

THE LEOPOLD WRITING PROGRAM

2 0 1 8 A L D O L E O P O L D W R I T I N G C O N T E S T A W A R D W I N N E R



AKSHAY WARRIER OVERALL BEST ESSAY

When I was younger, I used to lay on my father's lap on our green recliner chair, listening to the stories of his childhood. He told me about his life in India: running through the sea of paddy fields on the way to school, splashing barefooted through puddles filled with cool, clean, water, riding elephants during festivals and parades, and climbing coconut trees that kissed the sky. Every story was different, and they were all fantasies to me; worlds in which I could feel the pure bliss of nature – ones free of the oppressive weight of the modern world. At that age, the stories served me the same purpose as listening to bed-time stories or watching a movie, but now, these stories illustrate to me the reason that my father is so enamored by nature and its phenomena. His bond with nature was born of his experiences and upbringing in a world that emphasized a close connection to the environment.

Today, if he is not working, helping me and my brother, or sleeping, my father is out in our garden. Whether he is under the intense gaze of the sun during the summer, or even the savage cold of the winter my father loves to go out into the garden and tend to his plants. He is constantly visiting nearby nurseries, department stores, and websites for information to optimize the plants' conditions despite the weather. Even when he is not tending to our garden, his love for nature is evident as he is always the first person to point out the beauty of the New Mexican landscape or various household plants wherever he goes. However, despite all of his actions and the product of his work, his bond with nature is most accentuated by the attitude with which he interacts with nature. Every time I see him in the garden or among nature during hikes, or vacations, I see the pure joy he garners just from experiencing the environment. Every plant, animal, and insect he looks after or observes receives undiminishing love and care. Even as he illustrated his childhood to me, every detail was oriented around his sentiment for nature. My father's relationship with nature is unique and ineffable, but it is one of mutuality, adoration, and care.

Aldo Leopold described a land ethic leader as one who has an "ethical, caring relationship" with the environment. His message is commonly interpreted to describe someone whose actions are well-renowned and evident in the community. While this person can definitely be a land ethic leader, Leopold's message was meant to refer to a much larger crowd. This crowd consists of members who are devoted to nature not only through their actions but an untainted view of nature's beauty and an understanding of its import. My father is my local land ethic leader - he sets an example for me, and those around him, to look at nature through a new lens in order to rewrite the human relationship with the environment.



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