

Sita Moses

Sweet Briar College

slmoses3011@sbc.edu

15 February 2020

I am Sita Moses, a first year at Sweet Briar College. I have not yet decided my major but am interested in studio art, primarily in oil painting, creative writing, and Sweet Briar's equine teaching and training certificate program. I am from Dublin New Hampshire, a small town, home to the second most hiked mountain in the world, Mt Monadnock, which overlooks the most beautiful spring-fed Dublin Lake. I began riding horses there from a very young age which eventually brought me to Sweet Briar College where I am now a member of our IHSA (Intercollegiate Horse Show Association) team and working student at our Harriet Rogers Riding Center. I hope to continue learning and adventuring in the years to come.

Sita Moses

Sweet Briar College

slmoses3011@sbc.edu

Moses 2

A Wilderness Education

A small circle of girls huddled around a late November fire, preparing for their plunge into the frigid marsh water, set on retrieving the glowing parcel floating in the middle of the lake. Inside, they would find a map or a clue or a riddle leading them onto their next adventure. They trudged into the murky water, mud squishing between their toes, sucking their feet down into the sediment.

These girls — and I was one of them — were at Coyote's Path, the wilderness school which my two older brothers and I attended to for eight years, on the first Saturday and Sunday of every month in the Fall and Winter and into the beginning of Spring. Coyote's Path was where I learned how to live within the beauty of the natural world, how to see the path a deer has left behind where the once crisp leaves of autumn or the first fresh grasses of spring were flattened and compacted into the dim semblance of a trail, what plants to gather for a meal or an appetizer or a simple on-the-go snack, and how to walk silently, barefoot, toe to heel so to feel the ground before entrusting one's whole weight, through the darkening woods.

At Coyote's Path storytelling was an integral part of our community. Animals would often play roles in the tales told around the glowing fire. Many of the stories resembled or stemmed from Native American folklore, the animals in these stories playing the roles of protagonists and antagonists, taking on different powers and meanings. The bear embodied strength and the owl, knowledge. The coyote was the trickster. These stories, woven together so

Sita Moses

Sweet Briar College

slmoses3011@sbc.edu

Moses 3

carefully, were always meant to impart some kind of message or sense of adventure to our young hearts.

The passing down of oral stories creates room for growth and change with every new rendition. The stories are made beautiful by the different voices that have become a part of their fabric. The stories shift and alter with each retelling allowing their unique lives to live on, gaining and losing pieces throughout. The counselors would pass along their stories to our expectant ears while we stoked our fire late into the night.

The spring before my freshman year of high school Coyote's Path came to its end as most wilderness programs do. The attendance runs lower and lower as each sibling from each original family cycle works their way through the program. My young self will forever be running on and stalking down the trails of our little forest looking for new life and adventure around every bend.

Two years after my final Coyote's Path expedition came to a close, Lucia, my friend, and fellow wilderness school counselor-in-training, contacted me about a mission she thought only someone from Coyote's Path, someone brought up in the same realm of samurai challenges (dares of all sorts), would agree to embark upon. It was a nighttime adventure to gather an invasive lily species that was completely taking over a distant marshland. Accompanying us on this late night harvest were four children, not one older than eight. While Lucia, the rest of the adults, and I waded waist-deep into the cold water the children waited on shore. Every once in a while I could hear a burst of muffled laughter or a faint whisper but mostly they just watched.

The children waiting on shore reminded me of the magic that is allowed to manifest out of curiosity and a little fear. When we returned, the children asked what time it was. We told

Sita Moses

Sweet Briar College

slmoses3011@sbc.edu

Moses 4

them the sun would be rising in a few hours when really it was closer to midnight. The look of wonder on their faces was priceless, because believing they had stayed out under the light of the stars and the moon, successfully fighting off the biting cold, for so many hours gave them a feeling of power in their bones that I could recognize instantly. I remember golden lies crafted from those same strands of how far we had walked, the lands we had journeyed across, the hours we had spent stalking a counselor, practicing our art. These small alterations of time and distance were not meant to harm or detract from our experiences but to heighten them, to make the magic of those hours in the woods longer and more full.

The feeling of unbelievable strength and endurance was something the counselors often created for us. As young children, we felt immense freedom being alone in the wild. Our teachers knew how to make their presence invisible and because of this, we learned where each of our own limits and boundaries lay and how to push at them in just the right place.

This era of my life feels like it happened in a far off past, the glorious world of complete youth, a time I will always cherish. I will always remember the counselors and individuals who lead so gracefully and with such confidence. The leaders in our community were respected and trusted; the woods often display the trueness of a person. Kindness was expected from all, especially from the leaders. Coyote's Path, located two hours away from where I grew up, was my escape from all the happenings in my immediate life. Its distance allowed for the world of adventure to live on untarnished. Coyote's Path was a world for stories and night games in the sandpit, stalking and plant identification, fire-made breakfasts and barefoot running. It was a

Sita Moses

Sweet Briar College

slmoses3011@sbc.edu

Moses 5

world where a child could be self-sufficient as well as an integral member of her tribe, without compromising either.