

The Brooklyn Bridge Park brings together urban architecture and atmosphere with art, education, recreation, and culture with the natural world. Gazing from the Manhattan Bridge to the Brooklyn Bridge, one can see a partnership between the natural world and humanity: the once ugly industrial pier is now covered with lush green plants neighboring the magical antique carousel that is enjoyed by hundreds of children every weekend. The hard work put into restoring the carousel is mirrored in the rest of the park. At the north most part of the park, in an area of Brooklyn called DUMBO (Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass), there is a small beach of the East River estuary that has been restored to a natural place of marine life and activity. There, I worked as an assistant to a marine biologist and teacher with a class called, "Seining the River Wild". This class taught children, ranging in ages 4-16, about the marine life found in the estuary. I would gear up in waders and with a partner, walk into the East River and cast a net. We caught crabs, Atlantic Silver Sides, puffer-fish, and much more. Farther down, the park has another enclave of beach with cool rocks, artifacts, seaweed, algae, and crabs. These articles are used to teach children about the shoreline environment in another class that I assisted with, "Living on the Edge". Just like the carousel functions and operates smoothly, these places serve as habitats for a broad range of life with an increasing amount of species being found every year.

One of my favorite activities of the summer was helping the Conservancy's volunteer coordinator, Sarah. Sarah was a natural botanist and conversationalist. She combined these two skills into her volunteer programs that were focused on improving the park through gardening. Corporate groups who both gave funds and volunteer their employees for projects also aided the Conservancy's efforts. One corporate group helped clean up the park's marsh; another installed trimming along a path. Not only did corporate volunteers help with the park, but also locals and gardening enthusiasts as members of the Green Team. Every week, people from all over the city would come and help weed or plant trees in the DUMBO area. I loved helping out with the volunteers because I was able to garden, converse with people, and enhance the beauty and health of the park. Sarah's job is something I could see myself doing in the future.

On Pier 1, beautiful garden flora spill over fences onto the walking path, making people feel like

they are in the middle of a tropical jungle. If one stops for long enough, like enthusiasts did in the class about the insects of the park, “Birds, Bugs, and Bees,” one will be able to see the busy activity of pollinating insects or over by the marsh, mating dragonflies. Another class I assisted with was part of the Green Living Series: “Planting Pollinators” teaching participants about the different plants that attract pollinators to a garden. This pier also has NYCSE (New York Center for Sustainable Energy) that harbors the first electric car charging station in New York. Next to the charging station is a classroom where I assisted with classes on the Brooklyn Bridge history and suspension mechanics for children; weather of the park for children; and “sustainability” learning for adults, teaching them how to use recycled materials to build simple furniture for their homes. The adult classes I enjoyed the most because I was more able to effectively communicate with them and help them. Pier 1 also had some interesting circumstances arise that tested my skills. One day, while working “Checkmate 101,” a weekly chess tournament/lesson, a mentally ill woman made quite a ruckus by accusing our sweet chess instructor of cheating. It was very difficult to get her away from the other peaceful players. There was never a dull moment in the park. However, my favorite activity also happened at Pier 1: yoga. Every Monday morning, I would wake up with the sun, walk down to the park, set up the speakers on Bridge View Lawn, lay out the yoga mats, set up the information table, and sign people in. At the start of class, I was allowed to join the class in finding balance in my mind and body. My bosses’ permission for me to participate shows how they truly cared for my happiness and that I gain as much as could of my experience.

Walking next to the water along Pier 1, a visitor will come upon Granite Prospect where Books Beneath the Bridge took place and where one night hundreds of people crowded to hear Patty Smith read from her literature (after her reading, I got her autograph and shook her hand! It was awesome). At Granite Prospect, many other performances took place like the Metropolitan Opera and Comedy of Errors. Further along the water is Harbor View Lawn where the SyFy Movies With A View (outdoor movies) takes place. This was everyone’s favorite because of the high energy level, the great people watching, and of course the popcorn. These nights, after setting up, I would usually survey visitors or ask for donations. When we showed *Wet Hot American Summer* the whole cast showed up, including Paul

Rudd and Amy Poehler, which made the crowd go wild.

