



AUTHOR: MHCINI

July 28, 2022 by mhcini

i turned 21 and woke up to corn fields

So yes, my birthday was July 20th, and I celebrated here in Iowa. Initially, I wasn't too thrilled to be celebrating my 21st away from my close friends and family. I had imagined being surrounded by my loved ones to celebrate such a milestone. And while I didn't think that that could happen as I am 902 miles away from home, I still managed it unexpectedly. This might get a bit mushy at some point, I apologize sincerely for this as it makes me cringe as well, but I could not give this week justice without the heartfelt emotions.

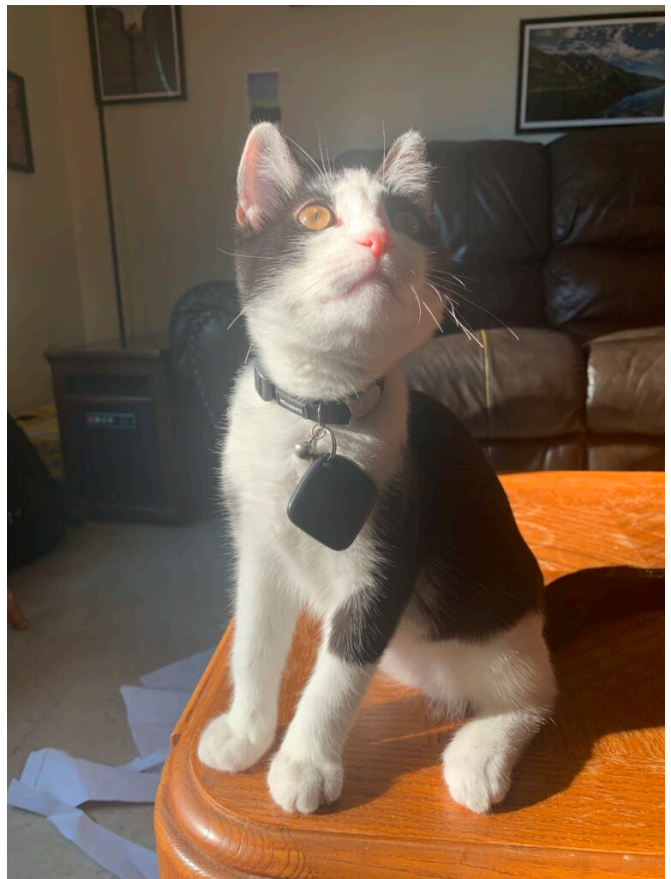
It started off Sunday when Thomas gave me a surprise in the form of tasty lemonade. This moment genuinely made me tear up. I was not expecting anything in any form from my friends here, I was only expecting the packages my parents were sending honestly. So that caught me so by surprise and really made me consider the connections and relationships I've formed in Ames, Iowa. Flash forward to Tuesday afternoon, I'm buzzing with the anticipation for Wednesday (my birthday!) and I'm discussing our project with Alli. Jack then surprises me with a gift of one of my favorite popcorn and granola that doesn't have coconut in it! At this point, I'm overflowing with gratitude toward these people and I'm honestly confounded.

Wednesday comes and it's my birthday!!!! That day I had a chat with my mother as I went and had a cute little breakfast at the Hub. For this day, we had all planned a small birthday

dinner, including the 9 REUs, Jack, Dante, and Mattan. I genuinely had such a great day, like genuinely cannot express the happiness I was experiencing because of this day.

I really want to make sure I'm not coming across as making these past couple days so great only because I got gifts. I truly appreciate the thought and time I got to spend with everyone. It makes me so happy to have been able to have spent these past several weeks with such an amazing group and it makes me sad to write this as we come to an end.

