

adventure risk challenge a leadership and literacy program

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University of California Merced and Berkeley | Yosemite Field Station



Writings of the Hardcore Mosquitos

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To Fly As High As I Can

I am a strategic, intelligent Belted Kingfisher bird,
Flying against fast winds,
Opening my wings to the dangerous world,
Staying optimistic and determined,
To Fly as High as I Can.

Flying through what looks like an obstacle course,
Picking up maturity and independence
From betrayals and attacks,
Avoiding predators and staying alive,
There are people that hurt me.
Hurt me in many ways;
Stepping on me,
And breaking my wings,
But still,
I'm taking risks.
To Fly as High as I Can.

Like a bird I molt every year,
To leave hard times behind,
Getting rid of hurtful feathers.
Feathers that make me sick
And deprive me from singing and chirping a melody.
Sometimes I need to keep memories
To never forget how people hurt me.
To learn from my mistakes.
The pain is no longer felt.
The feathers are gone.
But the memories are still there.
Forgiveness is needed
To chirp a melody again.
Its better this way.
Molting is freedom.
To fly as High as I Can.

Family is always first,
But when my guardian angel was born,
I knew he was my inspiration to everything,
And my meaning to anything.
I have a wonderful innocent child by my side
That helps me live.
Pepe, he's the angel that flies next to me,
To the top,
Past a peak,
And through the clouds.
My little brother makes me feel comfort and calmness.
A seven-year-old angel that inspires me to go farther,
And fly to where my soul leads me.
Thanks to the inspiration he gives me

I'm able to wake up
With a smile on my face
Being able,
To Fly as High as I Can

Like a bird I travel through life
Passing through many phases.
Like learning how to fly,
Sometimes the journey is hard,
And sometimes I want it to last forever.
Being strong and fragile at the same time,
I will always stay strong.
To Fly as High as I can

I am a Belted Kingfisher bird,
Talented and bright.
Dependent in so many ways,
I am a sensible bird
Trying to live,
Trying to hold on,
Going through a unique life,
Experiencing joy and hardships,
But most of the time

It's just better to fly.
To Fly as High as I Can



I start as an innocent baby bird,
Only having a red belt on my chest
To distinguish me as a girl.
Only having a few feathers,
Not knowing how to fly,
I molt feathers I no longer need
To be able to sing.
Claws from predators
Scar me for life
But that doesn't hold me back.
The biggest inspiration I have
Has many names:
Pepe, my brother, my guardian angel,
My everything.

In this life anything is possible,
To fly anywhere
And as high as I want,
Hardships and joys
Are just parts of the journey,
But if I really try,
I know it is possible
To Fly as High as I Can.

Reality Check

The opportunity of experiencing an afternoon and an evening by myself in the woods made me reflect on the life I lived before ARC, a forty day leadership and literacy program. I pondered many aspects of my life including my family. When I sat next to a ponderosa pine tree in Yosemite and looked up at the sky, different thoughts came to my head. One of the aspects that I pondered included my family and how I interacted with them before coming to the Adventure Risk Challenge program. I reflected on all the new experiences that I faced through this summer. I overcame physical and emotional challenges by facing my fear of heights and bonding to my team of ten other teenagers. I learned new things about myself and the life I lived before ARC. The opportunity of experiencing time alone in the wilderness changed the perspective of me and my life.

As the hours passed on my solo experience, I reflected on my thoughts toward my family before joining ARC. Just a couple of weeks ago, I thought that I would not survive without my family. I grew up very attached to them, especially my little brother. My family always came first in my life, but I didn't realize that my dependency usually held me back. I remember in sixth grade I wanted to go to camp. I wanted to attend sixth grade camp to enjoy time with my friends and learn new things. I wanted to learn about science, different animals and how to live outside in the wilderness. Then I remember not wanting to go because five days without my parents seemed forever. I couldn't go so long without them I missed out on this experience because of my dependence on my family. I never believed that I would leave my family. I always thought of my family as an unlimited resource for support, care and love. Living without that essential resource felt like living without water for weeks. Although I received love and support from my family, sometimes I wouldn't return the support. I would ignore my family and not pay as much attention to them as I expected to receive. I also did not reciprocate the love and support I received from my community.

Looking up through the trees and into the sky helped me realize how little I actually gave back to the town where I grew up. I just sat in the middle of my sleeping bag pondering how much I took from Dos Palos while rarely returning anything. I realized that I wasn't active in the diverse community where I lived. I always stayed home after school instead of spending my time doing service in the small town. Before coming

to ARC my interest in helping the Dos Palos community did not exist. I wasn't aware of events taking place in Dos Palos. My ignorance led me to bad habits that affected my community in a negative way. Taking long showers, washing clothes everyday, keeping my TV and radio on all the time and washing my pool frequently all had a negative impact on Dos Palos. Living in a small town in the central valley means using limited resources, including water and energy. I never thought about how much I could affect the town I live in with my daily life tasks. Without a voice to help or change Dos Palos, I felt in possession of an excuse for my bad habits. During this summer in ARC, I experienced new things that changed the way I thought about my life and my role in the community.



During my solo, I remembered the new experiences I lived through and how they impacted my life. Most of these experiences dealt with physical challenges. This summer, for the first time, I experienced rock climbing, rappelling, jumping from a perch, and accomplishing the ropes course. All these experiences dealt with one of my biggest fears:

heights. Challenging myself in new experiences, and dealing with my fear impacted my perspective on life. While I hung from a rope two hundred feet in the air many emotions came to my mind. Memories, people, mistakes and my daily life at home came to my head. Tears and heavy breathing overcame me. I remembered shaking and feeling desperate to touch flat ground. At the same time, I felt a new type of motivation that made me keep going. Even when I felt scared I overcame my fear.

The other experience that dominated my thoughts throughout my solo included the day of the evacuation. I remember backpacking with my team in the late morning and slipping while crossing a creek. I stepped on a wet sharp rock and slipped, landing painfully on my knee. This day I experienced a new level of emotional and physical stress. For the first time I hurt myself to the point of getting dizzy, and feeling a degree of pain that I didn't know existed. Hearing the news that I would be leaving my team to go to the hospital surprised me. Raising my head and seeing my team cry felt like nothing I ever experienced in my life. Going through and hugging each one and listening to their sobs made it difficult to stay calm. For the first time I went on a helicopter and then an ambulance. I felt terrified. As I stayed in the hospital I didn't know how to tell my parents about the evacuation. I realized that in moments of weakness, my teammates would support me. I also realized that everybody experiences moments of weakness and that someday I will be the strong one for others. Sitting alone with only the sound of nature around

me, made me feel these mixed emotions and I realized how much I changed during ARC.

On my retreat, I thought about my life before ARC and the experiences I lived this summer and I felt surprised about how poorly I knew myself. Remembering everything I went through showed me my true capabilities. I learned that I wasn't self confident before coming to ARC and that affected my involvement in my family and in my community. I saw a distinct side of me where I could accomplish challenges and become a leader. Now I seek different characteristics that describe me and my personality. I never saw myself as an ambitious person but I realized how much I hoped to accomplish. I want a life with two careers - cosmetology and nursing - a house, a car, a family of my own, all while staying independent and keeping my family close. Reflecting on who I became inspired me to make changes in the life I used to live.

I took time on my solo to reflect on how I want to change my life when I go back home. With the knowledge I gained during the summer I want to be more independent, help my community and believe in myself. I want to stay close to my family without holding myself back. Now, when I spend time at home, I'm going to pay attention and support my family in the same way they support me. I want independence for myself and the capacity to let go of the shore, take the risk and face challenges. Another change I want to make from my old life is how I interact with the small, diverse town in which I live. Now I know that I own a voice, I want to help the town that saw me grow up. I'm going to volunteer teaching kids and help the environment by recycling. I want to inspire other teenagers to get involved and be active. I'm certain that my old habits are going to change. I will help preserve my community's resource by taking shorter showers and by remembering how to be an advocate for the environment. I know that the sixteen-year-old girl that arrived at ARC forty days ago will not be the same when she goes back home.

