

## 2022 Mono Lake Committee Scholarship

essay by Kylee Lange



With my family being a part of the Mono Lake Kudzutika'a tribe, where generations of my relatives have resided, I feel a deep connection with Mono Lake and surrounding areas. Kutsavi are the fly pupae that the woman would collect from the shores of the lake in the spring. This kutsavi is the namesake of the tribe. About two months ago, my family gathered on the shore of the lake to spread the ashes of my father's cousin. My family laughed, cried, told stories, sang traditional healing songs as she passed home to be with our creator, my great grandmother, and great aunt who were laid to rest there as well. My family has told me stories and legends about the formation of the landforms around the lake, and I feel blessed to be able to witness this place in such a rare form. Places like Mono Lake matter because there is so much history and connections for indigenous people, similar to the other lakes in Northern California and Southern Nevada. The lake along with other scarce artifacts are a way for native people to connect with their land and feel the history and connections to the sacred grounds. Feeling the breeze, and smelling the fresh air, watching the birds fly around, land on the tufas, and the shore, I imagine what life was like for my family before colonization, as they would move around during different seasons and hunt accordingly. Something I admire is that due to the lake being so salty, people cannot swim, boat, or do typical lake activities there, this almost preserves the sacredness of it, because it can only be viewed and admired by its beauty from people passing through. Mono Lake is one of the most beautiful places I have ever been to. It protected and provided for my people, it is where my family lays their family to rest peacefully with the others, and it is just so unique compared to surrounding lakes.

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essay by Sergio Santillan-Leal

What does Mono Lake genuinely mean to me? Water? Nature? Our souls? Our futures? I honestly didn't know until I approached the shore of this breathtaking place at the beginning of sunset and stepped away from the wooden bridge. I stepped on the soft dirt full of mud and felt no longer connected to the modern world but immersed in the world of nature, where I took my vans off and stepped on true love. I ran on the shores of Mono lake and nature strapped me but divided me with the flies as they fly away from me because nature no longer trusted us. As I placed myself in the saltwater, I felt disconnected from my own backyard; nature did not trust me. As I looked around, the Mono Basin told me that humans had the audacity to take its soul away as we took every drop of life that the Sierra Nevada gave to it.

As my feet were on the deep shores of Mono Lake, every particle of salt gave me a reason to care for this place. I saw a flock of seagulls and all different kinds of birds, even those who had just

come to pay a visit, fly over me. They appreciated what was left of true nature as they know that Mono Lake is in danger. As I closed my eyes, I became one with nature; my nose identified pure life from salt water that hit my nose with the cold breeze fresh from the Sierras. Nature intently brought me back to reality, teaching me that we cannot live in fantasies. Nature forced me to open my eyes to see the wooden bridge that took us away from nature and put us in a world filled with artificial life. Tourists call the tufas “beautiful,” but don’t understand their pain as they could no longer grow. I was amused at how my visual sense affected the smell of this place, as they both escaped me from the reality of bringing me back.

As my toes left the water, I was brought back to my superficial life but got all the salt particles stuck in my skin, each containing a beautiful memory of this place. Mono Lake became my solace as I enjoyed the sunset with my body laid on the sand—all my stress of being a “perfect” student, to not fail the people who helped me, faded away, but a beating noise interrupted me. I heard the footsteps of people hearing music, taking my soul away from nature and making me hear artificial sounds instead of the birds chirping with the water lapping the shores. I decided to leave before my experience with nature was ruined. I walked off out of the sunset, saying that today’s story has come to an end, but there is still home for a new beginning with the sunrise.