Joy Cipoletti Memorial Hike

Good grief it’s hot. The sun is pounding down on my head, settling on my shoulders and sneaking pounds into my pack. Part of the reason I came on this hike was to get away from the heat. Yet, every hike must start somewhere, and ours starts in the foothills overlooking the San Luis Valley and the Great Sand Dunes National Park. At least the view is pretty. We are almost floating above the valley below. The wildflowers are out, and I am surprised to see so many this early in the hike.

Our group is beginning the climbing to the valley below Ellingwood. It promises to be beautiful, challenging, reflective, and yes- hot. At least for a while. We are here hiking to remember a friend who touched all our lives at different points. I try to remember the first time I met Joy. I’m pretty sure it was during a backcountry ski class. I know that many of the experiences I shared with her involved skiing. She had just begun to learn, and it was not easy for her. I admired her determination and her positive attitude. We skied with one another for the next couple of years, and I know one of the last trips I spent with her was attending instructor training for our backcountry ski class. By then she was instructing as well. She was amazing. I loved going on trips with her since I knew she would be prepared. She was someone I could depend on, the kind of person you want to experience the outdoors with.

The hike was tough but beautiful. Somewhere along the way I forgot about the sun, the climb, and even my sorrow. I love doing this. Joy loved doing this. The sweating, the challenge, the views, the beauty, the sound, and the smell. The way the world changes around you as you climb. When I stopped to take a picture, I could almost imagine Joy doing the same thing right behind me. She would have loved the strawberries that we found.

That evening we sat and watched the ripples along the surface of the lake disrupt the perfect reflection of Mt. Ellingwood. The familiar sounds of mosquitoes, falling water, and other hikers blended into a peaceful and familiar soft white noise. It was mesmerizing, relaxing; like watching and listening to a campfire. The thunderstorms passed for the moment, and the weather was perfect. Clear and calm and achingly beautiful. Then suddenly, the lake’s reflection came into almost perfect focus, and I nearly cried. I missed my friend, but she would have loved this spot. She would have reveled in the beauty and the moment. As I stared at the mountain on the water, I just tried to remember her joy. I was glad we came to sit with her a while.

Laneha Everett