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## Finding and Preserving Peace

My first memory of the American River involves a day spent rafting down the river with my father. On a random morning, we stumbled upon a raft rental company, and, in the spur of the moment, decided to spend the day meandering down the American River. We floated along for a few hours, my father paddling and me playing in the water around the raft where it was safe. That day trip left a wonderfully happy impression on me and inspired me to continue exploring the world along the river. Most recently, I have enjoyed hiking trips with friends and family in the Auburn State Recreation Area. These adventures allow me to escape the hustle and bustle of daily life and to find a moment of personal peace. During the day-to-day rush, I often find myself stuck in a routine of schoolwork and extra-curricular commitments without truly enjoying the world around me. The American River and all of its surrounding canyons give me the opportunity to step back and refocus my perspective. Nature does not require any of my effort or time, it is simply beautiful and awe-inspiring as it is. As Maya Angelou articulated, "A bird doesn't sing because it has an answer; it sings because it has a song." The time I spend exploring along the American River gives me the freedom to step outside of myself and simply listen to the music around me.

I want to make sure that this same opportunity is available for everyone who needs it. It is far too easy for people to get caught up in a complicated collection of work events and social commitments. The American River gives those in surrounding communities the chance to step out of their daily lives and find a little peace. Additionally, the American River is a key component of local history. Our region's colorful past of gold mining and exploration is tied to the American River. In order to protect the river as well as its memories, a respect for nature, and a desire to preserve its wonders, has to become ingrained in our culture. Instead of allowing children to plug into virtual worlds, they must be taught to explore the natural world around them. School field trips and presentations can help foster this desire to explore and experience nature. Furthermore, community clean-up events can be organized with a focus on school groups in order to inspire youth to put in the work required to maintain the natural opportunities available to them. Working as a community, we can insure that the Auburn State Recreation Area and the American River remain beautiful for everyone to enjoy and cherish.

The American River stands as a testament to the beauty and power of nature. If we allow it to be poisoned by pollutants and trash, what hope is there for the rest of the natural world? It is our duty as humans on this earth to preserve natural wonders, and the American River certainly fits this qualification.

Word Count: 500