

ADVOCATE

Exploring the City of Boulder

by Max Sayer



The city of Boulder has many attractions that local residents flock to in their free time. With anything from walking the Pearl St. Mall to skiing at Loveland, it's virtually a guarantee that Boulder has something just for you, no matter what your hobbies are. Given that the culture of the city massively revolves around health and physical activity, it makes sense to spotlight the opportunities for these first.

Skiing and Snowboarding

With the proximity to the mountains it is only natural that snow sports is a priority for many of the citizens of Boulder, and this rings true for the participants at AIM House as well. Every Friday, those who desire are able to go with a staff member to Loveland Ski Area and ski or snowboard until they can no longer feel their legs. Beyond this, there are many other options that are just a short bus ride away.

With places like Eldora Mountain Resort and Breckenridge close by, it is close to impossible to be dissatisfied with your options.

Hiking

One of the go to activities for seemingly everyone who lives in Boulder is hiking. It would be close to impossible to list every local hiking option. Just a few will be presented.

The Devil's Thumb Lake Trail is a ~14 mile hike (there and back) that provides great scenery along the way and rewards you with a fantastic view of the lake at the end.

The hike to Bear Peak is roughly 6 miles with an elevation gain of over 2700 feet. If you are looking for a stairmaster-esque workout to test your machine of a body this would be a good choice. There are certain portions of the trail

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ADVOCATE

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New Year, New Who

by Daniel Conroy



Hello Friends!

So! The New Year is upon us. Of course, nothing is actually new. We do this ritual every year in our culture: New Year, New You. By the time you are reading this, your resolutions (if you had them), will likely be fading. That is okay. We have the idea that a resolution on January 1st will change who we are, or our luck in the New Year. I'm not sure this is the case.

I don't believe people change. We wear new costumes, get new hair styles, and can maybe even alter behavior patterns from time to time—but we don't really change. Appearance may change. Gender identification may change. Political views change and evolve. Likes and dislikes change but, my friends, the bad (and good) news is that people don't really change. I believe we are who we are. The parts of ourselves that we try to "change" are usually the parts of self that are not a genuine reflection of who we are! For example, I have gained and lost weight through the course of my life. When I am heavier than I like to be, I think I will be a different person when I weigh X amount. I may feel better at a lighter weight because I am eating clean and I am fueled properly. I am living in more balance and harmony with my body; I feel better, and I applaud myself and others for making choices that ultimately lead to greater health and wellness—but, nothing about ME changed.

In order to successfully make changes to our lifestyles, weight, and/or relationships, we must completely give up the illusion that we are self-help projects who need to fundamentally change. "There is something wrong with me!" I hear people say that literally, every single day, and from my perspective it simply is not true. There are billions and billions of dollars made every year on the promise of self-help and self-change. Each year, there are new techniques, approaches, diets, fads, and affirmations. These can be helpful tools for losing weight or feeling better about yourself, but they won't change you. We all have shadows and light within us. When we accept this, when we accept who we are, we can approach self-help from a place of shifting behaviors and parts of ourselves, rather than changing who we are at our core. It comes down to awareness. It comes down to noticing patterns, beliefs, and themes in our lives and how they make us feel. It is all a practice really. Being human is just that. We practice being in alignment with ourselves. Most self-help stuff is selling you the illusion that there is another you somewhere "out there." Imagine if this wasn't the case. Imagine if you, the REAL you - not how much you weigh or what you wear - already is complete. Take a deep breath and consider that you (we) are already enough. Already enlightened. Already happy. Already OK. Already free. Speaking of Already free, if any of what I am writing here resonates with you I recommend two books: *Already Free* by Bruce Tift and *The Untethered Soul* by Michael Singer. I have many extra copies of both; if you are interested, I will send you one.

I stopped making resolutions a while back, although, I have set a goal of not cursing as much. I heard someone say that cursing is a sign of a lazy mind. While that feels a bit harsh, it is true that words do matter. I have also found myself saying certain words repetitively like "awesome". Awesome should probably be reserved for a pretty big deal, right? Seeing something magnificent in nature is probably awesome—literally inspiring awe... I'm not sure it is the best way to describe how someone is doing though. I am awesome. What does that mean? I inspire awe? How was dinner? Awesome? Dang! must have been a very special dinner. When you think about it, words are kind of silly. Sometimes words can be incredibly impactful, other times they fail to give true meaning to what we are trying to express. Words get overused and slowly lose meaning. Awesome. Love—that's another big one. We use these words so much, and in so many different contexts, that they begin to feel diluted. Moving forward, I will attempt to use accurate words to best express my intent. I'm not calling it a resolution, because using the word "awesome" less won't change me as a person, but feel free to hold me accountable to sticking with this goal.

