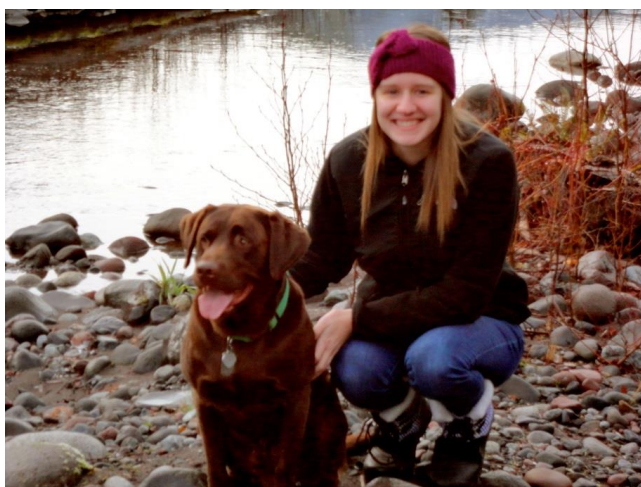


I grew up with Mt. Rainier National Park as my backyard. Even when the mountain wasn't "out" because of clouds, fog, or rain (which is quite frequent in the Pacific Northwest) I still had the foothills as a backdrop. I never realized how much the mountains meant to me until I moved away to college in a much flatter part of Washington.

My parents toted my 3 siblings and me around the West in a minivan to many national parks in Washington, Oregon, California, Montana, Wyoming, the Dakotas and others. As a cranky teenager, I complained that all we ever saw was mountains and forests. I wanted the beach! I suppose the saying is true that you really don't know what you've got until it's gone. After my four years in college and now living in a city, I ache for elevation and the comfort of Evergreen trees.

Native Americans in the area have ascribed spiritual powers to the mountain, which they call Tahoma, and I have to say that I join in their reverence. I feel a spiritual connection to Mt. Rainier, and see it as a true embodiment of God's power and love. There is nothing better than hiking through meadows of wildflowers in the shadow of this mammoth crown of Creation. I know that I am fortunate to have grown up outside of Mt. Rainier and that my parents instilled in me a love of the outdoors. I also know that I am not alone in encountering the Divine in wild places. I can't think of a better way to give



Tricia with her dog Boo outside of Mt. Rainier National Park

thanks to God for Creation than to get out and explore these special areas and find one that speaks to you like Mt. Rainier speaks to me.

Tricia Bruckbauer is an Eco-Justice fellow with Creation Justice Ministries. She is a "National Park Junkie" and loves exploring new parks across the country.