

A PLACE TO SHARE

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Learning to Teach about Nature

My love of the outdoors, along with my scientific curiosity, can be traced back to my childhood adventures in the woods. The house I grew up in did not have air conditioning, making it unbearable to be indoors during the months of July and August. I, along with my older sister, found my refuge in the cool shade of the woods. At first we would stick to a clearing that housed two small boulders at the edge of the yard. Once I was ten and didn't have to be in direct eyesight of my mother, I forged my own paths in the woods. I created an entire kingdom that spanned far beyond my family's property. Not only did I become more adventurous in my own yard at age ten, but that summer marked my first time attending overnight summer camp at Camp Calumet Lutheran in Freedom, New Hampshire. I immediately became enamored with the beautiful red cabins nestled beneath the towering white pines next to the glistening lake.

After that first stay, Calumet became a constant fixture in my summers and a place I yearned for year-round. I would attend the same session every year, meeting up with friends from throughout New England that I may have never had the chance to meet otherwise. I was more excited to receive my acceptance letter as a counselor-in-training at age sixteen than I would be when receiving my acceptance letters to college two years later. I spent a blissful eight weeks crammed into a tent with seven other girls, sneaking out at night to lie under the stars. During my time on staff I learned confidence and a sense of self most teenagers wouldn't be graced with until they ventured off on their own to college. I also learned practical tasks, like how to do my own laundry and share living quarters with multiple people. In my final summers at Calumet, I got involved in the environmental education program offered to local schools during the spring before camp began. In this program I was able to share my love of nature with kids who had never been to summer camp, or even away from their home before. As I led hikes and helped kids cook an entire meal over a campfire, I realized that there was nowhere else I would rather be. I decided to translate all I learned during my time at Calumet into a lifelong career.

After enrolling at the University of New Haven, one of my required courses was an education clinic, held at Camp Pemigewassett, where both graduate and undergraduate students learn how to write and implement their own curriculum in a camp setting. Before my arrival at Pemi, I considered myself to be in the "advanced class" of the clinic due to my background working at camp. While I was experienced with some of the games and activities that were offered, I never imagined that I would learn so much, especially when working with people who had never previously worked at a summer camp or considered education as a career. Pemi solidified the fact that you don't need expensive gadgets in order to experience or teach about nature — tools you make yourself may provide even better results.

The most rewarding aspect of the clinic was my experience with my colleagues. To become acquainted with someone in a sterile and organized environment like a classroom cannot prepare you for spending twenty-four hours a day with that person, especially when they are out of their comfort zone. The majority of my colleagues had never attended a camp before, and I enjoyed watching them experience the joys and hardships of living in a rustic setting. The first afternoon I was teased for my enormous duffel bag, which I had filled with various items to prepare for any situation. Later in the week I relished in sharing my abundant resources and tips for surviving the relentless rain and cold New England nights.

After my time at Pemi, I am rejuvenated and more ready than ever to start my career in environmental education. Pemi also reinforced the importance of getting back to nature. Although most adults do not have the opportunity to attend a clinic like the one at Pemi, it is important to recognize how much time is spent with a computer, phone,



or television screen. Find time to remove yourself from technology and simply enjoy all that nature has to offer. If you crave the true summer camp experience, volunteer at a camp or after-school program. Everyone should have the opportunity to experience summer camp and immerse themselves in nature, no matter how old they are.

Editor's Note: Read more about the Camp Pemi Nature Instruction Clinic on page 26.

Photo courtesy of Camp Pemigewassett, Wentworth, New Hampshire.

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