



OUTWARD BOUND CANADA
TRAINING ACADEMY

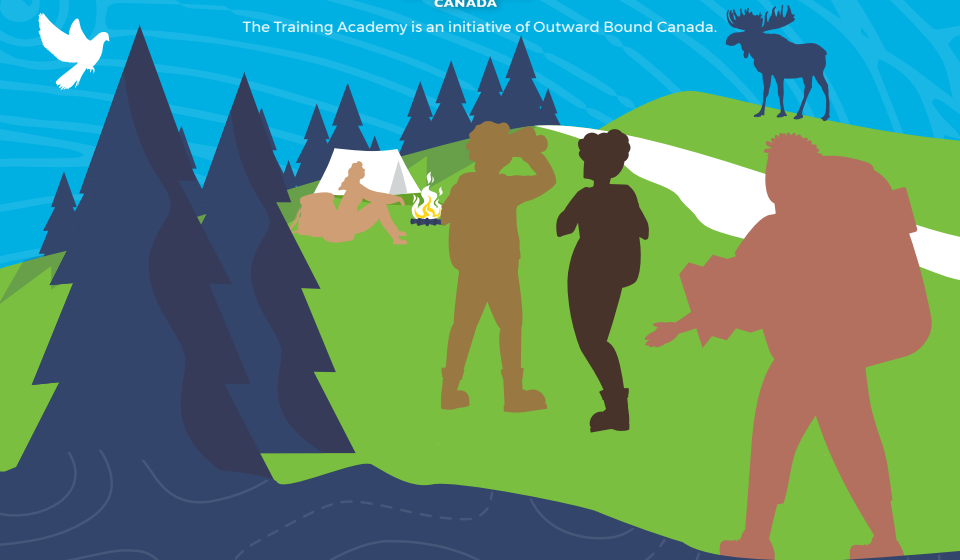
DIVERSE VOICES IN THE OUTDOORS

AN ANTHOLOGY



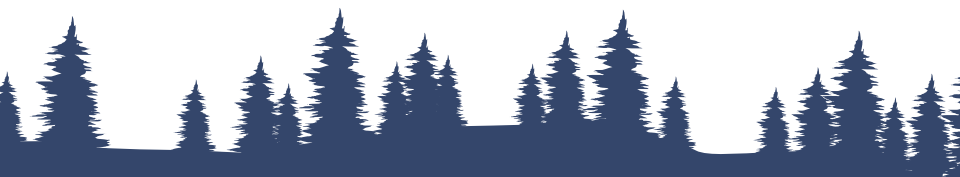
OUTWARD BOUND
CANADA

The Training Academy is an initiative of Outward Bound Canada.

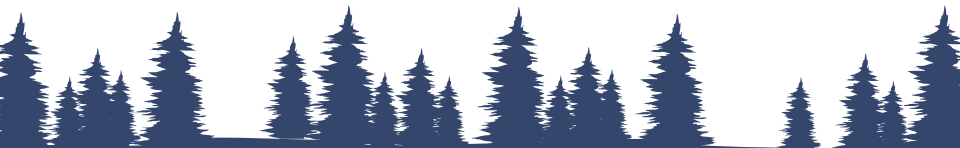


Canada 

The Training Academy is funded in part by the Government of Canada's Sectoral Initiatives Program, as an investment into this sector's economic recovery.



VOLUME 1



Land Acknowledgement:

Outward Bound Canada is a national organisation and our head office lies within the shared traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnaabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat, and home today to many diverse First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. We recognize this gathering place where our programs take place is home to many past, present, and future First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people. We also acknowledge our shared colonial history. Our team is committed to reconciling relationships with the first peoples of the land. Our land acknowledgement is our declaration of our collective responsibility to this place and its peoples' histories, rights, and presence.



Giving a Platform for Diverse Voices

*Through honest essays, personal reflections, and heartfelt poetry, **Diverse Voices** explores personal relationships with Canada's outdoor spaces. The project asks writers to reflect on joy and inspiration, to share what barriers exist and why exclusion persists and provides a creative outlet for voices so often unheard.*

*The **Diverse Voices** anthology is an anthology of human stories, with contributions from a diverse range of communities. Our priority was to ensure contributors share their stories in ways that were authentic and honest to them, and we accepted all interpretations of 'outdoors' so as not to impose our own views.*

By highlighting the ideas and experiences of individuals not traditionally heard from within the outdoor sector, it is our goal to encourage internal reflection, support and encourage sector change and prompt rich discussion to broaden our perspective.

About Outward Bound Canada:

Outward Bound Canada (OBC) is a registered charity that builds resilience and empowers youth through experiential adventures in nature. Since 1969, more than 175,000 participants have experienced our unique high-impact programs for individuals and school & groups, many of which are youth underserved with outdoor education who need our scholarships and bursaries.

Using the outdoors as our dynamic classroom, we help thousands of young people annually to develop their physical, social, and emotional skills and environmental leadership.

Visit www.outwardbound.ca to support our vision of Canada where all youth have access to high quality, impactful outdoor education experiences that help them realize their potential.

About the Training Academy:

Launched in 2022 and funded in part by the Government of Canada's Sectoral Initiatives Program, the Outward Bound Canada Training Academy for Outdoor Professionals delivers inclusive training across Canada through an innovative combination of experiential workshops and outdoor journeys.

We strongly believe that the outdoor sector should be accessible, welcoming and diverse. By valuing and celebrating the complex and intersecting identities of our participants and staff, we are striving to build a community where everyone belongs.



**OUTWARD BOUND
CANADA**



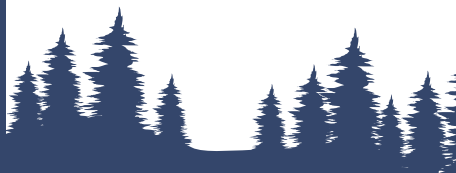
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CELESTE ANDREWS

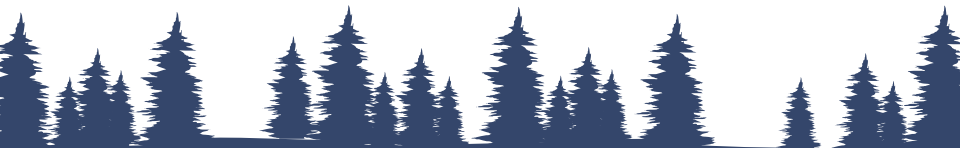


Outdoor adventurer and overall doer of things, Celeste Andrews is a Multi passionate, Gen X black woman, and daughter of immigrants, with decades of experience serving communities, families, and the built environment across three different countries.

Her mission in the outdoor industry is to provide fun, adventures and challenges in the outdoors with a focus on health, wellness and community building centred around ethnically and racially diverse communities. Specifically, she serves women over 40, families, seniors and newcomers to build courage and resilience, find joy and connection, and foster curiosity and wonder.

She is a hike and outdoor adventure leader for organisations serving people of colour and shares her life experiences under the hashtag #SeeMeSee You.

*Celeste is an avid library reader and can be found listening to audiobooks, embracing winter sports, kayaking, bouldering, gardening and cooking.
Follow her on Instagram @cmecu*



SEE ME, SEE YOU

BY CELESTE ANDREWS

I love going on adventures, learning new things, and connecting with others. Especially in the outdoors. I hike, snowshoe, boulder and kayak. I've tried ice climbing, mountain biking, white water rafting, paddle boarding, skiing and have so many more adventures I wish to experience!

“

HOWEVER, MY BIGGEST CHALLENGE HAS NOT BEEN IN THE OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES THEMSELVES, IT IS IN HAVING PEOPLE TO DO THE ACTIVITIES WITH WHERE I CAN BE MY TRUE SELF.

”

This has led me to work to inspire and guide other people of colour to see themselves through my experiences, be brave and step outside their comfort zone within a safe and welcoming community.

To understand, my why, I would like to share a little about my story. My parents immigrated to Canada from Guyana. Guyana is a multiracial former British Colony and the only English-speaking country in South America. Due to the trans Atlantic slave trade and it's colonial past, Guyana shares it's cultural identity with the Caribbean. I was born in Toronto, Canada in the late 1970s and identify as a Black Women.

As a child growing up in Malvern, Northeast Scarborough, Ontario, my community was made up of around 95% immigrants. There were students from over 100 countries at my high school. I grew up only knowing of a diverse and



culturally safe world. From elementary to high school, we celebrated our diversity, forming deep connections and understanding. We didn't just learn about each others' religion, food, music and cultures we lived it, as part of our everyday experience.

