

Spending time at Taylor Wilderness Research Station (TWRS) has shown me that the word wilderness is flawed. During my Wilderness and Protected Area Management course taught by Ed Krumpe, I was required to read a passage from the book 1491 by Charles Mann. Mann explained that there is a widely known misconception regarding the population of Native Americans in North America during the time of new European settlement. As mentioned in my American Environmental History course taught by Adam Sowards, religion had a massive influence on how new settlers viewed their environment and what we refer to as wilderness. Most religions viewed wilderness as a sacred place, a place “untouched by man”. But as I have learned from Ed Krumpe and Ed Galindo, that idea could not be farther from the truth. Areas that European settlers marked off as wilderness were in fact the homes of Native Americans who had been having a significant impact on the land for many years. The concept of wilderness further separates humans from nature and acts as a way to distinguish our species from others.

Since living at TWRS, I no longer think of this place as wilderness. It is my home. It is where I feel comfortable and relaxed. It is where I feel normal. I feel more human than I ever have. I like to think about something Jennifer Ladino, my Environmental Writing professor, said: “After all, we’re all animals too, right? That seems to be something a lot of people tend to forget”. I thought about what Jen said a lot and it made me realize something; I came to Taylor in search of something new, but I have in fact found something very old, something that’s been buried my whole life. My time at Taylor has awakened a dormant instinct within me. One that pushes me towards the earth and all its natural beauty. Although the natural world isn’t always sunshine and rainbows, it deserves respect and appreciation for what it is.

I remember something that Pete Gäg, my Ecology professor and one of the managers at TWRS, told my class: “I don’t like to use the term natural resources because the environment is

not strictly here for human benefit”. What Pete said really resonated with me. It reminded me that we as a species are a moving cog in a much bigger machine. We fit delicately, but our society has thrown a wrench in the works and the human cog has bounced out of place, causing the machine to malfunction. The actions our species are vital to this delicate machine. Ecology is a fragile system that we are a part of, and like all other species, we must find balance to maintain this system before it completely collapses.

I wanted to come to Taylor Ranch to feel closer to nature, and I think a large part of that is being able to live as “wildly” as I can. Today, it’s difficult to live a life not separate from nature, and I won’t be able to live as I have here probably ever again. The things I have learned from my Leadership class, taught by Meg Gäg, have shown me how to live productively within a community (and not just a community made up of humans). Through the wise words of all my wonderful professors, I have learned to live more presently and cherish the precious time I have been given to live in this wilderness. I realize how I fit. How humans are meant to fit within the context of the natural world. We are one. This concept of wild is just a reflection of the things humans try to keep in check. Anger. Aggression. Savageness. Fear. It is all a part of human instinct.

My hope is to take everything I have learned at Taylor and incorporate it into my life in the front country. I hope to live a more natural lifestyle as best as I can and to do everything within my power to live as I am meant to live; wild and free.

Oh Taylor Oh Taylor

You've influenced my behavior

From the many hard hikes and crossing of streams

To the aweing and smelling of ponderosa trees

You have supplied me with such knowledge

That I'd never gain in a lecture hall at college

The Frank Church of No Return Wilderness has welcomed me with open arms

And wrapped me up all snug with a blanket made of the finest yarn

How can I possibly show you my gratitude

For cheering me up when I am in a foul mood

For showing me four seasons in a day

And leaving me with no words to say

How truly grateful I am

For allowing me to become a proud and strong woman