BTW: here are some photos from other days



jump scares x100

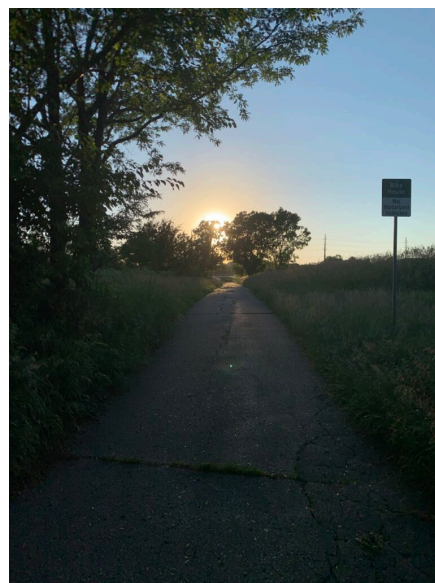
Me? I am not a fan of jump scares. I cannot handle them, in real life, in movies, in songs, etc. It doesn't matter, they'll do exactly what they're trying to achieve. For example, and I promise this leads into REU-related topics, one time my mom and I were going to watch The Meg movie, and during the beginning trailer portion the shorts for the Nun came on. Now let me explain that I had seen the trailer for this movie so many times by this point and I knew exactly what moment scares me and its timing. And yes, I did jump and scream bloody murder and was precisely the only person to do so in the packed movie theater – and yes again, there was about 20 seconds of silence before laughter erupted in the theatre and the kid next to me started making fun of me. The reason why this backstory is so important is that in the time span between Friday night and Monday morning I had about 10 jump scares that really took a lot out of me, like I lost a few lives honestly.

Friday night, as I'm sure many of my REU compadres have explained in their own blogs, was awful in terms of fire alarms. But my take will solely focus on the jump scare stimulus that these alarms provide. Around 9:30ish, I'm sitting in my room having just woken up from a rather spontaneous nap. I'm eating my dinner and watching some youtube. A rather uneventful night up until this point, when the alarm goes off. I'd like to state for the record that it's quite interesting how fire alarms in different buildings all sound different and evoke a different reaction. This particular one made my soul levitate out of my body and I had to jump to catch it. – That was my way of saying that I genuinely jumped about a foot off of my chair basically. But one thing that I'll say, maybe even brag about, is that I do get the jump scare but I'm quite literally the definition of jumping into action. Because once the alarm went off and I jumped off my chair, I landed and began putting my shoes on and running out the door. No hesitation, no buffer, stutter, nada! Action! And then of course we went outside, yada yada yada, more details about that could probably be found on other posts.

At this point, I'm back in my room and I've decided that that fire alarm was just too much and that I should go to bed. Then for a second time that night, only this time it was 5am, the alarm goes off again. What I envision happening to me was that my body was lifted out of my bed like one of those scary movies or the conjuring where I'm levitating parallel to the bed underneath me. That's what it felt like, but faster because that was my soul jumping out of me and my body trying to catch it. Then, like the time before it not so long ago, we went back outside to wait for the firefighters.

Cut to Sunday night, Thomas had told me he had never seen Spirited Away. I decided then that it was my duty to expose him to this masterpiece of cinema. We sat down to watch the movie, and some others joined us, not more than 15 minutes into the movie the smoke detector alarm goes off. Now... If I thought that the fire alarm was loud and obnoxious, this alarm was not only 5x that, but it spoke to us as well. This alarm particularly struck me because I was in a calm and relaxed state of enjoying my movie, being sucked into the Spirited Away cinematic universe ya know! And then this obstructive sound barges into my eardrums and simply would not stop. It continued for so long, that eventually, the RA had to come and try and put an end to this. Unfortunately, she didn't. Well, let me not mislead my readers. She put an end to that first one. Keyword = "first one". There were about 5 more after it. Each time that grating alarm went off, I lost a life.

Also – a special shoutout to Thomas for buying me lemonade as my birthday present. For those who are unfamiliar with me, I love lemonade. It brings me so much joy in this life. So thank you so much to Thomas for that wonderful gift!



