

An Alaskan Journey

By: Claire Johnston

My family and I have had the privilege of taking a summer vacation every year. Over the course of my life, we have had amazing trips that I will never forget. However, as I get older, I am starting to realize that the destination isn't necessarily the most memorable: the moments that are forever imprinted into my memory are the ones that are made on the journey there. The vacation that is at the forefront of my mind is Alaska. My family of four took an Uncruise adventure cruise for the second week of our Alaskan holiday. Uncruise is a company meant to get its passengers off the boat exploring. On this trip I was able to meet Ava who is from California. Ava was traveling with her family of five and happened to be on the same boat as my family at the same time. Ava and I became fast friends on our weeklong trip. The ship offered a variety of activities like eco meandering, kayaking, bushwhacking, paddleboarding, and skiff rides. Bushwhacking was Ava and I personal favorite event because of how much freedom there was. Your group would be in remote woods with only one guide and all the Alaskan wildlife. No trails were marked prior to our hike, often our path was one that a bear had somewhat cleared. Contrary to its name, you do not get to whack the bushes; the bushes whack you. Our group consisted of my brother, me, my dad, the tour guide, Ava, and Ava's dad. I distinctly remember when the group of six disembarked the skiff into the remote woods, Ava was so adamant on climbing one particular mountain.

We had just gotten dropped off onto a rocky beach and Ava had pointed to the tallest mountain and said, "Jesse, please let us go up there."

Jesse, our tour guide, was very flexible but had more logic than Ava, "Ava I don't think that's possible without any climbing gear." Jesse was the type of tour guide to rarely ever decline a suggestion, however, Ava's mountain was completely rock and I'm pretty sure there was a snow cap on the top. Ava was willing to try to climb anything and everything while I on the other hand was much more cautious. Finally, our group was able to decide on our destination and to Ava's disappointment it wasn't a full-blown mountain. Jesse gave us the typical run down of what to expect and safety precautions. "Since we are trespassing on the bear's property its nice manners to give them a warning. Typically, I'll sing or yell out throughout the journey." Jesse had explained.

After the briefing Ava and I linked arms and set off into the wilderness. Being fresh into our friendship, we began ping ponging questions off each other. "So, what were you doing with your summertime before Alaska?" I had asked Ava as we trampled over bushes.

“I was actually in Washington, DC earlier this month.” I gasped, “I was just there too.” Ava and I realized that we were in the same museum at the same time in Washington, DC. We even had the same photo of the same crystal just two minutes apart.

“Oh my gosh, that’s crazy.” Ava always drew out the last word in a valley girl tone and yes, we did make fun of her for it. Ava stopped dramatically and grabbed my arm, “Claire this is like a Taylor Swift moment.” She then proceeded to start singing “Invisible String” by Taylor Swift.

“Thanks for warning the bears girls!” Jesse complimented our off-key singing. At one point, our group stumbled upon two different paths. One, climb over huge boulders on the side of a hill. Two, go down into the cave that the boulders had made. Naturally, Ava wanted to go into the sketchy rock cave that looked like it could collapse at any point and squish you. Jesse, being a sane tour guide, agreed with Ava. The entrance into the cave was a four-foot drop that had a section that dropped you down into dark oblivion. When you jumped down, you had to land in the right spot.

“I am not going into that death trap.” I had firmly stated, Ava let out her signature high pitched laugh, “Oh yes you are.” Ava had pushed me out of my comfort zone and slightly forced me to drop down into the damp sticky cave. The moss covered most of the floor and squished under our feet. In one fluid motion, Jesse easily climbed up out on the other side of the cave. The only way out of the cave was one small hole about five feet above my head.

“Okay Claire you’re going to jump and I’m going to push you out.” My dad instructed me. Following his orders I jumped up, and he gave me a boost from behind. I didn’t fully clear the hole, so my fingers sank into the moist moss, and I had to claw my way out of the rock cave.

“Hey Jesse, they made it!” Ava’s dad pointed at us dragging ourselves out of the exit. In unison Ava and I started singing the theme song to *Jessie*, “It feels like a party every day, hey Jessie.” Ava and I started laughing while the rest of the group gave us odd looks, “We should start a band Claire, wouldn’t that be crazy?”

For the rest of our hike Ava and I sang our hearts out to that one chorus. “Please can you just sing the whole song instead of that one part?” My brother had begged us. Ava laughed, “We would but this is the bit we actually know.”

Despite being a young adult age, Ava and I were having the time of our lives acting like children. I can confidently say that no one else enjoyed our singing as much as we did. Later in the journey to the top of the hill, it got quite muddy. As much as Ava liked adventure, she did not like mud. Our group had formed a line going uphill, grasping onto any nearby branches to stop us from slipping down. Ava and I were towards the end of the line probably singing some nonsense. Suddenly Ava lost her grip on her precious tree branch and went toppling backwards. Being the caboose, she ran into me on her descent. Ava and I rolled down the hill in a muddy mess. I remember sitting up and bursting out laughing at Ava’s blonde hair turned brown.

“Ava you are filthy dirty.” She gasped obnoxiously and threw more mud at me. When the mud slide was over, we had to climb up just to go down again. The Alaskan wilderness featured rolling hills that we climbed over. We still had not reached our destination. Our descent was rather slip down on mud or slide down on the flat rock ledge. Ava decided to slide down feet first on the rock ledge. Ava pushed off the ledge and slid down the rock faster than she expected. When she stood up, she had a tear in her pants. By the end of the hike, our hair was torn out of our braids, our faces were streaked with mud, and our stomachs hurt from laughing. I hardly remember finally climbing to the peak, but what I will forever remember is laughing and singing with Ava on the journey up to the mountain.