

## Student Reflection

### Emily Erdos

*Emily Erdos grew up in Harvard, MA. Currently, she is a rising junior studying sociology at Princeton University. This summer, Emily interned for the Quebec-Labrador Foundation in Montreal and New Brunswick, Canada.*

### Me, Myself, and Meredith Blake



I used to sheepishly joke that my hiking skill level was that of the “almost-step-mother”, Meredith Blake, in *The Parent Trap*. For those unfamiliar with the film, Meredith is a novice. Although I know better than to spray sugar water on myself as bug spray and can rock scramble with slightly more audacity than the delicate blonde actress, my hiking experience is nearly null. However, there are some key differences between myself and Meredith, or this “Cruella de Vil”, as Meredith was nicknamed.

My diversion from Meredith Blake begins with her occupation as a publicist, and my aspirations as a journalist. I’ve always had a passion for writing and telling stories. However, my prior summer experience at a local television station drove me to try something new search for something more than my childhood journalism aspirations of becoming the next Katie Couric. So, I decided to put myself outside of my comfort zone, and immersed myself in something new.

Arriving to the inaugural ALPINE program with Rachel Carson as a stranger and “conservation easement” as a vocabulary word, I immediately self-identified myself as the neophyte in the room. Young and already very accomplished conservation professionals surrounded me. The first three days of ALPINE were my conservation boot-camp.

Prior to being invited to the ALPINE program, I had accepted a summer internship working with the Quebec-Labrador Foundation, an international conservation and stewardship non-profit, to work on their Global Leadership Network, interviewing alumni and sharing their stories.

Despite my insecurities rooted in inexperience, the first thing Program Director Jim Levitt did at ALPINE was require the twelve student participants to become friends. As comforting as new friends was Jim and Marianne Jorgensen’s assuagement that not all of us were destined to become conservation professionals.

Jim’s honesty, acceptance, and support of our range of careers allowed me to relinquish my silence and share my distinctive story, but also to relinquish my pride and open myself to learning.

As much as the redhead twins in the *The Parent Trap* disrespected Meredith Blake’s amateurism, my ignorance for the conservation field was not only accepted, but respected. ALPINE fostered a welcoming environment which encouraged us to expose our vulnerabilities through discussion, leadership exercises, self-reflection, and presentations.

I carried the skills from the first session of ALPINE with me throughout my summer internship. Without an open-mind, I may have never been able to fully understand or appreciate the profound achievements of my interviewees (who were conservation “celebrities”, if you will). Additionally, the



self-exploration skills that I learned at ALPINE helped me contextualize how a summer working in conservation fit into my journalism career.

In all honesty, this contextualization was tricky. And without ALPINE, I may still be wrangling with doubt about my decision to spend a summer outside the newsroom. My ALPINE mentor enabled me to see the value of my summer. One of the most rewarding parts of the program, each participant had a mentor that they connected with during the sessions and throughout the summer. In one reflective conversation, my mentor challenged me: “How would you explain in your next journalism job interview the value of having someone who took a summer away from hard news?” In other words, my mentor was asking me my convergence plan for my past and my future.

After some rumination, I realized that the first step in linking these two diverse fields is to do what Meredith Blake didn't: give up. After this summer, I understand the persistence required to bring attention to an underappreciated subject. Conservation never appears as the “click bait” news stories. But if I can make the conservation stories, or more generally, the underrepresented stories, as glittery and attractive as the over-told stories, therein lies my potential niche. As my peer mentor eloquently analogized, “If you can make candy sweet, okay. But if you can make bark sweet, awesome”.

Without ALPINE, I might still be Meredith Blake with that sweet, overripe candy. I am so grateful for the opportunity to step out of my comfort zone and to find the intersection between journalism and conservation. Thank you, Jim. Thank you, Marianne. Thank you, ALPINE.