

Magic, I Guess

by Matt Fallon

At the twilight of the summer, when the last session has expired in the Monkton woods, when the colors of the trees are still green but the smell of the oranges and yellows itching to come forth are palpable, a magical thing happens at Nature Camps. When the last of the campers have gone home to ready their notebooks for school, when the counselors have hugged hugs of goodbyes, remembrance, and future meetings, when the rusty iron gate at the end of the stone driveway has been locked, Don Webb goes on one final walk.

Many people believe that on Don's walk, he visits the leprechauns down by the stream just shy of the ropes course, as they only come out to talk when peace has blanketed the woods. Others believe that Don scout-proofs the trails, so that those winter adventurers can't redirect our favorite hikes into a swamp and can't hide the swamps we want to visit in the KALOR pavilion. A few even think he may commune with Fred and Clem for a spot of the 'ol moonshine, seeing as it is the only time of year that the three of them have the time for a good chat.

But no. Once everyone has gone, once the dining hall has been shut, the upper bathrooms have been cleaned, the latrine has been covered in lye, and the swings have been put away, Don strolls down behind the maintenance house of the pool. It is down there that the drain has been installed. Beneath a pile of leaves, a plastic plug, the size of a dinner table for four, covers the drain. It has a metal eyeloop, to which Don attaches a bungee cord. He returns to his Bronco (oh yes, he still has his Bronco, despite what you may have heard), and attaches the cord to the trailer hitch. As Don drives out of camp to hibernate for the school year, the cord stretches. It becomes especially taught near the driveway sign that says "slow as unto a turtle" and then... SNAP! The plug is dislodged, and camp begins to swirl down the drain.

The pool goes first, being the closest. The campsite is not far behind. The twisted tree, in all of its twisted glory, is among the last of the sacred spots at camp to scuttle into the drain. Everything is down there in a reservoir of Nature Camps. Pistol Dust is mixed with sassafras root. The falls become a strong brew of tea.

Regardless of all the little details, the point is, Don just pulls the plug, and that's that. How does he get it out again for the next summer? Magic I guess. I've never seen him do it. I just know that it's there, and it's as if it's always been there. But if you try to find camp during the winter, when you're not supposed to be there, you'll be surprised how close Big Falls Road runs to Blue Mount Road. And if you walk that thin tract of woods, look on the ground for a big pile of leaves. Don't step on it though, unless you want to do the upper ropes course. There could be a great big hole the size of a dinner table for four hidden beneath it.

Matt Fallon was at Nature Camps for most of the 1990's. He was a Camper, Teen Adventure Explorer, and on Staff as a Counselor both at Day Camp and leading Teen Adventure trips.

He graduated from NYU in 2002, and currently heads up Business Development in the western US for Lincoln Financial. Matt's hobbies include fixing up his Civil War era Philadelphia rowhouse, reading and writing, playing music, and charitable work for the Philly SPCA.