

*Swan Stories:
A Community of Youth*

Aspen Anderson



As a student in the 2016 Landscape and Livelihoods field semester program through Swan Valley connections, I was asked to create a community conservation project that related to the Swan Valley or surrounding valleys in some way. My interests have always resided in writing, and more recently have merged with education among youth. Because of this, I chose to base my project around the intersection of the two. From this intersection came the creation of “Swan Stories”: a book of written stories from students around the area which speak to their relationship with the land, and more specifically, if those relationships help them create a sense of place.

In compiling “Swan Stories: A Community of Youth”, I wanted to elicit a voice that often goes unheard or underestimated in our society; a creative, unique voice that everyone has had at one point in their life; an innocent perspective on this crazy world that tells it how it is, truthfully and wholeheartedly. My reason behind finding this voice was to validate and make known the opinion of youth growing up in the Seeley/Swan area, as we met with numerous adults in the community to understand their relationship with the land, but never with the young people who live there. Writing, to me, seemed like a good way to express this voice.

In the seven classrooms I visited and ran writing workshops in, each student produced a final piece to be submitted to the book, providing me with 100+ entries written from students around the area.

The voices of students K-12 ring loud in this compilation of short stories from around the Seeley/Swan area, telling of their experiences with the landscape they inhabit and their connections to a place they call home.

I give many thanks to all of the students who participated and the teachers who so graciously allowed me into their classrooms. It is through your writing that we are able to envision this world in the ways that you see it, and begin learning from the voices of the youth in the community.

"Home"

The Pyramid Mountain and Salmon Lake.
The first image of the safe place we always come back to.
The sweet smile on the faces of the new babies.
Sunshine and heat,
Tan native skin.
Winter and snow,
But too many injuries to play.
The soft fur of the cats,
Seeking out momma's attention.
Long work days only to keep everyone happy.
Laughing and bickering echo as Emma and I are together.
A beautiful family pieced perfectly together.
Acceptance, happiness and love,
That is what built my home.

- Grade 11

Welcome to my home. It is in the woods and around the bend, you cross the river over the hill, through the meadow. Over another stream and I can hear my dog from here, we're close. I stop at a lake and fish for a little bit, then go around the lake, go through the swamp and I am at my home. We don't have to pull our sleds because our dog does. His name is Tank and he is $\frac{3}{4}$ Newfoundland and $\frac{1}{4}$ golden retriever.

- Grade 6

The Blue Skies, and starry nights.
The adventures, wilderness, and the feelings,
Just all seems right.

Sounds from the lakes
View from the mountains
Make Montana home.

Hunting and fishing
Hiking and sight seeing.
It'll keep you busy
No need to worry.

No traffic no noise
Just the
The game crossing.

Montana is the last best place
But I heard North Dakota is better.

- Grade 9

Montana. The place where I grew up.

From the day I was born I knew I was going to live here my whole life, but I was wrong. Montana is a very great place. This is my story of how and what I did here. I see Montana as a beautiful place and what you can do is extraordinary! I see the forest as a home for anything. It's so green, quiet and a good place to relax. I've seen many things. My parents have shot many many deer, and I think it's awesome that they do that, but for 1 and a half years I lived in a city. It was more of a town but it seemed like a city to me. I moved there when I was 9 years old, and I am 11 years old now. The city was an experience for me and my family. The city was also something that nobody liked. It seemed like the world had rolled over. No one was happy, not even myself. But we got through just fine, and came back to Montana where we belong!!

This year I am hunting, and I am going to get a bear and a deer. When I walk in that forest, I hear birds chirping, squirrels squeaking, and the deer trotting in the soft sounds of the forest. Then there is fishing, another great activity to be in, and more great sounds. Birds, the river and the bugs, reeling up a fish into the shore is exciting, and catching those slimy frogs!

And of course there is hiking, yet another thing!! It's beautiful, and when you hike, you can feel the forest swarm around you. You mostly see waterfalls and lakes, which are so amazing!! You see squirrels and chipmunks, bees and flowers, and birds and a blue sky.

Driving up a dirt road, most people would think that it would be boring. But no, it's not. When you drive up a dirt road, it feels like you're free to do anything. You smell the fresh feeling that makes you want to let go of everything. If you try these 4 activities, you will for sure stay and live in Montana your whole life, and will fall in love with the forest. My point of view of **Montana Is Noble**.

- Grade 6

East Montana

Where I come from
The land is plain but bright
It is empty, but full
If you wish to see...
See the hidden flowers grow
Spot the antelope that like to play
A ranch busy with life, here we go
Along the dancing fish and flies
To a place most don't know
Far back on an old dirt road
Watch out for the holes
Where friendly critters make a life
Or a venomous snake may try to bite
It all lies hidden on Montana ground
Where most cannot see its glory
Instead of North, eastward bound
Where it is known as the Great empty Ground
But all you need to do is take another glance
Open not one but two eyes and see
What the land enjoys to hide

The wind may blow but still you can hear
Its enchanting song
Where most do not plan to see..

- Grade 9

My earliest memory of being in this area was when we moved here and I instantly loved it. Being in the mountains with the towering, thick barked larch instantly drew my attention to this area. The trees are comforting and act like a protective figure towering over you to protect you from anything. The mountains so tall, so old, yet so new because they give you a new feeling on life. They give you new courage by not letting things move them and they are always there when you need them. The crisp, high altitude air is so refreshing and is impossible not to miss. When you first see this place, you think it is a typical tourist town, but it is much more. It's a rare gem in the world. There is everything that you could want; trees, clean air, clear water, big skies, tall mountains and friendly people.

- Grade 10

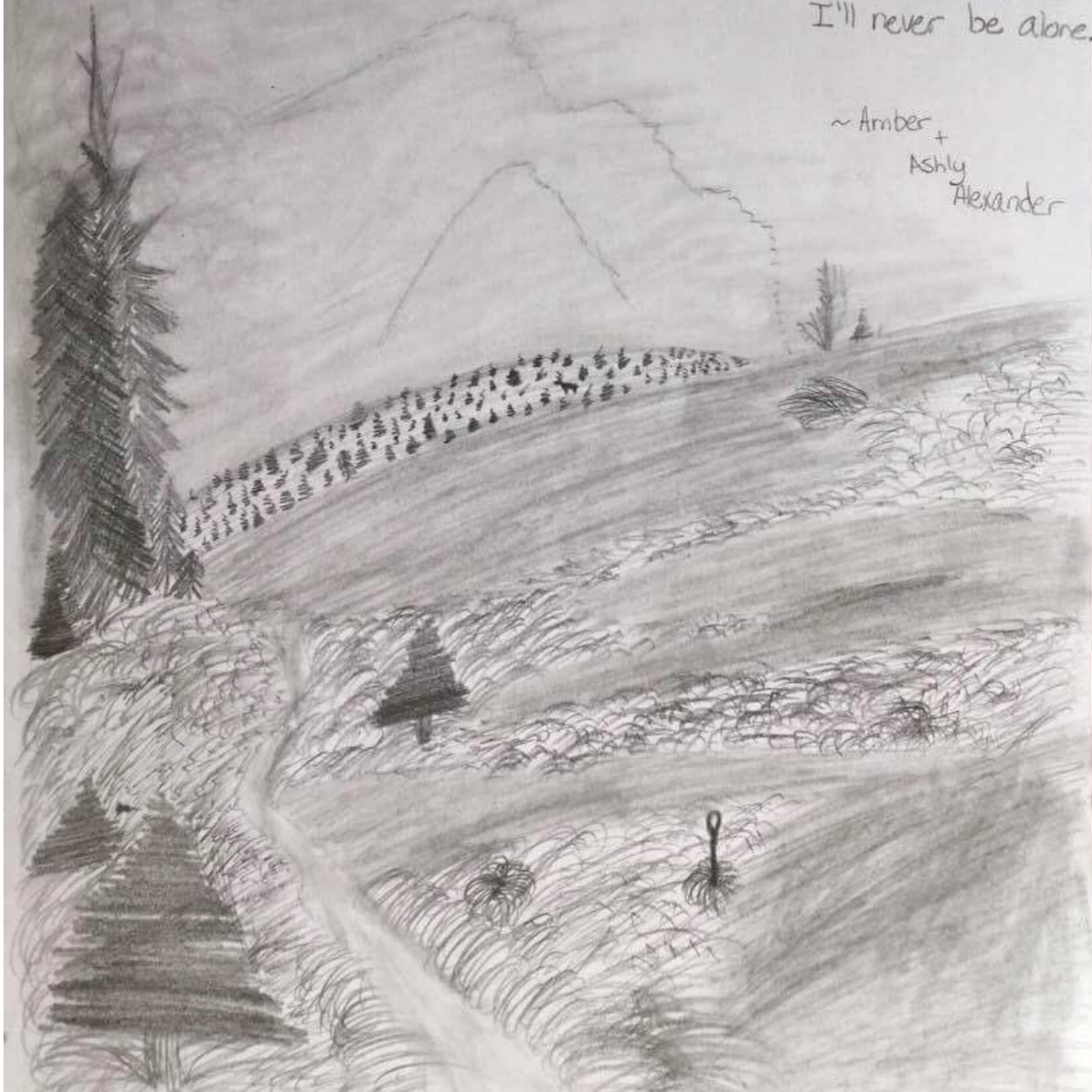
Montana to me
is a horizon
with tree after tree.

