

Billings Middle School – Alumni Spotlight



“Billings taught me how to get involved and advocate for myself... To any 8th graders heading to high school, I would say if you’ve gone to Billings then you definitely have the skills you need to excel. If anything, you will already have a better idea of what is important in your life!”

-Annie Allen, Class of 2008

1). Can you describe a specific experience or moment at Billings that still stays with you? Why was it meaningful?

There are a lot of moments that have stayed with me so this is a tough one! Looking back, the most memorable moments were usually when I was totally out of my comfort zone but still having a good time. I was lucky to go on a trip to Guatemala with Billings, and I specifically remember one night when my classmate Katie got a really terrible bloody nose while we were in our rooms at a home-stay. We were in a totally separate building from the family who was hosting us and had to deal with it on our own, and try to get walkie-talkie signal to our teachers. Katie and I were scared, but ultimately were able to handle the situation, and grew from that experience. You never know what's going to happen when you're out of the country, but the experience turned out to be extremely valuable!

Another moment that sticks with me was performing in the Little Shop of Horrors musical as the Dentist. Most middle schools would not encourage a 12 year old girl to play a sadistic, wife beating, laughing gas addict who gets killed and fed to a huge man eating plant, and let me tell you, I wasn't always totally sure about it myself. My teachers were extremely supportive and nonjudgmental throughout the whole process. Plus, they enjoyed the fact that I beat out the boys auditioning for the role, and I think it's awesome that they even let me try out for it in the first place. It was extremely rewarding to be on stage and hear the cheers and laughter of my teachers!

2). What are you up to now?

I am studying biology with an emphasis in ecology at Humboldt State University and a minor in botany. It's a very hands-on and outdoorsy environment for those of us who got used to that type of learning during middle school!

Sophomore year I got an internship through HSU that let me work with the head forester and fire ecologist at Redwood National Park. Since much of the park had once been a clear cut, they use forestry practices, including prescribed burns, to try to restore certain areas. I learned how to collect data, set up sampling plots, and use certain equipment in the field. I ended up being hired later that year as a seasonal biological technician. That summer I mostly pulled weeds around the park for the Exotics management team, but also got to work on forestry and fire projects.

The following summer I was hired back to RNP as a forestry technician, reading plots and taking tree measurements, and this past summer I was hired on as a crew lead. Working at Redwood National Park has easily been one of the highlights of my college career.

I have also been able to take some pretty unique course in college! Classes have included: plant taxonomy, community and population ecology, fire ecology, forest pathology (all

exams took place in the field), ascomycetes and basidiomycetes (certain types of fungi), lichens and bryophytes, plant tissue culture, and agrostology (the study of grasses).

3). How was your experience transitioning from Billings into high school and into college after that?

My transition from Billings to a public high school was a little rough. I didn't really know anyone at that high school, and the size difference was extreme. However, Billings taught me how to get involved and advocate for myself, and I made some lifelong friends in no time. To any 8th graders heading to high school, I would say if you've gone to Billings, then you definitely have the skills you need to excel. If anything, you will already have a better idea of what is important in your life!

Interested in being a featured alumni in an upcoming newsletter? [Email Riley Burns.](#)