

## Finding Serenity

By Samantha Schneider, MD

As physicians, we are constantly faced with new challenges and potential sources of stress. There are the pressures of increasing regulations, less time for patient visits, and, not to mention, all of our other “life” obligations. One key to success in this ever-evolving technological world of *more, faster, now* - is to unplug.

One of the most therapeutic things that I have discovered during my training is to turn off my phone and get outside. Now, let me start by saying that I never thought I would have said this before medical school. I did not enjoy being outside *at all*. I say this as a way to encourage some of the possibly more reluctant readers. You can do it! And, you may even surprise yourself.

Start small. Maybe you will just walk around your neighborhood (without your headphones). You’ll be amazed at how much more you notice from the birds chirping to new flowers along your route. If you have a local county or state park, find a trail and get after it. Once you get started, you’ll see that “hiking” is really just walking on dirt instead of a sidewalk.

As you become more advanced, you may head to a national park for bigger landscapes (and depending on the time of year and the park, bigger crowds). Some of my favorite national parks for hiking and camping are Zion National Park in Utah and Kings Canyon and Yosemite National Parks in California – all of which tend to be very popular destinations. On each visit to the park, we plan a trip to the “backcountry” which sometimes can mean just one to two miles away from the popular tourist destinations. It is remarkable how quickly the crowds can melt away. That being said, we also always spend at least one day doing the typical touristy “front country” hikes. You can’t go to Zion and *not* see The Narrows or go to Yosemite and *not* see El Capitan.

And, as your love for the outdoors grows, you may even start to seek the opportunity to be outdoors. Now, my husband and I travel for a week in the national parks carrying all of our food and water and camping in remote locations. There is nothing like fully immersing yourself in nature away from our busy daily lives. It is remarkable how restored one can feel after a few days in immersed in nature. You get a sense of how small we are compared to the rest of the world and sometimes we need that reminder and that ability to re-center.



This is a view of the mountains in Kings Canyon from our tent.