July 14, 2022 by mhcini

im not that guy, pal

At this point, I really like going in-depth about specific moments and experiences as my blog. I just feel like you get so much more out of me and so much more detail. So, on Sunday the 10th we all took a trip to the Ankeny Summer Fest! I had a roller coaster of emotions throughout the night (no pun intended), so get ready. It started with childlike

excitement and anticipation for the festival/fair. It was going to be my first time at anything like it so I had no idea what to expect and what was going to happen. When we got there I was blown away by the number of people and vendors around. We all took a look around to plan out what rides we wanted to go on and plan how many tickets we could get in a bundle. After obtaining the tickets, Thomas and I immediately went to find the first ride to get on. Now, in hindsight, I should have thought more about this because I have a history of easily getting nauseous and dizzy. And I had this thought before we got our tickets, but I thought I could brave through it. Sadly this was not the case. Given that I had no actual knowledge about how the first ride operated or moved, I had no idea what I was getting into. So I was able to confidently sit on the ride and get excited. And then it started moving. This was where everything went wrong. I was thrown and jerked in so many directions, I even tried to keep my head on straight by finding a focal point like “spotting” in dance. This did not help. But I got off the ride in the end and tried to walk out like a champ. And then I made the bad decision of agreeing to go on another ride. Mind you, at this point I am definitely feeling a little dizzy and nauseous. This ride also had a wee bit of a line so I actually got to see what the ride’s movement was like. This was a bad move because even watching the ride made me feel worse. And ya know what? I still got on it. Thomas, bless his heart, sat next to me the whole time talking and I just did not hear a thing. I was concentrating so much on not throwing up that all visual and audio input was blocked. Also, I need to make a point to discuss how long it took the operator to stop this ride. He was stopping it with his hands which did little to nothing. It felt like an eternity as all I wanted to do was jump off the ride and lay down on the ground. Once it did come to somewhat of a stop I jumped off and did exactly that, laid down on the ground.

Thomas sat next to me as he felt some side effects. As we sat there trying to recuperate, I decided that I can not be manipulated or convinced to go on any rides in the future, so I donated my tickets to some random kid sitting near me.

I genuinely was in the pits. It probably didn’t help that I hadn’t eaten that much throughout the day. After trying to recuperate for a couple of minutes, Thomas and I went to get some food. We sat on the grass, off to the side of the food area to eat and people watch. Eventually, everyone else met up with us and sat to eat as well. The rest of the evening went much better. Then later in the night, Thomas, Alli, and I found ourselves laying down on the grass again after the fireworks (which were much better than the Fourth of July ones in Ames), starrng up into the sky talking about planets, aliens, and religion. Once we were all heading back to the cars, Eli, Grace and I split into Eli’s car to go pick up Farhan

from the Des Moines Airport. That was pretty much the end of the night and a wonderful day!

July 6, 2022 by mhcini

this blog will not mention corn ;)

So I ran through a corn field Sunday evening. This is genuinely the only thing I really want to blog about right now. Yes of course I did other things and spent time with my peeps but genuinely I need to express this moment.

So, it started when someone commented, at Eli's parents 4th of July BBQ, that we make a photo op out of that moment, and then it progressed to taking a photo in the corn fields by his house. At first, I was all like, [read sarcastically] oh how convenient that we're so close to corn at this moment, and then I was like, I can't even imagine the kind of bugs that I would be in the presence of. Anyhow, no complaints from me because the majority rules and it is what it is ya know, like of course corn makes its way into the conversation. Low and behold we get to the cornfield and it is like a scene from a movie. In this moment, I couldn't believe the quality of what my eyes were taking in. If I could show this memory to anyone they would think it was a photo taken with one of those thousand-dollar cameras. (Not to mention the photos I took are such a huge letdown.) I was genuinely stunned at how beautiful the sun and the greenery of the corn looked with the crisp blue sky. It was such a surreal moment, corn going so far it blended into the sunset and the sun such a wonderful and magnificent golden light reaching over the corn.

