RMNP PROGRAM FOSTERS LOVE OF OUTDOORS
Pathways to Parks an Express Route to National Park Service Employment

Portions being reprinted with permission from the August 24, 2010 edition of the Fort Collins Coloradoan by Bobby Magill

Before Cynthia Alonzo came to Estes Park to attend the Eagle Rock School, she lived in Compton, CA, where there was no way she was going to graduate from Compton High School, she said.

Eagle Rock is an alternative school designed for those who can excel in a non-traditional learning environment. It attracts students from all around the country.

“When I first arrived, I was a Compton girl,” said Alonzo, 20. “I wanted to fight everybody.”

Today, after four years of classes and personal growth at Eagle Rock, Alonzo wears a National Park Service uniform and drives around Rocky Mountain National Park in “Rusty,” the recycling truck.

Her job, along with that of fellow recycling crew member Jon’ya Crawford, 18, of Bridgeport, CT, is to empty all the park’s recycling bins into the back of Rusty – an essential part of park maintenance.

The two are part of Rocky Mountain National Park’s Pathways to Parks Program, an express route to a National Park Service job for Eagle Rock students who have discovered a love for the outdoors after leaving the inner-city or other places where a government job was hardly a dream.

GOVERNOR RITTER PRAISES 2010 GOVERNOR’S SERVICE AWARD WINNERS

Portions being reprinted with permission from the May 19, 2010 edition of the Estes Park Trail Gazette

Governor Ritter honored AmeriCorps and other volunteer efforts today at the 2010 Governor’s Service Awards ceremony. Recipients were honored for their outstanding contributions to community service work throughout Colorado. The awards were given by the Governor’s Commission on Community Service (GCCS).

Governor Bill Ritter proclaimed the week of May 8 - 15, 2010 as AmeriCorps Week in Colorado, spotlighting the vital work done by AmeriCorps members in communities across the state since the national service program began 16 years ago.

The Governor stated, “AmeriCorps Week provides us the opportunity… to shine the spotlight on AmeriCorps … We look at AmeriCorps and the work that they do in Colorado and see them tackling the toughest of problems...”

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ER-29 was my graduating trimester and I was assisting Robert and Philbert in their orientation of Eagle Rock for the new students before they left on the Wilderness trip. I remember meeting Kate for the first time very vividly. She was shy and timid in comparison with the other students brought in with her. She had a brilliant smile that made you feel extremely special whenever she graced you with it, which wasn’t often enough. Though she was quiet, she had an air of determination that made me think she would definitely be an Eagle Rock graduate. Lo and behold, Kate graduated in December 2005 with her diploma in hand and an exciting future ahead of her.

Kate was accepted to Warren Wilson College in Asheville, North Carolina as a Bonner Scholar because of her commitment to community service. Kate enjoyed school in North Carolina and decided to major in History and Education with the hope to become a History teacher. Some of Kate’s favorite classes at Warren Wilson included *The Works of Charles Dickens*, *Russian History I, II, and III*, and *Western Civilization*. Through the Bonner Scholar program Kate had the opportunity to take a summer internship at an overnight camp called *Mountain Adventure* for children and adults with autism run by the Autism Society of North Carolina. Unexpectedly Kate found her niche working one-on-one with children and adults with autism. She continued her work at *Mountain Adventure* for three summers working her way up the chain of responsibility. She was promoted from Activity Director to House Care Activity Director, where she focused on her campers’ medical needs. From her experience as House Care Activity Director Kate really found her passions, working with people with special needs and nursing.

Kate made the decision that history and education were not what she really wanted to study, so she put them on hold to look into nursing programs. This past October Kate moved to Baltimore, Maryland where she enrolled in a Surgical Nursing program with the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC), which was recently ranked as number one in the “up-and-coming national universities” in the *U.S. News & World Report America’s Best Colleges Guide*. Kate chose surgical nursing because she has found that she has a strong stomach and within the Operating Room there are so many necessary roles that she will have many different opportunities to learn and work in her career. She currently has 14 months left in her Surgical Nursing program.

Once Kate completes her program at UMBC she would like to join the
This past year, twelve individuals came together to make up the 2009-2010 Public Allies Teaching Fellowship Program. If you ask the fellows, they will tell you that the amount learned about themselves, education, and community was immense. After their departure on August 11th, fellows headed off to many places, and though they will be missed, Eagle Rock is excited to hear about their future adventures.

**Matt Bynum**, Wilderness Fellow, spent much time with new students in the wilderness this year. His humor was contagious, and one couldn’t help but laugh when with him. Matt returned to Eagle Rock after a climbing trip in Canada with Amir and instructed the fall wilderness course with the ER-52 new students.

