

In Pursuit of Unseen Wonders

By Joshua Jacobs

English 8A

7th Hour

April 17, 2017



Dear Reader,

It is my sincere hope that in reading this paper/project, you will gain some modicum of understanding into just how astounding nature truly is – and how vitally important it is for us to conserve and protect it. Without having seen it first hand, the absolute beauty to be found in nature is near incomprehensible. Even with modern day pictures, which hold incredible beauty in their own right, cannot and will not compare to seeing so many of nature's wonders in person. One can stare at a picture of a magnificent sunset for hours on end, but never will they capture the utter brilliance of being in that singular instant. One cannot truly relay that same magnificence to others without losing a great portion of its majesty. More people know the scientific aspects of my argument – that nature is important to our continued survival – but fewer know how to contribute or why they should bother. So it is with no small amount of urgency that I write this paper, hoping to correct these wrongdoings to yourselves. Enclosed you will find a variety of works created for this very purpose, which you are free to peruse at your leisure.

Reasons Nature is Important

- 1. Plant life supplies fresh air to the entire planet.**

Ways to Conserve and Protect Nature

- 1. Recycle all plastics, metals, and papers.**

December 12, 2012

Today I skipped out on school and went duck hunting with my dad and cousin, as is tradition on the date 12/12. We are, after all, the Founders of the 1212 Hunt Club. We went to the public grounds just off the North end of Carlyle Lake, as per usual. But rather than our usual spot, we went a bit further and found a nice line of willows to set up camp in. It was a misty morning, the fog hung heavily around our heads and the moon was absent from the sky. After setting up our decoys and an hours wait, the sun began to peak above the horizon. I've seen many a sunset and rise, but this was the first I have ever truly stopped and just looked at. It was absolutely breathtaking.

The way the first rays of dawn shot up from nowhere and kissed the clouds, forming a dazzling display of reds, oranges, and purples along the edge. The way the globe stuck its head above the horizon, lighting up the area around it in a fiery glow, and shooting beams of light down to the water's edge. The way the fog glowed iridescently and the water sparkled along each and every ripple. The way the breeze ruffled the trees and shifted the colors in the sky. The way ducks flew past in swarms, sounding like a squadron of fighter jets cutting through the air. The way it all came together in an instant that only I would ever recall, only I had seen, and no one I told would be able to truly comprehend.

That singularly unique and utterly unimaginable moment changed something in me. I realized something my dad and grandpa had been trying to teach me for so long. I realized that our trips out into the wilderness, here or anywhere else, were not truly for the purposes of hunting or fishing or whatever we were doing. It was for that moment. It was for the opportunity to appreciate that which far too few of us get to see. It was for the experiences that we could look back and smile on, being glad we had the chance to see it while it lasted.ⁱ

Unseen Wonders

Is it the fault of a man, that he should be ignorant of what wondrous beauty nature holds?

Or is it the fault of the world, the society in which he lives?

Does it even matter?

Regardless of the cause, we have become so focused on work and school and society that we block

that which should matter so much more.

We don't stop to see the sunrise.

We don't pull over to stare into the endless sea of stars.

We don't slow down and take in that priceless instant nature gifts to us.

It is our own fault that we have ignored the sometimes subtle,

but always momentous glimpses of true radiance that nature gives.

We speed to make our appointment.

We stay in the city where stars don't shine.

We obsess over the insignificant, all the while something life changing passes us by.

Nature is a blessing, be it an act of God, a chance occurrence, or something else entirely.

And if we'd just stop to see it, we might find something worth our while.ⁱⁱ

Reasons Nature is Important

2. Plant life can provide new medicines used to treat deadly diseases.

Ways to Conserve and Protect Nature 2. Use less electricity and gasoline.

A Hunt of Silence

As you sit in silence, the cold air nips at your fingers and cheeks. You are bundled up as tightly as possible, but have limited your clothing this day. It allows you greatly improved mobility when birds come flying by, but on these icy days you are often left less than comfortable.

Already tiny icicles have formed on your eyelashes and your partner's beard, but you pay it no mind. Instead you are consumed by the world around you. The water around you is frozen solid, save for the hole you carved out about twenty feet ahead. All around snowflakes the size of thumbnails fall slowly, the worst of it having already come down. Everything in sight is plastered white, shimmering with the rising sun. Every so often the early morning light catches the flakes in the air, sparkling briefly before disappearing.

