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“Bear is the holder of medicine knowledge for the people and has a special relationship with plants. He is the one who calls them by name, who knows their stories. We seek him for a vision, to find the task we were meant for. I think I am following a Bear.” (Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Gathering Moss*)

My family is Bear Clan. I now believe that I was meant to come here, to Grizzly Country. My passion is plants. I grew up with them in my everyday life, training since childhood for awareness and understanding. Early memories find me looking at the ground, always in the dirt with the bugs, flowers, leaves, rocks and wood. It seems natural to have chosen a field of study that I have always been fascinated with, and that interest led me here.

Over the summer I have had the opportunity to work at Glacier National Park’s Native Plant Nursery. I participated in revegetation projects, plant care and growth, seed collection and phenology study. My time at the nursery has not only been fun and educational, but environmentally productive. To be a part of a team that share similar ecological values and to actually take action in restoration projects was a life experience that I won’t forget.

Hands-on experience with propagation left me with an empowering sense of accomplishment, like I am giving back to nature and preserving my traditional values at the same time. Learning plant names, habitat types, and species traits became an every day challenge that left me exhausted, but wanting to know more. I’ve found that studying them gives me connection to the world, to something greater than myself. This place has been the perfect learning facility for recovering the land, and I got to use the perfect medium: plants!

Helping out with cuttings, seed stratification and collection, and the general handling of native plants was the best way for me to learn about them. I knew I was learning a lot when the mouths full of Latin flying around didn’t leave me intimidated or confused! I keep telling myself Latin words are only names, so I try to remember them all. When I am out in the field each plant’s face has a name, like old friends with new hair-do’s; “I know who you are but what’s your name?! Oh, yeah. *Claytonia lanceolata*, how are you?” (I really do greet them this way!)

In the past I have learned that the people around you can become powerful influences in your life. I feel lucky to have been a part of this crew. Each person was so knowledgeable, especially about native plants and the inner workings of an important division of the restoration program. It’s a wonder to me how they manage it all so proficiently and diligently. They became my teachers, pulling my mind wide, showing me how to look closer and be patient, how to test myself and leave room for improvement. I am grateful for their time and effort with my learning; it would have been easy to get lost without them.

As human beings, we are natural scientists. We give things names, gather and analyze data, control their surroundings, hybridize and alter genetics for a more efficient tomato. We ultimately try to understand how the natural order works, and try to better it. What I liked the most about Glacier is that their philosophy is to let things be. It shows respect for nature that is hard to come by in this day and age. It has been the best place to continue my education on plant life in that aspect because the learning was substantial and real, a way of thinking that appeals to me.

I think that in order for one to truly know something, it has to be taught to the mind, body, and spirit. I know plant life is vital to all life, and I feel we have a responsibility to plants because we are as much a part of them as they are us. We coexist, we are not separate. The park became a haven for me because of personal interaction with the land. Whether walking into the obscurity of the Westside understory or into the constant push of the Eastside wind, the land is alive and I am a part of it. Protecting and restoring native plant habitats has been important to

me, and I am glad I got to work with likeminded people. There is so much to experience! I am still looking at the ground, learning.