**Amanda Christman**, Curriculum Fellow, filled many roles at Eagle Rock such as organizing the class lists and teaching the new students’ 201 course. Eagle Rock is lucky that Amanda will remain at the school through April as the interim house parent in Ponderosa House. Amanda will continue to strengthen her relationship with Ponderosa while also studying for the GRE’s.

**Daphne Clyburn**, World Languages Fellow, taught a variety of courses beyond Spanish and Italian. She also became very involved in helping out with the major research process. After Eagle Rock Daphne started a new job as a Spanish teacher at The Saint James School where she will continue to develop her skills as an educator.

**Amir Erez**, Math Fellow, was a quiet leader throughout his year at Eagle Rock. Amir shared his passion for climbing through teaching *Physics of Climbing* with Matt during the summer. After Eagle Rock, Amir went climbing in Canada with Matt, and is continuing to run, work for Outward Bound, and scheme plans for a new school in the Bay Area with other fellows.

**Peter Finn**, Music Fellow, contributed to the Eagle Rock community through sharing his musical talents at gathering on a weekly basis, his love for *This American Life* through a class of the same name, and his desire to learn through participating in the licensure program. Peter’s talents are many, and he continues to obtain more as he transitions to life in Portland, Oregon.

**Kelsey Glass**, Professional Development Center Fellow, was a constant source of support and advice for students and staff, and represented Eagle Rock well in her many roles on campus. After Eagle Rock, she continues to work in youth and community development and is searching for an ideal job to fit her many talents!

**Dan Hoffman**, Societies and Cultures, contributed to ERS this year through creating and executing thoughtful lessons in his classes and spending time with Spruce House in his free time. After his term of service at ERS, Dan hiked over 300 miles in the Sierra Nevada. Afterward, he flew to Katmandu, Nepal, where he joined his girlfriend Catherine, and is currently reading books, looking at the mountains, and thinking about the educational non-profit he hopes to start with Amir and Joel.

**Anne Lindberg**, Science Fellow, shared her interest in science through creating classes such as *Brain, Body, and Balance*. After ERS, she started school in Boulder to study Ayurvedic Medicine. She hopes to return to ERS in the future to teach an Explore Week class in holistic healing.

**Alyssa McConkey**, Health and Wellness Counseling Fellow, shared many of her passions this year beyond being a constant support for the students. She taught classes in food politics and gardening, and also shared her love for meditation with the community. After ERS, she is traveling in South and Central America working on farms for eight months. Afterwards, she will start Graduate School in August 2011.

**Joel Oubre**, Human Performance Center Fellow, contributed much time and energy to ERS this year by being a strong male mentor for students and sharing his constant positivity with the community. After Eagle Rock, he hiked in the Sierra Nevada with Dan and Ryan, and is now sailing in the Caribbean with friends.

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EAGLE ROCK RECEIVES STATE SCHOOL OF CHARACTER AWARD
by Cherie Faumuina, ER-51 Graduate

On July 15th, in the middle of ER-51, several students, including myself, were chosen to receive the 2010 Colorado State School of Character award in Denver on behalf of Eagle Rock School & Professional Development Center. Walking into the Supreme Court Chambers in the State Capitol was priceless. The Capitol seemed as if it was too nice to walk into. Walking through security and then having the opportunity to stand in such a landmark was incredible.

We entered the Supreme Court chambers where the awards ceremony took place and we presented examples of our school values to those in attendance. We took turns presenting on Eagle Rock values we call “8+5=10” and how we focus on creating a safe environment to ensure effective learning and personal growth. We gave many detailed examples for each value that we live by everyday as students.

As an Eagle Rock graduate, I’ve experienced over the years that students are challenged everyday about personal growth. Having a chance to sit in the State Capitol and hear that there are other schools that exist with similar goals to Eagle Rock was really empowering. I sat back in my chair listening to students from other schools as young as twelve years of age speaking on strategies to address certain issues schools aren’t recognizing these days.

Standing up in front of people I’d never met was intimidating at first. I knew that we had to present our school well and I did not want to disappoint anyone. Talking about the values our school and then seeing other schools reactions was astonishing. I looked around the room and all I saw were smiles and heard comforting comments. I felt like I was at home. It gave me hope as a student that there are people that do care about education and I have played a role in receiving an award for the hard work everyone does at Eagle Rock. Knowing that I played a part in making schools better through mentoring and hosting is one experience I will never forget. I am truly proud to have graduated from such a wonderful place.

Ryan Plantz, Service Learning Fellow, constantly found opportunities for students to do service projects on and off campus. After Eagle Rock, Ryan traveled in California with Dan and Joel, then moved back to Boulder where he hopes to pursue a job in education, leadership, and youth work.

Reggie Scruggs, Literature and Literacy Fellow, shared his passions with the community through things like his Saturday Seminar, Muses for Mindfulness. After finishing his term of service, Reggie returned to his home in Chicago to reconnect with friends and family. He continues to search for a job in the nonprofit world where he can fill many roles and work with young people in an urban community.

