

Walking Around Town

by Michael Stahl



It was a light, spring Sunday in Brooklyn, New York. Doug and his wife, Eve, were enjoying it with their copy of the *Sunday New York Times* newspaper, which they would pleasingly read section by section over a hearty breakfast of eggs, bacon, and, of course, some warm and soft New York City bagels.

Both Doug and Eve were hardworking people, having to commute by subway throughout the week into different parts of their neighboring borough of Manhattan where both of their offices were located. Therefore, they usually took full advantage of their days off by lounging around their apartment, reading and watching television. This was especially true throughout the winter, when temperatures were too cold and the skies too cloudy in New York to make Doug and Eve leave their place if they did not absolutely have to. They could rest and recover from their long workweek indoors, away from the snow and chilly temperatures, just as well as they could outside, and probably even better so!

However, this was the first clear and relatively warm day of the year that Doug and Eve could go outside and enjoy wholeheartedly, without having to bundle up and pile on layers of clothing. Eve became anxious as the morning neared a close and the afternoon came upon them. She desperately wanted to go outside exploring and snap photos with her brand new digital camera, which she had bought just the day before. She was worried that Doug would not be up for such a trip and he would give the excuse that he was too tired. Eve was also hoping she could coax Doug into becoming a little more enthusiastic about photography himself, so they could plan fun photo excursions together. After all, they lived in one of the five boroughs of the city of New York, which ranks among one of the

biggest cities in the world, and is overflowing with countless images worth capturing on a camera. Eve really loved photographing the city (though she would not take as many photos in the frigid winter time) and thought getting Doug into it too would give them an excuse to have some extra fun time together.

"Doug," Eve began a little tenderly, and nervously. "How about we head into the city today?" (New Yorkers tend to refer to Manhattan as "the city," even if they already are residents of the five boroughs because the island is really its epicenter.)

"What for?" asked Doug, sipping his juice with a puzzled look on his face.

Eve sighed. She was wishing for the conversation to go more smoothly.

"Well, I'd like to take some photos today. It's beautiful outside! And I thought you'd like to come along," she said.

Doug replied with a simple "Oh." He folded his paper and put it down without much of an expression.

Eve didn't know how to react to that. Then, Doug got up and left the room, making Eve wonder what in the world that meant. Did he want to go? Was he angry at the request?

"What are you doing?" she asked him, projecting her voice down the hall.

"I'll be right there," he said.

After a moment, Eve heard Doug's footsteps reentering their little dining room. She looked up and saw him smiling, holding two cameras: her brand new one and the other one he had secretly bought for himself as well.

Doug and Eve left their apartment and began walking the pavement toward the subway stop they were very familiar with, looking forward to their day of photographing the wonderful sites of New York City. What they, like most New Yorkers and city dwellers around the world, probably did not even realize, is they were going to observe all the highlights while being part of a tremendous ecosystem.

People usually think of an ecosystem as something much more natural than a city with incredibly tall, manmade buildings on top of concrete that run parallel to streets with zipping vehicles spewing toxic carbon monoxide into the atmosphere. Typically, the ocean comes to mind as an example of an ecosystem, or the rain forests of South America, while the African deserts could be another. However, an ecosystem is simply defined as a community filled with living and nonliving organisms that interact with each other within a particular environment. And an urban ecosystem is actually the one ecosystem that human beings are in fact most familiar with, while it is also arguably the only ecosystem in the world that is growing.

Like they usually do on Mondays through Fridays when travelling to and from their jobs, Doug and Eve decided to take a local subway line from their home in Brooklyn to the island of Manhattan to enjoy their Sunday.

New York City has a massive subway system that helps people get around. The trains travel above and below ground, over bridges and through tunnels. These electrical behemoths are vital parts of the city's ecosystem for they, in effect, help people survive a bit easier than if the trains did not exist.

Human beings are incredibly social creatures. In other words, they naturally desire communication and companionship with other people. The city's subways allow that to happen with much more freedom and ease, not to mention the quicker pace that is possible compared to the alternatives of a horse and buggy or walking. Furthermore, the subways help individuals get to their jobs, allowing them and other people to be productive. Necessary goods, such as food and supplies, become more easily available to people with better transportation. Plus, important services like medical treatment and education can be more easily taken advantage of.

Both Doug and Eve took some last minute photos of the incredible Manhattan skyline through the windows of the subway car before it headed underground, into a tunnel, and through the East River into the subterranean depths of Manhattan.

When Eve and Doug walked upstairs from the subway station onto a Manhattan sidewalk, the first thing they saw were tremendous skyscrapers standing thousands of feet high. The island of Manhattan is littered with hundreds of huge buildings that have become world famous for, not just their height, but also for their recognizable architecture and symbolism of mankind's never-ending desire to create. Doug and Eve immediately reached for their cameras and started taking

some photos of buildings like the Empire State Building, the Freedom Tower and the Chrysler Building.

Many of these skyscrapers are essentially incredibly large office spaces. Therefore, the buildings serve a vital function in the ecosystem in that they house many people throughout the day, while they are working on any number of projects that could help others. A large percentage of these buildings are also homes to restaurants and eateries where people not only enjoy plenty of available nourishing food, but commiserate with each other as well.

One of the drawbacks of so many skyscrapers is that it creates shade. This might sound like a positive, and it partially is because it gives people relief from the hot rays of the sun. However, too little exposure to the sun is not a good thing either. The sun is blocked so often from New York residents by those buildings, that people are not getting enough Vitamin D into their bodies, because the sun's rays help build the levels of Vitamin D.

