



Week 4 of the Academy July 16th - July 22nd , 2001

Written by:
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MONDAY:

After an eventful and relaxing free-weekend came to a close, Monday morning rolled in with a grumble. As is the custom, Monday morning was followed by an Astrobiology speaker. Dr. David Peterson, also known as Dr. Doom, enlightened us with his depressing commentary on the end of species on Earth, and the green house gas problem. We were all left a bit stunned at the closure of his talk, and we stumbled back to our offices/cubicles befitting a mood only fit for Mondays. Our moods were once again elevated at the weekly house meeting when our caring staff assistant Mr. Andrew Hock informed us of proper camp "etiquette."

TUESDAY:

Tuesday was devoted entirely to our PI's. In the evening Marv Christiansen spoke to us about fumbling our way to a new career. Marv's talk was inspiring, and it reminded us all of the ladder that we have to climb to over the course of our careers. He stressed flexibility and taking opportunities when they come upon you as the best ways to get ahead and be successful.

WEDNESDAY:

On Wednesday the panic began to set in with time running short on our midterm presentations. Nine "research assistants" were scheduled to give their talks on Thursday. Our entire Wednesday was devoted to PI time, which translated to making slides and scrambling to get data at the last minute. A discussion of the Midterm presentation for the Group Project followed in the evening. A number of individuals were seen working late into the night.

THURSDAY:

A tense van ride marked the start of Thursday, signifying the nerves and frustration of those unfortunates compelled to talk for a long fifteen minutes about projects they weren't sure if they knew all that much about. The radio flipped around the dial, as the more casually dressed carried on normal conversation, secretly glad that they weren't the ones marked to speak that day. With the project presentations in the air, normal work was near impossible. Even for those who were to speak on Friday, the balance between thinking what one was to say about a project and actually working on the project was impossible to maintain.

And, who knew who was going to be there to watch. Participants were noticeably absent from the free outdoor lunch, perhaps in their offices turning over scrawled-upon note cards in their sweaty little hands and repeating things over and over to themselves, and wondering if what they were going to say was too long, or too short, or too technical, or not in-depth enough, or at the very worst including something not quite accurate that their PI was going to catch them on, out in front of all the people. But, the midterm presentations went on without a hitch, color visibly returning to those faces whose turn was up, who were finished and done for the day, for the week. PI's showed up and were sometimes themselves put on the spot to answer questions about their projects, as RA's deferred questions to them with a sense of grateful relief. A few people got to ride in a nice Porsche on the way home.

FRIDAY:

Ah yes, beautiful Friday. While for some Friday marked a day of utter doom, for the majority of the RA's it was looked upon as, well, Friday. The four remaining RA's masterfully delivered their speeches, and sat down one by one with the visible weight lifted off their shoulders. Following the completion of RA talks, a select few continued with the Group Project update. This update prompted a most helpful discussion about how to continue with the work we had been planning for four weeks. With every new thought the direction of the project changed drastically. Dr. Dave DesMarais and Dr. Rose Grymes led the discussion, and their insight was most helpful. At the conclusion of Midterm Presentations, we grabbed a quick lunch and sat down for two hours of Hazmat training. I am sure that most of the other RA's would agree that we all learned a lot from the training, and our lives are enriched from the experience. Remember - it's all character building. At about 2PM we all piled into the vans and headed for Yosemite for a weekend of team building and hiking. Remembering our "camp etiquette," we set up the tents and staked our sleeping spots. Tom and Laura cooked for hours upon hours, and after long wait everyone was full. After a reminder by Joe that 5:30 AM is really early, the mood turned to sleep.

SATURDAY:

Saturday was Hike Day for some of us. On Hike Day, we got up at about 5:30 and hiked all day. We hiked up a big, tall mountain named Half Dome, and then back down again to where we started. Only we were lighter, as it took a lot of energy to get up to the top and down. And, we drank a lot of water, because we lost a lot of our precious bodily fluids. One of us fell down and didn't make it up and we were all sorry and wished that she had gotten better. A few other people didn't feel well on the side of the mountain and one turned very red and delayed us from going down, and we were all upset at him, but it was OK. We climbed up where there were some steel cables going to the top of the hill and there were lots of people climbing all over each other and I thought of an anthill. People were climbing on the sides and there was a man at the back yelling at everyone to hurry up, and people wished that he would go away. On top of the mountain we ate sandwiches and lost more fluids in the bright sunlight, which burned us.

Then we went back down the mountain to the car, where Natacha was waiting, and we annoyed her on the ride back. Nobody knows what the people that didn't hike up the mountain did. Later, we ate spaghetti and drank beer. There was not very much meat in the spaghetti.

SUNDAY:

Eventually the Sun was able to wake up all of the tired, sleeping RA's. One van was to head back early and relax at Phi Sig, while a number of us wanted to continue with the sights. Those who continued the weekend on to Tuolumne Meadows, Mono Lake, and Sonora Pass were captivated by the spectacular views on the way. After "monkeying around" at Tuolumne Meadows, we headed through Yosemite and on to Mono Lake. Each stop we made was short because there were so many wonderful things to see. A wish list was created as we drove to Sonora Pass -- some desired to see snow, others waterfalls, some for danger. After fulfilling most of the wish list for the RA's we headed back to Phi Sig. Monday, once again, came too early.