

I dragged my feet in the soil carrying what seemed like 100 pounds on my back all the way to what was known to be the greatest spot in Michigan, right next to the famous fresh water, Lake Michigan. I think I might have packed just a bit too much for this trip: make-up bag, jewelry, jeans, and a jacket for everyday of the week. But I need these accessories. I can't live without them.

"Just listen to those birds. Oh, and do you see that deer over there!" Dad exclaimed.

"Yes." I said as I rolled my eyes, trying to be included in my dad's language, but my mind is just not as hooked on this "nature stuff" as my dad is.

"We are almost to the campsite, just hold on a couple more minutes."

"Fantastic," I muttered to myself.

My dad smirked. I just wanted to rest.

We finally came upon a deserted open area, with woodchips spread all over, and seven trees, seven feet apart, spread out forming a circle that bubbled the camping area off from the rest of the woods. I took off my backpack, and sat down on a sideways wooden tree trunk next to the first tree. The tree trunk started crumbing, and that sent my bottom bumping onto the ground.

"This is just great. No cell phone, no T.V., and now no clean clothes." I became frustrated.

"This is the joy of being out in the woods with nature." Dad explained.

"Oh, real joy. We *are* staying here for just one night, right?"

Dad ignored my question. "Hey, it is getting late, we should set up the tents, and eat dinner. And the best part, *you* are in charge."

"What! I don't even know where to start!"

"Relax, now you get to learn. And don't worry, we will be swimming in the lake tomorrow and then we will pack up and go back home. That way, you can have some of your spring break to yourself."

"Oh, thank goodness!"

We poured heated water onto dried noodles and chicken, bringing it back to life and ate our dinner. As we were finishing up, my dad gazed up and absorbed the scenery. I was tired and still eating.

“By the look of these clouds, we should probably get to bed before it starts raining,” Dad announced, while rubbing his tummy, indicating that the meal was delicious. “You will sleep in that tent, and I will sleep in this one.”

My tent was a little smaller than Dad’s, but then again, I am smaller than he is. Mine was brown, my least favorite color, and it looked like it could collapse at any second. “What if something scary comes along, and I can’t get a hold of you for some reason? Or if my tent actually collapses.”

“You will be fine. Your sister Julia was fine when she was a teenager like you, and I brought her out here.”

“That’s because she can handle anything.”

“Trust me, you will be fine. Now get to bed. It’s getting late. These clouds can’t wait for us forever.”

This night will probably be the worst ever. I usually have my cell phone with me, and I play games, and text with my friends. I can’t fall asleep without it. I wondered how many messages and alerts I would have on my phone when I get back home. I just stared at the ceiling of my tent, and couldn’t muster myself to sleep. I tried all of those sleep exercises, but none allowed my mind to drift away to the land of dreams. I tossed and turned on the uncomfortable ground. Then I heard a rain drop on my tent. *Good grief*, I thought, *this night could not get any worse*. But, as my luck seemed to run out, it did get worse. Just as I finally got comfortable, my ears heard a frightful whistle, like from a broken down train. I sat up instantly, trembling. It silenced for seven seconds, and then screeched again. I grabbed my flashlight, hurried out of my tent, and stepped onto the ground with my bare feet. “Ewww,” I whispered, stepping in mud. That noise had drowned out the rain, which was coming down even harder now. I grabbed my shoes from the outside of the tent. They were not really rain boots, instead they were ordinary school shoes. But they would have to do for now. I ran over to Dad’s tent.

“DAD!” I half-screamed, half-whispered. “Dad, do you hear that sound?”

"Yes, it's you. Go back to sleep." He moaned.

"No, not me. That screeching noise?"

"Go to sleep. The water is fine."

What? He doesn't know what he's talking about, I decided.

"Oh, creature," I quivered while turning from dad's tent. "Shoo!" But the creature wouldn't go away, and it whistled again. I listened carefully, and heard the screech coming from one of the seven trees. I carefully stepped one foot at a time to the first tree in line, moving very slowly, so not to disturb it. I looked behind the tree, but nothing appeared. Then I caught something in the corner of my eye that was behind the fourth tree. It was not very big. I couldn't see it well with the sky casting its dim light on the thing. The rain was getting stronger now, also making it harder to see the thing. I didn't want to shine my flashlight on it because I didn't want to scare it. And, I didn't want my shoes to make any loud squeaky sounds walking toward it. I was perplexed. I stepped ever so carefully, and when I got to the third tree, I could finally make out the shape of the thing. It was a bird. A mockingbird, I think. I could make out the white tummy, and the black and white wings. Now I realized this mockingbird was calling for help.