Learning about my strengths, weaknesses, challenges, fears and mistakes taught me who I really became. I know that I didn't value the life of comforts I lived back home. I didn't appreciate my family or my community enough. I was not confident in myself before ARC. This summer I discovered a new person inside of me. I no longer see myself as an ignorant teenager. I feel like a new person who wants to change and make a huge impact in life. I feel a strong desire to learn from my mistakes. Forgiveness is now a part of me. I learned many lessons the hard way, and those lessons will help me in the future. This summer worked as a reality check and showed me who I was and who I can become. Now I live by many core values including ARC's: determination, compassion, service and integrity. I'm proud of becoming an experienced Hardcore Mosquito who is willing to try. My solo experience helped me put all my thoughts together and realize the person I am today.

angela aguirre

My Journey

I am a Bullocks Oriole
A rare and unique bird
That migrates every winter,
And returns in the spring to build its nest,
Finely woven with thin twigs.

My young and fuzzy feathers,
That begin light then darken over time,
From light buttery cream
To a dark bold Amarillo,
Which is my four-year-old sister's favorite color on Wednesdays.

I had to leave my nest, not once, but twice,
One of my journeys hurt more than the other.
When it was time to expand
My powerful and migratory wings,
It was hard, but I also knew it was time.
To let go of that nest "my home".

Los Angeles the home of the famous people,
Lights camera action.
To me it was a crowded place
Surrounded by gangs, abuse, violence
Three lockdowns per year at school,
Hearing helicopters over roofs looking for the most wanted.

The concrete forest was the worst habitat ever,
Everybody was always busy all the time, including my family,
I lived with my parents but I only saw them on the weekends.
The feeling of loneliness was always present.

Mexico was my place of peace, family and friends,
There I learned how to make friends.
I loved Mexico,
I loved inhaling clean and fresh air,
Smelling the aroma of wet dirt
At the beginning of raining season in the summer.
Here I could fly,
I could spread my wings as much as I wanted
But then my parents decided it was time
For me to leave the nest.

I started my new journey in search of a better future,
Atwater, a town in the Central Valley,
Was the setting of my dramatic transformation,
Started growing my darker maturity feathers.
I pressured myself to not only do good but try to do great,
I learned how to be more independent
More confident in myself

Now it's time to move back to Los Angeles,
And start building my nest again
I am growing stronger and stronger with each migration
Although the story doesn't end
My problems won't repeat themselves
I have learned from my mistakes

I am a Bullocks Oriole
Migrating through problems, places, and people
Hoping I will land in a place
I can call home



My Adventures, Risks, and Challenges

During a 40 day literary program I took many unhealthy risks, for example on our independent expedition I left the instructors behind. That was a risk because anything could have happened to my teammates and me; we could have gotten bit by a rattle snake, gotten lost or even fallen off of the trail. But we took all of those risks because we wanted to arrive early to Wawona Elementary School. I went through adventures like exploring a new place in the forest that I had never been to, and going off trail. Things like backpacking and rock-climbing were my physical challenges. Doing my solo and repelling were my emotional challenges, because I am afraid of hanging 200 feet above the ground with only ropes preventing me from falling. At ARC I experienced challenges, from taking many risks, to wanting to have an adventure to finally accept and accomplish those challenges. Here at ARC I faced challenges everyday, some more difficult than others, some physical and others emotionally challenging.

Each one of us face fears every day. Some small and others that have been there for a while. A big fear I had in the past was that if people would get hurt around me I would always blame myself even if it wasn't my fault. I thought of my sister; when she stopped breathing I rushed her to the doctor. No one else was at my house except us two. When my dad found out, I knew he blamed it on me even though he did not say anything, I was supposed to take care of her. After that I was scared of having to witness something like that again. I saw her face when it turned pale. Something that I fear for in the present is that, since I have been away for a while, something could happen to my family while I am not there with them. Something I have learned and reflected about on my solo is that it's always good to take care of my family. However I learned its important for me to have my space to grow and be more independent, because one day I am going to be on my own without them, starting a family of my own or just have my own career. I won't always be there to protect them. A fear I have for the future is not being able to complete my goals, to not be able to get my dream job, and to not be able to have a family of my own. As a human, having fears is part of growing up physically and emotionally.

Physical challenges can be difficult but as time passes one can overcome those challenges. I can overcome my physical and mental challenges because I definitely feel emotionally stronger, more independent and self sufficient. I knew what hardworking was. I knew how it felt to be in the sun all day breaking a sweat, taking care of cattle, making corn crops every summer and making sure the farm was in tight condition. And now I'm just doing a different kind of hard work. Gaining more knowledge, learning how to be much more skilled in reading maps, having more leadership in a group and plan our own expeditions. Backpacking, carrying 30% of my weight

on my back dealing with most of the weight on my hips and shoulders. Backpacking in the snow was the worst, a lot of times I fell in a hole made by a log or big rock, I used to like snow, I used to think it was beautiful and harmless but now I think it's the worst. But despite the challenges I have taken, I was able to overcome them and become stronger emotionally and physically. Now for my future I plan to use up what I learned from my hard work and the accumulation of knowledge I have gained over the years in order to accomplish my goals. As an adult I will continue to be physically strong and explore the outdoors.

Being able to have a solo for twenty-four hours is very rare; it can be a challenge, mainly emotionally. I remember having to fight off tears, just thinking of my dad, my mom and three sisters. It made me think, why can't I have the same close relationship with my parents and siblings that I have with my family of 11 Hardcore Mosquitos. I have lived with my parents for a while and sometimes I see conflicts between my sister and my dad. I have only been with this group less than thirty days and we already adopted each other as brothers and sisters. This solo, I feel was the best thing that happened in this program it gave me a chance to reflect on life, especially in the way I have grown more independent, through life and throughout this program. It also gave me the chance to start thinking of what I wanted to do when I grow up to be an adult, I had to start thinking of my future, my education and what was I going to do in life. So I knew I had to do something even if it meant leaving my family back at home. I went from Mexico into the U.S. to live with my cousin and go to school, work hard at getting good grades, so that one day I will accomplish my goal in getting my professional degree in the medical field. I gained a lot of knowledge about myself in my solo; I learned that I can stay 24 hours without talking to anybody and not go crazy. I also learned that I'm not scared of being by myself in the night in the wilderness. It was actually very relaxing and inspiring, to look at the trees makes me want to grow as tall and proud as they are, looking at the mountain makes me want to hike over every goal and looking at the small creek makes me want to flow as life goes on even if there are rocks in the way.

In ARC I face challenges every day, some hard, some easy. My fears are being battled everyday, some short-term and others long-term. Learn-

ing from all of these experiences, like learning how to work more as a team and also how the word struggle does not have to be in my mind, I can make it fade away when ever I want. That word only keeps me from reaching my goals faster. Working as a team will help not only here in ARC but for the rest of my life. Working together with my family would be good because that way as a team, a family, we can make decisions jointly. I chose to take a great risk, for example when I came to the U.S.A. by myself. The only people that I knew in Merced were my cousin and her family and I felt like I was risking the relationship between my family and me. I worried that when I would go to my parent's house it would be awkward because of the time and distance that separated us. Some of my goals that I accomplished were to let go of the wooden perch and slide down the zip line at the ropes course, although I screamed the whole way down trying not to think of the huge amount of butterflies I had in my stomach. I felt as though I needed to throw up, but I ignored and tried to have fun on my way down. When the rest of the Mosquitos and I went rappelling I faced my fears by telling myself that there was nothing to be afraid of. As I saw everybody go before me it made me more and more nervous. I thought about the cliff's height, I thought of the rope ripping and me falling, I felt a lot of fear. But I had to trust myself, I had to be more confident in the ropes I connected to, and I told myself there is nothing to be afraid of; the only thing that's stopping me is myself. Now I know how to battle my fear and win every time. And even learning to appreciate myself I learned that I can do many things once I put my mind into it. I really appreciate how I am a fast learner and how it can help me now and throughout my life. To me, this is a really good key for a happy and successful life.



