

CHAPTER ONE
ORIGIN OF SEEKERS:

FROM CAVEMEN TO CAGE FIGHTERS

According to the official program, Nick Wernimont stands just under six feet tall and weighs 170 pounds. He looks like the kind of guy that if you saw him walking down a dark alley...well, you would probably think he got lost looking for the VIP entrance to a night club. What's most striking about his appearance is how much he does *not* look like a ruffian compared to the other raw slabs of beef lumbering around inside the ring tonight. Although he does appear to treat his trips to the gym with due respect, Wernimont reminds you more of an underwear model than a cage-fighter. Even from the cheap seats (which pretty much describe every seat in the house at an amateur boxing match) you can see Wernimont's sparkling rows of white teeth. He has a day or two's collection of stubble sprouting on his face where an aspiring beard will have its hopes dashed by a razor as soon as tonight's fight is over. The shadow beard is presumably an attempt to draw attention away from his other metrosexual features like the suspiciously perfect tan, and what I can only guess are well-manicured nails. In truth, it just makes him look even more like Brad Pitt, but less like Pitt's demented character in *Fight Club* and more like his dapper Dillinger role in *Ocean's Eleven*. Either way it's a thinly veiled effort to deceive, which probably fills his rough-looking opponent with confidence. Unfortunately for his foe, that confidence will prove to be painfully false. And then I start to think that maybe that has been Wernimont's strategy all along.

There is definitely more to this guy than meets the eye. He has been training with his boxing coach, his world champion jiu-jitsu coach, and his

Muay Thai coach six days a week for the last year with just three exceptions. He took one week off to run with the bulls in Pamplona, Spain...on all five of the five days he spent there before returning home to Chicago. He spent a week in Florida in late December getting his sky-diving certification. Then there is also his trip to Brazil to experience the festival of sensory excess found nowhere else in the world except at Carnivale. Nick Wernimont has no shortage of friends, but it seems right that the only person he could find to join him on his wild adventures should be a member of his own gene pool. His brother Chris's work schedule helps. He works two weeks on, two weeks off work as a helicopter pilot carting roughnecks from their New Orleans homes out to drilling rigs in the Gulf of Mexico. But the average person would agree that spare time alone isn't a good enough reason to go on these types of adrenalin binges. Nick and Chris have far more than flexible schedules in common.

Tonight's boxing match was arranged as a warm-up bout before Wernimont's first full contact cage-fight in a few months. The arena is alive with murmurs of blood-thirsty fans hoping to see a pretty-boy pummeling. When the bell sounds, the pugilists dance around the ring for a few seconds and size each other up. Wernimont's face reveals what could best be described as a controlled ferocity – aggressive yet strategic. After a swing and a miss from his opponent, Wernimont makes his strike. A couple of hard blows reach their destination and it isn't long before a cut opens up under his opponent's eye causing a little rivulet of blood to run down his cheek. The second round offers more of the same. The referee eventually intervenes, calling for a standing eight count to let Wernimont's opponent regain his composure. By the third round, the fight is all but over. Shortly after the bell sounds, the referee decides he's seen enough and the fight is called.

Wernimont is officially one and oh in his fight career. His first full-contact fight is on the horizon.

Full-contact fighting (or Mixed Martial Arts) is the closest thing America has to ancient Roman gladiators. Except for biting, hitting below the belt, and finger torque-ing, it is a no-holds barred affair with no violence spared for the audience.

“Five wins and I can start making some money at this,” he tells me with a wink. Five wins on the sanctioned amateur full-contact circuit qualifies a fighter for a professional bout where they can actually get paid for doing something that most people would ransom their first-born child to *avoid* doing. The real joke, however, is that Wernimont will have to become the world Ultimate Fighting Champion before he begins to make the kind of money he does now at his day job. In this way he is like the rare few ancient gladiators who were not slaves, but free citizens who simply enjoyed the thrill of the games.