The fellows have undoubtedly left a footprint behind at Eagle Rock. They now move on to new experiences, but their Eagle Rock experience will always remain a huge point of learning in their lives. Eagle Rock welcomed the newest class of fellows as they arrived on August 28. You’ll meet them in the next edition of Eagle Eyes.
Did you know that roughly 30% of the students entering college are first generation college students? First generation is defined as being the first in their family to attend college. Krista Ramsey and Cliff Peale of USA Today explain that of first generation college students, 25% will drop out after their first year and 89% will leave college without a degree. First generation students often have an uphill battle when it comes to higher education. Whether it's knowing how to fill out college applications and financial aid forms or how to improve their study habits and where to get proper support on campus, these students often have little or no support from an individual who has attended and graduated from college.

More and more Eagle Rock graduates will become the first in their family to attend higher education. The support that ERS is giving these students is built into the curriculum. Life After Eagle Rock (LAER) coor- dinator Denise Lord explains that the required experiences of the Life skills Portfolio and the Portfolio of Possibilities assist students in gaining important skills that will benefit them as first generation college students. She explains, “(...) our students go through Life skills, where they learn about financial responsibility and the obligations they will have regardless of post-graduation plans. Through simulation, they learn how to set themselves up for the life immediately following ERS and go through the process of finding housing, buying groceries, getting insurance, paying bills, establishing credit, saving, and more. They learn how to be successful with these things while still at ERS so they can put it into practice when they leave.”

The life skills experience will allow students to recognize what is necessary as they plan for college - whether it's making a budget or learning how to find affordable insurance for their healthcare, car, etc. Students complete their Portfolio of Possibilities, which is in two parts, during their graduating trimester.

“The first part is to help the student develop their immediate post-graduation plans. It requires students to think about their purpose, goals, fears, hopes, as well as means for people to support them as they leave Eagle Rock and transition into LAER. The second component of the portfolio is to help students create a professional portfolio to be used in their post-graduation pursuits. Included are a resume, cover letter, letters of recommendation, transcripts, Learning Experience Records, significant school work, awards, certifications, job applications, college applications, test scores, etc. The intention of this is to have students be prepared with the necessary materials to gain employment, apply to colleges, scholar- ships, internships, and more,” reports Denise.

These two experiences go a long way to prepare students for LAER and get them thinking about what will be necessary for them to be successful. Another huge help for our first generation college students is the $14,000 graduates are eligible to use in support of their higher education through the Graduate Higher Education Fund. As an Eagle Rock Graduate myself, the financial support I received allowed me to focus more on my education and less on working outside of school to pay for my expenses.

While Eagle Rock has some excellent structures in place to support our first generation college students, Denise recognizes that we could do more to help our graduates find success in higher education.

“It would be great to have a more intentional and deliberate plan for first generation students to help familiarize them earlier in their ERS career to LAER opportunities. I think this kind of exposure could make the difference with students who are on the edge about college, helping them to see all the possibilities that exist, encouraging them to pursue their dreams, and aiding them in the often daunting process of college navigation, application, and support,” she says.

Along with more structures to support first generation students while they are at Eagle Rock, there are some partnerships that ERS could form that would benefit students when they pursue their LAER. One partnership is seeking out colleges and universities who have specific first generation support programs. For example the University of Cincinnati has a Gen-1 House that’s set up to support students through a very structured environment to reduce potential distractions. Students sign a contract where they agree to follow a curfew, maintain a specific GPA, commit to not using drugs and alcohol, will not visit home within the first half of the semester, and will not work more than 20 hours a week. Staff involvement is very heavy in this program, such as giving wake up calls or texts if students are not at class. Another partnership is working with colleges or universities that have TRIO programs. TRIO programs are fed- eral outreach and student services programs that provide services to low-income individuals and first generation college students.

Eagle Rock recognizes the need for additional support and Denise is on the project to help our graduates become part of the 11% of first generation students who graduate from college.
Ground squirrels spent the summer breaking into Willow House, sneaking into the strawberry patch and avoiding the constant threat of campus dogs. The Summer Production however, set its sights on a wiler varmint, the elusive *Mus Musculus*.

The Production course spent 10 weeks rehearsing and preparing Agatha Christie’s ultra-classic, harrowing whodunit *The Mouse Trap*. Directed by the Music Instructional-Specialist Jon Borodach with assistance from the Music Fellow Peter Finn and the ever-passionate thespian Alex Ramirez, the cast took the challenge of putting on a mid-winter, English countryside murder mystery as an outdoor performance in the midst of the wild-flowered, thunder storm-stricken, mid-summer Colorado Rocky Mountains. If this sounds difficult, just try figuring out who of the eight snowbound, cabin-fevered, suspicious guests is actually a deranged murderer!

