

# My Story



## Wild and Wonderful

Pennypack Park on the Delaware

By Sheryl Young, Park User

*“I can access three entrances to the park from my house, and have walked the entire width of the city. My son has grown up with the best playground there is.”*

My journey to Pennypack Park has spanned a lifetime. I was born in the Northeast at Nazareth Hospital, and while my older brothers recall going to the fish hatchery off Linden Avenue, I was still a babe when we moved, several times, out and away from the city. Eventually I was raised in Chester County.

Now I am back, living in a duplex a half mile from where I was born, a single mom with a dog and a teaching job. Rhawnhurst is a far cry from Chester County's bucolic scenery. Thankfully, I have access to Pennypack Park, the jewel of the Northeast.

I can access three entrances to the park on foot from my house, and I have walked the entire width of the city, from Pine Road to the Delaware, on both the paved and dirt trails. There I have seen hidden sculptures and the police horse stables; I've followed deer trails



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to secret knolls and have been lost in the twisty brambles, now turned into acres of meadow off Veree. There my family and I have bushwhacked, bicycled, and created creek ball; there we have danced at the music fest and collected fallen leaves and seed pods. My

son has grown up with the best playground there is.

I am a person who likes to go off trail, when possible. So when Pennypack on the Delaware opened, my brother and I immediately explored the gated area to the north. There we had to wade through tall grasses to access the riverside trail, and it was on that trail that I experienced my first double rainbow, my first sighting of eagles, and my first glimpse of the mouth of the Pennypack Creek. I especially like the

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mudflats and lilies at low tide. The trail was curious to me. It was well-worn. But who had been walking there? Wasn't this part of the prison grounds? It made me realize that our



city has wilderness everywhere, and where it is, people will find it. We need it. That northern part is now civilized, with a paved pathway ending at the creek, waiting for its bridge (which I hope will be built soon).

So now we typically wade through other tall grasses to access the riverside at the southern end. There I have seen beavers, Honey Locust trees with three-inch long spikes, the remains of someone's crude hut, and debris washed up on the rocky shore. Entire trees have washed up, and for years my brother and I recorded the plant life growing on an exposed root ball. Whenever I go, I collect the debris--small bits of curlicue metal, smooth ceramic, glass, stone--for a mosaic birdhouse which will then go back to a tree by the river.

I have seen the tide change so drastically it covers a three-foot tall rock (dubbed by us "the seal rock" for its shape); I have seen lumbering barges, swift sailboats, and serious police boats. I have seen shooting stars and fish leaping from the water. From that vantage point, I await every year the Riverside, New Jersey homeowner who celebrates the Christmas season by lighting an enormous tree on the river. This is a gift for all everyone on the river.

The greater part of the park, where most people go, is beautiful. There is flat green grass with a winding trail, trees, a gazebo, and an old pier where people go to fish. People play soccer in the fields and picnic at the gazebo. They walk their dogs or sit on the

benches facing the river. There is always a breeze, and when my son and I went to see *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, it was gloriously cool and bug-free. Once during a clean-up with the Friends of Pennypack Park, I found a rock painted with someone's confession, "I have lived a lie." A somber note. People are called to nature for healing, health, a respite from our busy lives. I hope that person found some peace in this offering to nature, its pained message perhaps eased in the waters of time.

When my friends from England visited last summer, I drove them through Fairmount Park. "Marvelous," they said. I bragged that Philadelphia boasts the largest landscaped urban park in the world. But I wish I could have shown them the Pennypack. Of course, the Pope did land there when he came to visit the prison, so they could glimpse some small part of it. But that small slice on TV did it no justice. My love and allegiance have slowly switched from Chester County's Brandywine Valley to the wild and wonderful Pennypack Park.

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