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Sustainability & the Environment

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George Modlin Book Award

Application by: Marissa Parker
Environmental Studies and Geography, Class of 2016

Collection: Sustainability & the Environment

April 8, 2016

I cannot remember when I first became interested in the environment and sustainability, but I do know that it is now a very important part of my life and my soon-to-be career. I never meant to create such a collection around the theme of sustainability when I started. I was simply drawn to books around this theme. I started collecting my own books while I was in high school and it quickly took off.

One of the first, and probably my favorite, books I bought for myself was Sophie Uliano's *Gorgeously Green*. This book explains how to incorporate more sustainable practices in every aspect of one's life. It opened my eyes to the environmental impact of many everyday practices, but also taught me how easy it can be to live more sustainably and more healthfully. I loved this book so much that I immediately bought two more of Uliano's books: *The Gorgeously Green Diet* and *Do It Gorgeously*. *The Gorgeously Green Diet* taught me more about the heavy impact that some foods, especially animal-based foods, have on the environment, and that by eating more sustainably, I would also be eating healthier and even save money. *Do It Gorgeously* provided more extensive and detailed tips and recipes to implement sustainable practices, like making my own beauty and bathroom products. Reading these books made me excited about sustainability and how easy it can be to take small steps in my own life.

After reading Uliano's books, I became specifically interested in reducing animal-based products in my diet. I picked up two more books to add to my collection: *The China Study* and *Skinny Bitch*. *The China Study* is a compilation of comprehensive nutrition studies comparing diets of Americans to those of other cultures, mostly in rural China. Studies linked increased consumption of animal products and processed foods to "diseases of affluence" such as heart disease and diabetes. *Skinny Bitch* had a very different tone and a slightly different focus. This book is aimed at more of the average, non-scientific reader and presents information in a fun, sassy, and easy to understand way. It covers not only the environmental impact of animal-based foods, but the health and ethical implications. These two books inspired me to take the plunge to make one of the most impactful changes I could at the time: cutting animal products from my diet.

After starting my book collection with this handful of titles, I was addicted and wanted to read more. I borrowed books from my local library and purchased the ones I really loved, like Maria Menounos' *The Every Girl's Guide to Life* on how to live more efficiently and simply while still maintaining many of the traditional comforts of our society. I started receiving books as gifts on occasion when my mom realized how my collection was growing. She bought me cookbooks like *Vegan Fire & Spice* and *The Joy of Vegan Baking* to help me learn how to cook on my own without meat and dairy. My dad gave me *The Vegan Cheat Sheet* on a recommendation of his friend. My dance teacher's father, who worked for an estuary program in my home county and knew about my interest in the environment, also gifted me books from his collection including

The Citizen-Powered Energy Handbook, Human Development and the Environment, and Ecosystems and Human Well-being which all include interdisciplinary aspects of environmentalism, like policy, geography, and economic development.

When I started college at the University of Richmond, I originally wanted to study chemistry with an environmental focus. But after I decided I did not want to stay in the hard sciences, I was drawn to the Environmental Studies and Geography majors because all of the classes required seemed very interesting to me--and after four years I can confidently say they have been. I added many titles to my collection between all of the classes within my majors, from textbooks I kept for reference to classic environmental literature I could not part with at the end of the semester. In my Environmental Ethics class, I was finally forced to buy *Silent Spring*, arguably the most influential environmental book of American history and a book I had been wanting to read for many years. *A Sand County Almanac* is another classic environmental book that I kept after this class. As an environmentalist, I knew I had to have these books in my collection.

During my studies at UR, I also took many science or science-heavy environmental classes which I believe has greatly benefitted me in providing a technical background. While I quickly parted with my physics and calculus books, I held onto books from some of my favorite classes: *Human Geography, Ecology, and Geosystems*. These textbooks stand out as the most highlighted and weathered texts I've had. Between them, they span biotic systems, physical earth systems, politics, human interactions with the environment, and more--all part of the interdisciplinary aspects of environmental studies that I love.

Now in my senior year about to embark on my adult life, I have returned to my earlier interest in implementing sustainable practices into my life. Knowing that I will very soon have my own apartment, along with my own kitchen and responsibility to clean it all, I have begun exploring more ways to live with a lighter impact on the environment and my wallet. Intrigued by the growing minimalism movement, I acquired two recent titles by the same author: *Adopting the Minimalist Mindset* which is a crash course on minimalism and *Natural Green Cleaning* to learn how to make my own cleaning products.

Books are undoubtedly an important component of learning and growing. Creating my own collection of books has helped me explore my interests in a fun way. Through my collection and studies, I have learned that sustainability to me means living in a way that ensures future generations can thrive while also addressing the needs of the present. Like our interactions with the environment, I have shaped and been shaped by my personal library. And my collection of books, and the journey of how it got to its current state, has helped shape me into the young environmentalist I am.

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