Of course with this kind of beauty in front of you, all rational expectations and thoughts that create the foundation of who you are fly out the window because I promptly RAN through that corn. I felt like a child giggling through a pasture of tall grass that I bet anyone reading this could picture from a movie scene. Except that tall grass was corn and it got taller and taller and I was me without any thought for anything else but pure happiness.

This moment is quite literally the highlight of my time in Iowa. It was something unplanned, that just happened on a whim, something I could have never taken into account or have expectations for. It just was. And now I get what all the hype around the corn is for.



I can only use this photo from Eli's camera to give justice to what I'm trying to describe.

June 28, 2022 by mhcini

fun adventures with a spicy ending

Friday night, I met the REUs that are part of the Forensic Science Department. Some of them and some of our own group went out to El Azteca Mexican Restaurant. It was good to get out and get some food elsewhere, I had amazing fajitas and wonderful company! Saturday morning, I took some time for myself. I biked to VRAC to get some practice work done and just think my thoughts. However, this little side adventure had led to suspicions of this area being haunted. Over the hour and a half that I spent getting work done, the nearest door to leave this part of the facility had opened and closed 5 times with no one entering or leaving. I sat and watched it happen the last three times after the confusion of the first two. I promptly left after the fifth time, I simply did not need to be here for the sixth. So I went to the gym, had a good workout, and run. Eli had mentioned to our group that his parents had a food truck going at this place in Ogden, so we had made plans in the

evening to visit. However, we ended up going to a great Thai place close to the university. They had amazing food and an amazing Thai iced coffee. Let me explain that really don't like coffee, I like coffee ice cream and the flavor but that actual drink is just not good in my opinion. However, Thai iced coffee is the only coffee drink that breaks this opinion.

Sunday morning, I met Alli at VRAC to go over project work and to discuss how we can fix some little bugs. After this, we had lunch at Friley Windows and then headed back towards the dorms. I ended up going to Walmart with some of the group to get some much-needed groceries. Because the weather at this time was so beautiful, I went on a run after this trip. Might have been still a little too hot for the run but I had a great time running through Brookside Park. Still loving the weather, some of my group of REUs and the other REUs decided to play volleyball. I have to shout out to Thomas for his amazing serves that served to boost our score each time.

Monday. This day was a great way to start the week! (100% sarcasm in that sentence if it didn't come across.) I woke up around 6:40am feeling a slight pain in my lower right abdomen but didn't think much of it. Sometimes I get random lower left abdomen pain so it just seemed normal. It wasn't until I got to VRAC that it started getting worse. I couldn't laugh or walk without feeling a little stabbing of the pain and it became a more persistent presence. Eventually, after the first session of our deep dives, around 11am the pain was quite intense. As noticeably uncomfortable as I was, I was convinced to head to the wellness center with the thought of an appendix issue being tossed around in my head. From the wellness center, it was advised I head to the ER for an almost certain appendectomy. Shoutout to Glen for picking me up and driving me to the ER and shoutout to both Glen and Eliot for staying with me and supporting me! I appreciate their support so much! At the ER I was poked with more needles and had more tests run on me, including a CT scan. I forgot to ask for a disk of my CT so I could see my scan in the C6, that would have been great. Eventually, after sharing concussion and head injury stories, the Nure Practitioner came with my results. I'll spare the gory details, long story short it was not an issue with my appendix. After a roller coaster of emotions and pain, I left the hospital with the knowledge that I would not be the first REU here at VRAC to have gotten surgery.



June 20, 2022 by mhcini
time to catch up!