This course was such a new experience for me, and I did things that last summer I would never imagine myself doing. The things I have done during this course include rock climbing, rappelling, kayaking and white water rafting. All of these things were just a dream last summer now I know that anything is possible. There is no such thing as impossible. Something that I really learned, and will always think about is that, I need to go out in search of an adventure, or else I will never know what's out in the real world. I need to take risks so in the future I won't regret not ever trying to accomplish what I had set myself to do. And I will challenge myself, so that way I will set a lot of positive goals that will give me the opportunity to look forward to life. This program to me was like a small push into the future. All that I learned are true acknowledgements that will help me for the rest of my life.

cindy chavarria

Soaring Through Life

I am a puny puerile fly,
Flying in this race of life
Who wants to acquire new experiences,

There are many people,
Who can make me smile very easily,
My friends and family,
When I look at them a smile glides through my face,
The moments I spend with them,
Is what keeps me going through this race,

I spread my wings and try to soar,
When I lay my eyes on an open door,
I go in that direction,
I spring to all opportunities that come near me,
But some things hit me with all their power,
They wound me,
But nothing is permanent,
I will always get up,
Though a scar will be left in my soul,
Which will follow me till the end of this life

I expected an ordinary day,
When I got the news,
I felt there was nothing ahead,
It was the day I found out I'd never see her again,
I'll never get to tell her how special she was to me,
Suddenly tears streamed down my face
Into my flooded bed of pain,
The day I found out it was her end in this world,
When all my hope was crushed,
The day I realized she'd never return,
We all felt truly devastated
Can we continue without her?

I experienced this pain more than once
I have guilt,
That haunts me,
Wherever I go,
Because I know I could've done much more,
Before his end in this world,



I didn't visit him at the hospital
when he was sick,
It haunts me every time I see one,
Because I could've visited him,
One last time
Before his final days here,
Every time I pass by a cemetery,
I remember I chose not to go to
the ceremony,
The guilt I cannot get
off my chest,
Will haunt me until,
My soul goes to rest,

But in the end, I know there is always someone,
That I can always trust,
Indeed it's my family,
I know they'll always be there for me,

I open my wings to fly again,
Because I know there is too much ahead of me,
I would never quit this race so suddenly,
Flying around obstacles that appear so frequently,
I spin around gradually until I've gathered strength,
To get up and fly once again,

There are many people, who can make me smile very easily,
And those people are my friends and family,
When I look at them a smile glides through my face,
The moments I spend with them
Is what keeps me going through this race,

I want to continue my journey,
To see where life will lead me,
No matter how many people try to interfere,
I'll push past them,
Because I was brought here as a little fly,
For a special mission,
I'm not sure what it is,
But I am determined to find out,
Because there is a great life ahead of me.

Becoming Courageous

I knew that ARC stood for Adventure Risk Challenge, but later realized that I only comprehended the definitions of the words. When I came to Yosemite this summer I started to understand what ARC really means: sweat, tears, and smiles. ARC impacted my life in a variety of ways, like making me realize what a wonderful life I live. I've never fully appreciated everything and everyone before this experience. It's opened my eyes to the real me and I've learned to challenge myself beyond my limits. I've acquired many things; like inspiration to help out in the community, fearlessness, and the confidence to interview a stranger.

This summer I learned ways to appreciate and take care of my community. Through this program I've learned that one person can and does make a difference. I will admit back in my school I littered trash due to my reluctance to walk to the nearest trashcan. When I return, I'll throw everything inside the trash cans, and if I find time I will pick up other people's trash and inform them about the harms of their waste. I learned dramatic harms and statistics about pollution and conservation from a video we watched, and saw how pollution harshly affects our breathing and our sewers when trash goes down the drain. I'll make a huge effort to recycle every possible thing and encourage others to respect our earth, our only home. Taking shorter showers favor my community as well as my family. The bills at home will decrease and I will conserve water future generations, animals, and others. My shower routine will not continue the same after coming to ARC. Before coming to ARC I stayed in the shower for 40 minutes, but in ARC we only took 5 minutes showers. I now realize the importance of conserving water, so when I return home my shower span will change to 20 minutes. I will continue to teach others about the importance of conserving water, recycling, and helping out in our community.

Separating from my family for 40 days helped me realize how much they really love me and how much I really love them. I've also reflected on my great life but I never appreciated everybody and everything like they deserve. I've noticed the value of my family and how I wouldn't appreciate so much time away from them again. Before leaving home I remember the excitement that came to me when I thought about leaving everything and everyone. I finally broke down on our second expedition after finding I couldn't continue without my family anymore, and started sobbing. Aaron, one of our instructors, helped me through my moment of homesickness,

by a giving warm hug and telling me to ask for support from my teammates because we all felt the same way. I also thank Sarah. Although I wished I could talk to my parents through the phone, she wouldn't let me, and in the end I grew emotionally stronger and its also made me value every letter I receive from them. Thinking of that special moment when I will finally see my family at graduation encouraged me through my rough moments. When I return home, I will value family time a lot more and I'll start more conversations with them.

I learned that you need to give yourself a chance to reach your goals, and not to fear any challenges. This summer, I've done things, seen things, and heard things I never would have if I hadn't come to ARC. Com-



ing to ARC itself became a huge challenge; my friend who previously attended this program warned me that ARC would change my perspective to life. I didn't believe her, so when I go back I owe her an ice cream. My biggest challenge has been expressing my feelings, because as a child I projected a cheerful, worry free, courageous little girl personality and when I grew up everybody including me expected the same. In reality while I grew older I grew fears, doubts, and worries that I never shared with anyone because everyone looked up to me for always demonstrating bravery. Here I learned to share with people how I feel, and what's bothering I me when before I would keep everything piled up inside. I acquired skills

for communicating my fears without feeling embarrassed, and I'll always express my true feeling from now on with out any regrets.

At the shadow of Tuolumne Peak on July 7, 2010, I carried two heavy backpacks, one in front and in back of me. It felt like torture, but I volunteered to carry them and when I finished I felt accomplished. When I finished and took off my backpack I felt like I had landed in heaven. I've never felt so relieved in my life. I expected that the solo event, where I spent 24 hours alone outside, would challenge me because I cannot stand solitude or darkness. The solo helped me overcome that fear and helped me realize that I truly enjoy spending time alone in the wilderness. The ropes course presented another scary challenge. I felt extremely confident and totally underestimated the ropes course, until I saw one of my peers fall and hurt herself pretty badly. I went right after she fell, I felt really nervous at that moment. That day was the first time I ever admitted of having fear. These events will help me in the future because from now on I'll always express my feelings, and I'm going to challenge myself to reach my potential.

The day I interviewed Teresa, my heart pumped fast and I could feel my palms sweating. After meeting several interviewees I felt relaxed, finding them very polite. Strangely, out of 20 seats, my interviewee and I sat next to each other and chatted before knowing that we would end up together. I recall thinking: I hope my interviewee is like her, while we spoke. She made my button of motivation click because she told me how she succeeded through her tough life. She talked about life as a single teenage mother who paid for housing all alone and later graduated from college. Her story interested me because we shared something in common - expectations. My family expects me to show up with straight A's, like my brother, something I never thought possible. Now I'm able to set my goal for straight A's because ARC taught me that anything is possible, we just need to believe in ourselves and set challenging goals. Interviewing a stranger taught me not to fear before even knowing the result of the situation.

