

2016 Greenfield Peace Writing Scholarship 1st Place Entry

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I was 13 years old when my biology teacher recommended I read Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*. It was my freshman year of high school and I was just beginning to dig my teeth into ecology and the problems anthropogenic climate change causes. I was naive and young (I still am, to be fair) but this teacher, this single mentor, opened my eyes to a problem I had very little awareness of. Mr. Davies sat with me day after day as we spoke over a messy desk about water shortages, invasive species, veganism, biodiversity, and melting permafrost.

I was 17 years old when I decided to become a vegetarian. This part of my identity quickly became an easy conversation starter. I loved the excuse it gave me to speak with others about the environment, about something real, about something that I care deeply about. I loved the excuse it gave me to search out people who had recipes and dietary tips to share. I loved the excuse it gave me to talk.

I was 18 years old when I started volunteering as a Crew Leader with the organization Friends of Trees. I had done other work with groups like SOLV and my city's parks and recreation department, but this experience was different. One day I looked up from the envelope-sized hole I was pushing the roots of a Snowberry shrub into and felt the world pause around me. The sun shone on my face and I watched as everyone around me laughed, boots ankle-deep in mud, eyes fixated on a heron landing ridiculously in a Western Red Cedar.

The point I'm attempting to make is this: other than certain physiological predispositions, there is only one thing that every human shares. It's our home, our planet, our Earth. It is the corridor that connects each of us to our neighbor, to our enemies, to a village 12,000 miles away. Every time I do my part to pursue a healthier planet, I connect with other people in a raw, honest, beautiful way that I have a hard time comparing to almost anything else.

In my volunteer work I have seen an old Mormon Bishop connect with a 24 year-old tattooed lesbian over the correct way to uproot ivy. But that was just the beginning. What started with a simple inquiry of technique quickly snowballed into a conversation about how both of them had seen Metallica live and preferred Italian food to everything else. I even saw the two strangers exchange phone numbers at the day's end. If ecology can bring two people of completely different backgrounds together, I have no reason to believe that it couldn't do the same for military enemies, international opponents, and people of different languages/races/religions/political opinions/etc.

While it's important to consider the economic and socio-political equity, improvements in human health, and brighter future that combating climate change allows, the most important thing it lends us is an appreciation for one another. As climate change pulls our world apart, finding ways to fight it brings our species together. When we pick up trash, lab coats, and conversations, we are forced to set down guns, hate speech, and ignorance. We become natural and determined and full of love. When we chase environmental health, we aren't chasing peace, but it tends to find us anyway.