

Stories of Gratitude

How Your Giving Changes Lives

SUMMER/FALL 2023



WILDERNESS
AWARENESS
SCHOOL

Footing and Foundation

by L.J., Spencer's Mom

It is difficult to express the level of gratitude I have for the scholarship my son Spencer, 16, received from the Wilderness Awareness School. This scholarship allowed him to participate in Wild Within, a once-per-month weekend program. Without it, there was no way he could have attended.

Wild Within has been Spencer's footing and foundation in many critical ways. It has also been his joy. For a boy like Spencer with a busy and overloaded solo mom (who also grapples daily with disabling chronic illness), virtually no additional family, and zero financial resources to devote to cost-based experiences or education, **the opportunity to participate in Wild Within has been life-altering, in the most positive ways.**

Because Spencer is a fairly talkative boy, I am fortunate to hear details about Spencer's camping weekends (often after a nap). His sharing inevitably fills my heart with gratitude for the wonderful time he had, the support he experienced, the meaningful relationships that grew for him, and the education he received.



Thanks to your donations, Spencer (second from left) looks forward to weekends at Wild Within with his favorite instructors and peers.

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Since he spends most of his time close to home, I can tell Spencer is thrilled when he gets to see other places with Wild Within. For instance, he could not get over the beauty and topography in Eastern Washington at Umtanum Canyon. At Deception Pass, he experienced completely new areas on foot that I wouldn't be able to take him to by summiting a peak where he had a view of one of our favorite family places. On another trip to San Juan Island, he was awestruck to observe dozens of black foxes.

Spencer has been personally challenged in positive ways by camping outdoors and hiking. After a trip to Lake Serene, he told me he went on a hike that was harder than any other he had done. "I had to dig deep to keep going, but I did it"! **The feelings of accomplishment and recognizing he could do hard things were written all over him!**

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Notes From the Eagle's Nest

by Warren Moon, Executive Director

I hope your summer was filled with many memorable moments in nature. Thanks to you, over 2,000 youth enjoyed awesome nature adventures and deepened their relationships with nature, community, and self this summer!

Immersive time in nature is critical for our youth. As they struggle with a rise in mental health issues, your donation helps more kids experience the healing and calming benefits of time spent outside with skilled mentors and engaged peers. **Your compassionate giving is what makes this all possible.** Thank You!

I am excited to share with you our latest edition of Stories of Gratitude, so you can see the positive impact you've made:

In *Footing and Foundation*, you'll be moved to know how life-altering a scholarship to attend Wild Within was to Spencer, as it helped him stay grounded, resilient, and healthy amidst the challenges of growing up in today's world.

In *The Teacher I Was Meant to Be*, you'll learn how your support not only helps individual youth, but also supports training adults like Kevin, who go on to reach hundreds and thousands of students around the world.

I am so grateful for your incredible generosity. Together, we can help more students cultivate healthy relationships and grow into the compassionate leaders, mentors, and stewards that our world deeply needs.

With gratitude,

Warren
Moon



For Spencer, the relationships he has forged at Wild Within have been just as meaningful as the outdoor experiences. His relationships with the instructors have been extremely important and positive for him. They support him deeply and encourage him to find and be himself. They have added much to Spencer's sense of self and shown him that authentic relationships can also be fun. The other kids have also been a wonderful part of Spencer's experience. His friendships with his Wild Within buddies have grown into get-togethers outside of the program.

Spencer has also come to appreciate the break from social media and high school drama he is afforded while away at Wild Within. He has seen that you can take a break from it all in a healthy way and that there are others who enjoy doing this too!



Your generosity has given Spencer life-altering opportunities!

The experience of Wild Within has helped fill a number of impactful voids in Spencer's life. It has given him something to look forward to each month and reflect on between class weekends. Every aspect of it has grounded him and carried him through "regular life" until the next Wild Within weekend. The relationships and experiences of his peers and instructors have lifted him and given him internal confidence. **Bottom line - without this program, I think life for Spencer would be much more difficult and high-risk, and he would not be nearly as comfortable as he is with himself.**

It is amazing how one scholarship can lift and carry a teen above that fray and into the beauty of themselves, others, and the outdoors. From the bottom of my heart, thank you!!