Wishing you and your families all the best in 2019. 🌈

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Daniel Conroy".

I Will Always Follow the Art

by Max Sayer

One of AIM House's primary goals is to promote healthy outlets for self expression, and one of the major vehicles for acting upon this initiative is creativity. We interviewed one of the castle's participants, who utilizes the creative resources AIM provides.

Mal's first real creative experience was through the Crested Butte creative arts program. Compared to the conservative community that Mal grew up in, Crested Butte's focus on expressing yourself; individuality was considered a breath of fresh air. While at Crested Butte, Mal focused on the performing arts, learning how to read lines and perform scenes. Although performing was a passion, it wasn't what ultimately captured Mal's attention going forward.

At the age of 14, Mal was on one of many trips to a museum; Mal's interests were specifically piqued by Van Gogh. After acquiring a Van Gogh print, Mal attempted to replicate it by mixing original colors and painting on a 24" x 32" canvas. About halfway through the process, Mal stepped back and said, "Hey, this is pretty damn good." Going forward, Mal invested in new art supplies and pursued this new passion. Mal was trained in landscape artistry as a primary education, at which point the teacher suggested oil painting, which was taken to as the new focus almost immediately.

Due to the more pliable and customizable creation process, Mal became "infatuated by the smell and unique texture of oil painting." Mal continued to develop this skill with very little, formal training, pulling almost entirely from memory.



As college application deadlines became imminent, Mal selected several different environments to apply to; universities, liberal art schools, and some dedicated art schools.

Mal was told by the authority figures that acceptance was unlikely due to GPA, but fortunately, Mal was accepted into the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA), and graduated with a degree in Painting and Curatorial Studies degree. "My time at MICA was so beautiful, accepting, and empowering that it was one of the happiest experiences of my life," shared Mal.

Mal selected AIM House specifically for the Madelife program. The idea of a mentor in the art world is a very valuable and exciting opportunity. "Having a space and someone to teach you is essential. It is important to find

your own voice, and that is what I valued about my teachers in art school - the fact that they taught me to use my own voice."

When Mal does the creative accelerator program offered at Madelife, a mentor teaches their own take on the artistic process, and works to infuse each other's individual methods together. Going forward, Mal would like to pursue art while using it as a vehicle to travel to different culturally relevant places across the world. The first city on the list is ideally Florence, where Mal hopes to pursue fresco restoration.

Mal feels that other future destinations could include Portland, Los Angeles, Baltimore, and an international gamut of places that consists of Korea, Germany, and China. 

Mission: Wolf

by Max Sayer

Upon initially hearing the news about AIM House's volunteer camping trip to Mission: Wolf, many Participants, including myself, balked at the idea of camping in the mountains of Colorado in mid-November. I just left the wilderness, I think I'm good on camping for a while, was my initial train of thought when the idea was presented. After hearing about what the experience would entail, it seemed it would be a unique opportunity, and if nothing else, a good story for later. The morning of our departure, my cynicism began to rise; it was a similar feeling to when you make plans with someone that you don't really like and the moment has arrived to spend time with them. Most of my reservations were the same as before: It was really cold outside, and going back to sleeping on the ground wasn't very high on the list of priorities. However, the desire to try new things prevailed and we started the multi-hour drive out to the campsite in the morning.

After pulling off the dirt road to the site, we unloaded the vans of all the camping gear and immediately set up our tents as the sun would soon be setting. The next few hours were spent sitting around the campfire trading stories, singing songs with the accompanying guitar, and preparing the food for dinner. After eating some classic camp food consisting of mostly pasta and broccoli, most of us went to sleep at a very early bedtime, as the temperature was approaching -15 degrees, and the appeal of a sleeping bag was too much to pass up. After hopelessly struggling through a night that thoroughly lacked in sleep due to my feet seemingly being frozen solid, mercy was shown by the reappearance of the sun and it was time to start the next day.