Wernimont’s career, just like the rest of his life, is marked by short bursts of intense activity and radical changes. After graduating from college at the University of Iowa, he moved to Los Angeles where stimulation is never in short supply. Once there, he spent his days at Morgan Stanley, clocking in as a financial analyst and earning their number one new salesman award. He moonlighted as a bartender at the Saddle Ranch on Sunset Strip. After narrowly missing final selection as one of the cast members for MTV’s *Real World: Chicago*, he decided to pack up and head to the Windy City on his own leaving bartending and financial planning behind. Now he spends his days working as a successful sales manager for a dental implants manufacturer (an ironic selection for the future cage-fighter)

and buying real estate. His evenings are spent at the gym sparring with world champion martial artists.

Getting to know Nick Wernimont only creates more questions. Of course, anyone who voluntarily chooses cage fighting as a hobby is a rather intriguing individual. But he is extraordinary even compared to his cage-fighting peers. This is what makes Nick Wernimont's foray into full-contact fighting so compelling. He is not a former Olympic gold medalist who wants to make a living doing what he knows how to do best, nor is he a deluded dock worker who has seen one too many Rocky movies. His collar is as white as his teeth and the only gold he owns is wrapped around his wrist and tells time with amazing accuracy. He lives each day in a waking, postmodern American Dream - young, smart, good-looking, and financially successful with no visible regrets about any of it. It just doesn't seem to make sense. With all of this going for him, why would he subject himself to the kind of punishment inherent in a crazy sport like full-contact fighting?

1. The Novelty-Seeking Gene

At the turn of the millennium, the world buzzed with anticipation about the possibilities and pitfalls in store for Y2K. Inside the walls of Jim Swanson's research lab at the University of California in Irvine, the level of anticipation was no exception. Two courses of fascinating research were about to collide in an unexpected way that would cause scientists from around the world to drop what they were doing and take note.

Jim Swanson is a humble man who insists that much of his success as a scientist is owed to his "collaborations with other great scientists." Nevertheless, Swanson is still recognized as one of the world's foremost experts on child development. His research center in Irvine was one of the

first seven labs chosen as a Vanguard Center for a very ambitious project called the National Children's Study that will stretch across the country with the aim of understanding the biggest problems facing American children. Over the span of the next 20 years the Centers will collaborate to study over 100,000 children and their families. Swanson's recognition is due in large part to his ground-breaking work on the rising occurrence of Attention Deficit with Hyperactivity Disorder, or ADHD. Most people today recognize the disorder by its original name of just "ADD," which first came into vogue in the 1980's after it was officially recognized as a psychological syndrome rather than a behavioral problem. The term "ADD" has since infiltrated the everyday lingo that Americans use to describe kids who are unfocused or inattentive. Now psychologists have officially thrown hyperactivity's hat into the ring to describe the fidgety aspect of the disorder. As Swanson's team was about to discover, the hyperactive element of the syndrome is a key piece of the puzzle that may help explain a lot about ADHD, and also about human history.

Like many other mental illnesses, treatment of ADHD was very rudimentary once it was first recognized. But as the number of children diagnosed began to skyrocket, there was a need for treatment and understanding to catch up. From 1994 to the 2004 the number of paid doctor visits for treatment of ADHD nearly tripled. This alarming increase has had many doctors and educators wondering how big the next wave of this possible epidemic might be. For researchers like Jim Swanson, the clock was ticking to find some answers.

Early in 2000, Swanson's team sat a group of ADHD kids down to play a few brain-teaser games. One of these games is called the Logan stop-signal test and resembles the popular children's game "red light/green light."

Each child is given a task such as watching a light or pressing a button on a computer keyboard. Then when instructed to do so a child has to stop whatever action she was engaged in. Children with ADHD usually take much longer to complete this task than a normal child, because they are slower at reacting to the stop signal. What Swanson's team found when they tallied the results surprised everyone, including Jim Swanson.

