

Third Place, Prose
Grades 7-9

“Walking on ice,” Cameron Wisel

It was a cold sunny day at Dark Woods camp, and everyone was excited for the day as it was warmer than most, but still very cold. We had just eaten breakfast and were all getting ready and dressed for the day. Me, Ryan and Eli have been going to camp together for a long time. We met when we were going into 3rd grade. Ryan lives in Chicago, and Eli lives in Southern California. I am one of five kids at camp who are from Colorado. It is always fun for us to come together every summer in Wisconsin. It is even more fun that we get to be together in the Fall for camp which is a first.

We were ready and had stepped outside of our cabins for a moment, and then Ryan said, “What should we do first?”, while jumping around in the bit of snow that was left from a couple days ago.

“Let’s play some football over by the field,” I said as I started running to the shack to grab a football. Ryan and Eli started running to catch up to me. We got to the shack, grabbed a football and started playing. We played for a bit and had some fun, but we wanted to do something else, as it was a beautiful day, and we wanted to take advantage of doing the most we could.

“Let’s all take one turn on the zipline and then grab a drink from the lodge,” Eli said as he waved for us to come with him to the climbing wall. We walked over to the climbing wall which had three sides and was pretty tall, but we had all been on it before. At the top was a zipline that went from the top of the climbing wall to the end of a long runway bridge in the trees. There was a counselor at the top to hook you on and off the zipline and to the climbing wall. There is also a counselor at the bottom to hook you up to the climbing wall. We sprinted over to the climbing shack where we got helmets and harnesses.

Immediately after we all got our stuff on, I yelled, “I CALL FIRST!” with a loud but tired voice after running a bunch. I ran over to the counselor over by the bottom and asked him to clip me to the rope which connects you to the climbing wall. He did and, as taught, I recited the climbing commands, “belay on and on belay” and started climbing.

With the blazing sun in my eyes I reached the top, and the other counselor unclipped me from the climbing wall and hooked me onto a bar. Sometimes I need to remind myself that I am attached to the climbing wall at all times. Especially when I would look down.

I was breathing heavily after climbing up the metal ladder that was a bit wet and slippery. I always get nervous on the ladder. My heart was starting to beat a little faster and my legs were shaking. The counselor attached me to the zipline, and I was sitting on the little wooden platform before I dropped. I looked down at Ryan and Eli and waved at them as I went off the platform and was going very fast as I screamed, "YEAH!" going the whole way down.

After I stopped, another counselor put a ladder up and unclipped me from the zipline, and then I slowly climbed down it. My legs are always a little wobbly when I finish the course. I ran back to the benches where Ryan and Eli were sitting. Just as I got there, Eli sprinted off to go next on the climbing wall.

"How was it?" Ryan said, even though he knew it was always fun.

"It was great, just like every time, but I do feel like it gets better, because I feel less nervous each time," I said after moving my hair out of my eyes.

Ryan nodded his head. A couple of minutes had passed, and it was Ryan's turn. He got up the climbing wall a lot faster, as he was a more experienced climber.

"That was so fun!" Eli said with a smile on his face, as he had only gone on the zipline one other time. It felt like 30 seconds, and Ryan was already back. Ryan didn't have much expression as he had gone on the zipline many times, but we knew he still enjoyed it. We had all put our gear back in the shack and thanked the counselors. We all started walking to the lodge too tired to run after a good morning. The sun was shining right over Bass Lake as it always does around noon. We got to the lodge and walked over to the mugs of hot chocolate.

"Ok, that was fun, but what should we do next?" I said after taking a sip of the hot chocolate.

"Hmmm," Eli said before being cut off.

"We should go check out the lake to see if it's frozen!" Ryan said.

“Umm, are you sure? I heard the ice was getting very thin,” I nervously responded.

“Oh please, I heard it is almost completely frozen and you can walk on it,” Ryan said in a normal but mischievous voice.

“Eli, do you want to go?” I asked in a defeated way, silently praying he would say he didn’t want to go.

“I don’t really care, but sure why not,” Eli answered in a weird way.

I thought to myself, *“It’s almost like he wanted to go but was trying to keep it a secret. It’s probably nothing,”* as I took my last sip of hot cocoa.

“Okay fine, let’s go, but I need to head back to the cabin first to get my boots and waterproof gloves just in case it gets a bit wet,” I said as I put my mug in the dirty bin and walked out the doors with Eli and Ryan following.

I walked into the cabin and wasn’t really anxious about going to the lake across the hill, but I wasn’t very excited either. I enjoy the cold as I’m from Colorado, but freezing water is the worst feeling on your body. I got my boots on and sat on the side of my bed as I waited for Ryan to put his boots on. Eli was standing by the door all ready to go.

“Come on,” Eli said in an impatient voice. He was looking outside through the window clearly wanting to head out but stood there quietly.

“Hmmm, there we go, let’s go,” Ryan said after struggling to get his gloves on. I got up and walked through the door as Eli was holding it.

“Do we really have to go over there? It isn’t even cold today. How would it be frozen?” I said in an irritated and worried voice.

“I know, I know, it isn’t very cold today, but last night I heard it was below 0. And it was cold enough to freeze the top of the lake and if we don’t go now, it’s going to be too thin and melted to even throw things onto it,” Ryan answered in a very convincing tone.

