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On Lake Placid

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About the Contributor

Grayden Schafer is a senior English major. Grayden is a senior who has enjoyed a variety of activities at Cedarville and, as his piece shows, he enjoys travel as well.

On Lake Placid

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I can tell that the town is old merely from the smell. It is that old, familiar scent of weathered wood. The smell of long, hot summers and frigid, devastating winters seems to emanate off of the oak and birch buildings like steam rising off the nearby lake. And yet, there is a sense of dignity in that smell. It says that these buildings have seen the years pass and still survive. They still stand, a testimony to the respectable, durable quality of the town.

Lake Placid is certainly respectable and has proven its durability by surviving two Olympic gold rushes. It sits nestled high in the Adirondack Mountains, one of the few areas of New York where skyscrapers cannot be seen and the rough feel of grime does not invade. This breaks the mold of New York State. Travelers too often think only of NYC and do not recognize the farms, mountains, and rustic places that dot the state's landscape. Lake Placid proves that not all areas have been "citified," not all land has been industrialized. The town has hosted the Olympics twice, in 1939 and 1980. It has been, and continues to remain, the destination of countless legions of nature lovers, hikers, ice skaters, and outdoor enthusiasts. It is, in essence, the quintessential resort paradise—clean, pure, and invigorating.

Yet, this outdoor destination is not without certain mysteries. There are certain things about the

town that seem too perfect, too quaint for me. For one thing, the town has not grown. It remains curiously tiny: a simple Main Street flanked by dime bookstores and Mom and Pop grocery stands. Sure, there is the occasional intrusion of a Howard Johnsons or a Kroger, but the town basically remains true to its simple, rustic roots. Perhaps this simplicity explains my attraction to it. I enjoy life when it is uncluttered and uncommercialized, free from garishness and glitz. There will never be a Wal-Mart at Lake Placid; no McDonalds will invade its territory. The aesthetic value of the town would simply be destroyed.

Lake Placid life unfolds in this same, uncomplicated spirit. Days seem to luxuriously unravel, the sun takes its time to run its course, time travels at a different speed. The morning begins at dawn; folks rise with the robins and songbirds. Breakfast has already been cleared and children are already swimming by 8:30. Perhaps the lack of sound is the most apparent oddity of a stereotypical Lake Placid morning. It is quiet—pleasantly quiet, no frantic horns, no angry shouts, no traffic jams clogging Main Street. People instead walk to work, usually just a matter of a few blocks. The few cars that do pass on the road are driven with infinite care. There is no speed limit in Lake Placid, but it is uncommon for a car to go over thirty in the town proper. I have found that watches and speedometers hold little power at Lake Placid, it doesn't matter where you're

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going, when you get there, or how quickly it takes you to arrive. Here, time unfolds at a leisurely rate. It refuses to become a slave to hurried schedules and crowded day-planners.

Afternoon and evenings proceed at the same languid, peaceful pace. The only sounds usually heard are the splashes of swimmers, the chimes of the bells at City Hall, the scuffs of skates inside the air-conditioned ice rink. This overall tranquility reduces tension; it soothes like a massage of the temples, gentle, consistent, calming. It is an atmosphere that paradoxically forces me to relax. I do not run at Lake Placid; I stroll. I do not take the dog for a walk; I take a hike up a mountain. I do not breathe cautiously through my nose; I drink in the air with large gulps through my mouth. My shoulders droop, my nerves unwind, my smile broadens. The town has the mysterious ability to make me forget my problems; I simply surrender to its surrounding, intoxicating charms.

However, several questions bother me about this idyllic place. This summer retreat seems inhabited by the same people every time I visit. It's one thing to see the same people every day in a small town. It is something else to recognize familiar faces summer after summer on vacation. "Hey Mom, isn't that the same dog walker we saw last year?" "Man, that attendant looked so familiar!" "Hey, I know that girl—she was the organist at that Methodist church we went to two summers ago!"

People do not seem to leave Lake Placid. Its inhabitants seem content to spend their time sitting in

the same place, doing the same thing, day in and day out. I cannot fault them for their desire to remain here, the attraction is obvious. However, I question their widespread lack of ambition. Don't these people have any plans? Any hopes or aspirations? Where do they go on vacation? Do they even feel the need for a vacation?

These people are to me the key to the Lake Placid's most central puzzlement. The town is my personal vacation getaway—a place to escape, kick back, relax. I have never considered permanently residing there. However, Lake Placid and its people are never far from my mind. Maybe I'm missing out. Maybe the secret to life lies in this quiet village with these people. The ultimate purpose in life might not lie in getting another elusive buck or finding the perfect occupation. My niche might instead be found in the groove of the comfortable lawn chair carelessly situated outside that simple five-and-dime. It might lie in simple pleasures—smelling the old wood, watching the kids swim, and driving under thirty.

The truth is, I probably will never know. There is a definite distinction in my mind between an Adirondeck resort and a mailbox and permanent address. I am content to remain an annual tourist; that way the town will never lose its freshness or charm. So, once a year, I'll smile at the organist, laugh at the kids splashing in the water, and enjoy the therapeutic massage given by the town's atmosphere. But most of all, I'll continue to respect Lake Placid for what it is; a dignified wonder where your only obligation is to have no cares at all.