

## 2023 Mono Lake Committee Scholarship

essay by Esha Eilts



I find myself in a strange moment in my life as I sit on the benches of the boardwalk gazing out at beautiful Mono Lake. I have driven by this lake nearly everyday for the last 17 years. On the bus ride to school, when I am trapped in my head I look at the beautiful Mono Lake in all its glory. It looks different everyday, its colors change drastically, some days it is smooth, some days it is choppy. I like to think that it matches my moods! Today as I sit here watching the sun set, it is calm. I hear the birds' conversations all around me. Most of the snow has melted out despite a few patches here and there, contrasting to the light brown grass beneath. The lake is like a mirror to the world. The tall mountains surrounding me both above and below me, shining in the tranquil waters of Mono Lake. The tufa stand still in the constantly changing colors of the lake, they embody consistency and growth. It reminds me of both the beauty of consistency and change. Because at the moment I am faced with the biggest change that has ever occurred in my life. I feel afraid to leave my community, and the constant view of Mono Lake from my school bus window, but I am excited for the growth, the seasons of life. As I sit here I think about all that this place has given me, I love my community and the nature that surrounds it. I will always remember being on June Mountain and seeing the deep blue of Mono Lake miles away. Backcountry skiing above Mono Lake and watching it appear bigger and bigger the higher I got. In the summer time getting salt in my hair and floating as I watch the birds and clouds float by. This evening all of the colors seem subdued, tired, the light gray sky glimmers in the lake. Everything appears simple, gray, brown, white, but as I look more at everything the more complicated it becomes, all the different grays, browns, and whites, the shifting shades. Just like life, it can be beautiful but not always easy. Mono Lake however, and other places in nature are my outlet to feeling at peace and as I sit here I feel at peace, more so than I have in a long time. Because here in nature it is raw and true, and that is why I find it so beautiful and comforting, that is why I love Mono Lake. So thank you Mono Lake for being my constant reminder of how beautiful this life is and all that I have to look forward to when I leave but also the peace that I can find when I come back home and return to you.

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essay by Kelly Thompson

I remember finding myself as a child staring outside my kitchen window, my eyes glued to the tree in my backyard. It was clear the house would cave in at some point. The roots were growing underneath the house, our walls bound to be covered in branches. The thought was bittersweet. I found it beautiful. Maybe I wanted to live in a treehouse. Maybe I wanted my roof to touch the sky, and let the tree carry it in its strong branches, but the last thing I wanted was for that tree to come down. It seemed at the time that I was the only one defending that poor tree.

Maybe it didn't mean to grow under our house. Regardless, all I knew was it wasn't supposed to come down. I couldn't help but wonder if that same fate would happen to other places in the world, and when avalanches cut off our access to Mono Lake this winter, I couldn't help but shake what Mono County would be like without it.

After the storms cleared and the road opened, I found myself there, overwhelmed with the stress of graduation and my future, and I just needed a moment's peace by myself. I wanted to say goodbye to the place I grew up in. Looking out at the saline lake, I remembered my past; my mom talking about how influential that lake was to our community, my childhood tree and how I felt like I was the only one advocating for its safety and existence. That feeling came back to me. I couldn't see as many tufa towers as I used to, and I became emotional when I heard a bird chirping, almost as if it was saying, "It'll be okay. We'll still be here." I directed my attention back to the lake. I felt sorry for a body of water with a declining ecosystem. I felt like the greed of humanity failed it, and I put myself in its shoes. I stayed optimistic. The ripples of the lake calmed me. I want that to be the case for everyone else who seems to forget about the importance of nature, and how comforting and intimate the feeling of being alone with it is.

I believe the reason why I find nature to be so nostalgic is that it's a form of history.

Mono Lake has familial ties to the tribes of the Sierra Nevadas; it has seen the best and worst of human history. Compare Mono Lake to an old building, or even a childhood tree of your own. The history those places have seen and the people who made history at those places are integral. Nature is alive. It exists alongside humans and animals. We always preach the conservation of history, and how we must learn from our mistakes and our triumphs. There is no reason why nature should be outside of that threshold.

Conserve history, conserve life.