“Ugh, fine, I will go, but I am telling this to you now that this won’t go well,” I said as I started walking with them.

“Okay, let’s go,” Eli said as he started to skip ahead a bit. We passed the other cabins and the lodge. We sprinted over the hill as it was pretty tall and long. We reached the top, and we all let ourselves fall onto the snowy grass as we were tired after running up the hill.

With a very heavy breath Ryan pointed and said, “Ok let’s take a bit of a rest and then start walking over to the dock.” He then laid his head on the ground looking at the clouds that had covered the sun. I had swum in the lake many times, water skied, and fished, but never have I walked on it or even seen it frozen in a picture or in person.

I had a little feeling that this would be very cool and a once in a lifetime experience to be able to walk on the lake at camp, but most of me had a weird feeling, that I just knew something bad could happen. The other part of me was thinking how I could tell all my camp friends this summer that I had walked across the frozen lake.

The clouds passed by, and I could feel the warmth of the sun on my face and the wind blowing through my hair.

“Wow, I still can’t believe that it is this beautiful,” I said as I admired the blue sky.

“It looks just like summer,” Eli responded.

I could tell he was amazed at how it could be so cold and there could be so many cloudy days and rainy days, but still have these special days when it is so beautiful. Since Eli is from Southern California, he has never experienced snow or anything below 50 degrees except for when he visits family in the Midwest.

“Well, it sure doesn’t feel like it,” Ryan said, trying to make a joke. No one really thought it was funny, but I let out a little giggle so he didn’t feel embarrassed.

“You guys ready to go now we have had a good rest?” Ryan asked.

“Yeah I’m ready, Eli. How about you?” I responded, trying to sound optimistic about going down to the lake.

“Sure,” Eli said as he got up and waved for us to come.

I was getting less and less nervous but still didn’t really want to go, but I thought it would be fine because we would just stay on the dock if it the ice looked thin and

we would be safe. We walked down the hill trying to keep our balance as it was hard to not run down, and we reached the bottom and walked over to the front of the dock.

I grabbed a rock and turned it over in my hand and said, "Okay, let's see if you were right, Ryan." As I threw the rock, I could clearly see a layer of ice, but I did not know how thick or strong it was.

"BOING." The rock completely bounced off and barely made a dent.

"Yeah!" Eli and Ryan said as they were happy the rock bounced straight off.

I was grinning ear to ear as I felt happy and relieved. It was going to be safe, and I may actually be able to walk on it. I saw Ryan start to go to the end of the dock, so I followed. Ryan started to put his foot on the ice and IT WORKED! I heard a tiny creaking sound, but I was too excited to worry. He put his other foot on and started to slide a bit out.

"We should have brought ice skates!" Eli screamed.

"Come on," Ryan said and waved his hand for us to come. I was still a bit hesitant and then walked over and waited as Eli stepped on.

"Woah, look at how thick the ice is," Eli said as he looked down at the ice.

I sat at the end of the dock. My boots were hanging off the side a couple inches away from the ice. I took a deep breath and slid myself off the dock and onto the ice. In my head I felt like the second I touched the ice, I would fall in and the ice would break. I didn't know what to think as I was standing atop the ice. I wanted to do what my friends were doing and not seem boring. Then it hit me, I was actually on the ice, I was walking on the ice. With no fear and no worry I walked over to Ryan and Eli.

"Good call," I said to Ryan, thanking him for convincing me to come.

I have walked on a lake before, almost half my year is winter with snow and the cold. Most of the time it is the middle of winter when it has been below 5 degrees for the past month and I have tested the ice with heavy things and with one of my parents. Today it just didn't feel right. It was a sunny cold day, but not extremely cold, and we really didn't know what to expect.

“Thanks for coming with me, guys, and I am glad we got to experience this together. If you want, we can go back,” Ryan responded, knowing that I was nervous about coming. Even though I had hidden my feelings, good friends know you all too well.

“Oh, it’s fine, we can stay,” I answered, as I was not nervous anymore about being here.

“I’m good to stay as well,” Eli said, adding on to what I said.

I could feel the breeze blowing straight at me as we slid on our feet looking through the ice to see what we could find, but now I did not have any fear or worries. I felt calm and at peace as it was very beautiful walking around and seeing all the frozen plants and life under the ice. We slid around on our bodies and then laid on our backs looking up at the sky. We stayed out there for 5-10 minutes and slid back on our knees.

Back on land I picked up a rock and threw it as hard as I could against the strong ice. It bounced in a low line almost like I was skipping a rock. I felt really good about myself that I did something I was nervous to do. We went back over the hill and saw the whole camp before us. We passed the shack with the balls and then the climbing wall. We finally arrived at our cabin. We took off our heavy snow pants and coats, then our boots and gloves. We were getting into lighter clothes as our late lunch was starting in five minutes.

“Let’s do that again another day!” I said holding the door for Ryan and Eli.

“Sure thing, but not in the summer. HA!” Ryan said, as they walked through the door. We walked to the top of the stairs that led to the lodge and could see a bit of the frozen lake over the big hill. After that day we could never go again, as it got too weak and we would go home soon. But we always had that memory of walking on the lake at camp--a thing few Dark Woods campers have ever done.

Cameron Wisel is in 7th grade at Heilicher Minneapolis Jewish Day School. Cameron likes snow, water skiing, sailing, and football.