

Personal Essay

Growing up, I had been a BMX kid in the inner city of Dallas and have since always used the bicycle to commute to school and to work. But it wasn't until I was 23 years old that I had applied to be a bicycle mechanic at a non-profit bike collective in Tucson, Arizona that I actually began to learn about the very thing that I had been using all my life. I was surprised to get an interview and beyond excited when I got a call afterwards saying that they wanted to offer me a position as a collective member. I was trained in almost every aspect of bicycle mechanics and after my first under the bridge bike camping trip, I knew that I had finally found what I was looking for my entire life. I found how to express my autonomy in a way that healed me from all previous traumas I had experienced in my life. I was hooked and immediately starting seeking out ways to go on my first long distance tour.

I remembered previously hearing from friends about this bike collective, Bikes Across Borders, that did an annual migration from Austin, Texas to Mexico and reached out to get some details to decide whether I'd be able to go with them. Upon hearing the dynamics of the group and its history, I felt confident that I would be able to contribute as a bilingual mechanic and started saving up money and making plans to get to Austin. When the time finally came to leave for tour, I hitchhiked my way back home to Texas and began my first long distance bike tour. Those two and a half weeks have been the most memorable times of my life. I have never felt so empowered riding through my home state and being a femme bike mechanic for a group of fifteen people. It was that tour that inspired me to go on my first solo tour through southern Mexico and Belize.

Two weeks after returning from tour, I sold all of my belongings, quit my job and took a one-way flight to Mexico City with my bike to fulfill my dreams. Little did I know, the route I wanted to take was smack dab in the middle of rainy season. I had to wait four months before I could set off on my adventure! Now I consider those four months a blessing in disguise. While waiting for the rain to end, I was squatting at a community bike shop trading bike work and classes for a bed to sleep in. While teaching free, weekly build-a-bike classes exclusively for women, trans and femme persons I found my first group of friends and because of them, began to feel at home in the city. I got connected with little gigs here and there doing bike courier work, painting murals, teaching bike mechanics workshops in English and was able to save up enough money to go on tour.

December finally came around and I toured solo for three weeks through the Yucatán Peninsula and Belize. On that trip, I found myself able to reconnect to my heritage that I was severed from for years. Being able to speak Spanish and explore the land where my ancestors came from on my bicycle combined all of the things I am most passionate about in life. The fact that I was able to build my own bike from the frame up, plan, raise money and complete my entire trip independently has since become an accomplishment I am most proud of! It is from this trip that I got set on riding the Baja Divide this winter. This route is 1,700 miles of off pavement riding starting in San Diego, California and ending in San Jose del Cabo, Mexico. Although I am preparing to ride this route solo, I anticipate that I will encounter other cyclists

along the way and hope to share parts of my journey with other passionate people like me. The gnarly route itself covers all types of terrain from dry prickly desert, miles of sand to partially graveled roads. Because this terrain and climate are so demanding and there will be a span of days where I will be isolated without towns or stores nearby, it is absolutely necessary to have the appropriate bike, gear and attire for this arid desert route. While I have gear for bike touring in rural areas, I do not have the gear for this extreme type of cycling and as we adventurers know, this gear is not cheap. Even with the current job I have, my income is not sufficient to pay my bills while also saving up for the gear that I would need for this dream to come true. I am entirely independent without outside or familial financial assistance and this scholarship will grant me the ability to conquer this gritty adventure by helping me purchase the gear I need. I hope you will consider me for this amazing opportunity & I guarantee you that I will make Ryan proud!

Sincerely,

Alex