Far off in the distance you are watching a large group of mallard ducks fly in the opposite direction. Normally you'd be disappointed, but the day is still young and many opportunities await.

Beside you, your partner sits impatiently, he is still new to hunting and has yet to realize there is so much more to the hunt than the kill. He has yet to truly appreciate the beauty of the world surrounding him. He taps his fingers and plays with the grass and twigs around him, desperate for a distraction. Phones are expressly forbidden while hunting.

Then you hear it, the telltale swoosh of Green Wing Teal cutting through the air like a squadron of fighter jets. It's music to your ears, one of the best sounds you have heard in a very long while. You look up slowly, hoping for a sneak peak of the graceful birds. You get it, they are about sixty yards high, coming from your left. The same side your partner is on.

You bring your favorite call to your lips and let out a mellow *quack*, just enough to get their attention. Your partner stays dutifully quiet, having been adequately scolded the last time he scared birds away with his subpar calling ability.

The group of birds swings right, looking for a place to land. They fly overhead then turn back around for a second pass. Again and again they circle your decoys, getting lower and lower each time. Five anxiety filled minutes pass, some of the longest in your life, and finally they look ready to commit to your spread of decoys. One last pass and they drop down to just above thirty yards into the sky, but they are at least seventy out from you. Just as they cup their wings you signal your partner to be ready.

The squadron of Teal bob and weave through the air in a graceful gravity defying dance. Soon they are upon you, and then, just before you can call the shot, *Bang! Bang! Bang!*, your partner jumps the gun and fires off all three rounds into the flock. He misses every shot. The birds flare hard, pulling nearly straight up into the air. You have time for a single shot before they are too far away. You take it, but nothing falls.

You *sigh*, looking to your faithful Labrador laying at your feet in the blind. He turns to your partner and *growls*. It's an almost scolding tone, and it says much more about the event than any number of words ever could. You *chuckle*, looking to your partner. The dog said it all for you, no scolding necessary. Your partner has much to learn, patience key among those lessons.

Normally you'd be peeved at the failed opportunity, but you just can't bring yourself to be upset today. Something keeps you from being aggravated. Maybe it's the scenery, maybe it's the situation itself, or maybe you just slept really well last night. But it doesn't matter. You're here, out in woods, with good company and lots of ducks in the air. It doesn't get much better than this.ⁱⁱⁱ

Reasons Nature is Important

3. *We rely on nature for food, both meats and produce.*

Ways to Conserve and Protect Nature 3. *Use reusable products such as lunch boxes.*

Unknown Importance

Nature, in its unrivaled beauty and importance, is something that far too few of us understand and appreciate. All too often we pass by the unimaginable beauty we are presented with, unable to slow down for a moment and take in our surroundings. And even when we do, the vast majority of us are stuck inside concrete jungles where nature's radiance fails to shine through.

Even then we are woefully ignorant of just what nature does for us. It provides us food, resources, air to breathe – everything we have is because of nature. Without it we would not be living today. We rely on nature to provide for us, and yet we disregard it nearly in its entirety. It has been said for centuries that nature has healing properties. That is true in every sense of the word. Being in nature can help to mend mental ailments. Plants and wildlife hold undiscovered cures for diseases such as cancer and diabetes. For as long as humans have lived, nature has been our solution to sickness.

A man or woman suffering from stress, anxiety, depression and many other mental ailments can leave the city for a while and find a nice country town to camp out in. It is a more and more provable fact that these jaunts into nature can help to relieve and prevent mental ailments, specifically high stress and depression (Stanford University).

Scientifically speaking, it is due to a decrease of brain activity in the subgenual prefrontal cortex, which is the portion of the brain stimulated during the repeated occurrence of negative thoughts (Stanford University). In layman terms, it is because we tend to think more positively in nature compared to urban environments. The same study led to the discovery of other benefits, such as improved mood, critical thinking, and memorization.

Of course this is not a recent idea at all. For decades, centuries even, societies have believed nature to have healing properties, both physical and spiritual. For instance, Gordon MacQuarrie – an American author from the early 1900's – wrote a short story based on fact named *Nervous Breakdown*. The story was about a man suffering from undue stress, who saw

his problem and turned to nature to solve it. He ventured alone into the Canadian Wilderness and just lived. When he was found by a cargo plane two days after he was meant to return to civilization, he was a changed man and opted to remain in the wilderness until he was ready to leave. There are many other cases of such things. People tired of the ruckus we cause and retreating to their roots to find something, peace or some lost part of themselves.