Completing ARC changed me; I will return home and amaze everybody with my transformation. I will keep these memories of ARC with me forever. I'll remember the challenges that fortified me and motivated me. My leadership in my home and community will continue to grow. I'll also take my experience from interview day and share Teresa's story with others, and hopefully inspire them. Words cannot say how grateful I feel for receiving this life-changing opportunity.

Going Towards My Dream

I am an ugly duckling,
Weak and tiny,
Walking slowly in a fast moving community.
Everyone picks on me because of my identity.
Everyone fears my emotions and the changes
I will make for myself toward my dream.

Many challenges are waiting ahead of me,
Starting from a small child,
Knowing how to walk, talk and read
Were my accomplishments.

As an excluded ugly duckling,
Chosen to be the smallest in the family,
I always try my best to finish my duty.
Told to be the ugliest in the community,
I always express my beauty in my work.



When I was young,
I was struggled to ride a bike by myself,
I couldn't focus on my balance,
Trust and confidence.
So I dropped, fell and had
Bruises all over my feet.
I truly lost my heart,
But my parents were there to give me a wing,
And after a thousand times of falling down,
I finally succeeded.

Inside our community, I admired those with talents,
A person who can dunk because he is tall,
A person who plays well at violin because he is a musician,
Everyone is born with talents,
But you must practice, work hard, and build confidence.

In the past I have tried many things
But I did not succeed
I dropped countless amounts of tears on my face,
Blood from my wounds,
And allowed forgiveness of myself.
As I put them altogether, they became the steps taken
To discover a new dream.

The life of a swan is very fortunate,
Meeting with others on the lake,
And getting married to create a happy life.
This is what I have been looking for, working hard
To accomplish my ultimate goal

As a person grows mature,
I will have to keep on going forward,
Never letting myself down.
From an ugly duckling,
Turning into a beautiful white swan,
It takes sweat, blood and tears
For me to continue.
It takes experiences, confidence, and forgiveness
For me to face challenges.

All of us can be the ugly duckling,
But it takes courage and patience
To become a beautiful swan.

My Growth Toward Creating Miracles

Many unique treasures are waiting for me to discover. In the past, I believed it was unrealistic for me to change myself. At the beginning of the program, I was afraid that I would find despair in many difficult situations, but I chose to face those risks and challenges. In the end, I transformed and I didn't notice it happening. ARC, the forty-day literacy and leadership program, has motivated me to cooperate with one another, make confident actions, reflect my ideal goals, and develop talents within myself. During this time away from home, I encouraged myself to make miracles throughout the challenges and risks that I took in ARC. In this course, I learned how to motivate myself to grow from the past toward the future.

My experiences at ARC taught me how my actions could affect the community and myself. At the beginning of our expedition, it seemed awful for us to face this forty day ARC program. Oftentimes some of us felt homesick and sobbed about sacrificing ourselves to stay here. I remembered one night when we shared thoughts and deep feelings about this group. We talked about distrusts, lost of support, disagreements, and conflicts from ourselves. Most of us cried, but I tried not to let my tears out because I wanted to support and encourage my team to recover from these difficult situations. I lifted my group up from despair and grabbed their hands to maintain an impressive family.

Staying away from the family and gaining independence was a remarkable experience for me. That day I sat alone near trees and rocks. It reminded me of an ironic day that I had in San Francisco. I experienced loneliness in the crowd similar to the loneliness of the solo day. The temperature of nature brought me joy but I felt depression thinking of my family, friends, and school. The complete silence awakened me, made me foreshadow my future in college, when again, I will have to leave my family to become stronger. The little and adorable animals, like the ants, always stay and work together to

form a mighty union. An old Chinese quote says, "It might be easy to break a stick apart, but when all the sticks join together, it's more difficult to collapse." When I came back from my solo, my teammates, the Hard Core Mosquitoes, gave me a big warm hug. I always remembered my family and friends when I was by myself. I learned to be more independent and reliable and can apply this while I am growing up. The ARC group is a second family to me, they taught me how lovely and powerful we are as a team.

I never would have guessed I could succeed in the risks and challenges I chose to take. I remembered a day nine years ago, when the sky was raining cats and dogs. I tripped on the floor through the curiosity of looking down at the rain from the



balcony. I was physically and mentally injured from heights and had a serious gash on my chin. The Ropes Course was a risky challenge for me. My awareness of heights frightened me when I stood on top of a fifty-foot pole, shifting from my weight. At first my body was shaking and wanted to overwhelm me, forcing me to return to the ground. But I knew that my teammates and mind were encouraging me to proceed. "Zi Ming, can you make a miracle in this?" I asked myself. Addi-

tionally, I was determined to deliver on a commitment to myself. I made a gigantic jump and committed myself confidently to reach outside of my limit. I conquered my height phobia and did my best with no regrets. At that moment, I told myself that I made a wise decision to trust myself and overcome this fear. Further in the future, I believe I can fight against fear and accomplish even bigger challenges.

My growth and reflections in ARC has motivated me to develop into a successful person. I discovered that taking responsibilities for my actions have altered my attitude towards my behavior. For example, whenever I finished packing my personal gear, I will have to check my belongings not once or twice, but on three occasions. On one morning, when I left camp with my team, I dropped an aqua sock from my backpack without noticing. In the snow, I realized that the aqua sock was lost and I needed to turn back and search. Unfortunately, I didn't find the aqua sock and had wasted the group's time. From that episode, I learned the lesson of taking good responsibilities and become reliable. I am glad that I changed to be more humble and willing to accept fault so that I will have a better understanding of how to change it in the future.

My attempt at ARC has encouraged me to create miracles in my life, and never let myself go. This program gave me opportunities to build unique talents and led me to transform into a proud leader. I felt very fortunate to gain success in my challenges, taking risks and making myself become stronger in the future. When I graduated from ARC, I will continue follow my path to make my dream come true. My dreams are to attend college, to become the first pharmacist that walks on the moon, and to have an enjoyable life with my family. In order to make these dreams to happen, I will promise myself to change what seems impossible. By the time I go home, I will continue to grow and perform to the best of my abilities toward my goal.

jenny hernandez

The Snowy Blanket

I am snow on a mountain
Surrounded by many trees, rocks, and branches
I drift upon the open space with ambition
To spread my white blanket among the world

My fear is that those who misunderstand me hold me back
Like man anticipating the cold, unpleasant feeling of snow
When the experience is more than that.
It has beauty and enjoyment that must be discovered
By those who are ready to be amazed

Like snow I have a right to flow freely among the world
Ignoring those who say "I can't"
My freedom matters more
And I will leave a trail for those who follow me
For there is more to learn about me.

I remember my peers saying
"You're a failure, and embarrassment,
only thinking of yourself."
All the beauty and my dreams crashed against a massive rock,
Stopping me from moving forward
Now I'm stuck in the present
With the future immensely far away.

My path is slippery without support of those tall trees
My confidence brought down
To the deepest hole in the ground,
Melted and not prepared
For the warmth of the sun.

Their doubts are nonsense!
It's a shame that judgment leaves a trace
On my white snowy flakes.
You've enraged me in an uncontrollable way
And sooner or later



An avalanche will crash on top of those
Who underestimate me,
Leaving me in peace.

My freedom is important to gain knowledge
And give a hand to those
Who stumble and break through my frozen surface.
To the flowers who want to sprout under me.
I need to melt at my own pace
So those beneath me will learn to appreciate my water.

