

## What an Honor to Spend it with You

Little muddy hands digging into the lake, sand stuck in scalps, and peeling sunburns: what fueled my childhood. Years and years of failed fishing attempts and late night stories beside the campfire. What do all these things have in common? Nature, sure, but that is not what is prominent to me. The things my soul keeps a grasp on is not the grass or leaves itself, but the feelings it brought me at such a juvenile age. The immense happiness and innocent joy, unwavering as I dealt with the smallest of worries. What lives with me even now is the anticipation towards traveling to the lake to camp, arms burning from using the kayak's oars too long, and popsicles on the back patio.

One thing I can visually remember is the tote bags being packed full of hot dog buns, chips, and paper towels in the kitchen, my mom already dressed in her swimsuit. The cooler sat open next to it, ice cascading into the bottom, building up and up until the very top had some. Seeing this meant one thing, and one thing only: we were going camping. It was going to be a weekend occupied with swimming in the vast lake, smores smeared over my face, and sand tracked into our dark green tent. My grandpa always told me, *'Anticipation always seems to be more fun than actually doing what you're excited to do.'* Once we would arrive, my dad would set up the place we would be sleeping for the weekend as me and my brother scurried off to explore. We tended to find a new spot to camp every time, so each new plot carried more land to discover. While my brother found and kept insects and rocks, I found more interest in the flowers of all kinds. Later into the night, darkness encompassed the sky and the earth was silent, save for the little insects chirping and fire crackling. Falling asleep under the stars has never felt anything

less than magical, even as I have grown. My family and I never stopped camping, just added more people to enjoy it with. Every summer, no matter how much I have aged, the same feeling I felt as a little girl returns.

The next day as I awoke to the sound of our tiny stovetop sizzling, I would unzip the tent and step out. If I thought falling asleep out here was amazing, I was always reminded how much sweeter waking up was. Birds flew around singing out their calls, waves gently crashing against rugged rocks. I seemed to consistently wake up earlier than usual when out in nature, probably because there were no alarm clocks, no electronics, or need to be anywhere in a hurry. Hurry is the single most significant thing the outside world does not offer, and it is what makes it so enjoyable. My dad always drove home to feed our dog and let her out into the backyard. She used to come with us, until she got older and couldn't handle the trips. After he came back, the kayaks would be tied onto the bed of his truck. Kayaking was my favorite way to spend the day on the lake for a few simple reasons: you get tan, it gives you a workout, and you get to see parts of the water you typically wouldn't otherwise. After twenty minutes my limbs felt like they were to fall off, but it was worth all the memories I still have today.

Camping was not the only thing I did outside when I was younger. Rewind to an even smaller, more energetic child who didn't take no for an answer. I have been living in my home for my entire life, never moving. To this day, I am directly reminded of all the things I did as a child in the very same house. The same house where I would go out to the yard to throw a tennis ball to my dog was the one who felt my cries as I came home to a house without her. Popsicles were a fan favorite in my home, all the neighbor kids knew we had the biggest collection in our garage freezer. They were the kind shaped like tubes and made of plastic that would leave your mouth raw if you didn't know to cut the corners off. Dripping bright colors stained the concrete

of my backyard, until the rain came to wash it away. Maybe it wasn't about the popsicles itself, but the people I shared it with. The friends I once played with daily who moved far away, never to play together again. Perhaps it was not the cracks in the ground me and my brother would race our cars over, but the idea of spending all day outside with him.

What an honor it was to live so much of my life outdoors. What an honor it was to not only spend it out there, but to spend it with those who made it more fun than ever. Because let's face it, sitting outside wouldn't be as memorable if you were alone. Spending time with others as I experienced the excitement of going out to the lake to camp, arms on fire from the kayaks, and melty popsicles with old childhood friends was nice. It was good and it was safe, but most of all, it was something I will never let go of. What an honor it was to spend it with them.