

Rob Johnson (Class of 2009)
College Entrance Essay

Fire Ant Soup (and other life lessons)

I woke up in the middle of the night to the sound of gentle rushing water. As I looked around I saw a gray tarp above me and a grimy bath below me. I was on a school camping trip, in a tent, in the Okefenokee Swamp and the time was three a.m. Rain had suddenly inundated the campground producing a murky fire ant soup and we were literally “floating” on top! My science teacher’s words were ringing in my ears, “When you’re out of your comfort zone, you’re in your learning zone”. As we all exhaustedly helped to break down the campsite, somehow, in that moment, I felt myself resenting those words! It wasn’t until much later that I came to believe in the wisdom of his phrase.

This is one of the many trips I grew accustomed to as a student at Friends School of Wilmington, a small Quaker school I attended from the second to the eighth grades. My time at Friends really played a huge role in forming who I am today. When you’re out of your comfort zone, you really do begin to rely on your core values. For example, in this type of setting you have the opportunity to rely, utilize and model these values in an unfamiliar more challenging environment. Quaker schools strongly foster the SPICES which is an anagram for the Quaker testimonies. SPICES stands for Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality and Stewardship. While the trip was physically exhausting and sometimes unpleasant, the overall experience was really quite fantastic. Simplicity, stewardship and peace melded into one as we found ourselves deep in the woods with only a few tents, basic supplies to meet our daily needs and a respect for the natural environment around us. Equality, community and integrity were reinforced through the close knit community which this particular trip helped foster. Even though the school camping trip I described earlier might sound like a nightmare to some, it is perhaps one of the many experiences which helped solidify my understanding and practice of the Quaker SPICES in my everyday life. Since leaving Friends School I have worked hard at continuing to apply these values in my daily routine. Through my interest in community service I’ve been able to educate kids at our local aquarium, participate in research concerned with environmental issues and even give back to the school where it all started. I intend to remain steadfast in terms of my adherence to these principles through college and beyond. At the time, I didn’t view the trip as anything other than a fun, albeit wet, week of camping but as I now reflect back on the event I realize the true depth and meaning of the experience. The trip was really a conglomeration of everything I loved about my time at Friends School even “floating” in a tent of fire ant soup.