



Saysetha Philaphandeth

GROWING THROUGH THE LOPPET



Saysetha Philaphandeth, a sophomore at Patrick Henry High School in North Minneapolis, is a veteran nordic skier. He has skied every winter since third grade thanks to the Minne-Loppet program at Bryn Mawr Elementary School or eight years of winter fun and joy for this enthusiastic young man.

At 16, Saysetha, a budding videographer, Nordic ski veteran and canoeing aficionado, knows a thing or two about getting out of his comfort zone.

Saysetha participated in the Anwatin Ski Team at his Minneapolis middle school for three years. When the program expanded to year-round activity Saysetha eagerly tried summer activities like mountain biking and canoeing even if they scared him.

When it came time to canoe during Loppet Adventure Camp, then a seventh-grader, Saysetha was terrified of the water and the fish in Wirth Lake. With calm reassurance Coach Allie Rykken coaxed Saysetha into the canoe and taught him how to paddle -- and more importantly for Saysetha, how not to tip! The following day Saysetha teamed up with a mentor and continued to fine tune his paddling skills. He gained confidence and a solid J-stroke. He now adds canoeing to the long list of things that he loves about Loppet Foundation youth programming.

Schoolwork comes first

But at one point Saysetha had to curb his ski team activity at Anwatin in order to get schoolwork done. When he rejoined the team, he found the beginners right on his tail. Saysetha was dismayed to find that his fitness had decreased. But he was ready to do the hard work to get it back.

Besides gaining fitness Saysetha learned how to make friends. "I didn't have many friends in middle school," Saysetha says. "I liked being alone, doing my work and playing video games. But through the Loppet, I talked more openly. I made friends, and we have been friends ever since."

In high school, Saysetha continues to juggle the demands of school, skiing and extracurricular activities. Sometimes it is challenging to participate in skiing because his parents do not fully understand what the sport is all about. Saysetha says that because they are from Laos, not Minnesota, his parents worry about him being out in the cold and worry that he might get hurt. "That is challenging. You know when I ask can I go on this trip or the training, they ask why, what do you do? They are not familiar with Minnesota so they are not coming to what I do. They are really not seeing what I do. They are always working but that is fine as long as they let me ski."

Documenting the benefits of Loppet

Saysetha is passionate about videography and uses his digital skills to help make videos for the Loppet Foundation. He works alongside an experienced videographer to create videos that help to educate the public about the foundation's work. Just as participating in the Loppet program helps Saysetha develop his leadership skills so too does documenting the program's work with young people in Minneapolis.

Saysetha believes the Loppet Foundation middle-school program is pure fun. "Even though it is just skiing in the winter, there is a lot more to it. Summer, winter, fall. It is there all the time, not just that one season," he says. "They want kids to get active, 24-7." Saysetha knows the coaches have high standards for the young athletes' performance and behavior, but the real goal is all about providing a supportive, fun environment where young people can be outside and engage in healthy activities. All the better when it helps young enthusiasts like Saysetha with their performance in school.

"The Loppet Foundation is a great non-profit. They are getting support from others, trying their best to provide programs for elementary and middle school students," says Saysetha, beneficiary of all that goodness. "Loppet is a great program for kids to have fun."



The Loppet Foundation provides opportunities and creates passion for year-round outdoor activities and adventures in the Minneapolis area, especially among inner-city youth.