Before the experiment, Swanson's team had split the kids into two groups based on whether or not a child carried a specific variation of a gene called dopamine receptor gene D4. The function of D4 is to tinker with the levels of dopamine in the child's brain. (As noted earlier, dopamine is the brain chemical that makes us feel happy and vibrant.) Every person has this gene in one variation or another, but we don't all have the exact same variation of it. This is standard practice in the world of genes. For example, we all have a gene that determines what color our eyes are, but we don't all have the same eye color gene. Some people have the blue eye gene, while others have the brown eye gene. The same is true about this dopamine receptor gene, D4. Everybody has it, but not everybody has the same variation. What separates the variations is how many times a segment of this gene repeats itself in the genetic sequence. Most people have a shorter variation of the gene that gets repeated four times. But some people have the longer variation that repeats seven times. This longer variation causes a less sensitive response to dopamine, which then creates a deficit in the amount of dopamine output to a person's brain. In other words, the dopamine that is present in their brain has to try a little harder. They have to round up even more of their chemical friends than the average person in order to really get the dopamine party started and that requires extra-stimulating activities. In the late nineties, scientist Richard Ebstein found that people with the longer

variation also had a personality trait called “novelty-seeking.” Thanks to Ebstein’s discovery, the longer variation of the D4 gene is commonly dubbed “the novelty-seeking gene.”

As you might expect from the name, people with the novelty-seeking trait feel more compelled than the average person to seek out new and exciting experiences. The problem is that everybody’s brain craves dopamine, so the people born with a natural shortage of dopamine output have to overcompensate. They find it hard to keep themselves satisfied with the ordinary, slow-moving pace of just about everything that happens in their lives. The normal acts of reading a book, sitting through a meeting, obeying traffic laws, and even a roll in the hay don’t necessarily keep these people’s attention. While most of us are happy and relatively satisfied doing most of these things, they quickly bore people with the novelty-seeking gene. That means these restless souls have to go looking for action anywhere they can find it in order to stir up some more dopamine just to feel “normal.” They might drive fast. They might disregard instructions designed for safety. They might jump up in a cage with their fists cocked.

Heart-racing, dopamine-producing endeavors can also cause feelings of bliss in the ordinary person. But it’s not all fun and games with dopamine. Too much of this good thing can easily turn excitement into fear and bliss into anxiety. What gives the carrier of novelty-seeking gene an exciting rush is likely to do nothing for the ordinary person other than cause a panic.

Currently, about one-quarter of all people have the novelty-seeking gene, but more than half of all people diagnosed with ADHD have it. Not surprisingly, Ebstein’s discovery led many scientists to believe that the novelty-seeking gene may as well be nicknamed the “attention-deficit gene.” Although not all kids with ADHD have the gene, researchers believed that

the kids with the most severe cases of ADHD symptoms would carry the gene. The purpose of Jim Swanson's study was to verify that exact point. His Irvine research team expected to find that the kids *with* the novelty-seeking gene would do significantly worse on their brain-teaser tests than the ADHD kids *without* the gene.

After the experiment, Swanson's team tallied the results. The ADHD kids without the novelty-seeking gene performed just like a run-of-the-mill kid with ADHD should. They made more mistakes than normal kids, and they were slower to respond. Their inability to pay attention caused their mind to drift without giving that second line of reasoning a chance to catch them. Swanson's team reasoned that if ADHD kids with the normal version of the dopamine gene performed poorly on the test, then the kids with the novelty-seeking gene didn't have a prayer.

But they were wrong. When the numbers were crunched, they did find a difference between the kids with the novelty-seeking gene compared to the kids without it, but it wasn't the difference they had predicted. The novelty-seeking group did much *better* than expected. These kids ended up scoring the same as the kids with no symptoms of ADHD whatsoever. Furthermore, the novelty-seeking kids proved to be even quicker on the draw. Apparently, there was much more to this new gene than anyone had previously guessed.

