

I remember the first time we came to Hyde Park. We stood in awe of Springwood and hiked the trail to Top Cottage while listening to our podcasts for the first time. I remember how proud we were to be a part of such an extraordinary place and to have our voices heard. It only took that one visit to start our love affair with the Roosevelts and the estate.

We joined this program as 8th graders when it first started up in 2011. We had no idea what would become of our involvement or how important the history of Springwood and Val Kill would become to us.

It's amazing to think back on the connections we have made and the opportunities we were given to explore facets of the Roosevelts. Learning from their home and the grounds has given us a love for this park that will last a lifetime.

Each year brought a new experience and theme that allowed us to learn hands-on and to take an active part in research for the corresponding year's project. Our first two years we created podcasts for the Roosevelt trails and the Vanderbilt mansion. Researching facts, writing scripts and recording our voices. Next, we visited with archivists and learned about the care and preservation of artifacts. We learned how to clean and care for items from the Roosevelt estate. Last year provided an opportunity to learn about land management with the head horticulturalist, which led to our development of a hydroponic garden at our school. Along the way we created presentations on human rights issues, met with the Minister of Education of Ghana and a descendant of the Roosevelts, met with many types of rangers to learn about their jobs, had home tours, grounds tours, and visited the museum, all with the help of Ranger Norris and many other NPS staff. This year, the last of our program, we have concentrated on celebrating the National Park across the U.S and the people who make them possible. We have created a video that showcases some of these wonderful places and are looking back at the journey we shared.

We've learned more in this program than we could in a classroom and have been able to use these experiences in our personal lives. Angelica and Kate both wrote about their involvement in the National Parks

Service for their college essays and Noah was able to connect with rangers involved in law enforcement to help him along his career path. Most of all we simply just fell in love with this park that FDR loved. In fact, we seniors return together every summer to enjoy its beauty and history and share it with our own families. Coming to the estate is like coming to our second home and each year we became more and more like a family.

We'd like to thank the people who held it all together: Ms. Stott and Mrs. Peterson. Their passion for this project has inspired each of us. We couldn't have imagined the last 5 years without their guidance and dedication. It will make leaving high school even harder. We're beyond thankful to have been given these opportunities and to learn about this beautiful area and the people who make it possible for us to enjoy it. Thank you.