Bear, elk, moose,
Reside in the woods,
While eagle, crow, goose
Reign the skies.

Pollution doesn't touch here,
All you can smell,
Is crisp, clean air.

Montana is home
with all the wildlife
I'll never be alone.

~ Amber +
Ashly
Alexander



Montana. The place I was born and raised. I couldn't be more proud of the state I live in. From the beautiful sunsets of orange, purple, blue and pink to the changing of leaves and needles in the fall. Heck, even the first snowfall of the year. The way the snow lightly covers the tops of trees. To the elk and deer that roam in our backyard. Everywhere you go, you get an opportunity to see wildlife. It's a great

privilege to live in such a wonderful place. If I didn't get to see this everyday, I would probably go crazy. Montana is the place I love the most. The place I will always call home.

- Grade 10

A friend once told me, "home is where the heart is". Now, growing up in Montana can be interesting. You learn from a young age that sometimes the world ain't all sunshine and rainbows. Well, unless it rains for five minutes then turns into sunshine, then it's usually rainbows, but that's besides the point. Montana is unique, the kind that really makes you appreciate what you have and what you learn. Most kids don't know what a thick lodge pole forest is or have had the glory of slaying a deer or elk, or even seeing the night sky and all of its magnificent stars and constellations. I've been to other places completely different than Montana and seen some pretty cool things, but none as cool as the Big Sky. And that is why my heart is in Montana.

- Grade 10

Basketball is my favorite sport. Things that come with it are the swoosh of a made basket. You're aching muscles after a hard practice. The feeling when the ball leaves your fingers and you know it is going in. The night before the game you're calm but focused knowing all the hard work has been put in for this one game. The sound the crowd makes when you hit a game winner. All of this I love and that's why basketball is my home.

- Grade 11

Montana, wow I feel so weird in this place. I'm not used to it, but I'm here now and I've been living in a hotel for like two months now. So yeah that's home for you, ha just kidding Montana is such a bright place and it's so colorful. Also the experiences I've had like oh my gosh they were so amazing I just love this place it reminds me so much of home. My family is there, I have my pets, there is food there and I feel just safe there. I feel so stupid saying this but I saw this in a movie once and this adult couldn't find his home and there was a bum who came up to him and said "home is where you make it!" I just heard that and I'm like wow that is so true it doesn't matter if you are in a cardboard box right now that is your home. If you feel safe there then that's good. You followed what I said.

- Grade 9

Montana is home to me. I was born here, raised here, and I belong here. I belong with the smell of campfire lingering on me in the summer, the feel of cold wet snow sinking into my boots because it's so high, the taste of fresh deer meat from the deer I just shot, the feeling of dirty, gross, bug filled lake water, not clean, chemical filled chlorine water. I should be able to walk to a lake, not drive two hours to get to one. I say I hate how fast the weather changes and how crazy it gets, but I think that's what makes Montana so great, and I think I secretly love it. I don't think I could ever like not living in Montana. I can't go on vacation for too long without getting homesick. This is home.

- Grade 10

All I know is cooking. It's one of the few things I'm good at, more of a family tradition. Each member of the family has a specialty; my grandpa's pulled pork, Nana's tamales, Mom makes a killer shephard's pie "sans the lamb". I make steak. I make marinades to be more exact, and each ingredient offers its own property. If you add enough brown sugar, it sizzles into a crisp, perfect. Add too much and the steak is too sweet. Vinegar adds zest; balance it with the rest of the ingredients and it's marvelous. Over do it and the whole damn thing is ruined. Oil is a necessity, blends everything together – never had too much oil! And wine. Wine offers an earthy aroma. Always use a dry wine. Get it right and the flames engulf the steak, whole, satisfying. Get it wrong and you'll be serving charcoal for Sunday dinner. I've spent years sitting by the grill, waiting for the right time to bring dinner in. Maybe this sounds stupid, but I take this seriously. When I cook it's like I belong, right there in the kitchen. When I see my family's pride, I can finally be proud of myself too.

- Grade 10

Mountains and land and not many people so it's good we have snow and mountain lions and also grizzly bears too and a place is not as good as here and people shoot guns and drive trucks everywhere. There are deer and elk everywhere so come down to the glorious Swan Valley where it's cold so don't forget your jacket.

- Grade 8

Home (To Me)

Running up the trail
With all the overexcitement of a three year old
Not paying attention to
Where I'm going
Suddenly I'm falling
I scrape my knee
But I try to say it hurts more
Because I don't wanna get back up
That was 12 years ago
And I still do the same thing
I trip and fall all the time
And try to make it look
Like I meant to do it
By just sitting down.
When I don't trip for a while
It's weird
I think that anywhere
I fall down (physically)
Is kinda like a home to me.
Basketball courts
Tracks
Hiking trails
Hell, even in my room –
Which I can't even walk in
Because it's a loft –
I trip.
I fall.

And I try to pull it off
As just wanting to sit down
Because that means I wanna stay
And I only wanna stay
Somewhere that feels like Home.

- Grade 10

In Condon we hunt for food, there's lots of trees, big mountains, warm in the summer cold in the winter, deep snow, wolves, elk, deer, pretty sounding birds, snowmobiling.

- Grade 6

What shapes my sense of place where I come from includes the mountains and trees, forests and many recreational lakes. Events that are mainly big in Seeley are the 4th of July, Bob Marshall music festival, and Snow Joke. The advantages and disadvantages of living in a small town include everyone knows everyone and rumors spread quickly. The advantages include not having much traffic and being able to get from point A to B quickly. The disadvantages are not having very many places to eat at and do stuff at with most of your entertainment and things to do including shopping, being an hour away in Missoula, Montana. Also, we are known to get very harsh winters here as the snow never seems to let up.

- Grade 10

This valley is special. It's dotted with small, blue collared towns criss-crossed with dusty back roads padded down by trucks, the valley floor coated with a dark green carpet of evergreen trees and split down the center by a series of cool mountain lakes connected by meandering mountain rivers. The valley is enclosed by gray towering mountains capped with snow and looming over the valley like giant sentries. Elk, deer and many other animals roam the area and call the forest home.

- Grade 11

Home, what a concept. They say home is where the heart is, so wouldn't that mean home is wherever you're still breathing? Is home the place where your family resides, or is it that moment in the arms of someone special? Is it a place or an emotion? Home differs from person to person, but who decided what home is? Home can be elusive like smoke, yet at the same time be the rock that holds you together. Perhaps home and sense of place can be interchangeable after all both are where you feel you belong. Both have all those things you love and enjoy. Both have the family defined by your character and shared experiences. Both are where you can breathe, feel at peace. Both are the place where you wouldn't rather be anywhere else.

- Grade 11

Where I live is where I feel at home. I live on a ranch. Why I feel at home on my ranch is because when I ride horses on my trails I feel so relaxed and at home. I feel relaxed about things like fishing, swimming, swinging on my big swing, seeing my chickens, stuff like that.

- Grade 3

Montana is the, well, almost the most beautiful place. Well it actually is very fun and VERY pretty! Especially all the cool and awesome animals like... gray wolves they're pretty even mountain lions even though maybe a wolf or a mountain lion jumped on the porch and kept running that night!

- Grade 4



In Condon we hunt for food, there's lots of trees, big mountains, warm in the summer, cold in the winter, deep snow, wolves, elk, deer, pretty sounding birds, snowmobiling.

- Grade 6

When I think of home I think of horses, I love them and my horse is really special to me. I think of my horses running through the meadows on my ranch. I have lots of property and I know that without my ranch and horses and meadows, my home would not be the same. The saying "home is where the heart is" is very true, I think that home isn't a place, it is a feeling, or it is where you love and feel safe and are tied to in a way that is indescribable. Home is the place that where the things you love most are, my home is wherever my family and horses are, as well as my friends. To me, my home has to have four things: family, friends, horses and basketball, the best sport there is. Home is with my teammates who are also my best friends. Home is when me and my best friend Aspen are laughing so hard we can't breathe. Home is when I'm watching the sunset over the Missions from the upstairs of my creepy old barn.

