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Outward Bound: Scene with filter (water).

On the second day of the trip, we hiked in the pouring rain for much of the day. We did not really know each other very well at that point, and everyone was a little bit on edge. By the time we reached camp at around 6:00, I was exhausted, and wanted nothing more than to be able to rest a while. Every day, we were given jobs, and on day 2 I was a “camel”, essentially a water collector. Immediately after we arrived at camp, one of the counselors, Elizabeth, gathered the camels (Andy, Sarah, and I) and told us that we had to hike to the river. We set out, and eventually came to a muddy hill that we descended to get to the river (it was really just a pool of water). We started the trip with three filters: a fast automatic filter, a very slow automatic filter, and a very slow hand pump. The fast automatic filter ripped. We sat there on logs set at awkward angles and rotated using the hand pump while the slow automatic filter filled bottles up drop by drop. In all, we had to fill up 24 Nalgene water bottles, and 4 large sacks of water. I distinctly remember sitting on an angled log, pumping away, my muscles at the point of exhaustion, and getting stung by a bee on my thigh. That was the first and only time I have ever been stung. I yelled, and looked at my counselor, expecting her to comfort me, or at least take away the pump. She looked at me, and didn't even acknowledge that anything had happened. I fumed, but continued to pump. That was when I realized

that I wasn't going to get any help on this trip – I would have to take care of myself and pull my own weight. As sobering as that was, it was also liberating. My experience on the trip would be defined by me – no one else. Later, as Andy was pumping, he was stung by three bees in quick succession. He winced, but just kept on pumping (as a side note, the pump malfunctioned halfway through this, reducing the amount of water it was producing by about half). We returned to camp 3 hours later, quietly furious and determined at the same time. Dinner had already been made hours ago, but nobody had eaten it yet. We all sat down together and ate cold macaroni.

Outward Bound: The effects of the trip now.

Now that I'm back in the city, the whole experience seems surreal. Could I really have run 7 miles, most of it uphill, at 6 AM? And then done a ropes course 6 hours later? Honestly, it's hard to imagine.

The “four pillars” of Outward Bound are self-reliance, physical fitness, craftsmanship, and above all, compassion. All of these have been amplified within me since I came back from the course. I am much less likely to ask for help with something that I could just as easily do for myself now. I am much more physically fit than I was when I embarked on the course, and I have a better understanding of the value of being physically fit. I do not think that you can fully enjoy everything

life has to offer if you are not physically fit. Craftsmanship is a very interesting idea for me personally. Before Outward Bound, I could honestly be described as a bit of a slacker – I did just enough to get by, but didn't do anything to the best of my ability. Since coming back, I've found that I've put more effort into my athletics, and especially my schoolwork. Compassion is a difficult value to quantify, and I'm not going to say that I've become more compassionate. That's for others to decide. I'll continue to think of specific things that have changed since I've come back, but that was the broader view.

Outward Bound: Relationships

The relationships that were formed on the trip are very interesting to me. There were many different personalities. Billy, the good-natured football player from South Carolina. Justin, the hyperactive (he had ADHD and forgot to take his meds several times) taskmaster. Owen, the personable comedian from Atlanta. Maisy, who must've cried at least 30 times on the trip and was our slowest member by far but kept on going. Andy, the friendly lacrosse player from Florida, and also my best friend on the trip. Chad, who was probably the goofiest person I have ever met but who carried more weight than anyone else without even buckling his belt strap. Brian, who was always calm and kept us under control. James, who was very awkward but always took anything that someone else could not and who placed first out of around a hundred on the 7 mile run. Mack, who wants to become a

scientist and was overmatched physically but was the only one who could tie knots – a skill essential for making camp. Sarah, who was probably in better shape than most of the guys and never complained. And Jesse, who was nice but never stopped talking about what she was going to do when she got home. An interesting dynamic is created when you're on a trip like that. I did not like Justin at all as a person – he was much too loud and hyper for me. But he was essential to the group – he kept us going, pushed us harder and harder, and shouldered much of the leadership duties, and so I appreciated him being there and wanted him to do as well as he possibly could. Under normal circumstances, I do not think that I would ever have even talked to James. He actually turned out to be a pretty cool guy, and towards the end of the trip he was carrying everything that someone else couldn't carry. I was extremely fond of every single person in my crew, and yet if I had met them in real life instead of out there, I may have only been friends with four of them. I'm not sure exactly what to make of that.

