There is a certain feeling one gets when entering a park to camp. Through the gates and you're a world away. No outside distractions provide ample undivided attention for sharing fish stories with the boys before they head off to write their own whale tales.

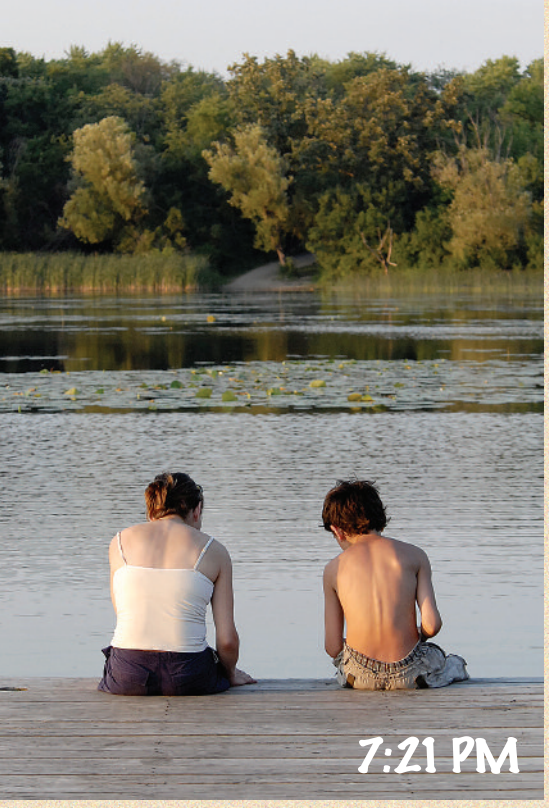
24 Hours in a Park

Join an Illinois photojournalist and her family on an overnight at Chain O'Lakes State Park. With hundreds of parks to choose from, a similar experience is just down the road for your family.

Story and Photos
By Ronilyn Mussared

Life gets busy. Really busy. Before you know it, summer's half over and you've yet to take some time to get away. Take 24 hours out of that busy life and spend it at an Illinois state park. You'll be amazed at what a simple, inexpensive activity it is, and a great way to reconnect with your family.

Small pan fish are plentiful off the piers on Turner Lake. Watching the kids work together and learning to bait your own hook makes for a more satisfying catch.



Only electric trolling motors and man-power watercraft are allowed on Turner Lake. Glide across the glassy water in a canoe amongst the reeds and lilies, listening to croaking frogs and catching a glimpse of a heron.

With no phones, no televisions, no computers or PlayStations, what was left? Peace and quiet. Conversation is as natural as the surroundings.

As sure as deer come to the shore to drink, families gather on piers for fishing and to take in the sunset.

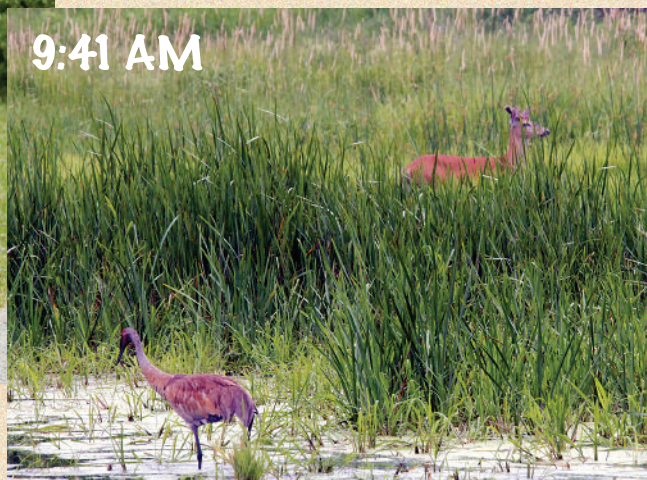
Working together to enjoy any small comfort—fetching water, searching for the right stick, throwing another log on the fire—dinner can be as simple as a hot dog cooked over hot coals. With no one else there, siblings interact with each other and feast on an endless supply of roasted marshmallows.

Not to be outdone by the sunset, the sunrise over the Fox River is worth getting up for.

A kettle of water for coffee and oatmeal, canned hash and eggs over an open fire is a breakfast for champions.

After breakfast, it's a walk to the lake for some fishing before biking the 6-mile trail between the concession stand and the park office. See the look of contentment of the girls faces? Memory accomplished.

Chain O'Lakes has four scenic trail systems through shady forests, prairies and wetlands, with interesting destinations such as a wildlife-viewing platform overlooking Pike's marsh. Crane and deer frequent the area.



Another interesting destination on the trail is the Chain O'Lakes State Park Riding Stable, located near the park entrance. For a guided trail tour, horses can be rented a the park from May through October.

A turkey vulture wasn't fazed by hikers trekking down the 2.25-mile Nature's Way hiking trail that starts at Oak Grove Picnic Area.

Bike trails at the park are easy enough for the youngster just transitioning from a training-wheel bicycle.

A scenic pull-off near the park entrance provides one last look across a wetland restoration project.

Ronilyn Mussared is a freelance photo-journalist based in Richmond. Her images can be viewed at www.photos byroni.com.