Imagine a childhood led by a real-life Dr. Do-little. My fascination with the environment and natural world started at a young age, inspired by an animal-loving grandfather. He had dozens of animals at any given time that he adored, including over a dozen dogs, hundreds of birds, monkeys, wild deer, and even a pit of snakes! He was quite the character, inspirational in a plethora of ways. Watching my quirky grandfather take care of hundreds of animals as I grew up planted a seed in my young brain that grew into a career-long passion to protect and preserve our natural world.

In high school, I narrowed my focus to a career that involved conservation around marine mammals. After researching scientists in the marine mammal field, I read, printed out, and highlighted Robin Baird's "guide for students interested in a career in marine mammal science." I spent a year at Seattle Pacific University taking coursework intended for a Marine Biology major, when financial difficulty hit, and I had to transfer after that first year in order to work while attending college online. I decided then to model my career after Dr. Baird, thus I graduated in 2010 with a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Regent University. I had hoped to take a gap year to gain hands-on experience with different internships to help focus my career goals and gain skills that would make me a strong candidate for graduate school. I accepted a position as an intern at Cascadia Research Collective in 2011 and fell in love with the work. I collected data on whale watches, assisted with necropsies of stranded marine mammals, and sorted through thousands of photos looking for matches to their long-term catalogs of humpback and blue whales. After my internship was over, I was given the opportunity to represent Cascadia as a marine mammal observer on a line transect survey in 2012, and while initially unpaid, my enthusiasm, hard work, and determination impressed the CRC staff so much I was hired as staff after that leg. The unexpected and incredibly humbling part was that I ended up working directly for Dr. Baird and John Calambokidis as a research associate, a position I have stayed in for the last ten years. Graduate school went on the back burner, as I had managed to get into the field I love, doing a job I love, making a difference for marine mammals and the natural environment.

During my time at Cascadia, I have worked on a diverse set of projects and manuscripts that assess the population movement, distribution, and anthropogenic impacts of a variety of marine mammals. While working for Dr. Baird, I studied the population structures and re-sight rates of rough-toothed dolphins and pilot whales in Hawaii, and presented a poster on injury prevalence in pygmy killer whales using underwater imagery at the world marine mammal conference in Barcelona in 2019. For John Calambokidis, I have studied the population structures, movement patterns, distribution, re-sight rates, ship strike risk, and entanglement issues surrounding humpback, blue and gray whales all along the west coast. I have also developed a Risso's dolphin catalog of animals sighted in the Southern California Bight and will have a paper submitted to Marine Mammal Science soon encompassing their movement patterns and occurrence in that area, the first-ever published photo-ID effort for that species in that area. This paper involved developing a photo-ID catalog from scratch using Access, tracking re-sights of animals by day and year, using linear regression models to examine differences in effort by year, mark-recapture analysis, a regional comparison of IDs to determine whether our population may be closed or open, and developing a number of figures using GIS. I have also gained a wide array

of experiences out in the field, including projects related to ship strike risk, small boat surveys, and working on projects that assess the impact of navy sonar on sensitive species. This led to hired work for another local nonprofit organization, SR3, where I have gained familiarity with additional species and tasks such as assisting with photogrammetry analysis.

While these field experiences and in-house analysis experiences have been valuable, I would very much appreciate having a stronger background in environmental science to put to immediate use in the professional realm. Writing my first paper as a lead author has been painful at times, and I'd like to have better knowledge of the scientific writing process and the appropriate statistics to use for a given dataset. Working for over a decade in the marine mammal field has been both incredibly humbling and inspiring, and working to preserve our environment is as much my passion now as it was when I was young.

The MES degree at Evergreen seems like a perfect fit for my career goals, as I am keenly interested in learning how to expand the knowledge I have already gained working for Cascadia and SR3. One of the best ways we can help struggling marine mammal populations is to publish clear, concise, accurate peer-reviewed scientific papers, and communicate those papers to the public in an easily digestible way. This degree will help me learn how to apply my skills in analyzing data, communicate those findings to the public, and help inform policy that will help conserve our oceans for generations to come. I've always wanted to make my grandfather proud and inspire others the same way he inspired me. The MES degree at Evergreen will get me a little closer to that lifelong goal, and hopefully, make the world a little better for our cetacean friends.