My first watershed moment came when I was a junior in high school in Connecticut. I was part of an after-school program called Science Scholars, though not really invested in it. I didn't really consider myself to be a "science person." I went to weekly meetings where we discussed scientific articles, and during the summer we were supposed to do some kind of research project. Most people in the program would go "work with" some professor at Yale, making copies and stapling things. That was not exactly my ideal summer.

I proposed working with a local organization called Harbor Watch/River Watch <http://www.earthplace.org/environment/water_quality.html>, who used citizen science to monitor local streams for coliform bacteria and *E. coli*. I lived near the Long Island Sound, where this contamination was a big problem. With this project, I would go out in the field every other Saturday, take samples at 4 sites along the Silvermine River, and take them back to the lab to process them. The organizers of Science Scholars didn't think that was a very good project (they really wanted me to make photocopies at Yale), but they had very little control over it, so I did it anyway!

For nearly a full year, I did my sampling every other Saturday. Often I would drive there straight from softball practice - hence the sweatshirt and sweatpants you see in the picture! By the following spring, I had enough information to write a report and make a presentation at a symposium sponsored by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Conservation.

Working with Harbor Watch/River Watch was a fantastic experience - and it gave me the chance to really understand how land is connected to water. One of my stream sites was adjacent to a house that kept llamas. I heard quite a bit of grumbling from the program director about the lack of riparian buffers there... and about the llamas. (He really hated those llamas. And I learned what a riparian buffer was!) Looking at the weather data, I saw how rainfall increased bacteria levels in the stream - and *really* made that connection.

When I started doing research at Vassar College, I decided to monitor coliform bacteria in the Casperkill Creek... and there was no stopping after that. From that initial experience, I've come to really love watersheds (as most people who interact with me find out), and really appreciate the interconnectedness of the environment.

- Emily, City of Poughkeepsie resident