

PORTAGE INTO THE WILDERNESS

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This is my story of my first ever experience with absolute wilderness. I had just turned 16. I had live in the cess pool of metropolises all of my life.

I had never been free and on my own. I had never experienced nature. All I knew was life in the big city surrounded with cold strangers, concrete, noise, stress and pollution.

So far my life's experiences had been a long list of absolutely horrific abuses. I had already lived in hundreds of different locations. Foster homes, group homes, orphanages and more. I had been treated as a piece of garbage by most. My experiences compiled of child abuses, torture, beatings, neglect, malnutrition, abandonment. Sexual abuse by people put in positions of trust over children.

It would take a huge book to describe all my horrible experiences.

One day. before I turned sixteen.

I decided that I needed to do some healing and get in touch with my inner self. The only way I saw to do this was to go back to the basics of life. I needed to get out of the city and go to the wilderness.

I decided to leave Toronto and go far north to the huge Provincial wilderness park. Called Algonquin Provincial Park. Ontario, Canada

I saved up some money. I bought a sleeping bag and a cheap tent. Got some other necessities.

Then for the first time in my life I hitch hiked out of the city. I was free. But it was scary for as I had absolutely no knowledge as to what waited for me.

The trip to Algonquin Park was pleasant. I headed to Portage Lake where they rented canoes.

But first I had to speak to a park warden and get a permit to enter the interior of the park. I was told of the rules. I was told that I was not allowed to leave anything behind. etc, etc.

The warden gave me a topographical map, and explained how to use it with a compass to travel. He explained how to use the sun and how to use the compass to calculate my position and to calculate distances to far away object of landscape.

The most important advice he gave me was about my food. He seriously cautioned me about all the wild animals in the park. Such as wolves, bears, moose. This park was absolutely teeming with wildlife.

I had never ever seen wild animals in my life.

He told me that if the animals smelled my food, that they would probably attack to get at it. Especially the bears.

He told me to use my sleeping bag's carry bag. Put all my food in it, and every night. To make sure that I find a tall tree and find a long branch up high. Throw a rope over the branch and pull my bag of food up high and far from the trunk of the tree. For if I was far into the interior of the forest. It could take me days to get back and I would get very hungry. Plus my adventure would be cut short.

If I got attacked by a bear and injured in the park. I could very likely die there. As no one would know where I am and very few people ever went into the interior of the park. There is no roads and no motorized vehicles of any kind in the interior of the park.

In those days there was no cell phones. Once in the interior of the park, one is completely cut off from civilization.

The park warden looked at me with puzzlement. He had never heard of anyone going into the parks interior alone. Plus I was young and inexperienced. But After speaking with him I felt confident that I could do this. But like all young people the confidence comes from lack of experience and knowledge. But I possessed another quality that was absolutely necessary for this adventure to succeed. I had to be brave and not scared of the unknown.

It was a beautiful bright sunny day. I had never before experienced such bright and clean air. The smells of nature were wonderful.

I walked around to the other side of the lake and went to the portage store. Got some supplies and rented my canoe. Again I got more disconcerting stares of puzzlement from people. They had never seen anyone attempt to go into the interior alone. They felt that that was a very dangerous thing to do.

I studied my map and picked a course I would start off on. I sat in my canoe and pushed off. The lake I started off on was called Portage Lake. It was a fairly long lake. I decided that I wanted to enter the wilderness as far away as possible from people as I could get. I did not want to see anyone while I went on my adventure.

So I paddled for hours and went all the way to the other end of the lake. I picked a spot to portage that I knew would lead to a smaller interior lake. The paddling was exhausting.

I got to shore and unloaded my canoe. I then began my trek through the dense woods carrying my canoe over my shoulders. I walked for at least an hour and found the other lake. I had to return to where I first landed to get the rest of my supplies.

I also always had to keep track of the time of day. For I knew that I would need time to search for and set up my camp for the night.

All the while I am taking in the majestic beauty of the unspoiled nature.

I reloaded my canoe and cast off again into the unknown. I paddled for a few hours, all the while scouting for a suitable location to camp. But I always had the thought of meeting up with a bear or wolves.

I saw a good location of cleared space for a camp. But a young couple had beaten me to it. They were typical people from the city. Their campsite was loaded with material possession scattered everywhere. Their camp site was a mess and they had food out in the open everywhere. I thought that was foolish, as the odours of open containers of food was very likely to attract animals.

