

Glacier's Beautiful Nature

By Emmy Newhouse

"Wow mom, a cow!" my littlest, Jackson shouts from the backseat. We named him after Jackson Glacier. It's one of the last glaciers, if you can even call it that anymore, in Glacier National Park today. I remember the annual summer trips I would take with my family as a kid. My favorite part was always driving up to the overlook and using my dad's binoculars to study the Glacier. I was fascinated by the way it covered the mountain like a fresh sheet on a bed. Little did I know that while I was standing there, admiring it, it was dying. Little did I know that driving up to see the glacier was also burning it alive. Little did I know that it would almost be gone by the time I was taking my kids on annual trips to the park. Many things are different now than they were back then, like the cows. "Yes honey," I reply, "that is a cow. When mommy was little there were so many cows you couldn't drive anywhere without seeing hundreds." I leave out the fact that these swarms of cows were destructive, causing the mass future tragedies that our generations were left to clean up. "Hundreds?!" he inquired excitedly. A few decades ago the government put limits on the cow and agricultural industry, so this sighting of a cow is rare. People had to find other ways to make money, most starting growing sustainable gardens or building solar and wind farms. Now kids are more used to seeing solar panels lined up like ants in a line than cows flooding the fields that surround them. There have been many new policies implemented by the government regarding the climate crisis. They finally woke up and took action after a huge wildfire, the biggest Montana had seen, devoured the state. The effects were catastrophic, entire cities shut down and tens of thousands of people were required to relocate. Some beautiful forests, ones that were once lively, luscious and green, are now nothing but bare, charred, black plots of land. I am glad that the government finally started taking action because who knows what Montana would look like if they hadn't. Our family gets all of our food from local vendors and even grows some produce in our backyard. Jackson loves to help out with the garden, and I make sure to remind him that choices like this are what is saving our planet. I'm not sure he fully understands but I am glad to be raising a kid that appreciates the captivating place we call home.

When we arrive at Glacier National Park we pull into the parking lot to switch modes of transportation, regular cars are no longer allowed beyond this point. Today, we choose bikes to ride and explore on. As we are biking around the park I note the abundance of wildlife. Instead of swarms of cows, there are crowds of mountain goats, elk, and moose. But now, sightings of bears are rarer than ever. Not because there are so few left, but because their habitat and land is blocked off from all civilians. Park Rangers have predicted that their numbers are nearing 2000, which is vastly different from the 1000 bears that lived here just 50 years ago.

We bike up Going to the Sun Road and around the rest of the park until our legs are jelly and the sun is just barely peeking up over the horizon. Setting up camp, I think about all of the adventures that will take place tomorrow and all the sights that have yet to be seen.

The warm sun glows through the tent walls in the morning. We all practically inhale our breakfast and hop right back onto our bicycles to continue the adventure. Our first stop is the Jackson Glacier Lookout. Looking over to Blackfoot glacier, it looks smaller. It may not be from the last time we visited but compared to what I used to observe when I was Jackson's age, almost half of it is gone. Meanwhile, most of Jackson Glacier is gone, melted, simply a part of the water cycle now. Looking at my little Jackson, I am mournful that he will never get to know the Jackson Glacier that I did. Every time we ride here, without fail, I shed a tear. A tear for the land that was lost, the beauty that

was lost, the Montana that was lost. But also a tear of happiness, a tear of gratitude. I am thankful that we finally took action. We saved our home, because we needed to.