Over the 10 weeks, students worked hard to memorize lines and blocking. In addition, each student went into the minds of their characters. They analyzed their character’s goals and emotions, drew out important actions and created fictitious pasts that would help explain motives throughout the play. Seeking the Effective Communication Power Standard, students also gave ‘sneak previews’ at gatherings approaching the performances and adjusted their acting based on feedback drawn from the community.

And while being snowed-in with a murderer may sound stressful, working intimately with such a small group for two months under a relentless sun was perhaps the greater test of patience. With no small parts in the play, every student had substantial stage time and was responsible for much material. Tensions rose with the heat of the day and as scenes were rehearsed and re-rehearsed, cast and directors alike learned to cope with individual frustrations for the betterment of the group.

And then, in the exciting last chapter of preparation, in the style of any good Christie stage play, a twist! With a mere week before opening night, veteran actors Alex and Jesus were put in situations where they had to learn entire parts! Alex used the help of memorization strategies and taurine to learn his lines while even Jesus’s roommates knew most of his lines after hours of repetition in the wing.

With a new cast, the play put its up-stage foot forward and ‘set to’ with a new drive for success. The final week’s rehearsals were full of life, energy and passion. Accents grew thick and personalities emerged after long days and starry nights. After a giggle-ridden dress-rehearsal, it was clear things were coming together.

Thursday evening’s opening performance was a resounding success. As the sun set, Mollie (Gretchen Horne) took the stage and fretted away as her irresponsible husband Giles (Alex) did little to help her prepare their newly opened inn for guests. As light faded, the audience laughed uproariously at the comic entrances of Christopher (Eliza McCloud) and Paravicini (Diana Riviera). Additionally, they were shocked by the audacity of Ms. Boyle (Leslie Hernandez) and mesmerized by the intensity of Sergeant Trotter (Chelsey Morris). To add to the comic relief was the Sean Connery inspired Major Metcalf (Lance Burgess) and the ever gender-ambiguous and legally blind Miss Casewell (Jesus Ramos).

Miraculously, and defying NOAA’s hourly weather forecast, clear skies set the canopy for the following two performances. Although there were some minor technical power issues, the show must go on, and on it went. The finale was wildly successful and a good-sized crowd from the local town of Estes Park attended to enjoy the show as well.

In melancholy reminiscing, the cast agreed watching Jesus walk down stairs in a dress, high heels and a partially blinding wig was one of the highlights of the experience. In response, Jesus agreed that being able to act like a fool on stage was in fact a lot of fun.

And what’s next? Alex hopes to land a role in which he gets to sleep a lot. Jesus is gunning for Aragorn of Lord of the Rings. Diana is reluctant to admit her undying passion for the stage but does plan on vacationing in El Salvador for the time being. And for next year’s production? There has already been talk of epics such as The Godfather and Jurassic Park…

**THREE BLIND MICE, SEE HOW THEY RUN:**

An account of the ER-51 Summer Production

by Peter Finn, former Public Allies Teaching Fellow in Music
As part of the National Schools of Character awards program, the Character Education Partnership (CEP) gives annual Promising Practices awards to schools and districts in the United States and elsewhere for implementing unique and specific strategies in character education. Selected schools and districts receive an award certificate at the Promising Practices Awards Ceremony at the CEP National Forum on Character Education.

Eagle Rock School joins 229 schools and districts from across the United States as well as Mexico and Puerto Rico awards for “Promising Practices” in character education and is being honored specifically for their nationally recognized “new student orientation” process.

Head of School, Robert Burkhardt, explains, “We are honored to be considered for this award. For seventeen years Eagle Rock has strived to build a learning community where students and staff develop the content of their character on a daily basis.”

The Character Education Partnership (CEP) is an advocacy group for character education based in Washington, D.C. It is a “nonprofit, nonpartisan, nonsectarian, coalition of organizations and individuals committed to fostering effective character education in our nation’s K-12 schools.” CEP’s mission is “Leading the nation in helping schools develop people of good character for a just and compassionate society.”
In late June, leaders from the nonprofit, government, and corporate sectors convened in New York City for the National Conference on Volunteering and Service. The conference, co-convened by the Corporation for National & Community Service and the Point of Light Institute, is the world’s largest gathering of volunteer and service leaders.

Dan Condon, Associate Director of Professional Development, and Ryan Plantz, Service Learning Fellow, were both in attendance representing Eagle Rock School and Professional Development Center as well as Public Allies.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg opened the conference with inspirational examples of successful volunteer campaigns in New York City. Bloomberg discussed the recently launched NYC Service, an initiative that seeks to connect volunteers with high-impact duties around the city. The opening plenary, held at Radio City Music Hall, also featured Patrick Corvington, CEO of the Corporation for National & Community Service; Michelle Nunn, CEO, Points of Light Institute; Senator Mark Warner; and Governor David A. Paterson. Also speaking and in attendance was Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education.