It's been a while since I've written here and since then, lots and lots of stuff has happened. Last Tuesday night we watched the Martian. Found out that Mark Watney was not a clever character name for the actor Mark Wahlberg as it was not Mark Wahlberg playing Mark Watney, it was Matt Damon. That same night, I experienced for the first time an lowan thunderstorm. All I can say is that I did not sleep that much that night as each thunderclap woke me up with a heart attack. Coming from the east coast where thunderstorms last about 30-45mins, a 3-4 hour thunderstorm was a rude awakening.

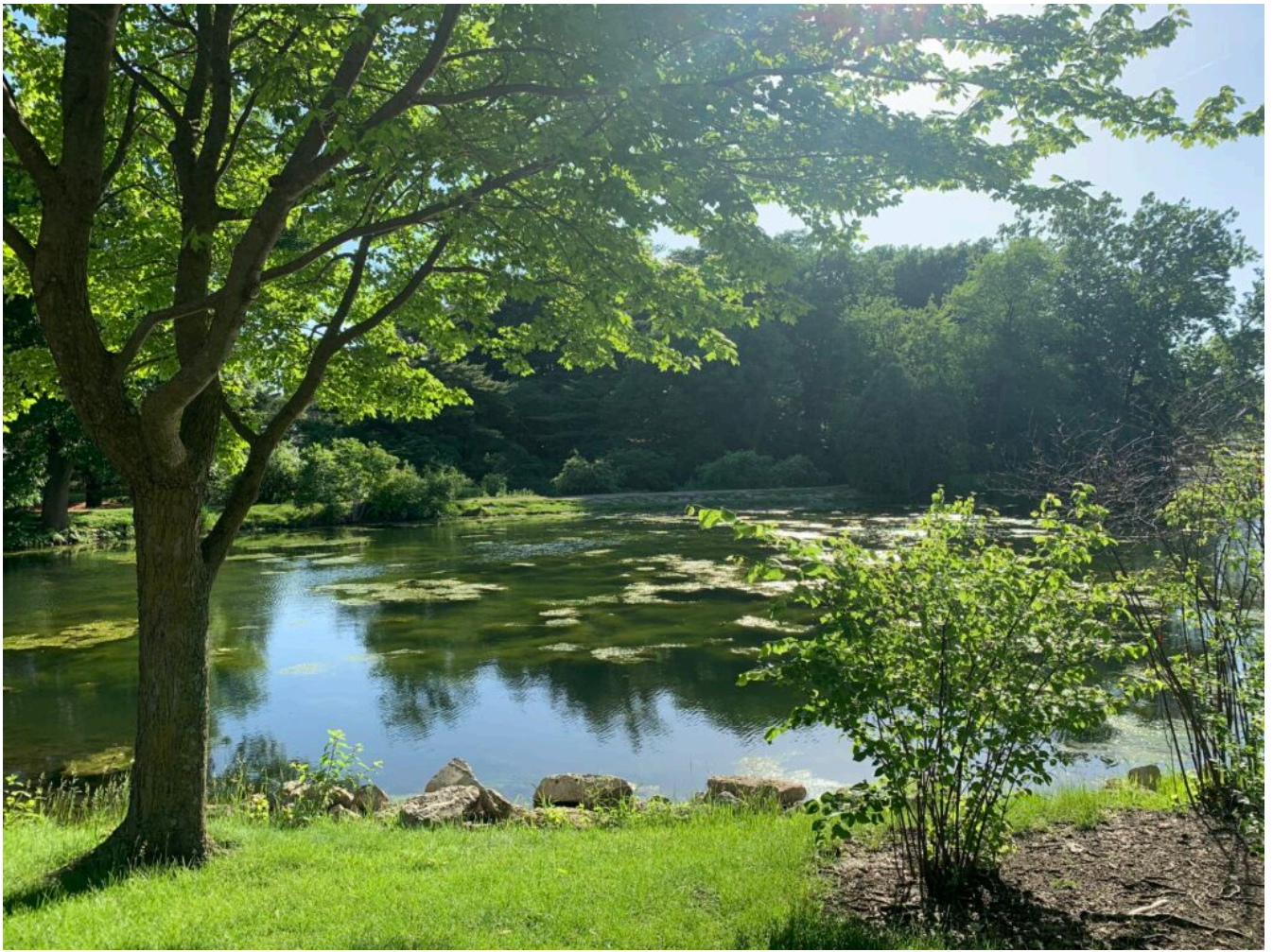
On Friday Glen brought his two cute doggos in. It was a very much needed serotonin rush for the end of the week Friday feels. They had so much energy for their tiny bodies and were just so fluffy and cute. Hopefully, this leads to others in the VRAC bringing in their pets.