- Grade 8

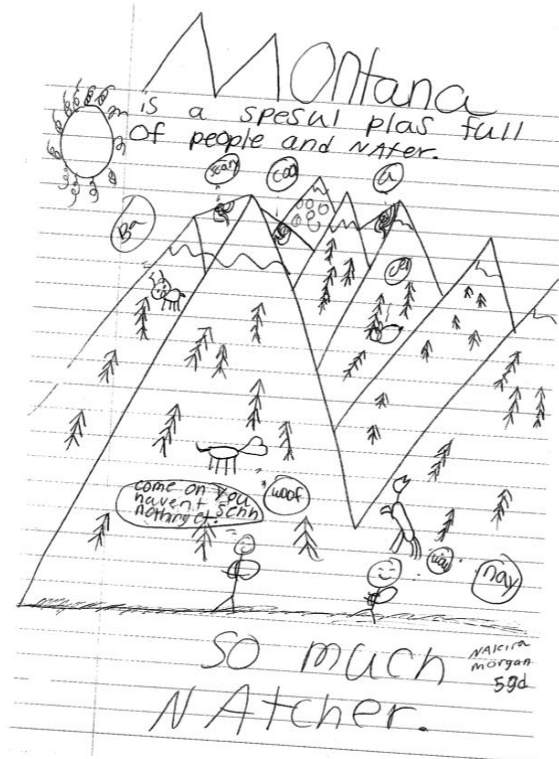
I wake up and pull my boots on
The sun is just starting to kiss the mountain tops.
The grass is stiff and wet.

There are little bunny tracks in the mud.
 I'm the only one awake this morning.
 I wander down to the creek and splash my face with brisk mountain water.
 I can hear the horses making their way down to camp
 Their bells ringing and echoing down the canyon.
 The canvas wall tents huddle together like small villages.
 I watch a cow elk call to her new born calf.
 This is home.

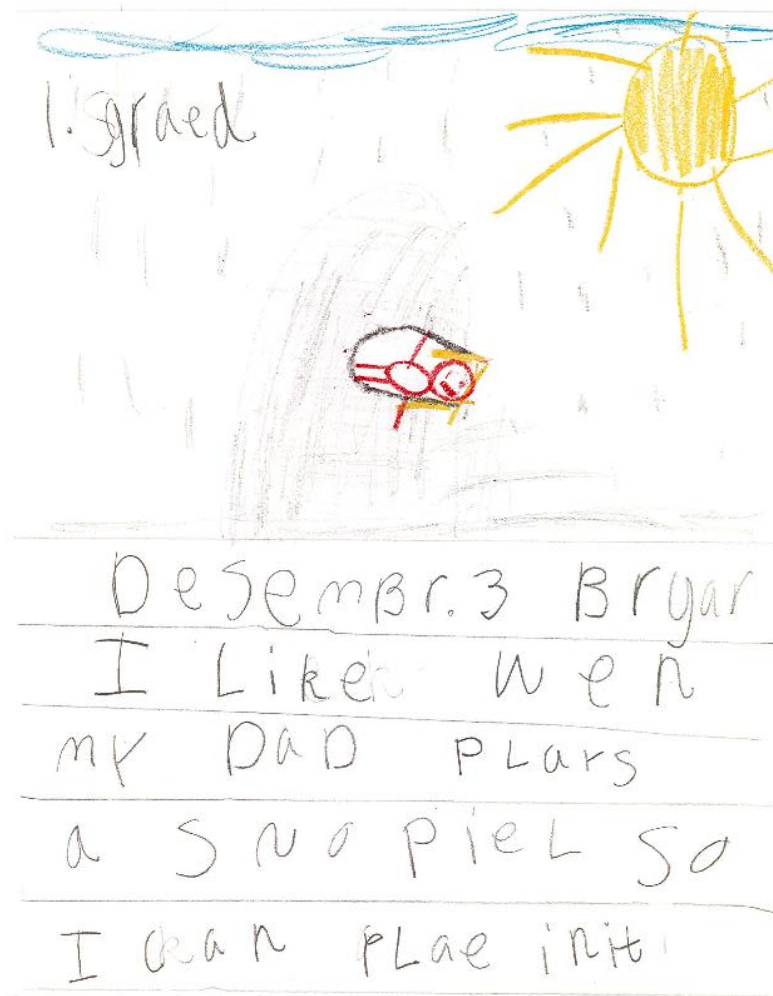
- Grade 11

Seeley Lake is the only place I've ever known. I think people who have lived in multiple places would have a different idea of home after they've lived here. For me, home is quite a vague term. It's a small town in Montana. It's the small strip of sand we call a beach. It's the Ice Cream Place when summer comes. It's a little grey house on Frontier Drive. It's even just people who I have known my entire life. I've heard people tell me about all the places they have lived and why Seeley Lake is their favorite. In a way I understand that, but at the same time I have no clue what it is like to live anywhere but Seeley. Sometimes I wonder what it's like to have experienced something else. Sometimes I don't think living anywhere but Seeley would even be appealing. Everyone complains about living here but no one wants to leave. Someday I'll graduate, I'll pack up all my things and I'll finally live somewhere else. No matter where I go I'll never forget the place that made me who I am.

- Grade 10



Snow



Snow. Snow really identifies this part of the world. Most of the year, snow covers the ground here. Early fall, depending on how new to the area you are, you will either anticipate the coming of snow, or you will dread it. At first snow is an intriguing thing, coming down in huge, puffy flakes. It is good for sledding, skiing and many other exciting activities. Snowmobiling is especially fun. Going with friends and riding in an inner tube is really fun. It's amazing how many people you can fit on a tube. The chilly fun is great, but after about a month it gets old. Then, soon its already spring and the snow starts melting. The thing is it takes a couple months to melt. Many years we hunt for easter eggs in snow banks. By the time the snow is all melted it's time for summer, but after a while you start waiting for the snow to come back.

- Grade 9

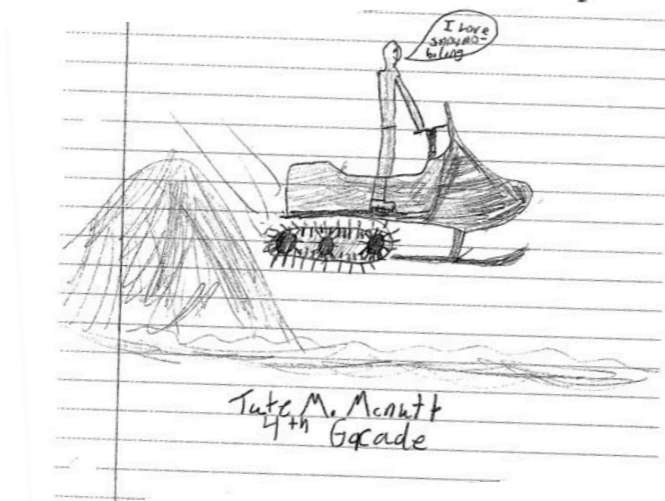
My favorite time of the year is the very dead of winter in my bedroom waking up under my very thick and warm quilt and having frosty breath because I left my window open the night before. Going into the kitchen and grabbing a cup of warm and sweet apple cider with a cinnamon stick in it for a straw. And later on in the day I either shovel snow or go tromping around in the woods for no reason or purpose. Now that said, I still live in the center of town so it is not as easy to go into the woods as it will be at our new house right out of town, seven miles to be accurate. But I do not know how much tromping I can do. I guess the place I feel I belong is our new house on a winter's day.

- Grade 9

Snow is for sure my sense of home. It comes with some of the world's best things, like snowboarding, snowmobiling and Christmas. These are all things I could never live without. There is no other feeling that even comes close to when you're sitting on top of a mountain drinking a cup of hot chocolate looking down over Montana while the snow beats down.

My earliest memories took place during winter, and maybe that is why I like it far more than summer. My earliest memory is when some of my brothers, my cousin and I were up on top of the sledding hill. When I say hill, I don't think about something you can just run up in five seconds. Think of something just barely under a mountain. Anyways, we finally got to the top, (I was carried most of the way) we jumped on our sled and made the great decent. This is one of the happiest memories I have that's probably part of the reason I love snow so much.

- Grade 9



One of my most favorite places to be is on a snowy slope with my friends, snowboarding. It's the best feeling going through the trees, gliding through the fresh powder. Knowing that if you fall it will feel like a pillow. Also, getting the adrenaline rush, just missing the trees. Watching your friends fall on their face.

