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### No Land in Sight

Nerves had woken me long before my alarm chimed as a signal for me to rise. Half-packed overnight bags littered the floor of my room, staring at me as I hastily threw on clothes that were carefully selected the night before. My mother and father greeted me with a smile and a heaping pile of scrambled eggs when I finally made my way into the kitchen. After confirming I had everything needed for the next two nights I would be away, they loaded up the car for the quick eight-minute drive to my middle school.

In the parking lot stood a towering charter bus that was ready to depart surrounded by a select group of my classmates and teachers. We were lucky to be going on a field trip different from any learning experience our thirteen-year-old selves had previously embarked on. In two hours, our bus, tired from its journey, would disappear in the horizon as only the vast Chesapeake Bay stood between nineteen kids accompanied by two teachers and our destination: Fox Island, a misleading name for the house built on stilts due to its location in the heart of the bay.

The water was a crystal-clear blue, providing perfect voyage conditions as we boarded a boat for a thirty-minute cruise to Fox Island. I stared at the waves and felt the brisk breeze which passed the time on the boat. The waves were a soothing therapy that comforted me while fears of abandoning my warm bed for a marine adventure plagued my thoughts. Upon arriving at the house, we briefly were able to take in our surroundings before we were ushered back onto the boat. The salty air was crisp as we set off into the water encompassing horizon. A grassy island appeared in the distance, small yet big enough to hike and explore. The abandoned island was filled with tiny mud holes and many shells that had washed onto shore. The entire island was no bigger than a football field and housed a vast amount of birds, insects, and tiny fish swarming the small puddles that were spread throughout. Experiencing the island, even with twenty other people, provided me a personal bond with my surroundings. As a lover of nature and water, I felt at peace just standing on an island not overrun with commercial buildings and roads. It was a rare experience of a raw environment, isolated from human impact. Saying goodbye to the island to head back to the house was harder than saying goodbye to my parents earlier that morning, for I was saying goodbye to an untouched beauty of nature that I was likely to never stumble upon again.

The Chesapeake Bay was brimming with crabs that were able to be seen in the shallow waters surrounding Fox Island. These crabs were present in such mass

amounts that as low tide crept that evening, the floor of the bay was mostly covered by crustaceans. I sat on the edge of the dock, my toes faintly brushing the surface of the water, and watched the way the crabs interacted with each other. I pondered on how the many crabbers of the Chesapeake Bay have an immense supply of profits lying beneath my feet. I fetched a fishing pole someone had left out and casted the rod. I was not expecting to catch anything, for I knew that I had no bait on the line, but fishing had always put me in a state of peace. The naked hook descended into the water as the sun began to go to sleep. Nature can have a powerful hold on you when you embrace it; exposure to it allowed a restless seventh grader to pause and really take in the beauty that was in sight.

The next morning, we awoke before the sun. Carrying our warm blankets pressed tightly to our skin exposed from the thin pajama material, we made our way out the door. Our eyes adjusted to the faint dawn light and revealed the gorgeous estuary waters. The sounds of chirping birds were the morning alarm for myself and my class huddled together to battle the chill of the young day. We had front row tickets to the most beautiful show being performed in a fifty-mile radius: the sunrise over the bay. This show was uniquely starred clouds and seagulls as the opening act. When the main event arrived, a true star, the crowd went silent. Most main characters must have the spotlight shined on them, but the sun radiated its own dazzling light. The sun rises and falls every day, but it was an event to see on

the bay. Watching the sun rise that morning was a reminder to me that nature never stops existing, no matter how much we ignore it.

The remainder of that day was a continuation of outdoor exploration and activities. We boated, fished, trekked through mud, and just simply enjoyed breathing in the crisp oxygen not soiled by exhaust fumes and chemicals. When it came time the next morning to depart from Fox Island, I was saddened to have to leave. To call the trip a nature retreat may be an exaggeration, but it sparked a true change in me that still exists today. This weekend getaway was the beginning of my love affair with nature, especially with water. When I have a stressful day or just need to think, I immediately seek a location with water that will accompany my thoughts. As humans, we are outdoors often, but we only take the time to value nature occasionally, which is what makes these experiences so unique compared to most times. My experience with Fox Island, especially on the dock simply sitting and watching the water, left a lasting impact on me by making me a person more in tune with nature.

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