

Meagan O'Neill Flying Ryan Personal Essay

What stood out for me about Ryan's Core Principles and listening to friends of his speak, was how much he valued having fun and truly living. Having fun sounds simple and obvious, but sometimes I find myself letting other people's opinions get in the way, or prioritizing everything else in my life over having fun. It has been a recent journey of mine to set aside time to have fun and do "meaningless" playful activities because, looking back, those are some of my most cherished memories. That being said, he was also an extremely hard worker and persistent - I think those qualities are also important for climbing out of hard places in life and sometimes the reward of a satisfied life is worth that much more if hard work and dedication was put in.

I am currently a senior at University of Wisconsin Stevens Point majoring in Soil Science and Land Management. The importance of soil itself has grown to mean a great deal to me. Soil has an underestimated impact on the health of any given ecosystem, as well as the planet's health in relation to global warming. Most people I come across have a misunderstanding of soil and were raised to think of it as dirty and not much more. This is understandable - soil is complex and may not be everyone's cup of tea. However, soil is literally the foundation of our existence - it is needed for the food we eat, the air we breathe, and every living thing we love depends on it. There is a quote from Jacques-Yves Cousteau, "People protect what they love, they love what they understand and they understand what they are taught" - for me, this quote sums up the importance of education in conserving nature and what we love. My learning and appreciation of soil would not have been as strong without friends, peers, and teachers. Having people to support each other's education in this way, both in the classroom and out, is a factor that cannot be overstated in conserving soil health as well.

This summer, after I graduate, I will be traveling to Alaska to work on an organic, no-till peony farm in Alaska for the summer through the WWOOFING program. I will be working for free, in exchange for free housing and food. For a few years now I have known that I want to go to Alaska - I have had a number of friends visit and tell me all about its raw beauty and how I need to go. I also have been encouraged to make use of my time right after graduation and travel because I don't have many responsibilities yet. These two factors had me thinking about visiting Alaska for some time now, and once I learned about the unique soil properties up there, I decided I was going to go. This scholarship would help with the cost of flight tickets and money to explore, camp, and backpack in my free time. Depending how the summer goes, I am considering a long-term career in Alaska working with its carbon sequestering soil that is so important in mitigating climate change.

In anticipation for this summer, I have been saving money and scavenging backpacking gear. I have also been picking up several hobbies such as crocheting and whittling to encourage limited phone usage and encourage a more immersive experience. I check flight prices on a regular basis when I am bored too. Any financial amount this scholarship can provide would be greatly appreciated - thanks!