- Grade 9

I was sledding with my dad last year and we were up at Little Africa by Marshall Lake. We were heading back to our house when I sort of slammed into a stump and flipped my sled sideways. It kinda sucked. I had gotten my skis caught between some smaller trees that had been buried in snow, and the nose of the sled was lower than the back, which is never good because it means you have to level out the sled, and that requires a hell of a lot of digging.

Once we'd dug out a little bit, it was time to get the trees out of my skis, but they went deep and it took ages to dig them out enough to get a nice cut. Not to mention the stump I'd ran into made it impossible to gas it hard and float to the top so we had to reverse it out. After almost two hours we got it so it could nicely dig itself back onto the top, but it was near dark so we scrambled home.

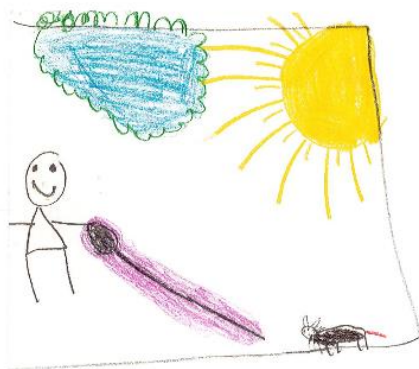
- Grade 9

When I ride, the cool breeze in your face, you're unstoppable. Free to be who you want, ride how you want. You're connected. A bond. Starting that engine for the first time all day. It makes your heart race. Riding alone where you're free of responsibility. Sitting on your sled at the top of a mountain looking over the valley. You feel like you've accomplished something. You forget about everything, worrying about anything but riding. Hard, fast. When you ride so much you have to replace your track. Riding all day, it connects you to nature, your home. If you want to ride, come to the Swan Valley and we will show you how to get it done, just don't bring a Polaris.

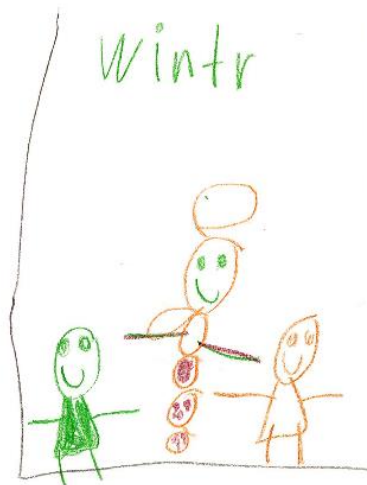
- Grade 11

Every winter my friends and I have fun in the snow. We build snow sculptures. We have so much fun. One year we built a pop star out of snow. It even had a microphone. I'll never forget that day. We also make snow houses. We build walls, couches, archways, and more! I love hanging out with my friends. We make lots of unforgettable memories.

- Grade 4



Laciey
Sukinf



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Generations/Community

Every car that we pass at that highway seems to hold a waving driver. My dad waves back. I never know who they are, but he does. I always just figured they worked for him, but I eventually found out only 150 people work at the mill. So if almost every person passing waves, it couldn't be just his employees. As I grew up, I began to realize that this place was special. It wasn't just some small town in the middle of nowhere. It was home. It was where I was born, it was where I grew up. It was where my great-grandpa came to build a life. It was where he raised my grandpa, and where my grandpa raised my dad. This place is my place, and I know that every good person that waves on that highway shares respect for one another, because they realize the same great thing about this town.

- Grade 11

My Family Homestead in Condon

At one time we owned over 500 acres in the valley, now we own about 280 on two properties. They were loggers, and well not much has changed because my dad and his dad and his dad were all loggers. Then there is me who actually wants to do something else, but I still run saw, I can set chokers and run heavy equipment.

Condon is boring sometimes. Actually, it is boring most of the time. Unless you're hunting, fishing or working, you will probably get bored. Camping is also fun, but it's just not something you do all the time. I dislike summer only because of all the people who come through. We also have cattle who like to get out which, during tourist season, can possibly be in danger of getting hit.

Condon is for the most part extremely conservative, and we like to be left alone. I wouldn't go around sneaking on other people's property or stealing firewood because some, not all, won't take too kindly to that.

I enjoy the view, the people, even the logging. Sure, I wish there were more people my age, and more to do, but I wouldn't trade it for anything.

- Grade 10

Sleepy little towns like Seeley can be boring and tight knit. The high school is sort of a gathering point. It brings people from everywhere within a 30 minute drive. Condon, Ovando, Potomac, Sunset, Placid. For most of my time in this area, I have lived in Seeley on the double arrow, but have been living in the Placid

Lake area now for a year and a half. My family is one of the only families with kids in the area because the rest of the houses are retirement houses or summer cabins. It can get boring, but there is always something to do outside: hike, hunt, dirt bike, fish, swim, play football, and run.

- Grade 11

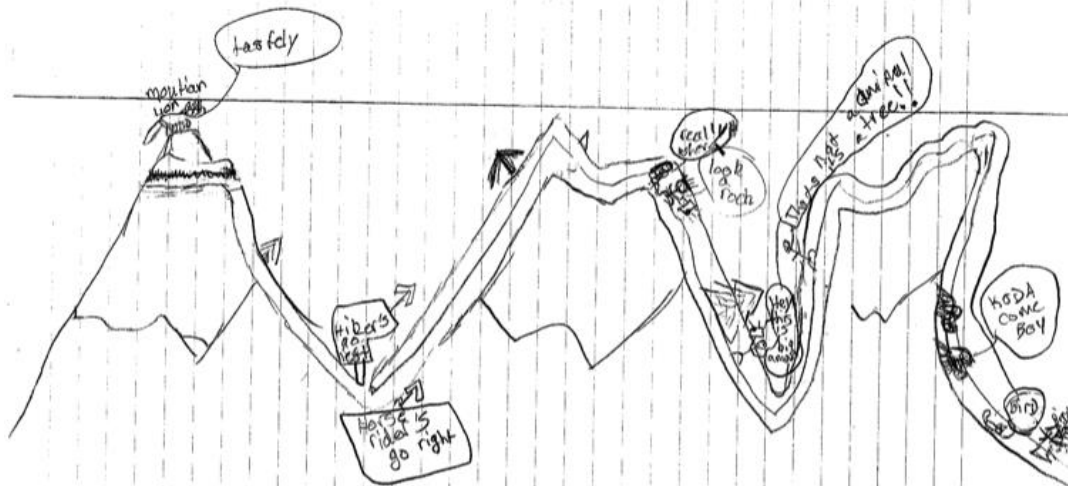
My Sense of Home

Home is the land and the memories I make on these acres. The signs we don't always abide by. The back roads that lead to thoughts, the ones that no matter which turn you take you'll eventually end up at the highway. That feeling I get when I get around that gate and discover a new area.

The mountains and the trees and the land that has a history with my ancestors. The memories that they have made with the land and the opportunities that it gives me. Home is being a loggers daughter, the fifth generation to be taught and support the importance of what really matters in the valley we live in.

- Grade 11

Mountains



Bob Marshal

I remember when I climbed to the top of Holland Falls. I could see so far. I could see the whole lake. It was amazing, but when I looked behind me, I saw even more of a mountainous journey. I know I would get an even better view from up there. Next time, next time. I know I will climb it eventually, but for now I will stick to my bushwhacking trail. I remember when I first started. I never planned on walking up there, but I am glad I did it. The reward was worth it. The view was astonishing. The blue lake, the mountain background, how the sun made the water glisten, I loved it.

- Grade 11

I've traveled to many places across the US and visited two different countries, but my sense of place has always been here. "Home" to me has always meant being a few miles off the beaten path in the beautiful Montana mountains. Being in the mountains, standing around a campfire with family and friends has always been my favorite place to be. Laying under a billion stars, miles away from civilization will never get old. Here, in the mountains you will grasp a full understanding of why Montana is known as "The Treasure State". Growing up here has allowed me to do and experience so many things that a lot of kids don't get to do. I get to hunt, fish, hike, camp and see so many beautiful mountain scenes and sunsets that I can't even begin to describe. And all of this is in my backyard, and it makes me feel lucky. I love where I live and wouldn't trade it for anywhere else.

- Grade 10

[If I could go anywhere for the day] I would want to go into the mountains riding my horse with gun and fishing pole in hand and dog willow at my side. I wish that I could take trapper up there for the last time in his life. I would bring the whole family if possible.

- Grade 7

My home is in the mountains of the Swan Valley. They're not just any mountains. There are plenty of places in Montana that have mountains, but none are like the ones in the Swan.

