

Crater Lake

After being squished in the back seat of our packed white Honda Pilot for over three hours, it felt heavenly to stretch my legs. During our drive across Oregon on the way to Anaheim, California, we watched timeless Disney films such as *Finding Nemo* and *The Little Mermaid* to pass the time. My parents, my younger sister, my two cousins from White Rock and I leapt out of the van, and we headed across the parking lot towards the entrance of the Cleetwood Cove trail. Our footsteps kicked up dust into the air around us making us sneeze.

Although the walk down to the lake was a mile long, it was a captivating adventure in itself. We were up where no humans lived, and untamed nature surrounded us. The winding trail coiled and swerved around the steep terrain. With one little trip you could go tumbling down the rugged hill strewn with jagged rocks. The crisp, fresh scent of forest filled our lungs, and between the towering trees we caught glimpses of the lake; the sun's rays perfectly reflecting off its crystal waters. The nearer we came, the more the water summoned me, and the more drawn to it I became. After a while we arrived at Crater Lake.

The sky was hazy with smoke that blew over from the wildfires in California; where we would arrive later that day. As we could not see across to the opposite side of this vast body of water, the lake resembled an ocean with its calm, gentle waves. Near the end of the trail stood a dock and a small lifeguard shack. A few teal dinghies drifted by the rocky shore awaiting passengers for a tour of the lake and a visit to the island within it. The trail extended to the only legal area where one was permitted to swim in the lake. Upon arrival a small, steep hill awaited us; we slowly and cautiously inched down. Beside us were a washroom and a cliff people were jumping off into the depths of the lake. I leapt out of

my clothing to uncover my royal blue Speedo practice suit. My purple PoCo Marlins towel along with my clothing were set on a dust covered rock. Chipmunks darted in between the rugged stones.

I clambered onto a half submerged rock and slipped into the water. The water chilled my skin, but after a moment my body adapted to the temperature. I dove deep down underwater and opened my eyes beneath the surface, and what I saw was extraordinary. Transparent cerulean water surrounded me, and I bobbed in its gentle waves brushing up against my skin. The fresh water tasted like an ice cube one would put in their drink on a hot summer's day. Deep beneath, black volcanic rock blanketed the floor of the lake. Unfortunately I could only explore underwater for a restricted number of seconds at a time before I had to swim to the surface. I dove over and over. I even swam some butterfly for mere entertainment. I had already known that water was my element, but experiences like this confirmed it. I felt almost like a mermaid swimming in a tropical ocean, and I could visualize dolphins diving with me.

Slowly but surely, my family members began wading out into the lake to meet me. I had swum out pretty far without even noticing. Some of them swam out to where I was and treaded water for a while, but eventually they all decided it was too freezing for them to swim. I stayed out there exploring the lake. Places like this are my happy place. Unfortunately it couldn't last forever; eventually we would have to get back onto the road. I swam back to the rocky shore and climbed onto a rock. Coming out of the water made me feel weakened as if I was no longer in my environment. However, I was most likely also affected by the numbing temperature of the water.

I seized my towel, dried off, and got dressed; my new black Nikes already blanketed with a layer of dust. Walking down the trail to the lake may have been effortless, but hiking back up to the parking lot was not the same. The hike ached my calves, and I could taste the dry, grainy dust on my lips. When we reached the top, we piled back into our van that had been baking in the sun, buckled our seat belts and drove back onto the road. It was the beginning of a new adventure.