More than 5,000 attendees had the opportunity to learn, connect, and be inspired through a wide array of plenary sessions, workshops, exhibits, special events, and service projects. A few of the many workshop focus areas included Education, Health, Global/International Service, Philanthropy, Skills-Based Volunteering, Technology and Social Media, and Youth Leadership. Such a wide variety of workshop topics draw a diverse group of attendees, including volunteer coordinators and supervisors, non-profit professionals, social entrepreneurs, philanthropists, AmeriCorps Alums, and leaders in corporate social responsibility.

Other conference highlights included unique service events such as the ‘Party for Good: Making Meals to Feed Young Minds,’ sponsored by Target. Conference attendees celebrated the spirit of volunteerism by gathering to assemble 150,000 meals that were donated to the Food Bank For New York City.

The conference was also an opportunity for the Public Allies family to reunite and reconnect. MacArthur Antigua, Director of National Recruitment and Expansion at Public Allies, organized a dinner gathering that included current Allies, Public Allies staff, and alums that were at the conference. Condon, an Ally from the Milwaukee class of 1995, had a chance to reconnect with fellow alums, former colleagues, and Public Allies staffers.

Organizers chose the theme ‘It’s Up to You,’ which recognizes that everyone has the power to make a difference, and that our nation’s progress and prosperity depend on the active civic engagement. It challenges service leaders to increase the impact of their programs, and to all Americans to roll up their sleeves and participate in rebuilding our country.
As a creativity coach working with writers, I find creative ways to encourage people to stir up their gifts. I don’t accept excuses for missed deadlines or incomplete projects unless they come with a legitimate reason. I push my clients to dig deeper and be better, I want what they want for themselves, to ultimately have their message inscribed on paper.

My philosophy toward working with authors stemmed from a wilderness experience I had as a staff member at Eagle Rock School and Professional Development Center in Estes Park, Colorado. Along with eleven other individuals from across the country, I had been chosen to participate in a fellowship opportunity through Public Allies, an AmeriCorps program. One of my first assignments at Eagle Rock was to participate in a twenty-four hour wilderness experience. We were replicating the mandatory twenty-one day expedition required by Eagle Rock students as part of their new student orientation process. The goals were to help us understand the transformative power of our student’s experience, to build our communication as a team and to strengthen our individual drive to “find a need and fill it” while at Eagle Rock.

Our expedition started with a night hike. When we left the valley, all but one of my teammates darted up the mountain like horses out of the stable. One stayed behind with me as I literally crawled to the top – at times on my hands and knees. It quickly became clear to me who I could trust, who I would have to learn to depend on in the future, and who I would avoid altogether. I was out of shape; overweight, inexperienced in the outdoors and violently gasping for air (literally) like a fish out of water from the mountain air. My accountability partner stayed within feet of me where I could always hear, see, or feel him. That accountability helped me keep my head up and focus on the top of the mountain, my goal. For every one of us with a goal, there is a season of hard work, sacrifice and pain. Those of us who keep pushing are the ones who see the promise.

Keith Ferrazi in his book Who’s Got Your Back? encourages the use of an advisory board to help goal achievement. Keep the following things in mind:

1. Strong allies will hold you accountable and tell you the truth when you need constructive criticism.
2. Set your pace, when you achieve your goal it will have been worth all of your hard work.
3. You may get discouraged along the way, but think of failures as lessons learned.
4. Set challenging and realistic expectations, write them down.

“We may fall seven times, but we have to get back up” (Proverbs 24:16). Accountability keeps our goal visible and ensures that we won’t allow ourselves to fail. Whatever the goal, a strong cheering squad in our corner will ignite our passion and perseverance. When the path was dark and I could not see my feet on that mountain, I knew that I had to get to the top because my team would not let me fail.
I feel the earth’s rocks under me like armor as the wind slowly blows past my body raising the hair on my arms. The white clouds in the sky are struggling to hold back the sunlight, while the sun easily pierces through the white fluffy clouds with an unstoppable force. Below that I see the tops of the trees struggling to reach toward the sun for extra sunlight. Further down, the high hills teem with life as smaller trees slowly grow, patiently waiting to be the highest tree in the woods. Beneath that, the rich soil crawls with bugs, each going in their own direction with their own agenda.