The Swan Range and the Mission Mountains frame the valley forming a fortress. When you step out my back door, you are at the base of a section of the Swan Range. You are surrounded by larch, fir, lodge pole, and ponderosa trees. You hear the gentle rushing of four or five creeks. The squirrels and birds are chatting with each other, if they're not, you should be very cautious because you're probably not alone. There is a musty smell after it rains and after the frost burns off in the morning. The smell is not disgusting, it is a refreshing, clean smell.

The woods are dense like no other place in Montana. If you go up the mountains a mile or two and reach a clearing in the trees, the valley will unfold before you. If you get to the top of the mountains you can see almost the whole valley and all the lakes, everything is wilderness. You can't see any signs of people existing in the valley, but they do.

When I was little we would have snow on the ground from about late October to sometimes April, and it was almost always four or more feet deep. When you would drive south by Salmon Lake, you would almost always see more mule deer and elk than you would see white tailed deer. There are many ranches in the valley.

This valley has always been and will always be home to me.

- Grade 10

The mountains are calling and I must go. At least that's what everyone says anyway. There is nothing better than taking your horse up in the mountains on a cool fall day. Each time you go, it all looks a little different as the aspen leaves change and the snow starts to fall, but even as little changes happen, it's all the same. Every time you go, it all has the same peace, calmness, and sense of home. Following the steep and winding trails as the leaves rustle and the needles fall, your thoughts falling away leave you with a sense of peace. Everything else just falls away.

- Grade 10

Freedom/Safety

I didn't come from all smiles and giggles. I didn't come from riding your bike on the sidewalk freely. I didn't come from "Can I go to the park?" with no parental supervision. The place I came from wasn't home. Sure, I was born there and lived there until I was four. Also, I visit almost every year because my family lives there. Then we moved to Oklahoma and lived there with family for one year, then moved to Seeley Lake, Montana with my dad's brother. Since I was five I've lived in Seeley Lake, Montana. Since I'm 16 now, I couldn't begin to explain the change and impact it had made on my dad and sister and I. I never grew up in cities or big, crowded areas, but the first year ever visiting my home state, California, I had never wanted to leave Seeley again. Seeley is stunning and beautiful. The mountains are like walls, protective walls. The lakes are beautiful with their size and opportunities. Fishing, boating, swimming, relaxing. We are very, very, very lucky to live in a place like Seeley. The trees in autumn, the yellow and green pitter patter, the way the lake looks when it's five in the morning. The way you can see every single star in the bright, clear sky. This is home. Condon, Seeley, Missoula, Ovando, Kalispell. It's all home. It's a safe place. You can walk 10 feet behind your house and see so many animals that you wouldn't be able to see in big cities. It's beautiful and it's the town and place I will never stop thanking for finding me and my family.

- Grade 11

In the valley that I grew up in, I could do about anything I wanted to. Whether it was riding dirt bikes, chasing cows, or snowmobiling to the top of any peak. Although, as the years go by, the more restrictions there are, and it is not only affecting my life! Between proposed wilderness and public land that certain groups of people are trying to close off! It is just a big issue in our valley and I think it should be brought to the attention of more people. In my opinion, it is a tragedy because if this continues how will it affect the generations to come if public land isn't "public" anymore?

- Grade 11

Condon is really awesome. There is so much to do, like biking, swimming, fishing, skiing, sledding, hunting, and playing in the forest. Condon is really awesome but besides that, it is a really good place to think. You can think anything you want and no one will correct you.

What I do is find a quiet spot somewhere where I can be alone and think. It feels like your thoughts come true. It is a very nice town to live in.

Also there are very nice people to share it with. Condon is a really nice place to live. Come to Condon if you have not.

- Grade 5

Montana is the best possible place to live. You can go hunting, fishing, hiking and more! I love where I live because it's quiet and little so you know your neighbors! I love to be able to be free and not have to follow strict laws. I always know I'm safe in a small community in Montana.

Some of my favorite things to do in Montana are swimming, kayaking, ice skating, building snow sculptures, and being with family and friends. I love to be in the Bob Marshall and ride horses. It's beautiful here in Montana.

- Grade 4

Montana is a special place for me because I feel safe. Montana is so open and free. Condon is a place I would call home because it's a friendly neighborhood, it's open and free. I can keep my animals here. There are so many things you can do like ride horses, dirt bikes, snowmobiles. You can visit everyone. There are things you can visit like the Hungry Bear, the Swan Valley Café, the Swan Valley Ecosystem Center, the Swan Center and more. We used to have a merc but it burnt down last year. The merc wasn't just a store, it was a family place. People from Condon would go there and talk. It is really sad that we don't have that place anymore. Some people said the owner is going to rebuild, but there is no sign yet. Montana has beautiful views. It also has beautiful animals like grizzlies, mountain lions, and other wild animals.

- Grade 8

It is really cool here because it's FREE you can do about anything! In our free time (which my family has really never) we snowmobile, dirtbike, horse ride, and just live. But if you wanted to move to Condon/Swan Valley there's not a lot of jobs here. So you meant to think about that.

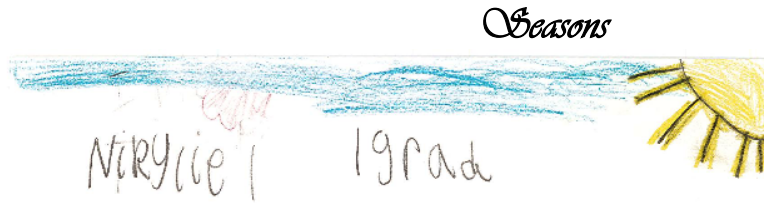
- Grade 6

Home is a place where I can feel comfortable and at peace. Also home is where I can feel stable. Home is where the fresh air hits my face when I walk out the door and see the tall trees around me. Home is where I can have my independence and be free. Home is where I can do what I want and enjoy life, because life goes by so fast. Home is where the rivers run and never go dry, where the sun sets with a beautiful view, and where my family is always there for me.

- Grade 8

How I feel at home is whenever I go outside and I go on my tire swing and spin around and around. I go so fast that I almost can't see anything. If a car goes by it looks like a huge ball rolling around. When friends come over, they eat then we go on the tire swing and they almost throw up.

- Grade 3



My sense of place is in Western Montana, particularly Seeley Lake. Whether it's the almost luke warm lake in mid July, or the forest blanketed in fresh powder in late December, I feel at home. My summer is spent trying to wakesurf on Salmon Lake just South of Seeley, waiting for the moment when the water is calm enough. Here I am surrounded by my family. I spend winters snowmobiling and playing made up games only my sister and I know how to play. In fall, we go on long walks looking at the changing aspen leaves. My spring is mostly school, track and waiting for summer. No matter what season, my sense of place is in Western Montana.

- Grade 9

I think it is awesome here. There is so much to do in the summer, you can swim and ride dirt bikes, kayaks, and horses. At night you can call friends over to have a bonfire. In winter you can snowmobile and sled down huge hills, you can also make snow sculptures. In fall you can jump in leaves! In spring you can shovel off snow on the decks.

- Grade 4

Change

The colors begin to change, as do feelings. The sky turns blue and the grass turns green. Waves rush to the shore and the boats chase behind.

The colors begin to change, as do people. The sky turns grey and the grass turns yellow. Leaves rush to the ground and the bugs don't fall far behind.

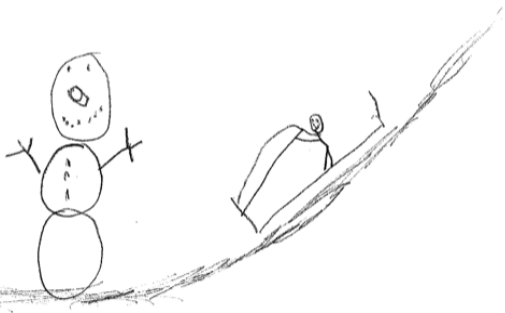
The colors begin to change, as do memories. The sky turns white, as does the ground. Snowflakes fall and children catch them with their tongues.

The colors begin to change, as do senses. The sky turns blue and the grass turns green. Flowers begin to open and the bees begin to pollinate.

A neverending cycle that lines the same life over and over. My life. My home. My fantasy. A sense of place bums deep inside. "Where do you want to live? Where do you want to go?" they ask. Home isn't home until you experience it more than once. You feel the power of the scenery. You feel the heat coming off the ground like a burning rage that lies deep in your body. One that will escape if not careful. The burning desire to feel passion when you look at someone or something. A sense that cannot be described.

- Grade 9

December Levi



forests



In the forests of Seeley is where I go to feel at home. I go out there to both find and loose myself. I hear the creek of the trees as they sing a lullaby to my mind. The ground feels softer than any bed I have ever slept in.