On Saturday, Thomas and I went to the gym around mid-morning. It was an empty gym when we walked in, I was so happy. Then to my dismay, people flooded in after about 5 minutes to which we realize the gym had just opened so we were just the first people in. At the end of my workout, I had planned to run. Because of this, I needed to change my shoes, so I went down to the lockers where I had secured my stuff to do the switch. Unfortunately in the rush of adrenaline that came with thinking I had an empty gym, I never made a point to address in which locker I was leaving my belongings. So I basically had no clue which locker was mine. I had been so sure that I left my stuff in one of the first couple of lockers because that makes sense right? Like if I was one of the first people to be in the gym, that means there are empty lockers in the front so I would choose one of those. After about 10 minutes of trying the same 4-5 lockers, I had to come to terms with the fact that that is not how my brain works evidently. So I tried every locker on the top row and finally to my much-needed relief a locker opens! It was 3 lockers away from being dead last, I just really don't know how I got it so wrong. After that fiasco, Thomas and I went for a run and then got acai bowls.

On Sunday, Thomas and I again joined forces and went to VRAC to get some work done. After this, we went to Reiman Gardens. They had very large bugs (which was a natural force against my enjoyment), but they also had a butterfly enclosure which was awesome. During our time in the gardens we found the largest "concrete" gnome. This excitement died down with the heat getting worse but then increased again with the promise of ice cream after.

All in all, a good time in the past few days spent with some great people!







June 8, 2022 by mhcini

fun times in the making

Since the last time I posted, there have been a lot of fun times had and a lot of friendships made. Over the weekend, Alli, Thomas, and I went to the farmers market. We were on a specific hunt for maple syrup while also taking the time to browse around. It was a beautiful morning and we found exactly what we needed while also getting some great smoothies. Because we missed the bus back, we had a great walk that ended up with a competitive game of what can go through the Green Glass Door. After we got back, the syrup we got was used for the tasteful french toast that Emma and Grace so kindly made.

The next day we all went to Val's Bike Shop to help with some organization while also choosing some bikes that she graciously was donating to us for the summer! After this, Alli, Charles, and I went to VRAC to get some work done – however, the forecast called for stormy weather so Alli and I had prepared to go back to the dorms so as to not get caught in the bad weather. This did not go according to plan. It began pouring rain and we got a bit wet, unfortunately.

One of my favorite nights so far was when Elli informed us of a trivia night at a restaurant called Old Chicago. We had amazing food there and won the trivia night on the last question!

So far having a great time with the people here and learning so much from all of them. Can't wait for the days to come!

Also – shoutout to Grace for the funniest 5 < minutes of laughing



June 2, 2022 by mhcini

...the last 72 hours

After a couple of delays at the airport, the descent into Des Moines Iowa consisted of more cornfields than I've ever seen so far in my life which was none. So cool! The rest of the day consisted of meet and greets with the rest of the gang which included good food and a cute dog. Day 2 consisted of more meet and greets with more good food and a lovely tour of the campus given by our awesome mentors Lale and Imtiajul. During the tour I heard my first tornado siren and got a bug stuck in my hair, both of which are excitable moments. Day 3 is now almost under wraps and we've been presented all the research projects and got more introductions, had lunch with our research professors and grad students. Excited for the upcoming weeks with these great people and the research to come!