Swanson believes that the kids classified as having ADHD who carried the novelty-seeking gene do not actually have the same version of ADHD as those without this gene. He says this group only has a "partial syndrome characterized by behavioral excesses without cognitive deficits." So while these kids may behave a bit on the hyperactive side in the classroom, and have trouble settling down at home, there really isn't anything dysfunctional about the way they think. It is only those

“behavioral excesses” that make these kids a handful for their parents and teachers. Swanson believes it is probably also those same excessive quirks that can drive frustrated parents into their pediatrician’s office to get a pharmaceutical fix.

This was a discovery that nobody saw coming. Whatever else they are, these kids are quick thinkers. Whether or not that is a good thing or a bad thing was the real question.

To find out, the Irvine researchers teamed up with another group of scientists and embarked on a journey back in time. In finding the novelty-seeking gene’s roots, they hoped to shed some light on why this mutation lurks in so many of today’s children.

2. Misguided Mutation or Misunderstood Gift?

Roughly 165,000 years ago modern humans (i.e. homo sapiens) debuted on planet Earth. Compared to their stocky and slightly older kin, the Neanderthals, our ancestors had long foreheads in order to accommodate bigger frontal and temporal lobes in their brains. They also were more gracile with longer limbs and narrower hips. The two groups mostly kept to themselves, co-existing without much incident for the next 115,000 years. Then shortly before cave-painting and music came into vogue, the short version of the dopamine gene D4, which had been around ever since homo sapiens first appeared, spawned a lively mutation - the seven-repeat variation now commonly referred to as “the novelty-seeking gene.

At this time in our pre-history (40,000-50,000 years ago), modern humans called the savannas of Africa home while Neanderthals dwelled mostly in the caves of Europe, the Middle East and Western Asia. Although the African continent was home to all of what we now regard as “modern

human” civilization, hardly anything that existed then would fit into our definition of “civilized.” In the technical sense, there were people with similar physical attributes to the people of today. But they were people with little to no symbolic behavior such as art or decorative objects that characterizes our culture today. They had no complex speech and no music. They hunted, they gathered and they died. They were not quite the homebodies that Neanderthals were, but our ancestors were not exactly circumnavigating the globe, either. Not yet, anyway.

Then all of a sudden, modern humans made a breakthrough. Some restless souls embarked on a quest to see what they were missing elsewhere in the world. Australian scientists, David Cameron and Colin Groves explain that “40,000 years ago, *Homo sapiens* began, for whatever reason, spreading into the Neanderthal heartland of Europe.” That move signaled the beginning of the end for the Neanderthals as they then became casualties of rapid extinction. (The last Neanderthals died 27,000 years ago). But it marked the beginning of something big for modern humans. Their migration north was a bold move considering the first map wasn’t drawn until just 800 years ago, much less the luxury of Mapquest.com. Magellan and his troupe of fellow sea-farers would not set sail for another fifty millenniums. Moses didn’t hustle his people toward the exits of Egypt until less than ten thousand years ago. These ancient people didn’t know the world was round, and probably had no comprehension of what *round* as a concept even meant given that the first wheel wasn’t rolled out until about five thousand years ago. Not to mention that their slender physiques were not built for the colder climate like the husky Neanderthals.

Trekking into unknown territory was a risky choice. Yet humans did it, anyway, and history’s course was forever altered because of it. But not

only did they become explorers, a kind of pre-historic Renaissance also began around this time. Archaeologists found a flute in Germany dating back 36,000 years ago, and two others in France from 32,000 and 27,000 years ago. As early as 34,000 years ago people were carving animal figurines in Germany, and 32,000 years ago they were drawing pictures on cave walls in France and Spain. It is not that humans had not made technological advances in terms of tools and hunting techniques since their inception in the preceding 120,000 years. It is just that they had not made much headway in the kind of symbolic behavior that generally characterizes the emergence of modern humans. In their book *Bones, Stones and Molecules*, Cameron and Groves explain that “compared to the later explosion in Europe there is little evidence for the widespread development of artistic or symbolic behavior within the earliest modern humans of Africa.”