The Montane ecosystem is a very unique ecosystem. The elevation is anywhere from 5,000 to 9,000 feet. There are many meadows and wetlands. There are very few Lodgepole Pines as it is more abundant with Douglas Firs. Many animals such as black bears and elk roam this ecosystem. The roar of a thousand trickles of water is almost deafening as it rushes down the river smashing into rocks. Despite the constant roar I can hear the faint sound of birds chirping, sweetly calling each other. The wind blows softly into my ears as if quietly whispering something I cannot understand. I breathe in the warmth of the dirt below me, and the rich clean watery smell that wafts through my nose.

The sweet pure air of the mountains smells like soft soil and Ponderosa Pine needles, which are also abundant in the montane ecosystem. The forthcoming of the summer air slowly hits my nose through each breath that I take. This is truly bliss to be out in the wilderness.

I’m at a swamp in the montane ecosystem and it seems like I’m at a science fiction movie. All the sounds of frogs, birds, and planes make me feel out of this world. There are dozens of birds I hear, each one with their own distinct unique calls. Some sound familiar and some sound as unfamiliar as space. The frogs sound as if someone was scrapping a stick against a wooden fence over and over and over again. I hear a fly, or maybe a bee, buzzing around my head but it’s too fast for me to see. If it is a bee then it is absolutely essential to this ecosystem. They help pollinate the various flowers around this area and help each flower carry on through the many generations to come. Whatever it was it sounded like a light saber. A bird flew so close to me that I could hear the wind in its wings. I heard the wind ruffling each feather as it slowly glided my way and then out of sight. I hear the wind rustling the trees as if someone is trying to ‘shush’ someone, or when you put your ear to one of those seashells and it sounds like the ocean is inside. I see a couple ducks flying overhead getting ready to land. Again I hear the wind in their feathers. They are so close. As they prepare for their descent into the water their feet stuck out. Then I heard the sloshing of the water as they landed in the waters of the lake, shaking their heads as they settled in.

The ducks frequently would duck their heads into the water. Perhaps they were eating something or simply they were just getting a better feel for their surroundings. I looked down in the murky depths of the lake only to find slithering leaches. They looked like flat worms wiggling in the cold chilled waters. Above them I saw a roundish bug jumping its way in the water trying to catch bugs that were almost too small to see. I’m not used to seeing bugs in the water and the ones that I did see usually ended up drowning.

At a higher elevation I found myself surrounded by the subalpine ecosystem. There are no Ponderosa Pines this high up, which is one of the differences between the montane and subalpine. The subalpine ecosystem ranges from 9,000 to 11,000 feet of elevation. The forest becomes denser at this altitude making it harder to see farther. However with a few gaps in the trees it makes for a spectacular view of the land below.

At Gem Lake, which is in Rocky Mountain National Park, I remember hiking up and seeing many caves, one that...
required me to angle myself diagonally to enter the mouth of it. It was cool in there and apart from Kylan and myself there were no other living creatures inside, none that I could see anyway. There were rocks that we could climb inside the cave to another section, but we weren’t allowed to go up because it was deemed dangerous. I soaked up the last bit of chilly air before returning to the suns gaze as my body quickly warmed back up.

Again a cool rush of wind rushed over my body as I soaked up the final coolness before heading out into the sun for a wilderness reflection. It hit me like a ton of bricks. The heat was sweltering, making me feel like I needed more water than before. I sat myself high on a hill of rocks and took my shirt off for a little tan, put my backpack behind me and lay down. The softness of my backpack felt like that of a pillow. I closed my eyes and listened to nature, one of the most beautiful sounds on earth. Off in the distance I heard a frog, again sounding like a stick against a wooden fence.

I heard more wildlife than I actually saw. There was no doubt that it was there however. There were many birds that flew overhead, some were small and some were much larger. I couldn’t distinguish what kind of birds they were but I knew they were important to this ecosystem. I figured the bigger birds were birds of prey, which means they are carnivores. They might eat small rodents like the Golden Mantle Ground Squirrel, and by doing this they keep their numbers in check. There was no shade in sight; it reminded me of the movie the Lion King when Simba was in the desert with no shade anywhere to be seen. I opened one eye and saw another squirrel looking at me, perhaps curious whether I have any more food. They sure were abundant, sort of like they are at Eagle Rock.

I later found myself going from this subalpine ecosystem to the alpine ecosystem. The subalpine ranges from 9,000 to 11,000 feet in elevation. The alpine on the other hand is 11,000 thousand feet and above. It’s much colder up at this altitude. It can be as low as 30 degrees Fahrenheit or colder.

This place is unreal. Stunning, spectacular, amazing, none of these words come close to the truth about this place. About two thousand feet above I gaze upon the many jagged peaks of this mountain as the clouds blow against my face. I can see puffs of clouds no more than 20 feet away in all directions. I’m in a cloud at about twelve thousand feet of elevation. The jagged peaks seem unreal, like something out of Lord of the Rings. Snow sneaks its way through the many gaps and trails down the mountain. I look further down and see a lake still partially frozen over. When the snow melts from the mountain it will most likely run off into this lake doubling or even tripling its size. I spot something moving with much black fur and some brown. It’s a Yellow Bellied Marmot. They are the biggest species in the squirrel family. It sniffs around before taking shelter under a rock. After a few moments it pokes its black head out. There is a light brown ring around its nose. It climbs on the rock it just took shelter in and stands on its hind legs, scanning the area.