I am snow on a mountain
Surrounded by many trees, rocks and branches.
Supporting me
Lifting me
Allowing me to be free
So I can blanket the open space that awaits me.

It's Time For A Change

All the creatures around me sound beautiful and peaceful and I feel jealous of their amazing home. Throughout the course I've faced many challenges and have pushed myself to a level that I never imagined. In the past, my attitude was always negative when I tried new things. The experiences and hard times in ARC have made me a stronger person. In thinking more positively about my future, I recently figured out that everything is possible if I keep my head up and scream out, "I can do it!"

Being alone in the wilderness frightened me but I was excited to give myself time to reflect on all the struggles I faced. I missed my home and the extraordinary people that wait for me there, but I looked at the bright side and realized that spending time alone is definitely worth it. I knew this was my only opportunity that I would get to think of myself for once. I wanted time to cry and laugh on my own without worrying about what others thought of me. I thought back to the time I hiked up hill with a 40-pound backpack that drained my energy. In the back of my mind I always wanted to quit and tell the instructors that I was sorry that I couldn't handle being here anymore. When I thought of telling them tears ran down my face as I struggled to hike the steep trail. "You're always thinking negative Jenny! Stop it!" I repeated over and over in my head. If my Hardcore Mosquitos can do it so can I. I wondered how I managed to stay strong for my team and myself. Every obstacle I faced brought me back to my hardships in the past and that made everything worse.

Rappelling was my most challenging experience because my phobia in heights took me over. Two-hundred feet down a mountain sounded incredibly hard and over my limits. I wanted to give up and run away. I had to trust those who were supporting me and holding the rope that connected to my harness. That's where my fear of trusting again popped into my head. The face of the individual that once betrayed me took over my concentration. He was my best friend the person I loved the most after my mother. For the most part

he was the one I trusted and I did not expect his betrayal at all. I believed in him and thought he wasn't like other guys. The first time I confronted him of being unfaithful to me he promised that the rumors weren't true. I believed him and never brought it up again but my friends begged me to believe them, but I wanted to trust him and erase all of the negativity that surrounded me. In the back of my mind I knew he lied. Ever since that day it's been hard to trust anyone and now I was being forced to again trust people I did not know. Once I was let down that two-hundred feet mountain I prayed to god that the people holding the rope wouldn't betray me and let me fall. I was anxious to get to the bottom and once I did I was extremely proud of myself. I had to trust and they didn't betray me, my fear of not being able to trust was disappearing slowly but it was a process, and I thank the rappelling experience for that successful challenge.

As I walk down the path to my future, the rocks no longer intimidate me. I ignore the danger and I look at the beautiful view, thinking positively about my life. My determination in backpacking made me realize that I want to continue to challenge myself, especially in school. While backpacking, I kept my frustration inside. Complaining would only bring the team down. I felt if I accomplished our goal, my actions would motivate them also. In school



I can complain about tests, but now I will keep my negative thoughts to myself. I want this experience to shine through my goals later. The people I know in ARC have faith in me and believe I can do great things. ARC has changed my

outlook of life. I believe I was destined to be here. I believe in myself now, and I never want to hear myself say, "I can't!" because I can do anything if I set my mind and body to do the work. I'm not that kind of girl that everyone expects to be a failure in life. One day, people will learn to acknowledge that I don't rely on anyone but myself.

I'm proud of myself for accomplishing so much in just forty days. Before ARC I feared truth and challenges that forced me out of my comfort zone. I was scared of change, petrified to trust people I didn't know, and if someone hurt me I would forgive their mistakes but wouldn't forget how much it hurt. That mentality converted me into a revengeful person. Many fears filled my head and would stop me from enjoying life and its beauty. During the forty-day course in Yosemite I was encouraged to try different activities that I once dreamed of never being able to do. For example, I white-water rafted, kayaked, rock climbed, and rappelled. They were experiences that I significantly grew from.

I will continue to grow as a strong leader and I will take the advice that a wise man gave me, "continue learning how to learn." I'll be successful in life and I'll look back to this course and thank nature for giving me a chance to believe in myself, and being patient with my struggles and exhaustion. I feel like I can touch the sky reaching out so high that nature will protect me. And the heights I'm no longer afraid of them. All my worries feel like they've disappeared, and the smooth breeze takes them far, far away to a place that I will on no account be able to reach.

I will never forget the smell of fresh air in Yosemite. I will never forget the freedom I had here and the open space that gave me a chance to breathe and think. I admire the trees that stand so high, so proudly as if they're never going to give up on growing. I feel like the ants are my friends now, and feel like a bad person if I leave them behind. They've accompanied me while I was alone and I thank them for that. I took advantage of the last hours I had here and I walked around slowly in the small space that was especially picked out for me. I take time to smell the pine trees, and admire the interesting rock sculptures that make images in my head. I'm not crazy, its just nature that sets free my imagination. Yosemite is my second home, a place where I demolished my fears and challenges. I take with me my goals and accomplishments. I'll look back at pictures years from now and take a moment to exhale the air and thank ARC and the solo for converting my life to an adventure with risks that challenged my inner self forever.

jesus samaniego

The Sounds of Nature

I am the sound of nature,
Varied with different notes and instruments,
Amazing both children and adults,
There is no age limit.

The sounds of roaring bears,
The calm wind blowing through the trees and tunnels,
Birds chirping beautifully throughout the forest,
Woodpeckers tapping against tall sequoia trees.

I am like nature's scavengers,
Looking for sticks, twigs, and food,
To make it a part of itself,
I look for notes, parts of other songs,
To make it my own,
A part of me,
Both of us becoming stronger.

I make the sound of roaring bears
When I strum my electric guitar,
The amplifiers roaring with power,
Suddenly exposing nature's anger
And letting out my tensions.

Like a lake drying out,
I feel tons of stress,
Weighing on my shoulders,
About school,
Homework,
Problems with others,
I come home to find chores,
My parents expecting me to do a lot around the house and
Have family time.
My baby brother and sister,
Want time to play with their big brother,
All this stress is building up,
The lake, drying out.

Snow falls,
It melts and flows into all sources of water
And the valleys get the water they need to survive,

Everything happens for a reason,
My parents didn't have much money,
They couldn't afford someone to teach me,
But I still push myself to the edge,
On my own, learning how to play the keyboard,
Slowly able to analyze the notes,
All this stress building up,
But at the same time,
Relieving that stress
Once I complete my first song.



I make the calm wind pass
Through the wide and gold
Tunnels of my saxophone,
Expressing my sadness
In the sound of my music,
Releasing the aching notes
Coming from my soul.

I make the surrounding sounds
Of beautiful, chirping birds
When I gently press
The smooth keys of my keyboard,
Demonstrating my happiness
To my audience,
Sharing that happiness
With those I love.

I make the sound of tapping woodpeckers,
When, at the starting of a song,
I hit my drumsticks against each other,

CLICK, CLICK, CLICK,
Giving the beat to both worlds,
Mine and the natural world.

The sounds of the environment come together
When I strum a chord on my acoustic guitar,
I release all of my feelings at once,
The majestic and extraordinary sounds of nature,
I make the sound of music,
I've become the sound of nature

Second Family

In ARC, coming in as strangers, little by little we earned each other's trust, and through our shared trust, we built a strong team, a family. We all joined ARC knowing very little about one another; we slowly began to talk and open ourselves up. We learned so much about each other, we learned fears, strengths, and even weaknesses. The ARC program makes you experience challenges, which make you think about a lot and you learn things about yourself that you didn't know before, you start realizing things that before you took for granted. The challenges I went through in ARC helped me to appreciate my family for everything they do for me. I also became more confident and courageous in everything I do.

