

been everywhere except home. I moved to Florida, got married and divorced, and am finally back at home finishing my degree at Valparaiso University. Grandpa has since passed away, but I have a feeling if I wanted to see him I could drive up to the St. Joe this Friday night. He'd be waiting there with enough bait to last until Sunday afternoon.

SOLITUDE

Allison E. Rubow

Accounting
Robbinsdale Armstrong High School, Plymouth, Minnesota

Every summer, in late August before school starts, my family stuffs the mini van, secures the canoe to the top and heads off to the great north woods of Minnesota. The five hour drive from the Twin Cities to the Canadian border is just the beginning of our week long family bonding time. Not only is the trip time well spent with the family, but it is a relaxing time for ourselves away from the hustle and bustle of the big city. We make the common stops for food and gas, and finally arrive in a small town, Ely, on the edge of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area (BWCA) on the border of Minnesota and Canada. This will be the last night's sleep in a warm, comfortable bed for a week. We will also fill up our water bottles and water jugs with clean, drinkable water in the motel room and prepare to leave behind all of the accustomed luxuries.

We awake early the next morning and drive by car as far into the BWCA as possible down the Gunflint Trail, moving from a smooth paved highway onto a bumpy gravel road where the rocks bounce up and hit the bottom of the car and the dust trails behind us, to find a parking lot of packed down grass. Here we not only leave the car, but the comforts of civilization. We pile all of the week's necessities into the tiny, silver canoe and paddle our way to our new home for the week. With our family of four and all of our gear, we set off on our summer vacation to enjoy the true beauty of nature.

The trip to our new home for the week is not an easy one. The canoe cuts through the glassy water making ripples that can be heard if you listen close enough, which is relaxing, yet, at the same time, very tiring. We canoe for half a day from lake to lake, through lily pads, weeds, and cattails and open lake water where the wind can catch the tip of the canoe and set us off sight, but we will still get to our campsite. The portaging (emptying the canoe and carrying everything to the next lake) is

a killer in itself, but our destination is soon in sight. We set up camp on our “deserted island” that measures less than a half of an acre, and occupy the only campsite on the entire lake. If this traditional campsite of ours is taken, we paddle on to the next lake, or even the next, to find another campsite that we find to our liking. Many people only stay a night or two at a specific campsite, so it is likely that if we arrive at “our island” early enough in the day, the occupants of the previous night will have already gone and no one else will have arrived to claim the island for the night. It is unlikely that we will even see more than a canoe or two all week because of the thousands of routes that are entwined through the BWCA.

The campsite could not be more unlike my suburban home in Minneapolis. Cooking on a grate over an open fire, bathing in the cold lake, and going to the bathroom outside, we are far from the amenities of the city. We set the campsite up the same every year. From the beach you see a campfire up on the rocky bank and the tent is pitched about thirty feet behind that. Two small campfire stools sit next to the campfire and a hammock hangs adjacent to that. The food pack (which I might add is a pain to get in a tree) is hung not too far from the campfire. The setting up of our home is divided among the four of us so that as soon as we all finish, we can eat and take a nap. My job is to pitch the tent with my sister and I think that we do it faster every year (after all, it is the easiest part). I feel as if I am one of the fur traders who traveled the Great Lakes many years ago, who quite possibly might have stopped in the BWCA. I have a feeling that they might have had it even rougher than we do today.

Setting up camp takes a lot of work, but a cat nap is quickly approaching. Falling asleep to the sound of the waves washing upon the beach on one side of the island and the splashing of water against the rocks on the other, is nothing like the suburban life of home. The sun’s rays keep us warm as we sleep on the beach or just sit and relax against a pine tree. The pine needles make a soft bed for a nap. The pine tree also serves as a back rest for reading a book while burning our fair white skin in the hot noon day sun.

Before we can nap, though, we must feed our hungry stomachs. Meals are always a task, no matter how many people you have helping. The first meal after paddling for many hours is desperately needed by all of us. Everything is piled in the food pack (approximately 3x2x2 feet) and it is inevitable that the food item that is starved for and desired is on the bottom. Much of the food is freeze dried, so we just pop the plastic bag with its contents into the boiling water to cook. My dad is the expert outdoorsman and knows all there is to know about cooking over an open fire. We always have rice and some kind of vegetable or stew, and of course, fish. Getting the water for cooking is never a fun task either. You

have to haul up buckets full of water from the lake and boil all of the bacteria out of it. At one time the water was safe to drink directly out of the lake, and some people still do drink it untreated, but with the increasing amount of people that visit the BWCA every year, the water has become contaminated. We cook with the boiled, hopefully bacteria-free, lake water and drink the water that we carried in from the motel. A good drink of cold water is hard to come by, though, since there is no refrigerator; usually Tang is added to the water and warm punch quenches a dry thirst. Glass and aluminum cans can not be brought into the BWCA and all garbage must be burned. Therefore a can of soda is never consumed and Spaghetti O's are never eaten. The food pack always hangs in a tree where no animals, especially bears, can get to it. Bears can smell food a mile away. Even when you are on an island, the bears will swim from the mainland to eat people food. Personally, I have yet to have a run-in with a bear, and I would like to keep it that way.

Bathing is another thing that we all do before we go to bed under the same roof. We usually try to bathe when the sun is the warmest because it can be real warm in the afternoon, but turn bitter cold when the sun begins to set. Biodegradable soap is never left behind at home. An attempt to get clean is made in the lake, and I emphasize "attempt." It is not possible to feel completely cleansed by washing in the algae-filled lake, especially when the lake is so piercing cold that you only want to stay in for a minute or two.

