

Spc. Dunagan, Michael

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Narrative Practice

HUNT

FORT GEORGE G. MEADE, Md. -- He sits comfortably with his water-filled homemade mug, one leg resting over the other, thin mustache and blue eyes that have seen their share of adventure. United States Air Force Staff Sgt. Aaron Jenne, an instructor at the Defense Information School (DINFOS) at Fort Meade, Maryland, begins the tale of his passion for hunting and all things outdoors.

A native of Watertown, New York, Jenne moved to Alaska after hearing his college roommate go on about how wonderful and exciting his experiences in the state had been. With Jenne's love for the outdoors and need of an internship relative to his biology major, the challenging environment which Alaska offered seemed like a match made in heaven.

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After some networking and handshaking, Jenne wound up at the farm lodge in Port Alsworth, Alaska, which is approximately 150 miles southwest of Anchorage.

“My desire to go to Alaska revolved around my love for the outdoors,” Jenne said. “Living off the land, hunting, fishing, all of those activities were instilled in me by my family growing up.”

While living in an isolated community sounds like paradise for self-described introverts such as Jenne, the location has its pros and cons.

“If you enjoy a tight-knit community where everybody knows everybody, you’ll probably love it,” Jenne said. “If you’re used to going to the store and buying things for yourself or having easy access to healthcare, you’re in for a rude awakening.”

Jenne’s new home in Port Alsworth had only 130 year-round residents and is only accessible by plane from the outside.

He grew up hunting, and the topic brings a smile to his face. “I always grew up around hunting.” Jenne said. “I was between 12 and 14, but didn’t get anything until 21.”

While this sounds like a dream come true for outdoorsmen like Jenne, it’s not always possible to fulfill every desire. Alaska’s hunting laws allow only in-state residents to hunt on preserved land without a guide, with prices being up to several hundred dollars for a license for non-state residents like Jenne.

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“I got my first deer when I was 21.” Jenne says, “we’d also trap beaver that would cause nuisances with their dams, hunt for spruce grouse, ptarmigan, and I went on several Dall sheep hunts as packing help.”

To scratch that primal itch, Jenne acted as a hunting guide to still get out in the woods while complying with Alaska’s hunting laws for non-state residents.

“It was a long two days. We hiked fourteen miles up this mountain up to the apex, and then came down and slept overnight.” The memory of the cold Alaskan nights shoots a chill up his spine. “When we woke up in the morning, my shoes were frozen solid, it was that cold.”

Jenne said.

When it comes to Alaska, one of the first thoughts that hit people’s minds is cold. Jenne’s tenure was no different.

“I was tasked with changing the seats to one of our aircraft in negative 18-degree weather.” Said Jenne. “One of the pins was being stubborn and would not budge with gloves on, and my hands were ice sickles within five minutes.”

In spite of the unforgiving environments and trying times, the hardest part about being in the Alaskan frontier for Jenne was not always able to do what he loves most, enjoy the outdoors.

“The unspoken rule is you’re not really allowed to touch a rod or assist your client with hunting or fishing,” Jenne said. “I was helping this one little girl fish, and I reeled in for her the biggest arctic grayling I’d seen. It was well over trophy size, and I couldn’t claim it as my own!”

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Despite the adventures, this environment can cost a man his life if he's not careful.

"I've been clumsy before." Jenne chuckled. "I had a close call while rafting, and while digging a ditch, I had a very close encounter with three high voltage power lines."

Being in an area only accessible by plane; it's not always possible to have full access to comforts like readily available internet or streaming services.

"The internet was strong enough for browsing at best." Jenne said. "My streaming service was still in the DVDs in the mail phase."

Speaking of mail. "The rest of the country gets mail six days a week," Jenne said, "we got it three days a week weather permitting." Troubling times indeed, when we see the creature comforts of today.

Looking back on it all, Jenne said he wouldn't change a thing about his experiences.

"I loved it because I knew the community well." Jenne said. "I knew everyone's name and face, and that's just something you don't see in modern-day America."

Introverts prefer to be alone, not eager to meet new people. That's how Aaron Jenne would describe himself, but his peers have different observations of him.

"He's always anxious to get out and make new friends" said Tech Sgt. Nathan Maysonet, an instructor at DINFOS who's known Jenne for over a year. That's not most people's definition of an introvert!"

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When it comes to Alaska, your average person may not be cut out for the environment. “When I think of Alaska, I think that Jenne was made for that land.” Said Maysonet. “Very few people could make it out there, but Jenne was born to thrive in that environment with his love of everything outdoors.”

It rings true that people are creatures of comfort and take the modern-day conveniences for granted.

“A wise man once said, we have no ownership of this land. We’re merely stewards of it for the future generations.” Jenne said as he took one last swig from that water-filled homemade mug and wiped the residue from his thin, kept mustache.

