

2024 Mono Lake Committee Scholarship

essay by Kaelyn Lange



As I am given the privilege to sit along the shoreline of beautiful Mono Lake, I have yet to experience the true hidden beauty of it all by simply sitting peacefully in silence. Mono Lake is a place that's often brought my family together for funerals or celebrations of life. My ancestors are from Mono Lake, Mono Lake Kudzutika'a Tribe. Our family has a close connection to Mono Lake and the surrounding areas. My grandpa, aunts, and Uncle grew up in the Old House on 395. Many of my ancestors were born in the sagebrush. My relatives lived the way humans were meant to live, by constantly caring for one another and prioritizing their health using the many resources surrounding Mono Lake. I picture my great, great Aunties making baskets from willows to come to collect brine shrimp from the lake. They would collect them and lay them on canvas to dry, cook, and boil to make soup. They would gather wild berries growing around the lake, and they would also eat rabbits, deer, piaga, and wild onion. They would gather water with buckets from the creek that was a ways from the house. I sit here with the satisfaction of knowing this lake took care of my family, and how my family also took care of the lake. I can't help but begin to get emotional as I think about how humans have become greedy, that it has begun to affect beautiful places such as Mono Lake. The fast pace of human creation is causing Mono Lake to rapidly fade away. My dad remembers when he was growing up, there were thousands of seagulls but, I see only one or two passing by. I've also noticed in my lifetime the water levels of this lake are declining. I am grateful for the vast amounts of salt in the water because it limits human activity to simply admiring the Lake. Due to my love for the environment I have chosen environmental science to preserve beautiful places like this. The view, smell, and connection to Mono Lake have been some of the many experiences to influence and push me to protect our planet.

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essay by Alden Seiberling

Mono Lake has fascinating geological formations, thousands of migratory birds, complex ecosystems with international importance, but to me it is the quiet background of my life and something I see everyday. Mono Lake changes very often and can look completely different than it did the day before, some people even say that it has different moods. Some days Mono Lake is flat and reflects the clouds and mountains like a mirror. On other days it is green and wind capped, and from far away it looks like a field of long green grass being blasted by the wind. On a dark silent night, when the moon is golden, the light reflects across Mono Lake like a beam from a flash light. Sunsets are glorious at Mono Lake, and when the lake reflects the purple, gold, and pink colors of the Sierra Wave, everyone pulls over and takes pictures, even local police officers.

But today it is calm and clear and a group of us are canoeing at Mono Lake. California seagulls nest on the islands, and charge across the beach to catch and eat the swirling black clouds of Alkali flies. When you smell the saltiness of the lake but also the sweet smell of growing grasses on the wind, and hear the calls of the seagulls it feels like you are at the ocean. There is tranquility in watching vibrant life all around. Hundreds of birds float on the surface of the lake and at random dive for brine shrimp, others fly in perfect synchrony across the lake surface, and dart into nests in the tufa towers. This place is so incredibly beautiful because of all the creatures that rely on it, but its beauty is also because it is a place of solace. When I am here, I am in the moment, hearing the paddle dip into the water and drip back onto the surface of the lake, dipping my fingertips into the slimy smooth water, and hearing the birds calling to one another as they soar and dive freely.

There are so many things that I have learned from this place; I have learned that we are connected across continents, that life can thrive even in water three times saltier than the ocean, and most importantly, I have learned to take a moment to appreciate the astounding beauty that is around me everyday.