Back then, our school took us on a lot of outdoor trips, including downhill and cross-country skiing, skating, hiking and outdoor education away camps. In the summers, we would be with our extended families in Scarborough, our parents home countries or summer day camps at the local recreation centre. Summer sleep away camps were only things I saw in American TV shows and movies. I don't recall any of my friend's parents sending them away. It just wasn't something immigrant parents did those days unless it was with the school, a religious organisation, cadets guides or scouts.

“

BOTH MY PARENTS WERE ADVENTUROUS AND CURIOUS PEOPLE AND THEY TOLD ME OF STORIES GROWING UP IN GUYANA WHERE THEY WENT CAMPING, BUT I NEVER SAW THEM DO THAT IN CANADA. ”

The most outdoorsy we got was packing picnics and heading with our extended families or community groups to a park or local beach. Those days were so much fun. There would be a lot of laughter, intergenerational games and all our favourite foods.

I have so many amazing core memories about the outdoors from those school and family experiences. It wasn't until I became an adult that I realized how fortunate I was to grow up in a such diverse community and how unique that was compared to most of Canada.

Adulthood and leaving my community presented nothing but barriers to enjoying the outdoors beyond parks and beaches: We weren't invited to outdoors events. We didn't go because we felt it wasn't for us. We didn't know the systems. We found it hard to book and arrange access to outdoor activities for ourselves. We didn't have the gear.

There were cultural barriers as well. The outdoorsy people I met as a young adult outside the communities I grew up in, were mostly white and their families had been in Canada for more than one generation. The immigrant and people of colour those white folks grew up with were in the small minority and would change their names to make it easier to pronounce, change their foods so that it didn't attract comments or tone down their 'ethnic selves' to not stand out.

We constantly felt we had to play a role to fit in and get by just so we can participate and hopefully be invited again. The thing is no one in the white majority outdoor groups ever seemed to notice. They appeared to get to enjoy the outdoors with the luxury and ease of their music, inside jokes, culture and of course gear talk!! All the pretending, code switching and tension we held in these situations was stressful and exhausting. Only when we were back in our communities could we relax and be ourselves again.

My love for the outdoors and adventure was too much to let those barriers completely stop me. I would go on adventures when I had the opportunity, often being the only person of colour there.

In my early 40s, through social media, I finally found



communities of people of colour who had the same interests I did. I couldn't believe it!!! Finally, being able to embrace the outdoors in a way, I had not thought would have been possible. The comfort and ease of participating in BIPOC centred programs unlocked the joys that I had from my childhood and expanded the possibilities of experiencing outdoor adventures.

I began sharing my adventures on social media under the hashtag #SEEMESEEYOU. I would get comments such as: "Oh my goodness you're so brave!", "I love watching your stories." "I could never do that." "I wish I could do that." Through sharing, I aim to inspire and encourage people of colour to see that if I can do these things, they can do it too.

People of colour, especially women over 40, who never considered themselves to be outdoorsy people, changed from saying "I can't: or "I wish", to asking me "when or how they could join?" I saw them challenge themselves, discover new joys, make meaningful connections, and improve both their physical and mental health.

When we are with our communities or with communities that value us and see us for who we are, we can be our true selves and feel safe enough to explore and experience things in the outdoors that take us out of our comfort zone.

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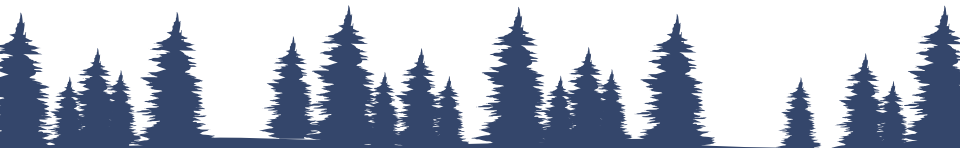
MY MESSAGE TO EVERYONE IS: KEEP GOING, KEEP GROWING.
YOU GOT THIS!”



ARANYA LYER



Aranya Iyer is an ecologist who first got interested in conservation because of her connection to migratory birds. She co-founded Field Research in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology Diversified (FREED) to increase access to field research and naturalist skills for other Indigenous, Black and/or Racialized undergraduates. She also currently works for conservation research at WWF-Canada and is a board director for Blooming Boulevards. She was a host for the “World of Birds” segment for the popular science Youtube channel “Animalogic.”



ARANYA LYER'S STORY

BY ARANYA LYER

“
THERE ARE MANY NIGHTS I GO TO SLEEP BELIEVING
I AM THE LUCKIEST PERSON ALIVE.”

It is those nights where I think about the gift of laughter and of my relationships with human and non-human kin such as plants, animals, and landscapes. Below is a poem I wrote a few years ago after hiking Princess point, a lovely trail connected to the McMaster University campus in Hamilton, Ontario. To me, it captures the ongoing conversation and relationship that I have with the natural world around me. Specifically, how that conversation feeds into my own relationship with myself.

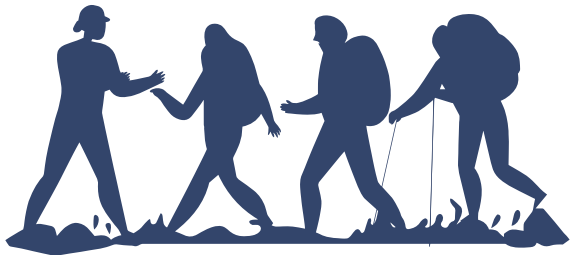
On top of this personal connection, I am incredibly fortunate to work towards my values in a professional setting. Currently, I work for conservation research at World Wildlife Fund for Nature – Canada (WWF-Canada). It is a job where I get to continue fostering my connection with animals and work towards goals that aim to protect and steward these creatures and their homes. Doing this work is rewarding, almost a gift in itself. Unfortunately, it is not an opportunity that is accessible to all people equally.

Access to green careers starts before an individual gets a job interview, and even before they step onto a university campus. It begins with the opportunities (or lack thereof) to immerse in and learn about the natural world. Before the pandemic,



my family and I had a heightened sense of awareness that we were usually the only racialized family out birding during the peak migration season at Point Pelee. For many Indigenous, Black and/or Racialized (BIPOC) individuals, the lack of representation, financial support, a professional network are major hurdles to pursuing a career in conservation. It took my parents' incredible financial investment in my education for me to be able to pursue multiple field seasons where I earned nothing but gained everything I needed to succeed in my career in conservation.

Lack of access to these career-defining opportunities stem in part from the roots of fieldwork in North America. Naturalist work (as it is classified now) started as a colonial enterprise with European explorers - often men - who collected specimens, 'discovered' species in 'exotic' places, and stole knowledge from local Indigenous groups. These actions culminated in the foundation and blueprint for conducting Western science that is still pervasive today. It also led to the creation of institutions and practices that favored the ideologies and lifestyles of these early researchers. These institutions, like universities and government, are now pressed to find ways to engage communities for whom these structures were not built.



The lack of diverse perspectives is a detriment to conservation. Fostering diversity in personnel results in a vibrant group of individuals who ask different questions and are interested in proposing new solutions. This is needed to address the many complicated crises facing our world today, including habitat destruction, climate change, and social injustice. One example would be environmental justice which centers on environmental issues impacting low-income neighbourhoods, which often correlate with other marginalized identities such as race.

I started Field Research in Ecology and Evolution Diversified (FREED) in 2020 alongside Mariel Terebiznik and a village of talented and dedicated individuals to address some of these issues. FREED's mission is to give BIPOC individuals a safe and meaningful experience in fieldwork (scientific data collection in nature) through representation, mentorship, and decolonization - thereby cultivating a more equitable conservation community.

“

OUR MISSION IS CONNECTED TO A LARGER NEED TO CREATE AND MAINTAIN THE NEXT GENERATION OF MOTIVATED, AND KNOWLEDGEABLE SCIENTISTS THAT WORKS TOWARDS ADDRESSING GLOBAL CRISES WITH LOCAL IMPACTS.

”

Together, this contributes towards the vision of a society that fosters diverse perspectives by centering and empowering people to care for nature.

