

It still scares me to look back at the summer I just experienced. I remember the bugs, the storms, and the unknown. I also remember the laughs. It's not often you live in a tent in the wilderness for a month. It's virtually unheard of to not shower for eight days while still enjoying every minute. I can say I've faced all of that, and more.

As my sophomore year raged on, I knew my summer needed to be different from those of the past. I wanted to do something crazy; something out of my comfort zone; something nobody would expect me to do. Most importantly, something I wouldn't even expect myself to do!

I thought endlessly about my options, bouncing ideas around for weeks. I settled on Teva Trek. I've been at Herzl for six summers, and while most campers don't return for this intense, to-the-limit program, I committed my summer to Teva Trek. Teva Trek translates to nature trek. Let me tell you, I was in the for the nature trek of all nature treks!

Teva Trekkers sleep in beds in tents on large wooden platforms, out in the woods. That's right: no electricity and no bathrooms. For me, this was the beginning of the true Teva magic. The culmination was a one-week trip to Voyageurs National Park. With one backpack and two 7-person canoes, we would go for a week without showers, electronics, and civilization.

When I arrived at camp, I was terrified. We learned to construct a fire, cook over it, and pitch tents with our eyes closed. We learned to use maps, walk silently through the woods and work as a team. The preparation would all come in handy at Voyageur's National Park.

After arriving and unloading the bus, we reloaded it all into canoes, and began paddling for our campsite.

The natural beauty all around me left an everlasting picture in my mind. I inhaled slowly and the freshness of the air pierced my nostrils. We took a break to digest our surroundings. Trees on small, serene islands were everywhere you turned, and while each direction looked entirely the same, each island radiated a beauty unique from the rest. It was in that instant that we spotted our first campsite.

We stayed at that campsite for three nights, leaving enough time for us to wander aimlessly through a rock garden, explore every inch of our island, and watch three enchanting sunsets. For the final one, we night paddled and watched it on the calm, serene water. We chose to remain silent for the duration of the paddle and the sunset. After the sun had disappeared behind the horizon, we turned back for camp. As I continued to paddle through the water, it occurred to me how much the little things in life could affect you: a meaningless sunset had taken my breath away and left me speechless the rest of the night.

The next day, we set off early and moved campsites. It took us six hours to travel sixteen miles, to find our next campsite. There, we sat in a waterfall and jumped off of a 13-foot cliff into the sparkly blue water. Nothing will ever compare to the rush I felt falling straight down. Words will never do that moment justice. The jump was breathtaking, freeing, and dream-fulfilling for me.

Teva Trek changed my life, and showed me my true limit. It morphed my old, afraid-to-get-dirty, shower-obsessed persona into a jungle girl, ready to take on anything. I'm sorry more people didn't share in my life-altering experience called "Teva Trek 2009." Don't miss Teva 2010.

Written by Jessica Koolick, a Junior at Armstrong High School in Plymouth, MN. She's been a camper for seven years.