

Outdoor Leadership

Newsletter

Volume 12, Number 1

Edited by Sam Christopher

Winter 2008

The Instructors Can Learn, Too **Personal Experiences With Diversity Education** By Sam Christopher, Outward Bound Intern

This summer, I was an intern at the Thompson Island Outward Bound Education Center in the Boston Harbor Islands. In 1988, Outward Bound made Thompson Island one of its urban centers. While Thompson Island believes in Outward Bound's four pillars, physical fitness, self-reliance, artisanship and compassion, and follows the same education guidelines and goals as Outward Bound USA, this particular Outward Bound school has a special focus on empowering urban youth, working to eliminate racism, and spreading diversity education to the masses. In August, I went out with a crew of ten young women on a course designed to empower twelve- and thirteen-year-old girls. More so than any Outward Bound group I've ever encountered, they came from a number of extremely different heritages. During our ten days together, we sailed all around the Boston Harbor on a 30-foot sailboat named the *Sally Drew*.

One of the girls on the boat was a young Latina woman whom I will be referring to as Sofia. Even after I had spent an entire summer working for Outward Bound, when Sofia first boarded the *Sally Drew*, it was easy for me to discount her, for she was the most quiet of the girls, and she was also the largest, the slowest. She came from an urban, low-income family, and did not have the same access to quality education that some of the other girls had. I certainly didn't go out of my way to ignore Sofia but on such a busy boat, it was always much easier to pay attention to the other girls: the faster ones, the more energetic ones, the skinnier ones. I found myself being more attentive in teaching them the skills that were necessary to live on the boat. When Sofia had trouble grasping a task, it was easy to pass her off and not worry about how she was feeling about herself or the trip as a whole.

And then I had my wake-up call. On day four of the expedition, we were having a discussion about
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OUTDOOR LEADERSHIP IN SCOTLAND Department Leads WorldWide Course to UK

This year the ODL department offered an international cross culture course that took place in Scotland. The course had two components, one was classroom based where students prepared mind, body and spirit in preparation for a spring expedition to Scotland. Through discussion, guest speakers, readings and student presentations we explored the culture, literature, geography, and current environmental issues being addressed there.

The **Field Component** involved spending fifteen days immersed in the wilderness and culture of the western highlands and a small village on the Firth of Forth. In keeping with the theme of traveling lightly, time spent in motor vehicles was kept to a minimum and any time we did travel, we took public transportation. Emphasis was placed upon exploring the dramatic natural environments (imposing mountain ranges, glens, lochs and wild coastline as well as unexpected lush vegetation). Students participated in a 5 day course at the Loch Eil Outward Bound School, which included backpacking and sea kayaking and learning how Outward Bound operates in Scotland; We also visited and participated in sailing and climbing as well as learned how the local community based outdoor education programs operate at the Low Port Outdoor Centre in Linlithgow, which caters to groups from the surrounding Edinburgh area. We concluded our course with stay and service project in the historic village of Culross. Students taught in the local public school, as well as worked with local village members in a variety of clean up projects.

“When I reflect back on my field course now, these images stand out...Seeing the waterfall of Glen Coe, Climbing slick, craggy rock, Sea kayaking past an ancient castle, startled sheep, white sandy beaches, mountainous islands peaking through the fog, gigantic artichoke plants in the place garden, ancient cemeteries and abbeys, friendly villagers, children playing games and Tea Time!” said student Amanda Williams.

NOTES FROM THE MAIL BAG:

“Just thought I'd drop you a line, everything's going well in Michigan. I've been having lots of fun with my dogs. I had my first race a couple weeks ago, it was an awesome a 240 miler. If you have a minute check out <http://up200.org/>

Our season is winding down now, even though we have loads of snow still falling. This summer I'm going back to Alaska with these folks and the dogs to live on a glacier and give tours. I've got a few weeks between the two so I might be rolling through WWC sometime in April.

Hope everything is swell down south.”

--Krister Raasoch, 2006

“I have just accepted a position as Program Director at Eagle's Nest Foundation! As Program Director I will be working all year round with the camp and the school components. During the school year I will supervise the wilderness education component of the Outdoor Academy with some wilderness trip leading and teaching physical education twice per week (this will be mostly cooperative games and team-building as well as honing skills for wilderness trips). I will be overseeing risk management for the school (yikes!) For the Summer I will be overseeing all programming and staff in regards to their program design and implementation. The camp hosts students ages 6-17 with both traditional camp activities and trips all over the country and the world.”

--Christie Etter, 2000

THE INSTRUCTORS CAN LEARN, TOO

what we liked best about ourselves. When the discussion came around to Sofia, she burst into tears. My other instructor and I looked at each other, shocked: slow, quiet Sofia had been bottling something up? She tearfully sobbed that she didn't think that there was anything beautiful about her and that all her life people had been telling her that she was dumb, ugly, and fat. It was one of the most powerful realizations of my life. Though I hadn't expressly told her these things myself, I had been discounting her all the same. We instructors quickly turned the discussion around to how the media's standard of beauty was a faulty one. But that addressed merely the academics of the question, and not Sofia herself. What about the heart? For the rest of the course, I paid special attention to Sofia. I started out by looking for and pointing out moments when her beauty shone through, such as

LETTERS FROM ALUMNI

“Since graduating 3 years ago, my education at WWC has opened many doors for me within the ODL field and outside it. Recently I went to Tulane for a Doctorate interview I discovered that the panel was much more impressed and interested in my course work at WWC than the graduate work I completed at John Hopkins. Classes such as Organization and Administration, Program Planning and Design and Leadership were courses they focused on. Since Tulane's doctorate is designed to prepare graduates to run public health programs abroad, these unique classes were of particular interest to them, especially since they had never seen a transcript with them before. I am happy to report that I was accepted and got a full graduate assistantship!

In addition to education, the networking and recognition of WWC within the ODL community has been spectacular! I've worked for 2 WWC graduates, obtained recommendations for several and hired a few myself. The quality of graduates that came out of WWC has far exceeded my expectations.

Lastly, the preparation the ODL curriculum gave me for running outdoor programs are tools I have used as a participant, instructor, and director. Many situations have risen in which I have drawn from my WWC experiences and education to find solutions. My WWC experience has profoundly influenced the direction my life has taken as well as the opportunities open to me.”

--KT Maloney, 2003

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the way she would smile after mastering a particularly difficult sailing concept. As our time together went on, I didn't have to remind myself to say it anymore because now that I started paying attention, I really, started to understand how amazing she was, she could tell that I wasn't lying to her. And the most beautiful part of it was, she started to believe in it, too. When she took her graduation pin on the last night, she talked about how she deserved it because she had learned how beautiful she was and how much she could do.

This summer at Outward Bound, I learned that every single child has potential. While out in the field we have the opportunity to either squelch this little miracle, or to raise them up so that they see it for themselves. On one level, our job is to teach outdoor skills, but I believe that we have a far more important responsibility to believe in them and inspire them.

