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Yosemite A Home Away From Home

If the muzzle of a bear's face was so close to yours that you could smell its fishy breath, what would you do? Paul Gefken recounts his chilling experience with the bear Sugar Plum while camping in Yosemite Valley. In August of 1977, Paul Gefken was camping in Little Yosemite on his way to the top of Half Dome with his father Bob, his sister Lisa, and his friend Mike. Clearing up from dinner while watching the sun go down, Paul hung their food high in a tree to prevent mischievous wildlife from getting a hold of it. Within ten minutes, a bear, later identified as Sugar Plum, wandered his way into their camp. He went directly to the tree and started climbing it. By throwing rocks at him, the campers hoped it would drive him away. He finally climbed the tree and was able to reach the line with his enormous paws, causing the food to fall to the dirty forest floor. Eating all the provisions, and stuffing himself full of freeze-dried mac and cheese, Sugar Plum hurried off into the night, at least that's what Paul thought. At midnight, he awoke to the smell of horrible breath next to his right ear. Petrified, Paul, Lisa, and Mike, terrified of moving, lay completely still so as not to aggravate the black bear. After thirty minutes of demolishing their gear, Sugar Plum got what he came for and retreated to his den.

The next morning, with nothing to eat, they journeyed to a nearby ranger station to report their terrifying encounter. Instead of scaring Paul away, it became a place he went back to year after year. My dad Paul, has always loved nature. He is happiest spending time with his loved ones experiencing the national parks, hiking in the local redwood forest, and exploring the

natural beauty right in our backyards. At a young age, his family vacations were always spent in Yosemite. This is why it was important to him to share the memories and experiences with his own family, always emphasizing the importance of conserving this precious resource for future generations.

Standing at the top of Half Dome, Paul looked out across the Valley, admiring some of Yosemite's natural attractions, reminiscing about experiences with his parents and sister. Yosemite to him is a part of his heritage that will continue to be passed down through generations. Others agree that Yosemite is a magical place where families make memories that last a lifetime. "Yosemite is more than just another pretty place--it's a vital part of our heritage. It was the first federally mandated park and the model upon which our national park system was based (May 1985, Sunset Publishing Corp)." Upon traveling to Yosemite during my spring break and exploring the valley that I had not been to since my eighth-grade school trip, I was flooded with memories. I can see why it's so important to my dad and our family as well as everyone else who goes there. "There isn't anyone who isn't touched by Yosemite (Lisa Gefken)."

Swimming, hiking, biking, horseback riding are favorites with the family when traveling to Yosemite. "Our typical activities when we stayed in Wawona, was to go for a walk or hike in the morning and then we would play tennis and then have some lunch and then after that, we would usually go swimming in the river in the afternoon (Paul Gefken)." When he was a kid my dad's favorite activity was going to the valley floor after dinner to watch the fire fall. "Each evening in the summer, a roaring bonfire was built at the edge of Glacier Point, which towers 3,200 feet above Yosemite Valley. Hundreds of spectators had gathered in Curry Village below. At 9 pm sharp, a master of ceremonies in Curry Village shouted out, "Let the Fire Fall!" and the bonfire's glowing embers were pushed over the edge of Glacier Point, creating a glittering

waterfall of Fire (James Kaiser).” Seeing this was breathtaking, unfortunately, they don’t do this anymore due to how horrible it is for the environment. Now, his favorite activities are hiking on the hundreds of trails that make up Yosemite or swimming at the suspension bridge.

Walking in the steps of John Muir, Paul journeys his way under Giant Sequoias, waterfalls, and vistas. There's no shortage of things to do and see. From swimming in the Merced River to camping at the top of Chilnualna Falls, you are surrounded by the beauty of nature. “Yosemite National Park lies halfway between the range's northern end near Lassen and its southern terminus at Tehachapi Pass. Within it are represented all of the major Sierra Nevada ecosystems, from foothill woodlands to alpine tundra (May 1990 Sunset Magenise).” The wildlife is the main reason why Yosemite attracts so mainly yearly visitors. From the sound of birds flying high in the trees to the occasional bear or rattlesnake, you are never alone and spend the whole trip in awe.

Paul hopes that in the future, Yosemite will be kept in pristine condition. He hopes that the park is conserved for other families to experience what he has experienced with his own family. His worry, however, is that the park will be degraded by pollution, climate change, and other negative actions by humans. When Paul was a kid he remembers that the rivers were rapidly flowing and wherever you looked you would see green. Now, there are times where the water levels are so low, that jumping off of rocks and bridges will place you in the hospital. Burnt mountain sides extend out from the valley floor, making the views less picturesque. “Yosemite Valley is a sort of the iconic place. The granite and what the ice age did to carve these massive granite rocks, Half Dome, El Capitan...it's an amazing park and I don't think there's anything like it in the world, it's so unique (Paul Gefken).”

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