

Justin Diem

Question #2

I could go on and on about thousands of memories I have of living in the mono basin. Fishing on Tenaya Lake with my dad, watching the cascading falls. Reading My Side of the Mountain, on the cliffs of McCabe Lake looking over Tuolumne Meadow. Sitting on the backside of Mono Lake in thick Poconip, waiting for those mysterious Canadian geese to come soaring by. Trudging up the shale on Dore Pass feeling so small in the vast landscape. But this doesn't represent my whole story behind the reason I love living in the Mono Basin.

Even today, the putrid smell of the hospital fills my nose and mind with only horrible memories. At four years old, while all my friends were back home exploring with friends, I was stuck in the hospital with no company but my mom. Every day progressed with only more medicine being pumped into my veins, breaking down my immune system to kill the cancer that sat behind my right eye. For two years I lay in a hospital bed, while kids were experiencing their first days of school at LVES.

When my first year of chemo ended, the doctors agreed that the cancer was gone. My mother was so relieved that we had made it through. However, it was not over. When I was six, I was diagnosed once again. For months my mom slept in a chair next to my bed as I suffered from weak body, but I always kept a strong spirit. Everyday, new treatments faced my already ravaged body. Needles poked, lasers scanned, and blood was taken and replaced with liquids that a human body should never face. Some days there was not a platelet in my body so the smallest bruise meant a near death experience. As I watched foreign blood injected into tubes protruding out of my chest, I felt like a science experiment. As each drop of liquid fell from the bag into my body, all that I thought of was the rippling lakes of home, imagining sitting in an old aluminum boat with my dad, trying to catch the big one. Memories filled my mind and for once I could escape from the terrors that faced me day after day in the hospital. The smell of the wet willows on the lakeshore overthrew the stagnant smell of the hospital bed that was my world for so long. Lying there night after night, I squirmed with the memories of home. It was like the feeling of being so thirsty and not being aloud to drink. It was such a simple thing, yet for two years I was deprived of that great feeling of being home in the Mono Basin.

After an eternity, it was finally over. One last liquid was injected into the blue-capped tube that protruded from my chest. The liquid filled my mind and my last thought was only of home. Awakening from my last surgery was like nothing I had ever experienced. The light was so bright and everything seemed to have changed while I was out. My mother appeared in my eyes and whispered to me, "Let's go home, sweetheart." The burden that dragged on my mind, body, and soul was finally gone. The stress that streamed through my mothers head, every night, sitting in the same chair, was all gone. The relief was beyond anything I could

imagine. I could finally go home, see my dad, see my brother, see my dog; just be a regular kid.

Returning home was the most uplifting part of my young life. I could finally start exploring the meadows with my friends again, go fishing with my dad, and hike with my brother. Everything seemed to fit in the right place while roaming around in the fresh air. Of course I went through stages where I pretended to not enjoy this beautiful place, but always have known my true bond with the high sierra. I plan to attend the University of Nevada Reno next fall so I can visit home quite often. The power of this great basin will never let me go too far from home.