The question is *why then?*

3. Positive Selection

In 2002, a research team from the U.S. and China lead by biologist Yuan-Chun Ding at UC Irvine offered an answer to that question. In short, their answer was the novelty-seeking gene. Ding’s team intended to find out where this peculiar gene variation came from and what it has been up to ever since then.

Determining the exact age of a gene is a complicated process. But if we indulge in just a moment of mental masochism, we can find an important clue about how humanity came to be where we are today. Biologists will look for two things when they “age” a gene. First, they want to see the size of a gene’s family tree. If a gene has produced lots of branches on its family

tree (i.e. variations), then we can be pretty certain that it is an old gene. However, if the gene only has a few limbs on the family tree, then we know it is still young. Just like your grandparents are at the root of more branches on the family tree than you are, older genes will have more branches than younger ones. Second, geneticists know that if a gene is young, then it hasn't had much time to spread its seed, which means that not many people today will carry it.

As long as a particular gene or gene variation isn't too harmful - such as a gene that contributes to a disease - chances are that the gene will spread slowly but surely over a long period of time. This dispersal through the population is due mostly to chance. For example, having two webbed toes like my son has, doesn't offer any huge advantages since our amphibious ancestors decided to shore up on dry land millions and millions of years ago. Unless we find ourselves in Kevin Costner's *Water World* soon, my son will just have to learn to live comfortably on the fringe of normal-toed society until the polar ice caps finish melting already. At the same time, webbed-toes are still genetically determined. Somewhere along either mine or my wife's ancestry this recessive webbed-toe gene has smuggled itself into our DNA and it continues to spread. But it is spreading only by the process of genetic drift, which essentially means it is spreading by chance. It doesn't offer any discernible advantage to its carriers, nor does it pose any kind of a threat. Even though having a pair of webbed toes is not typical, it isn't all that uncommon either. The webbed-toe gene must have been around for quite a while in order to have spread to so many people simply by chance.

As a rule, genes mutate fairly regularly so any single mutation is a rather lackluster event. A mutation needs to firmly stand the test of time before it can be considered something worth noting. After natural selection

runs its course, the “good” mutations that offer an advantage - like opposable thumbs and sweat glands - end up sticking around. The not-so-good mutations get weeded out like bad fashion trends and ultimately become evolutionary casualties. The more neutral mutations like webbed-toes, loiter on the corners of our genetic sequences, simply because nothing has caused them to self-select out of the process. Since the novelty-seeking gene continues showing up disproportionately in an error-prone disorder like ADHD, the laws of selection would seem to give this gene very little staying power. After all, a mutation that might cause a person to leap without first looking is likely to disappear pretty quickly as the gene’s carriers die off prematurely. But the novelty-seeking gene was spared the fate of other short-lived mutations. Somehow this gene with a strong connection to social problems from chronic criminality to aggression to cocaine addiction has made the improbable journey from mutation to mainstay. It is not only surviving, it is thriving.

That is why the novelty-seeking gene is a paradox. It has very few branches on its family tree, which means that it is still pretty young. However, lots of people around the world – about 25% - carry it. That isn’t a majority, but 25% of 6 billion is still quite a few. This means that the novelty-seeking gene is not spreading randomly. If the novelty-seeking gene were like the gene for webbed-toes with no distinct advantage, then at this early stage in its life cycle, only a few people out of a hundred would carry it. If it caused kidney failure or cancer, then hardly anyone at all would still carry it. Look around you right now. Approximately one out of every four or five people sitting next to you is probably a genetic descendant of our ancient African seekers. At some time in the last 50,000 years, nature has realized it has something good going with the novelty-seeking gene and has

elected to spread the good news. Despite being the bane of grammar school teachers dealing with attention deficit in the classroom, this gene must be offering an adaptive edge to those who have it.