The mountains stand proud. They watch over us like guardians. They are the crown of this continent making this one a king. They reach out to stop the worst of the storms. They have an army as far as they can see. The Bob is just a battalion's name, the river is their ammunition, the trees their heartbeat.

And alone I stand as the wind hugs me in its chilly embrace, feels like Death is there standing next to me. I smell smoke from my fire, I get lost in its flames as they dance the pattern of my life, my dreams, my wrongs, my faults. I feel the dirt, stick, and grass dig into my back as if they know where I have been stabbed, by both friend and family. I see the mountains, I see them like teeth of a giants jaw, well a dead one. I see the green and yellows of the forest as if it's a painting of an awe-inspiring artist.

- Grade 12

Once upon a time there was a ghost in the forest. But all the sudden there was a howl in the forest. She knew there was a wolf in the forest. She was not scared! The wolf was nice! I go to the forest a lot. I LOVE it there! Once I even had a chipmunk and squirrel sitting on my shoulder.

- Grade 3

It has lots of life and wilderness! You can see deer, bear, wolves and mountain lions. You can also hike, fish, go swimming and hunt.

- Grade 4

Logging/Wood

Firewooding

Most of my life, I have lived off of wood heat. It's definitely a chore to cut up enough for the long winters. Every year I'm more relied upon to do the work. I run saw and split the rounds. I even have my truck outfitted to carry all of it. Out there falling trees, just me, my stihl 046, my truck and 7mag. Cord after cord until the wood shed is finally full of fir, larch and lodge pole. I was gonna sell it this year, but my knee got messed up from football. I miss the smell of that 046 burning gas, chewing it's way through. The smell of fresh cut trees fills my truck as it chugs its way down the dirt roads fully loaded down. It's truly a way of life for me.

- Grade 10

My favorite memory of being outside is getting firewood. Getting out there right after sunrise so we can work around the heat. I start my stihl 66 and it roars through the valley. There is nothing like getting firewood with your cousins. The forest is quiet until we get to work. Every once in a while, a doe and a fawn will walk in and start chewing on some moss. I make a face, cut in a tree, then I start on the back. I look up and I see that the tree is slowly falling. Within seconds it crashes on the forest floor. Then the fun begins. It's a lot easier when you have family or friends to help. We get the cords of wood sold, we split the cash and everything turns out all good. The timber is a big part of me and I want to try to keep it that way.

- Grade 10

Small Town

Without that mill on lumber, none would be here. This valley is for the true men and women – the kind that bite the bullet when it's zero below. You must be strong both mentally and physically. This valley shall shape a man, show him hard work and hard play. The small town is the place to be. Everyone is on a first name basis. This town is a timber town where trucks roll in and out all day long. Without timber, this town would be no more.

This town is a small town, but come summer it turns to a small bustling city, people everywhere you look. Some are here year round, others are just chasing the sun.

This small town is a logging and tourist destination. What logger doesn't want to say "I have logged the Rocky Mountains"?

- Grade 12

Friends



Family Friends

I am alone most of my life. I left my dad when I was four. I hardly see him. My mom and sister are gone a lot, but I feel at home with my friends. They are my family. My real family all but left me, but I've got my friends to guide me. I was taught to throw a football from my friend Jared. An old friend of mine named Lily, she always pushed me in grade school, even if she didn't mean to. We were rivals in running, jumping, reading, and soccer, even if we were on the same team. I got to Seeley. A friend name Chance always challenged me. A friend named Ariana helped me with my manner and taught me to dance. Another friend, Koda, taught me how to build, how to work hard and spend wisely. Then there was Madi, she was always there for me when I needed someone to talk to. She always tries to include me in stuff, which is a good thing. Finally, my friend Andi, she helped me get over my first breakup. She taught me to get back up. These people have been there for me. My friends have been more family than friends.

- Grade 10

Home. When I picture it in my head I see myself laughing and having fun with my friends. It's perfect, we are perfect. Living as ourselves and being free. We are young and free living among the tall pine trees. We are at the peak in our lives. Young and reckless. No boundaries, just living young and dumb like a typical teenage boy and his friends should.

- Grade 10

Birds chirping in the trees around Lindbergh Lake.
"Don't try to catch up to me. You'll never make it!"
Paul called back to me as he raced even further ahead.
"Wait!" I called, trying to catch up.
He stopped and waited.
"Let's just sit here. It's so nice out. I haven't
been happy like this in a while,
you make everything better."
The fresh air was nice.
Sitting on the lake in
Kayaks.
"OK, we can sit here as long
as you like angel,"
he said.
He took my hand.
The water was chilly, but felt
Good on such a hot day.
I'd occasionally run my finger
Through it.
The lake, and trees, and sun
Was so gorgeous.
But I couldn't stop
Looking at him.
He is my place,
My life,
My home.
Without him,
I am
Nothing.

Water

The lake is my backyard. I spend countless hours in the water. My feet are always dirty and spotted with sap. Everything is always up and about. In the day there are always birds chirping, and at night the bats are taking care of our mosquito problem. I wear my swimsuit all day. There's no point in taking it off.

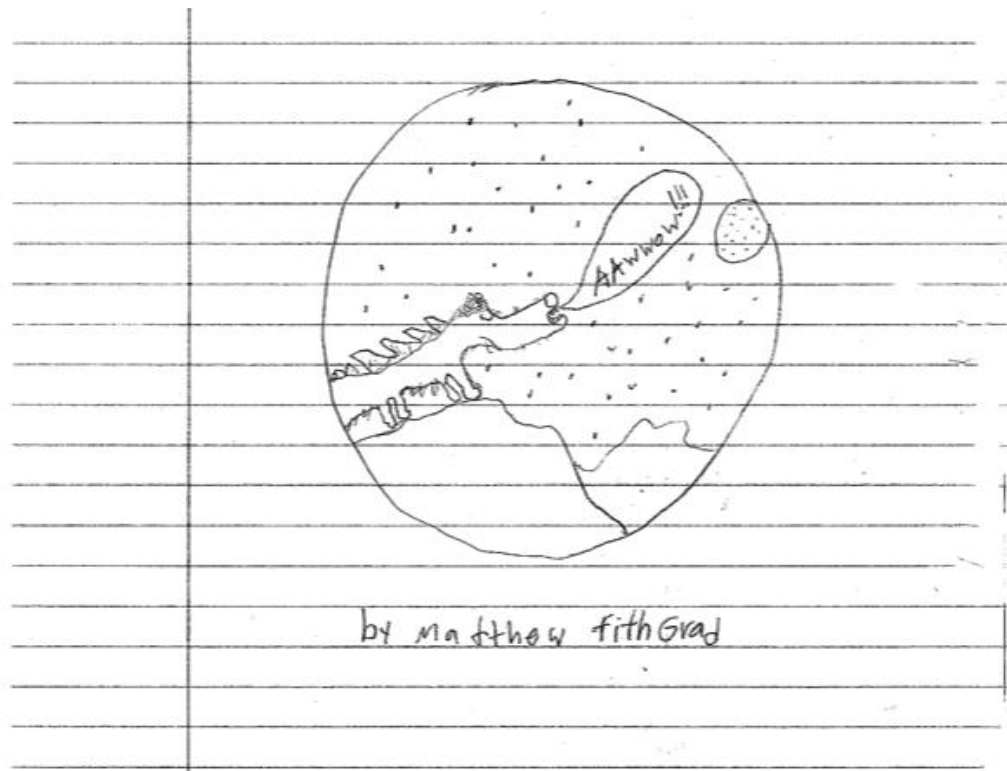
Every morning when the sun peeks up over the mountain, the fog settled on the lake starts to rise and the hundreds of dew droplets coating the grass start to fade. At home, everyday should be a new adventure. On the lake there is always something new to try, but you just have to think about it.

- Grade 9

Living in a small town has its advantages and disadvantages. You are more connected to the community and the surrounding area. Being outdoors is a big part of life. In a town named after a lake, lots of us spend a lot of time in the water. I sail. My friend and I live next to each other on the shore of Seeley Lake. A year ago, we were bored on a windy day. Usually those are the worst times to be near a lake because it's too cold to swim when it's windy. The water is too choppy to go knee boarding or wakeboarding or water skiing. My friend's family had just brought over three Hobie Cat Catamarans from wherever they were keeping them. We up the mast and the jib (it was only our first time) and set out onto the lake. Since then, we look forward to windy days and have a few great stories from on the boat. That is the best advantage of living in a lake town, the opportunities that we would never get anywhere else.

