

Personal Essay

My name is Avery Ellis, and I'm an adventurer and mountain biker from Vermont. I grew up skiing, mountain biking, and exploring around my town of Montgomery. Jay Peak provided all I could ever need to get lost in the woods and connect with myself and my friends. It all began on alpine skis at age 2 and continued on as I learned to mountain bike shortly after. I liked these activities because of hot chocolate breaks and the friends I got to see when I did them.

As I grew up, though, I realized that it wasn't just the hot chocolate breaks and the friends that kept me in it. It was the overall ability of these sports to challenge me physically and mentally; bringing me into a community of like minded individuals and helping me grow at the same time. I discovered cross country skiing when I followed my best friends to the Craftsbury Outdoor Center and joined the junior ski club. I loved the community I found there, as it was full of driven, kind, fun-loving people who made me feel strong and confident. I also loved that the cross training for XC skiing included activities like mountain biking, backcountry touring, and running - basically all the sports I already loved mixed into one! As a ski racer, I also competed in XC mountain bike races and ran competitively.

Not only did I love the adventures with friends, but I also loved the time alone in the woods. This time gave me space to understand who I was and reflect on my goals and my passions. My connection with nature is a part of who I am, and spending time outside grounds me. I channeled this connection to other passions, including painting. I loved painting the unique patterns in the trees and mountains. More than that, I loved painting the *feeling* I got when I was outside and the way I could express myself through this art. I am thankful that my connection with these outdoor sports gave me art and added another passion to my life.

I loved this lifestyle so much that I continued ski racing and training through college. My training became more focused and more serious, and I put competitive running and biking aside; only doing them as a means to make ski training as fun as possible. When I graduated from college in 2022, the idea of pursuing mountain biking competitively moved to the forefront of my mind. I started with the Eastern States Cup enduro series; having no idea what I was getting myself into. I instantly loved everything about it - the time spent climbing to the tops of mountains, the challenge of tackling the scariest trails I had ever ridden, and the friends I made doing it. Enduro is a heavily male-dominated sport, and the small community of women I found there is tight knit and unwaveringly supportive of one another.

After a while, I was not *just* having fun, but I was also finding success in the sport. I wanted to find other opportunities in the sport, and looked to the Enduro World Cup circuit. Most of these competitions are held in Europe, and are difficult to access as someone in North America. With the Flyin Ryan scholarship, I hope to enter into world class racing by using the support to travel to Italy and race in the EDR world cup qualifier in the Finale Outdoor Region. I am excited to continue living with the values I've gained through sport my whole life, including building community, embracing the beauty of the world, working hard, and having fun.