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A Steward's Eye-opening Easter

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Monday, April 11, 2016

A Steward's Eye-Opening Easter

Julia Hall, 2018 Cohort

The last text message I received before I turned off my cell and hoisted my overstuffed pack over my shoulder read, "Jules- You'll be touching God on Easter morning." My dad had just sent me this message, as I was about to embark on a four day, three-night adventure in Shawnee National Forest in Southern Illinois with UD's Outdoor Adventure Club. Those words reaffirmed my decision to skip out on the typical family Easter to go backpacking. Instead of listening to static while driving to grandma and grandpa's house, I was listening to the crunch of hiking boots in a silent forest. Instead of hunting for Easter eggs, I was hunting for a glimpse of a flower bud. Instead of talking to my sister about high school, I was talking with horseback riders along the bridal trail. Instead of sitting in a pew, I was sitting awestruck at the striking star infested sky.

The campfire colored the cave walls and our dirt-streaked cheeks with the warmth and hue of the dazzling flame. We leaned in closer, stuck out our chilled fingers, and grinned. The company was good. Swapping stories of other wild adventures, funny-with-distance mishaps, and contemplations of life's purpose exposed us as twenty-four individual human beings. However, our attitude towards life clumped us together and marked us as different, odd. Stinging eyes served us only as a reminder of the smoke that billowed from our fire. The simple soup and pb&j tortillas sustained us without complaint. Our sweat-stained t-shirts were our armor against the night's bite. We recognized the comfort that simplicity brings.



At the end of the third night, we sprawled out on a boulder that jutted over the rumbling of hills and under the spherical expanse of wonder. Sounds of the Lumineers' *Stubborn Love* soothed us into silence. We watched the leaps of light perform upon the inky, black stage. Noticing the three glowing dots of Orion's belt, pointing, whispering. Without a camera separating my vision and the moment, I swiveled my head right, then left as I captured the memory. I carry that photo in my back pocket now that I have had to exit the woods and reenter the world. Walking back to my apartment after a rough night at the library, I look up, disappointed that no friendly wink meets my glance. Yet, the memories I made this Easter Break serve as a clear reminder of what it means to be full of light- to live simply, talk deeply, and savor the gifts of creation.