It's fun to think that maybe the spunky guy or girl with the carefree spirit each of us knows, and all of us are secretly envious of from time-to-time, might have been responsible for the mass migration of our ancient ancestors. However, that claim is difficult to verify. The science of genetics is too complicated to tie any single gene's mutation to an entire human exodus. But as Irvine biologist Deborah Grady points out, "the relationship of this gene to ADHD has been confirmed by so many research teams around the world...that it has stood as one of the most reliable genetic findings yet reported for the association of a gene with specific behavior." What we do have are some very significant historical human events (the migration out of Africa, art, and music) coinciding with the mutation of a very significant human gene (the D4 7-repeat novelty-seeking gene). Yuan-Chun Ding's team suggests that:

It is tempting to speculate that the major expansion of humans that occurred at that time, the appearance of radical new technology...and/or the development of agriculture, could be related to the increase in DRD4-7 allele frequency. Perhaps individuals with personality traits such as novelty seeking, perseverance, etc. drove the expansion and partial replacement.

We can be certain that this mutation appears to have grown in influence faster than an average gene should. We know that in order for a trait to last, it has to be enduringly advantageous in some way. So what is it about the behaviors this gene seems to encourage that make it so sticky? In

this case, the advantage may be the very same thing that was the deadly *disadvantage* at Pincher Creek.

4. *Boundary Blind*

September 11, 2001 is one of America's saddest days. Like many tragedies before it, the terrorist attack of 9/11 left many victims, but it also produced a great number of courageous acts. Not the least of these displays of heroism was that of fireman Stephen Siller. On the morning of September 11, Siller had just finished working an all-night shift at Brooklyn's Squad #1 firehouse. He was in his car on the way to meet his four brothers for a morning round of golf at the Glenwood Country Club when he heard news of the attacks on the World Trade Center. Without hesitation, Siller headed toward the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel leading into Manhattan and, always considerate, he made a call to his wife so she could tell his brothers that he would be a little late. Siller arrived at the Tunnel only to find that all traffic was being stopped by police. Again without hesitation, Siller grabbed his 70 pounds of gear and took off on a three mile jog to towards the blazing inferno of the World Trade Center. That was the last thing we know for sure about Stephen Siller's actions that morning. He never made it to meet his brothers for golf.

Most people regard Siller's determination that day as an uncommon and inspiring act of bravery. He lost his life in the impulsive decision to join his squad. His heroic trek is even commemorated every September in the Tunnel to Towers 5K charity run. What makes his act remarkable is that the average person may have decided to heed the call of duty and pack their gear into the car with the goal of reaching the Twin Towers. But when confronted with a road block three miles from the destination, the average person

probably would have simply given up their efforts to join the rescue. Someone would still be applauded for trying, even if they ultimately left the situation to the firefighters who were already on the scene.

But Steve Siller felt an undeniable impulse to do his duty, and he acted on it despite the quite literal roadblocks in his way. Just like the time in 1991, when he drove 2,000 miles from Brooklyn to Kansas City straight through, just to watch George Brett's last at bat for the Kansas City Royals. Then he drove straight back to Brooklyn another 2,000 miles after the game in order to make it to work on time the next day. If that isn't impulsive, I'm not sure what is. Where the reasonable person saw boundaries, Stephen Siller saw an opportunity to be a part of history.

Most people are dumbfounded by the things that a guy like Stephen Siller does. But perhaps the late Lane McGlynn is one guy who would have understood perfectly. McGlynn's role in the Pincher Creek avalanche is an example of the tragic nature of impulsive decisions. Yet it also symbolizes the tight relationship forged between tragedy and heroism. If we take another look at Lane McGlynn, we'll see that he and Stephen Siller were much more likely two of a kind rather than diametrically opposed. When you read about the Pincher Creek avalanche, you might have felt that McGlynn was responsible not only for his own death but that of his colleague Kevin Bruder. He blatantly disregarded an order when he charged up that hill. It was a tragic accident, but one that might never have happened to begin with.