As the sun sets, we remember the efforts that it took to get to this paradise and realize that it was all worth it. Looking out from the campsite, the glowing orange sun reflects off the clouds and paints a picture that looks like a watercolor painting across the sky with all different shades of red, orange, yellow, pink and hints of the remaining blue sky. The lake is not of a large size, but the horizon is better than from my suburban setting back home. Large pine trees line the lake shore and cattails just below that in the five feet of water off shore. The picturesque setting is often depicted in paintings of a woody lake shore setting.

Sitting around a warm campfire is what camping is all about and even though we are tired from canoeing all day, we will not retire to bed until we light our first campfire of the week. Memories of roasting s'mores and singing campfire songs with the setting sun encompass the best parts of camping. The flickering light from the fire casting shadows on familiar faces, the crackling of the fire and the echoing of our voices across the lake, will remain in my mind forever. It never fails though, that no matter where I sit around the campfire, the smoke seems to blow in my face, but I sit there anyway and enjoy the beautiful scenery. We tell stories

of past trips to the BWCA, many of which we can laugh at today. One that gets told every year, without a forgotten detail, is the time that I “caught” my sister. My dad, sister and I had set out for an afternoon fishing outing. Little did I know that I would catch something weighing eighty pounds. When we were portaging, I handed my fishing rod to my sister and she grabbed the rod, took hold of the fishing lure and snagged herself on one of the hooks. We had to paddle all the way back to our campsite with the barb in her finger so that my dad could get a pliers to clip off the barb and then pull the hook back out of her finger. We have many interesting stories to tell, but sometimes it is just fun to sit quietly and look at the fire. I love to sit around the fire and wait for the hot embers to go out; it may take until early morning, but it is awesome to watch. My sister and I always light the end of a stick and wait for it to stop burning, until it turns to cinders, and write our names with it in the cold night air. After we leave the campfire scene, the hungry chipmunks soon come to scrounge around for the crumbs left after dinner.

We always like to sleep out under the stars the first night, despite the mosquitoes, but there are not quite as many in the late summer, and they do not seem to bother us after we fall asleep. Each individual star is visible in the dark, night sky and not shadowed by the bright city sky line. You can see thousands of glowing stars, like tiny fireplaces in the sky. Many sounds come from the woods at night that you do not hear in the city. The wandering hoot of an owl, the lonely cry of a wolf, the soothing call of a loon, and the rustle of bugs in the pine needles, are all sounds only experienced in the great North Woods. During a midnight rain, the nights are spent in the tent. The moisture in the tent condenses on the ceiling and falls upon the victims lying in the sleeping bags. It also never fails that there is one nasty mosquito that gets in the tent that keeps us awake half of the night, constantly buzzing around our ears.

Nothing beats waking up to a magnificent sunrise, with beams of sharp light glistening off of a crystal clear lake through the tent window. The sweet song of the birds, the splashing of fish, loons calling and deer coming down the bank from the woods for a drink of water from the near by stream, also establish the early morning setting. The BWCA defies all known peaceful places on earth. The first morning at our campsite is eagerly anticipated. Many mornings we arise at the crack of dawn to the crisp, clean, refreshing air of a new day and go fishing. Not only is the lake calm, but there are always animals out and about scrounging around for food. A singing loon, Minnesota’s state bird, is often visible anywhere on the 10,000 lakes of Minnesota. Loons are so amazing, as they are able to swim underwater for many yards at a time and come up on the other side of the lake. It is a special treat when they have babies with them. They sit on the mothers back and float: quite the life! If we observe

closely the banks of the lake, a moose might be lurking in the muck eating the lush weeds and plants. A deer and fawn may also come down for a drink of the cool, refreshing water. The proud eagles swoop down among us, so graceful and acrobatic, looking for their breakfast. The fish jump at the flies that hover above the water, so we know they are there and will make for a delicious breakfast. The ambitious fisherman can enjoy freshly caught, lemon seasoned walleye for breakfast in this type of atmosphere. Even though not everyone likes fish, this appetizing opportunity can not be passed up.

Although Minnesota has almost 10,000 lakes, just the few hundred that make up the Boundary Waters Canoe Area make spending time along the lake front all worthwhile. Traveling through the endless lakes makes it an adventure in itself, especially when you do not have a map in hand. The peaceful, serene and tranquil surroundings are unbeatable by any beach strip in the Caribbean. You are so at one with nature that all concepts of time are soon forgotten.

NIGHTMARE SUMMER

D. Rachelle Turley

Exploratory
Wheeler High School, Wheeler, Indiana

I was sixteen years of age when my father decided it was time for me to spend some time with my great aunt. Reluctantly, I went along with his notion. After all, giving up one weekend of summer wasn't going to kill me. Mom had packed my clothes for the trip. I didn't understand until we started loading the car that it wasn't just for the weekend, but for my entire summer vacation! "Oh no!" I cried. "My summer will be ruined! How much fun am I going to have living with an eighty-year-old woman?" This was an absolute nightmare!

My great uncle had just passed away, and my parents volunteered me to keep my great aunt company. To them, it was the perfect solution for all of us since I was dating a guy they totally disapproved of—Mike. His hair was longer than mine and just touched the top of his belt. You can imagine what my father thought of him since Dad served twenty-two years in the Navy. Mike and I were high school sweethearts. He treated