

Alumni Spotlight:

Daniel Paseltiner



This summer we caught up with Daniel Paseltiner a 2006 Upper Elementary graduate.

Daniel's mother, Linda, a steadfast Montessori alum mom popped in at 34 Whipple Road this summer while visiting Connecticut from their new home in Pennsylvania. Linda

updated us on all three of the Paseltiner boys Daniel, Matthew, and Issac, all Montessori Alums. After finishing a six-month internship with Hasbro, Matthew has returned to Rochester Institute of Technology to continue studying game design. Issac has started his first year at Conestoga High School and is keeping himself busy playing soccer and ultimate frisbee.

At the time of Linda's visit, Dan had just come off the Pacific Coast Trail (PCT) after hiking the full Appalachian Trail (AT) the previous summer. A few stats on these famous trails: the PCT spans 2,650 miles (4,265 kilometers) from Mexico to Canada through California, Oregon, and Washington. The Appalachian Trail was made famous by Bill Bryson in his book (and subsequent movie), "A Walk in the

Woods." The AT is a 2,180-mile footpath along the Appalachian Mountains from Katahdin in Maine to Springer Mountain in northern Georgia. The trail traverses Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, West Virginia, Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, and Georgia.

Dan started his education in Primary at The Montessori School, graduating from Upper Elementary in 2006. After Montessori, Dan attended Stamford public schools and then Bates College, where he majored in physics. He remembers always having a natural love for science and math, which were nurtured and encouraged during his Upper El years with beloved Teachers Kathy Allen and Gerry Leonard. He credits his strong foundation to the School and distinctly remembers that "Gerry jazzed me up about science and math... lots and lots of lessons from Gerry." In particular, he recalls in 8th grade algebra at Stamford Middle School, there was a subject being taught one day that was already familiar to him. Arriving home that day he shared, "I pulled out my old Montessori work and realized I had learned systems of linear equations in 5th grade!" Although a science and math guy, when reflecting on his time at Bates, Dan was brought back to the origins of his interest in theater. He credits The Montessori School for sparking his involvement: "Abby Walker's shows and doing technical theater really stuck with me from Montessori. I grew to love it and kept it up [through college] and ultimately ended up on the over-hire list at the Stage Hand Union



The Muir Hut (built in 1930) is located at the proximate mid-point of the John Muir Trail (JMT) section of the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT).

in Portland working on the Elton John Tour.” During college, he booked other similar theater lighting gigs and enjoyed creating lighting designs for friends in the modern dance department.

As Dan grew, he set two important personal goals for himself. His first goal, dating back to early childhood, was to hike the Appalachian Trail. The second goal was to pursue a PhD in physics. At Bates, he focused his academics on physics as planned, but as he neared graduation he thoughtfully took a purposeful detour on the way to his PhD. He chose to take a gap year between college and graduate school to prepare for the application process and to defer the beginning of his AT journey to March, a good time to start the northbound hike. This was now the plan, and he was in forward motion. During that gap year, Dan worked at the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), a government lab just outside of Washington D.C, and then back at Bates in the neuroscience lab.

At the NIST lab, Dan received valuable experience but also had a type of epiphany: a PhD in physics was laudable and useful, but actually not what he wanted. He desired a deeper connection with people, and a more practical application of his mind, and his life’s work. So, with a physics degree and a love of hiking, he needed to plan for his next steps. Reflecting on his time at Bates, he had completed a Wilderness First Responder Course, and then EMT training. His passion for and interest in both of these areas helped clarify that his new path would be medicine, with a focus on neuroscience.

The physical next step would be the



Southern Terminus of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail (PCT) (Elevation 2,915 ft).

AT, a four-month journey hiking from Georgia to Maine. He began on his own and, like many on the trail, met and connected with fellow travelers along the way. He would be part of “loose groups that form and walk together, or sometimes camp together and hike alone...and sometimes I would just be by myself too.” “It felt pretty good to finish the task,” Dan said contemplating his achievement. But he stated, “In a bigger sense, the takeaway is realizing this incredible agency that we all have, that we can do the thing we want to do. At the end of the day, it’s about putting stuff in a bag and starting. The hard part is overcoming the fear holding us back.”

This August, Dan completed three months on the PCT, book-ending the country and his hiking journeys (for

now!). Dan recently returned to Bates to continue work in the neuroscience lab, but this time, with a new goal: to complete the courses for pre-med. With ample math and physics under his belt, he now is focusing on biology and organic chemistry courses and his work in the lab.

Practical, confident and charming, Dan approached his educational journey just like his hiking, with a well-thought-out plan, successfully contemplating and executing course corrections along the way. Just like the lessons from the AT, he has packed his metaphorical bags and with a strong foundation and purpose, embarked on his path, with some adventurous twists and turns along the way. We look forward to hearing more about Dan’s journey in the future!