A few moments later our eyes lock and it jumps off the rock. It waddles out of sight with its tail flapping as it goes. Again I see its head poke out of a few rocks, staring at me perhaps curious of what I am. His head disappears behind rocks and my curiosity grows. What is he doing? What is he looking for?

Again, I gaze upon this vast mountain where the hills are unimaginably steep. I hear ruffling and see what I believe to be a Golden Mantle Ground Squirrel, but this one is grey. Perhaps it’s an adaptation to this ecosystem. After all, had it not been for the noise it made I would not have seen it. The clouds subside around me and things are much more clear. However there are still clouds flirting with the peaks of the mountains ahead. What I would give to be up there. There are a few flies up at this altitude, and while most may think they are annoying I know they are actually the primary carrier for the pollen, which helps this ecosystem prosper for generations to come. They are the ones to spread the plants seeds, so thank you flies. This is bliss. This is heaven, or at least its high enough to be. This is the alpine ecosystem, a place where I’m the tallest living thing around. There are trees up here, but many don’t even reach up to my knees.

There is much less oxygen at this altitude so its harder to breath, but this is not why they are small. The reality is it’s warmer toward the ground. The trees are also very clumped together in what looks like a bush garden. This helps protect them against the harsh wind that can reach up to 100 mph. They also
saw a crow flying near the mountain in front of me. I didn’t know crows went this high. I later found out they weren’t crows, they were Common Ravens. I hear the sound of a busy highway far away, but as I looked for it I came to the conclusion that it wasn’t a highway at all. It was a river, and a fast moving one at that. Perhaps it was coming from the small lake I had mentioned earlier. Everything is so spectacularly big.

That is until I took the time to look at a square foot of the ground. Not just look at it, but observe and interpret. In one little square foot lies a city of life. In this city is the home to at least five different species of plants, not to mention the different lichen on the rocks poking out of some gaps in between the plants. There are two types of lichen I see. That makes up 7 species of vegetation in only one square foot. In addition there were a few unique looking bugs. I see many ants searching through these small plants that tower over them. There is some sort of beetle that is jet black that seems to have a very hard exoskeleton. Most likely it is used for defense.

I hear some kind of high-pitched squeak. I look up to find two Yellow-Bellied Marmots fighting one another, or perhaps they are playing, much like dogs do, or maybe neither. I do believe it is an ocean or a sea. Over these mountains I could see the city. I’m not sure which one, but it was spectacular. There were clouds over the city and I was eye level with them.

traveling nursing program since she enjoys moving, living, and learning in different parts of the country. She loves being in school and plans on continuing her education by taking classes while she works in the hospitals. Her ten-year goal is to live and work in Mexico where she has family.

When looking back on her experiences at Eagle Rock, Kate has a lot to say about what she appreciates and remembers about her time here. Kate was one of the many students who really took advantage of what ERS has to offer and in turn was able to travel, experiencing new cultures and encounters she would not have gotten at her previous high school. She traveled to Guatemala where she practiced her Spanish speaking skills, stayed with a local family, and completed service to give back to the community where she was graciously hosted. During the bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark expedition, Kate participated in a class offered by former instructor James Sherman where they studied and canoed the routes these early explorers took. She also had the opportunities to canoe the Green River in Utah and travel to Washington, D.C. for the

Close Up program. These many experiences sparked a passion in Kate for travel and new experiences, which goes hand in hand with her professional goals of joining the traveling nurse program.

Kate has many memories of Eagle Rock, including how she discovered life-long sisters in the Spruce girls wing, which was important to her as an only child. One memory that sticks out is being a student in former instructor, Alison Trattner’s Act Out classes. Kate was painfully shy and reserved so being asked to perform in front of an audience was terrifying. Despite Kate’s fear, Alison pushed her outside her comfort zone allowing her to find her voice, which has helped her ever since. When asked about an enduring lesson she learned from Eagle Rock, Kate pauses trying to narrow down the many into the most important, which I find very wise. “Never turn down an opportunity. I like to plan and have an idea where I’m going, but I always allow room for change. Eagle Rock has opened so many doors for me. I’ve learned how to keep opening those doors.”
This summer we watched yet another group of four strong women walk across the Human Performance Center stage to receive their high school diplomas. Robin Harrell, Cherie Faumuina, Aisha Davis, and Cynthia Alonzo are off to new opportunities where they can utilize their ERS toolbox in the “real world.” These young women will be remembered for the fun, humor, compassion, and leadership they regularly bestowed on the community.

