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Primary adventure/dream: Krocka Expedition's Ecuador Semester Trip

To begin with, I will attempt to give you a bit of a picture of who I am. Fully describing myself in a single essay is like trying to capture the ups and downs of a day in three words. Just as every day and every moment is unique and important on many different levels, every aspect of my life is complex and involves several layers of my conscious being. However, by dividing my life into three categories and explaining a brief excerpt of each, perhaps I will be able to compose a response that is a little more informative than the equivalent explanation of "it was fine", a response which it is so often necessary to resort to when a day is too complex to summarize.

Thinking of my life and my personality as a whole, it occurred to me that my life progresses in three different worlds, the physical, mental and spiritual. The physical world is what some people would call the "real" world, those things that can be visibly seen, heard or sensed. The mental world within me is comprised of the tangible ideas I form through my interactions in the physical world and the information I strive to remember and understand. The spiritual world is really quite nebulous and difficult to define. It is the part of me that feels and grows and changes; the hearts of my true self, for it is where I experience the feelings and generate the concepts that truly define my personality. These three worlds, and their interactions, define who I am as a person and how I interact with the world around me.

The physical part of my life is quite simple and easy to relate. The activities which I enjoy are quite polarized and incongruent, but in some beautiful way, they all make sense for me. Music, sports, learning, art, nature, work and service are all incredibly important parts of my life and my passions. I love singing profoundly, for it connects me to my inner self.

The mental portion of my personality is a little less straightforward to describe, but even more important than the physical world. Thinking is a beautiful thing if it can be separated from worry. I love learning about the earth and societies and reading good literature and other academic subjects, but the kind of thinking that is most demonstrative of my mentality toward life and the visions I have for the future is easier to understand through the goals I have formed for myself.

People who know me very well often say that I'm a thoughtful and insightful person, traits which are directly tied to the connection I have with my inner self. I strive to listen to my inner voice which often shows me fascinating insights into how I view the world and how society functions from my

perspective. Articulating these thoughts can sometimes be a struggle, but when I am able to, they provide for exciting and dynamic conversation as well as deep connections with others. Furthermore, living in connection with both the outer world and my inner world is a vulnerable place that can give birth to unfathomable forgiveness and acceptance of the self, so I have a very positive view of myself. Of course, there are times when I feel totally insecure about myself and feel like I don't fit with the rest of the world. In general however, I am able to appreciate the joy of living in close connection with the inner world and the outer.

Kroka (the semester program in Ecuador that I am fundraising for) is a fundamental step in this process, I have come to believe. It will be a learning experience entirely different from anything I could receive in my senior year in public school. It combines academics, athletics, musicianship and the social implications of living simply and sustainably in a manner that connects me directly to the world I live in, and to my passions. Life's adaptations are brilliant and one of my foremost goals is to spread the understanding that in order to preserve this magnificence. We will have to make industrial cycles circular rather than linear; we have to think about waste not as waste but as resources for new commodities. The semester will challenge me in ways that I have not been challenged before, so I will learn new skills that will be extremely important in my life of pursuing this goal.

The semester will begin on August 31st in NH where myself and thirteen other young people aged 16-19 will prepare for Ecuador. During these first three weeks, we will study Spanish, natural history, nutrition and New England. We will work on a farm and make backpacks and knives for our expeditions in Ecuador, cooking all our meals over an open fire. On a six day bike trip, we will go visit a farm where we will help harvest and prepare garden beds for winter. Besides all this, we will run, paddle, cave, rock climb and swim to stay in shape for the intense expeditions in Ecuador.

In October, we will fly to Ecuador! For the first part of our journey in Ecuador, we will be living in the foothills of the Ecuadorian Andes where we will study the culture of the Inter-Andean people, the area's geography and the ecological impact of the oil industry. We will make traditional penco drums, cheese, yogurt, bread, wool vests and many other useful items. After a month of working, learning and living in the Highlands, we will set off on an expedition across the Eastern Andes, using compasses and maps as our only navigation devices. We will make a cataraft and use it to raft down tributaries of the Amazon to the remote Shiwacotcha native community. The indigenous people will teach us about living in the rainforest and we will explore the ecosystem of the Amazon along with many other aspects of this rich cultural and biological area.

At the end of the semester, we will make an expedition to the top of Cotopaxi, a 19,200 foot volcano! Having lived in New England all my life, the tallest mountain I have ever climbed is probably Mansfield, so the prospect of full on mountaineering is incredibly exciting. In order to make it up such a huge volcano, I'm going to have to ascend the assumptions I make about my own capability. The entire semester will push me to learn, for I will have to step out of my comfort zone. I have been in high school for three years and I am comfortable with it. On the contrary, I have never confronted a lot of the challenges I will be faced with at Krokia, so I will be able to learn many new skills.

I realize of course that Krokia is pretty different from skiing. However, the heart of Krokia, and my journey to get there, is adventure. The entire semester is an adventure, for adventure is stepping out into the unknown, and that is exactly what Krokia is about. Fund raising is new ground for me. I have a hard time asking people for money, so raising these funds will also push me outside of my comfort zone. I am actually glad that my parents can't just pay for Krokia though, for learning how to handle money and fund raise will definitely be useful skills. Moreover, all the work I put into fundraising make every moment of the semester that much more special.

Applying for this scholarship is also part of my fundraising efforts. Though I never met Ryan and I don't know a great deal about him, I was very touched by the video about him, what was written about his life on the website, and most of all, his core principles. I don't know that I've ever found something so simple and so true that expresses what is most important to me. Some of his core principles don't apply to me directly, such as being a good uncle, but the fundamental idea of loving your family is important to me as well.

Two principles I would add to Ryan's list are "stay true to myself" and "be receptive". To me, staying true to myself means staying connected to my inner self, never giving up hope and staying grounded even when accomplishing my goals seems impossible. Being receptive means being open to every idea and person I encounter and never making assumptions. These principles are already woven into Ryan's, so they are not really necessary, but they are how I would write these same ideas.

I wish Ryan were alive, for it would be incredible to meet him. In a sense, he is alive though. Without ever having set eyes upon his warm smile except in a picture, I have been inspired by his spirit and his story. I can't imagine how difficult it was and is to lose him, but the amazing thing is that he is not lost. He is still living on in the hearts of his family, friends, and even strangers like me, all day, every day.

PS. I have created a blog to share my fundraising journey that may be interesting to you:

sonyabugliongluck.blogspot.com