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In the summer before my sophomore year of high school, my family packed their bags and moved from the busy Bay Area to the small town of Auburn. The area was so vast, unfamiliar, and overwhelming to explore; that was until I witnessed the inherent beauty of the American River for the first time.

It was a warm summer day in the heat of July, and my family decided to drive through Cool - hoping to witness the stunning watershed and hiking trails that were brought to our attention. The moment my eyes first laid upon the river was the moment my perspective on my new home suddenly changed. No longer did I feel such anxiety or lack of belonging. For the first time, I felt at home.

After discovering that the Placer High School Environmental Club frequently visited and discussed the river and its surrounding area, I knew that I needed to join. I spent my junior year attending copious amounts of trash cleanups and learning so much about the locale, and I was often in awe of the mesmerizing climate that I had the privilege of living so close to.

I became the club's secretary in my senior year with the goal of aiding in the planning and execution of more events involving the river. Our club was made aware of an opportunity to assist PARC in their 50th Anniversary Celebration, in which we agreed to participate with no hesitation. This event involved myself and 9 additional students acting as models in their fashion show - filled entirely with clothes made out of debris that was incorrectly disposed of in and near the river. We presented these handmade and intricate designs in front of many PARC representatives and influential environmental advocates. The outfits were created from a variety of discarded items including rafts, fishing nets, umbrellas, tents, discarded plastic, and much more. The goal of this fashion show was to inform the public of the extent to which waste is being carelessly abandoned in one of our area's most sacred places. The amount of waste discovered in the North and Middle Forks alone is incredibly concerning. Plastic debris, which often appears similarly to food, is constantly eaten by marine life, causing death and a plethora of additional health concerns. Furthermore, the waste found in the river can be extremely harmful to the nearby water and soil quality. The reckless behavior of tourists who are unable to comprehend the severity of this plastic pollution will lead to the destruction of the river if we are not careful.

Activism is the first step towards change, and through my work with the Environmental Club, we are opening our generation's eyes to the importance of recycling and the correct disposal of waste. With more trash cleanups and the education of Auburn and its surrounding communities, everyone will feel at home at the American River Canyon, just as I have.

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