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I was born and raised in Auburn, California. My backyard borders the trails of Robie Point. As a child, I lacked perception of the world outside of where I lived; all I knew was the canyon. I didn't appreciate and understand the value that it had. My earliest memories of the canyon are the hikes my parents used to force me to partake in. I would revolt so persistently that my parents would have to place M&M's up ahead on the trail to entice me to keep walking. When the routine family walks ended, I didn't venture into the canyon till many years later.

In the spring of 2020, during the COVID-19 lockdown, I took up running and have stuck with it ever since. It took hundreds of miles in the American River Canyon for me to recognize how rare a place it is. There is nowhere else in the world that makes me feel at peace, free, and alive. The canyon has shaped the person I am today. It has taught me to be conscious of my surroundings and appreciate the area I live in. I have observed a similar impact the canyon has had on those in my community.

After learning more about the importance of the environment and observing how modern humans have decimated the natural areas thus far, who would think to keep causing harm? I thought everyone cared for nature just as I did. But I was quickly proven wrong. In high school, I was very taken aback by the actions of my classmates. I watched them consciously litter and damage the plants on campus. I felt like I needed to stand up for the Earth and protect it. It made me want to become an environmental scientist and advocate for the natural world. I also became active in my school's environmental club and have participated in many trash pickups. Just recently, the club went to a Placer Land Trust Broom Battle, in which invasive broom was removed from the Canyon View Preserve.

As a child, I wanted to avoid the canyon; as a senior in high school, I long to spend more time exploring every trail, witnessing the leaves change color, and noticing when the first flowers bloom. What has changed over the years? I have gained so much knowledge about the canyon and the environment. I believe education and experience in the natural world can impact how people interact with it. If they are able to form a connection with nature, they will be more conscious and caring of it. To allow for the continued preservation of the American River Canyon and other wild areas. Ensuring those who come to these places after us will experience them just as we did.

PARC High School Essay Contest Winner, 2026