I went on a short distance and set up my first camp for the night across the lake from the young couple.

One thing that amazed me was how clear and easy it was to hear their voices in the silence of nature. All my life I had been in noisy environments where you had to scream over the noise of the city to be heard.

Well the big city campers were active and noisy. I also realized that a lot of noise would attract curious bears.

Well after I set up my camp I started to eat something. Then I heard the woman on the other side of the lake screaming. She was terrified. I knew something bad was happening. So I paddled to where they were.

Their campsite was all torn apart. They had been cooking and the smells of food lured a bear into their campsite. He was unafraid of them and went after all their food. He destroyed all their containers and even their tent.

Well I felt braver and wiser than them. I explored the situation and I saw a trail of flour going into the woods. The man and I decided to follow the

trail. It was amazing to me to see all these marks of flour giving us a clear trail to follow.

So as I got farther into the woods. It came to me that, what would I do when I caught up to the bear. A shocking and scary thought came to my mind. I thought what a stupid idea it was to chase a bear into his turf.

I suddenly stopped and told the other guy that we are crazy to chase after a huge wild black bear. All of a sudden he got a really scared and terrified look on his face. And started to run as fast as he could back to camp.

When we arrived back at camp. I realized that these people had a big problem now. They had no supplies or shelter. Even their sleeping bags were ripped. The campsite was littered with debris everywhere. It was a huge mess. They also had to consider that the bear would probably come back. She was absolutely terrified of that thought. They only had one choice. They had to return to the Portage Store. It was really late and it would be dark in a couple of hours.

They took what they could and loaded their canoe. They broke the first rule of the wilderness camping. They left their camp ground a huge mess. All the debris looked so out of place in this beautiful natural setting.

I felt sorry for them. But I also wondered why they had not been given that great advice that I received from the park warden.

Well I watched them leave. I knew they would have a really hard time of it. For they had to do a two hour portage into the woods to get to the other lake. It would be dark by then. They would not be able to do it in the dark. Plus they could get attacked by animals.

Wow I thought. What a first day this is turned out to be. As I paddled back to my camp ground in the quiet of the evening. All I could hear was my thoughts. They were not pleasant ones. For I realized that now I

would have to camp and that I could possibly get attacked too. But now, I was all alone for the first time in my life.

There would be no one to help me if I got attacked or injured. Oh well! That's why I came here. To be all alone.

I found a huge tree nearby and I put my food up high like the warden told me to do. As it got dark the sounds of the forest came to life. Its amazing how noisy it got. I could hear sounds from far way. I could hear tree branches breaking. I could hear splashes in the water.

Hisses hoots and all kinds of other sounds I had never heard before. It was a bit scary. Plus I kept thinking that these woods have bears and wolves in them.

Now I was in for another first experience. I never knew that it got so absolute dark in the wilderness. It was a moonless night. I could not even see a foot in front of me. I could not even see the ground at my feet.

Being an inner city kid I had never been in an environment that was not lit up.

So I had a small flashlight and I found my way to my tent. I thought that this tent would not offer me any protection against wild animals. All the sounds had me spooked. Especially all the braches that I kept hearing cracking nearby. Now I was scared. I figured I would have a real hard time going to sleep.

I laid there all alone. In the middle of nowhere. I kept hearing sounds outside my tent. So I opened the zipper on my tent and with my flashlight, looked around. Hoping to see nothing.

I did this a few times. The hours went by. I was getting really tired. I needed to get some good sleep for my long day tomorrow.

So I laid down with my head right beside the wall of my tent. Just as I

closed my eyes. I got the biggest scare. There definitely was a large animal walking around my tent. I was too scared to make a sound. I could hear it sniffing around my tent. Then it was right beside my head. The sniffing was really loud now. It was sniffing right beside my ear. I was paralyzed with fear. I choose that it was best that I did not move. Especially if it was a bear. I did not want to startle it. For if I did it most surely would of attacked me.

I laid there for a while and the sniffing stopped. The animal left my campsite after a while. Now I was really in an alert state. I listened to all the sounds. But I was so tired. After a while a finally fell a sleep.

Hours later around two thirty in the morning I was awoken to. Tick, Tick, Tick, Tick. What is that? It was so loud and rhythmic. Now this was a very different sound then all the other sounds of the forest. The tick, tick, tick, tick continued. I got dressed, got my flashlight and slowly opened the zipper on my tent. The zipper sounded so loud in the quite of the forest.