Still, it is important to recognize that these buildings of Manhattan are, in some ways, as "natural" a thing as an anthill or a bird's nest. First of all, human beings, who are undoubtedly a part of nature, have built them, and they have been built by raw materials taken up from the planet's resources. Certainly, soil has been covered by concrete and iron, but there are plenty of places in nature where there is no rich soil, like Antarctica, for instance. The previously hilly island that had thousands of trees on it has simply been exchanged for an urban ecosystem containing different things that serve the same function as many others that are called more "natural." In addition, skyscrapers still must be built with respect to many laws of nature. An elite architect along with a construction crew cannot simply erect a building that stretches to an infinite height. The effects of gravity, wind, and, yes, the density of soil still within the earth of Manhattan, must be considered in the planning and construction of a building.

Eve knew that if she was going to have a successful day of photography, she and her husband would have to take a trip to Central Park. Central Park is located in the middle of Manhattan and takes up quite a chunk of land. It includes a couple of ponds, hundreds of trees, large grassy areas, rocky

parts, and trails for urban "hiking." Many species of animals call Central Park home, too. For some of them, it may be the only place within New York City where they can actually survive.

Central Park was constructed because city planners knew that New Yorkers would need a getaway location, a place where they could reconnect with nature, or at least the parts of it that are more traditionally considered "natural." It is still certainly the case that New Yorkers need this outlet, which explains why Central Park still exists today as the price of local real estate has only increased over the years. Parks like this one "soften" the urban experience, giving locals a place to relax and engage in important recreational activities. Many scientists note that, though cities are ecosystems and a growing part of nature, the loss of greenery is a severe problem that needs to change. The urban planners of today are becoming more sensitive to this by making sure to include parks, taking a page out of the books of those who helped create Central Park as they continue to build new cities and expand upon those that have already been founded.

Doug and Eve strolled around the park for quite a while. They took tons of photos, ate lunch together, and even rode the famous merrygoround. They were truly taking advantage of the pleasures allowed by the existence of such an incredible and unique location.

When Doug and Eve left Central Park, they began to chat about all of the noise in the city and the overflowing garbage cans that were seemingly on every block. These are common complaints made by many about the urban ecosystem, and might be more noticeable just after leaving such a beautiful place. Though they are considered to be large negatives of urban life, it is nearly impossible for noise pollution and garbage to be avoided.

Noise pollution is a byproduct of the large population and all of the transportation needed to get them around. Without such transportation, humans would not be able to live, prosper, and interact as effectively. Many people would rather not think about the existence of bugs, rats and other organisms that can live off of garbage, but they too, are part of the ecosystem and would not be able to survive as easily in many other parts of the world.

Doug and Eve took the same subway back to their home in Brooklyn. Tired from a long day of walking around the city, they kicked off their shoes and sat on the couch in preparation for a nice movie viewing. The film was a documentary about living in the backwoods of Montana, enjoying life in a forest's ecosystem. Doug and Eve thought about vacationing there, inspired by their afternoon in Central Park, wanting to be closer to some more nature. They didn't even stop to think that they had both been active participants in an urban ecosystem, a particularly unique part of nature, over the course of the entire day.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What does Eve want to do with Doug?

- A. watch television
- B. lounge around the apartment
- C. take photos in Manhattan
- D. go shopping in Manhattan

2. What does the author mainly describe in the passage?

- A. the makeup of an urban ecosystem
- B. the makeup of a rural ecosystem
- C. a tour of Central Park
- D. the importance of city planning

3. Eve is uncertain that Doug will want to go on a photo walk with her.

What sentence from the passage best supports this statement?

- A. "Eve sighed. She was wishing for the conversation to go more smoothly."
- B. "'Doug,' Eve began a little tenderly, and nervously. 'How about we head into the city today?'"
- C. "'Well, I'd like to take some photos today. It's beautiful outside! And I thought you'd like to come along,' she said."
- D. "It was a light, spring Sunday in Brooklyn, New York."

4. Based on the passage, why might someone be less likely to recognize New York City as an ecosystem?

- A. New York City has buildings that are built by humans.
- B. New York City has a massive subway system that helps people get around.
- C. New York City does not seem to have a lot of natural features.
- D. New York City does not have a rain forest.

5. What is this passage mainly about?

- A. the urban ecosystem of New York City
- B. the best tourist spots in New York City
- C. how to take good photographs
- D. a disagreement between Doug and Eve

6. How does the narrative of Eve and Doug's photo walk fit within the overall structure of the passage?

- A. It is a factual introduction to life in New York City.
- B. It is the focus point of the passage which the author enhances with details about New York City.
- C. It is an anecdote that is unrelated to the rest of the passage.
- D. It is a frame within which the author presents facts about New York City's ecosystem.

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

The abundance of skyscrapers in Manhattan creates a lot of shade; _____, resident New Yorkers do not receive enough Vitamin D from the sun's rays.

- A. moreover
- B. as a result
- C. ultimately
- D. such as

8. What is an "ecosystem" as defined by the passage?

9. A negative element of New York City's ecosystem is noise pollution. What is an example of a positive element of New York City's ecosystem that is identified in the passage, and why is it positive?

10. Explain how different parts of an ecosystem can have an impact on one another by using an example from the passage.
