

To the esteemed members of the Orcutt Gem and Mineral Society whose contribution has helped make Summer Field possible.

A full year into my alpine summit is ending rather well. But to say that the last year has been anything short of a struggle would be untrue. I am beginning to understand why fire is the associate of change. You have to put yourself to it again and again with hammer and anvil to wrought something worthwhile. Fearing these flames is but the terror and beauty of beginning. And so it was with this great trepidation that I reentered University.

My story actually began 12 years ago. After graduating from college in the first go round, I set out on the road. I travelled far and wide during those years and didn't look back much. I was a nomad, a surf bum, I was in love with life and freedom, and lived quite happily and harmoniously in a state of perpetual unemployment.

And so my greatest fear entering college again was that I would never be that same freewheeling, adventurous person as I had been. — I would be stuck and stagnant, something I equated with death. A year on, and as I look into the mirror these mornings, I can't quite believe that there was ever anything before this person whose whole focused world consisted of nothing but the nagging derivative to be solved, the chemical equation to be balanced, or the fossil in the drawer to be identified. When you have committed to something wholeheartedly there is only that moment, and the next, like the paddler committed to his wave or the climber to his crag.

But for everything in this life, we must pay the piper's debt. Being so committed has put me sufficiently on the edge of financial ruin. I have had to let go of everything outside of school to finish this struggle of a semester. And as the student loans dwindle I feel like some fish at the end of a long dry season, flopping in mud puddles, hoping for that little bit of rain. In the past, being a simple nomad, poverty was never a problem. There was always a friend's couch to sleep on should things get low, or worst case, there was always the beach. And there was always talk of work in the next town, a little further down the road.

But for those amongst us who would commit to furthering their minds and bettering themselves, it helps to have the freedom of space and time to do so. For every hour that I can commit to my studies rather than working some job, it would have its payoff a hundred fold in the future. Coming back as a mature student, having experience the world, I approach my education differently than before. I have lived and traveled throughout parts of the world wholly oppressed by its poverty. This is a gift that we have here in the states, the time and luxury for education. As much as the talk is in the media these days that financial crises and congress keep us down. For those truly committed, there is the ability to conquer mountains and spit lightning. And so I feel it is my duty to treat this gift of time and resource, that honor and privilege that has been given to me by others, the due respect it deserves.

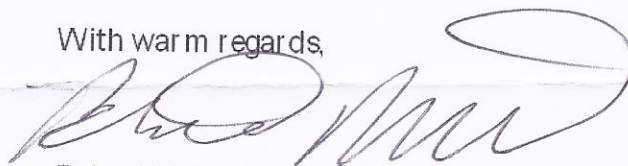
I see my education now as a portal to the future. When I studied before, I never saw the connection between career goal and coursework. It was something I did because I was told I must do it— an extension of high school. I studied English and got my degree from UC Berkeley, but I joked afterwards, when asked what it is that I wanted to do with my life, that I had studied to become an overqualified waiter. But now that I have entered into Geology, I can see over the wall and glimpse the opportunities that can evolve. I see the contribution that these long hours spent mulling over calculus, chemistry, and fossils will evolve into.

And so it is with gratitude that I accept the contribution from those who would impart their hard

earned money into the hands of complete strangers, strangers who hold nothing as collateral other than their hopes, dreams and aspirations. I am grateful. And I am continually amazed in this life of the generosity that can exist in people who have the ability to look further than the tips of their noses. That there are people who appreciate the role that education plays in the continuity of our economy and society, like the farmer who hold soil and seed sacred, you have deemed the academic community of SBCC sacred; you have deemed our hopes, dreams and aspirations sacred as well.

I am so grateful to live in such a caring community where grass roots endowment like the summer field grant from the Orcutt Gem and Mineral Society can exist. That local members of this community would invest in the future of strangers ensures me that the decisions I have made, coming back to school to toil away my hours in study, was the right one.

With warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian Minkin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Brian Minkin