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I am in 12<sup>th</sup> grade at Hanover High School  
My hometown is Mechanicsville, Virginia.

### **Hiking Quandary Peak**

A spotlight was shining on the red-rock peak, an imaginary trophy appeared in my head, sparkling as the sun hit it. My family and I were hiking one of the tallest mountains in Colorado, a fourteen-thousand-foot-high beast called Quandary Peak. While hiking, I saw lovely yellow aspen trees trickled in with the green evergreens. The sunlight was scattered due to the trees, making the trail ahead of me sparkle. We were hiking in a line, like playing follow the leader, because the path was so narrow. Squirrels and other wildlife scurried across the path as we pushed onward. The countless pictures I snapped did not do justice to the breathtaking views that surrounded me as I gained elevation. I enjoyed the view, the jagged and crisp Rocky Mountain Range jutting out as far as I could see. Hours went by until I made it beyond the tree line, around eleven thousand feet above sea level.

That was when the hike became treacherous, wobbly rocks would cause me to lose my balance, and peaks that I had thought were the top of the mountain ended up being false peaks and tricking me. At some points in the hike, there seemed to be no trail, but just jumbled rocks that you had to direct your way through. The sun's intensity was sizzling my skin as I was climbing, although I kept needing to add layers as I ascended. The pressure from the altitude was causing headaches, so I had to stop frequently. With the lack of oxygen in the air, I could feel my lungs heaving to pull extra air in each gasping breath. Thoughts of giving up crept into my head, but I ignored them just like pop up ads on my computer. All of us were battling some sort of personal difficulty, my dad was struggling to take even one more step, my mom was becoming cranky from hunger pains, and my brother was starting to wish he had drunk more water before starting. However, everyone got an extra spring in their step when I spotted a majestic white mountain goat blocking our path. Two mountain goats were on the trail with their

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little baby, who hadn't grown any horns yet. We were able to get some wonderful close-up pictures of these beautiful and surprisingly large animals. It turns out that mountain goats have been known to attack people and have even killed hikers on Quandary Peak. We did not learn this tidbit of seemingly important information until after our hike, but it was a good thing that we did not go and give our fluffy friends a hug. After spending a good amount of time observing the mountain goats and acting like the paparazzi with the celebrity goat, we continued our trek to the top.

We were now on hour three of our hike and still were not half way. I talked to many of the interesting people that were also taking on the mountain, many were locals and had experience with other Colorado mountains. Unlike the other hikers, my family and I are from Virginia and attempted to hike a fourteen-thousand-foot mountain the day after we landed from our flight. This was not smart because the difference in elevation seemed to influence our hiking abilities, but we were determined to get to the top of this majestic mountain. After many water breaks and rest stops, I finally made it to the final stretch of rock before my goal, the peak. Just. One. More. Step. Summiting, I collapsed in awe that I made it to the top. Looking out at the vast landscape, blue sky met with sharp and pointy grey mountains.

My family and I made it to the top of our very first fourteen-thousand-foot mountain. As we put our arms in the air for victory, we didn't think about how many more tiring hours it would take to get back down the extravagant mountain. For my first time being in Colorado, and first time hiking that tall of a mountain, it was an experience. I enjoyed every bit of that hike even when my legs ached with each step up the mountain. Nothing beats breathing in that fresh, crisp air, the breathtaking views, and the victorious feeling when you finally reach the top. Hiking

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Quandary Peak was an amazing adventure and has inspired me to one day hike more of the fourteen thousand high mountains in Colorado!

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