

# I Found Something in the Hills

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I found something in the hills. Maybe it's a zest for life or an appreciation of the little things, or maybe it's being more in touch with my inner child. Either way, I realise that life is fleeting. I have known that for a long time.

When I was a small child, I looked up at my dad and asked, *'What's the point? We're just tiny specks in the universe. We're so small! Nothing really matters.'* He responded with a look of surprise, as though my existential crisis had come much sooner than he anticipated.

But I found something in the hills. I look up and see the big bright night sky, dazzling me with millions of stars, probably billions of lightyears away. *'We really are just tiny specks,'* I think to myself. Now, it doesn't feel so pointless as it did when I was a child. Now I know, *'I'm lucky to be here.'*

Our time on this planet is fleeting and small in the grand scheme of the universe. I do well to remind myself of this.

*'What's the point?'* I thought to myself a few years ago, riddled with chronic pain all over my body.

*'There is no point,'* I tell myself now. Why does life have to have meaning?

We have no purpose, we simply are.

We are lucky to be here, to witness the miracle of life. The chances that we exist here at all are astonishing. *'Let's enjoy what we can,'* I say. Being here is what matters. Realising that has given me a sense of appreciation for my life, no matter how unfortunate I may be. I am fortunate to be here and to experience what it is to be an Earthly being.

It's true that I no longer have the ability to work. It's true that I excelled in my studies and never got the chance to use my degrees. It's true that I live in excruciating pain every day, and my heart beats too fast. It's true that I love to write but only do it once a year because it hurts too much to make it a regular occurrence.

What's also true is that my life matters, even though I don't get to contribute to society in the way that society expects me to.

What matters is the meaning you assign to yourself in this life. I am here to simply enjoy life when I can. I am here for my partner, my family, my friends...and very importantly, my parrot.

I have suffered a lot in this life, and I know I will suffer in the future. I allow myself to observe my suffering as an inevitable trade-off for existing.

There is a quote I've heard many times from a book called *Credence* by Penelope Douglas, which I have never personally read. She says, '*Pain always reminds us that we're alive. And the fear along with it that we want to stay that way.*'

As a person who is permanently in pain, I am constantly reminded of how alive I am.

I found something in the hills. It was a zest for life, knowing the good doesn't come without the bad. The hills around me rise and fall as do the ups and downs of life. Our thoughts, feelings and experiences all matter. Every living being on this planet matters, too. The trees, flowers, kangaroos and birds. We all share the same humble origin story. We all exist together. Life and death. No matter what you believe, or whom you believe in.

You might be familiar with the famous philosophical question presented by George Berkeley, '*If a tree falls in the forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?*'

Well, of course it does. Fundamentally, a fallen tree will provide essential habitat and resources and contribute to a healthy ecosystem. That may be my environmental science degree talking. Just because nobody was around to hear it, doesn't mean that tree didn't make a sound. It doesn't mean that tree didn't matter in its life or death.

That tree didn't need a witness to deem it worthy.

Once I believed if I knew I would become disabled so young, I might have never bothered attending university. '*What was the point? I'm never going to make a career out of it,*' I thought.

But my degree allowed me to save dozens of baby turtles in the Philippines, which were stuck swimming in circles in a bucket instead of being released into the ocean. I was on holiday with my family when I saw them in the resort lobby. I was able to tell them I was a qualified 'Marine Biologist', and for that, they listened to me. If I studied for four years to be able to save some turtles from an untimely death, maybe it was worth it after all.

Now I know that the education was an achievement in itself, and that's all that matters. It doesn't matter that I never made a career out of it, even though that was my initial intention.

I am a fish out of water, living in the hills. A washed-up Marine Biologist, who's never felt more alive.

I found something in the hills. Peace, happiness, quiet. A sunny breezy day, sipping tea on my deck, watching the parrots fly through the valley beyond. A love for the falling autumn leaves and the icy cold winter mornings. Swimming in the river in the summer evenings. A burst of excitement when my plants grow new leaves or my flowers bloom. The rainbows that reflect all over my house from the sun-catchers on my windows. The lightning, thunder and rain. The starry skies. My fluffy green parrot who I would die for. Being alive and sharing this life with the good people around me.

These are the things that matter.