

Keely Podosin's Essay:

Once I turned off the 395, I saw nobody. We were the only car in sight, the only people out and about. I turned on to Navy Beach. Nobody. There was just the lake, with its tides lapping and the sun shining down on it. I saw some seagulls flying overhead, and wondered if they noticed a difference in the world. If they noticed how nobody was out exploring, taking advantage of their beautiful backyard. Did they like it? Without so many humans to scare them away, to ruin their homes and ecosystems, did they enjoy our absence? The sun was beating down on my neck; my bottom was sore from a combination of the tufa I was sitting on and the leg workout I had done previously. But I couldn't help but wonder, were we really necessary? The natural life at Mono Lake goes on, even when humans are put to a halt. The sun was out, the day was gorgeous, and everything felt normal. Sitting at Mono Lake's edge, a sense of normality crept over my body. I was out, enjoying nature, as I love doing and had done so often before. I wasn't worried about my proximity to other people; I didn't feel sad about the outcome of my last year of high school, or potentially my first year of college. Sitting at Mono Lake's edge, I felt content. Nature allows us to lose ourselves, to forget our thoughts and worries and focus on the beauty we are fortunate enough to enjoy. Places like Mono Lake allow us to put our lives in perspective and humble us. Places like Mono Lake do not need people to succeed as productive ecosystems, but rather, they can thrive in our absence. I focus on the sound of the water again, bringing me back to where I am. There's a smell I can't recognize, and I feel what seems like an ant crawling up my leg. There was no ant. I look up at the mountains surrounding the lake, and then the snow-capped ones behind me. I think of all the great memories I've had on mountains like these, hiking, skiing, laughing with friends. Again, the sound of the water brings me back. I stand up and head back to my car. As the water fades into the distance, I notice again how deserted the road feels. I cross an empty highway, and start driving back home. I am once again brought into my thoughts, and a part of me couldn't shake how everything was feeling wrong. I wanted to see my friends, I wanted to finish off my high school career. But Mono Lake was able to give me a break from these feelings. Mono Lake, and places like it, showed me how even in the worst times, nature can make me feel content.