I peeked out with my flashlight. I could not see anything. But I kept hearing the tick, tick, tick, tick. I looked all around in the dark. It was really hard to see anything with my little flashlight. I could not figure out where the sound was coming from. For the forest has a really neat echo effect. Then I looked up way, way, way up. Tick, tick, tick, tick was getting louder as my ears where going up the big trees trunk.

Wow I thought what is that. I saw an animal. A big animal. It was hanging onto the tree trunk with one of its claws and was reaching way out with the other one. The tick, tick, tick was coming from my food bag. This animal could not quite reach my food. All it could do was just clip the bag with its claws. Every time it touched the bag, the bag would swing away, and every time it swung back. The animal would claw at it. Causing the tick, tick sounds.

I was lucky that my bag was made of strong rip stop nylon. For if it had broken. My adventure would have been over.

Now I had to make a quick decision. How to stop this animal before it got a good grip on my bag. What to do? I quickly looked around on the ground for something to throw at it. There were no rocks. All I could find was small twigs. So I threw some pieces of wood at the animal. I could not reach it. It was up too high and I had nothing heavy enough to throw that high.

A couple of my throws got close. It got the animal's attention. But it did not get scared. It continued the tick, tick, tick.

I had to think of something quick. So I started to scream at it. This worked. It looked at the bag, then looked at me and decided it was not worth it.

The animal was at least forty feet up. Oh now it started coming closer to me. Now I had another problem. What would I do when it got to the ground? This animal was big. It was the size of a small bear.

I had nowhere to go. There was no trail or clearing near me. All I had was the lake. I could not take that option in the dark. So I continued to make screaming sounds and kept throwing twigs at it. Now it was close enough and I was able to hit it. I had nothing big enough to hurt it with and I had nothing to defend myself with. But I did have one thing that I knew would be alien to this wild animal. I had my flashlight. So I began to blind it in a strobe effect. I knew that if I kept blinding it. It would get confused and it would eventually start seeing spots. It worked. The animal had a real difficult time trying to see or identify what I was.

But now it was on the ground, really close to me. I was frightened, for this thing was big and strong with huge claws.

I kept screaming at it and throwing twigs. It left. I then had time to figure out what it was. But it did not make sense to me. It was way too big to be. It was a huge raccoon. I mean huge. If it stood up. It would have

been as tall as me. I was puzzled and confused. For I had never ever heard of or seen a racoon that big. But it really was a racoon. There was lots of racoons in the city and they were nothing as big as this one.

I went back to bed and eventually went to sleep. I did not enjoy getting out of my tent in the middle of the night. I was now really cold and all damp from the dew.

The next morning was beautiful. I packed my canoe and continued down the lake. I studied my map. I portaged twice that day. I was now far into the interior of this huge wilderness park. At least thirty miles from any humans. I never saw another person for the rest of my adventure. I was definitely all alone.

I decided that from now on I would only set up camp on small islands. So I studied my map and set course for one. I had to keep using my compass.

Now in front of me was a long portage through dense forest to get to a lake that had an island.

I was now in for another first experience. I knew that this would be a difficult portage for I had to carry all my supplies and the canoe in one trip. It was getting late and I would not have time to make it a two way trip.

This portage was different for now there was thousands of mosquitoes. As I approached the shore the swarm of bugs attacked me. It was horrible and painful. I could barely keep my eyes open. There a constant buzz of thousands of mosquitoes all around me. I quickly unloaded my canoe and started my portage.

I walked as fast as I could. The bugs never left me. They chased me all through the forest. I was covered in mosquito bites. I had blood all over my face. I was so anxious to find the other lake. I could now see the lake. I threw the canoe as fast as I could into the lake. Jumped in and paddled

as fast as I could. Eventually the mosquitoes disappeared. It was too windy for them in the open lake.

So on I went. I found the island I was looking for. It was a tiny island in the middle of a good sized lake. The water was absolutely still. There was no wind and no clouds. I set up my camp and ate.

I was very tired because I did not sleep well the night before. But I wanted to stay up to enjoy the beautiful scenery all around me. It was so peaceful and still. The noises from the forest were far away. So it was very quiet.

As it began to get dark I began to hear the strangest sound. It was coming from far away across the lake. It was loud and melodic. It was kind of eerie. It had me scared because I did not know what it was. And in the silence it sounded really loud. It echoed all around the lake. Now the sounds started coming from every other part of the lake. The sounds were all around me. It sounded like a pack of wolves had surrounded the lake. I thought they wanted to get at me. The sounds continued for a couple of hours until it was completely dark out.

