

Statement of Purpose

My career as a conservationist began at an early age. My grandfather, an avid observer of birds, was the first motivating figure in what would become a lifelong passion for wildlife and an unquenchable thirst for learning. A factory worker with no more than an 8th grade education, he could name any bird by sight, song, or flight pattern. He never used terms like ‘habitat’ or ‘niche’, but everything in nature had its place to him, and he was the first to teach me the inter-workings of ecology through the words and actions of rugged experience. In his backyard, I first witnessed the basic principles of wildlife management as he trapped and killed some species to help protect and preserve others. Growing up under his guidance engendered in me a genuine appreciation for the natural world.

My career as a herpetologist, however, can best be understood as a consequence of the discipline’s tangibility. As a six-year-old, birds were simply too far out of reach. The incessant wandering of my gaze to the ground, coupled with a true need to hold things in my grubby little hands in order to understand them (and possibly a touch of A.D.D as well) kept me searching for something to pick up. I soon learned that toads are much easier to ensnare and manipulate than humming birds and consequentially became enamored with the world of things that creep. My childhood fascination with ‘slimy’ creatures is not likely something different from most other people, however, I simply never grew out of it.

In college, not thinking it possible that I could actually have a career studying wildlife, I explored other avenues. My love for science and writing helped foster a desire to pursue a technical writing career, and this strange turn of events found me toying with the idea of declaring a biology major in addition to my well-established English curriculum. In the department of biology, I met a fiery professor whose unbridled zeal for wildlife had earned him quite a reputation. Under his guidance, I allowed my enthusiasm for biology to rekindle and ignite into an ingenuous excitement again.

Because my love affair with nature was initiated by observing another’s passion, and because it only persists today as the result of one college professor’s quest to make biology seem like “cool stuff” again, I am forever indebted to education. Webster defines education as “the act or process of imparting or acquiring general knowledge”. I define it as the passing of a torch, whether from grandfather to grandson, or professor to student. The torch has been passed to me, and it is my full intention to pass it on to others. That is one reason why I intend to be a professor of conservation biology. My goal is to obtain my Ph.D. doing research on issues related to the conservation of amphibians, and my long term goal is to obtain a position at a University that grants me the freedom to continue in the direction of that research. I am committed to a life of research and education.