

Alone in Nature

Jennifer Hanson inspired me with a quote, "Perhaps we all need time to be free, time alone in nature, supported and encouraged to discover our own wild selves, to reconnect with who we are and what we want from life." I believe finding comfort in solitude is the ultimate gratification. This, however, is not always an easy achievement. On a fall afternoon in Giles County, Virginia, I took it upon myself to experiment with the possibility of what being alone in nature could do.

Virginia is home to many beautiful places, one of them being the Cascade Falls located in the Jefferson National Forest. My recent move to Blacksburg, five hours from home, had left me more alone than ever. The solitude I was feeling was not the most pleasant. The Cascades had been calling to me for quite some time, so I decided to make a trip one Friday afternoon. I had the essentials: my camelback filled with water, a snack, my phone, and some headphones. I parked and practically jumped out of my car. The place was beautiful, and I was not even on the trail yet. My heart was swelling with excitement, which, to this day, has yet to cease. This was my first true hike, and I was doing it on my own. I began the trail just as a few ladies were finishing it. We all exchanged true smiles, and I kept on my way. I chose the Lower Trail, as opposed to the Upper Trail, but this, I had heard, was the best way to begin. My smile deepened as I crossed the bridge of the Little Stony Creek. The water rushing down over the many rocks and boulders was a pleasant sound. The trail offered so much for me to look at. Little ground squirrels ran all around me, leaves had just begun to change colors, and there were numerous boulders of all shapes and sizes. The sun shone brightly through the trees creating a glowing atmosphere. I came to a spot in the creek where a tree trunk laid across it. On a whim, I decided to get on it and like in the movie *Dirty Dancing*, I started to do a little jig across. I am sure the squirrels were laughing at me. I certainly did not look like Patrick Swayze or Jennifer Grey, but I felt too free to hold back. I did not care how I looked or what I did because nature was not judging me for my wildness. Nature, I realized, was just as wild and more so.

After my little excursion off the path, I continued on up the trail. I had not yet seen anyone else until I came up to a man and his young daughter, who he was carrying on his back. The man had an exquisite camera for which I am sure he was taking beautiful pictures of the scenery with. I offered to take a picture of him and his daughter so they could look back on the beautiful memory. A short while later, I reached a small waterfall as a cool breeze settled across the trail. The chilly air and the rush of water propelled me forward. I came up to a bend in the trail and, as I rounded it, the sound of the cascade reached me just as my eyes connected with the sight. A short distance into the pool of water, there was a large, flat rock that I made my way onto. I perched myself facing the waterfall and pulled out my snack. I left the headphones and my phone in my bag. There was no need for music from my phone, because, all around me, nature was playing its own music. The wilderness poured peace into me, and finally I was able to surpass the loneliness I had previously felt.

Jessica York
Virginia Tech
jcy2123@vt.edu

I was enticed by the roaring waterfall and it's surrounding life for quite a while. The sound of the rushing water flowed through me, wiping my slate clean of many fears and filling it with dreams. My mind opened up, and I began to realize what I really wanted out of life. I want to never be afraid of being alone, but if I am feeling lonely, to power through it. I want to always have the strength to be wild and free regardless of whether I am by myself or with others. I want to be like nature in that there is no judgment and no restraints on how I conform my own self. Jennifer Hanson is absolutely right; time alone in nature is all that is needed to bring out the best in someone. The Cascade Falls will forever be my favorite place in Virginia, not only for its beauty, but also for the truth it revealed to me.