I have lived in Montana my entire life and have attended the Belgrade school district the entire time. I am involved on my school’s speech and debate team, as well as a member of NHS and our tennis team. I am also a tutor in our writing center. Outside of school, I enjoy playing the cello, riding horses, and volunteering at the Gallatin History Museum. After high school, I will be attending the University of Mary Washington to study historical preservation and museum studies. Ultimately, I would like to do archival work or something else in the preservation of physical history.

There is something deeply beautiful and cathartic about being immersed in complete nature. There is a reason that so many poets focus on the beauty of nature and the natural world in their works. In 1968, Edward Abbey said, “Wilderness is not a luxury but a necessity of the human spirit, and as vital to our lives as water and good bread. A civilization which destroys what little remains of the wild, the spare, the original, is cutting itself off from its origins and betraying the principle of civilization itself.” Every aspect of human society comes from nature and in many ways, we rely on our environment to sustain us. The destruction of natural areas cut us off from a long and rich history that is embedded in our deep relationship with the natural world.

As fellow inhabitants of this earth, I think many people understand on an innate level the ways in which we are tied to our natural planet. More than that, though, there is evidence that fostering a personal connection with nature is very important for our health. Modern society keeps people very busy. Often, a daily routine involves commuting to work, working on a computer, commuting home, making dinner, and going to bed. The average American spends eight hours a day looking at a screen (Moody) and according to the EPA, less than 8% of an adult’s time is spent outside (Buchholz). This is very unfortunate, as many studies have shown that increased exposure to nature can help reduce stress and even improve cognitive functions due to the increased blood flow that accompanies physical exertion (Deans). Nature can have such a powerful effect on our mental health that there are a number of programs focused on giving veterans exposure to the outdoors to help them handle PTSD. We are intended to have a connection to nature and when that is missing, life can often become less fulfilling. Growing up in Montana, I spent a lot of my childhood outside. My mother loves hiking, so throughout my childhood I have spent a lot of time exploring every inch of the mountains surrounding my home. Some of my best memories of childhood were formed on camping trips. Those days we spent without any schedule or commitments were so freeing and full of adventure to me. We could wander through the area surrounding the campground and simply explore. I think those trips were the closest I have ever felt to my family. We were able to form strong bonds and important connections while in the wilderness and even at a young age, the freedom that being in nature provided gave me a deep feeling of relief and helped ease the stress I was under. The impact that nature has on our mind sets, especially in today’s busy society, is profound. Throughout the history of humankind, nature has always played a large role in helping us
develop a structured society and it still holds immense value even with growing urbanization. Exploring nature and expanding your relationship with it can help boost your wellbeing and help you get in touch with yourself.