To address systemic barriers, FREED organizes overnight, outdoor, experiential learning opportunities centered around rigorous research practices at provincial parks and field research stations for 10 - 20 BIPOC undergraduate students

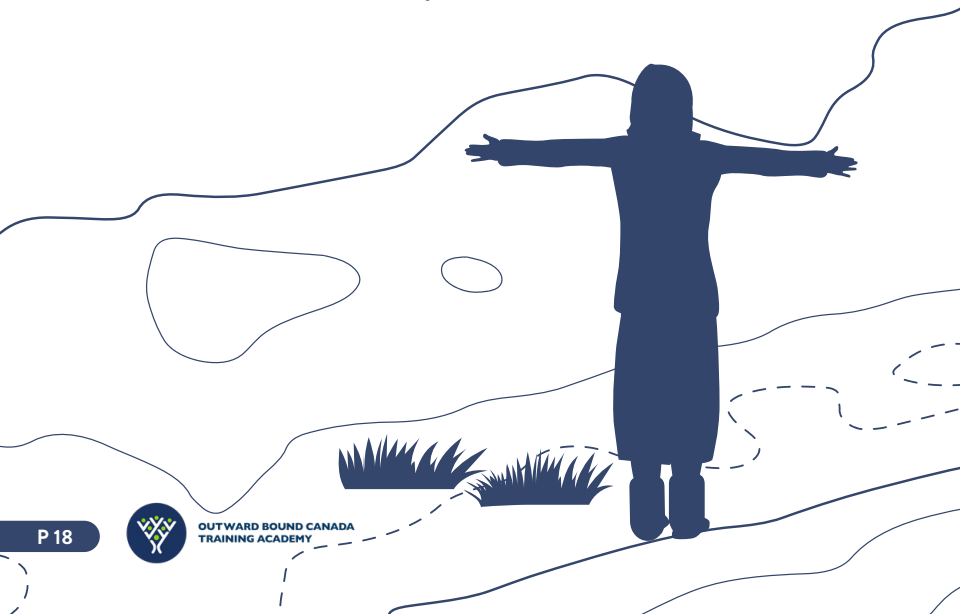


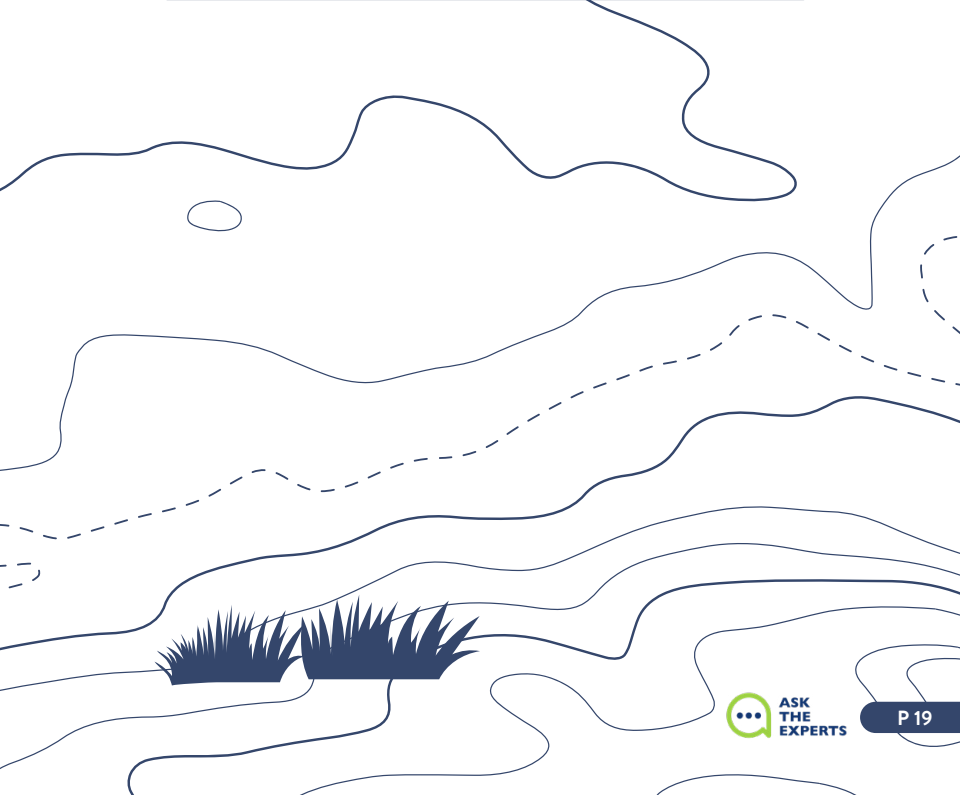
from universities across Ontario. After two successful years of operation, FREED has hosted 4 overnight excursions with 56 participants, 4 universities, and 40+ partners. Given our success and continued support from Ontario Parks, FREED is in the process of expanding with new events in collaboration with new university and conservation partners in 2024.

Excursions consist of 2-3 daily workshops, each focusing on key taxonomic or relevant skills. Workshops included sampling benthic macroinvertebrates, tracking turtles with radiotelemetry, and discussions on ethical animal handling practices (e.g. turtles, small mammals, migratory birds). Guided hikes centered around plant and tree identification, emphasizing the importance of traditional ID methods, and taught the use of identification apps like iNaturalist. Evening workshops focused on skills like science illustration and communication. Students and instructors learned a variety of outdoor based skills designed to increase their comfort in nature. At our weeklong event, this included a Learn to Canoe workshop (Friends of Algonquin Park), a donated camping trip (Ontario Parks), and a fly-fish workshop (Brown Girl Outdoor World). Each event also starts with discussions of Indigenous Knowledge and weaving knowledge systems together in research and conservation, either led by Christine Lukasavitch (Waaseyaa Consulting) or informed by her consultation. At all events, these themes are integrated into every workshop based on group consultation sessions with Christine prior to the event.

Throughout FREED events are opportunities for individuals at every level of the organizations to build connections with each other, the animals, and the land. Each event hosted a session for individual reflection, where students were encouraged to consider their relationship with the land after their experiences at FREED. Students individually expressed their thoughts through the writing prompt to 'Write a thank you letter to the land.' The responses were rich with experience and filled with insights.

Many of these insights reminded me of my own connection to the land. The poems, the letters, the photos, and the collections shared by the students transported me back to where this all began for me. It began with a conversation in nature. It began in places like Princess Point. To me, it is an honor to create space for others to start using their voice to do so as well. I am excited to do so much more of that as we go forward into 2024 and beyond.





PRINCESS POINT

You are the human in this trail of life
You got here, and so for the moments that you can be—
Try to be –
Still. Finally here.
Alone and free

First, you notice that the sun is always out on this broken,
beaten down path through the forest,
And it peeks out behind the clouds:
To hum its own tunes and buzz its own sounds
To have a conversation with the wind.

It's only when you turn to it, eyes squinted with judgement
That it roars a deep throaty laugh,
“Child, be not afraid.
Though I am different, we are the same.
I'm a bit further, but never too far away.
You, on your own journey, must tread carefully,
For distances I can see,
Your adventure awaits, but remember that it all began with me.”

Otherwise, you are mostly to encounter the standing giants
who will be there –
Who have been here –
And learnt how to curve themselves to the winds' caresses,
To receive its gentle kisses.
It's these pillars bearing life that teach
The selfless love hidden in allowing others to make their home in you.

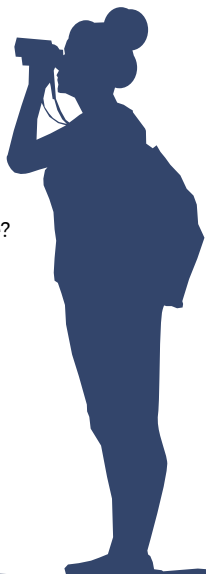


If you can, pay close attention to that one bird you hear
As it defies gravity and whisks itself away.
It has this to say,
“So why do you compare?
You don’t have my tools; you can’t be one with air.
I was built for this---and you, something else.”
As it spreads its wings to fly
You spread yours to try
And shake your head and laugh at the absurdity.
How silly I thought that that could be me.

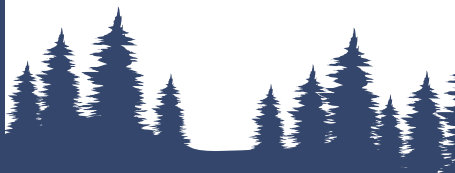
You instead move your feet,
No one else can do that quite like you.
On this pathway that leads you to you.

It is your mind that is fierce,
It is your awareness that is grace,
How else could you have read these words?
To have given meaning to these half-filled blocks of space?

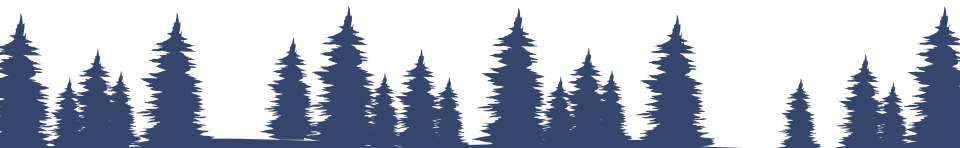
It is because you are human in this trail of life
And you tried,
To be alone and to be free.
You have succeeded in getting this far
In finding your way back to me.



