



SENIOR YEAR OF HIGH SCHOOL

WINNER

WHY ANNA LOVES ARIZONA

WRITTEN BY ANNA, A SENIOR AT NORTHWEST CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

ALL PHOTOS OF ARIZONA SHOT BY ANNA

Beautiful Arizona! Beautiful HOT Arizona! I have always adored you even when others complain about your weather and post their dashboard thermostats as a way to shame you on social media. I have never wavered. You are the only home to me over the last 17 years. You are beautiful in a majestic and misunderstood way. I feel like we have many similarities. I too am often misunderstood. I too am judged for not always fitting in, or for shining just a little too bright.



It is hard when your essence is overpowered by the average. I have tried my whole life to fit inside of the box; to please others and conform to what is expected. It has taken me a long time to see my unwavering beauty and gifts through the noise. My ADHD brain wants to blow in the hot breeze, run with the desert coyotes, and stand like the immobile Saguaro Cactus melting in the sun. It wants to go, stop, jump, rest, all at the same time. The unbearable heat inside of my head has made it hard to socially engage and concentrate. It is what most people would term anxiety. It is like a relentless day in July. The heat overwhelms my senses and renders me vulnerable. My anxiety coupled with ADHD has left me feeling like that dashboard thermostat-shamed.

Arizona, we know that is just one layer of our being. We are complex; made of God-given Natural Wonders. We can drop below freezing and catch a sunburn all on the same day. We are the depths of the Grand Canyon and the peak of Humphreys. What a glorious place. What a glorious being. What wonder and beauty. I wish more people really saw you like I see you.



I see your magnificent sunset lined with gold and I know it was no accident. It looks perfectly painted as if you are dimming your candle for the evening. I hike your desert landscaping and hear the crunch beneath my shoes. I see the fruit from the Prickly Pear Cactus and feel the colors adorned by the Saguaro Cacti blossoms. I hear your peace, as scorpions and the Western Diamondback Rattlesnake make their way home under your layers of complexities. We are alike Arizona! We know those who adore us, are those who have taken the time to really see us. We are complicated, convoluted, and remarkable. We do not fit inside of the box and that is our beauty.

I often enjoy capturing your idiosyncrasies through the lens of my camera or through the stroke of my paintbrush. You never disappoint. Your art shines through. It becomes my honor to allow others to appreciate your beauty and celebrate your differences at the gift of my hand. It feels like that is when I am truly alive. It is when the noise stops, and I am at peace. I become like your winter nights, calm, cool with a renewed hope for the days ahead.



I capture what others rarely see. It is the raindrop on the leaf, or the red rock traveled by visitors. It is the leaf eaten away at the edges by the Hornworm. The spikes on the healing Aloe Verde plant, or the rock worn away by Sedona's breathtaking waters. Your imperfections are perfect. I see you Arizona!



I see you and I think you are perfect. Like me, we come in a small package with lots of nuances, but we do not have to apologize. We are wonderfully and fearfully made. It has taken me a long time to appreciate my differences. I have had to work harder than others, almost like applying a thick layer of sunscreen to protect myself. I feel like I have learned to appreciate me. I do not have to turn myself down like a thermostat to make others comfortable. I do not have to pack a hat because that is what others would do. I am learning to make less apologies for me. I am still a work in progress.

I am bright and unfiltered, and I am bound for greatness my senior year at Northwest Christian School. I am not sure what the future holds. Maybe I am the desert tortoise or the Mountain Cottontail. The only thing that I know for sure is that I will define that greatness.

There will be haboobs along the way. I will falter and need to dust myself off, but even after the greatest of monsoons, there is a painted sky that brings rejuvenation. Just like you, Arizona- I hope my journey is filled with too much- too much sun, too many stars, too many breathtaking views, and too many unapologetic days. I think I'll just wear shades.