Adventure, Risk, Challenge, the name says it: Challenge. ARC is full of challenges: physical, mental, and emotional. My biggest emotional challenge was homesickness, missing my family. In the beginning, I wanted my family there with me, experiencing the same things. When we arrived at base camp, I started to feel homesick. At dinner time, we all sat and ate dinner together; we were all talking and laughing about things that happened throughout the day. This reminded me of sitting at the dinner table back home with my family. At home, my family and I sit at the dinner table and eat together, talking and laughing about things that happened throughout the day, dinner at ARC felt just the same. Later that day Sarah handed out mail. I didn't receive mail, when mostly everyone did. I wanted to go home, with my family. I just needed to get away from everyone. I finished dinner and started dishes. I finally received mail about halfway through the course. When I read my letters, I didn't know if I could hold back my tears so I took my mail to my tent and read all my letters from my family, my eyes began to water. I also felt a little homesick on my birthday, July 15. For the first time, I spent my birthday away from my family. Even though I was away from home, the ARC family, my second family, helped me feel at home by baking a cake for me with my favorite fruit, strawberries. At home, I have a loving and supporting family, I just never realized it until we were apart. Having this time away from my family



made me think about everything they do for me, especially my parents. The money they spend everyday just to keep me happy and the hours my dad works to earn that money, takes a lot of sacrifice. These experiences helped me grow a little more independent from my family.

Along with mental challenges, came physical challenges. The greater challenges were rock climbing and rappelling. Rock climbing frightened me once I reached the middle of the mountain, I looked down and realized how high I climbed. I pushed myself to reach the top so I didn't think about my fear and I made it to the top. In the end, I enjoyed climbing and I kept climbing until time ran out. After rock climbing, we went rappelling. At first I didn't think it would seem scary because I already experienced rock climbing so, how frightening could it be? Climbing the Toad didn't seem too challenging. Alma and I were the first two to make it to the top and we waited there for a while. The instructors strapped me in and once I was ready to rappel it didn't seem so bad. Then,

after a while, I looked down and saw Aaron hanging in mid air, that's when fear started to kick in. I didn't know how hanging in mid air would feel, my palms started getting sweaty and I felt a little nauseous. Once I actually started hanging, I had so much fun, I wanted to go faster and faster. During the rock climbing and rappelling, I didn't think about my fear of heights until I actually reached the top. I had fun even though I climbed so high, which helped me overcome that fear. Another physical challenge that I went through was climbing the first peak. In many spots there are big boulders in the way and steeper places than others. This challenge reminded me of other challenges I've gone through in life. All those boulders and steep places reminded me of the hard times I went through learning the keyboard, with no teacher. When I reached the top of the peak, I saw an amazing view of Hetch Hetchy. Looking at the view reminded me of when I actually did learn songs on the keyboard and it also reminded me of the view of my first audience.

During my solo, I reflected on my thoughts about the 40 day course. On my solo, I was really bored, I didn't really know what to do, so I started to write about what was going on, sometimes throwing in the random fact that I was really hungry. While I wrote

in my journal, different kinds of thoughts started coming in to my mind. I started to think about how I have changed during the course. I first started to notice the physical changes, I lost some fat and I gained more leg muscle. I also noticed the muscles beginning to form on my arms. I felt proud of myself, hard work pays off, I kept thinking to myself. Another physical thing that I also noticed was that I got darker, a lot darker. Once I noticed most of my physical changes, I focused on the changes I made on the inside, both emotionally and mentally. I reflected on all of the challenges that came up during the past 25 days. I realized that before, I thought I was afraid of heights, but I still went rock climbing, rappelling, and did part of the ropes course, and I enjoyed completing these challenges. Before, I thought I was afraid of so much, but looking back at all these challenges I have completed, while having fun, I realized that I don't have much fear. I remembered thinking back, after every challenge, I felt like jumping on a roller coaster, my biggest fear. I felt like I could do anything in the world. Looking back at all of these accomplishments, I figured out the most important thing that I learned about myself, I can do anything I set my mind to, the only problem was that I never gave myself the chance to prove it.

The many challenges in the past 40 days helped me change as a person, and value the many things I have in life. I learned to appreciate everything that's given to me. Sometimes I would want my parents to buy me something because what I have "isn't enough". I learned to appreciate everything my parents give me. When I go back home, I want to work for everything I want, instead of just asking my parents for something, without really earning it. After all these challenges, I know I can do anything I set my mind to, I know I can work for anything I want and achieve that goal in the end. I want to have that feeling of accomplishment, and I will value all I have. Throughout this course, I realized how important my family is to me. I didn't think I would miss my family as much as I do now. My family has always supported and loved me. I never noticed it until now, having been so long without their love and support everyday. When I was rappelling, I felt like I needed that support from my family, but even though I didn't experience that exact support, the support from my second family, the ARC team, still existed. The support from my family is the most important thing I can ask for. Their love and support is all I need to keep me moving forward.

Liliana Zapata

I Am The Merced River

I am the Merced River
Easy going and courageous
Always looking forward
Never looking back
Pushing myself to my potential
Flowing gracefully to my next journey

My parents want me to thrive and achieve great goals
As if I was the only hope to keep them from drowning
But I don't meet high expectations
My family depends on me
The crystal clear water reflect my emotions
My frustrations are carried in the massive currents

The tranquil and steady streams are my new experiences
Like the early spring runoff
My mistakes are like the rock slides trying to cover my path
But I don't let it get in my way
Creeks of knowledge connect to me
How to take care of a baby
How to ride a horse
The water flow rises

The waterfalls are my tears
Pouring out of my eyes
Friends, people, family
Hurt me
Disturbing my smooth river
Preventing me from following my route
I plunge and smash against huge rocks
Friends turning against me
Lies and betrayals
But eventually I find my calm river once again

My community uses me as a resource
And I want to do what's expected
Do what they tell me to
Be the same as everyone else
Get married
Have a big Mexican family
Stay home
Cook and clean

But it drains me for my life water
They try to contain me and put me down
They take advantage of my kindness
And block my river like a dam
But I get the strength to make a path and keep on going

I feed on white, frosted snow
To build larger and stronger
The mountains determine how rapid and steep I can be
Influencing my decisions
My river flows into the meadows
Some of the water stays behind
Like the negative things in my life
Filtering in the soil
So that I can stay purified

What keeps my stream going is my nephew, my brown trout
He was a gift
My river has changed direction because of my little fish
As my river drifts I know
He will always be with me no matter what
He gives me hope and courage
To live day by day with him by my side
Not to be frightened of where I'm heading



I've struggled all my life to be
The beautiful river I am today
I've had twist and turns
Through varying elevations
But like my river
I'm strong enough
To push through anything in my way
My journey is getting better
Every step I take
However my journey is not complete
I began as a petite streams
Joining courses with others
And gradually growing
Into a flourishing resilient river
I am the Merced River

Self Discovery

Solitude makes your thoughts, feelings, and ideas inescapable. The flat screen television, the song on the radio and even the time can't distract you from your only true friend: your thoughts. My solo day proved to be the most difficult challenge I ever faced in ARC (Adventure Risk Challenge). Twenty-four hours separated from my group became a day of relaxation, calm and peace. However, it also presented the most challenging, both mentally and emotionally. On day one of the solo, I said good-bye to my ARC family before I left. As I walked expeditiously to my solo camp spot in Ten Lakes I only thought about the view. A beautiful lake surrounded with huge mountains and elegant pinecone trees. I made myself comfortable in my relaxing spot; I heard the wind rumbling past me pushing my hair with a force. The sun was hitting me on the side of my cheek; I felt warmth on my face but coolness throughout my body. My solo day gave me some time to think, something I rarely have time for in ARC because of all the activities we did. With no distractions, I thought about these experiences I gained in ARC. While I looked at the light blue sky and the soft, fragile clouds moving towards the distance I reflected all the things I did in ARC, not just physically, but emotionally and mentally as well. I realized my ARC community, family, and future are more important than I thought. As I think of my future, my past comes to mind as well. My time alone in the wilderness was the hardest experience in the forty-day course but it made my eyes open to new opportunities.