QIAO LI



Qiao Li (they/she) is a 28 years old new immigrant from China. They live in Toronto, Ontario. They work in drug development as a biostatistician. They are a daughter, granddaughter, good friend, cat uncle, and home chef. In the future, they wish to see the outdoors being enjoyed more equally and plan to make it more accessible to new immigrant, queer, women, and BIPOC.



QIAO LI'S STORY

BY QIAO LI

I've always loved the outdoors. I enjoy even just staring at a tree. Before moving to Canada, burnout from toxic work culture and not knowing anyone who does it, I never had the chance to keep it as a habit or consider making it a career. After I settled in Toronto, it became so accessible. There are trails near my apartment. I still remember when I moved into my apartment, before I even own a mattress, I went down the trail under shades of summer green, sat at a fallen tree trunk by the creek, and just know this is a place I can call home.

Life in this Canada started quickly and I finally had the time and energy to build connections. Common love for the outdoors makes it easy to build friendships and I learned so much from more experienced friends. I started organizing outdoor events like urban hiking to find my community of fellow women, new immigrants, and queer. In nature, away for distractions, it becomes so natural to listen and to express, to understand and to support, to sooth the loneliness of being all by yourself. Among the uncertainties, outdoors provides a sense of stability. You might not know how many months or years it'll take to see your family again, and if they'll accept you as who you are, but you know there'll be golden leaves in fall, snow in winter, bloom in spring, lake in summer, and friends along the way. In nature, it becomes so easy to forget about the struggles, to just be with the surroundings and feel the footsteps or strokes.



But it's hard to forget who you are. I cannot just ignore how different people around seems. In my old apartment building, at least half of the residents are BIPOC and a lot of them work in labor jobs. Merely five minutes walk away on the trail, people become predominantly white, middle classed, and seemingly heterosexual. How could we call it fair if people in more vulnerable situations, who potentially needs the benefits of the outdoors more, are not included? This segregation becomes more obvious as I started doing harder activities outside of Toronto. I still remember going to BC for the first time, wearing jeans and sneakers, hiking an "easy" trail per AllTrails app, having no idea that there'll be snow in BC mountains in late June. Everyone I met on the trail is super nice and smiley. Still, I can't help but notice that me and my friends are the only people of color group on the campground of 50 campsites, and we only met one other queer couple the day we left.



“
BEING IN THE OUTDOORS IS A PRIVILEGE. IT TAKES
CONFIDENCE, TIME, ENERGY, KNOWLEDGE, AND MONEY.
LUCKILY, THE OUTDOOR INDUSTRY IS ALREADY DOING A
LOT OF THINGS THAT EMPOWER LESS PRIVILEGED PEOPLE,
INCLUDING ME.”

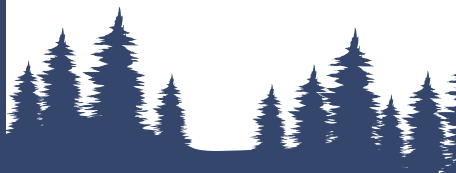
I learned skiing in Nathan Phillips Square from free lessons provided by Blue Mountain. I learned how to properly canoe, how to be responsible to environment, and how to lead outdoor trips from Outward Bound Academy. I am inspired by organizations such as Color the Trails. But there is so much more that can be done to make the outdoors more diverse and inclusive. I wish I can see closer collaboration between the outdoors sector and NGOs like 519 community center, organizing events that provide opportunity for all. I wish the information of local outdoor resources can be broadcasted in places like city libraries and schools in multiple languages.



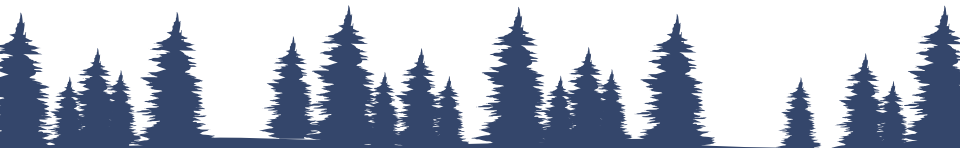
I wish I can see more outdoor influencers that represents my community. Nowadays, with online contents act as daily painkillers in our lives, I believe creating high quality short and long videos can play a key role on influencing people to get to know what's out there and to take the first step to go to the outdoors. Especially if they are in the language of their mother tongue, on a platform their people use. Though having no idea how yet, I am planning to start creating contents and be part of the force that drives the change.



METOK RUBLING



A Tibetan and second-generation Canadian, Metok spent her childhood years between Canada, Ethiopia and Cambodia and has always felt most comfortable connecting with diverse cultures. She holds a BA in English and has over 10 years of experience in client & community service, program coordination and education. Metok currently works in tech education and helped start and volunteers with Multicultural Trail Network as Communications Lead & Vice-Chair, providing affordable and inclusive outdoor programming for BIPOC & newcomer youth in Calgary. Though she has always carried a love for nature since she was a child, she has a keen awareness of how her experience with outdoor programming was limited. Through her work with Multicultural Trail Network, Metok is excited to be a part of a movement in fostering positive experiences, mental health benefits and confidence for diverse youth in the outdoors.



NURTURING THE FUTURE OF THE OUTDOOR SECTOR:

A VISION FOR THE NEXT 5-10 YEARS

BY METOK RUBLING

In the ever-evolving landscape of the outdoor sector, envisioning its growth over the next 5-10 years requires a thoughtful consideration of inclusivity, sustainability, and innovation. As we strive for progress, certain elements must remain steadfast, while others demand transformation.

First and foremost, fostering inclusivity within the outdoor sector is paramount. Over the years, the industry has made strides in promoting diversity, equity, and accessibility. However, there is still much work to be done to ensure that everyone feels welcome in outdoor spaces. Initiatives should focus on breaking down economic and cultural barriers that limit access to outdoor activities. Collaborations with community organizations, educational institutions, and local governments can help create programs that introduce underserved populations to the outdoors.

To enhance inclusivity, the outdoor sector must also address issues related to representation. Women, people of color, and individuals from marginalized communities should be better represented in marketing, leadership roles, and product design. By highlighting diverse voices, the industry can inspire a broader audience to engage with outdoor activities, creating a more inclusive and representative community.





Sustainability is another critical aspect that demands attention. The outdoor sector has a unique responsibility to protect and preserve the environment that serves as its playground. Embracing sustainable practices in manufacturing, packaging, and operations is essential. Companies should prioritize eco-friendly materials, invest in renewable energy sources, and minimize waste to mitigate their impact on the planet. Educating consumers about responsible outdoor practices can also contribute to a collective commitment to environmental stewardship.

“
INNOVATION IS THE LIFEBLOOD OF ANY INDUSTRY,
AND THE OUTDOOR SECTOR IS NO EXCEPTION. OVER
THE NEXT 5-10 YEARS, ADVANCEMENTS IN TECHNOLOGY
CAN REVOLUTIONIZE THE WAY PEOPLE EXPERIENCE THE
OUTDOORS. ”

From smart gear that enhances safety to virtual reality applications that allow users to explore different landscapes from the comfort of their homes, the possibilities are endless. Embracing these technological innovations can attract new demographics and keep outdoor activities exciting and accessible.

While change is essential for growth, some aspects of the outdoor sector should remain steadfast. The core values of environmental conservation, respect for nature, and the promotion of physical and mental well-being should remain at the heart of the industry. These timeless principles are what make the outdoors a sanctuary for individuals seeking solace,



adventure, and connection. Preserving these values ensures that the outdoor sector continues to serve as a source of inspiration and rejuvenation for generations to come.

In conclusion, the future of the outdoor sector lies in a delicate balance of inclusivity, sustainability, and innovation. By breaking down barriers, embracing eco-friendly practices, fostering representation, and leveraging technological advancements, I believe the industry can chart a course toward a more vibrant and accessible future. Let us envision an outdoor sector that not only thrives economically but also serves as a catalyst for positive social and environmental change, enriching the lives of all who engage with the great outdoors.

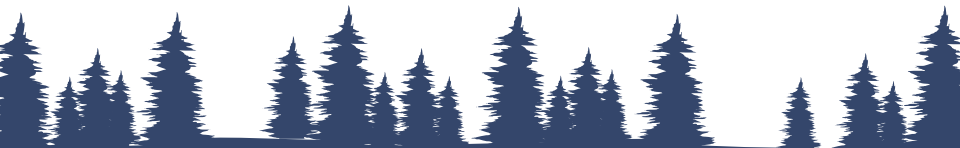


HIRA SHAH



Hira is a dedicated advocate for social justice, driven by a commitment to amplify underrepresented voices. With a background in science communications and a Master's in Conservation Biology, her journey exemplifies a passion for empowering change by encouraging communities, organizations, and governments to take action. Hira's work has involved championing equity-deserving groups and researching barriers these groups face. Throughout her career in the non-profit sector, Hira has demonstrated a strong commitment to inclusive communication strategies and community engagement.

