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The Importance of Urban Greenspaces

If you live in a city, surrounded by concrete, it may be easy to forget what it's like to be surrounded by nature. As more Americans move to urban environments, we need to remember the value of parks and gardens, also known as "urban greenspaces." My community and I have benefited from urban greenspaces in various ways. Interfacing with nature via greenspaces is significant to me personally for several reasons. Urban greenspaces are important to me because access to nature benefits children, reduces disparities between communities, and encourages people to care about the environment.

Growing up in a rural area, the majority of my childhood activities were dependent on the parks and forests that were accessible to me. I played soccer in the nearby fields, learned about animals in the closest ponds and creeks, and socialized with other kids at playgrounds and parks. As I grew older, my choice of activities changed but the venue remained the same: outdoors. Playing soccer quickly became playing baseball, while exploring nature at nearby creeks evolved into day-hiking trips at national parks and forests. The parks and greenspaces around me acted as stages for my curiosity, recreation, and socializing. I look back on these now as invaluable experiences that I hope all children and adults can experience, regardless of whether they live in an urban or rural environment.

Subsequently, I was naive to the important role that greenspaces played in my life and development until I relocated to a more urban environment that lacked accessible greenspaces. Having been surrounded by forests, small nature areas, and community parks growing up, I took the benefits of these greenspaces for granted. Fulfilling my desire to interact with nature was a difficult task, as it took time and planning to achieve these outings—so they grew fewer and further between. It was then that I realized the deficit of outdoor recreation I was experiencing

was the norm in many urban communities and that most children don't have the opportunities that I had to experience nature and the benefits of greenspaces. The more that I contemplated this issue, I began to observe and learn about the unequal distribution of greenspaces among communities that oftentimes correlates with wealth. It struck me as wildly unjust that the children in some communities are able to gain an invaluable relationship and understanding of the natural world, while the children on the other side of the city were not able to experience this relationship.

Simply stated, my affection and curiosity toward plants and animals is the most important product of my experiences in nature and greenspaces. My experiences growing up shaped my philosophy as an environmentalist and inspired me to continually learn more about the natural world. In the current state of the world, it is even more important that citizens develop a relationship with nature and an opinion about environmental issues. Many aspects of the natural world are currently threatened by human activities, and most people's response to the environmental degradation is not proportional to the amount of damage being done to the natural world. If every person were given the opportunity to develop a meaningful relationship with nature like I did, there would likely be more widespread concern about the environmental degradation taking place. I believe the health and welfare of urban communities depends on city planners making sure that urban greenspaces are available and accessible to everyone. While there are many challenges in developing greenspaces in urban areas, the first step is giving people space to interact with the natural world.

In summary, I have benefited from greenspaces in many ways throughout my life. Experiencing nature helped me grow physically and emotionally as a child and continues to provide a meditative environment for me as an adult. While greenspaces were stages for many

important aspects of my childhood, they are virtually lacking from many children's lives. When children do not have access to greenspaces, they can't develop a relationship with the natural world. Providing more urban greenspaces could change this. If we want urban children to spend time outdoors and understand the value of connecting with the natural world, they need parks and gardens in their neighborhoods. This topic is important to me because I believe that every person should have the opportunity to benefit from greenspaces in the way that I did.



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