My solitary experience gave me the space to rethink not only about my community, but my ARC family and myself as well. I sat on my sleeping bag and realized I was wearing a necklace from one of my group members. I started thinking about what I had experienced these last couple of weeks with my ARC family. It was a surprise to me how much I could trust and believe in them. I never trusted people completely, or share my feelings like I did with them. On our first expedition backpacking for eight days with backpacks that weighed about forty pounds, I just wanted to give up after a mile and go home. I thought I wasn't capable of doing anything at that point, but my friends at ARC encouraged me to push myself out of my comfort zone and keep on going. It was a surprise to me because I have only known them for a small period of time and they showed so much compassion toward my whole group and myself. No one ever motivated me as much as they did. They are truly my motivation for the whole course and I really appreciate them for supporting me. On my solo I stared at the ants and watched them in a line gather food and help one another transfer it to their home. Watching the ants help each other made me wonder about unity and how strong my ARC group was after just a few weeks.

As I thought about my community and ARC family I thought about my real family and how they figure in my life. I looked back before I came to ARC and realized I wasn't the best daughter to my parents. I

never appreciated or respected them as much as I should have. When that thought came to my mind I felt my eyes getting watery and my face turning hot. The two people that gave me life don't deserve disrespect from me. I didn't care about what my parents thought nor what they said. I just did what I wanted to do and did not care. It saddens me because I know I shouldn't have treated them the way I did. I recalled a time when I was in elementary school and every morning my mom would walk me to school holding hands. I could imagine her jet-black curly hair, her black olive eyes looking into mine, and her soft, gentle hand holding my hand. We would walk everyday to school and I would tell her everything that happened the day before. When it was time for her to go she would give me a kiss on the cheek and say the words "Que Dois te bendija." "May God bless you." I felt tears pouring down my eyes when I thought about that moment, however I didn't bother wiping them off. I missed those moments with my parents. Having to be in ARC for forty days without seeing my family made me realize how much I miss them and need them. Before I wouldn't listen to my parents and just leave with my friends and do what I pleased. I realize now that I need to respect and appreciate my family, especially my parents.

As I sat on my sleeping pad I reflected on how I changed physically, mentally, and emotionally. In the past I never challenged myself to my abilities. I couldn't leave my comfort zone or believe in myself to do anything difficult in my life. Fears held me back, I wasn't social, and I didn't trust as much as I should have. My insecurities held me back from doing many things in my life, for example trusting people and going on roller coasters. I recall a certain time when I would go to parties with all my friends and never dance. I would feel embarrassed and shy whenever I tried to dance, so I just never did. I felt really disappointed in myself because I would miss out on all the fun moments with them. Since I didn't want to dance I felt as if I was letting my friends down too. Now I always dance at parties and have fun. I gained all my confidence in ARC because of all the support and accomplishments I earned since these forty days. I feel more confident and self-motivated to do all the things I always wanted to do in my life.

By repeatedly facing my fears I was able to overcome them. I never thought in my whole life I could climb a peak, rock climb, and spend twenty-four hours completely alone. ARC forced

me to face my fear of heights. The most frightening moment this summer came when I rappelled down a cliff. I refused because of my fear of heights but I knew I could not descend another way. As they showed us how to put the harness on I started to get more nervous by every second. I was the first to rappel, my palms were sweaty, all my emotions were going through me, and my heart was pounding. I started walking off the mountain; I lowered myself to the ground very slowly. Those seconds I was rappelling felt like hours, but eventually I finally made it to the ground with a huge smile on my face. I felt so accomplished that day. I felt as if I could do what ever I set my mind to and I didn't have to be afraid of heights anymore.

ARC prepared me, not only for my challenges in life, but also for the future. I thought about my future and what I want to do in my life. Before I didn't really care about school or think about what I wanted to do as I get older, it helped me realize that I need to do great in school and try my hardest at anything if I want to follow my dreams. ARC has also helped me be open to different surroundings, cultures, and challenges. I come from a town that is mainly Mexican, the people in ARC come from different cultures and their diversity taught me

to value other people. In the future I will continue to look for new opportunities and experience more cultures and surroundings. Now I look forward to challenging myself and pushing myself to my limit. I plan to pursue my passion toward the environment by joining green clubs. Going to college is difficult but I'm more motivated than before to study psychology and become successful. It also helped me open up to people, share my feelings, and help others with their feelings.

I was disturbed from my peace and quietness to head back to my campsite and to reunite with my ARC family. I felt so relieved to see my group once again. As I walked toward my group and I took a deep breath inhaling the Yosemite air, feeling good that I reflected on how my life has changed in ARC. It was like I lifted thirty pounds off my chest and as if I started a new journey of self-discovery. My solo made me reflect on all the things I have done in the course. I will always remember ARC as the first time being part of a team, focusing on myself, and challenging myself on many different levels. On my solo I realized I have pushed myself to things I thought I could never do and, it challenged me mentally and emotionally. It helped me open up to people and to appreciate others in my life like my family. I have grown as a person through ARC, on facing many of my fears. I know what I want to accomplish in the future like going to college and becoming a psychologist. I never thought spending twenty-four hours alone would change my life forever.



Luis Zuniga

My Roots

I am an aspen tree
Strong and connected with my family
The roots are far away but they still support the others
Even when the winds are strong the roots sustain me.

I lose my old leaves in the winter
For new spring leaves that I really need.
I have to shed my old leaves in the past
To have something new in my life.
Like when my green leaves turn to beautiful orange in the fall
I am changing, becoming more mature.

My branches are very strong
A simple wind cannot hurt me
But a storm can break branches



I understand that something is wrong in my life
And that I will have to change it.

A storm passed through and shook our lives in 2005
When gangsters attacked my brother at the Dos Palos fair
My brother tried to defend himself
He asked a police officer for help
My brother did not speak English
They put him in jail.

When a storm passed over our lives
Our trunks felt frozen, it was hard not to break
My parents tried to find a lawyer to help
But the lawyer was too expensive
My older brother was in jail
My parents were in Mexico
The roots felt strained
But still connected

From the streets where my mom sells shoes
To the dairy farm where my brother in law grows alfalfa
To the office in Mexico where my father collects taxes
To my sister's house with my nephews
Our roots are connected

From small, beautiful Santa Rosa in Guanajuato Mexico
Where you can hear the birds singing
And smell tortillas in the morning
To small, beautiful Dos Palos in California
Where you can hear the cars
And smell the restaurants

The sun always shines on my clone of Aspen trees.
Our roots are connected
We will support each other
Never giving up
I am an aspen tree
Strong and connected with my family

Steps To My Future

ARC is a program for literature, grammar, leadership, and poetry. ARC stands for adventure, risks, and challenges. Each summer, ARC is active and ready to receive new students. I spent 40 days exploring and discovering Yosemite. I went on four expeditions: white water rafting, kayaking, climbing, back packing. We also challenged our selves on the ropes course. Through those expeditions I learned how to move forward. The ARC program opened their doors for me. I found many things that I needed and appreciated. I found what I wanted, new opportunities to continue with my education, opportunities hard to find. I am very proud to form part of the ARC program. It is a privilege to be part of the ARC program, learning in different ways, sharing, and having funny memories with the team. ARC is not a simple program; it's your family and your future. ARC gave me an opportunity more than I imagined. What I learned in ARC during the summer was the importance of appreciation, how to support each other, and the significance of my education.