Hira is also extremely passionate about inclusivity in nature and outdoor recreation. She is currently involved with the Multicultural Trail Network, a non-profit organization which strives to make outdoor adventures more accessible for Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour youth.



NATURE, FOR THE FIRST TIME, AND AGAIN.

BY HIRA SHAH

In the busy streets of Lahore, Pakistan, a young man sits dreaming of adventure. It's 1985 and there's a whole world he's yet to see. But with eight siblings to care for, new responsibilities arising every second, and money to make, adventure seems very far away.

My father explains that he was the outlier in his family and peer groups. Feeling like the only one in Lahore who wanted to climb snow-capped mountains to see what the birds see, he didn't have any resources on where to even begin.

As if he conjured adventure itself, a friend asks him if he can help check in on a mutual friend's sick dad. A friend who lives twelve hours away, just outside the border of the infamous Swat Valley, where the earth comes to life in the shape of mountains, lakes lull you into an eternal calm, and wildlife sings. So they hop on a bus to find their friend.

For my father, that urgent call towards nature always persisted. So much so, that he found himself bringing his wife, and three young children to an entirely new country. Growing up in Calgary as a Pakistani-Canadian, I felt like a paradox. I loved the water, but I never learned how to swim. I wanted to climb mountains, but my mom was too fearful to let me. I wanted to go camping, but didn't know where to start. Nature was all around me, but how did I get there? Thankfully, I had the guidance of a natural adventurer who wasn't afraid to take risks.



It's dark by the time they arrive in Pacha Kalay, a small mountain side village. There had been recent criminal activity in the area and both were afraid and unsure of their next steps. Eventually someone points them in the direction of a mountain, letting them know to follow the road for three hours.

Despite my mom's fears, I eventually wore her down to go on a camping trip. While I didn't purchase my first bear spray until I was 24, I planned my first camping trip when I was 15, and was made responsible for the safety of four others. My family went to the nearest Canadian Tire a couple days before our trip. Without the support of Google at our fingertips, my brothers and I finally selected a tent, air mattresses, and some sleeping bags.

With the sky starting to welcome its starry companions, the two friends get started on what they don't realize yet is a 1000 m elevation gain hike. Rain steadily starts to pour down but they are determined to help their friend. They continue walking in the darkness. Wearing dress shoes.



This first camping trip that I planned was an absolute disaster. Despite having gone on multiple day trips to the mountains for picnics and short walks, we had never before experienced the drastic weather changes that our mighty Rockies have to offer. We had felt quite confident and accomplished after setting up our sleep system, but in a split second, dark clouds filled the sky. Intense rain started pouring down on us and we fled to the sanctuary of our tent.

After a grueling hike, they finally arrive at their sky high destination in Mula Banda. Dress shoes broken and covered in mud, but confidence unwavering. They stop multiple villagers to ask for directions but soon realize it's futile. Now being closer to the Afghanistan border, the majority language is Pashto, not Urdu. The young man with a passion for adventure has found himself in the middle of a forest, on top of a mountain surrounded by people who have a deep connection with nature, but still unable to connect in that passion. Again, he feels alone.

The rain didn't stop all night. In fact, it got worse. Our tent started leaking water in and our air mattresses quickly fell flat. Our sleeping bags provided extremely little warmth. We considered getting in the car and driving home, but my mom was scared of the wildlife. We decided to tough it out for the rest of the night. My brothers spent the night making jokes about how this was all my fault for wanting to go on this silly camping trip. I felt so alone squished in this small tent with my four family members. The only one who was excited to be here.

Eventually they are able to get directions from an elderly mute man. They direct hand signs at each other until they



are able to locate their friend's home. The young man marvels at their interaction. It's funny how being in a new place and not speaking the language can't stop you from forming these connections. They reach their friend's home who confirms his father is now doing well. They get a well deserved rest.

Although I barely slept my first night camping and was cold, wet, and had two angry siblings by my side, I remember the sound of the rain falling on our tent. It's still one of my favourite sounds in the world. Something about the raindrops hitting polyester sounds both muted and echo-y at the same time. I like to imagine each raindrop sharing its story with me, communicating without communicating. Each story providing me with such a strong sense of closeness with nature while also feeling protected.

The next morning, the young man wakes up to the sounds of the mountains roaring loudly, calling him outside. With the sun now streaming over the valley, he's overwhelmed by the beauty he missed in the darkness. Colours that don't exist in Lahore. Sights that don't contain rooftop after rooftop. And most importantly, the mountains smiling down at him, happy to see he's finally taken up their invitation. Experiencing nature for the first time.

When I heard the rain finally stop just as the sun was coming up, I quietly snuck outside while my family was still asleep. Despite the rough night, I was so excited to be waking up in the middle of a forest for the first time. I felt a rush of excitement. Is this what my dad got to experience in Pakistan's Himalayas when he was younger?

Though my mom still strongly stands by that first camping trip being one of the worst nights of her life, we did go on more camping trips in the future. My dad was motivated to learn more, research better gear, purchase some proper safety equipment and try again. Unfortunately, camping wasn't an activity that stuck with my family, but my parents still love picnicking by the mountain lakes, glamping, and hiking.

Just like my dad, I'm the outlier in my family. My love for nature overwhelms all aspects of my life. I decided to pursue a career in Conservation Biology so I could better understand our natural spaces and what we can do to protect them. Through my academic and professional career I learned that we can't actually advocate for nature until we're able to connect with it properly. However, as my personal experiences taught me, it's so difficult to have those positive experiences and connections in nature as a BIPOC. I wanted other BIPOC families to also feel safe, welcomed, and well-equipped in nature so they could experience the same joy that I get from it.

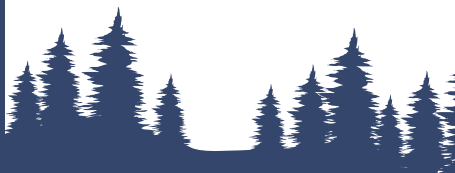


With the Multicultural Trail Network, I've been able to do just that. MTN is a Calgary based non-profit organization that's dedicated to helping BIPOC youth experience safe, affordable and positive outdoor adventures. This soul-filling work is helping to re-shape Calgary's outdoor community to make nature something that everyone can experience.

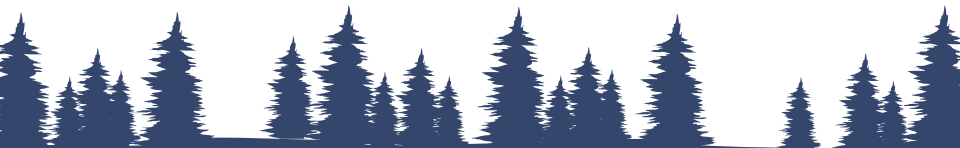
I've been lucky enough to explore so much of Alberta's natural beauty. But lately, I hear the same mountains that were calling to my dad calling to me as well. I hope to one day experience Pakistan's natural beauty myself and listen to the stories that the mountains, the valleys, and the raindrops have to share. Getting to experience nature for the first time. Again.

I'd like to thank my father, Sohail Shah, for sharing his story with me.

DR. SARAH BROWN



Sarah Brown is an Assistant Professor at Mount Royal University, a contract instructor at the Haskayne School of Business at the University of Calgary, and an active adventure guide and instructor. Her passion is connecting people with the natural world through education, play, and a deep sense of reverence and responsibility for all life on our planet. As a professor and outdoor educator, Sarah is deeply curious about the ways people connect with their inner selves through exploration of the outer wilderness and the transferable skills that can be fostered through experiential education. She is also dedicated to the complex journey of decolonization and reconciliation by taking responsibility as a Settler of this land for the ongoing violence of colonization and centering Indigenous peoples and knowledges.



GUIDING THE FEMININE THROUGH A LIFE IN OUTDOOR LEADERSHIP.

BY DR. SARAH BROWN

I am humbled and honored to share a piece of my story and perspective in this anthology of diverse voices in the outdoors. I would like to begin by recognizing that despite the discrimination that I have faced as a woman living in a patriarchal society and working in a still predominantly male-dominated field, I have also been afforded many privileges as an able-bodied, cisgender, white European Settler to the land we currently call Canada.