Just as being in nature can heal the mind and body, bringing treatments out of nature can do just as much. Undiscovered species the world over hold natural remedies to the deadliest diseases we currently face. We have been attempting to find and refine these remedies to help save lives since the dawn of modern medicine.

Beyond that, nature provides for us the building blocks of our lives. Without the natural resources we can harvest, none of our modern marvels would be possible. Without coal and oil, we would have no power and no vehicles. Without plants and animals, we would have no food. Without plant life, we would have no fresh air to breath. We cannot continue exist without nature, it is a simple and undeniable fact.

And yet we continue to treat our planet with disrespect and abuse. We pollute it with radioactive wastes, poison it with biohazardous materials, dirty it with waste that will take centuries to dissipate. Our planet, nature is our responsibility to conserve and foster new growth in. If we ruin our world, what hope do we have? As far as we know, we are the only currently habitable planet in existence. If we can't maintain what we have, where will we turn? It is imperative to our continued survival as a species that we maintain the health of our magnificent world before it is too late. We *must* conserve resources above and below the ground, we *must* continue to develop new and more efficient technologies, we *must* heal the damage we have already done to our magnificent home.^{iv}

Reasons Nature is Important

4. Man's best friend is in fact an animal, a part of nature.

Ways to Conserve and Protect Nature ***4. Never litter, and always dispose of waste properly.***

A Day to Remember



It was a hot day, not one I'd generally enjoy. But the light breeze and ample shade on the lake made it bearable. Of course, in retrospect, the non-stop fish catching action probably helped more than a little bit.

Myself, my cousin Jon Franko - who is more of a brother to me than anything else - and my dad, Steve Jacobs, were all crammed into a twenty foot long piece of floating fiberglass. We were on Cedar Lake, a horseshoe shaped lake in Northern Ontario. The water was clear as can be, except that it was tinted red - kind of like a well-mixed iced tea. The lake itself was a low spot in a series of mountains and valleys formed by solid granite mounds, carved by the glaciers and shaped by centuries of water running over the surface. It was lined with pine, cypress, fir and birch trees that grew from the cracks in the rocks or the layers of moss that covered them.

We were well into our annual trip, about the fourth day, and we were having a blast. A group of twenty guys fishing all day, playing cards by night, and sleeping in till noon if we felt like it. What more could we ask for?



A mammoth fish, that's what. And that's exactly what I got. After a long day of fishing and a glorious dinner, anything tastes good after a day on the lake, we set out for our prime Musky spot - the exact location of which shall remain undisclosed as per the bylaws of the Musky Code^v. We were fishing along the inside edge of a shallow cove when it happened. I had perhaps one of my least accurate casts ever. I had meant to land my bait, which was a shad colored stick bait, up along a mud line parallel to a log lying in the water. Instead, it landed about half way there and five feet to the right. Now, I've never been one to waste even the crappiest of casts, so of course I reeled it in, even if I *knew* nothing was going to bite. While doing so, I turned my head and joined the ongoing conversation between my boat partners, something about a movie I'd never heard of.

So when I turned back around to pull my bait the last couple of inches to the boat, I was absolutely dumbstruck when a monstrous maw of teeth was clamping down on my bait. Though I shall never admit to it, it has been said that, as I set the hook and screamed for someone to drop everything a get me a net, my eyes were at least the size of tennis balls. Then, moments later, I had a 50 inch fish sitting in my hands for a picture. I can't remember ever being happier than at that exact moment.

Then I had a choice to make. What did I do next? Did I bring the mammoth back home with me? Or did I let it go after my pictures were taken? Some part of me wanted that thing above my fireplace, it would be one hell of a trophy. But another part reminded me of something my dad had once told me. "Every year a Musky lives, it grows about an inch longer until it maxes out somewhere around 50, from there they just get fatter." This amazing creature in my hands had been nearly triple my own age! How could I ever have the right to remove one of these giants from the waters? I had no reason. I wasn't looking for food, I wouldn't have eaten a Musky if I was starving, and this thing was my elder by decades.

So, reluctant only in that I may never again see a fish quite so big ever again, I released the fish. And to do so I had to lay down in the now slime covered boat and gently lower the fish into the water. Then I had to grab its tail and move it back and forth to get water to its gills. Then, after a moment, I saw something amazing. The limp fish sprung to life and slowly sunk into the depths of the lake. It's a hard thing to imagine if you haven't seen it yourself, but it was stunning to say the least.

