

My Story



Connections

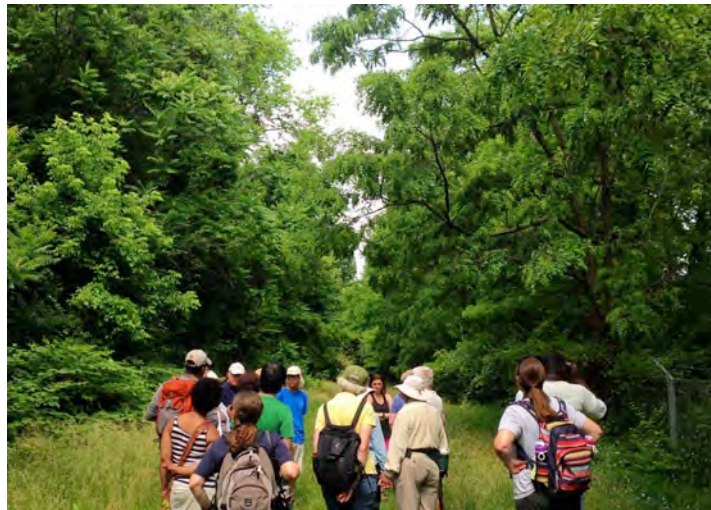
Fairmount Park

By Nicole Taylor and Ambrose Crenshaw

"We love the opportunity to live in an urban setting while still having plenty of opportunities to be in nature."

We are happy to call Philadelphia home, mostly because we love the opportunity to live in an urban setting while still having plenty of opportunities to be in nature. Individually, we each had a love of being in the woods, but that love deepened once we started dating and ultimately got married in the Wissahickon at Valley Green Inn.

Nicole: When I moved to Philadelphia in 2008, I kept hearing about the beauty of running on Forbidden Drive. I figured it was a secret hideaway for runners. Finally, a friend took me on a walk there and could not believe that within city limits there was a forest to wander around, so many different kinds of trees to appreciate, water to sit by and enjoy, and endless trails to meander along. Whenever I could get someone to come with me, I'd take a walk in the Wissahickon, and those walks



Keystone Fund Investment: \$675,000
Local Funds Leveraged: \$1.3 million
Funded: Renovation and development of pedestrian paths, lighting, ADA access



brought me instant happiness. I noticed I felt de-stressed, more relaxed, centered in myself, and in tune with nature.

Looking for more of the same when friends weren't around to hike, I found the Fairmount Park Conservancy (FPC) and started going on guided hikes. I was so grateful to

find an organization whose mission is to champion Philadelphia's parks. Through the Conservancy, I got familiar with Boxer's Trail, East Park Reservoir, the Horticultural Center, Centennial Lake, and Pavilion in the Trees, to mention a few. It was like a whole new world opened up, even closer to the neighborhood in which I lived. I met so many people who also had a love of being in nature.

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I was fortunate to be able to partner with the FPC by volunteering to offer my services as a meditation teacher. Luke Rhodes led the hikes and I led the meditation. It was such a gift to be able to pair two activities that are great ways to practice self-care.

When Ambrose and I met, it was such a joy to find out how much he liked being in nature. He started to join the hikes and together we found new areas of Fairmount Park to explore. Now, for meditation hikes, he leads the hike portion. It has been great to collaborate with him in that project and also in life (we recently got married at Valley Green Inn). For us, the parks continue to be a source of rejuvenation: a way for us to connect with nature, and with each other.

Ambrose: As a child growing up in suburban Philadelphia, my mother would take me on long walks down Forbidden Drive and up into the surrounding hills. As I grew into my lazy yet rebellious teens, I lost touch with it for a while. The disconnect continued through college as, like many others, my attention and free time shifted to athletics and girls (a frustrating combo). At the time I only saw the parks as a means to those ends.

After graduation, with newfound money, freedom, and focus, I started to rediscover a deeper connection to the outdoors through mountain biking, roller blading, and grass volleyball. Even though I was technically outside and in the parks, my relationship to it was utilitarian. I found places to engage in athletic obsessions where my focus was really on the competition and challenge at hand. As I settled into my 30s, I yearned for adventure and exploring new things. That yearning sent me all over the country in search of beauty, excitement

and connection. I found beauty hiking The Cascades in the Pacific Northwest and excitement exploring the Presidentials and Mount Desert Island in the northeast. To my surprise, in all their diversity and grandeur, a true sense of connection remained elusive – until I came home.

Still seeking connection, I re-found the trails and woods of my youth in the Wissahickon and across Fairmount Park and quickly realized that the elements of beauty I chased were right here all along. I found the equivalent of alpine meadows, meandering rivers, dense evergreen forests, tranquil pools, and humbling rock formations right in my backyard – only at scale. Most importantly, though, were the relationships forged in that rediscovery. I began my new local expeditions with Nicole, and together we shared our journey through the park, discovering more about ourselves and each other. I joined Nicole in leading the FPC meditation hikes. Forbidden Drive became the place where she got to know my family and I got to know some of her friends. Now, every mansion we pass, every bridge we cross, and every rock where we rest serve as landmarks in our journey of life together. The parks have become the place where I finally found the trifecta I so desperately sought: beauty, excitement, and now, connection.

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