

Select College Essays from the *New York Times* (2017)

by **Tillena Trebon**

I live on the edge. I live at the place where trees curl into bushes to escape the wind. My home is the slippery place between the suburbs and stone houses and hogans.

I see the evolution of the telephone poles as I leave the reservation, having traveled with my mom for her work. The telephone poles on the reservation are crooked and tilted with wire clumsily strung between them. As I enter Flagstaff, my home, the poles begin to stand up straight. On one side of me, nature is a hobby. On the other, it is a way of life.

I live between a suburban land of plenty and a rural land of scarcity, where endless skies and pallid grass merge with apartment complexes and outdoor malls. I balance on the edge of drought. In the summers, when the rain doesn't come, my father's truck kicks dust into the air. A layer of earthy powder settles over the wildflowers and the grass. The stale ground sparks ferocious wildfires. Smoke soars into the air like a flare from a boat lost at sea. Everyone prays for rain. We fear that each drop of water is the last. We fear an invasion of the desert that stretches around Phoenix. We fear a heat that shrivels the trees, turns them to cactuses.

I exist at the epicenter of political discourse. Fierce liberalism swells against staunch conservatism in the hallways of my high school and on the streets of the downtown. When the air is warm, the shops and restaurants open their doors. Professionals in suits mingle with musicians and artists sporting dreadlocks and ripped jeans. Together, they lament the drought, marvel at the brevity of the ski season.

I live on the edge of an urban and rural existence. At my mother's house, we ride bikes down paved streets. We play catch with the neighbor kids. We wage war with water guns. At my father's house, we haul water. We feed the horses and chickens. We chase the fox away from the chicken coop. We watch deer grazing, not ten yards away. We turn the soil in the garden. When the rain and the soil and the sun and the plants give birth to fruit, we eat it straight from the vines.

Traditional Navajo weaving and prints of Picasso's paintings adorn the walls of both homes. I straddle the innocence of my youth and the mystery of my adult life. That, too, is a precipice. I know I must leap into adulthood and leave the balancing act of Flagstaff life behind. Still, I belong at the place where opposites merge in a lumpy heap of beautiful contradictions. I crave the experiences only found at the edge. As I dive into adulthood, into college, I hope that I can find a new place that fosters diversity in all its forms, a new edge upon which I can learn to balance.