

## An Immense Drab Expanse

As I lifted the thick cover of *1984*, a light sprinkling of salmon scales fell from its smooth, cream-colored pages, like silver snow from some abhorrently diseased cloud. Memories of the sights, sounds, smells, and other sensitivities I experienced in tandem with George Orwell's brilliantly written plot, setting, and characters came flooding back in a sensory-literary cacophony. It was a day I remember vividly.

It was an unusually average day on the muddy brown waves of the Inlet. A swift breeze from the north chilled my cotton clad corpus to its core. The sky was its usual sickeningly azure self, the kind of blue only seen in dollar store postcards and tacky hotel room decorations. A gentle swell seemed to lull everything into a drunken stupor, literally in the case of my bearded, sunburned bear of a brother. Better conditions couldn't be had for a first reading of Orwell's opus.

*"It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen."*

That first line worked its way into the folds of my cerebrum as I sat on the ancient upholstered bench. The sounds of shouts, explosions, and office work generated by the novel were accompanied by every creak and groan of the hull, every splash of the all-encompassing sea, every whir of the geriatric *Melko's* Volvo diesel engine and CAT motor. Fish showed up as nothing more than uncharacteristic gray blobs on the radar, bringing to mind the drab Party uniforms of the book.

I absorbed the unyieldingly oppressive setting of the book conjointly with the pungent odors of the vessel. The drab, bombed-out streets of London were punctuated by a nauseating potpourri of diesel, slime, and four distinct flavors of body odor. This vile perfume could cause

even the most seasoned sailor motion sickness. I needed to look at a fixed point, lest I expel my nourishing breakfast of hot dogs, instant ramen, and hot sauce.

I snapped up from my book just in time to see a gang of salmon collide with our net, turning the sea into something akin to the top of an overpriced latte. My father squealed with glee and took to the radios to bragging to his fishing buddies about his newfound bundle of slimy dollar bills. Responses came from across the inlet in a symphony of uneducated hick Russian and slightly less uneducated Michigander English. The noun “you” was often followed by “sonofabitch” or “bastard” from the Catholics and Orthodoxias, “dirty dog” seemed to be the Evangelical substitute.

*“Put on your raingear, it’s time to pick”*

As the corks of the net came up from the stern like endless oblong marshmallows, I pondered the ways the fishes’ futile struggle mirrored those of the characters. Just as Winston was forced out of his revelatory thoughts to carry out the monotonous tasks of Big Brother, I was brought in and out of Oceania every hour on the hour to pull nets out of the water. The deeper I became invested into the novel the harder I worked. I picked through sets like my life depended on it, “slammin’ salmon” as my brother called it. The instant my work on deck was done I would retreat to the heat and relative dryness of the cabin to thrust myself back into Winston’s plight. The moisture from my saline hands was irrelevant, the pages could take it. I needed to find out what was happening next.

*Then it happened.*

The moment in the book that would forever change the way I looked at the world. The moment Winston came to the realization that everything the Party has every told him was a lie.

The moment Winston realized that truth wasn't what the Party said it was. The moment Winston and I realized there is only one truth: the whole truth with nothing but the truth.

I immediately began looking at everything with a more skeptical worldview. The talking heads my father vehemently enjoyed listening to no longer seemed quite as persuasive. "Facts" thrown out by politicians were incredible without context. I began to understand why my seemingly malevolent English teachers subjected me to the torture of bibliography composition: to avoid an Orwellian future where the truth changes based on the day of the week.

This was a luxury I could afford, but Winston could not. The moments where he endured the torture of the party played through my head as I picked the final set of the day. Winston was forced to believe the Party's lie once more as I picked up the final salmon to be bled. Once he had come to truly love Big Brother, he was executed on the spot.

*Snap. Thud.*