

Scholarships - Jennifer Ritzmann's Application Essay

"I have enough faith in human nature to believe that when people are both economically secure and aware of the value of biological wealth they will take the necessary measures to protect their environment. Out of that commitment will grow new knowledge and enrichment of the human spirit beyond our present imagination" - Edward O. Wilson

The Earth and every tiny microbe that dwells here is my inspiration, and the intricate functions of a single cell the only proof I need to believe that the spirit lies in life itself. My one goal is to do anything I can to protect the purity of life. I am astounded by the rate at which we destroy what can never be replaced, but I have not lost hope.

Since I have been at Ohio University I have explored many different areas of study, always pursuing a way to defend the defenseless. Through our environmental group at school, Campus Greens, I began to realize the Earth needs scientists who are willing to speak for it. Our latest goal has been to stop long-wall coal mining in Dysart Woods, a virgin forest in Ohio. Many people believe the mine will destroy the woods. However, there is not enough evidence to back up that claim. I feel the only way to end the destruction of the forests is through evidence of its importance.

During my junior year of high school I studied in Israel for a quarter. This was the single most important experience of my life. I saw how diverse life is and how beautiful all of those differences are. In three months my world expanded half way around the globe. I began to realize that there were millions of species I knew nothing about. This idea is what draws me to Costa Rica. I would love to study the amazing diversity of life that the rain forests offer and the communities that they support.

What intrigued me the most about Israel was the way Zionists had managed to grow food in a desert. They came and transformed a barren land into a garden. Digging into deep rocks to find aquifers and developing elaborate drip irrigation systems to conserve water permitted the beginning of a new culture with new crops. The entire society grew from a dream of living in peace with enough food to eat. When I learned about this I decided that after graduating I would like to go into the Peace Corps. My goal is to help improve agriculture in third world countries, without imposing cultural assimilation. I feel this program would give me insight into rural communities that thrive without submitting to westernization.

Eventually, I would like to become a professor of Tropical Agriculture. Since I have been at Ohio University, I have realized what an impact one

instructor can have on future generations. Last year I took a class entitled, "Plants and People". We learned about various plants, their origin, and how they have affected humans. While the subject was interesting, it was the professor that inspired me. Her lectures came to life with slides of trips she had taken and stories of collecting cassava with local shamans. Her passion is what led me to pursue Tropical Agriculture. I felt that the best teachers are those who can share their own experiences. I also feel that knowledge gained through experience is of greater value than hours of reading. When I am able to meet the people and smell the plants that I am learning about, the lesson becomes my reality. It is hard for me to comprehend the full beauty that lies in Costa Rica. Hopefully this program will give me the opportunity to explore what textbooks have only begun to explain.