

Summer was a smear in the ink. When you put marks down, they slowly leave subtle smudges in the paper as you continuously write. Events in the summer felt like a hand constantly writing; the words left on the page had a trail of faint streaks of a fading memory. I was always on “go mode”. And since life is built on contrast, people often curate the perfect handwriting and leave out those smears.

Chicago shifted my perspective on things. I take vacations as a time to find myself, as I’m somewhere I’ve never been before. New experiences and new thoughts, and trying new things. Although the streaks are still permanent marks on the paper, they follow the events I left in my mental notepad. The feeling of time passing by so quickly, yet in the moment, you rarely think of it, and later it becomes a distant memory. Each smear is that memory. People often forget the smears and treat them like an inconvenience, but the truth is that the smears are the true memory versus the one you were trying to set in stone. You know how when people only post the good parts of their trip, or only tell the positive parts of a story? They never consider the smears left from the writing, the unintentional, the mistakes, the often overlooked. But the smears are proof of the moment passed in memory.

Take a tree, for instance; if you carve into a tree, the damaged bark stays the same for the rest of the tree’s life. But as time goes on, it seems like the scar that was left got smaller, when in reality the tree grew around it. Individual mindsets frequently are stuck on the carving and not letting themselves evolve throughout the future. Focused on presenting only the positive sides, or “skipping to the good part” when you need the negative side to have the other, positive side. If you go about your life faking it, you won’t know how to react when the negative hits. If you are so focused on the handwriting and perfection and detail to the point where it becomes obsessive, you’ll have no smears, but you’ll also have less authenticity and be seen as more monotonous and “fake”. You’ll look like a machine made it instead of a human with no soul.

There’s that connection between reflection and action. The smears make you human. The hazards force you to wake up. The smears are living proof that you were moving, the *traffic cones* are the reasons to take a pause. There’s a transition from “go mode” to “perspective”. The act of being in a new place allowed me to finally look at the page and see the smears for what they were.

It is still that *oxymoron*. That permanent blur. The stillness in motion. It contradicts itself. I often think of clarity as the only way to preserve a moment. A memory can be both fixed in time and inherently messy. By acknowledging the smears, you accept the beautiful contradiction that life is most vivid when it is least "perfect."