The mockingbird was on its side, with its tummy facing me, and there was a red spot. Oh, no, it was blood. *What should I do?* Dad would be of no use, he would just tell me to go back to sleep. But I needed to find a way to mend the bird. I couldn't just leave it there to suffer. Besides, its screeching noise made my eardrums hurt. I coaxed myself to calm down and relax. Now, what should I do? I'm not a vet. I thought back from the time we arrived here, which was much brighter then. I remembered getting dirty from falling when trying to sit on that sideways tree trunk. That's it! I quickly, but ever so quietly went over to where I had fallen, and picked up a pretty long piece of the fallen bark. Then I went back towards that fourth tree, still keeping my distance. With this long piece of bark, I tried and successfully scooped up the mockingbird. Wait. Now what am I going to do? I couldn't put a Band-Aid on the mockingbird, and I definitely couldn't leave him here. I would have to use my brain again, and this is spring break.

Okay, so I needed to put him somewhere, and do something about his wound. This is supposed to be the greatest spot on Lake Michigan. Lake Michigan. I can't believe I thought of that. Now, in which direction is Lake Michigan? I looked at my flashlight. Oh, isn't that

handy. I have a compass on my flashlight. I am guessing it is south. I will first try to go south to the lake, and if I get lost, I will return and come back north to the campsite. Taking the mockingbird and the flashlight in my hands, I started out south.

I dodged every tree, bush, branch and twig, but I was still getting soaked from the rain. Two sets of clothes destroyed in a row. I guess that's expected when camping. But I haven't been camping before, so I wouldn't know. I will probably never consider going camping again. Even more, it was tiring, walking all over, with no place to sit for a while. My legs and feet felt like lead.

I finally found the lake, and it looked really big. If I were seeing this in the daylight, I probably wouldn't even be able to see the land on the other side of the lake. I had seen other lakes, but this lake was like nothing I had ever seen before.

I got to the beach. It was really dark, but with my flashlight, I managed. I first laid down the mockingbird that was on the tree bark. Then I found another tree bark on the beach that I used as a cup. I used this cup to grab some water from the lake, then quickly walked back over to the bird, and let the water run over the wound like a waterfall. The blood came off of the bird, and dripped onto the sand. I closed my eyes. I did not like the look of this. When I could open my eyes again, they met the mockingbird's eyes, which, from what I could make out, were a yellow for the left eye, and a green color for the right. He stopped screeching, and I was lost in his eyes for a moment. When I realized I was pouring from an empty tree bark cup, I went back to the lake, getting even more wet. I continued this process until the wound looked clean enough. Then I sat down on the wet sand, and waited for the bird to do whatever he decided. The rain was clearing up, but I was already wet, so I laid down and soaked in the wet sand. Who cares anymore? It was only the bird and me.

I tried to stay awake, but it was terribly hard. Finally, after what seemed like an hour, I heard a noise. It was the bird trying to stand up. I briskly sat up, while not disturbing the bird, and watched. The bird was struggling. I really did not want to touch it. It belonged to the wild. I sincerely hoped it would successfully get up pretty soon. And, as my luck was coming back, it got up, and hobbled away, not even thinking of flying. I watched the mockingbird go, then after a minute of deeply thinking reflectively, I stood up, brushed off the wet sand, and headed back north.

Climbing back into my tent, I put on some soft, clean, dry clothes and went to bed. It was about 3:00 o'clock in the morning, and knowing my luck was coming back, I went to sleep with no problem. When I dozed, the rain continued to drizzle. I fell asleep with a smile on my face, dreaming about what beauty tomorrow will bring.

I woke up with a light shining in my face. I got up, opened up the gates of my tent, and the sun shone down on the campsite. I saw my footprints; so it wasn't a dream. I looked around, but dad wasn't awake yet. Perfect. This could not get any better. I pulled down our bear-proof food bag from the seventh tree, and rummaged for the breakfast, including the coffee for Dad. I read the instructions for the scrambled eggs, bacon, and coffee. I made a fire, heated the water, and cooked breakfast. I made Dad's coffee and breakfast too, but then I covered it to keep it warm. After eating breakfast, I walked around the campsite taking in the scenery. There were a lot of beautiful things that I missed yesterday, and last night. In all respect, though, I loved being here. Wait, did I *really* just say that?

Dad woke up. He seemed confused when he saw the breakfast already made and me already awake.

"I had a very dramatic dream last night. But what happened to you?" He asked still looking a bit confused.

"Not much." I smiled.

"Okay. Why did you make breakfast? You never make any meals for anyone."

"I just woke up, and got bored. Plus, you showed me how to make camp food last night. I couldn't let that learning go to waste."

"Actually, I was going to let you sleep in, and make this breakfast myself."

"Oh. Well I beat you to it."

"Okay. Let's eat then."

"Actually, I already ate. But you go ahead and I'll talk to you while you eat."

"Okay. Hey, this is a good meal. Now, when I'm done we will pack up, then go to the lake." My dad explained.

I looked up, and at that instant, I saw my mockingbird fly away, soaring through the clear blue sky. His chirping sound was as beautiful as he was, whistling that tune for all to

hear. His sound was music to my ears. Turning back to Dad I asked, "Can we stay here for just one more night? I would like that very much."

Dad stared at me with a crazy look on his face, but I just smiled back.

"Ah.... Okay. I think we can manage with the food. You feel alright, Lizzy?"

"Of course. I am perfectly fine."

This spot was truly as advertised; the best spot in Michigan, and my story proves it.