

THE TREATMENT FOR NATURE DEFICIT DISORDER

“There’s been an accident – someone’s bleeding to death! Come quickly!”

Those were the first words I heard when I arrived at Camp Na-Gee-La. I had just turned in the driveway when I was greeted by this call to action from a frantic young man wearing only swimming trunks. I parked my car, grabbed my first-aid kit, and with my two sons on my heels, followed him through a thicket of trees to where his injured friend lay, also in bathing trunks, bleeding from a large, nasty gash on his knee. A pool of dark blood was spreading on the ground beside him. I was unfazed by the sight, and even my kids were calm. They were used to Mom handling emergencies. It’s what I do for a living.

While I assessed the wound I asked him his name.

“It’s Zack, and I’m gushing blood!”

Dripping, yes, oozing, maybe, but definitely not *gushing*. I knew exactly what to do. I took the blue-and-white beach towel still draped around Zack’s neck and pressed down on the wound to staunch the bleeding.

“Ahh, not my Toronto Maple Leafs towel!” Zack looked at his knee, winced, and looked away. “Am I hemorrhaging?”

“Don’t worry, you’ve got plenty more blood,” I reassured him. In the intensive care unit (ICU) where I’ve worked for the past

twenty-two years, I'd seen mattresses filled with blood. I'd cared for patients whose blood poured onto the floor at my feet, blood that I sloshed around in as we worked to save their lives. This was nothing.

"How did this happen?" I asked. Zack said he'd tripped while running through the forest on the way back from the lagoon. I glanced at the flip-flops he was wearing. Not the best choice of footwear. After a few minutes, the bleeding stopped. I cleaned the wound with hydrogen peroxide from my first-aid kit and bandaged it.

"You'll have to go to the hospital for stitches," I told him once I'd helped him to his feet. A deep, jagged gash like this would need stitches in order for it to heal. "When was your last tetanus shot?" I asked. Zack hadn't a clue.

"Is it really bad?" he whimpered.

"You're going to be just fine. Are you a counsellor at the camp?"

He nodded. His friend, who'd been watching anxiously from the sidelines, now stepped forward to introduce himself.

"Hi, I'm Mike, the camp director. You must be Tilda, our nurse."

Camp director? He looked more like my kids' teenaged baby-sitter. When we'd spoken on the phone, he'd seemed older than this gawky kid, still with traces of acne and a boyish grin. Mike had told me he was doing a graduate degree in political science at the University of Toronto, so I knew he had to be in his early twenties, but he looked about sixteen.

"Welcome to Camp Na-Gee-La!" Mike said. I reached out to shake his hand, but he pulled me into a hug instead. "Good thing you arrived when you did. Man, I was freaking out."

I looked around. We were deep in the wilderness of beautiful, green Northern Ontario at a "Youth-Leading-Youth Summer Camp Dedicated to Creating a Better Society with Equality and

Justice for All!” That was its motto. I was pumped, eager for my new role as camp nurse in charge of the health and safety of about a hundred children, and their teenage counsellors, too. Apparently I was already on duty.

“Breathe deeply,” I had told my kids, opening up the car windows during the drive to camp. “This is *fresh* air.” We were well into our three-hour trip north from our home in Toronto to Camp Na-Gee-La on the far side of Georgian Bay, long past the suburbs with their outlet malls and bedroom communities. I glanced in the rearview mirror at Harry, age eight, and Max, age six, but could see only the crowns of their heads as they hunched over their electronic games, their thumbs a-flying. “Take a look out the window. See the *countryside*.”

“Are we there yet, Mom?” Harry asked, not even looking up.

They were oblivious to the glorious view, but that would soon change. Before long, they would be living outdoors in harmony with nature, singing songs around the campfire, paddling canoes, and hiking in the woods, arm in arm with their new friends. They would be campers for the first time and I, a first-time Camp Nurse. We whizzed by farmhouses, fields of crops, and cow pastures. Then, we turned off the freeway onto a single-lane highway. On both sides of the road were the massive, craggy, pink-and-grey slabs of granite rock that I’d learned about years ago in geography class: the majestic Canadian Shield.

Camp was definitely going to be an adventure – for all of us. The outdoors was a foreign world to me. I was a city girl, at home in downtown throngs, used to breathing polluted air, idling in traffic jams, and navigating the underground subway system. The natural landscape was as familiar to me as the moon’s terrain, known only from pictures I’d seen in books. I had a bad case of “nature deficit disorder.”