Once in a while I could hear sound of branches breaking or rustling coming from the forest on shore. I kept my ears open for sounds of water splashing in case some bear decided to come over to my island. But I was safe.

So now I was in for another treat of nature. The island I was on only had a few smaller trees. I was close to the water. I had a clear view of the sky. I laid down on the warm ground. Put my hands behind my head and laid there listened to the sounds of nature and started staring at the sky. I was so amazed. The longer I stared up the more stars I saw. I could now see what appeared to be millions of stars. They were everywhere. The sky was completely covered in stars of every size. This was the first time I had ever seen stars. It was so spectacular. For I being an inner city kid. I had never been in an environment where the air was

clear and dark.

You see the sky in the big city always has a haze of pollution and the lights from the city always made the sky too bright to see the stars. .

Oh by the way. Many years later I discovered what that eerie sound was. When I was watching a Mutual Of Omaha's nature show. It was the singing of the Great Loons.

Loons are birds for those who also do not know what a loon is.

I then had the most peaceful sleep of my life. I was one with nature. It felt so wonderful to be in touch with the beauty of mother earth.

The next morning I began on another adventure of exploration. I went out into the perfectly clear and still lake. It was a bright and sunny day. There was no wind and no waves. It was completely quite. All I could hear was the sound of my paddle break the surface of the water. Then I would hear the drops of water fall off my paddle as I was singing it forward to dip it into the water again. Then I decided to stop in the middle of the lake and not make a move. My canoe became perfectly still. The only movement in the water was the little ripples from the edge of my canoe if I moved. Then I looked down into the water. The water was pristine. The lake was shallow so I could clearly see the bottom. It could see plants moving around. Then I would see bass swimming around. They did not even know I was there. It seemed like I could of just reached down and grabbed one. It was like looking into the worlds biggest fish tank.

I so enjoyed the experience with nature. That's why I have spent the rest of my life fighting to protect it. Nature is very delicate and we have the responsibility to protect it. Not exploit it.

Continuing with my adventure. I paddled very slowly close to shore. I only paddled once every few minutes. The water was so still that my

canoe just coasted along for ever from its own momentum. Plus I just wanted to be part of nature as if I was not even there.

Not knowing I was in for another experience of a life time. I was completely relaxed. Enjoying the still quiet water. Just as I came past a protruding piece of land only about two feet beside me. As my canoe came to stand still. I looked up just as a giant moose was lifting its huge head and furry antlers out of the marshy bottom. The sound of all the water as its head came out of the water and the dripping water in such an absolutely quiet place was breathtaking. I was paralyzed with amazement as the moose only about five feet from me came to it full height. It sat there and was acting like I was just part of nature. It was not afraid of me at all. It just looked at me. It seemed to give me a look that it liked me. Then just to my right I saw the brush moving. The moose swung its huge head and antlers to look back at the noise. And out popped a baby moose and jumped into the water. The moose swung back around to check on me to make sure I posed no danger to its little one. But again the moose gave me an assuring look. So I stayed there not moving for a few more minutes. Enjoying the spectacular moment.

I continued on my adventure enjoying nature at it best.

A week later my supplies were running low, so I had to bring my adventure to and end. The whole week I was blessed with perfect weather. Except on my last day. After my last portage. I entered the far end of Portage Lake. This lake is long. I began to paddle back. I was exhausted from my week long adventure. But as I began to paddle back the weather got nasty. I was hit by a very strong cross wind. The wind made my paddling extremely difficult. I kept being blown away from my intended course. This made my trip back twice as long. I was fighting for my life. The wind was blowing me into shore. I would of crashed into rocks. I had to paddle as hard as I could just to keep off the rocks and keep moving forward. I did this for about six hours. I was very concerned about the waves swamping my canoe. As I did not know how to swim and I did not have a lifejacket.

I made it back. Returned the canoe and walked out to the hwy. I hitch hiked back to the big miserable city.

This adventure was the best experience of my life. It is now 35 years later and I still look back at that adventure. Never again did I ever have an opportunity to do it again. Now my health is poor. And I know I will never again experience that closeness to nature.

Tears come to my eyes as I watch this precious and delicate planet being destroyed for greed.

In all these years I have watched the human race deteriorate into fascism. If only people could experience what I did . I feel that if everyone got close to nature this world would be a much better place.

After all it is God's country.

END