My narrative regarding the intersectionality of discrimination is limited to gender. It has been challenging to write this story since many others have faced far more significant barriers and discrimination. In reflecting and writing, I questioned the value of my story and perspective. I worried that my story might be perceived as “less than,” that I might come across as a “victim” or someone pointing fingers and focusing on the past. Ultimately, it was just these questions and ongoing insecurities that highlighted that I do have a story to tell, and more so “who am I not to share my story.” Diminishing my experiences serves no one, and there is value in contributing to a deeper understanding of discrimination and collective efforts to create a more just, safe, inclusive, diverse, and equitable outdoor sector.



“
EMBARKING ON A CAREER IN OUTDOOR LEADERSHIP
FELT LIKE A CALLING—AN EXTENSION OF MY DEEP
CONNECTION TO THE LAND, OCEANS, RIVERS, MOUNTAINS,
UNTAMED AND WILD PLACES. ”

My first summer as a camp counselor in the Rocky Mountains of Treaty 7 territory ignited my imagination and presented a world of possibilities to turn my passions into a profession. My next step was to find a program that would train me, certify me, and set me up for a life and career of adventure.

Enrolling in a renowned outdoor leadership program laid a strong foundation for my outdoor career. While there were no structural barriers that prevented me from being there and later establishing a career in the industry, my experiences as a woman in the outdoor sector were marked by subtle and overt gender discrimination. Perhaps the more intriguing and nuanced narrative lies in how these experiences shaped me as an individual and a leader and presented challenges that compelled me to strive for authenticity.

The lack of representation of women in the field that I experienced led me to question if I belonged there and created some confusion about how to navigate my presence. If your teachers, leaders, and authorities do not represent your situation and location, it becomes difficult to imagine yourself in those roles. It can also make it challenging to be authentic in that role once you get there.

A well-intentioned instructor once suggested I consider sea kayak guiding over my burgeoning passion for river guiding, deeming it a more “friendly and suitable path for women.” This advice left me feeling a mix of anger and confusion – why should my gender dictate my career path, while my male counterparts pursued their passions uninhibited? In many ways, this anger fueled me to prove a point. I adopted an attitude of “I will show them”. This hardened me in my early days of guiding when I feared that ‘feminine traits’ should be suppressed whenever possible, as they might signal weakness. An examiner for a guiding certification once told me “You put your boat where it needs to be, but you just don’t look like the other guys”. This was amidst a steady stream of sexist and inappropriate comments, particularly difficult as I was the only female in the group. One of his comments put me over the edge and I pulled off the river and walked away from the exam. Years later, needing this certification for a guiding position, I came back to do the course with this same examiner. Fortunately, he had a co-examiner with him who was far more supportive of female paddlers and created a more inclusive and safe space despite the challenging class 4 water that we were examined on!



I achieved the certification and moved on with my river guiding career with a bit more confidence to be my authentic self, less fearful of embracing my femininity. My understanding of feminine and masculine traits evolved within a patriarchal context that undervalues and misrepresents feminine qualities. Building relationships with Indigenous peoples and being exposed to matriarchal values, taught me that women have a unique power stemming from our connection to Mother Earth and our ability to birth life. Ironically, I did not see a way to balance my career goals, lifestyle, and motherhood. Many successful women in this field have found a way to do this, but I never saw a window of opportunity to have children unfold between fieldwork and the Ph.D. required to maintain my position as a professor in an outdoor program. I witnessed many of the women in my organizations shift away from field work once they had children, but the men often still found a way to balance fatherhood and outdoor careers. I am sure none of this was easy and I am humbled by the many amazing fathers that I work with in this field; parenthood remains, however, a unique consideration for women in the outdoor industry.

One thing I wish I understood sooner in life was that I could choose to turn my pain into my medicine and that all the bitter moments could ultimately become the experiences that would create growth for myself, and a safe space for someone else in the future. I also wish I had understood sooner that this would have to be a choice that would take great effort. Initially, the experience of feeling like I wasn't "one of the guys" was to harden and reject those feminine aspects that didn't seem welcome. It also took effort not to perpetuate

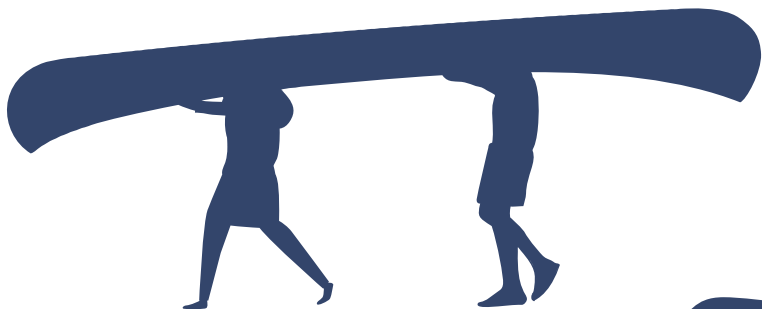
the same macho leadership styles that were role-modeled to me. Despite the ways that they negatively impacted me, it was easy to perpetuate that culture. My default defense is still often to become more masculine.

During my three decades in this sector, I've witnessed a noticeable shift in outdoor culture. Instances of gender discrimination are less commonplace and there is a heightened awareness of systemic barriers to both outdoor recreation and professions. Conversations around gender identity have evolved significantly beyond the binary experience that I am describing and are raising awareness of the complexities of identity. The evolution is promising, but the journey towards Justice, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion continues. I have no doubt that many emerging leaders are currently experiencing subtle and overt discrimination and wondering how they can find their way in this profession.

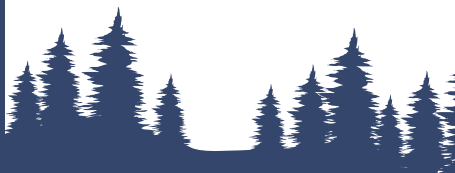
My vision for the future of the outdoor sector is a collective effort to dismantle the barriers for emerging leaders who are underrepresented in the field and open a path for them to travel in their unique way. To do this we need to recognize how the outdoor sector is exclusive, colonial, and patriarchal amongst many other things. Recognizing and challenging the dominant single story of outdoor leadership that has been perpetuated opens us up to new and diverse possibilities. I hope that those of us who experienced some form of discrimination can transform that experience into safety and inclusivity for others, and that those who did not face barriers



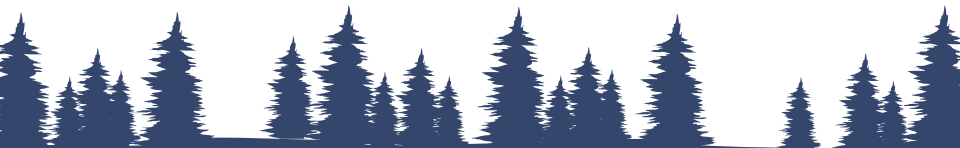
or discrimination step up to become allies and changemakers in the areas of Justice, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the outdoor sector. It takes courage and humility to turn your pain into medicine for others and to recognize that you might be part of the problem. It is a good thing that this is not a sector of people who shy away from challenges.



VALERIE FREEMANTLE



Valerie (she/her) lives on the traditional territory of Anishinaabe & Haudenosaunee. She currently works as a supply teacher in the the local school boards and an outdoor educator at a conservation area in eastern Ontario. She is grateful for the experiences outdoor education has brought her and sees the potential of outdoor education to encourage empathy, kindness, problem solving, and forgiveness in folks of all ages. She is launching her own business called "The Curious Raccoon Co" where she wants to teach kids and adults how to take care of their surroundings and themselves while outside.



DIVERSE VOICES IN THE OUTDOORS: AN ANTHOLOGY PROJECT BY OUTWARD BOUND

BY VALERIE FREEMANTLE

My parents immigrated here as children from England and Guyana and raised myself and my two younger brothers in the northern part of the Greater Toronto Area. When my mother was a child in Toronto, she wanted to enroll in Girl Guides like all of her (white) school friends. However, feeling that it was unsafe, my grandmother refused. So when I was a kid, enrolling me in Guiding was not something high on my mom's to-do list. But, when I was eight, my best friend's mom managed to convince my mother it was safe for me to follow my best friend to Girl Guide camp.

That started years of camping with my Guiding unit. I learned how to set fires, hike, pack, paddle, portage, cook, clean, sing silly songs, and be still in nature. This version of me wasn't afraid of walking through the forest alone at night to the washroom or of being goofy. It took many years, but eventually that version of myself overflowed into the rest of my life.



