

# In Closing

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## Rafael McLeod Final Blog Entry

Well, the Baton Rouge Complex was my last fire with the Alpine Interagency Hotshot Crew, and it was a great way to spend one of my last weeks with Alpine!

Throughout the season, as I mentioned in earlier blog entries, I observed countless examples of our core firefighter principles of Duty, Respect, and Integrity, and I learned many lessons that will help push me forward in my life. It was difficult to say goodbye because I wanted to stay for the whole season, but I needed to go back to school.

I started taking classes at the community college, and I am working toward an EMT certification. I've always struggled with academic work, and staying alert in class has always been a challenge. If the work wasn't hands-on, I became distracted. I consider myself a visual learner, watching and then performing tasks, rather than being lectured.

However, since I returned from the summer with the Hotshots, I've noticed that I am able to stay on task in class and pay attention with little distraction. I have learned how to manage my time, and I'm succeeding in studying and preparing for classes. I definitely have a stronger work ethic, and I'm more disciplined. Sure, I can still get distracted, but the change is huge. I'm definitely having an easier time with my studies.

Additionally, since returning home, I've discovered that I'm a more motivated, stronger worker. I've been working to reduce hazardous fuels on my parents' land, making piles to be hauled out. Along with this work comes the importance of tool maintenance, which I also learned while working with Alpine (I'm even teaching my dad a thing or two). My family works fast and doesn't often take the time to maintain tools, but after spending a summer digging and cutting, I understand how important maintenance is for the life of the tool, as well as for the safety of the operator. In fact, before and after thinning our trees, I spent an hour cleaning the saw and sharpening the chain. My neighbor even saw the work I was doing and asked me to perform some maintenance on their saw!

During my 2011 fire experience, I'd say one of the most important things I learned while working with the Hotshots was respect toward my supervisors and colleagues, and I've brought this concept back to my family and my everyday life. The next biggest thing I learned, and which I continue to apply every day, is the concept of staying cool, calm, and collected in hectic situations. For example, when I took my first EMT test, I noticed I did not have the anxiety I usually have when taking tests. I remain calm, and I learn from my mistakes. In the past, I've become depressed and felt defeated when I've missed test items. Now, I look at my mistakes and fix them, doing what I need to do to improve and learn. I realize now that this is MY responsibility. My supervisor taught me this lesson-when you make a mistake, don't make excuses. Just fix it.

Currently, I am enrolled in three classes, and although sometimes I feel it is too much, and I get discouraged, I bounce back quickly and reference my experience with the Hotshots. I believe more in myself, and I know I can succeed if I work at it. In class, I

take more risks and speak out.

I know when I get overwhelmed, I can pause and reassess the situation. I've used all of these tools numerous times during this semester, and it is helping me keep up with my grades.

I've recently joined Atalya Search and Rescue, and I am participating in the trainings. I took this initiative because it is something I really am interested in. I went on a seventeen-mile trip to the top of Wheeler's Peak with this crew, and I felt comfortable joining them because of the confidence I gained working with the Hotshots.

I love this type of work, and every day I can see how it positively affects other aspects of my life. I hope I am given the opportunity to be a part of the Alpine Hotshot Crew next season, to continue to grow as a person and as a student of fire. But most importantly, I hope Alpine benefitted from the work I performed as a detailed crewmember.