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11th Grade/ Homeschool

Madison County

Writer's Block and a Storm of Words

As I sat down to write this piece, I encountered a bout of writer's block. I have had many adventurous outdoor experiences, but, for whatever reason, I just couldn't think of one in particular that I really wanted to write about. I sat there, my pen hovering over the blank sheet of paper, my hand eager, waiting for the command to jot something down, but my mind remained as blank as the paper before me. I began to despair. So, I decided to set my work aside and take a walk outside where so many great ideas are formed. Soon after I walked out the door, a steady, cold rain began to fall, and I was forced back indoors - and back to my desk. As I listened to the rain drumming on the metal roof, I was reminded of one of the reasons I enjoy the outdoors so much - its unpredictability. My mind wandered to another time when strong weather came upon me suddenly. It was during the second leg of a 400-mile canoe trip down the James River that I had completed with my dad. Here is an excerpt from the journal that I kept documenting the trip:

July 11, 2018

8:17 PM

“... Having long passed the fall line of the river, we are now at the mercy of the tides and the open water. Where we camped this evening, the river is nearly two miles wide. Due to its winding nature, we are sometimes forced to leave the safer edges of the river and cross over to

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the other side to make better time. This makes for some exciting moments as it can sometimes take an hour or more just to cross the river, and the weather can change sharply in that time, leaving us stuck in the middle. This fear was realized today. The river took a sharp turn, and we decided to cross over to make better time. It was a beautiful day; some wispy clouds dotted the skyline, and we even noticed a few eagles flying high above us. The gentle waves lapped peacefully on the boat, and there was a cool breeze keeping us from getting too hot.

“We made good time in the beginning and it seemed as if the crossing would be completed without a problem. We were about a half mile out from shore when we noticed some dark puffy clouds begin to form in the distance. The wind began to pick up, steadily and swiftly, and the waves began to rise. We began to put more energy into each stroke, hoping we could finish the crossing instead of having to turn back to the closer shoreline. But a deep, guttural clap of thunder quickly changed our minds, and we decided to turn around and head for shore. A powerful cold rain drenched us and our supplies. The canoe bounced as it crested each wave. Soon we no longer worried about finishing our crossing, but, alternatively, we began to worry about staying afloat. The waves began to grow, and the rain beat against our backs as we paddled as fast as we could for shore. We tried to hit every wave head on so that we wouldn't capsize, but, even so, water splashed in every time we hit a wave. The canoe became increasingly unwieldy. We began to bail out the water to lighten the canoe. A terrifying streak of lightning

shot across the sky, lighting up our surroundings in a nasty pink color. Almost simultaneously, a loud boom rung in our ears.

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“All we could do was paddle for shore. We were still a quarter mile out, but there was no other option. The canoe rose up on each wave and slammed back down on the water as if being dropped out of the sky. The situation seemed hopeless when, suddenly, the storm subsided as quickly as it arose. The waves mellowed, and the rain stopped. A gentle rumble of thunder could be heard in the distance as the storm moved farther away...”

Reliving this story has reminded me of why I love the outdoors so much. No amount of planning can prepare you for everything creation has to offer, which makes the outdoor life so exciting. Sometimes, creation’s unpredictability can seem like an inconvenience, but it is one of the qualities that makes the outdoors so special. The best memories are made when something unexpected happens, like seeing a black bear waltz across a hiking path, or watching an osprey swoop down and snatch a fish out of water. These unexpected treasures and I’m-really-alive challenges are what make us return time and time again, and it is why I love the outdoors ... anything can happen.