

Curiosity Led Me Here

By Eleanor Lardner

On August 24th, 2021, I left the familiarity of my home in the suburbs of Connecticut. I said goodbye to my friends and asked them to write me letters. I tucked my rain jacket, fleece, hiking boots, and seven pairs of socks into a large teal backpack. I would carry it with me for the next 105 days. Backpack on my shoulders, I arrived in Bozeman, Montana. I had hopes and dreams clutched in my clammy hands, and nerves settling in my stomach like sour milk.

A few months before I arrived in Bozeman, I had been fed up with the monotony of COVID, online school, and a world where a grade on an essay mattered more than the topic. I had spent most of my education learning at the Cobb School. In Lower El, I'd devoured book after book because reading made me feel like I could understand other people's thoughts. Later, I began to write my own stories. I wanted to explore possibilities and writing allowed me to do that. One memorable story I wrote with some classmates involved people living on rocks in the middle of the ocean. It's no bestseller, but it does provide a window into my thoughts at age ten. I was curious. I wanted to see how someone would act in an absurd situation. So, I had written about it. But now, in high school, I felt like that curiosity had been sapped out of me.

“... we have to have some level of knowledge or awareness before we can get curious.”

Brené Brown, *Rising Strong*



Cobb alum, Eleanor Lardner decided to take a leap of faith and spent the first half of her junior year tech free, traveling from Montana to Arizona.

Frustrated, I made an impulsive decision. While many people would spend their junior year stressing about grades, drama, sports, and college, I decided I was going to go on an adventure. I did endless Google searching and thought about studying abroad in countless countries. Then, I found The Traveling School, a 15-week, completely tech-free semester for high schoolers. The program combines a standard curriculum of high school classes with outdoor expeditions, experiential learning, and travel.

The next two weeks of requesting recommendations, and editing essays led to two months of paperwork, packing, and preparation. I had wanted an adventure and I was about to get one. I was about to leave the familiar state of Connecticut and spend a semester traveling from Montana to Arizona with fourteen other students and teachers.

And so, I stepped into another world. I was still in the United States, but everything was foreign to me. I was plunged, or rather,



I jumped, feet first and eyes open, into the rural West.

With my classmates, I studied public land policy as our path led us through bison in Yellowstone National Park. In science class, we discussed water rights as we experienced a drought in the town of Bluff, Utah. We learned about the present and historical presence of indigenous peoples while camping in Navajo Nation. We discussed immigration reform, visiting the US-Mexico border where a thirty-foot wall ran through a city like a deep, painful gash.

Over and over again, my eyes were opened to new issues, new knowledge, and new ideas. At night, I would curl up in my sleeping bag and think about all that had happened in the last fifteen hours. I fell in love with those moments of reflection, lying awake when it was just me and my thoughts and light snores from whoever I was sharing a tent with that night.

Though I have washed muddy water from the San Juan River off my skin and shook the dust from Utah's red rock cliffs out of my

hair since returning home, some things still cling to me. I still have dreams for the future. Dreams for a hopeful future for all. Dreams of decolonizing indigenous lands.

Dreams of no drought in the West.

Because of The Traveling School, my world expanded like a balloon being filled with so much air that it almost popped. I have been so privileged to have this opportunity. Doors have been open to me that aren't open to everyone. It's my job to use that privilege and to hold on to the awareness I gained. I have to hold on to seeking out new perspectives, new ideas, and new issues. I have to use the first skill I ever learned at Cobb: curiosity.



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Scan QR code to listen to Eleanor Lardner, in her own words, describe her travels.