



On Top of The World

*With innovation and technology,
seems we have forgotten to cherish the true beauty the world has to offer.*

A.C. Van Cherub

This past summer I joined my family for their annual Adirondack vacation. Every July my sister and her family rent a cottage on a lake, the same place my family has stayed since I was a little kid. They always take my parents along. And every few years I join them too.

There are plenty of activities to keep everyone busy: swimming, fishing, canoeing and sand castle building on the beach.

Every evening at dusk, everyone gathers on the beach for a bonfire and s'mores and, at least once during the week, a pair of melted flip-flops when someone gets their chilly feet too close to the fire. Anyway, by the third day of the vacation, I had

noticed that my ten-year-old niece had spent most of her time watching cable TV, playing pinball at the arcade and browsing through the gift shops in town. Not exactly the wilderness experience I remembered from my youth.

So that night at the bonfire I told my niece I thought this was the year she and I should hike to the top of the mountain across the lake. The mountain is called Rocky Point because the peak is bare and rock-covered. It is considered one of the smaller mountains in the Adirondacks. Since nothing was planned for the following morning, we could hike it the next day.

“Well,” replied my niece. “Tomorrow there are some shows I want to watch on the Disney Channel, so I’m going to be pretty busy.”

“When your mother and I used to come here when we were your age, the cottage didn’t have a television,” I informed her.

My niece looked incredulous for a moment, and then asked: “So you had to watch all your TV shows on your laptop?”

I closed my eyes for a moment and rubbed my temples.

“We didn’t have laptops either. We just didn’t watch TV,” I said. “We were too busy swimming and canoeing and hiking up mountains.”

“Sounds more like punishment than a vacation.” My niece shrugged her shoulders. “Besides, I don’t think I can walk that far.”

“Your mother and I hiked it every year when we were kids,” I said. “It only takes a half-hour of steady walking to get to the top.”

“Fine, I’ll go,” my niece grumbled. I knew she was agreeing just to shut me up, but I would take anything I could get. “If you and Mom could do it, then I can too, I guess.”

The next morning was a perfect day for a hike, with sunshine, clear skies, and the temperature in the low seventies.

I got up early and made some sandwiches and filled a couple of water bottles, which I tucked into my backpack along with the bug spray and the camera.

My niece came shuffling downstairs and announced in a very unenthusiastic, robot-like voice. "I'm ready to go hiking, Uncle David." Then she turned to her mother and asked: "Can I take my \$10 spending money?"

"Why are you bringing your money hiking?" her mother asked.

"In case I see something I want to buy at the gift shop on top of the mountain," she replied.

"There are no shops," I said.

"What's at the top?" my niece asked.

"Rocks mostly," I answered, "and an incredible view of the lake. You can even see this cottage from up there."

There was a moment of silence. "That's it?" she said. "You mean there's not even a restaurant or an ice cream shop?"

I shook my head. "It's a mountain, not a mall. It'll still be a fun trip," I insisted.

My niece sighed dramatically and rolled her eyes, but we climbed into my car and drove to the trailhead about ten minutes away.

"I'm still not sure this is a good idea," my niece said as she stood at the edge of the gravel parking lot and looked down the shaded trail that led into the woods. "But if you and Mom could do it, I can too, I guess."

For the moment she was determined to start our journey.

About 200 yards into the forest, the trail began to climb a steep slope. I pointed out birch bark trees and a natural spring that bubbled out of the ground and a flowering plant called trillium, which I explained was an endangered species. My niece didn't share my enthusiasm.

She was thirsty.

She was tired.

She was sweaty.

She was bored.

I handed her the water bottle as she sat on a fallen log and took a break. "You know, I think we're almost to the top," I told her.

"You already said that three times," she replied. "And we're not there yet."

She grumbled another complaint as we continued on. She might not have been happy, but at least I was proud that she had the determination not to quit before we reached the top.

A while later we did make it to the top. First, my niece looked up, noticing we were no longer under the trees. "Where are we?" she asked.

She stopped, looked around and saw where we were.

Her jaw dropped, her eyes opened wide and she shouted: "Oh my gosh, I don't believe it. We're on top of the world. It's awesome!" It had taken us almost an hour to make the climb, but it was worth it.

A refreshing breeze brushed the mountaintop, not a cloud was in the sky and miles and miles of trees and lakes spread out below us.

We sat on a large boulder and took in the view, while eating our peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and pointing out islands and roads and, of course, the cottage where we were staying.

"This is the best, Uncle David. Can we come up here another day before we go back home? It's so cool."

No stores, no restaurants, not even an ice cream shop, but she had learned it was cool to climb to the top of a mountain.

And if I had given in to her complaining we never would have attempted it at all; which is a good reminder that sometimes a little determination is all you need to get to the top of the world.

David Hull