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The Rabbit to the Lion

It has been about a month since I went to my camp where I backpacked around Colorado, and some of the experiences are more difficult to remember than others. One moment in particular, though, stands out when I went to a wolf sanctuary five hours away from any great civilization. I was homesick, but this place gave me comfort, and I enjoyed the time I had while I was there. Although I had the support of my cousin Liles being there, I was skeptical throughout the trip and had lots of negative perspectives because of how I was feeling. Though I felt this way for a few days, I believe this trip was crucial for the growth of my mind and body. I learned so many lessons during that unforgettable trip. One in particular, began on a partly cloudy day when the sun had just peeked over the lip of the mountains ahead.

I woke up in my tent, to see the red top splitting the colors of light up all around. The air was cold, and I could hear distant howls of the wolves. My mouth was dry, and I felt parched, so I drank a cold sip of water down, coughed, and quietly pulled myself out of my sleeping bag. I was happy and not feeling homesick that morning, so naturally, I felt great. I paused and listened to the howling, which soothed my mind. I slipped on some pants, a shirt, some socks, and my hiking boots. I knew we were doing some volunteer work, so I needed some good shoes to protect my feet. As soon as I got out, it was about seven o'clock in the morning and the morning flew by. We ate breakfast, and by twelve had done some activities and were going to carry logs onto a big trailer. We worked for about four hours of hauling wood to various places in the field. As I loaded wood on the truck with the help of my peers, I looked around and saw the overwhelming mountains. I took a deep breath in, and everything slowly passed for a minute. I was stuck in my reality, swaying from one point in time to another in ways beyond pure imagination. Soon we were done, and we loaded back into the cars to travel back to the campsite.

I got out of the van and took a deep breath of fresh air. I had completed a task that was strenuous and needing to be finished, and I could not be happier that I did it though. Exhausted, I clambered back to my tent, where I softly fell onto my sleeping bag. I caressed the pillow to my delight and laid my head down. My arms were cut and bleeding, and my head told me to rest. Thankfully, we had a little bit of free time, but I wanted to be alert because sometime soon, I would have to get up to see the wolves. That was the moment I had been waiting for throughout the trip, the reason I stayed even through the emotional pain of homesickness. This was the chance of a lifetime, to be in a cage with a wolf. It was like being told I could fly. I relaxed and rubbed my arms and breathed softly from inside my tent. I felt accomplished that I had overcome my homesickness and completed the task of collecting wood.

"Crom? Are you in there?"

"Yes."

"I think we are going to do an activity, let's go!"

"Okay, be right out!"

I gathered myself and took a sip of water from the bottle. I slowly unzipped the tent and staggered out. I felt rejuvenated yet tired. I brushed my hand over my dry lips. A breath was taken from the air, a long one, a smooth one, a great one. Gathering myself still, I joined the rest of the group for an activity.

"Okay guys, we are going to do a team-building activity..."

We did an activity that required us to listen and lose one of our senses and at the same time and guide one person to a common goal. We got through about halfway through the activity when the director of Mission Wolf said, "Want to go see some wolves?" "Yes!" Replied, everyone excitedly. We then proceeded to haul ourselves up to a gigantic hill where which the wolves' pens were. As I walked up to the mountain, I saw the wolves pacing. My eyes zoomed in on one of the wolves; in particular, I would later learn that his name was Flash. Flash was not one of the wolves that I would meet, but I do remember learning that he had just found his mate, and he was supposedly delighted. As we continued, we saw other wolves and houses that were built by volunteers that had come over the years before. We kept walking and soon sat down on some logs that had been placed sideways or cut up to act as seats. There we

listened to a speech that was given about safety in the wolves pens. We were all so excited, but one rule was that you needed to act like the wolves weren't even there, or they wouldn't come and say hello (in their way, licking your teeth and making eye contact). We made our way into the cage, and I couldn't help it, I looked at the wolves, and not a single one came up to me. I was so disappointed and mad because at the time I thought that that was our only chance to see the wolves up close and personal, I was wrong.

The wolves howled in the night, and I woke from the howls all night. In the morning, I felt rested, but also a little tired from the howling. I was still upset that a wolf didn't greet me, but I was able to deal with myself to have a good day. I thought we were going to be getting more logs, but we were staining and scrubbing floors. I was happy because my arms couldn't afford to be cut up anymore. We cleaned for hours; my arms felt weak because we had scrubbed the floors of potentially an entire house twice. It was now clean enough to stain the floors. I wiped some sweat off my brow and grabbed a paintbrush. I remembered how to paint correctly from watching Karate Kid as a child and had fun making small strokes up and down on the clean floors. We then ate lunch, and I remembered how I didn't get greeted by a wolf, I was sad again.

I made my spirits lift and contributed to conversations that were held after lunch. I put a smile on my face, but inside, I did not feel accomplished as I had even before I had gone in with the wolves the other day. Suddenly, the man who runs Mission Wolf drove up in a vintage ford pickup truck. He rolled down the window and said, "Leaders, would your kids like to see the wolves again?". My head spun and finally refocused as everyone burst into uneven conversation. We were all so excited, but I pretended that he hadn't even said that. I wanted to have no clue what I was doing so I could greet the wolves, and they could greet me back.

We started the walk up the hill, and I made sure to walk slowly and not to look at the wolves the whole way up the mountain. To avoid this excitement, I cleared my mind and thought about home, my dogs, my mom, and my dad. I felt like I was able to contact them through my time walking up the hill. I finally got to the logs, and I realized we weren't the only people who were going on. I suddenly felt more excited than ever, but I tuned my mind and became calm again. All of a sudden, we all got up and slowly started to walk into the pen. I didn't care at this point I had made greeting a wolf seems like wrecking on a bike or leaving my home for a long time. I didn't look at the wolves and didn't want them to look at me either. Once I sat down though, I realized that I needed to have a little bit of excitement and so I looked at the wolves. I saw the ombre colors mixing from black to gray to white all in a single brushstroke. I saw their yellow eyes and felt their breath on my face. A wolf was coming up to me; this was my moment! I looked into the wolf's eyes and smiled. All it did was lick my white teeth, my braces were slimy afterward, but I finally felt accomplished. That day I learned that you must act like a lion when confronting intimidation, not like a rabbit. Thank you.