

# Guest Editorial: Reconnecting with the beauty of nature

FRANCESCA VARELA

When was the last time you stood beneath the sky? Perhaps during a few hurried minutes between commutes. If you're like most people, you don't even look up. As a society, we have lost our connection to nature. It seems high school students, especially, are deprived of connection to the natural world.

We are a culture obsessed with media. According to a study conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation, students ages eight to 18 spend over seven hours a day using electronic devices. The same study claimed that excessive media use lowers grade point averages, and may be contributing to the epidemic of obesity. Is this a worthwhile way to spend our time?

The Journal of Optometry and Vision Science also found that those who spend most of their time inside tend to have poorer long-distance vision than those who spend more time outdoors.

To counter these negative effects of modern life, The National Wildlife Federation has launched a "Be Out There" program. It encourages children, and people in general, to spend more time playing outside. They state that less time in front of a screen will improve fitness levels, reduce ADHD symptoms raise test scores, and lower stress. In fact, studies have shown that just looking at photographs of nature can reduce anxiety.

President Barack Obama signed a Presidential Memorandum on April 16, 2010, titled the "America's Great Outdoors" initiative. In the Memorandum,

President Obama cited that among conservation efforts, his goal was to "reconnect Americans, especially children, to America's rivers and waterways, landscapes of national significance, ranches, farms and forests, great parks, and coasts and beaches."

There was once a time when nature was all there was. It wasn't even that long ago. An excerpt from the introduction of author Richard Louv's book, "Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder" states that, "within the space of a few decades, the way children understand and experience nature has changed radically. The polarity of the relationship has reversed. Today, kids are aware of global threats to the environment—but their physical contact, their intimacy with nature, is fading."

And as development, pollution and progress swiftly increase, so does our detachment from the natural world. We have come to view ourselves as completely separate from nature. This is not the case. Our connection to all living things, to the Earth itself, is proven by science.

The theory of evolution states that all life on Earth came from a single cell. We are technically related to every animal and plant that exists on this planet. Our human ancestors have adapted specifically to the Earth's natural conditions, therefore, we are designed to live in

nature. Perhaps we have lost some of the knowledge to do so in the past century, but not the physical capability.

Despite money and our convoluted societal systems, we still rely on the environment for our food and water. Money is only

in some way. A love for nature will lead to the desire to protect it. The poetic flourishes of a leaf might be explored in English class, the angles of the sun in math, or the lifestyles of Earth-based cultures in history, but one must see it to truly

Graphic by Patrick Sluiter



appreciate it. Whatever the means, an emphasis should be placed on the environment in all subjects, not just ecology or environmental science.

Give us fresh air. Let us feel the rain upon our skin, and we shall be healthier and happier than ever before.

This mentality was shared by Joseph Knowles, author of "Alone in the Wilderness." This long-lost novel chronicles the true story of Knowles' two month experiment when he entered the woods of northern Maine completely naked. Alone, and without the aid of any tools, he lived off of the land just to prove it could be done. Upon his return to civilization, he was physically stronger, wise in the ways of the wilderness and enlightened.

His message to readers at the end of his journey was

an extra step. The food chain, the water cycle and the sun are our true providers. We need to respect and protect our mother Earth. After all, we can't live without her.

School is one of the greatest culprits in our detachment from nature. Since childhood, we've been forced to spend almost all day inside. Some classrooms in our school don't even have windows; we are trapped in prison-like cells.

Curriculum could incorporate outdoor experiences quite easily. Anything can be tied to nature