Since then, I haven't even considered killing for a trophy. If I kill it, it's going in the fryer. I've come to respect nature far too much to subtract from it to glorify my fireplace mantel.



Reasons Nature is Important

5. Nature holds rejuvenating and restorative properties to city dwellers.

Ways to Conserve and Protect Nature 5. Keep your local environment clean and healthy.

Memories of a Personal Paradise

Of all the places I have been, and there have been many, my absolute favorite would have to be Vermillion Bay, Ontario Canada. Or more specifically, the lakes and rivers surrounding it. Canyon Lake, Cedar Lake and Eagle River hold some of my most treasured memories, and many more to come.

I love going up North, the air is always fresher, free of pollution and filled with the smell of pine. The sky is clearer, free of the light pollutants and smog. And best of all you're isolated, no cell signal, no TV, the only people for miles stay in the same lodge as you.

Vermillion Bay is a beautiful place, surrounded by nature. The lake water is as clear as drinking water, you can see a good twenty feet down if it hasn't rained recently. The ground is mostly solid granite, carved by glaciers in ages past to form the thousands of lakes that make up Canada. From the lake, you can often see an array of wildlife. Ducks, geese, Bald Eagles, moose, minx, wolves, bears and the rare mountain lion.

One of my favorite things is the fishing, the best fishing on the continent. Smallmouth Bass, Crappie, Jumbo Perch, Walleye, Northern Pike, and Muskellunge all in abundance and easy to catch. On Cedar I myself caught a 42 inch Musky two years ago, and the very next day I caught a 48 inch Musky! My smile that day was so wide it's a miracle my face didn't split in half.

The first time I went to Canada was shortly after my tenth birthday. I had always wanted to go up North with all the guys - my dad had always gone for a week each summer, usually with a small group of family and good friends – and now I was old enough to go. It was amazing. I didn't sleep the entire twenty hour drive up, I was too excited to do anything even remotely restful. I was going fishing with my dad and grandpa for boat partners, and I loved every second of it.

We would fish all day long and then go back to the cabin for dinner, usually prepared by us, as the head cooks. Then after dinner we would sit around our table and play cards, always for money. I had been told to bring some money for cards, and my dad had expected me to lose

it quickly, intending it to be a lesson of sorts against big gambling. But, contrary to the expectations, I took my meager twenty dollars and turned it into around three hundred in the course of the week by staying out of big hands and making small bets I knew I could win. I'm only slightly ashamed to admit I became a bit of a gambler after that, or as much as a ten year old can be.

The second to last day of the trip, I was accepted into the Musky Club. To this day I don't know if it was something they made up for my benefit and their entertainment or if it was a legitimate thing, but I didn't and still don't care. To enter, one had to catch at least two Musky, and my dad had let me reel in at least ten that week. So after dinner one night, we walked out to the docks and everyone in the camp, even the lodge owner, lined up and held fishing poles up like the Knights of old would hold their swords for a king. As I walked the length of the dock, my dad and cousin at my heels, everyone hummed the classic presidential tune. When I reached the end, my Uncle Ed, the senior member of the group, was waiting at the end of the dock with his favorite Musky rod in hand. There was a moment of silence, then Ed began the ceremony. He made a great show of it, making me recite the oath with my hand held high. Then he prayed to the Great Musky Gods and announced the time had come to drink the Blood of a Musky, and other fine ingredients, the taste of which and true ingredients I shall not reveal in accordance with my pledge. He drank, my cousin drank, and then so did I, with great reluctance. Finally he blindfolded me and we went for an evening hunt to a secret spot on Canyon Lake.

Ed spoke of the seagull, and how it was a good omen that it had flown over while we were fishing. The bird landed on a rock in the center of a cove and ruffled its feathers, and honest to God the biggest fish I had ever seen hit my lure like a freight train. I only had a glimpse, but the fish was giant. It got off of course, having thrown the hook midair, but it remains one of my favorite stories.

