

GIRL SCOUTS VISIT MIKE LARSEN AND LINDA NELSON'S PRAIRIE

Early in August, the Girl Scout troop that I lead (and that meets at Judson) gathered in a local parking lot at 8 o'clock in the morning. We loaded the girls, their daypacks, and coolers of food into cars and headed south to visit Linda and Mike and their prairie.

When we arrived, the first thing we needed to do is learn how to use the composting toilet at Mike and Linda's beautiful house. The girls were intrigued but not concerned about using a toilet that did not flush.

With our most basic needs met, we headed out to meet the prairie. Mike did a wonderful job orienting the girls to all the living things that call the prairie their home. He described the interconnectedness of all the prairie inhabitants. Mike even explained how the plants communicate with each other!

He had the girls looking for and counting monarch butterflies. I was amazed to learn that every summer four generations of monarch butterflies are produced. The first three generations will each live for only a month, but the fourth generation (miraculously) will live nine months. These are the butterflies that will fly to Mexico for the winter so that they can survive until the spring and return to begin the process again. Amazing!

He told the girls that the prairie was still developing and growing into the prairie it once was. We realized that Linda and Mike have been cultivating this land for the same amount of time that the girls' parents had been caring for them. We decided that the prairie, like the girls, was almost a teenager!

Some of the girls encountered some stinging insects and Linda was very kind to apply lavender oil to each girl who reported a bite. I have to admit I enjoyed trailing any girls that had received medical attention from Linda. They smelled so good!

The sun was hot and the girls were getting hungry for lunch, so we walked over to their lovely sheltered picnic area. We set out a salad bar and had a chance to chat. Mike did not know what "walking tacos" were and the girls gleefully educated Mike about the dinner they were looking forward to later that day.

After lunch, Mike and Linda pulled me aside and observed that some of the girls seemed to be pretty hot and tired. After lunch, we had planned to go back into the prairie to gather seeds. They suggested that it would okay to cut our time with them short if that would be better for the girls. I knew that although some of the girls had lost focus, there was another group that would have been disappointed to leave early. We simply decided to remind girls that they could choose how they wanted to participate in the afternoon's activities.

So Mike gathered the girls and showed them the particular type of sedge grass that they would be looking for. He told them that at first, they may not see the skinny stalks and small pine-cone looking seed heads, but that once they knew what to look for, they would see them everywhere. He showed them how to pull the seeds into the buckets they would wear around their necks. Mike told them how important this work was to the continuing life of the prairie.

Not one girl could resist. They were curious. They all leaped up and headed back to the prairie. The girls took their work very seriously and enjoyed comparing the growing pile of seeds covering the bottom of their buckets. After a while, we scattered our seeds on another area of their land that still needed a lot of work to become the prairie that it once was.

I want to thank Mike and Linda for being great stewards of their land and for being inspiring educators. I know that many of us at Judson have had similar experiences and I hope more of us will have the opportunity in the future.