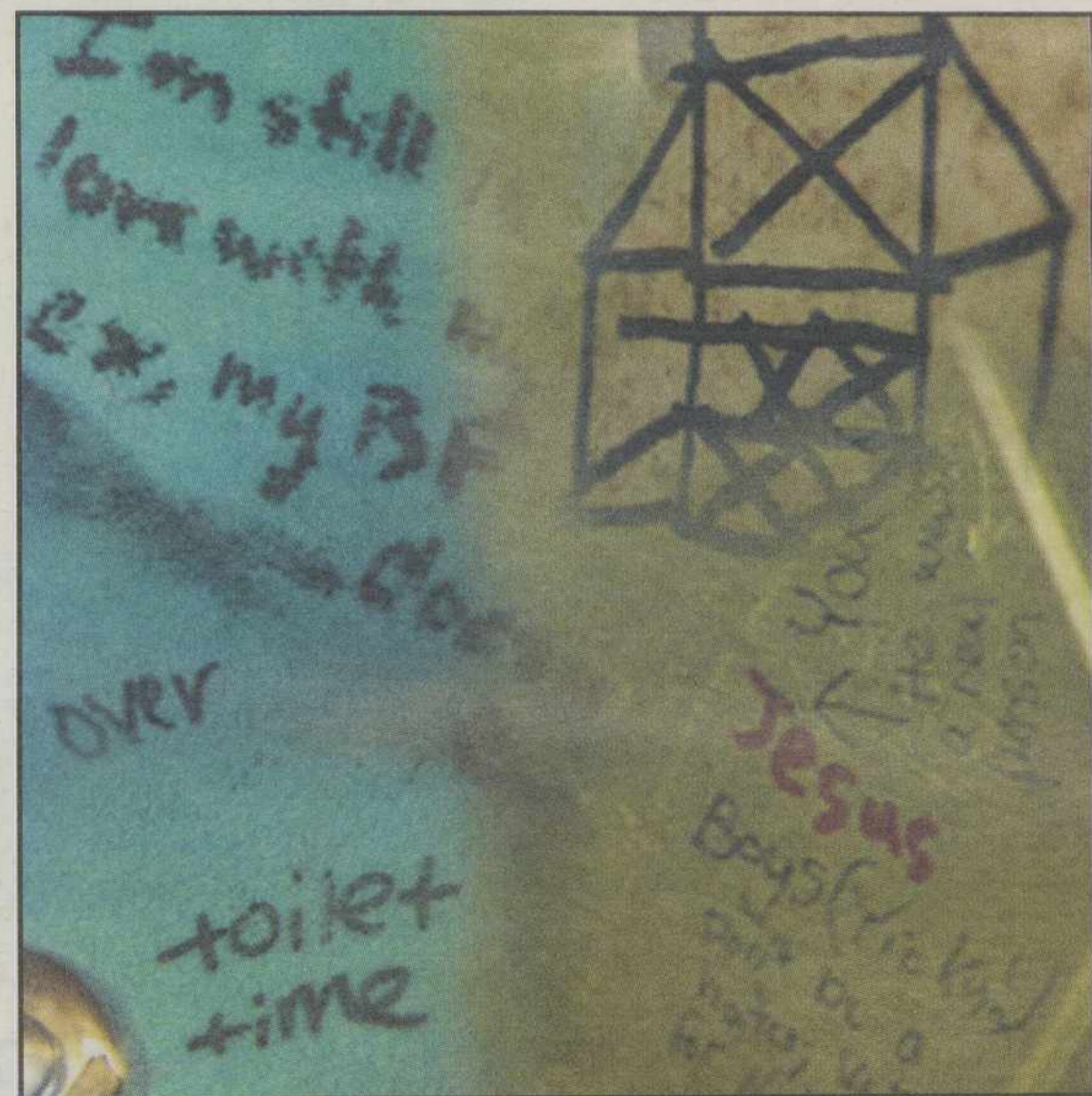
## Graffiti and writing in bathrooms proves problematic

PATRICK DOUGLAS

It's been a long day. You're anxiously anticipating the bell at the end of sixth period, not because school is boring, but because you have to go to the bathroom. It seems to be taking forever. The day ends and you run frantically to the nearest restroom. While in the bathroom, you look up. What's this? A swastika. More than that, the wall is covered in disgusting images of human reproductive organs and profanity of the harshest nature.

The fact is, the bathroom is a perfect place to write things. It's anonymous, and many people will be forced to look at it at some time or another. It's nothing to rejoice about. I appreciate people's comments and opinions, but only in a public format. The bathroom is not such a forum.

The types of writing on the stall walls are usually offensive. I've seen homophobic remarks and hateful messages. Sometimes it's more than just words. I'm pretty sure I've also seen burn marks from a lighter on the toilet paper container. I once walked into a bathroom to find an entire roll of toilet paper covered in urine. There was also an instance last year where some guy released excrement on the floor in the locker room, and it smelled awful in there for quite awhile.



Photos by Alex Houston and Laurel Massaro. Graphic by Patrick Douglas. A collection of writing on walls in both the female and male bathrooms shows the recurring problem of bathroom graffiti. People continue to deface school property, a trend which reflects poorly on the school and its students.

"It's disheartening when we see it, because it shows a lack of respect for the school and the building," Bill Ray, head custodial engineer, said. Graffiti shows up everywhere, whether it be in the bathroom or on the side of the building. However, it hasn't been as bad this year, according to Ray.

Things written in the bathroom can sometimes be funny or witty. Most often, however, they're just downright offensive. Any way you look at it,

"Let me appeal to every man, woman, and child to take advantage of the wonderful bounty that nature offers... let them understand the wild creatures, who have souls like themselves. Let them abandon all things artificial and really live. Let them answer the call of the natural mother—she has blessing untold to bestow. In a word, let humanity be born again."

A shift in the mind set of our generation is necessary. The world is alive, bright and vivid. Go explore it. See the great cedar trees that stretch into the clouds. Feel the cold water of a distant creek drip between your fingertips. Listen to the wind, the ferns, the owl. There is no better way to spend your time than where you were truly meant to be.

Stop leaning on luxury. Don't place so much importance on electronics or money. In comparison to the boundless wonders of life, these things mean nothing.

Erase the constraints set upon you by society—convenience, sloth, indifference. There's so much you can learn from the life around you. Visit nature at a park, on a camping trip, even in your own backyard. No image on a screen can replace the real thing.

## Amplifier

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