



Maiya Brock

HONORABLE MENTION Grades 8-9

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Healing Lands

When it comes to giving back to the Earth, each of us has a role to play. Whether big or small, the change a person or community can bring to our world is crucial to the furthering of our lives and lifestyles. By giving back to nature, we give to ourselves as well. This can be a major deciding factor in how our lives play out.

We often take for granted the things we could not bear to live without. Nature provides us with sustenance, shelter, and resources, all of which are then developed into the basic materials we use in our everyday lives. In “Returning the Gift,” Robin Kimmerer states that “...we must give back in equal measure for what we are given. Our first responsibility, the most potent offering we possess, is gratitude.” The first step toward giving back to the Earth is recognizing what the land provides us with, and being grateful for the gifts we receive.

In 2021, my family sold our home and purchased a four-acre plot of land and an RV. We were struggling financially and living as a family of four humans and four pets in a tiny trailer with hardly any privacy. Through our hardships, we still felt the need to provide care to our land — not only to create a space in which our family could live, but to make the world even the slightest bit better for all.

This love of nature applied not only to the land, but to the wildlife who inhabited it. We frequently spotted deer, jackrabbits, foxes, and other creatures on our property, and we decided to create a safe space for them to feed. In a small clearing, we dug a water trough and added a supply of salt licks, corn kernels, and fresh alfalfa. It quickly became popular among the animals, and it brought our family joy as well.

Then, in late December, my dad was suddenly diagnosed with cancer. As if this wasn’t hard enough for him, he was unable to truly enjoy and appreciate nature during his surgeries and chemotherapy treatment. He could not be outside in the chilly weather, and early spring gardening was out of the question. When he started to recover in April, the feeding spot gave him a renewed motivation to go outside. It helped him rejuvenate. By giving back to nature, my dad helped heal himself.

As Aldo Leopold states in the foreword of *A Sand County Almanac*, “That land is a community is the basic concept of ecology, but that land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics.” By respecting the land, we are giving back to the Earth and protecting our future. If we truly value what we have so generously been given, we must make an effort to provide for nature, in exchange for what nature provides for us. Our planet grants us life, and in order to truly live, we must acknowledge, respect, and give back to the land. It is what we owe the Earth for the lives we live upon it.