Feeling re-energized due to the warmth and sunlight as well as the excitement to meet wolves, we went to the Mission: Wolf facility to get started. We were greeted by a few volunteer workers, who educated us on the purpose and vision for Mission: Wolf. They shared, "The goal is to educate people on Wolf and Wolf-dog behavior, mainly to show people that Wolves are not aggressive creatures the way they are often portrayed by humans." Wolves are a keystone species and have a large impact on the ecosystems they are a part of. They help restore the natural balance in land ecosystems such as Yellowstone. After our tour of the facilities, the founder of the project, Kent Weber, explained how the wolves behave socially and the most effective ways to act when inside the enclosure in order to appear non-threatening and still peak their interest.

Once inside the wolf habitat, we all experienced something very unique: the way a wolf greets you is by sniffing your teeth, which can be slightly intimidating coming from an animal that is seemingly the same size as you. It was an unforgettable opportunity to go face to face with an animal that is typically portrayed as a ferocious beast. When approached by the wolves, it is suggested to bare your teeth and



maintain eye contact so that they can sniff and essentially decide if they like you. After this initial greeting, it was immediately apparent that regardless of how one felt about camping in freezing temperatures, it was already worth the trip just for this unique experience.

The next day, we went back up to the facility to provide more hands for jobs that needed it. After a couple of hours moving chain link fencing that will later be used for more enclosures, Kent offered the chance to go back and spend time with the wolves again. This was not something that was being planned on, and the group was elated to have the chance to spend time in the enclosure again before departing. This time spent with the wolves was perhaps even better than the previous, as we all now had a little experience interacting with the wolves. When we were out of time, we bid our goodbyes and thanked everyone for the accommodation and opportunity.

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Staff Bio: Wes Schreiner- Fischer

by Max Sayer & Charlotte Cox

Wes Schreiner-Fischer has a Bachelor's Degree in Health and Exercise Science with a concentration in Health Promotion. He has also completed CCAR's Recovery Coach Academy. He has been working with AIM house since 2015 and also assists as a Manifest Mentor. Wes is also a certified Colorado Peer and Family Specialist. Wes is a Boulder, CO native; his favorite thing about Boulder is how clean it is and in particular, the water and air quality. "I like how it is environmentally conscious and filled with friendly people," he adds.

Wes has previously worked as a coach for CSU youth sports camps on multiple occasions and as an assistant coach at Borrego Springs High School for baseball. He also has experience working at the Miraval Tucson body mindfulness center, at Insight Intensive at Gold Lake as a participant trainer, and as the Fitness Director at Borrego Ranch.

Wes decided to work in the mental health field after finding his own path to recovery. "After a decade of poor choices I found myself in treatment a few times. The last time I really enjoyed my experience and took a lot away from it. I get a lot of fulfillment passing on my experience and trying to recreate it for others," he shared. Wes' favorite part of his job is the connections he forms at AIM House with participants; this is also his greatest strength as a mentor - his passion is genuine, and the evidence is within the great connections and relationships he has built within the AIM House community. When sharing his experience of being a mentor he said, "A lot of the time it doesn't feel like work. One of my primary purposes is

to help young adults figure out what they want in life and how to get there, and those are conversations that I really enjoy having." Wes feels his purpose in this work is to help participants define their passions and to support them as they develop new skills.

Wes is in active recovery himself and hopes that through his own experiences and mistakes, he can help others conquer their fears and live a less painful life. Wes enjoys weight training, basketball, Brazilian Jujitsu and a full life of sobriety when he's not working. Wes admits he is a creature of routine, and enjoys the structure of everyday life. When asked what favorite thing he has ever done, Wes said, "One time I caught three shirts thrown into the crowd over the course of one Nuggets game. I felt proud and unstoppable."

"AIM House is lucky to have Wes as a Mentor; he has a great sense of humor, a unique ability to connect with so many participants, especially given his past personal experiences.

On a less serious note... here are some questions we asked Wes:

If you could have lunch with any person in human history, dead or alive, who would it be and why? What would you talk about?

"I have a few answers. The first one would be a three-person lunch with Nelson Mandela and Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson. We would talk about perseverance and motivation. The second would be Mandy Patinkin and Marshawn Lynch. We would start off talking about my favorite performances by Mandy Patinkin and then we'd see where it goes with Marshawn Lynch because he is hilarious."



If you could morph into any animal instantaneously whenever you wanted what would you choose and why?

