

The Right Path

Although it took time, some self-convincing and long explanations to friends, choosing a career in the outdoor education field was really a no-brainer for this future camp leader.

It was not easy becoming a professional in the outdoor education movement. When I was younger no one encouraged me to pursue a career in camping, nor were there any guidance counsellors at my school steering me into the field of recreation, outdoor learning or camping.

I did not have the good fortune to model my career path after one of my heroes or read a book or journal article that convinced me of the benefits of running an outdoor education business. Instead, the idea arose from a combination of discovering what I was good at, understanding my values and recognizing an inner drive that continues to guide my decision making.

To offer you a brief history, I was in the first semester of my post-secondary education career when the idea of becoming a camp owner redirected my life. I was standing alone in the dimly lit confines of my dorm room, feeling discouraged by occupational choices that lacked a sense of gratification and excitement. In the midst of my confusion the thought of becoming a camp director scampered into the forefront of my mind. Such a career appealed to my needs to follow a purposeful path and it made sense on an indescribable level.

I spent the next several weeks attempting to make justifications as to why I should not pursue a career in outdoor education, and when I fell short in finding such an explanation, I decided to give my new career idea a chance.

The decision to act on my occupational epiphany catapulted me onto a bumpy, unpaved, miraculous path. I went through periods of proving my commitment to those closest to me and dealt with the insecurity of selecting a non-traditional career. I tried to explain, without much success, what the camping movement meant to me and the benefits it could provide to society.

I relied on intuition and applied thinking to decide on the skills I needed to gather, the courses I needed to take and the experiences that would be most beneficial for my future. I lived on meager salaries, leading wilderness trips in distant

communities and foreign lands. I developed a palate for freezer-packed tuna and any other trip leftovers. I was taken advantage of by employers that neglected professional development opportunities and provided less than suitable living accommodations.

The rough patches, however, were overshadowed by the progress I made as a camp professional and by the perks of working in the outdoor education industry. I grew attached to the idealistic, open-minded, adventurous personalities that filled my employment and academic experiences. I found myself living in cabins and tents that lined some of the most pristine lakes, rivers and landscapes in the world. I shared meaningful conversations while trekking on the rooted paths of Northern Ontario and on top of the dry, delicate surfaces of the Mohave Desert.

I had the opportunity to create my own Master's program with three dedicated professors in the fields of recreation, business and outdoor education. I eventually moved into high-ranking positions at reputable outdoor education organizations and, most importantly, discovered that I could live by my core values and accomplish my

chairman, Jim Hayhurst Sr. The letter is yet another wonderful reward to myself and to the outdoor education movement:

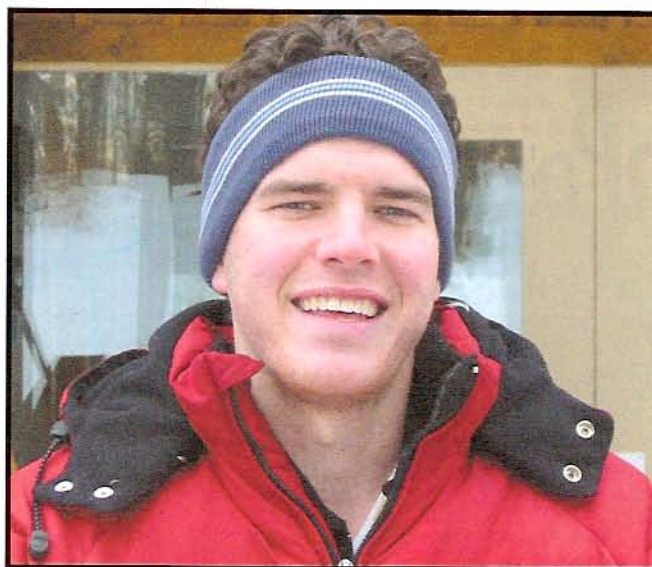
Dear Hurst,

I would just like to quickly thank you for Trails Youth Initiatives. I cannot describe in words how Trails has touched and changed my life forever. I look forward to going to Trails every month. It has had a huge impact on my life. My personality and my reality has all been determined by Trails and it has done an amazing job. This program has molded and shaped who I will be forever, the rest of my life. It has saved me when I was being led into a life of crime and drugs. That's how I look at Trails: As my gift that I have been blessed by God. Trails is my escape and my saviour. I thank you Jim from the bottom of my heart for giving me and all the other members (campers) this once in a life time opportunity.

All my thanks,

Jacob Clarke, age 13

I am thankful to have made my way into Jacob's life and to have become involved in the international community of camping profession-



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Jonathan Nyquist

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I recently found myself at the centre of a beautiful mosaic, working with a new business concept in outdoor leadership and helping direct a year-round outdoor education program at Trails Youth Initiatives for at-risk youth from the inner city.

Recently, a participant in the Trails Youth Initiatives program wrote a letter that will be pasted in a scrapbook for our beloved founder and

als. It is exciting to be a part of a movement filled with a whole host of passionate souls that share a deep purpose for their work. My occupational journey has been rocky and lonely at times, but undeniably rewarding. As an industry we need to continue to have the courage to pursue our dreams and remember how exciting it is to be a part of something so new and something that has so much potential.

Jonathan Nyquist is the assistant program director at Trails Youth Initiatives in Toronto, Ont.

