

DON'T VANILLA ICE YOUR WAY THROUGH LIFE.

There's a moving scene in the critically-acclaimed dramatic film...Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles II: The Secret of the Ooze...where the Turtles are forced to fight one of their own—a playful snapping turtle named Tokka. It's a gut-wrenching scene.

As a kid, I always saw Tokka as a lover not a fighter.

I struggled with whom the good guys in this situation really were. It definitely wasn't Vanilla Ice. He just watched the whole time, did nothing, then somehow improvised a hit single on the fly. Bull shit.

So there I was—now as a 35-year-old man—watching the Ninja Rap, overcome by these conflicted feelings...I went for a jog.

I live on the east side of Ann Arbor in an area surrounded by marshland. As I was running along the sidewalk of an apartment complex, I saw this giant rock in the middle of the driveway entrance. But it wasn't a rock...

JESUS! There he was. Tokka. A giant snapping turtle. Sitting in the middle of the driveway waiting for the inevitable. I couldn't allow it. I had just seen the Turtles destroy one of their own. I was destined to not let this one have the same fate.

I found a thick branch to try and nudge him out of harm's way. But he wasn't moving. I poked his leathery ass and, like a lightning bolt, he snapped his neck back and bit the branch clean in two.

I started thinking that he *wasn't* a lover, but a fighter.

Cars started slowing down to gawk, or offer me terrible advice:

“Don't pick that sucker up without gloves,” one guy said.

A woman yelled, “I saw him over by Barclay's Pond...know where that is?”

“You need a shovel for *that* guy.” Another person quipped.

Then they'd drive off, leaving me alone to deal with this immovable beast. I couldn't understand why he wasn't budging. Why he was just lying beside a sewer. And before the ninja turtle irony hit me, someone tapped me on the shoulder.

It was a beautiful woman, with hair so red you'd think it were dyed. She was...my April O'Neill.

"Hey," she said. "Need some help?"

"Yeah," I think I said, but was too heart-struck to remember.

She smiled and brushed her hair over her ears. "My *boyfriend* is a turtle expert."

Have you ever felt hope followed by an immediate crushing sense of despair? It's a really shitty feeling. And what the hell is a "turtle expert"?

But then something amazing happened: All at once, everyone who had offered their two-cents had returned. They were carrying shovels, plastic buckets, towels, and remember that lady who said he's from Barclay's Pond? She brought a fucking map. Like a paper map!

I couldn't believe it. These people weren't just gawkers like Vanilla Ice. They genuinely wanted to help. To participate.

And then in the distance, slowly running (if that could even be a thing), was the woman's boyfriend. The "turtle expert." Carrying a large cardboard box and thick gardening gloves. He had these dim-witted eyes, enlarged by giant round-rimmed glasses. No lips. A hawkish nose.

Guys, he looked like a fucking turtle.

"I am here." He said.

No contraction. He literally said "I" followed by "am" followed by "here."

His girlfriend—somehow proud that he came to save the day—stepped over the turtle and went in to hug him.

SNAP! Tokka lunged at her calf. All of us collectively gasped. He missed her flesh by inches. A child screamed, "Not the leg!"

Eventually, we managed to slide Tokka into a box, but not without a struggle. He'd hiss, snap. He just didn't want to move for some reason.

Were we doing the right thing?

We carried the box over to a pond, and placed him a few feet from the water. According to the “turtle expert” you can’t just drop him in. It’d be too much of a shock. You know, for a cold-blooded animal that spends most of its life in the water...

So we waited.

Two girls came giggling over to us, took a picture of him and ran off...

Vanilla Ice, I thought.

After a few minutes, Tokka took one last glance over to where he had been by the sewer, then waddled into the water, disappearing into the murk.

“What do you think he was staring at?” I asked the “turtle expert.”

“That’s a *she*, by the way.” He said, condescendingly.

“How could you tell?”

“By the tail. Males have *much larger* tails,” he said, wrapping his arm around his girl’s waist. “Right, babe?” She rested her head on his shoulder as they walked off.

Everyone congratulated themselves on a job well done. It was a shining example of coming together to do the right thing. But I was still bothered by why this turtle didn’t just crawl away. She wasn’t injured. She wasn’t sick.

So I walked back to where I found her in the beginning.

And I saw the reason. We had missed them amidst the commotion. There, near the sewer were two of her babies... They had been run over.

And just like Tokka from the movie, it was gut-wrenching.

All the snapping, all the hissing, all the aggressiveness that came from this mama turtle was out of a selfless instinctual protection.

She *was* a lover. Not a fighter.

Was I destined to save her? I don't know. But I can say that I was destined, at the very least, to realize that sometimes you can't just Vanilla Ice your way through life. You need to participate, and though the results may end up being sad, or unexpected, the story, the experience, will never, ever leave you.

But that's just my two cents. I'm no "turtle expert."

Thank you.