

What Does Entomology Mean To Me?

For the first few years of my life, I lived in a small offshoot of Pensacola, FL called Gulf Breeze. My parents worked a lot, and couldn't always be around to entertain me when I was that little, so they would drop me off at my grandma's garden shop. To me, that garden shop represents the purest fun of childhood; playing with my sister in the pond, flipping through the Audubon Field Guide to Florida, and most importantly, spending a lot of time catching and looking at insects. I always found it strange that some families imbued such a strong hatred of insects in their children, as mine always made sure to press their importance and encourage me to play with them. As a little kid starved for attention, I would bring my grandma insect after insect and ask her to tell me all about them. I loved hearing about why they were important and how they helped her in the garden, and would often spend hours helping her make and tend to her butterfly boxes. However, when I was six years old, my parents and I moved to California, and my time at the shop was cut out of my life. From that point until I went to college, my exposure to insects was dramatically decreased.

To me, studying entomology feels like going back to that little shop I spent so much time in as a kid. To study it is to be free from the years of feeling like I had to study a subject that was not inherently interesting to me. Unlike others I know, I never had much pressure from my family to study something that would make me traditionally successful. Instead, I was strongly pressured by my then-girlfriend to go into a field that would make us substantial money in the future (because of course, I was going to get married to my high school girlfriend). When I signed up for classes my freshman year, I begrudgingly signed up for pre-med requirement courses. About a week before classes started, though, I looked over my schedule and randomly decided to throw in ENTO 2010 "Insects and the Environment", despite what my advisor had recommended. It ended up being my favorite course of my freshman year, and inspired me to apply for and go on the study abroad trip to Ecuador. I was still fully against being an entomology major, but was convinced to add it "just for a semester" by Dr. Marianne Shockley, so that I could get the CAES scholarship and take off some of the financial burden of the trip.

The semester after that, my high school relationship ended. I was forced to take a look at how drastically changed the trajectory of my life was going to be and what I actually wanted to do. I could finally make my own decisions about my life without considering the life that anyone else wanted me to live. After looking over my options, I made the best choice of my collegiate career and dropped my pre-med path to devote myself entirely to entomology. I went from dreading the next few years of my life to being actively excited in the classes I was taking. Learning about insects didn't require me to force myself to try to enjoy something I wasn't interested in; instead, it allowed me to regain a sense of childish amazement at the things that I learn.

Many people I have met seem to think that that feeling - that sense of awe and amazement that you get as a child when learning something for the first time or when seeing something really impressive - goes away once you become an adult, and that that's just "part of growing up". I completely disagree. That sense might have been pushed away by a lack of passion for the field that you end up in, but it can always be regained if you chase it down. So for me, entomology represents the return to life as it is supposed to be lived; by loving what I do and being surrounded by a community of people who love it just as much as I do. And of course, what I love to do is go out into the woods and look for awesome bugs.