

Pushing the limits of Faith



July 24. 2018

By Nate Smelle

YOU really start to appreciate the little things the more time you spend outdoors. For the last two months, I have been making a conscious effort to spend as much time away from social media and other online distractions as possible. For me, clocking less screen time has equaled more time outdoors. The longer I allow this experiment to go on the more I want to carry on with it. That said, on occasion I have missed the bombardment of information served up with every second of scrolling the Internet. However, when the urge to login has arisen, instead of going online I have simply stepped outside to reconsider my options. Through this restructuring of my day-to-day operations, I've noticed how nature deficit disorder can creep into one's life very easily when we don't take the time to disconnect from the digital realm and reconnect with the reality that keeps us breathing.

During this time away, I have also realized how disillusioning and depressing it can be to focus on the negativity that dominates our online reality. Sadly, through this experiment I have also recognized how poverty, racism, environmental degradation, war, and all forms of violence seem to have become an acceptable by-product of maintaining a status quo that serves the wants of the few by exploiting the needs of the many. Luckily, a cure to this disease of spirit is waiting for us on the other side of our front doors. When we remove these obstacles that stand in the way of our path to happiness from our lives, we create for ourselves an opportunity to understand why it is that we cherish peace and desire harmony.

While exploring the Centennial Ridges in Algonquin Park with a friend over the weekend, it occurred to me how precious these moments are, and how instrumental they have been in shaping my own values. Though we had spent more than five hours traversing the rugged terrain that naturally paves this trail, there was something unexplainable pushing us onward. With the setting sun and darkness on the horizon, and very little water in our pack, we still made time to stop and experience the beauty that was quite literally taking our breath away. Resting beside a beaver pond located around the halfway mark of the trail, we spied a green frog that seemed to be lost in meditation as it glowed in the sunlight illuminating the driftwood by the water's edge where it sat. Looking and listening to our new non-human neighbours, we heard the chattering of a red squirrel and noticed several small toads crossing the path that we had just treaded upon. Enjoying the moment at hand, my friend mentioned how her two-year-old niece Faith would love to see these tiny creatures going about their business in the forest. Smiling in adoration, she described Faith's fascination with nature and how she often speaks to the ants in their garden and waves goodbye to them when it's time to go inside.

Despite the exhaustion and dehydration slowing us down, before going back to camp we decided to push our limits a little further by taking the canoe out for an evening paddle on Lake of Two Rivers. Paddling in the blue-violet light cast upon the water by the moon and stars above, we drifted across the glasslike surface without even the thought of a destination for our midnight voyage. Telling me how this was her first time in a canoe, and how nervous she was to be on the water at night, I told her that I admired how she chose to face her fears and embrace her curiosity. Now floating in silence, we could hear a pair of loons calling out to one another from across the lake, as a chorus of bullfrogs provided the backbeat. Swimming out of the darkness, a solitary beaver approached us

from behind, slapping its tail on the water. Startled by the sudden outburst of sound, we paused for a moment, rendered speechless by the interaction. Making our way back to shore just before midnight, we laughed about how sore we were and how much blood the deer flies and mosquitoes had drained from our bodies during our adventure.

Reflecting on the experience the next day as I patched up the blisters on my feet, I thought about the bond shared between Faith and the ants, and the uninhibited affection for these tiny creatures that she expressed by communicating with them. Switching on my computer to begin writing this piece I was instantly bombarded with a tsunami of messages and notifications all trying to grab my attention by stressing their importance. Deciding not to dive into the mountain of emails quite yet, I instead pondered what it is that compels us as adults to limit our circles of compassion by bowing to convention. If the stockpile of human history on the Internet has the potential to teach us anything about our species' short history of progress, it is that pushing the limits of economic growth beyond our planet's carrying capacity breeds violence.

On the other hand, if we wish to nurture a more peaceful and harmonious world it would be wise for us grownups to widen our circles of compassion by pushing Faith's more caring and inclusive limits.