Robin Harrell, the youngest of the graduates, arrived at Eagle Rock during ER-45 with a drive and commitment to her education that has inspired others during her seven trimesters here. Robin arrived from Chicago, Illinois after hearing about the school and its opportunities from her cousin who previously attended the school. Robin hit the ground running after her wilderness experience and received an Excellence Award her first trimester for being an exemplar student. Along the way, Robin created many memories that will always be with her. Many of Robin’s best memories include her coordinating and creating choreography for the dance team. This past spring graduation with Robin’s leadership the dance team gave an amazing performance that will not be soon forgotten.

One life lesson Robin learned from her Eagle Rock experience is “learning how to love myself and enjoying my life. I’ve spent too much time not enjoying my life and now my new motto is ‘have fun and be happy!’” After applying and being accepted to many colleges, Robin has decided to attend Spelman College this fall in Atlanta, Georgia.

Cherie Faumuina arrived in ER-43 from San Francisco, California because she wanted to leave the media-driven culture at home and head to a place where she would have opportunities and a chance to open new doors in her life. Cherie will be missed for her leadership in Spruce House that helped earn the house the Morine Cup during ER49 and ER50. Cherie has spent many hours being a mentor and friend to many Eagle Rock students. “One great memory would be the interactions I’ve had with the students on campus. I’ve had the opportunity to listen to other student’s stories and have had a chance to relate to them, which has gained me many long lasting friendships.” Cherie has learned many lessons at Eagle Rock, but the recognition of how important it is to be nice to everyone sticks out. “You never know what impact you’ll make on someone or what impact they can make on you,” she says. Cherie will be taking the year off to reconnect with family, work, and apply for college in the 2011-2012 school year.

Aisha Davis came to Eagle Rock from Harlem in New York City in ER-41. She chose to come to ERS because she wasn’t accomplishing what she needed to in school; instead she did whatever she liked which was not schoolwork. Aisha has a contagious smile and a quick wit. She is not afraid to stand up for what she believes and express her opinion. Aisha has learned a lot about self and about interactions with others during her eleven trimesters here. When asked about the greatest lesson she has learned, Aisha replied, “The only way people will give up on you is if you give up on yourself.” She has created many strong bonds with students and staff here and will miss the relationships and support she has received. Aisha’s proudest moments include her run-in and when she received her first 3P award, which indicated to her that she was finally taking care of business in school. Aisha’s plans for the future include working at the American Museum of Natural History in Manhattan and enrolling at community college before transferring to a four-year university.

Coming from Compton, California also in ER-41, Cynthia Alonzo came to Eagle Rock to get a better education. She was struggling in public school and knew she wasn’t going to make it to graduation. She needed small classes and to learn subjects she felt interested

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Pathways to Parks is unique to Rocky Mountain National Park, said park research learning specialist Ben Baldwin, who oversees the program’s interns and seasonal employees.

The program helps the students create a bridge between high school and college, providing them with a plethora of jobs to experience while interning at the park.

Students spend part of an academic year at Eagle Rock as park interns, getting school credit and a crash course in the arcane and paperwork-heavy federal job-application process.

The next year, some of those students end up getting paid to wear the “flat hat” and full uniform of a park ranger while they immerse themselves in the culture of the National Park Service and decide whether they want to make a career out of it.

As she directed traffic into the Bear Lake parking lot Wednesday morning, intern Natalie Osorio, 19, said she’s particularly proud of her uniform.

“I love the flat hat,” she said. “I’m the only one out of all the interns this year who gets to wear it. I feel like Smokey Bear.”

Osorio said she wants to be an interpretive ranger for the National Park Service, which would allow her to connect even more with nature. Osorio came to Eagle Rock from urban Orange County, NY, 40 miles from Manhattan, where there was little nature.

Osorio’s goal is to work as a ranger at Glacier National Park in Montana, a park more than four times the size of Rocky Mountain.

Renee Gallando, 19, who spent Wednesday spraying herbicide on invasive thistles in Moraine Park, said she wants to study biology and eventually work in natural resources for national parks in Canada.

The move from Orange County, CA, to Eagle Rock was a bit jarring, she said, because she had never had any outdoor experiences other than tanning on the beach.

“I was kind of ignorant,” she said. “I didn’t know much.”

But now, as an Eagle Rock graduate and a paid Rocky Mountain National Park seasonal employee, she’s on her way to college in Oregon at the end of the summer to study biology.

Cynthia has learned a lot about the importance of effective communication and how it is beneficial in every situation. She also learned about determination; “I’ve learned I can do anything I put my mind to.” Cynthia will continue her work with Rocky Mountain National Park this fall and then head to College of the Redwoods in northern California in the spring.