FINAL DRAFT

I arrived, exhausted, at the large clearing off the trail that would function as our camp. Covered in a mixture of sweat and rain, I immediately swung my backpack around and collapsed upon it. No more than two minutes had passed

before I was rudely awakened by my counselor, Elizabeth, a pint-sized ball of energy, handing me ten water bottles that needed to be filled from a nearby stream.

Four days into Outward Bound, the course had been physically and mentally challenging me from dawn till dusk. My crewmembers and I were responsible for doing essential tasks with little to no help from the counselors. After hiking eight miles each day with fifty-pound backpacks in either intense heat or humid rain, we set up our own camp, prepared our own food, cleaned our own cookware, and licked our bowls to clean them. By the third day, I was seriously considering spraining an ankle in order to be taken off the course.

The other two water collectors, an upbeat kid named Andy, and Sara, a hard-working girl who routinely outpaced most of the boys on the course, and I grudgingly followed Elizabeth. We carried twenty-four Nalgene water bottles with us as we walked, looping the straps through our fingers. Elizabeth explained that we had started the course with three filters, one fast automatic filter, one slow automatic filter, and a slow manual hand pump, but that the fast automatic filter was ripped and could not be used.

Elizabeth took a hard left into the underbrush and descended down a steep slope onto a muddy bank that bordered a body of water that more closely resembled a large puddle than a stream. The area was extremely damp, humid, and

infested with bees. We rotated the hand pump among us and watched the other filter fill the bottle drop by drop. As I began to pump, the reality of the situation dawned on me - each thrust of the pump yielded only a few drops of water at most. Before my bottle was even half full, I was starting to become fatigued.

Halfway through my second bottle, arm aching, I was stung by a bee. I yelped in pain and looked up at Elizabeth, expecting her to console me, or at the least relieve me of the pump. She did not acknowledge that anything out of the ordinary had happened - she simply glanced at me, almost as if she was wondering why I had stopped pumping, and said, "Those aren't real bees. They're swamp flies."

I stared at her for several moments, quietly fuming, and then looked closely at both her and my other crewmembers. Elizabeth had an awful case of Poison Ivy running down her leg. Sara had already taken her turn with the pump and was massaging her forearm as she sat awkwardly on a log. Andy was navigating a slippery rock a couple feet downstream, trying to hang the slower automatic filter on a branch. He had already been stung twice while pumping.

Coming into the course, if you had asked one of my friends whether he would have wanted to go camping with me, he might have invoked his right to stay silent. I would have been the primary candidate to conspicuously disappear as the

tents were being assembled. Now here I was looking for an excuse to avoid doing work. My crewmembers were carrying their own weight. Didn't I have a responsibility to do the same? As sobering as this realization was, it was also liberating. I could look for the negatives in the experience and continue to expect help that would never come, or I could resolve to buckle down and put everything I had into the course. I decided to put my head down and stop complaining.

This newfound approach not only made the rest of the course infinitely more gratifying, it has also made every day life more fulfilling as well. Before Outward Bound, I had looked to others to carry me through difficult tasks with minimal effort on my part. For instance, I would always take a back seat on group projects and allow the dominant personalities in the group to take over. Now, in the aftermath of the course, I have a stronger understanding of the value and reward that comes with pulling your own weight. Three hours after we started pumping, when we had finally filled all twenty-four bottles, we returned to camp and ate cold macaroni that our crewmembers had prepared hours earlier. I didn't mind.