

Adoring and Exploring
by Marciana Castillo

I was dreading the week to come. My mom notified my family that we would be spending a week away from home at a campsite near the Chesapeake Bay. She had signed up to participate as a member of the medical staff at an overnight YMCA camp, giving her the opportunity to let her family stay on the campgrounds while she worked, and allow her children admittance into the outdoor camp experience. That meant every teenager's nightmare: a week without any cell service or Wi-Fi. However, my mom advertised it as a new opportunity, plus, she already signed me up, so there was no way out of it.

Our family arrived to the campsite in the late afternoon, and we were greeted by the other medical staff members as well as the camp director. We settled into a cozy cabin, located a short walk from the sandy bay. It was a beautiful sight. The colorful hues of the painted sky melted into the shoreline, which was covered by a million course, grainy beads, creating picturesque view. I was not able to get too comfortable in our family cabin, since I would be moving into a different one the following day, which would house me, and eight other girls.

The next day, I ruefully departed from my cell phone, and my parents walked me to the cabin I would be staying at, Cabin 10. I was the first to arrive, and was greeted by my counselors, who introduced themselves to me, and told me to pick a bed to get settled. The cabin was much smaller than I had expected. There were six bunk beds all tightly packed into a tiny living area, accompanied by only two bathrooms for everyone to share. My skeptical attitude rose, but I decided to be optimistic and set up my belongings while we waited for

everyone else. Soon after, the rest of the girls began to arrive, each excited for the week to come, since most of them were camp alumni. They were all raving about the amazing upcoming experience, which boosted my spirits.

Each day was divided into two categories. Half of the day would be spent on land, and the other half on water. There were several activities available, all with a common theme: fellowship and nature appreciation. I decided to climb the 50-foot Alpine Tower, which stood out in the clearing. I encountered twists and turns as I climbed up, while being harnessed by a belay system. Despite my fear of heights, my cabinmates encouraged me to try, and I eventually reached the top while taking the easiest path. Without thinking too much about my fear of heights, I also suited up and sported a climbing harness and helmet, ready for ziplining. I had no regrets as I jumped off the ledge and surged down the zipline, as the wind rushed through my hair.

Among the other outdoor activities, I decided to try out archery and riflery. I channeled my inner Katniss Everdeen as I learned how to position, assemble, and shoot arrows toward the target. Riflery was challenging to me. Assembling the rifle was not too difficult, but my terrible aim kept me from landing any of the miniscule pellets on the target.

Although I enjoyed these new experiences, the highlight of my land activities was environmental science. I participated in environmental science for two sessions. The first time, my friend and I were the only two participants. The activity leader planned for us to release the frogs that were being kept in the lab. We hauled the tank over to a marshy area and carefully allowed each of the tiny frogs to jump out and hop back home. Little did we know that there

was also a turtle hidden amidst the frog tank, requiring the leader to cautiously pick it up and place it back in its home as well. For the remainder of the session we completed a nature walk and identified the various wildflowers. They ranged in colors and sizes, and some housed beautiful insects that fluttered around. My friend also witnessed a dragonfly get stuck in a spider web, so she helped to set it free. During the second session, we went to the bay with a giant fishing net to catch, examine, and of course, let our catches back loose into the water. We uncovered slimy aquatic wildlife including needlefish, snails, and jellyfish.

During water activities we spent half of the session at the bay and the other at the pool. The pool was fun since I was able to relax, talk to my friends, bathe in the sun, and conquer the giant waterslide. Although, the best part of water activities was the bay. I grabbed a paddle and hopped into a kayak, unaware of the arm workout ahead of me, and also into a large sailboat, where I learned the basic parts of the boat and how to successfully tie a figure eight knot. My friends and I also mounted onto a large, inflatable boat that was connected to a speedy motorboat, and each slipped on helmets to try banana boating. We were pretty unsecured as the only thing keeping us in place were the handles that we had to hold on to. The boat sped through the bay and the salty waves aggressively splashed us all. The intensity of the speed mixed with the waves and the laughter was irreplaceable. I became friends with a girl who was an avid sailor, who convinced me to try out the other different sailboats. We boarded a Hobie, a lightweight and speedy sailboat, and the smooth waves carried us far into the bay at a quick pace, thanks to the magnificent wind that day. I also got a chance to ride the Flying Scot, a bulkier dinghy that did not travel as fast, but the calmer speed made the ride

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more relaxing. We also swam around the gorgeous bay, which was the perfect counter against the beaming sun.

Before I knew it, my week at camp was over. I had bittersweet feelings about departing. I was going to miss the camp vibes, which emanated comradery and bonding through outdoor adventures. I am beyond grateful for the experience I was given to delve into nature and explore the amazing opportunities it had to offer.