked up at the waving trees that shaded the first part of the trail and my spine stiffened.

Since I was little, I've had an irrational fear of certain things moving uncontrollably in the wind. Flags, wind chimes, tent flaps, laundry hung out to dry. God help me if I see balloon men in car lots. Anything larger than my hand moving in the wind sends my brain into a panic, and I'm either desperately trying to remove it from its current environment, weigh it down, or remove myself and try to forget the image I just saw. Once when I was seven, my parents tried to fix it by standing with me out on the porch in the middle of a rainstorm while eating ice cream, watching our wind chime get tossed around.

They would smile reassuringly and call out over the frantic chiming, "See? It's nothing to be afraid of!" All I could do was tearfully gnaw at my cookies n' cream bar and stare at my shoes. I couldn't eat ice cream for almost a year after that.

As we began our hike, the intensity of the wind picked up, taking my anxiety with it. My stomach twisted in knots as I kept my eyes on my feet. Embarrassment burned at my face. I wanted to leave.

The wind tore through the trees, causing them to sway and creak loudly. I thought of debris among the branches being pulled free and crashing onto our heads. As if he knew what I was thinking, Dad called out from behind, "Don't worry. The woods here are thick enough that not a lot can get by. Just be alert." The warning was meant to combine with his reassurance and form a well-organized Dad Statement, but instead shoved the comfort entirely out of my head and filled it with entire logs plunging through the canopy and crushing me.

We continued hiking through the mountains. It wasn't tourist season

yet, and the wind and weather kept locals from joining us. The few hikers we did see coming down the trail smiled encouragingly and told us to be careful crossing “The Gap.”

Suddenly, the usual tunnel of green broke open. To our left, hundreds of felled trees surrounded us and swept down into the pooled valley below before draining out between two mountains. The mountains themselves towered over us, their peaks hidden from shredded rain clouds. Waterfalls trickled down their sides before the wind whipped them up into mist and carried it away. The avalanche that occurred over the winter had punched a massive opening into the thick forest, revealing a view no one had ever seen before since the trail was created. This was “The Gap”. For the first time, a feeling of excitement welled up and overtook my fear. It really felt like we had stumbled onto something special. Even my dad, a cautious man who isn’t one to stop in awe, couldn’t help but stare and take pictures of dissolving waterfalls.

The wind began to howl, and the trees shook unlike anything I’ve seen that day. I looked out into the valley and watched the trees arc in our direction. The realization dawned on me as wind funneled its way up the side of the mountain, towards The Gap and the mess of broken timber. We were standing right in its path, with another fifteen feet to get to the other side. This hit my dad at the same time.

“Go quickly!” He shouted just as the wall hit us.

Dust and branches flew up against us. We ran down the path, trying not to trip and protect our heads. I could hear something heavy and dead cracking below, preparing its own flight course. I looked up just in time to see a chunk of wood almost as long as my arm fly right by me. I froze for a moment, trying to register what happened before I managed to lurch forward again, stumbling until I was back under cover.

We stood for a moment, trying to catch our breath. My body shook as images of the massive plank looped in my head. Even Luke, as relaxed as he can be, stared wide-eyed at the opening as branches were thrown across the path we were standing on moments before. He was bleeding a little after something caught him in the ear. After inspecting it and giving him a water bottle to clean it with, Dad stood and looked at us with his hands on his hips and eyebrows raised in determination. My heart sank. It wasn’t the pose of someone ready to turn around.

“Ok! Good hustle, guys,” Dad heaved before continuing on. Luke and I glanced at each other. Not even the near death of his only daughter and the maiming of one of his sons was enough to make us head back.

We continued down the path, with me understanding that we could actually die out here, and my dad still determined to keep moving.

“Just think of how cool it’ll look when we get up there.” He would remind us as we climbed over yet another fallen log on the path. I decided that Dad went mad from the misting waterfalls and was willing to kill off half his offspring in order to get the pictures he wanted.

The trees continued to snap and creak and soon rain began to pour on us. There were no more hikers to encourage us as we trudged further in mud.

The trees slowly gave away to tall, swaying underbrush: a sign that we were only a few more minutes away from the lake. Mud turned to deep puddles.

We reached the outer ring of scrawny pines that hid the final reveal of our destination. We quickly passed through them, dodging any wild branches trying to scratch our faces.

I stood on the beach remains of Avalanche Lake. On a normal day, a stretch of rocky beach would splay out for hikers to wander and rest on. At the mouth of the lake, a conglomerate of dead trees gathered. But now the lake was swollen with melting snow, swallowing everything up. The normal crystal-blue water was now an oval of grey-green water churning in its place. Murky water lapped at my shoes several feet closer than where it should've been. The dead trees were only a couple floating logs, the rest submerged beneath. On the other side, a curved wall of rock loomed above me with waterfalls pouring down its face. Massive snow drifts still clung to the sides, juxtaposing the green trees and grass just beneath it. Rain clouds, blindingly bright from holding back the sun, curled along the edges and threatened more rain. Gusts of strong winds seem to burst out from everywhere and nowhere at once.

I sat down on a tree root, amazed at what I saw. It was as if we had come to the source of all my weather-related troubles that day. I unpacked sandwiches and passed them around, unable to look away from the scene. Wind whipped around us as if it no longer had a direction to follow. The rain stopped and the sun shone down, briefly warming our faces. Despite my frayed nerves, I couldn't help but smile back up into the sky. "Pretty cool, right?" My dad pulled out his camera. I nodded and smiled as he took pictures of the lakes, the waterfalls, and me eating.

The wind continued to blow the whole way back until we were down in the valley once more. And though I never got over my odd fear, I'll never forget the odd sense of peace I had in that moment sitting with the air lifting my hair, rustling waves and shredding clouds.