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The Nurturing Nature of Nature

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The Nurturing Nature of Nature

Abstract

This piece of creative non-fiction describes my relationship with National Parks and the way their beauty and power has shaped my life.

Keywords

Non-fiction, National Parks, The Nurturing Nature of Nature

Disciplines

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Comments

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The Nurturing Nature of Nature

National Parks

The ragged shape of a brown arrow head, a tall snow topped peak, and a bison grazing in a lush open field. That was my childhood. Not that scene specifically, but what it represented. The National Parks have been my home since my family's first trip to Mammoth Cave, when I was too small to even reach the fluorescent buttons on the steel barred elevator bringing us to the bottom. Every vacation, every possible opportunity, we would travel to a park. It's been a tradition that started back in the early days of my parent's relationship. When they traveled out West they fell in love with the parks, just as fast as they fell in love with one another.

The sheer beauty and magnitude of these places is something you can never get over: the power of the geyser at Yellowstone, the crystal-clear water in Crater Lake, the gravity defying arches. These places changed my life, and I knew they were meant to change the lives of generations to come. Not only did I speak to everyone I could about my experiences, but I began to look into how to maintain their beauty and prolong their natural wonder.

Wonder is something you can't quite explain. It feels like a bright, warm haze has swept over your body and mind. You feel full of possibility and your eyes begin to shine with the prospect of a brighter future. That feeling, that experience, is why I became passionate about environmental sustainability and conservation. That's what I felt in those parks.

REDWOODS

July 2016 on a red-eye from Chicago to San Francisco, a younger version of myself and my brother laid awake watching *Shrek 2* as our mom riffles through her bright orange vacation binder. She pulls out a picture from a travel website, taps on our chunky Delta headphones, and has us look at this fuzzy picture of some trees. I thought nothing of it until the next morning when we were woken up by the echoing screech of the hotel alarm clock at 6:30am. We all moaned and groaned, putting Band-Aids on our blisters before lacing up our hiking shoes. We loaded into the monstrous black Tahoe we rented; my brother, sister, and grandma got the spacious middle row while I was wedged in the back between the cooler full of stale airport ham sandwiches and 5 dirty, old bikes. I could see only a sliver out the front window, and half of it was taken up by my mom's hat as she leaned back and forth trying to input an address into the GPS.

Finally, after what seemed like a century in a sweaty, citronella-soaked car, we stopped and popped down the back seat. I reached my legs out of the car and immediately bent over to itch my bug bites from yesterday. As I finished scratching each little red bump forming a constellation on my calves, I looked up and was speechless. The massive giants surrounding me were taller than most of the buildings in New York City, the bark was knotted and worn, and what seemed like miles wider than our now tiny Tahoe. These redwoods were older than my hometown and had stood there in silence since before we even had a country to preserve them. They stood there, silent in their magnitude. Looking down on my tiny family and smiling.

My perspective shifted, I suddenly began to realize how small I was in this world. How small we all were in comparison to these trees. I began to come to terms with the fact that my size is so small in comparison to these gentle giants, but my actions determine their future. How

I chose to live my life would, in some small way, decide the experience future generations will have with these beautiful trees. That's when I knew.

CRATER LAKE

A place 7,700 years in the making, and it only took me thirty seconds to fall in love. The water in Crater Lake was still, glassy, and quiet. From the right perspective you could almost see the calico textured rocks more than 70 feet down that lined the basin. The trail surrounding the upper edge was filled with tourists trying to capture the beauty of this place through a selfish lens. As I began my trek down the dusty path to the water, I kept catching myself staring at the evergreen trees growing on the rocky faces surrounding the lake. Their roots were interwoven in the light gray rubble, surviving off only the rain water collected in this giant caldera.

I sat down where the calm water reaches the rocky beach. I sat staring into the motionless water with amazement. I couldn't believe the juxtaposition of nature's violence and beauty that I was looking at with my very own eyes. I couldn't believe it.

I jumped off the ledge into the water and shattered the illusion of glass, while spreading a soft wave through the entire lake. The water was glacial cold, but somehow, I felt warm in its embrace. I'd never felt freer than in that moment, wading into the crystal-clear water. I slowly began to realize why we went to all these National Parks in the first place. It's not for the stories, not for the pictures, it was to gain an appreciation for all the beauty we had been given in this life. That's when I knew.

PRIVILEGE IN PARKS

I've spent the better part of 19 years in a position of privilege. I was given the opportunity to see these amazing places, to experience their grandeur. But through these vacations I reflected upon the future of the planet, realizing that these sights might not be here

for much longer. The climate is changing, and the previously docile world has become violent, disrupted, and loud. All the pollution that happened in the past century has led to a crisis of global proportions. As I did more research on these facts I decided that preventing this crisis was the best way I could help my parks. In order to preserve the authenticity of the National Parks, I decided to become active in efforts of land conservation and efforts against further climate damage. I decided to act.

I walked up and down the uneven sidewalks of my hometown in my dirty white converse. Walking from door to door asking people about the environment and getting every door slammed in my face. But each day my commitment grew stronger. I walked dirty highways picking up mountains of trash, hearing the growl of pollution producing engines whiz by every 3 seconds. I became more and more angry towards those who were contributing to this negative future. I couldn't figure out how I could do something more, something massive enough to compare with the natural phenomena I was fighting for.

I felt like I needed to do something BIG. I worked on researching what I could do and how I could do it. I spent hours on end scrolling through data filled research websites, scrolling through what seemed like millions of tiny words. I read these articles until my eyes got fuzzy and my ears rang.

THE TRUTH

I became consumed in the search and the cause, rather than remembering the passion I had for the parks that motivated me in the first place. Motivation like the embrace of the tranquil waters of Crater Lake or the centuries old worn but mighty presence of the redwoods. The truth was that they made me feel like I could do anything but still kept me humbled by their size and beauty. National Parks, for me at least, were the perfect support system as well as the perfect

thing to ground me. I began to realize that I couldn't save these places with just me and my anger, that there needed to be more. I realized that the little things I was doing were making a more significant difference than I first thought in reducing the harm inflicted on my home.

NATIONAL PARKS

I will say it once more, I have been blessed. My journey has been given the backdrop of the most beautiful places in the world. I have grown up learning from nature: the burnt red and orange twisted rocks defying gravity at the Arches, the violent rapids of the Colorado River ripping through the towering orange walls of the Grand Canyon, the twisted vines and muggy waters of the Everglades, and the rocky ocean overlooking the sea lions diving into the chilled ocean at Arcadia. I would not be the person I am today without all these beautiful aspects of my life, and I appreciate them more and more each day for it. Passion is something that is never misplaced, and I found one of my passions in the beauty of the world around us. Nature has been my greatest teacher, strongest motivator, and closest friend.

The responsibility to protect these precious lands lies with each individual human being. National Parks have nurtured each generation and contributed to the growth of our society since their establishment. Without them we would cease to exist as the nation or world we are today. Nature plays a **STRONG** but silent role in our survival, and through my experience with National Parks I came to the realization that nature deserves the same from us. These are the truths I've held to be self-evident and they have guided my journey in helping to enrich the environment we live in.