

## **Nantucket Book Festival Young Writer Award Finalists 2019**

### **First Runner Up**

#### **Let's Go Outside: Grade 9**

**Sonia Dhar**

If you walk down the gravel path enclosed by various plants (which I happen to know the names of) you'll come across a fork in the path. As a mere eight-year-old, where the paths led nor what plants I could identify mattered as we approached this fork in the path. In between this said fork, were three trees. We called them broccoli trees; more formally known as Golden Arborvitae and each are practically identical to each other. Here on Nantucket, the deer enjoy snacking on these trees but simply can't reach the tops. This ultimately resulted in the shape or our namesake of the tree. I've been told the deer think it tastes of popcorn and although it does taste quite nice, I would have to disagree. Now, you may wonder as to why, I, at age eight, could name most of the plants at the UMass Field Station here on Nantucket, a know, is that I could've never appreciated nature the way I do today without my experiences at the field station. For years, my sister and I would walk down this very path as we were part of a group called the Jr. Rangers. We were a group of kids, most only slightly older than I, who learned about the wildlife from Lenny. Lenny and his wife, Sarah, lived and worked at the field station. Sarah was a scientist who did studies, mainly in the marshes of Nantucket and Lenny was no less than a stellar poet who took the time to learn about the wildlife on Nantucket. Lenny would teach us the specifics of the different plants and animals and how to identify them. We then would collectively give the occasional tour or do our own projects like setting color-coordinated cups of dish soap to attract insects. Lenny's appreciation and curiosity for nature and the world around us impacted my life in unexpected but significant ways.

Personally, the field station may be my favorite location on the island. It showcases a specific side of Nantucket that is preserved but also very visitable. Lenny was the perfect person to lead our group of Jr. Rangers and continually taught us more and more. The main thing that stands out to me more today, is how much he respected us; regardless of our age. I was only eight when I started and yet he still treated me with a respect that motivated me and embraced my curiosity as a kid. Through this and learning about the environment, he taught the importance of respecting nature. This is especially important since Nantucket is such a special place; unlike any other. Now this ranged from many different habitats including, but not limited to, the marshes, sandplain grasslands, and beach. Of course, it is important to share the beauty of the field station with others and we encouraged educating people about the area. Occasionally, people would visit and not treat the property as it should be treated. An act as simple as leaving something behind at the beach could negatively affect the environment. Of course, everyone makes mistakes, but mistakes are only beneficial if a lesson is learned.

You see, I was a very shy eight-year-old and to this day, avoid talking to people as much as possible. It was still only my first year being a part of the Jr. Rangers and we were casually walking down the beach, as we did most days. Though I can't remember exactly, I'm sure we were doing something along the lines of getting as much *Codium* as possible out of the water.

We just explored, wandered the beach and reinvented lyrics to Beatles songs. As you would expect of Nantucket, it was an overcast but pleasant morning; a mild day but no worse than any other. Soon enough we became aware of the fact that we weren't alone on this beach. These weren't just people enjoying the nice day; rather they were climbing the bluff. Not only is climbing a cliff extremely dangerous but also dramatically damages the environment! We here on Nantucket know the true tragedy of erosion all too well; as houses continually get closer to the water. This means it's important to stay off the bluff and more specifically not climb them. Now I, the shy eight-year-old in a pink shirt brighter than the sky that day, calmly walked up to the strangers and said something along the lines of "Hey, you're hurting the environment by climbing the bluff, could you please stop." It wasn't aggressive or out of anger, but said out of a place of care and respect. Anger never solves a situation. Instead, I merely explained to them the impact of what they were doing, they apologized and left. We continued our day; picking invasive seaweed off the beach in our own little world.

While this is one of many good memories from being at the field station, it displays Lenny's impact on me very well. In not even a full summer, Lenny had made a positive impact on my mindset and how I view the world. Through the Jr. Rangers and Lenny's leadership, I learned to appreciate the world without harming it. It became more obvious how people impact the environment without realization. Without Lenny teaching me about the environment here on Nantucket, I would never have known myself. Not only that, but he showed me that it's ok and important to tell someone respectfully if they are being harmful, rather than stand by and let it happen. Nature should be appreciated but we must be cautious to preserve its beauty. Although Lenny and Sarah have since moved, the field station is still my favorite location on the island, despite its changes. Overall, my experience with Lenny and the UMass Field Station impacted my life greatly in the way I view the world, and how I appreciate nature and our island.