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I remember listening to stories my father used to tell me about tales called "Water Babies". These tales were legends my ancestors told many years ago reflection upon the connection we have with rivers and the canyons water ran through. Perhaps my love for the American River Canyon is instilled in me due to my heritage or I have an organic feel for nature that is embedded my heart. As a child, my father would walk the American River Canyon with my brothers and me. He would teach us the importance of having respect for nature. I remember sitting in warm summer months listening to my father tell us about "Water Babies" who are water spirits that provide water to all river banks. My ancestors had to respect all aspects of nature or the Water Babies would get mad and leave. This meant the water would dry up leaving waterless rivers, lakes or canyons. I never question any of the tales my father told us about Water Babies or if these stories were fictional. I recall listening to stories for hours as my bare feet dangled into the cool water of the rivers. It was amazing to ponder the thought of hundreds of Natives that walked these canyons in search of food and collection of water as a major source in their lives. I didn't necessarily care if my father's stories were untrue. I knew walking these trails gave me my sense of connection to these canyons and that nature is deeply sketched in my heart. This is why I am majoring in Forestry and Water Ecology to help manage and protect all land and canyons ecosystems.

I felt incredibly lucky to be raised near the American River Canyon and North Fork Canyon during most of my life. Spending time in the native settings allowed me to be mindful of nature which permitted me to be part of something bigger than myself. At the same time, I was able to reflect upon my feelings that acknowledge the beauty these canyons share. I hope to work with local schools to participate in river clean-ups and hosting summer camps to teach other students about the beauty of nature. Students are the future to the next generation and can help preserve our canyons. I would also petition for grants to provide more designated picnic areas for families with plentiful garbage cans for wastes throughout the 120 miles of river bank. These grants could also help the cost of replanting native brushes, plants and flowers to attract native species. Educating all visitors visiting our canyons is essential. Most people are respectful individuals who appreciate nature yet they are unclear how they can be part of a solution. Posting signs with educational stories, facts and how they can make a difference is needed throughout all trails. Social media such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter or the local newspaper can be helpful tools to show how students and their friends are being successful in preserving our canyons. Another idea is to invite individuals needing basic work experience to shadow a Park Ranger or one of an American River Organization personal to help them obtain work experience and skills needed to be introduced into the work force. These individuals would be volunteer-based, opened to any age needing experience. In turn, they would gain tools such as communication, teamwork, self-management and problem solving skills to add to their resume as work experience.

My love for the American River Canyon runs deep in my blood. I am determined to teach others about nature and the intimate connection it has to all of us. I look forward in helping to preserve and improve visits of American River Canyon and all other canyons that are vital to our ecosystem.