

Nature & Self

Nature is something people believe to be an experience that is universally loved. Something that everyone can explore. Whenever someone is stressed, they are encouraged to go and take a walk to clear their mind. But I have never found nature welcoming.

The paths that people take are not made for me; they are bumpy, they are steep, they are climbing mountains. The world is not made to be a flat, smooth, steady incline with one foot per inch. And I know this.

When I go to these places, I am prepared for disappointment. I know the world has not thought of me, and that includes my peers and mentors. I am constantly placed in settings that push against my comfort, in the worst ways possible. *You can go down that hill, right? You can go up that lip, right? Your chair can go through snow, right?*

They claim to have thought of me in advance, and immediately back down whenever their plans are foiled by my existence. *We've never had a student like you before.* Bullshit. I've been here the entire time, been a part of the planning committee, been involved in creating the playlist.

It doesn't do well to dwell on these instances, because when I do, it sends me into a fiery rage.

Instead, I find solace in my books. When I find myself feeling down, disappointed, left out, I go to a bookstore. Which is often.

There's something about wandering through the aisles without a sense of purpose, without any expectations set on me, that truly makes me feel seen. Seen as a reader, and nothing else. The people in a bookstore don't expect me to be anything, except maybe a costumer.

The smell of freshly printed pages envelops me the moment I enter a bookstore. I know I am in a safe space. Under firmly pressed carpet, wooden floors creak with every movement, and under my chair it almost makes it even more special. The almost-silence creates a sense of ease.

I clutch the stack of books on my leg as I weave through the aisles, my rule is I can only buy as many books as I can hold on my own. I have yet to break that rule, but I also get creative with how I hold on to things.

It's called a *wheelchair perk*. You hang the shopping bags off my chair, and suddenly I am holding all the books!

This concept is seen in other settings, too. Like front row tickets at Red Rocks concerts – partially because that's basically the only option, partially because *why not?*

Being a living and breathing Fast Pass has its perks in places like Disneyland or Comic Con, too. It strokes at your ego; makes you feel like the most important person there.

The nature of being a person in a wheelchair is a complex one, as it pushes society's willingness to accommodate. It tests boundaries, even though the barriers shouldn't have been there, they get pushed.

While the outside world will remain inaccessible, the world in my head is filled with endless possibilities. A world without barriers (physical or social), a world with universal design in mind, and sometimes a world with dragons.