

THE LEOPOLD WRITING PROGRAM

2021 ALDO LEOPOLD WRITING CONTEST AWARD WINNER



INEZ CASTILLO

HONORABLE MENTION Grades 6-7

My Kinship With The Earth During The Pandemic

*“There are some who can live without wild things,
and some who cannot.”*

-Aldo Leopold

I am one of those people who cannot live without wild things. My family and I go hiking in the Sangre De Cristo mountains near our home. The mountains have many green trees and clear cold streams. We go there when we have inviting weather. We always hear birds chirping and occasional critters roaming the forest. There are so many birds and all of their songs are so unique. We like a hiking trail that passes by a stream. The water rushes over the smooth stones. I could not imagine life without a sanctuary where we can go to get away from the noise and pollution of the city.

Aldo Leopold dedicated his life to helping the creatures of the wild. He helped to preserve wildlife areas so that animals and plants would thrive. I visited the Gila National Forest in southern New Mexico this past summer. There were green trees as far as the eye could see. We visited a river with lush green vegetation and crystal clear waters. My family and I love to get away to the mountains. The sights and the fresh fragrances of plants are the reasons we go hiking. It is one of our favorite things to do! In 1924, Aldo Leopold helped make the Gila National Forest an animal and plant habitat that we can visit, but we do not stay there. We respected what was around us and we cleaned up after ourselves. Thanks to Leopold, my family and I can go to that forest and the animals can have a habitat where they have an abundance of food, water, space and shelter.

We also love taking walks around our community trails. We see lots of interesting plants with unique features and colors. We occasionally see a rabbit hop by. I love the feeling when you step outside and smell the fresh air. We always go in the warm summer evenings when the sun and the temperature is right. Sometimes we ride our bikes down the trails. I love the breeze in my face and the whistling wind passing by. This is what *querencia* means to me.

During this pandemic, nature inspired me to get outside more and explore different trails and landscapes. When my family and I went to Elephant Butte Lake, the water was blue and we saw Canada geese and a fish jumping out of the water. I even went outside in my backyard more frequently. Even though we are in the city, we can still enjoy being outside. We recently adopted three chickens and I love to go see them and feed them corn. They are fluffy and so loud! I feel like I have been able to get outside more and get closer to my family. The things that nature has to offer has helped me stay calm. Since I cannot interact with my friends, at least I can interact with nature and deepen my kinship with the earth.