But before condemning McGlynn's character, we shouldn't forget why he was at the foot of that hill to begin with. He was part of a *volunteer rescue squad* whose mission was to brave the elements during a Canadian blizzard in order to find three complete strangers who were stranded. We

also can't forget that McGlynn was just 21 years old. A 21 year old volunteer is a rarity, if not an oxymoron in today's "Generation Me." How many 21 year olds do you know who volunteer to do any work at all without pay, much less work that requires getting up at the crack of dawn to charge into the brutal conditions of a Canadian blizzard? Perhaps if Lane McGlynn had thought more about it that morning when he woke up, he would have had some questions such as *what if I get stranded out there, too? Aren't there enough people to help already?* Or maybe, *what's in it for me?* He could have conjured up a list of reasonable psychological boundaries. Fortunately, for the three stranded riders, Lane McGlynn didn't spend much time constructing obstacles in his mind. Instead, he hopped out of bed, threw on his snow gear and took off to answer the call of distress--just like Stephen Siller did on 9/11. Despite the risk and the consequences, both Siller and McGlynn went seeking. In the same way that humanity's ancestors crossed the boundary between Africa and the rest of the world, Siller and McGlynn crossed the boundary between security and vulnerability.

In spite of its prevalence in cage fighters, firemen and young snowmobilers too easily tempted by dares, boundary blindness is more than an extension of machismo. In fact, in TalentSmart's research we have found no significant differences between the impulsivity scores of men and women. As former CEO of the Washington Post Company Katherine Graham famously said "once power was considered a masculine attribute. In fact power has no sex." The same can be said of impulsivity. Taking daring leaps into the unknown is not an exclusively masculine behavior. If we look a bit closer, it is easy to see how this same sort of "damn the consequences" (or perhaps more appropriately, "what consequences?") approach helped fuel the engine of more feminine causes, like the women's liberation

movement. One representative illustration of boundary blindness was the rise of a small town girl named Joan Growe. When she was elected as the Minnesota secretary of state in 1974, Joan Growe became the first woman to hold a state office in the state of Minnesota. She held the office for the next 24 years. Her long political career began shortly before that in 1972 – the same year that Katherine Graham became the first female Fortune 500 CEO—when Growe waged an almost accidental campaign for a district legislative seat. Her decision to enter the race came down to “if I can get a babysitter, I’ll go to the local Democratic convention and try to get nominated.” Regarding her decision to run, she later told Tom Brokaw “it seemed like no big deal. I had no idea what I was getting into.” A more cautious decision maker might have spent more time weighing the costs in advance of making the decision. On the one hand, what Growe was getting into was an uphill battle that would upset many of the male constituents in her predominantly conservative neighborhood, as well as the beginning of the collapse of her second marriage. On the other hand, Joan Growe was carving out a little slice of history for herself and contributing to the empowerment of women across the country.

Of course, Growe was an intelligent woman with obvious leadership qualities. But it is likely that a lot of women in her district possessed great intelligence and charisma. Growe says that she wasn’t even the most politically active or feminist in her group of friends – after all, she still ironed her husband’s shirts. Still, Growe is the one that ran for the nomination because she just so happened to find a babysitter on that fateful evening of the Democratic convention. Growe’s career proves that paying little attention to the consequences is sometimes the only way to do some of things that each of us are really called to do, such as lead reform or save

lives. In the end, whether Joan Growe's personal sacrifices were worth the reward of her long tenure as a public servant can be debated. The voters who continued putting her in office term after term seemed to have been thankful for Growe's choice. Growe, sometimes struggles with the question. She says that during her youth "it never occurred to me that I would get divorced or run for office." But she concludes that "if I had not gone through that early trauma, I might not be where I am today."

It becomes clearer why a gene like the novelty-seeking gene has been on the rise since its mutation. When people fail to observe boundaries, nothing stands in their way. This realization forces us to re-examine what it means to be impulsive. Maybe there is something more to people like Nick Wernimont than a predilection for cage-fighting and sky-diving. A little boundary blindness may be what set humanity on its course of rapid change. And a little more boundary blindness may also be just what we need to get us through it.