

Amber LeBlanc

Jenn Ladino

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### SITW Testimonial

Within the 2.3 million acre Frank Church- River of No Return Wilderness, there is a small and refreshingly emerald green patch of land along Big Creek, the heart of the wilderness some would say. This oasis is home to Black Bears, Mule Deer, Cedar Waxwings, Cutthroat Trout, caterpillars, and humans—all friends here. Caretakers, researchers, interns, students, biologists reside with one another. Small planes fly overhead frequently, but the pilots never see the same image as the day before. Some days there would be little figures playing softball on the airstrip and other days a line of ginormous backpacks would move slowly towards the bridge to wilderness. Here lies the Taylor Wilderness Research Station.

A remote research station in the wilderness such as Taylor Ranch serves many purposes for all who encounter it. From the native Dukudeka people who were impacting the land long before Cougar Dave, who participated in the common predation hunting ideology of his time, to transfer over to University ownership, the station has seen the surrounding wilderness change. Mountains were cut with trail switchbacks and used for recreation, solitude, and soul searching. There are a variety of activities circulating through the station today— hunters pass through briefly after glassing for Bighorn Sheep on Horse Mountain, fish technicians stay for a week at a time to monitor Steelhead smolts, students stay and learn for a couple months, and caretakers

work tirelessly to run the whole operation. Taylor Ranch is like an ecosystem as each member, each plane, each piece of firewood is critical to the management of the station.

Time, dates, cell phones, shaving leg hair— all concepts that are not nearly as relevant at Taylor Ranch as in the front country. Days were as long as a Rattlesnake but flew by as fast as a Belted Kingfisher. There were no weekends at Taylor; students worked every day on their studies, lent a helping hand around the station, or went out hiking in the wilderness. We learned how to live in a more Earth friendly style by becoming aware of energy consumption, food wasting, water usage, wood burning, and waste disposal. We took showers less often, only did laundry once a week or less—sometimes resulting in some smelly smells—and relied on solar power for all electricity. Dunking our faces in Pioneer Creek for a gulp of crisp mountain water after a hot backpacking trek would be impossible if we were not wise with our trash disposal or the chemicals we send back into our ecosystems (or if there were Giardia). Whatever we put into our resources will come back to us in the long run. As Aldo Leopold wrote in his *Sand County Almanac*, “Like winds and sunsets, wild things were taken for granted until progress began to do away with them. Now we face the question whether a still higher ‘standard of living’ is worth its cost in things natural, wild and free.” Becoming more aware of our actions allowed us to appreciate the unique setting we lived in that much more.

Classes were taught outside on the airstrip that sometimes paused to watch an Osprey fly overhead or were held in a wood cabin classroom with a wood stove burning for heat. Our professor even taught on the trail in a foot of snow during a five day backpacking expedition. Teaching methods also differ at Taylor Ranch for Semester in the Wild in that classes were heavily discussion based, and the discussions continued long after the class session was over for the day. Close relationships were built with the professors, who in turn the students admired for

their passion towards wilderness and their own work. Ed Galindo taught us to walk in beauty, spread compassion to the world, and ask the plant people for permission before trampling on their heads. Jenn Ladino taught me to write about what you feel passionately for and want to see changed because anything can be brought to life in writing. Environmental writing is key to discussing matters that are becoming more and more important in today's world. Adam Sowards taught me that the conflicts within wilderness preservation are old news and to consider whose home the land was before it become a part of ours. Ed Krumpe told us stories that inspired us to protect this wilderness that has much to offer and consider what we can offer in return. He opened my eyes to the variety of problems that wilderness faces because of the many thoughtless actions we take. Pete Gäg taught me that birds are more than just a neat animal, they are crucial to the well-being of delicate ecosystems. Meg Gäg taught us to be a strong functioning family, to create our own ecosystem within Taylor. Tehya Gäg taught me to open my eyes to all the small wonders we often overlook that are oh-so-important to the bigger scheme of things.

Semester in the Wild has inspired me to go make a difference in this world somehow, whether it's through my career or education or day to day ordinary life in the front country. Caring about metaphorical or real ecosystems is the key to further comprehending problems in nature that we now have a complete toolbelt to solve. We learn about the wilderness around us to better understand ourselves. Wilderness creates solitude and allows for a deeper connection to our history, our inner desires, our natural world that is being threatened by many looming factors. Wilderness is not "untouched" or "pristine" as we have learned because our large human footprint has stamped down everywhere, but we can protect wilderness for future enjoyment by spreading awareness about what we are losing through excessive consumption. In the wilderness, everything is stripped down to the basics and it's simple to discover what you only want versus

what is really necessary. Let us, not just Taylor Ranch dwellers but all Earth dwellers, think about our footprints and what they are doing to our precious ecosystems. Seeing the rawness of wilderness in its most basic form caused a stirring deep within me that, over the past two months, boiled over to create a stew of passion for wilderness awareness and education. We need to fully understand what we will be missing out on if we continue our bad habits as wilderness becomes rarer and civilization becomes more addictive. We need to think like an ecosystem—think big picture and in a circle. I feel prepared to go back to the front country and circle back my skills and knowledge gained here to make a positive difference in this world. And of course, return to the wilderness when I feel lost as I leave a piece of my heart here, in this place I can call the home for my soul.