

ESSAY

After reading through Ryan's story, his core values, and his ambitious lifestyle one thing stood out to me more than everything else. That one thing is; this family is so close and cares about each other so much. It is evident to see that Ryan loved and cherished his family and friends, and from what I have read they seem to be the best support team around. It's one thing to enjoy the thrills of an adventurous outdoor life, but to have friends and family around you that share that same passion and support you towards your goals is what makes life worth living. Reading through Ryan's story not only makes me feel driven to live life to the fullest and enjoy every day all day, but it makes me appreciate those who I hold close. I think about all the goals I have set for myself throughout my 22 years of life, and I realize that I didn't achieve one goal completely on my own. I always had a support team even if that just meant my parents attended my cross country meets in the rain or snow to cheer as I raced by. I felt loved and supported and I know that Ryan must have felt the same way in all of his life ambitions.

Ever since I was about 14 years old, I have wanted to hike from Georgia to Maine. I'm not quite sure why I was so intrigued by this as a young teenager, but as the years went by this dream became closer to reality. Throughout high school I read books and watched videos and I started to think that maybe this was possible for me to do. In college I decided in my freshman year that I was going to learn how to backpack and immediately joined the University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point Adventure Club. I learned from my peers how to navigate, pack my bag correctly, prepare for the weather, and make a plan. Throughout college I pushed myself to go on all the weeklong or weekend backpacking trips I could and learn as much as possible, even planning a route for myself and friends to backpack through Bandelier National Monument in New Mexico.

In the summer of 2022 and 2023 I moved to Burlington, VT to intern at the Natural Resources Conservation Service. I had lived in Wisconsin for my entire life, and this was my first major move. I loved it so much. I hiked all the mountains I could and fished so many streams. After these two summers of exploring the long trail and experiencing New England I realized that thru hiking the Appalachian Trail was going to happen for me. I absolutely adored the Eastern Mountains and I want to experience them again.

I graduate college in December of 2023 and plan to start my hike in late March of 2024. I have been accumulating gear over the past few years and have been working multiple jobs at once to save for this adventure, but this scholarship would really help relieve some financial stress in purchasing some new gear I can't quite afford yet and paying for food along the trail. I appreciate your consideration and I am so happy I stumbled across Ryan's story. He really left a beautiful legacy and set a good example of how to live life to the fullest.