Blue Heron Canoe Journey Success



Blue Heron Canoe Family paddlers get ready to start their journey at Mukilteo. Founder Mike Evans (with drum), prepares to send them off on the two-week journey.

We are deeply inspired by your support of the Blue Heron Canoe Journey! Your generosity raised \$3,105 for this multi-week event that celebrates the cultural lifeways of the Coast Salish people of the Pacific Northwest. Thanks to you, the trip was an amazing success.

While Blue Heron journeyed the past two years, this was the first full Tribal Canoe Journey since 2019, with over 100 canoes participating! The Blue Heron Canoe Journey ran from July 17 to July 30, traveling from Mukilteo to Whidbey Island to the San Juans and eventually ending at Alki Point. The journey was then followed by six days of Protocol at the Muckleshoot Reservation, where each canoe family had the opportunity to share songs, dancing, and more.

Along with your donation, which provided funding for food, travel, and supplies, Wilderness Awareness School provided a van and trailer and two drivers/helpers to support the journey.

We are deeply thankful for your support of our efforts to reach for Right Relations with our Indigenous neighbors and help uplift this important cultural practice of the Coast Salish people.

Summer Moments Made Possible by You

"To be out in the wild, away from the modern world, with a group of adults who have so much infectious passion creates an amazing environment where you feel safe to be yourself. I wish every other teen could be able to experience this kind of support and care too."

- Cassidy, 17 year old Wolf Tracking Expedition student

"This is the best week of my life."

- Stellan Smith, age 8, Nature Adventure camper

"My 8 year old daughter attended a week of Nature Adventure camp. She thoroughly enjoyed the experience and brought home a lot of critical thinking skills for observing nature. The week after, my daughter was hiking with my mom and found some bird poop on the ground. They looked up in the trees and saw a barred owl sitting in the branches of a tree. I'm pretty sure before this camp this is not something she would have ever taken note of, but I was so impressed that she found that and she was able to see an owl."

- Andrea N., mother of an 8-year-old camper

The Teacher I Was Meant to Be

by Kevin “Porcupine” O’Malley

As a child in Cleveland, I was not tested on my intuition, my sense of place, or my knowledge of where birds’ nests were. My attention was focused on the outdoors, where I longed for the kind of deep connection with nature that children can have: energized by the newness, mystery, and truth of the living world.

Wilderness Awareness School turned what I was hungry for as a child into reality. My time as a student of The Immersion in 2008 gave me permission to be the type of person I was meant to be. This way of being- fully present, open, and curious in nature- was a dream I had thought was impossible for adults. I learned that I was not childish but childlike and that this was a strength I could bring to the world.

After graduating from The Immersion, an idea kept coming up for me: **I needed to share my passion for nature-based education with children in the underserved community where I lived.**

To start a business on my own was daunting, overwhelming, and risky, but upon reflection, WAS taught me to do this type of work and have the confidence to do it in my own way. After I moved to South Seattle, a very diverse community, I founded **South Sound Nature School (SSNS)** a non-profit that offers nature-based educational programs for children and adults. Now we’re in our seventh year of summer camps, after-school



Kevin is now able to share the mission of nature connection at his own nature school, thanks the scholarship you gave him!

“I can now return the favor back to my own community by offering scholarships for our own programs!”

programs, and seasonal classes that teach to the senses, focus on learning from the seasons, and foster nature connection. SSNS has been a valuable resource for families, and they keep coming back year after year so children can consistently learn in this way.

I will always be grateful for my experiences in The Immersion, which truly changed my life for the better. And, **I don’t think that I could have participated without the scholarship I received.** I’m amazed that not only is my life fulfilled by the school I founded but that I can now return the favor back to my own community by offering financial access and scholarships for our own programs! I’m grateful for the chance to give back and change lives in my own work.

Yes! I want to be a lifeline for those needing nature connection!



- ☐ \$35
- ☐ \$50
- ☐ \$100

- ☐ \$250
- ☐ \$_____ - the possibilities are endless!

Name: _____

Email: _____

Address: _____

Donate securely online at wildernessawareness.org/donate