



Summer at Pine Ridge

Rachel Routzong

When I heard I had the approval from the Isaac Harvey Fund for money, as long as I showed that I spent that money towards my trip, I was extremely excited to pursue my efforts for the Pine Ridge Work Camp 2015. I was not just excited to get extra aid towards my trip, who doesn't appreciate and love help especially when it involves getting free money? For me it was something else and honestly at that moment, I did not fully know how much that would mean to me. When receiving this grant I realized that I can actually do this work camp, without the fund, I would not have experienced Pine Ridge. I thank the Isaac Harvey Fund for the once in a lifetime experience.

In the first week I quickly came to realize how wasteful of water I am. I have definitely taken water for granted. Shannon actually has a well unlike most people on Pine Ridge. In order to get a well, you have to get approval from your relatives. That can be difficult when your relatives do not want you ruining the land of their ancestors and the fact that there is paperwork. And just because there is a well, that does not mean they have plumbing and everything hooked up. They have an outdoor shower. This shower is one of those large trashcans you will see at the fairgrounds or park. It is blue and does not have a lid, therefore rain water and insects add into the shower water. You also have to take into account daylight and temperature. These elements are well controlled in our homes, but here you need to plan out the best time to shower and you definitely do not shower every day. Take a moment and think about how much water you use in a day. When you drop something on the floor and you need to rinse it off, you are thirsty, cooking, you want to clean your hands, or you just went to the restroom and flushed. We carried jugs of water to our use every day. Some water was set aside for dishes too. We were lucky to have a well because I do not know how the families that live in trailer homes do it. They also have no electricity. That means no phone, lamp, television, video games, laptop, refrigerator, toilets, washer, dryer, oven etc. They somehow make do. We were also lucky to have outhouses. In the outhouse we would have a bucket and sometimes some pine shavings to put over the smell. Even as a female we were told to only use the outhouse for number 2 due to the smell, the easier clean up and the waste of space. Every time I sit on a toilet or use a shower I have to take a moment and appreciate what I have. I now turn off the water when I am applying body soap and conditioner. The second week we did not even have a well, we would drive to an elders house whom had a well. We also used sun baths. I realized you really only need a couple of gallons for a good shower. These showers had incredible views of the badlands.

One thing that really shocked me was the fact that Shannon did not know if Raven would be going into first or second grade. She is doing this thing called no schooling learning, where you learn from your parents. It is not home schooling because the parents are not teaching them anything besides doing their daily tasks. I know personally we are having problems between my grandparents and my little brother's dad because he should have gone to preschool last year. People hear keep looking down on me for not being ahead of the game for my brother, who is four (almost five), but Shannon is not worried at all, not even pushing Raven, who is seven, to learn. Shannon said she will not send her kids to the reservation school because they are horrible teachers and the students there are either the horrible dangerous kids or the kids with real traditional parents. She does not want to risk her kids getting beat up all of the time. It is just a shame how the facilities made to help the indigenous people are avoided for better care. Most do not use the reservation hospital because the nurses and doctors are not well trained and the wait for any treatment will take an extremely long time. If someone needs something done, then they must go to a family doctor.



I never saw one fat animal without a tick. There were tons of ticks; I found a few on me every day. These poor animals would have ticks all over them. I felt uncomfortable just petting these animals. I would right away start picking ticks off even though it would not do them any good since there were still hundreds on them. The ticks would be huge and gray full of blood, along with the ones whom just started to feed. I just wanted to take all of the dogs and the horses freely running around and give them a good bath and dinner.

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One of the coolest things for me was the fact that my father called me while we were in Red Cloud. I finally had something to talk about that is interesting to my dad. When I would hear about all the places and names; Wounded Knee, Red Cloud, Black Coyote, Sitting Bull, and Crazy Horse all I could think about is how my dad has spoken of these names for years. When I got back home I told him of my stories and the way of the land. It was so exciting to even have a conversation with my dad. Having that connection built with my dad was enough to say the trip was worth every penny. At that point in my trip I was on my way to the best week of my life to come.

When we arrived to our destination in Wanblee I was dumbfounded by the incredible view of the badlands. I later woke up to the sunrise many mornings to see the incredible view of the badlands. That evening of arrival, Mike quickly went over clothing rules, hand gesture rules, respecting elders, and camera rules.

Little did I know the next day I followed those rules as an elder, Dewayne Milk, spoke with me. I later found out we were using his land for the sundance and he even hand crafted me a bracelet because he liked my hard work. Mike called me his carpenter for the same reason. Everyone there made me feel so good about myself. It is hard to describe in words besides I would love digging six feet outhouse holes and digging post holes with a broken finger for them for the rest of my life. I also did not mind building or cleaning the outhouses for them. I felt more at home and more loved by family than I have ever felt even at my actual house. Even Alisha introduced me as the girl who has helped out so much. I just felt so appreciated and I knew my work was for a great cause. I even got to help make the arbor, sweat lodges, and tipis. Those honors are amazing to hold onto. Before the ceremony started I got to help as a fire keeper, unfortunately that night it started to rain, hail, lightening, and pour. Josh and I worked so hard at keeping the grandfathers on fire, draining the fire and blowing on soaked logs. It was a lot of fun, the hail hurt, but getting soaked in the rain with the sky throwing us a strobe light party with the lightening was fun; it just looked beautiful. And the sky at night is unbelievable; you can see billions of stars with a clear sight of the Milky Way. I still picture the rocks, lightening, and especially the stars because I never want to forget how astonishing they are.

Speaking with the elders taught me the most. Lucas and Tigger, whom just got married a couple of weekends ago, really changed my life. Lucas inspired me to follow my dreams and to do what makes me happy no matter who tells me differently. And that literally changes the rest of my life because my path for my major has changed back to my original thoughts before college. Tigger taught me the exact science in building a tipi and many many other tips of advice. These people are all so warm hearted, loving, respectful, and just full of kindness, which makes me feel relaxed, loved, and down to Earth. I want to continue that vibe for others.

This experience has just been so remarkable for me. I learned so much about the indigenous culture, their traditions, their promised but never given help, they hardly take showers, they respect their elders, they pay respect with tobacco and sage, inhuman treatment. I still mind myself speaking of South Dakota all of the time. I learned so much about understanding different cultures and to not place any judgment onto someone without fully knowing him or her. It is hard going back home knowing that there is something I can still do out there to help. People here don't understand the way I feel. Honestly the hardest part was leaving, they invited me back and didn't say goodbye because they know they will see me again, but what if I don't make it back? That is definitely the hardest part. The work was not bad, and you can get over certain people that do not work the same way as you do. I hope to return, but I must thank the Isaac Harvey fund for allowing me to make it on this trip this past summer. This is something I tried to do a couple years ago and was not able and now I am extremely grateful I was able to make it this summer. I can't even show exactly how this trip has even helped me love and respect my family more.





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