



Life Beyond a Rainbow

A STORY ABOUT COLORBLINDNESS AND HOW LIFE CAN BE SEEN IN DIFFERENT SHADES

ART CREDIT: SOFIA FEREGRINO

BY SOFIA FEREGRINO

Could you imagine a world without color? Waking up in the morning and seeing a red sky and white trees. Well, some people can imagine this—it's their life. What is color to a colorblind person? What is color to a person who can't see color? There are many different ways to be colorblind. You don't just see black and white, you might see slightly faded colors, or only certain colors. When I think of colorblindness, I think of an old photograph, it still holds emotion, just not the subtle beauty of color.

A young photographer made it possible for us to see through colorblind people's eyes with her photography and art. People are able to experience what it feels like to be colorblind because of a Belgian photographer named Sanne De Wilde. Sanne used the island nicknamed the "Island of the Colorblind" to create a series of images showing the island as a colorblind person may see it. Today, 10 percent of people on the island share a rare condition of colorblindness known as complete achromatopsia. During a 2015 visit to Pingelap Atoll, the South Pacific island, she created photographs inspired by the vision of the

people who live there. Some are all black-and-white images, but others have light variations of colors, like red, blue or yellow. She used photo settings and lenses on her camera to change and soften certain colors.

"Color is just a word to those who cannot see it," Sanne said in a National Geographic article about her work. To better capture what they can see, she allowed some of the colorblind islanders to paint over some of her images with watercolors to illustrate the world they saw. "What I'm really trying to do is to invite people to a new way of seeing and interacting with the world," Sanne said later in the article.

Have you ever heard a colorblind person's story? Daniel Stone wrote about Sanne for National Geographic. He had a connection to her work because he is colorblind. Sharing his perspective on the condition, he explained that colorblindness is a result of cones. Most people have green, blue and red cones in their eyes that let them see those colors. There are several different kinds of colorblindness, but the most common one, red-green colorblindness, happens when people lack the red cone, only allowing them to see green

and blue. Around 10 percent of males have that condition.

"Colorblindness affects a lot of people. It affects mostly men and boys, because of how it works with our genes," said Daniel Stone, professor of environmental science at Johns Hopkins University and former National Geographic contributing editor. "We all have genes, you know, different traits. That's why you might have brown hair, other people have blue eyes. Some people are tall, some people aren't, because of the genes that we inherit from our parents. And colorblindness is inheritable from our parents."

The reason colorblindness affects so few women can be explained by the gender differences in chromosomes and recessive genes. "I've only in my whole life met one girl who was colorblind, and I was amazed, astounded," Daniel said. "I was so excited, because it never happens."

Most people have colorblindness from birth but some discover it later on. "Colorblindness is part of an identity, it's part of my identity. It's something I've had since I was born, and I only learned about it when I was about six," Daniel said. "And what I

THE IMPORTANT BOOK - BY DANIEL STONE

realized at the time, was that I see color differently than other people." Daniel then shared a story that intrigued me: "When I was a kid, I would draw stick figures and families in little pictures. I always put the skin of the people that I drew in green, which to me just looked like skin color."

Something I learned through reporting this story is that being colorblind doesn't really bother or affect you, and you can definitely live without having to see all the colors of the rainbow. As Daniel said, "Colorblindness doesn't affect my daily life. I don't feel like I need to be cured." You don't need to see color like everyone else does, instead view the world distinctly and uniquely, because even though there are some ways to fix how a person sees color, there is no cure.

"Colorblindness isn't such a hard condition to deal with. So, I wouldn't want to go into surgery and have them put a needle in my eye just so I could see color better," Daniel said. "But there are times when I look at my monitor, or I look through those colorblind glasses, and I see the world in such rich color that I think, 'Wow, I wonder if everyone else sees this all the time.'"

An excerpt from
Daniel Stone's
childhood book.

The important thing about me is that I am me. I was a baby who grew into a child, I will grow into a man, But the important thing about me is that I am me.