When I was about 12, I remember asking the educator working with our Guiding unit at Algonquin Park how he got his job. He told me that I wouldn't want his job. He said that it was seasonal, precarious, didn't pay well, and that he was away from his family for days at a time in busy periods. He said he was actually looking for new work for that summer and it was likely his last winter working at the park. That was really discouraging to hear. How could such an interesting job be making someone so unhappy?

Fast forward to my undergrad and I'd managed to snag a job working as an outdoor education intern at one of the Toronto District School Board's outdoor education schools. I ended up staying for two work terms and absolutely loved it. When I asked the staff how they had got there, most of them said they loved it, but that it probably wasn't the job for me. The divorce rate was high, the pay was low, the hours were long and you were away from home for days at a time.

So, I put that idea on the back burner and I did a masters. Maybe I could become a professor and lead field courses? By the end of my degree, I was still passionate about science, but didn't see a future for myself in academia. I wanted to get people to care about the world first, and then help them find the answers to better understand it.

So, a week after defending my master's thesis I started teachers' college in Queen's Outdoor Education program. About eight months later I had my first day of my outdoor education practicum. Schools were on work to rule, so there wasn't any school programming at the conservation area where I was placed. However, there was the forest school that

they ran in-house. I had never worked at a forest school before and the first day was eye opening.

Kids started arriving and immediately picked up sticks. My yard duty supervision alarm bells went off and I immediately went to tell the kids to put the sticks down. But the supervisor stopped me, gave me an iPad, and told me to document their learning. I was uninitiated to the concept of risky play, but I quickly learned how when done right it can empower kids to be more connected to their surroundings and be better at measuring risks.

I now work at that conservation area and encourage students to catch frogs, play in the mud, pick up sticks, climb trees, and run off trails. This past summer I had a four-year-old introduce me to “the most beautiful frog” who she insisted was the best kisser. She proceeded to kiss the frog twice to prove her point. We see kids who struggle in a traditional classroom flourish in the different paradigm of an outdoor classroom. I had a grade 8 student with oppositional defiant disorder get a fire started with just a magnesium rod and a striker. His teachers remarked that this was the most focused and patient than they had seen him since they had known him.

I absolutely love my job, but the same problems that I was told existed over a decade ago still exist. Cuts to conservation areas and changes to their mandates at the provincial level have made management where I work very reluctant to create full time jobs. After more than 3 years, I am still an on-call employee with no guaranteed hours or schedule. But I’m still dedicated to staying in the industry. My pension and first



house downpayment both ask the same question you might be asking: Why?

“
SIMPLY PUT, IT IS BECAUSE OF THE COMMUNITY I HAVE
FOUND AND THE WORK I WANT TO DO.
”

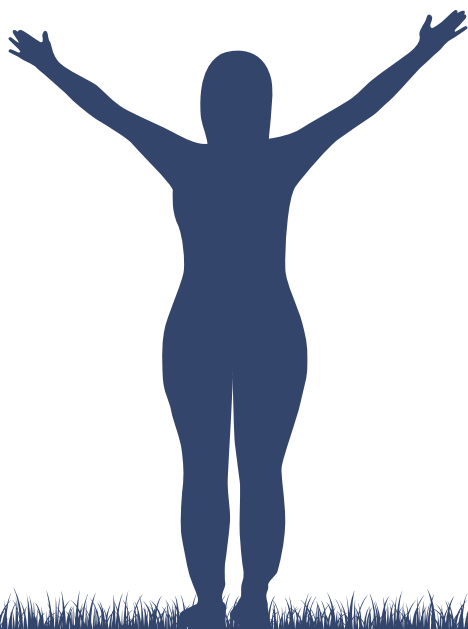
While at teachers' college, I went to my first Council of Outdoor Educators (COEO) conference. For the first time, I was surrounded by 200 other people who had chosen to make outdoor education their career. They were resourceful, kind, and generous with their time and skills. If these folks had figured it out and still seemed happy, why couldn't I?

A few years later, a friend asked me to co-chair the 2023 fall COEO conference with her. COEO is fantastic, but we felt that it did not yet reflect the diversity that exists in the outdoors. As an often straight and white passing queer woman of colour, I wanted to be on that leadership team. Themed "Opening the Doors to the Outdoors", we wanted to highlight the barriers that exist for indigenous folks, folks of colour, folks with disabilities and folks in the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. I am so grateful that people from those communities came to share their expertise and experience. We still have a long way to go, but you could feel a shift happening over the course of the weekend. Four new board members were elected. Two of us were people of colour, one of us was queer, and three of us were women. At the board level, we are now actively looking at where we can build reciprocal partnerships and make COEO more representative of those working in outdoor education in the province. The work is happening and I'm proud to be part of it.

Parallel to planning the conference, I was accepted into Outward Bound Canada's Training Academy. A business idea had been kicking around in my head for a while, but it all came spilling out to a peer there. I wanted to bring outdoor education to people's local parks and backyards. I didn't want cars to be the only way to get to programming. I wanted people to feel safe and welcome while getting the basic camping, hiking, and outdoor skills to keep exploring safely. I wanted to have kids that looked like me, my siblings, and my cousins to grow up feeling like they had a right to explore and care about the world around them. My family had the means to send me away for a week of camp a summer as a kid, but I wanted to make sure that families who didn't still had a way for their kids to get those skills. I wanted to be employed full time and have some sort of control and security about my work. My peer said I could do it and I believed her.



I am now in the process of building that business. I hope to be able to run a March break camp in one of the underserved areas of my city. I have started making partnerships with people who work with at-risk youth and newcomers to Canada. I want to build a business that pays me and any staff I hire a living wage while still providing high quality outdoor education that is accessible to everyone. I have never done it before, but feel confident that I can. If I can canoe, climb a tree, swim in a lake, walk through my local park, or try to have a conversation with a barred owl - I can do anything.

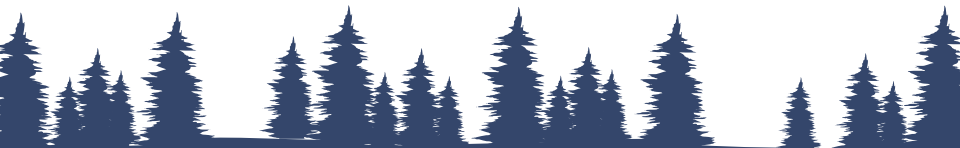


ELAINE LEUNG



I've had the dream life of a marine biologist studying amazing animals like whales, sea lions and penguins all around the world from BC to Antarctica. When I finished my PhD, I realized that over 30 species that I studied or interacted with are at risk of extinction within my lifetime. Our ocean is in trouble but it's not too late for us to save it.

I started Sea Smart to empower kids to be ocean heroes. We are a Vancouver-based charity whose mission is to inspire and empower kids to love and protect our ocean. Through innovative, action-oriented and solution-based education programs like summer camps at the beach, school workshops, shoreline cleanups and online programs, we get kids excited about the ocean and importantly, help them foster curiosity, connection and love with nature. This is important because you only protect what you love! We are committed to diversity and inclusion and focus on delivering free programs to at-risk and Indigenous youth, as well as providing girls-only programs to help smash the gender barriers in STEM!



ELAINE LEUNG'S STORY

BY ELAINE LEUNG

Making the world a better place has been the main driving force throughout my entire life, especially when it comes to animals and the environment.

I was always the kid who was picking up worms off the sidewalk to put them back on the grass, picking up garbage in the streets and yelling at my brother for harassing the terrified little crabs on the beach. Little did I know that my purpose to make the world a better place would lead to a career in marine biology. After all, I get seasick and I'm a horrible swimmer. Why on earth would I ever voluntarily spend weeks at a time on boats to study whales or get to my study sites?!

“

IT TURNS OUT THAT PASSION AND PURPOSE CAN HELP US
OVERCOME EVEN THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES...AND I'M SO
HAPPY I PERSEVERED!

”

My career as a marine biologist has taken me around the world, to places like Antarctica, Alaska, Hawaii, New Zealand, and my beautiful home, British Columbia. I've worked for various governments, universities, and nonprofits. My research mainly focuses on studying threatened species, what's causing their decline and how to minimize those impacts. I've had the fortune to study amazing animals such as whales, dolphins, sea lions, penguins, and many other critters in some of the most beautiful, remote places in the world.



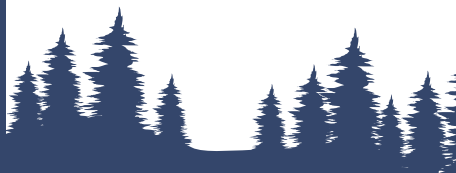
We're living in a world where all we hear is bad news about the environment and it's so easy to get overwhelmed and think "there's nothing I can do to help". I believe so strongly in the power of individual action to create positive change that I started Sea Smart, a charity whose mission is to inspire and empower people, especially kids, to love and protect our oceans.

