

Leave No Trace... Or Less.

Ever since I could walk, I've loved being outside. I am not exactly sure if that love sprouted from constantly running (or fast-tottering when I was little) around my backyard in Maryland or from my very crunchy, progressive elementary school's emphasis on the important of nature and the outdoors, but either way, I am ever grateful for my love for it.

Growing up, I was actively engaged in nature in a variety of ways. At the aforementioned elementary school, Green Acres, we all celebrated Earth Day by singing Pete Seeger's "Inch by Inch, Row by Row" – pretty much the anthem of my childhood –, tending the school's gardens, and learning about the different biomes on our campus. I loved this day every year, as I was able to actively engage in the picking and planting processes, and it has inspired me to still celebrate Earth Day every year. I took my Earth Day appreciation one step further as a camper at Songadeewin of Keewaydin, a hard-core/survivalist canoe camp in Vermont.

I attended Songa for six years and every year, starting at the age of eight, I went on an overnight canoe trip. These trips started as three-day trips to lakes nearby camp (Green Lake) and culminated in a ten-day, white-water canoe trip in Canada (Lake Temagami). There is no better way to appreciate nature than to have it as your only resource. Every day on my canoe trips we would get up as the sun rose – sometimes before –, paddle ten or more miles, portaging – carrying the canoe in way where the yoke of the canoe is around the back of your neck while walking the portage trail – when necessary, until we arrived at our next campsite. On these trips, we only had access to the food we were able to carry, the fires we learned how to make, and a waterproof map. These days were some of the best of my life.

Here's me, mid five-day-trip to Tupper Lake in 2015:



Songa preaches and practices the motto of “Leave No Trace” (LNT). While my trip-mates and I were on each of our trips, we were responsible for making sure that when we left a campsite it was cleaner than we found it, that there were no food scraps near the fire we used to make dinner, no stakes in the ground from the tents we pitched, and that we had all of our belongings. This practice, to me, represents how much we should care for our environment. Leaving No Trace embodies what it means to respect nature because of how much nature provides for us (shelter, fire, water – the list goes on and on).

While I am no longer a Songa camper, I hold the LNT philosophy close to my heart. What does it mean to Leave No Trace as a modern-day consumer? I believe this question is central to what it means to be sustainable. It seems almost impossible when everything leaves a carbon footprint: the clothes you buy, the food you eat, the textbooks you learn from, all have a carbon footprint in production, shipment, and consumption. Modern-day sustainability, is perhaps, then, the practice of “Leave Less of a Trace”.

In my house, we do what we can to “Leave Less of a Trace”. This mainly revolves around my Dad and his garden. The first thing you should know is that my Dad is an incredible chef, specializing in creating dishes that not only taste magical but also make you smile. Not to mention, he *will* convert you into a brussels sprouts lover.



(I mean... C'mon...)

In the same vein, my Dad loves experimenting with seasoning. He is always mixing up his marinades from homemade Teriyaki to mustard, garlic, and lime to spicy cumin and turmeric; the kitchen is his spice laboratory. To supplement his various tests and trials in a sustainable fashion, my Dad decided to grow an herb garden. In it, he grows mostly Basil, Thyme, Parsley,

Coriander, and Rosemary. Occasionally, he will grow small peppers or tomatoes in his garden or something else more adventurous, but for the most part, he sticks to growing the fundamental herbs he uses in all of his recipes.



Without this garden, all the herbs my family purchases definitely leave a trace. They come in small plastic packages, having been mass produced and transported across state lines. My Dad's garden uses locally sourced soil, water from our house, and seeds purchased from a local plant nursery. While it is not a perfect LNT system, his garden certainly leaves far less of one. The benefit of this garden and the sustainability of it also lies in the happiness it brings my Dad and the rest of my family. Seeing my Dad's face after he grows a beautiful bushel of herbs from just a few seeds is priceless and the taste of them in his cooking (I may argue) is even better. As he says, "I feel so rich from my garden even though it's so simple because of how flavorful it makes my food." Our whole family loves and cherishes this garden, as it lets us contribute, albeit in a small way, to more sustainable, delicious eating practices.

Overall, my Dad's dedication to this garden is reflective of the "slow-burn" of sustainability and a deep care for the environment. It is this patience and care, tending to each plant multiple times a day, that is emblematic of his respect for the environment and investment in the quality of the end-product – both of which are integral to sustainable practices.

More broadly, the notion of Leave Less of a Trace can be applied to any industry. It can function in the agricultural industry, as mass-produced, corn-fed meats are a large contributor to carbon pollution and slowing the production of this meat could greatly help the environment. It can function in the fashion industry, as boycotting companies that outsource to foreign countries and mass-produce like crazy, and, instead, supporting "slow-fashion" by purchasing clothes either second-hand or from a company that has more sustainable practices could greatly help the environment. Whatever the scale, it is the notion of "less" that is important. "Less" may just be the key to sustainability.