At Pier 2, the most popular recreational activity, boating, took place every Saturday. Volunteers helped people get out on the water in large sit-on-top kayaks. I worked this many times earlier in the summer and the variety of people who participated was wonderful to see. It is because the park's programs are free that many are able to participate. Later in the summer at Pier 2, I worked at the Kayak Camp, a program for private camps that taught kids how to kayak. Many of the camps, like the camp for kids with incarcerated parents, were funded by the city. The kids that came to Kayak Camp had very diverse backgrounds and economical statuses. It was interesting to get to know them and to make kayaking as great of an experience as possible. Earlier in the summer, I was taught how to kayak by the Brooklyn Bridge Park Boathouse to be a safety boat for the camp and am now a Level 2 kayaker!

The park is still quite young and has been under construction for its whole life. Pier 3, 4, and 5 are currently under construction to be made into recreational places. However, at Pier 6, the end of the park, there are volleyball courts, gardens, and playgrounds. I did not work as much in this part of the park although I always enjoyed running through it.

The organization that I worked for and that truly makes the park so popular is the Brooklyn Bridge Park Conservancy. For over 25 years, this grassroots effort made up of local advocates, government, and residents, has worked hard to make the park a vibrant and dynamic place for all kinds of people (and wildlife) to enjoy. Now, it's a well-run organization with full-time employees that work hard to maintain the mission of the conservancy. Many different activities and programs are made to engage a diverse visitor involvement in the park. All the educational programs are funded through government grants but the recreational and cultural programs are funded through generous private donations. Because the Conservancy is such a small group (they only have eight full-time employees), I was able to see up-close the different responsibilities of each employee. In turn, I was able to make conclusions about possible career paths and the diverse opportunities that can come from working in a non-profit organization. A lot of the work was media based, focused on attracting, reaching, and bringing people to the park. However, the real powerhouse of activity this summer were the memberships, donations, and

fundraisers that helped fund the park. More than half of the Conservancy worked on these. Without this influx and generation of money, the park would be unable to support its amazing free programs – every program and activity in the park is completely free. I watched the hard work of these people pay off in innumerable ways within the park and was very impressed.

Never before has the summer gone so fast – the saying is true, time flies when having fun. Every day was different and packed with things to do. As the summer progressed, I was given more responsibility with different programs like education and recreation. This increase in responsibility was granted to me because I executed my responsibilities well. My high energy level and positive attitude impressed my bosses and they in turn, entrusted more responsibility to me. As my boss, Kara Gilmour, said, “You took it and ran.” As the summer progressed, I gained more authority and leadership in the programs. I was trusted to be the face of the Conservancy in many situations. For instance, at the SyFy Movies With A View series, I was the intern conversing with the visitors and at Books Under the Bridge, I greeted visitors as the enthusiastic representative of the organization. With the majority of the environmental science talks and classes, I was the sole assistant to the teacher, positively influencing the class through my help.

Working at the park allowed me to reach my utmost potential in energy, enthusiasm, positivity, and sense of “doing good” for a greater community. Although some days of the summer were grueling, like the days of the Park Visitor Count (volunteers counted how many visitors entered and exited the park over a span of a week), those days taught me more about myself than any other day. I learned that I am a very strong and generous person. I stuck true to my moral goal that the experience of every person in the park should be a wonderful one. Therefore, although exhausted, I remained positive and hopefully influenced the visitors in a worthy way. In this sense, this internship accelerated and enhanced personal self-growth and taught me many valuable lessons on interactions and humanity. After seeing how a non-profit operates and how many opportunities there are, I am now very interested in using my personable skills to attract donors to environmentally conscious programs that teach environmental awareness and valuable lessons about nature or teach the programs myself.