"It's either Gorilla or Rhino. I can't pick between the two, I have similar reasons for both, they're both really cool and super strong." I think Wes is a Gorilla.

If you could have one song play out loud every time you walked into a room as your entrance music, what would it be?

"You Know What it Is (Ft. Wyclef) by T.I. I enjoy the song." 🎵



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that have been described as more of a “rock scramble” than an uphill walk, so definitely make sure you know what you are getting into before departing on your adventure.

The Royal Arch Trail is a roughly 3.5 mile round trip hike with an elevation change of 1400 feet. It is one of the more crowded local trails near Boulder, so it is recommended to go early in the mornings or on a weekday



Pearl Street

Pearl Street is a good catch-all answer when suggesting local entertainment in Boulder. Walking up and down the sidewalk and popping into any store that catches your eye, can provide hours of worthwhile entertainment. Beyond this there are attractions such as the Boulder Theater, which hosts many attractions such as film festivals and concerts. Just recently featured was a “Beatles vs Stones”

musical showdown, and it has events coming up that include the “Boulder International Film Festival.

The schedule is available online for anyone who wishes to attend the shows. Going further past the scheduled aspect of the Boulder Theater, there are often many talented street performers to listen to as you walk. All sorts of street performers make Pearl Street exciting: from a singing guitar player, the “zip code” man (who can guess any zip code you were born in), a man contorting his body into a small box, to someone playing the bongos.

Boulder Reservoir

For anyone from the coast that misses the beach and the ocean, you can attempt to recapture some of that magic at the Boulder Reservoir.

While it is no substitute for the real thing, the Reservoir can provide a nice break from the typical mountain activities that surround Boulder. It is the grounds for many events - from polar plunges to triathlons and marathons. It is also probably one of the only local places to participate in popular water sport activities such as wakeboarding or water skiing. 



Mission: Wolf

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Kaitlyn Anderson described the programmatic purpose of the trip: “My intent with bringing AIM House Participants to mission wolf is to help reconnect them back to wilderness experiences through camping, campfires and shared experience outside. Often times this can be a reset for many Participants in their program to help remind them of the importance of community, self-care, having boundaries and literally getting grounded in nature.”

I certainly feel that my trip to Mission: Wolf matched up with the intended purpose. It really was nice to reconnect with nature and go camping again even if I did have reasonable reluctance to do so. It reminded me of what made wilderness a positive experience for me in the first place, which is something that can be easily forgotten. Even though it is not unique to this particular trip, my largest takeaway is simply that trying new experiences is an essential part of life. When presented with similar opportunities I will certainly remember how my perspective changed from taking advantage of this one. I obviously wasn’t completely sure about my decision to attend the trip beforehand, but I sincerely enjoyed the time I spent there learning and doing things I had never done. 

Academics at AIM House

by Max Sayer

Roughly 50% of participants are engaged in college or high school courses, which totals into 82 college credits spread among the students. There is a vast range of academic options here in Boulder. Participants are currently enrolled at Naropa University, Front Range Community College, University of Colorado, and University of Utah.

The challenges of school can be all encompassing. Matt Sullivan, program director said, "My experience has been that school is a challenge emotionally and logistically. It challenges your brain and your heart as well as your executive functioning." The challenge differs little based on whether the classes are online or in person, but it is often where the "rubber hits the road." Another challenge has to do with academic history. People often have a lot of logistical work that needs to be done in terms of getting transcripts and test scores together to present to a new institution.

The amount of credits a participant takes varies based on the person. In general, students average about 60-70 credits in a semester. People are working on many different levels: some are doing high school, undergraduate, or high level college classes, which plays a role in the decision.

The perspective at AIM House is that it is more important to take a few classes that you are interested in, rather than drown in multiple demanding classes. The process is more about rewriting the emotional perspective on school rather than trying to make as much progress toward a degree as possible.

According to Sullivan, the ideal experience for a participant at AIM House "is to be a professional academic and an academic professional. It is important to treat your academics as if it is a job that you will be fired from if you do not show up for it." It is also important to be aware of your strengths and weaknesses as if you were working a job and work around those to maximize your potential.

AIM House works to create a community culture that views going to school and performing well positively. It is important to see it as a core value of the process. Self belief comes from seeing success. We tend to be focused on deficits as a society. When we get an 86% on a paper all we see is that we didn't get an A. It is about reframing results and expectations. 





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