- Grade 9

Memories



When someone says the word “home”, most people will probably describe what their apartment building looks like, or what their neighborhood is like, but for me, and most Montanans, home is where the mountains are. My earliest memory of being outside is probably when I was about five. My parents, my aunt and uncle, my two brothers and I were on a six day rafting trip along the North Fork of the Flathead in Glacier National Park. Not only is Glacier Park known for its scenery, but when you’re there, you almost feel pure. Everything up there feels so fresh, almost like you could drink the water without worrying if you’re going to get sick. But that was 10 years ago. Now when I go there, all of the roads are paved, there are too many designated campsites to count, and you see more tourists holding a dog in their purse rather than holding binoculars.

- Grade 9

Home

The view when you drive into the Elvis Presley Boulevard Road reminds me of so many memories that lead up to home. The view has an old dirt road that goes across an old bridge over a small creek. Then up on top of the hill is my grandma’s house. I remember when we were little she would always take us down to the bridge where we would try to find mermaids. Grandma would always tell us that the green stuff flowing at the bottom of the creek was mermaid hair, and that ripples in the water, mermaids made them, and of course we believed everything she said. We stopped doing that though, because my cousin and I were driving my grandpa’s dune buggy and we weren’t very good at it and we weren’t supposed to and I drove right off the bridge and grandpa had to get it out, killing all the green mermaid hair, and as it came out on the orange dune buggy, we realized it wasn’t mermaid hair. That is why this old bridge reminds me so much of home.

- Grade 9

My dad, my brother and I went on a trip up to Glacier National Park where we met my best friend and her dad. We stayed the weekend there. It was the end of summer, and the fall colors were creeping their way into the trees, and the air was crisp. On that trip we found the “land of triangles”. To most people, the land of triangles would just be a spot along the side of the river, but to us it was a wonderland. We spent hours there jumping from rock to rock and putting our feet in the chilly water. It was a one time place. In the spring and most of the summer, the water is high and covers the rocks and it is a place we can’t remember where it was exactly. It was a magical place that only lasted for an afternoon.

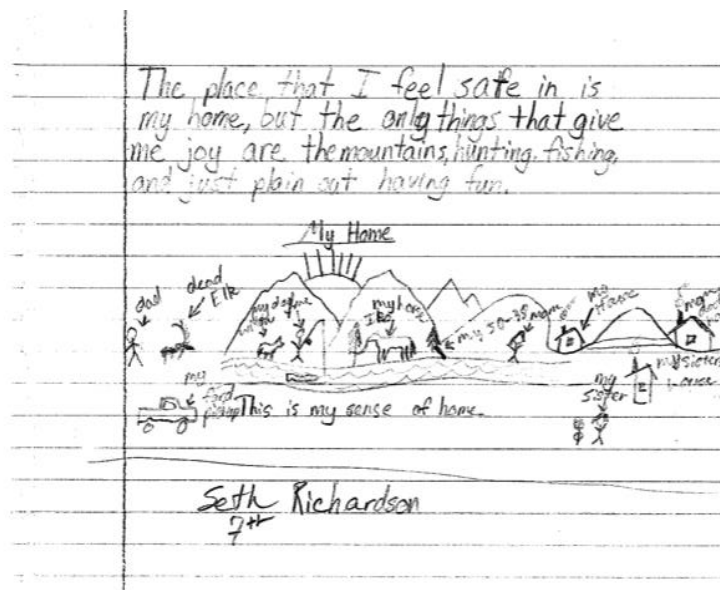
- Grade 11

The Picnic

Running, walking, splashing in the creek
Giggling, oh the fun.
Being young is great.
Tag you’re it
Another person joins
As we play all of our
Laughter can be heard.
Then suddenly a fall,
Tears are shed,
Taylor is on the ground
Holding her tiny arm
Tears roll down her cheeks
Thick as rain.
Her mom picks her up,
The adults call it a day
And we go back to camp
We’ll have more fun later
But for now
We rest our tiny heads.

- Grade 11

Fishing/ Hunting



Hunting

Walking through the woods off the side of the road my friend and I are stalking a buck. I wanted him to shoot it so I got him in a perfect position to drop it. He didn't want to shoot it so I stood up and looked through the scope of my 270 savage through some branches. Bang... he hunches up. Crap! Gut shot. I shoot again, he drops dead. I wait two or three minutes. I walk up to him and his guts are hanging out of his side. The second shot skimmed his belly. He was at a weird angle so I shot him in the guts and the bullet came out his hind leg.

- Grade 9

The place I live, my schedule works around. Hunting is what I do. Montana is the perfect place.

Waking up at 5:00 am, my pack is all ready with all of my survival gear that shows up in my stocking every year. Jump in the truck and head out. Once you reach your spot, you get out of the car and the cold chill greets you. Glad I wore layers. My dad leading me out into the forest that consumes you. The trees tower over us, but the mountains and snow caps tower over the trees. The mountains guard over the entire valley. Rock walls making everything captured. The clouds free flow over the tops, but sometimes get caught by the mountain tops. The blue sky is never captured. It is untouchable. My dad and I sit to glass. We sit next to plants that pour out of the ground with insects using them for cover, for we tower them. Through the scope we glass with, we see the four legged creature gazing under all that tower and over all it towers. We are equal. Same ground, next to the same plants. The wolves to the left raise their young, just as my dad is raising me. We all are on the same ground, same purpose – eat, breathe, think. Most importantly, we all consider this place our home and hope that it never changes.

- Grade 10

The waves of heat float off from the field. I'm glassing for any signs of a buck, the light hair, antlers or a strut. There, at least 600 yards away, a true beauty of a buck is just dropping into the alfalfa from the mountain. There's a creek up there probably half a mile into the tree line. He's walking right towards me and doesn't even know it. His antlers protrude inches outside of his ears and he walks like he's courting a doe. He comes closer and closer. He turns broad side. BOOM! He goes down. Now the real work begins.

- Grade 12

The brookies down in the creek during the spring, late fall, and winter took up all of my time from when I was 6-10, walkin down there with the 30-30 and my two labs. The muddy smell of my favorite hole I fished and the ancient look of the deteriorating log that the brookies spawned under were what I always looked forward to. Tossing the worm just in front of their nose, landing the lil buggers and admiring the bright blue and red dots and that orange belly they get in the spawn. It was fun to go down in the winter under the bridge, chip the ice away and jig there the whole day. Sittin there with a dog, some hot chocolate, a lil fire cooking the bigger ones I landed. That was my sense of heaven and I never wanted it to end.

- Grade 12

Still Searching



Sheltered

I've always felt unlucky, living in a place with such little exposure. Don't get me wrong, this is a special place, with no shortage of beautiful sights, but I've never really seen a strong Montana culture. It seems like we're immune to anything different or exciting happening here. A sense of belonging to me is somewhere I'm constantly learning and always experiencing new things. I want to feel new things, different emotions and smell things unique to their place. Every place has a smell, and all I can smell in

Montana is sawdust. That is such a safe smell, and I associate it with a home I thought I wanted. I haven't found a new sense of belonging, but the old one doesn't feel right anymore. Living in a sheltered habitat creates a wanderlust emotion, and when I'm wandering without a cause, I feel the most at home. They say home is where the heart is, I guess my heart feels at home everywhere.

- Grade 9

I Don't Have What You're Looking For

I keep revisiting
An old orange light.
Floating through the dying trees
I want to feel something
Sorrow,
Anticipation,
But I do not.

In this light I can see
I can see everything I have done wrong
You can't ignore something so blinding.

If you jump into the lake
On a perfect winter night
Before the ice has claimed water as its own
You can save yourself

Deep in the stomach of the lake
You will be digested
Picked apart
Piece by piece
Nothing left up for interpretation.

- Grade 9

Seeley

Coming to a new place is always weird. It's like watching a painter paint an image from his head. Seeing the faces you've never seen before, the wave of new scenery, even the air seems to be different. So beautiful, yet so unfamiliar. I'm standing side by side with fear, hoping this place will be different. That this mysterious place will bring me happiness. As I learn the faces in the painting and decipher it, more and more I learn that it can be both good and bad, that as I stand here fear went away, but pain and love replaced its spot. I just hope my love overcomes my pain.

- Grade 11

We are considered MCPS's ugly stepchild. Who would give a shit about a student body of 109 when you can spill all your money into redoing already nice facilities for a body of 1000's of students. I'm talking to you when say that our school can't afford new roof panels. But hell, you probably couldn't recognize a

problem when you visit it twice per year. I know you wouldn't believe it but students recognize the lack of presence of money, every, single, time we walk into this school. Students don't have a dwindling teacher to student ratio in Missoula. We can't even get a sub to come teach the future leaders of this country. Those are small cookies to you. You have to worry about big issues like MCPS's new football field. Best school. Best students. Best teachers. My ass. Did you tell our administrators to put that up? So you keep making small waves, and Seeley/Swan High School will recognize your lack of fight for us and we won't fight for you.

