

MJ Lake O'Hara 2022 Adventures
By Vesna Hozjan, OKM Parent

In the Spring of 2022, MJ comes home and tells me he is signing up for the OKM Grad Class tradition of attending a five-night overnight camping hiking adventure at Lake O'Hara. Sometimes that kid really knows how to surprise me. I am delighted, as these are adventures I have done in a previous lifetime, and I know how they make the most special memories. I swiftly enter him in the draw and apply to be a chaperone. Hope we are both selected...we are!

We gather as a group for our first practice hike: two other parents, seven young adults, plus MJ and I - it is a good day. The Spring weather is welcoming, and we have a few of the family dogs join us as well. It's not often I get to see MJ with his peers and settled into a relaxed stride knowing that he has built relationships within his community. They welcome him as one of their own. Through the summer, we methodically tackle longer and harder hikes as a group. It's a pace MJ can keep up with encouragement from his friends. A 14km day is another welcome surprise. We gradually bond as a group, it's a beautiful experience.

Although MJ was zero help in packing (arguably a distraction), he makes up for it with his enthusiasm. As we leave on departure day, literally going through the front door, he is asking about menu changes. I usher him into the vehicle, and we make it to the school in record time at the early hour of 5:45am.

He is nervous I can tell - and again not the most help around the site - but takes on the role of chief enthusiast. MJ marvels that all his school acquaintances are "living" just a few dozen feet away through the Lake Louise campsite for the next five days. He roams free!

It's an adjustment for him to navigate a new routine, he needs lots of support with the simple things that he has mostly mastered at home. That surprises me a bit too. I am grateful to be there to be that person and try not to wonder too much what that means when he graduates from school, and the support he receives there disappears.

Our group continues to bond and sincerely ask if I need help when MJ vomits (nerves?) later that night. Truly a testament to those kids and something I will never forget. No, I didn't take them up on the offer



Next morning, we embark on our hardest hiking day, Fairview trail, about 14 kms. MJ still looks a little green, but we load up with Pepto Bismol and he seems to settle. He is so determined!! Our crew continues to check in on him and circle back too. We are making memories. The rest of week continues with the little everyday challenges (expected) but the overriding sentiment is MJ has had an incredible opportunity to be with his peers in a natural setting - not in the traditional meaning of natural but rather spontaneous and inclusive. As a parent to witness this (mostly at arm's length) was an incredible gift I will hold close to my heart.

Thank you, students, of OKM grad class that attended Lake O'Hara trip and showed MJ your friendship and kindness. Special thanks to: Ryann, Jess, Abbie, Ashlee, Gwen, Tyson, Gabriella & Jim.

