

Rafting on the Shenandoah River

Lauren

Whoosh! The raft splashed over a large rock, and then lurched sideways.

“Watch out!” Sammy cried as Lily fell overboard. I grabbed onto the raft and Lily’s dad reached out to help Lily on board.

My dad and I were rafting on the Shenandoah River for the first time in my life, with Lily, her brother Sammy, and her parents.

Lily had scraped her toe, and her mom got out a band-aid to put on the scrape. As we passed over the rest of the rapids, Lily dried off her foot and picked up her oar again. Reaching calmer water, we paddled harder, sending the raft going one way and then the other as both sides of the raft competed with each other. Sunlight played on our faces and I sighed in gratitude as a cool breeze floated by. The water sparkled as our raft slid through it, sending agitated fish darting everywhere.

As we approached a fallen tree, Lily pointed out a dark shape on it.

“Hey, look, it’s a turtle!” she shouted, and we quickly stopped rowing to look for the turtle.

“I’m going to catch it!” Lily’s dad announced, standing up and tipping the raft slightly sideways. But the dark green turtle had seen us, and it tumbled quickly from the log into the clear water, scattering the tiny audience of fish. However, Lily’s dad saw another turtle on the log. It was a lot smaller and looked like a baby turtle. As Lily’s dad grabbed for it, the baby turtle followed the bigger one into the water. We drifted back and forth around the log, waiting for one of the turtles to emerge to breathe. I watched the water closely, hoping to see the baby turtle come up. Suddenly, the water splashed, and out it came! Seeing us, it tried to dive back into the water, but Lily’s dad caught it in his hand and held it out for us to look at. The little green turtle had green spots on its head and an orange underbelly. The shell was as green as a stalk of seaweed. Its head, legs, and tail were tucked into the shell, but after a few minutes, the tip of a head poked out. *I wonder what the turtle feels like*, I thought as I watched it crane its neck to carefully look at us, one by one. Lily picked up the turtle and looked at it closely, then offered it to me. I held the turtle carefully, trying not to squeeze too hard or drop it. Soon, the turtle’s legs and tail popped out of the shell, and the turtle wriggled back and forth, its tiny claws tickling my hand. I offered the turtle to Sammy, but he was scared of turtles and shook his head fearfully. Finally, after a few minutes of persuasion from Lily and me, Sammy quickly picked up the turtle, dumped it back into the water, and then we continued on our way.

We paddled down the peaceful and quiet river whose tranquility was interrupted only by the sound of rapids and birds behind us. All of a sudden, a loud *Toot-Toot* surprised us.

“What’s that?” Sammy exclaimed.

“That’s the train coming!” Lily replied. The train tooted its horn again as it rumbled on the railroad tracks along the riverside. We paused to watch it pass over a concrete tunnel.

“Isn’t that the tunnel that the guide told us to look out for?” I asked Lily.

“I think so,” she replied, watching the rectangular cargo containers clatter by.

“I think this tunnel is supposed to be the five-mile point,” my dad told us.

“Wow! That means that we’re nearly through!” Sammy exclaimed. Fully motivated, we picked up our oars and began paddling with a new vigor.

An hour of paddling later, I wiped sweat off my forehead as we stopped for another break, “Whew! Paddling really wears you out,” Sammy declared. I rested my sore arms and lay down my paddle. The tiny fish that were usually darting around quickly were moving more and more sluggishly. Suddenly, Lily’s mom pointed ahead.

“Look! It’s the bridge! That means we’re getting really close to the end,” she exclaimed. I grabbed my paddle, Sammy grabbed his paddle, and we began to send the raft forwards again, racing the little orange and silver fishes. Within minutes, our raft finally neared the landing dock. We all cheered and together sent the raft speeding toward it. Finally, we stopped the raft, and got out to drag it onshore.

As I stepped onto the gravel, my feet sopping wet from walking through the water, I felt very tired, yet ecstatic.

"That was so fun! I can't wait to go rafting again!" Sammy exclaimed. Everyone agreed that it had been a very fun and memorable trip.

