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This is Not a Gold Panner

This is not a gold panner. This is a photo of a gold panner. This is also only a picture of what the gold panner wants you to see—his success. Photographs are a wonderful invention that allows for memories to be captured within a square, and preserved to be looked upon even after the events have happened. However, photographs can also be deceiving, as only so much can be kept inside the borders of a photo. Expand on that, and you realize that only so much *has* to be

kept inside the borders of the photo, and you can leave out what you don't want to remember, or what you don't want revealed. For example, a gold panner is able to take a picture of his many full pans, filled to the brim with gold—250,000 dollars' worth of gold—while leaving out how many pans may lay just outside the border, empty failures left to be forgotten.

Gold panning is not an easy endeavor. The rate of success is depressing, and the rate of failure of even more so. Many people will only gold pan for the fun of the experience, since the chance you would make any money out of it is slim at best. However, there are those who might choose to pan because they have nothing else. In the image we see a man with five pans of gold dust, which add up to \$250,000. This likely has set him up for a much better life. But we must look beyond the photo we see, or rather, we must not look at the photo at all. This is not a gold panner, this is a photo of a gold panner, and we need to see beyond this photo. What we may not be seeing is this man's life before the taking of this photo. Why is he here? Why has he chosen to gold pan for what must be an excruciating amount of time in order to accumulate the amount of gold dust he has? Perhaps his life does not glimmer happily like the gold he has found. Maybe instead he is in a failing marriage—the old boots on his feet are years old with no grip on the bottom, it has been worn away from so many days walking out of the door and away from his wife. His career life is a wreck too, he was fired two years ago from an architectural company, the only thing he was allowed to keep being the hard hat he now wears every day. He hasn't told his wife because he knows if she finds out she'll leave him. He's been taking out loan after loan from his friends, asking a new one every time for money he swears he'll return to them, but he never does. All this in hopes his wife won't put together that when he leaves in the morning it isn't to the construction site like he tells her time and time again, but instead to the river, where he's been panning for everyday for a year straight. But all of this has finally paid off, just like

he'll finally be able to pay off his debts. This \$250,000 worth of gold will make everything right. The man in the picture isn't smiling because of his luck—luck had nothing to do with this—but because of the relief he feels. The five pans in front of him don't compare to the memory of the same five being piled into his rucksack every day at the end of the day when he would head home, nor do they have anything on the twenty he has stacked behind the camera, just out of view. This is not a celebratory moment for him, but he must make it look like such in order to appease his wife if she were to ever find this picture.

Pictures are wonderful inventions indeed. They will let this man show his wife an image of a stroke of luck he had. 'Just a hobby really, honey, I'm so glad it paid off,' that's what he'll tell her. She'll never need to know of the pans behind the camera, or that he was out of work for years without her ever hearing a word. He'll put back together their marriage with this gold dust, maybe he'll truly be lucky in that regard. And then years later his wife will pull out the picture and tell him what a lucky gold panner he was. Never she'll need to know his thoughts that he's not a gold panner, and that is not a gold panner in that picture.

Work Cited

"\$250,000 of gold dust." *Alaska's Digital Archives*, University of Alaska Anchorage, Anchorage, Alaska,
<https://vilda.alaska.edu/digital/collection/cdmg13/id/13886/rec/5> Accessed 12 Nov. 2023.