

If you're lucky enough to see a bird perch, its beauty can be taken in longer than when it quickly passes by. It is the time spent gazing upon that bird, the time when everything else is forgotten and nothing is more important than seeing it clean the underside of its wing, that makes that moment a part of a sanctuary. A bird always moves, always changes, just like the people in our lives. Knowing that we can't share a nest with them forever is what makes time with them so significant and their flight so bitter sweet. It is the scarcity of time with those we love, watching birds, and in our sanctuaries that make them so special. The reality that we cannot fly with finches serves as a reminder to make the most of chance to see them land in front of us.

The description of Rachana Rajendra paints her as a woman dedicated to her family, education, career, and passions. I am amazed she was able to be so active throughout her life. I felt connected as I read because through our shared interests of swimming, volunteering, and a love of nature. Normally the people I know from those three separate interests do not cross over, so as I got further into Rachana's story she became someone I wish I could have meet. Not all losses are the same, but having a young friend of my own pass away too early in life has helped me to understand the tragedy that is a life cut short. Their departure is so unsettling because of the many tasks left for them that will go undone. It is because these birds have flown off that we treasure the time we sat and talked and loved with them so much. Knowing our time was limited makes everything about them, from where we would spend time with them to the things they loved, a part of our sanctuary to them. The loss of Rachana touched even those who were yet to know her. Her potential was limitless, and the life she was able to share with those she knew should be celebrated and reflected upon. Only those who had known Rachana could really know who she was, but her memory is stands forth as someone we should all be so lucky to meet in our lifetime.

The sanctuary in Rachana's memory is a treasure to the campus of Michigan State University. It is a refuge for the birds and the students who pass through. Even with beauty all around

the campus, with the flowing Red Cedar and the diversity found in the trees and the Botanical Garden, it is not enough “outdoors” to satisfy the desires of students who love nature. The stresses of school and work are constant for all in and around East Lansing, and the sanctuary is a true refuge. It trades the concrete jungle for serene pathways guarded from Farm Lane by a wall of Oak, Maple, and Beech. Students who have grown up in Michigan have more than likely spent some time in the woods, and many have at least some appreciation for them. For some it is a place to return to childhood, where pressures of academic and social lives are worlds away even though students are only a bus ride from home. As someone who just has just begun to take up an active following of birds through the Birding Club at Michigan State, there is a lot to learn and a lot to see. The students in the club and I share an excitement in the idea of finding as many birds as we can. Although most members of the club are casual, some will go very far out of their way, but all appreciate how close and how diverse the Sanctuary is. For students who are not from Michigan, the sanctuary is a chance to learn what the wildlife and biomes of Michigan can be outside of campus squirrels and well maintained hedges. To me, learning about the natural aspect of an area is a large part in understanding what it means to come from that place. A retreat for humans and a luxury on a college campus, the sanctuary is a place needed for the birds to be able to thrive uninterrupted by telephone poles, endless agriculture, and brick smoke stacks.

The sanctuary provides a home to many of Michigan’s bird species. The university has a historic tie with our state’s bird, the robin, in part because of the research of Professor George Wallace. His investigation into the deaths of robins on campus caused by DDT made up a large portion of Rachel Carson’s best known work *Silent Spring*. It seems only fitting the school would continue to take pride and interest in caring for our flying friends. As parks and public areas become more fragmented throughout the state, it is critical that some plots of land be kept forever for the other creatures with whom we share the Earth. The fact this type of environment is so scarce

compared to what it once was makes it fit well into my definition of a sanctuary. Only there have I come across a flock of grackles so large that a dozen trees were blanketed with the birds. Lansing is right at the edge of where these birds live year round and how far north they travel to breed in the summer, making it crucial have areas set aside like this in mid-Michigan. Cooper's hawks fly over the train tracks and fields to the south, then return to take refuge in the high trees at the woodlot's edge. The sanctuary is also a place for mice and garter snakes to grow, which is a great reason for hawks to stick close by. Downy woodpeckers are abundant due to the vast selection of large trees to forge on, and seem to retreat to the new growth and shrubs at the rear of the sanctuary to rest. This land has everything these birds need to be content. Birds migrating fill it up in the fall because it is such a good place to rest up, and like those students leaving behind their school stresses, the worries of finding a good place to eat and sleep are set aside for the night. They may stay all year or might only be passing through, but all birds who pass through the sanctuary are lucky to have come across it.

I am lucky enough to claim multiple sanctuaries in my life. One of my earliest would be our family's lakeside cabin outside of Rose City, Michigan. Despite how populated the lake has become, it has always felt worlds away from anything stressful. For all I was concerned at the time, when I was at the cabin the rest of the world stopped, it stood completely still if it even existed. Being there meant feeling as close to my family as anyone can, and feeling as close to nature as a child does. It was here I learned to fish, dive, and take initiative. By watching my grandfather and father work to fix the place up, simply because it needed to be done, I learned I had the power to make things happen in the world around me. If I saw something that I wanted corrected or changed, I could make it happen. The feeling of accomplishment, freedom, and of course nature, made this place a sanctuary. I had the choice to chop wood because I really wanted to provide it for the fire, instead of

completing a homework assignment because it was expected. That was when I was young, and I've been able to take that aspect of sanctuary and apply it to my daily life.

One of the highlights of being at the lake was the presence of loons, something I had never found anywhere else. Loons are black and white diving birds and have come to be my favorite. Some years they were there and some they were not, which is what made seeing one so special. With more and more people moving onto the lake, I was afraid our loons would seek refuge in less populated waters further north as many loons do. Using the initiative from my days at the cabin, I decided to build a loon nesting raft to preserve the loon's desire to stay on the lake as my Eagles Scout project. I made the raft and set it in the water near their usual nesting location. I then realized whether or not the loons used the raft was up to them, not up to me. That was frustrating at first, but it soon made me realize that was also what made the loons so special. Sanctuary is about how limited something is, like a thick wood lot or going to a family cabin once or twice a year, but it is also about aspects of it being out of your control. We can build nesting rafts, set aside wood lots, and give to those we love. We can't force birds to live on them, students to use them, or family and friends to return any favors, but when they do it means the world to us. When we get to spend time with or in something with significance, and it returns the emotion, it is happiness, it is joy, it is beautiful, and it is a sanctuary.

All birds fly away, we just have to do our best to remember their colors and listen for their calls in the distance. No one shares the same sanctuary for the same reason; everybody will get something significant of their own from it. We all have our own inside jokes, our favorite places, and a bird we try a little harder to keep an eye out for. Rachana seemed to carry many sanctuaries in her life, from school, to sports, to her career, and of course birds. Look to her to see how a life of passion is led. Her example is one worth following to find success and happiness in the world. If we are able to make as large of an impact as Rachana Rajendra, then our sanctuaries may turn into those of people and birds who need them just as much as we have. While sanctuaries are ever changing, the

places we've been, dreams we've chased, and people we've loved, can always be carried in our hearts.