

Q2 Lit log 1
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B-Band

In 'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest' by Ken Kesey, the main character and narrator, Bromden expresses various events that could be interpreted as hallucinations. For example the Nurse in his ward swelling up into a wide terrible monster can be easily understood as a hallucination since the book is not fantasy and Bromden is in a mental hospital. However the reader can become less sure of where the delusion's end; when it comes to this mysterious fog. Is the fog a real thing that everyone brushes off like it suggested McMurphy may be doing (103) or is Bromden simply hallucinating conditions from his time at war? I can't be sure of either one, yet but a line mentioned early on made me really step back and reevaluate the way I was taking in this story. "...it's the truth even if it didn't happen."(8), words from Bromden that made me think of how even if you see something in the wrong context or recall an event or memory wrong but believe it to be true, then at least the impact on your takeaway is true.

Memory is a fickle thing. Our own perceptions aren't entirely reliable despite everyone not being mentally ill. False memories or inaccurate recollections are just side effects of life.

A couple weeks ago, I was talking to my dad about how as the fall was starting to feel more like winter, I'd have to take extra care so my eczema didn't flare up. Somewhere in this conversation I mentioned how as a child my flare ups used to be so bad that I had to take oatmeal baths. After first saying this my dad looked at me in confusion and simply asked what I meant. I proceeded to explain how my eczema was so bad as a child that baths were run and I used to soak in oats. The way I remembered it, there were so many oats covering the surface that the tub looked like a pot of oatmeal. My dad laughed and told me that while I did take one "oatmeal bath" it didn't happen like that. For starters the oats weren't floating on the surface of the tub like someone was making breakfast, but rather they had ground down and mixed in with the water. I was confused because until that moment I had seen myself sitting in a tub of oats and for some reason I remembered the smell of cinnamon. Which surprise also wasn't there.

If I had recalled that memory before that conversation, I would have told it the way I remember. Which according to my dad was not quite how it happened. It's not a lie, you could almost say the surface of oats and the cinnamon smell were just part of my skewed perception. And there are a number of reasons why that memory was so off, for example, I was really young when I lived that event so my child mind hearing about an oatmeal bath probably took it in the most literal way and logged all sorts of incorrect information about that day. Another thing is, there had been a significant amount of time between the present me and the me in the bath.

We all know that time makes memories more fuzzy. The farther away you get from most memories, the harder it is to recall certain small details(for most memories, but not all). I did a little research on why people can remember something so vividly and yet be so wrong. I learned

that the human mind is very vulnerable when it comes to suggestions.¹ So, when you discuss memories with other people or get new information about something your brain fills in any gaps where you may have been fuzzy on certain details or just assumes things were a certain way in the memory if you were unsure and after one or two times of this, it's no longer the pure memory. Now it has been edited and cleaned up so even if the base of it is true, like me taking an oatmeal bath, the other details like the oats surfaces and the cinnamon smell were things my brain picked up and just attached to the memory.

It's not a new idea to hear that people are who they are because of the things they've lived through or the memories they have. If we go by that logic then the way that Bromden remembers his time at war and how he perceives things in the war doesn't make him that unreliable of a narrator since we are all a kind of unreliable narrator but it's no our fault.

¹ <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-a-false-memory-2795193>