

“Still by the River”

The crashing rapids are relentless, but I am calm while sitting on the smoothed rock which the tireless waves have carved. The flow of the river, like the flow of time, has carved the rocks to a smooth surface by taking away its memories and sending them down river to a new place. I know back home the James River is wide and calm, for I have listened to its peaceful side. Hiding within it are the memories of this wild place. This is the same river, but it is as if it has two different personalities. It reminds me of myself.

I close my eyes and let the chilly breeze relax me as I contemplate where I am and what I've done to get here. I am with my class exploring the wilderness within our busy capital, Richmond. It is amazing that to the right you see towering buildings, but to the left you see a wall of rock where people are practicing their climbing skills. Within the chaos of our busy lives, there is still peace; you just need to find it. This is our hiking trip, we still have much farther to go, but right now I am sitting next to the James River and tuning into its greatness. We have prepared for this trip for about three months, hiking up stairs, endless stairs, to get us ready for this. At the beginning we struggled, but we have planned and prepared ourselves for this adventure. Now we are here, all silent and listening.

Exploring with my class has given me nothing but happiness, for I have enjoyed every moment with them. Their jokes and smiles bring me joy. That lets me know that everyone is enjoying themselves here, and that our minds are flourishing in this new setting. Their stories are developing along with mine. This cloudy day has brought only sunshine to me, but a darker cloud always ruins the day. I can't stop my mind from going to a darker place, a place of fear. I don't ever want to go to such a place when I am enjoying myself. However, it seems I have no

power over my thoughts. Even though we are having such a joyful time right now, must I be the one who doesn't? It hurts me to know that soon we will separate, after our trip, ending this entire chapter. It hurts me every time I think about it. Why must this be so? It seems to me that life is meeting people and bonding with them just to say goodbye. I am angered at the thought, for I don't want to think of such things in this way. I have learned that we wouldn't be who we are without the people we have met and parted from. But why does it hurt? I am reminded of this whenever I am here. I've made such an incredible bond; how can I part? We do not have that choice; we all must face what we fear. I am so close to them, so why can't I just stay?

I sit on the smooth rock thinking and the crashing waves are reassuring me with calming answers. I know the forests and rocks of this river will not always be here, so I will come to it as often as I can. They have become part of me. As time goes on it will change and I will change, but it will be here for me. It is only me that chooses to leave it or ignore it. I can go to it whenever I feel troubled and want to find peace and ponder on my thoughts. It will help me find the answers to my questions, because in chaos I can find nothing. James, I know you will not be like those limited connections, for you are welcoming with your trees gowned in shades of red and yellow, your soothing songs, and ceaseless effort.

You, inspire happier thoughts. You tell me that the wonderful bonds I've created are temporary, but not gone forever. They have made me who I am. I would never be here if it weren't for the friendships I've made. I wish I didn't have to leave, but there are others out there who are looking for that bond. Through time we are being shaped just like the rock; we are worn by the river and our edges are sharp. The bonds with the people we have come to know will be swept away and the memories will go farther down the river. But we are constantly being eroded to who we are now, as time goes on we meet new people and our edges will become smooth. So

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we cannot stay in one place, for like the birds sustained by this river, our wings need the room to fly and discover new things. Since being with this class I have found a new love for the outdoors, and I will continue to explore its mysteries and tell the world of my discoveries. I thank you river, and I thank you forest, for allowing me to sit in your presence and listen to your stories and wise words. Though at times they are hard to listen to, I will always come to listen, whether I am roaring like the rapids or when I am still enough to hear.

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