I'm so thrilled to share my passion for ocean conservation and work with Sea Smart to get youth excited about our oceans and empowered to be environmental champions! Sea Smart has been powering big waves of change. Since 2016, we've taught over 45,000 people through in-person programs and over 1,000,000 students in over 30 countries with our free online educator resources.

Check www.seasmartschool.com to find out how you can get involved to power waves of change around the world!

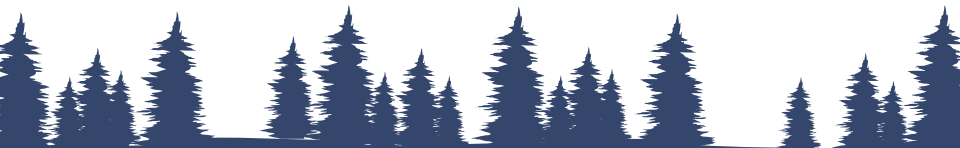


QUEENIE MAH



Embracing the philosophy of 'You Only Live Once', I made a bold decision in 2015 to leave Engineering to follow my true interests and travel around the world. My journey into the great outdoors began in 2018, starting with day hikes then quickly evolved into multi-day backpacking trips. I discover the deepest connection with myself when I am out in nature.

Beyond the trails, I take joy in organizing social events and connecting with people through my varied hobbies. This includes savoring diverse cuisines, delving into the intricacies of craft beer and cocktails, carving through snow on a snowboard, and mastering the art of pole dance fitness. I am always eager to try new activities, explore the unknown and venture into unique areas.



QUEENIE MAH'S STORY

BY QUEENIE MAH

My name is Queenie Mah, and I am a second-generation Chinese Canadian. My parents immigrated to Canada from Canton (Guangzhou) in the Guangdong province of southern China in the 1980s, seeking a better future.

I was born in Oyen, a small town in Alberta, where my parents owned a modest restaurant serving Western-style meals. My parents worked extremely hard to ensure my younger sister and I a good future, free from worries about basic needs, and to give us the opportunity of a post-secondary education. At the age of 10, I moved to Calgary, which has been my home ever since.

After graduating with a BSc in Electrical Engineering from the University of Calgary in 2011, I shocked my parents by telling them I was going to take a sabbatical from my engineering job. In 2015, I ultimately left the industry, realizing that engineering was not my passion.

This decision caused confusion for my parents due to a generational and cultural difference in work-life balance. Like many Asian (Chinese) individuals, they expressed their disappointment and shock that I was throwing away my post-secondary education. Despite knowing deep down that this was the right choice for me, I subconsciously felt guilty and fearful about the uncertain next steps.



During this period I explored my other interests, including working in the hospitality industry. Even some friends and immigrant colleagues criticized my decision, saying things like, ‘Why are you working here?’ or ‘You’re too smart for this. I would not be here if I had your degree’. Although I understood their perspectives, it was difficult not to constantly doubt myself and maintain a positive attitude during those trying moments.

During my childhood, my mom would take us on family vacations where I developed my sense of adventure and passion for exploring new places.

“

APART FROM OCCASIONAL WALKS AROUND THE LOCAL PARK OR TAKING RELAXED BUS TOURS THROUGH NATIONAL PARKS, I DID NOT GROW UP ENGAGING IN THE “GREAT OUTDOORS” LIKE MANY WHITE PEOPLE I KNOW.”

I emphasize the term “great outdoors” because it often carries the connotation of remote and wild spaces. I imagine it as being an extreme sport where people “rough it” (camp) under the stars, raft down white rapids, backpack in the remote country, conquer mountain peaks, and ski down snow-covered slopes. These activities require significant financial investment, expertise and skill, creating yet another barrier for People of Colour (PoC) who did not grow up in such environments.

Consequently, I faced challenges when I wanted to start hiking and camping. Since my family was not familiar with these activities, and I did not have many connections in my network to mentor me, I had to figure things out on my own.

Similar to the majority of my unconventional lifestyle, it has been a difficult and somewhat lonely journey to navigate.

Over the past months, I have been dedicated to my professional development with the goal of finding a job in the outdoor industry. Fortunately, I had the opportunity to participate in a fully-funded outdoor leadership training program with Outward Bound Canada (OBC). This experience was one of the most exciting and engaging experiences in my life. Now I have a chance to make a living doing something I love.

Upon deeper self-reflection, I realize that beyond the financial barrier, a significant obstacle for PoC entering the outdoor sector is the lack of a safe space. I believe that to thrive in this industry, there needs to be a space free of judgment and hostility where individuals can confidently ask for help and access resources to enhance their technical skills, and discover more extreme outdoor activities. Unless you already have a foot in the door, it is challenging to connect with professionals, mentors or potential employers in the outdoor industry.

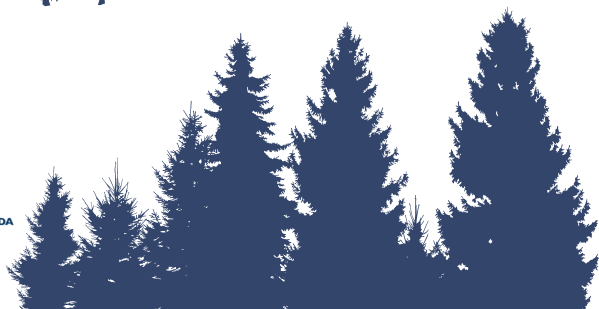
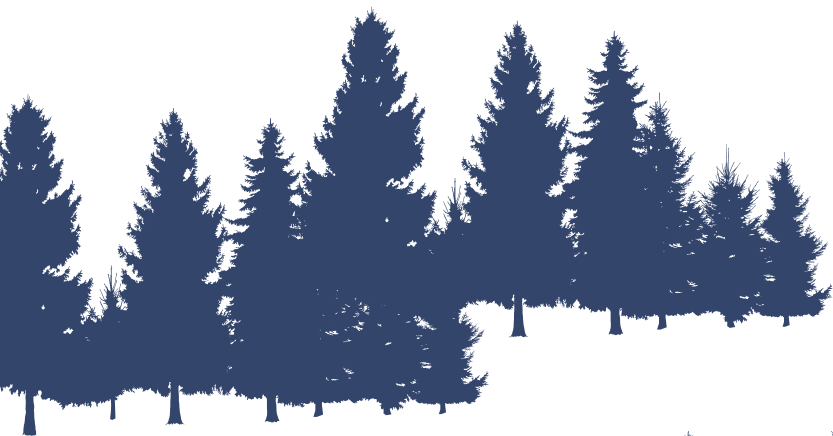


The outdoor sector remains inherently niche, predominantly dominated by White males. While there is an increasing inclusion of females, they too are predominantly White. Despite my extroverted nature, which enables me to connect with people from various backgrounds, a subconscious feeling still persists - a feeling buried deep down in the pit of my heart. Regardless of meeting friendly and respectful individuals, I still struggle with feelings of insecurity and isolation as an under-represented Asian (Chinese) female in the outdoors. These sentiments stem from the natural tendency of people gravitating towards those of similar race. It feels instinctively comfortable because of a shared cultural background and there is less likelihood of animosity.

For instance, OBC's commitment to Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) within the Training Academy aimed to prioritize under-represented groups. I was excited about the prospect of meeting other outdoor enthusiasts and was curious about the diversity among participants. However, upon arrival, I was ultimately disappointed. Once again, I found myself among the few visible minorities and that the entire leadership team was White. Despite the program's emphasis on diversity, it did not feel that way; it seemed like nothing had really changed.

It is important to note that this is not a criticism of OBC. Conversations with the Rocky Mountain staff revealed that they clearly acknowledge that this was an issue. This broad and deeply rooted systemic (racist) problem, intertwined with social, economic and cultural differences cannot be solved overnight. I applaud how OBC facilitates a safe environment to have these difficult and important conversations.

Concluding this narrative, and as cliché as it may sound, immersing myself in nature over the past year has been an incredibly therapeutic and transformative experience. A pivotal moment was joining OBC's Training Academy, where I connected with many like-minded individuals. For the first time in my life, I felt like I found people that resonated with my story and shared the same passion for the outdoors. Beyond sharing my story, I hope that one day I will be able to create an environment where under-represented groups can safely explore and embrace the outdoors.







**OUTWARD BOUND
CANADA**

The Training Academy is an initiative of Outward Bound Canada.