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I let this one fall through my fingers; it is too slim or, perhaps, too rough. I can tell with my eyes closed that it won't work. The next one in my hand is cool and pockmarked with age. As I let it out of my grasp, I feel it is too heavy. So I pick up another. This one is velvety from volumes of hands and I can feel the brittleness the sun has baked into it against my fingertips. I raise it in my hand like a coin and let go. As I open my eyes, it dances across the water, leaping and pirouetting; this stone teaches me more about ballet than three years of dance class could as it ricochets against the silver surface of the stream. I look to my right and a Swallowtail cocks her head at me. I stare at her until she leaps onto another tree, sending a flurry of dust into the cocktail of air and sunlight around us. It's the predictability of this riparian nirvana around me that fascinates me - not to say that the area is unsophisticated, but rather that it's so self-aware its actions become perpetually predictable. Though I was in the wild, I could watch nature tame around me. It was always the same kind of rocks that skipped the farthest and the same creatures that would flee from an unrelenting gaze. It took years of attention, spent sitting in the somber shade of China Bar, to realize that these patterns never changed.

I have a unique relationship with these scenes: I grew up in Davis, California, where you'd be hard pressed to find a good stone for skipping or a newt willing to crawl on your knee. When I moved to Auburn, at fifteen, it was the carved cliffs which left red soil stains on my shoes and crystalline creeks with complete ecosystems that taught me the magic of the American River. Had areas like this not been so accessible to me, I never would have learned the transcendent complexion of such a heaven-like place.

Now that I have grown and developed a wider range of interests, my favorite thing to do in the American River canyon area is to trek down from the main trails and paint or write. With such splendor surrounding me, it is nearly impossible to not feel some sort of inspiration. If tasked with improving recreation activities at the Auburn State Recreation Area, I would find a way to allow the numerous artists around Auburn to make better use of the area and add workshops to attract them. By expanding the accessible sites, while preserving the untouched candor of these beautiful areas, the growing visitor populations would be accommodated and residents would get new areas to explore and draw inspiration from. Because the American River and canyons have been such an important part of my life, I only hope that even more groups and generations are given the opportunity to explore it.