

Lexy Campbell

Roots

I grew up in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where our claim to fame is our unusually high Amish and Mennonite populations which are featured in many television shows including “Amish Mafia” and “Breaking Amish.” Yet, when I first think of my home, rolling hills lined with corn, a vibrant city, and forests pop into my mind. The Amish do, however, contribute to the picturesque landscape and bountiful harvest we have every fall. One of my favorite things to do is to drive on the windy back roads with my windows down on a crisp fall afternoon. I love the romantic scenery, the freedom, and even the scent of pungent manure streaming in my window. After a long drive through the backcountry, or gunnies as I call it, I stop at an Amish stand on the way home. I then will pick up the sweetest yellow corn and the plumpest, juiciest red tomatoes in the United States proven through my extensive research and bias.

If I want a little more excitement, Lancaster City is the perfect place to go. Lancaster City is one of the most historic inland places in the country. Unknown by most, Lancaster was the capital of the United States for one day when the founding fathers used it as a diversion during the Revolutionary War. With its long running existence, Lancaster City has had hundreds of years to develop into what it is today- a contemporary, growing city. One can find quaint coffee shops, rooftop bars, and locally owned boutiques centered around Lancaster Central Market- the heart of the town. Taking a forty-five-minute drive from Lancaster City to the South takes me to Southern Lancaster, the place that reminds me that Pennsylvania roughly translates to Penn’s Woods. Southern Lancaster is covered in vast woods that are perfect for hiking. When I begin my hike, my heart flutters and my mind spirals in anticipation of my exciting adventure that will

come from the wilderness. No matter how many times I have walked a path the jittery feelings of excitement remain.

Every time I go into nature my surroundings are slightly different a tree could have fallen and created a place to climb or the stream could have flooded providing me a place to swim. Southern Lancaster's woods remind me that my home was once barren to civilization as it is today. However, Lancaster's healthy ecosystem and fertile soil helped it grow to the diverse place it is now. Nature is the roots of Lancaster. The brawny trees softened the soil for agriculture and the agriculture supports the society in my home today.

Trees are the catalyst that transform any environment into a home. A tree, in itself, has its own ecosystem— it provides nutrients for insects, the insects are food for the birds, and the birds build nests on the branches for their young. I grew up observing this phenomenon in my backyard. Like most children, I would sit and swing from the oak tree in my yard, but I also loved investigating the life that lived within it. I would pursue the squirrels up it, poke the ants, and peak into the nests of baby birds. The micro ecosystem that the mighty oak created made my seven-year old imagination run wild.

As an adult, I no longer play under the mighty oak as I did when I was a child. Now, I explore my new home, Atlanta. At first, moving to Atlanta was very intimidating for me. My father warned me upon my arrival that I must be cautious because I am no more than a “little country mouse” in a wild concrete jungle. However, I did not let my fears of the urban ecosystem stop me from exploring. I have investigated Little Five Points and smelled the pungent skunk weed, traversed from Midtown to Krog City Market and seen the cosmopolitan skyline, and even relaxed in breezy Centennial Park.

During my first escapade into Atlanta, I unintentionally hiked from Midtown to Krog City Market. On this three mile trail, I had plenty of time to observe the nature present in this beautiful, intimidating city. I noticed stout pigeons swarming a half eaten sandwich, I admired a tabby cat and her kittens, and I even tripped over a crack formed from a tree root pushing its way through the concrete. After much exploration and thought, I realize that Atlanta has the same sturdy, strong roots in nature that my childhood oak has. Atlanta stemmed and grew from the Earth just as the oak tree did; however, Atlanta was dependent on the collaboration of both humans and nature and could not depend on only nature itself for its growth and survival. Nature provided humans the necessary food, shelter, and raw materials that we needed to progress to our current concrete, structured lifestyle. It is easily forgotten that the infrastructure of our “unnatural” manmade metropolises were built using the same plants that we often mistake for a separate wild and natural entity.

When I left Lancaster, I feared that I would become disconnected from the nature that has been an integral part of my existence. I thought that nature was confined to a limited box: nature exists on farms, in the woods, and in environments where human interactions are limited or nonexistent. Since moving to Atlanta, I have found that this restricted idea is far from the truth. I know now that nature’s roots are the veins that course through every corner on Earth, whether it be a city bustling or a remote location where no humans are present as far as the eye can see. Nature does not have a lesser presence in an urban environment; it only appears different. I know now that no matter where I call home, Atlanta or Lancaster, nature will always be at the forefront of my human experience.