

Another recent upset happened here at VU. The men's soccer team barely squeaked into the conference tournament with three wins. Despite their record and despite playing the second best team in the conference, VU pulled through with two wins to win the Mid-Con Conference tournament. This allowed them a chance to get into the NCAA tournament.

Sports have many attractive elements. The unpredictability and underdog factor help make sports one of the most popular forms of entertainment in the world.

## STABBING WESTWARD

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The Wild West is a window to America's glorious past. It is a place that has gone unchanged. It is a place so vast, so bare, and so lifeless, that one has only one's thoughts to resort to. This utter solitude has begged many to go west. It has scared most away. Few, however, have answered this call of the wild. But I braved the West's reputation as a land of cowboys, Indians, and gunslingers, and I traveled into this wild blue yonder. For I knew that a place where I can drive a hundred miles per hour, gamble (though not legally), and witness the most beautiful scenery in the world, was the place for me.

My Dad and I left for the airport on a crisp, late winter morning. I sat in the backseat and cast a sullen glance out the frosted window. A sense of budding anticipation blossomed in my stomach. In the back of my mind, I tried to recreate the exhilaration of taking off in a jet, but my memory failed me. The automatic doors spread jerkily open, and I realized that I had entered a world of perpetual rush-hour. The swarms of hustling businessmen engulfed me, and I searched for my Dad's eyes for guidance. His glare offered me no answers, so I just went with the flow like a twig on a mighty stream.

The commotion finally ceased once I got on the plane, and my thoughts focused towards the climactic rush of a plane taking off. All of my energy flowed out of me after the take-off, and I fell asleep out of pure

exhaustion. After a groggy sleepwalk through O'Hare Airport, another plane carried me west. We touched down in San Diego, and my uncle was there to greet us. We said our hellos and hopped into the car. On Highway 5, we sped north towards his home. We reached my uncle's home in approximately an hour. It lay in the shadowy valleys of Mount Palomar and the sun cast a golden glow to the pines high on the mountain. But deep in my heart, I knew that this was not the true West. People ruled nature here, and in the true West, nature ruled the people. It took me a while to find what I was looking for.

A few days passed, and I thanked my uncle for letting us stay in his luxurious home. And as suddenly as it started, we were gone. My Dad and I trekked north on Interstate 15 and around noon we skimmed the eastern edge of Los Angeles. A large brown globe of smog hugged the city. I gagged at the thought of breathing in that sticky concoction of auto exhaust, industry smoke, and burning trees. We pressed on and after what seemed like a month we rolled into Las Vegas, low on gas and starving.

Las Vegas is the center of all evil in the world. Many hard-working men come into it grasping dreams of wealth, then leave penniless and heartbroken. The lights flickered and flashed, and slot machines tolled. I had a sense of artificial mayhem converging around me. My dad got twenty bucks of quarters and ventured off into certain defeat. I did the only sort of gambling an underage person can do; I gingerly stepped to the video game arcade. I couldn't figure out why I felt so out of place, and then it hit me. I was the only person in the arcade over the age of ten. Suddenly, I was sickened by the thought of Las Vegas as a "complete family vacation." Young kids here on vacation! In my opinion, Las Vegas is not a place for children. I was eighteen years old and I was having trouble handling it. I buried myself in a two dollar snow skiing video game. Twelve dollars later, I was pissed off and bored. My Dad seemed to have worse money management skills than I did. He came back from the slot machines with nothing to show for it except for an empty change cup. At least I learned the fundamentals of snow skiing.

If you like to eat, Las Vegas is the place for you. Since the casinos count on you losing money, they discount the food to entice the potential gambler. I got to consume a ninety-nine cent jumbo shrimp cocktail. I forked out a dollar ninety-nine for an all-you-can-eat buffet. After twenty-two chicken nuggets, a tossed salad, rolls, tapioca pudding, and roast beef, that was all I could eat. My gut bulged to immense proportions, and calmly I unbuttoned my jean shorts. I needed all the space I could get.

I couldn't wait to leave the neon, plastic, phony, death trap that is Las Vegas. I wanted to experience the fruits of nature, so we packed up

our rental car and coasted northeast on Interstate 15. I took a quick glance up at a speed limit sign and I did a double take. It said, "75 MPH." Out of shock I exclaimed, "Whoopee! Seventy-five miles an hour!" I must have sounded like Doc Brown from *Back to the Future*. My Dad said cops are so few that you could travel as fast as you wished. The speedometer settled around a hundred. Cars were still passing us.

The skies in eastern Nevada and western Utah were the biggest I had ever seen. The large rock formations shone orange, red, and rust in the daylight. We stopped in Kanab, Utah, for the night. At the hotel front desk, I met a beautiful, soft Mormon girl named Ananda. In the fall, she was going to attend Weber State. She was nice, but I could tell that she took only a passing interest in me. I cried silently inside. After a filling dinner at a Chinese restaurant, I watched *Seinfeld* and forgot about Ananda and my other problems. It was still early, so I went out to take a long soak in the Jacuzzi. As I was burning off the skin on my legs while easing slowly underwater, I saw Ananda walking towards me. A spontaneous flow of testosterone filled me, and I involuntarily puffed out my chest in a show of manhood. It was only a false alarm; she was just emptying out the front desk trash in the dumpster. Yet again, I cried silently inside. I settled back into the scalding water.

The next day I had a realization. I hadn't really discovered the West I pictured in my head. My Dad and I drove south in hopes of seeing the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. The road was blocked off by a bunch of signs. The Grand Canyon was closed until May 15th because of snow. "How can they close the Grand Canyon?" I wondered. As Clark Griswold said in *Vacation*, "It's just the biggest damn hole in the Earth!" How could they close off a hole? Though our spirits were dampened, we traveled back north to Zion National Park in Utah. A narrow, windy road led us skyward. I felt a little uncomfortable driving along a road without a guardrail, where one mistake could turn into a one-thousand-foot plunge of death. Surprisingly, my Dad's questionable driving skills managed to get us to safety. We got out of the car and walked along a rocky trail. I came to a clearing and I stared into the sky. It was the richest blue I could imagine. Surely Crayola couldn't capture this color with a crayon. I felt like I was in my element. There were no cowboys, Indians, or gunslingers. As I sat on top of a mountain, a wave of serenity filled my soul. I was one with nature.

The drive back to the Las Vegas signified the end of my vacation, and I felt sad. The tumbleweed spun impulsively across the empty highway, and we drove in silence to the airport. I couldn't formulate anything to say. Instinctively, my Dad and I both reached for the radio dial at the same time to cover up quiet. The theme song from *The Dukes*

*of Hazard* echoed throughout our rental car. Even the upcoming jet take-off could not lift my spirits. I knew that once I left the West, the seed to return would be planted. It would grow and grow and urge me westward. The memories have faded since that trip, but the force driving me West is as strong as ever.