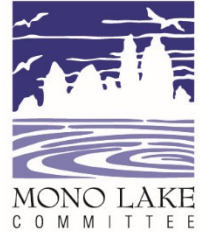


2025 Mono Lake Committee Scholarship

essay by Solomon McFarland



Mono Lake, a salty sea off in the high desert. At first glance, you see no life; the lake is seemingly too salty to support it, but as you get closer, you see more life. You enter a paradise hidden in plain sight, from the tiny shrimp to the Osprey flying above, to nests resting on tufas, and alkali flies buzzing on the shore.

I remember all of the memories that I have made as I cut through the glassy surface of this enormous lake in a canoe. I have explored the tufa and gone on various adventures with my family. At this moment in time, I am on no adventure; I am simply sitting here overlooking the still water as the sun falls behind me. I tune into the nature surrounding me and sense every last movement, feeling fully present. From the loud seagulls to the majestic osprey, I observe as their lives continue undisturbed by my presence. Unlike the fall when the migration peaks, I only see a limited variety of species. Having the blessing of living here, I have witnessed the phalarope in its unique beauty aggressively feed on the shrimp, and the one lucky time I saw a seagull run low along the shore scooping up the brine fly that hatch from the depths of this lake and gather in thousands along the shore. This lake is full of life and yet so peaceful. I pull myself back into the present and feel the spikey grass underneath me and the slight breeze that begins as the sun dies. This breeze pushes ripples across the lake, warping the reflection of the sunset and the islands off in the distance.

As I begin to stand and see the grass underneath me sprout up, reaching for the sky as it no longer holds a tremendous weight. I grab a stone, forever changing the shoreline that I stand on, and skip it across the lake. One two three four, and the stone falls into a new home. The ripples that I have created with this stone overpower the ones of the breeze. I begin the walk back to my car, and with the last glance I take toward the lake, I feel a wave of peace flow across my brain. In all the rush and pressure that comes with the end of every seemingly new year, I have found peace on the shores of Mono Lake.

The sheer beauty that is only seen when you remove yourself from the world of humankind and into the natural world will persuade anyone of the urgency to keep this lake protected from the unforgiving destruction that we as humans bring to the world around us. This strength that every human possesses, a blessing from nature, can be used for good if we only take a few minutes out of our day to go outside and appreciate the world around us.

2025 Mono Lake Committee Scholarship

essay by Bryan Ramirez Rodriguez



I remember my first visit to Mono Lake during a field trip in elementary school. Back then, I believed if I drank the lake water, a shrimp would grow in my stomach. That idea stuck with me for years. But today, standing at its dry, salty shore, I see the lake through different eyes. It's no longer just a strange place with brine shrimp, it's something much deeper.

As I walked down the gravel path toward the lake, I could hear the crunch of rocks under my feet. The air smelled fresh, with a strong hint of salt from the water. As I look out across the lake, I see tufas rising from the water like sculptures, some close to shore, others farther out, halfway out of the water sitting dry. Birds fly overhead, dipping in and out of the sky. I spot a few landing gently on the tufas. The breeze hits my face gently, cool and steady, and I feel a quiet calm that's hard to find.

Mono Lake makes me feel at peace in a way that I've been needing. Life can get overwhelming, busy, and loud. But out here, it's just me, the birds, and the breeze. When I came here as a kid, I didn't understand what this place really was. Now, I do. This lake isn't just beautiful, it holds memories, peace, and stories from so many different people, including me. It even seems to have moods of its own. Each time I see it, whether I'm standing at the shore or just driving past, it's a different color. The way the water flows and shifts with the light makes the lake feel almost emotional, like it's expressing something new every day. It's not the same lake every time you visit, and that is the part of what makes it feel so personal.

Places like Mono Lake matter because it's home to the birds, brine shrimp, and a whole ecosystem that depends on it. But it also offers something just as important to people, a place to slow down and reconnect. It's more than a tourist spot, it's a space to think, to feel, and to just be. Living in Mammoth, it is astonishing how little people talk about Mono Lake's preservation. It's right in our backyard, but it's treated like a distant thought.

I might not be here every day, but Mono Lake's peace stays with me. I hope more people start paying attention to the lake, before one day it is too late.