

Lucy Belcik
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Brentwood Christian School

Impressive Monument

My family is a camping family. We are well accustomed to the crunch of gravel underneath tired feet and the way smoke, swirling, gets into your eyes and your clothes and your hair. Our boots have hiked up brushy switchbacks in west Texas and past quiet waterfalls in Colorado. One of our hikes took me to the most impressive monument I have ever had the honor of visiting — Guadalupe Peak, the highest point in Texas.

The hike up to the peak was eventful, as most hikes in Texas are. Two moments stand out to me. The first was encountering a mother rattlesnake sunning herself in the middle of the trail, forcing us to retreat and wait Mother Nature out. The second is a moment only I remember — when I ask my family about it, they have no distinct memory. We were hiking adjacent to a small canyon, and when I glanced across to the ridge beside us, I saw a buck, his horns snaking towards the sky. We regarded each other for a moment, both of us questioning, for just a second, what both of us were doing here. Specifically, what *I* was doing here, with my brightly colored clothes and pack, invading his muted terrain of sage and brown and tan. Animal met animal, and I was reminded how simple our world can be. And then the moment was over, and the hike continued.

Bright sunlight beat down on us as we reached the peak, and I remember feeling as if every single drop of water in my body was steaming out in a cloud behind me. The monument at the peak is small, a brick of concrete stoically awaiting whoever reaches it next. A dusty black binder perches atop, full of faded ink, names and stories of those who hiked here before me. It is a monument in of itself because of what it holds. But the true monument is neither of these. The monument is the mountain, sprawling lazily under the painfully blue sky, bristling with sand and gravel and cacti. Rising up from the brushy Texas desert, it stands as a testament to what is and what could be. When you stand on a jutting rock, looking over the beautiful landscape below, it is difficult to deny that a God exists.

We hiked back down in the quiet, hot, tiredness that comes after a long day of trail underneath your feet. The spicy smell of mesquite and the sweet smell of sun clung to our clothes. Nature must have been looking for a reaction from us, because we had a run-in with yet another rattlesnake, walking down the asphalt road back to camp. All of us were exhausted, but I remember a feeling of fulfillment as I drifted off that night, the big, bright stars singing me to sleep overhead.

Lately, this hike returns to my mind often, of my visit to the monument of a mountain. I have recently been trudging down a path that twists and turns in front of me, threatening more time at home and less with my friends in every dark and dusky spot along it. The feeling I got looking out into the horizon of my state, is the feeling of infinity. My future now feels so constrained, and that feeling keeps whirling and swirling back into my mind. And it helps. It helps to know that whatever happens, there is something beyond my current situation. It helps to know that someday, I will see my friends again, and I will live normally again. It helps to know the one day, I will stand on that peak again, that monument of nature, looking to the horizon, and feel infinity again.