- Grade 10

Living in Condon has its ups and downs, and it is always going to be different for everyone. For me, it was great when I was young. I had freedom to do what I wanted when I came to the outdoors, but growing up I realize that it really is for a special breed. There is so little culture that actually getting out and meeting new and different kinds of people is a trip. I know that I'm never going to be able to stay here, just looking at it from another perspective, I see that it really traps people. Only three of my many cousins made it out, and that scares me because they will miss out on so many opportunities and experiences because the options given to them are so limited.

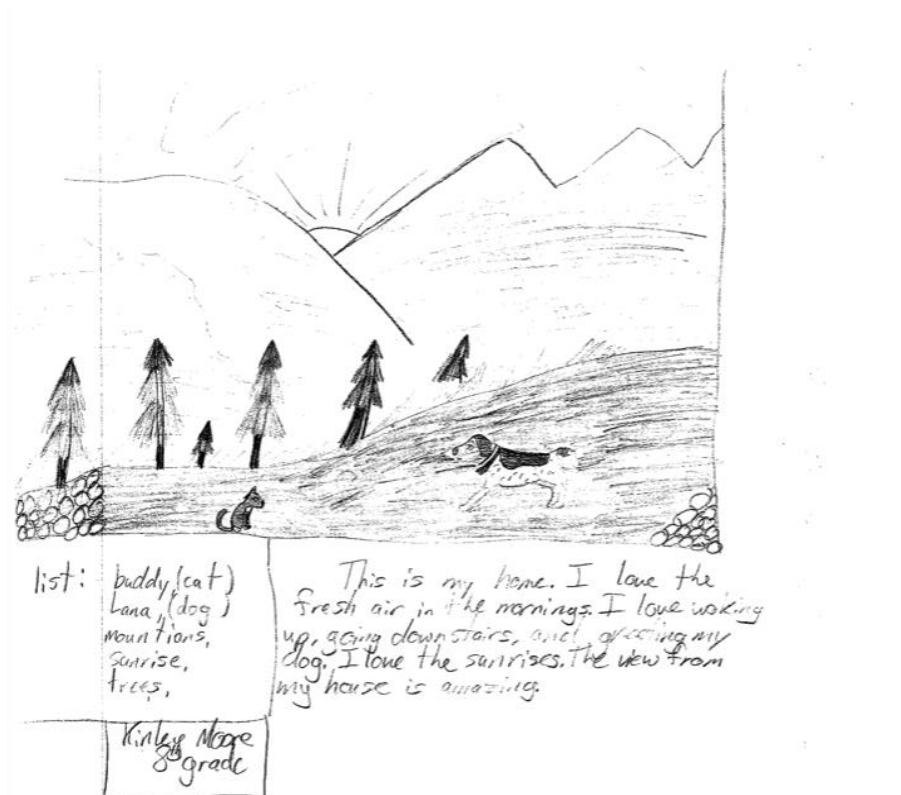
- Grade 10

You know... I didn't want to come here. It wasn't my choice but we had to. The mountains you see coming into Seeley, doesn't matter what side, are, just, you do get speechless. It's a great summer town and even more beautiful in the fall. Winters can be beautiful but they are very difficult. The town isn't beautiful. There is evil and hate in the towns. It, again wasn't my choice to live here. It wasn't any of our choices, not my families anyway. I'm definitely not going to give you a back story of my life. You probably want me to say how amazing and great this town is. Maybe you don't and you want an argument. All I'm telling you is this. The smells in the fall are beautiful. You can look at the mountains and be completely blank in mind and soul. Everything, the animals, how majestic and magnificent they are. How they are being hunted for "more food" and how they are "overpopulating". Yeah right. Shut up, they are not. Other than that, don't stay in small towns like these. You have to have "the name" to play in sports. The humans are evil and destroyed my family, but here is what you wanted me to say.

Everything is beautiful here.

- Grade 11

Found



Montana. The place I now call home. I've called many places home before. I was originally born in Oregon, but ended up moving to Washington when I was still a baby. I lived there until I was about four, so I don't quite remember much of that. When I was about four and a half I moved to Florida, way far away to be with more family. I lived there most of my life, 11 years almost. I remember the beaches and the palm trees and how much I hated both of those things, but by the time I was about 15 I moved back with my dad in Washington. We only stayed there for a year once I moved in. Then we came to Montana for a few reasons. My grandma lives here with my aunt and 12 cousins, and my dad got a new job here. At first I was upset about moving, but once we got here and I saw how beautiful it was I wasn't so upset anymore. I

don't like going out much, but I do love the outside. I love all the mountains and the trees and lakes. I'm glad that my brother and I chose Seeley/Swan High School. If we didn't go here I think my whole view on Montana and living here would be completely different. This community in Seeley is so small and kind. Way different than Florida. Living here has really opened up a lot of things for me.

- Grade 10

The smell in Montana smells way fresher than it did in Valdez, Alaska. When I arrived in Montana, I was so mad and sad. I couldn't get over that I left all my friends and family. My family was so happy, but I just hated that I moved.

Then one day, that all changed because I realized I didn't leave all my friends and family. They can text me back, they can call, visit or skype. Then I went outside and breathed in that fresh air of relief and went ahead and played a whole course of Frisbee golf. Then I played with my dogs and took them to the crick because it's hotter in Montana than it is in Valdez. In Valdez, 40 degrees is hot for us, but here 40 degrees is cold.

- Grade 9

Though Montana I call my true home, I came from Washington. Although I have a few memories from Washington, good ol' Montana contains most of mine. All those years of firewood and snow shoveling really grow on you. Granted, you get really tired of trying to do these things and how many times you have to do it. Some of my best memories are from Montana, such as drinking a hot beverage known as hot buttered rum (don't worry, it doesn't have alcohol in it) that is really just a simple mix of some ingredients. I have to say though, eating wild blackberries was awesome as well. On another note, I have to say that this winter is going to be a lot better than most other years. I actually have a snowmobile to ride this year. That's going to be a ton of fun.

- Grade 10

My name is Korinne Treser. I moved to Seeley about three months ago. Seeley actually reminds me of where I used to live. I feel most at home when I come home from either hunting all day or a really long hike when you've been outside all day and your cheeks are pink from the cold and then you walk inside and smell bubbling hot chili on the stove with steaming corn bread, but the best part is when you are all full and you're entire family is all around you all cozied up on the couch watching a movie, or if everyone is sitting at the table playing move, dominoes, liar liar, or continental. Being there with everyone who loves you the most is all around you, especially when we get back from hunting and you just want to show your family what you've gotten so you can see how proud they are of you. That's what makes me feel the most at home, and I hope that never changes because even when I'm older I still want to go hunting with my family, and one day I want to share that experience with my kids.

- Grade 9

I always thought home was my mother's arms, a place of safety, a place of love.

When I got older, I thought home was my best friend's house, my family, my sister.

But my home that I thought was back in California was broken. Moving to a place without her was saddening. I reached a new place, a new feel. Coming to a community of people is maybe what I needed.

My stress was gone as I looked at the beautiful trees that I had passed, the mountains that I want to climb and burry myself in the snow.

Home is where you feel that you belong. Home is where you can connect to find a person for friendship or love.

Seeley is my new home, a place with the feel of nature.

Big or small, it is my home that I hope will take me fully within its arms.

A place where it can be my mother's arms and my best friend's home, for this is a new experience to make memories and find myself.

- Grade 11

Seeley Lake

A town that once everyone knew each other, Seeley Lake. When I first moved here in 3rd grade, 10 years ago, I was very nervous, but that changed. Instead of feeling unwelcome, I felt invited. I felt as if I was meant to be here, born here. Seeley Lake is a joyful town. Most people think of it as a sad, depressing town, but Seeley Lake can tell you otherwise. July 4th as an example – thousands of tourists come from all over the country and line up on the side of the street ready to watch the parade. You can taste the happiness in the air, pure joy. I wouldn't want to live anywhere else. Seeley Lake is definitely a place to remember and call home.

- Grade 12

Home,
Where I can feel safe,
Get lost in the beauty within.
They say everywhere you go,
There's a soul,
That grabs you unexpectedly.
The soul that is in nature,
Like trees.
They're big and majestic,
Like a mountain lion
Big and powerful.
Sunsets are pretty too,
If you catch them at the right time.
All the colors,
Purple, pink, blue, red, orange, yellow.
So calming,
So desirable.
It pulls me in,
Like Home.
When you find the right place
To where you're not confused

Or lonely.
I feel safe.
So safe
That I finally found my home.

- Grade 12

Thank You, Writers!

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