I could write a book filled with all my stories from Vermillion Bay, my first trip to Eagle River, my first look at a fifty plus inch fish, the time I caught a carp fishing for musky, the time I

was picking berries and came face to face with a small bear. There are hundreds of memories, hardly any of them bad, though some scary, and each of them treasured. I love going to Canada, be it with only my fishing partner or a group of twenty or so guys. It's always a blast and always memorable.^{vi}



Reasons Nature is Important

- 6. Nature provides relief from mankind's daily stress and pressure.***
- 7. Nature holds beauty and magnificence unrivaled by anything man made.***

Ways to Conserve and Protect Nature

- 6. Support regrowth of wilderness areas harvested for resources.***
- 7. Keep up to date on new ecofriendly technologies.***

Hey Reader, you still there? I didn't mean now you know. Regardless, I imagine its about time I finished this letter up. And it is in equal parts happiness and reluctance that I now do so. A part of me feels overjoyed that I am now finished with this work, and satisfied that I have at least partially completed my goal of conveying to my audience the importance nature holds to us as a society and a species. But at the same time, I feel I have not done enough. I imagine it is not possible for me to truly write enough, the essence of my topic is such that only experience, not words, will ever fully drive my point home. It is not possible for me to properly transfer my experiences to you, and as such I can only hope that my work here has inspired you to seek out the wonders of which I spoke - or any others that may catch your fancy. So it is without further adieu that I close this paper, thank you for considering nature as more than an unlimited resource to be used, and wish you the best of luck in finding those wondrous yet fleeting instances. ^{vii}

Sincerely,

Joshua Jacobs

Works Cited

Franko, Jonathan. "Josh Jacobs Earns His Musky Stripes." *YouTube*. YouTube, 31 July 2009.

Web. 15 Apr. 2017.

MacQuarrie, Gordon, Paul Birling, and Zack Taylor. "Nervous Breakdown." *More Stories of the Old Duck Hunters*. Minocqua, WI: Willow Creek, n.d. N. pag. Print.

University, Stanford. "Stanford Researchers Find Mental Health Prescription: Nature." *Stanford News*. N.p., 08 Apr. 2016. Web. 15 Apr. 2017.

End Abstracts

ⁱ This work was a mixture of fact and fiction. It was a combination of personal experiences, knowledge and a bit of story telling. I enjoyed writing this piece, as the topic is extremely easy for me. I just sat down and typed it out in a couple minutes, then came back later for a second visit. The lesson featured here however is entirely factual, and is one of the marks of an accomplished hunter – what we should all strive to be.

ⁱⁱ This piece doesn't strictly need an abstract, but I felt I should include one. Simply because for the first time I didn't struggle to write this poem! For someone like me who dislikes poetry on a fundamental level, beyond schoolboy laziness, that is saying something. This seemed to just hop onto the paper. Maybe because of the style, maybe the topic, maybe something else. But I was happy with it in the end.

ⁱⁱⁱ This gem is a former quick write I decided would work perfectly as my flash fiction. It is entirely fictional and inspired by a variety of locations and events that have occurred in the lives of myself and my family. It is my favorite piece of writing, out of everything I've ever written, and I feel like it might just find its way into a book someday. If I ever decide recording all my adventures with the Musky Club and 1212 Hunt Club is a good idea.

^{iv} At first I was concerned that the research portion would fit into the paper whatsoever. But I was pleasantly surprised with the end result. I managed to perform research that was pertinent and informative, and manage to keep with the general theme of my project.

^v This piece was actually an experience of mine. I thought it would function well as my photo essay and it has. Everything in this work is factual, if slightly stretched as to keep with the Code. I placed a YouTube video of my initiation into the Musky Club – which I used as another part of my MG project – in the Works Cited, so the Musky Pledge and Code would be better explained for those who might be curious. And it functioned as proof the event actually did take place, so I thought it would be good extra material to share.

^{vi} Again, this is a factual story, if a bit stretched. Everything I said here did in fact happen as I said it, even if my account is a bit exaggerated. The Initiation is the same as I mentioned in the abstract for my photo essay. The video can be found in the works Cited under the name "Josh Jacobs Earns his Musky Stripes" by Jonathan Franko. I wrote this hoping to show that being in nature is a fun experience, and can be quite relaxing. This is also a modified variant of a previous memory book chapter.

^{vii} I wrote the Dear Reader letter at the same time. At first they were two separate works, but upon recommendation I combined the two and made the entire project like a big letter with papers enclosed within. It was kind of like a secondary unifying element. I was most proud of this piece because of the way it simply flowed out of me and onto the paper. I actually enjoyed writing this section, which is rare enough in school writing.