

Growing up, I never understood why people got tattoos. To me, they seemed impulsive and doomed to end up as mistakes, the kind of commitments that didn't fit into my conventional, narrow view of life at the time. As Kim Kardashian famously said, "Would you ever put a bumper sticker on a Bentley?". However, in early 2024, I found myself sitting in my friend Annie's living room, holding out my left arm as she gently inscribed a small stick-and-poke tattoo just above my inner elbow: *10 13*.

A month into my first term at college, on October 13, 2021, I got a call that one of my high school friends had attempted suicide and was in critical condition in the hospital. I remember standing numb in the library hallway during a study session, thinking how our entire friend group was scattered across the country at different universities, all of us individually grappling with the news while the world continued on as normal around us. I learned the following morning that she had been declared dead, and it was the first real moment of grief I had been old enough to comprehend, outside of the deaths of family members and childhood pets when I was young. The strangeness of continuing to live my life (knowing how fortunate I was to be alive and happy while she had felt stuck), and never having the chance to actually talk about and process the loss openly with my friends (since we haven't all been together in-person since high school) was, and still is, hard to navigate.

In the wake of my grief, after months of burying it, slowly opening myself back up to confront my emotions, and eventually confiding in my closest friends in college, I decided I wanted to live more boldly and intentionally going into my adult life. One of my friends, Sarah, has a tattoo reading 222 (a tribute to her late father's birthday), and by thinking on my own grief, I began to see tattoos for the art and storytelling form they are. With *10 13* now anchored to my arm, I carry the full weight of my friend's death everywhere I go, including the angst, the acceptance, and the thoughtfulness it gave me. It's something that has pushed me to get out of my comfort zone at every possible moment, particularly in the form of getting outside.

At Dartmouth, I discovered my love of the outdoors for the first time. Being raised almost entirely in rural, flat Central Florida, I had never consistently hiked or paddled, and having those opportunities be so geographically accessible and affordable in college revealed an entirely new and unexpected passion. I ended up working with my friend and roommate Anna to become the Dartmouth Outing Club's only two certified sea kayaking leaders, rebuilding the guidelines for becoming a leader after all institutional knowledge had been lost during COVID.

After graduating, I took the leap to move to the Galápagos to complete a five-month public service fellowship through Dartmouth's Dickey Center for International Understanding, working with an environmental education nonprofit on San Cristóbal Island. On a new continent, in a language I barely spoke, I leaned into this impulse to seek out new experiences and challenge myself, spending my free time studying Spanish vocabulary and grammar, and even scuba diving for the first time and earning my PADI Open Water certification on my 23rd birthday. When I returned to the U.S. in February 2026, I had a newfound appreciation for its outdoors that I had missed for the past half year, and knew a thru-hike was on the horizon as my next adventure. I started looking into the Vermont Long Trail specifically because of its proximity to Dartmouth, knowing I love New England but had never extensively explored Vermont

during college, and to my dad, who moved to Burlington in 2022 and will be an invaluable resource in the case of emergencies or unexpected situations.

When writing out my own Core Principles, three stand out in relation to my goals for the Long Trail: “remember who you’ve lost,” “challenge yourself every day,” and “fall in love with yourself.” Life on the trail would be a daily practice of all three: embracing discomfort every step of the way, taking advantage of extended time in the remote outdoors for real introspection, and honoring *10 13* by doing exactly what I’ve vowed to always prioritize: living more boldly and intentionally. The Flyin Ryan Adventure Scholarship would make this experience possible at a moment post-graduation when I’ve been choosing international experiences and low-paying seasonal outdoor and nonprofit work over building savings, and that support would make all the difference. Thank you for your consideration.