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## Reflections on the Hudson: A Duality of Place

As the sun dips below the horizon, casting the golden hue across the Hudson River, the Haverstraw Bay Park transforms into a sanctuary. The echoes of laughter ripple through the air as all the friends gather, feeling the space with the warmth of the shared moments that will turn into forever memories. The sound of the river flowing nearby becomes a familiar backdrop as it weaves through conversations that flow like the current. Time seems to stand still here, creating an escape from the chaos of school, family, and work. This park wasn't just an ordinary park; it was a crucial part of my high school years, and it holds a duality that reflects the complexity of growing up with an intersection of personal freedom and civic responsibility.



Sunset over the Hudson, Haverstraw Bay park. Source: Fine American Park

In those twilight hours, the park was more than just a place. It was a canvas that would later turn into memories from our youth. My friends and I would sit on the weathered benches and lean against the sturdy trunks of trees, lost in conversations. We talked about our dreams, secrets, and weekly gossip as our voices mingled with the rustling leaves and the gentle laughter of water against the shore. Each weekend night spent there was a tribute to our friendship and an oasis admitting the storms of adolescence. These moments, like the sunset, are not just recollections; they were formative experiences that shaped how we understood our friendship and our place in the world.

We would even sometimes create little rituals, like bringing snacks to share or picking a favorite spot by the water to watch the boats go by. Though the sunset signaled the day's end, our conversations often stretched late into the night. The park stood as a monument to our friendship and a testament to the bond we would remember in our formative years.

However, the parks shifted dramatically as the sun rose on the next day. The carefree nights of laughter and friendships were replaced by solemn responsibility. Over the years, I have

participated in many community service events that have transformed my understanding of this place. Programs like “Keep Rockland Beautiful” turned my evenings of escape into days of stewardship: picking up trash, planting trees, and ensuring the park remained welcoming for everyone.



Keep Rockland Beautiful Haverstraw Bay park. Source: Rockland Daily

Through these experiences, I learned that the park was not just a backdrop for my memory throughout high school; it was a shared responsibility and a space that demanded our care and attention. I still remember the first time I joined a cleanup crew through one of the clubs at my high school. Even though I felt hesitant, I was still excited to contribute. Armed with gloves and trash bags, we roam the park, picking up accumulated litter over time. As time passed, I began to see the park from a different perspective, not just as a playground that helped shave my youth but as a vital community resource that required our stewardship

This contrast between my nighttime sanctuary and my daytime obligations was highly evident. It showed the dual nature of the park as both a place for personal freedom as well as a site for community duty. While I enjoyed carefree evenings full of laughter, the daytime reminded me of the park's greater purpose, nurturing it as a place for everyone. Even when my friends and I gathered in the sunset's soft glow, we revealed our freedom and connection. However, during the day, the park became a site of labor and reflection. I also often participated in cancer walks that turned the park into a place of remembrance and solidarity.



Rides and Strides Cancer Walk October 22, 2023

These events carried an emotional weight that reshaped my relationship with this park. The air was filled with purpose as we walked together, honoring the loved ones and celebrating the

survivors, all for a good cause. Within the trees and pathways, I confronted the realness of illness and loss, learning the importance of collective effort and community spirit. The story is shared during these walks, necessary reminders of our shared humanity weaving together the narratives of countless individuals who would walk in these paths before us. The same duality of this park as its role as both a personal refuge and a public space has left such an essential mark on my identity. It is where the boundaries between individuals and collective experiences come together, creating a tapestry of memories that encompass both the lightness and youth and the weight of civic responsibility. This space has taught me that seemingly contradicting experiences are not mutually exclusive. Instead, they coexist in a delicate balance that redefines interactions in the spaces in which we spend our time.

As I reflect on my high school years, I see that the park emergency is the symbol of home, as well as complex, contradictory, and deeply intertwined with my journey. It represents the quiet and fun moments of friendship alongside a louder call to community action and embodies what it truly means to grow up. The park serves as a reminder that our identities are shaped not only by private experiences but also by how we engage with the world around us.



Typical Day at Haverstraw Bay Park

Haverstraw Bay Park, with its giant trees and winding path, stands as a testament to the beauty of coexistence. It invites both celebration and contemplation, allowing moments of personal freedom and collective responsibility to flourish side by side. Its interplay of light and shadow mirrors the complexity of life itself: joy, sorrow, laughter, and reflection. Each visit has added a layer to my understanding of what it means to belong, care for, and share the space with others.

One pivotal moment during my summer evening that I recall was when my friends and I organized a small gathering to watch fireworks over the river. . Excitement filled the air as we spread blankets and unpacked snacks.



Fireworks Haverstraw Bay park. Source: Rockland Daily

As the first fireworks exploded in the dazzling display, I felt a sense of unity not just among my friends but everyone else in the park. Strangers shared a smile, and gas highlighted how the space brought us together in a shared experience of joy and wonder.

I now recognize how Haverstraw Bay Park was never just a backdrop, it was a living breathing part of my story. It held the laughter of my friends as well as the weight of community effort and the quiet moments of personal growth that aren't easily defined. It was there along the Hudson's edge, that I learned how places just like people can demand attention and care while offering peace in return.



Haverstraw Bay park at dusk. Source: Rockland Daily

The park's paths and shores carry the echoes of our late night conversations, but they also bear witness to the work of hands tending to what is shared. This duality is woven into the fabric of my high school journey and has shaped my understanding of what it means to belong to a place and to be both a keeper of memories as well as a steward of a place. Each visit left its mark, not as a simple recollection but as a reminder of the balance between freedom and responsibility..

Even now, after my high school years, I find myself returning to this place not physically, but just in thought. The park remains with me not as a memory but as an ongoing presence, a symbol of what it means to inhabit a world that asks for joy and care. It reminds me that the space we hold dear is not static, and it grows with us as much as a part of our journey as the people we share it with. The lessons I learned here about laughter, labor, and connection continue to shape how I see the world long after the sun sets over the Hudson.

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