

## 2019 Mono Lake Committee Scholarship

essay by Orion Ellis



As I sit here now I reflect on the few fond memories I have of Mono Lake. The view transports me back to when I was a kid and came here on field trips and summer camp excursions. It was super interesting. I remember learning about the unique ecosystem of the lake, and the funny story about an attempt to destroy the land bridge that coyotes (or foxes, or something else, it has been a while) were using to cross to the black island and eat the nests of the seagulls who migrate to Mono Lake for their nesting season, only to have all the dirt fall back down in the same spot so the coyote who was waiting patiently the whole time could just walk across.

This is what Mono Lake reminds me of as I linger on it's shore once more. Summer camps, school field trips and weird half remembered stories that may or may not be true. It reminds me of being a kid, not the embarrassing or dumb stuff I usually remember, but the fun and excitement, the curiosity and discovery. It reminds me to get lost in the magic of the unknown and inspires me to create. It inspires me to evoke that sense of discovery in others, or at least try to.

I enjoy creating stories that people can get lost in, and Mono Lake inspires me to keep doing that. Being here again reminds me, amidst all the stress of being a senior going to college, of what it feels like to discover, to marvel at weird stories, and to be a kid again. I may not have many memories of Mono Lake, but the few I do have are treasured memories that inspire me to keep pursuing my passions and aspiring to evoke similar emotions in my friends and (hopefully) eventually in anyone who stumbles across one of my strange, imaginative tales.

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essay by Sophia McKee

The wind cools my face as I walk down the path to Mono Lake, bringing with it the sweet smell of sagebrush on the breeze. Except for my footsteps on the boardwalk, no noise penetrates the air surrounding me. Only as I near the lake does a California Gull cry out above me – I can see its shadow swoop in front of me for a few seconds before it disappears, once again leaving me to reflect in silence. In the distance, I can make out the tufa structures, their knotted, mangled shapes projecting that of an almost alien like land. As I reach the beach, the steady roll of the waves beat against the shore like that of a heartbeat. There are no people to be seen. It is just me and the lake. This is peace – away from the hum of everyday life. Here, time is at a standstill.

I lay out a towel to sit on and reflect on the simple yet extraordinary fact that I get to attend a school every day with the towering mountains on one side of us and this incredible lake on the other. I think back to all the memories Mono Lake stirs up within me - from Elementary school field trips when I was awestruck by the strange tufa structures and the curious alkali flies, to the

starry nights I spent with my friends floating under the moonlight. In those moments, I didn't realize how spectacular my childhood was - but now, sitting here on the shore, I know that I am truly blessed to have Mono Lake literally in my backyard.

Even though I have spent many hours here over the years, I still am astounded at the beauty of Mono Lake – the green-blue water, the mountains looming above it, a fresh layer of spring snow on their peaks today. And yet, I know that so many people have yet to experience this beauty. I picture a time in history when the lake was even lower than it is today, and I imagine the sadness and loss that I would have felt if it wasn't conserved. The impact Mono Lake has had on so many lives, mine included, is impossible to calculate, and I can't imagine my life without this natural landmark.

I hear voices as a family wanders down the path. The dad walks behind his young daughter as she sprints to the lake, giggling as she reaches down to grab the foam that has gathered at the edge. It suddenly makes me imagine the day I will bring my own daughter back to the place where I grew up. I think of passing along the joy that comes with growing up next to an amazing place like Mono Lake. It is then that I really understand why natural wonders like Mono Lake must be protected and kept safe. Their preservation is not just for our world now, but is truly a legacy and a gift for our kids, and their kids ... and for generations to come.