In ARC, I learned the importance of appreciating people and how to valorize their actions. Appreciations are a way to show thanks for that person. Through appreciations, I noticed that I was doing something well for the ARC family and it was an experience that filled my heart with joy. Before I came to the ARC program, I ignored what appreciation meant. I thought that appreciation was a simple thanks but is more than just a word. Now appreciation for me means being able to show someone whole heartily how I feel for them. I really appreciated the love given to me by ARC and their interest in helping me.

Another thing I learned this summer was how we need support to keep going. I know what support means. The ARC program supported me in becoming a hard worker. ARC helped me to never give up in achieving what I want. My English class at Dos Palos allowed me



to speak Spanish and I never practiced English. Here I was not allowed to speak Spanish and I had to practice my English so I learned more. I feel supported in going to college and continuing my education. ARC motivated me to motivate others in the future outside of my family. Now I want to help my community because I learned how to support others.

Another lesson I learned is that my education is my future. Last year in 2009, I worked in the tomato fields; in ARC I

found some thing better. The field jobs are very hard and they don't give me the same opportunities that school gives me. This summer I was going to work in the fields, but I joined the ARC program and I gained more than the fields. In the fields I gained pain, exhaustion, and

the minimum pay. In ARC I gained knowledge, love, and a new family. Thanks to this opportunity, I am stronger not physically but mentally. I improved my reading, writing, and spoken English skills. Education opened the doors to my future and the knowledge that I have no body can take away from me. I committed to helping students that want to continue with their education. I experimented how it feels to try to have a better education away from my parents, some times without money to buy what I need. The ARC program helped me in many areas and now I think is time to take action and do something for other students who want to continue and have a better education. As ARC opened their doors for me, I also want to open my doors for other people to show how important education is for their future. I want to finish college and be an example; if I can do it, they can also do it. The commitment that I

make, I make it with all my heart. I am hundred percent sure that my commitment will be realized.

Not only did I improve my English, I also met a new family. I love ARC, my family, my community. I appreciate all the love that they bring to me during the course. I want to continue taking adventures, risks and challenges. It helps me to move forward and don't give up. Now ARC is waiting with their doors open for you.

I Am A Sugar Pine

Where I came from is the small seed,
Released by the giant cone
When I grow I turn into a giant tree
People think a lot about me
How old I am,
How long I could have been on Earth

Everyone wonders how the small seed grows so big

While I'm growing as a small tree
I saw a lot of grass die in front of me,
A lot of killing and fighting around me
But I will make sure my family is next to me,
Safe under my branches

Scarred by fire, I live in the sky for life

I saw my body break apart,
Saw war separate the power of my heart
The fire and smoke awakened me
I left my country with emptiness inside

I am a sprouting Sugar Pine seed
I tried to learn the language of the forest
By repeating what it was saying
They thought I was mocking them
So fights and trouble followed me

I am trying to spread my branches and reach out for the sky

Scared of the strange new trees, their rough bark,
Unsure who is a true companion
Will they use me or teach me the way?
To get away from the hostility
I listen to the sound of the birds
So I can flee from the painful noise

I will be the strongest and tallest Sugar Pine

I am the one who will offer shelter for the animals
Family, friends, country and the people who trust me
Those who need safety and want to live inside me
I will be the strongest Sugar Pine seed that you have ever seen



ARC Has Changed Me Into A Better Person

It was a sunny and hot day. When they first told me that we were going to climb I felt nothing but happiness, but then when I saw it I was terrified. One of the most daunting experiences at ARC was our rock climbing adventure. I remember I climbed a mountain and fell as a child and I knew that I had to overcome my fear of falling. I learned to keep going hand by hand over the ledge and not look down so I would not lose trust in myself. I gained a sense of accomplishment at the top of the mountain. I felt triumph when I climbed to the top. I felt inside me an adrenaline rush after mastering the mountain. I felt like asking, "Why didn't I give myself a chance before?" But, now that I know I will give myself a chance overtime there are new things that are happening in my life or in any kind of activity. Rock climbing was a new accomplishment, but being alone for a whole day in the wilderness allowed me to reflect upon my entire life. Because I have worked hard and was willing to try anything no matter how fearful I was, I have learned to succeed and believe in myself.

During the 24 hour solo, when ARC required the students to be alone, I experienced many painful memories. However, I know that I don't want to live in the past, but in the future. Spending time next to the creek was interesting because I felt an array of emotions. I felt sadness, accomplishment, happiness and disappointment. I also thought about college and getting accepted and choosing a good career. I felt accomplishment after thinking about my goals. I also thought about becoming someone and doing something for my family and my country. I sat next to the big tree and I thought, if I wasn't here what would I be doing? Would I forgive myself for poor choices that I had made in the past? If I hadn't come to ARC, would I know how strong I am? I was thinking about myself and about my family back home. Thinking too much wasn't a good idea for me because everything comes back, including past problems, but thinking about them makes me stronger and I'll never give up in life. I felt I needed to find alone time because it helped me a lot to think about part of my life that I thought I would never think about.

Pushing through the terrifying thoughts was a struggle that felt like it would never end, but I completed the solo without the flashbacks putting me down. The scariest things I thought while I was spending time alone was a flashback from my past life in Ethiopia when I was forced to return to Eritrea. I saw killing and fighting. Seeing the bad memories again was stressful. When I was young visiting my family in an Eritrean village and I saw a man bit by a snake. All he did was cry and shout and he was in a lot of pain. I hate thinking about it. I also saw a man on television bit in the stomach by his own snake. At first he didn't care but after hour and hour it got more painful and he had

to go to the hospital. There wasn't even blood, just white stuff on the side and it was disgusting. And I thought about "If I'm bit by a snake in the woods no one will be there to help me." Since I came to the U.S I haven't been able to tell anyone about my problems. During my solo, when I was having flashbacks, I wanted to call the instructor and I wanted to give up. I thought about the mountain and how I climbed it without giving up. I told myself to shut up and I wrote the stories about my flashbacks in my journal. I cried tears of anger. "Why does my life have to be like this?" and "Why can't I just have a relax minute." I was terrified having all my memories back. I didn't know what to do. I just told myself to keep writing. I wrote in English. I tried to write it as a poem. All the people getting killed with knives like chopping onions or tomatoes. When I was a kid I used to say "I wish I was 17 so I could do something about it." Now that I am 17, I know that it is not easy to solve problems right away. It is not easy to forget my fears, or take about thoughts with the people that I love, despite my efforts. I was afraid because I had never slept alone before in my whole life. I have pride in facing my fears.

Sometimes being alone is helpful, just as having time to read and write is important. When I arrived my reading and writing skills were not as strong as they have become. When we read in class we discuss the meanings of words. I ask myself questions as I read and write. We get silent reading time and I get to read things more than once. I learn new words by writing the word on my hand and studying the word when



I play, or when I am eating a snack. This helps me learn new vocabulary. Writing about life in a poem was very helpful. I used to write poems in my language about my life. It was easy and fun it also helped me write in English because I translated the poem into English. Even though it's hard to translate the words, I still try my best to improve and find the truest words.

By challenging myself to improve my reading/writing skills I became more involved with school work. At first I never read out loud

in class, but now I share my poem with the group. Every time I read back in San Francisco I would use a dictionary to see the big words. At ARC I continued to learn new words and I practiced reading out loud. It was frustrating to read out loud because everyone would stop to correct me. It was stressful having people stop me because I would not pronounce the word correctly. It also helped me by trying to spell out big words that I had learned, or asking people what the word means and how can I use it in a sentence. When we run in the morning I try to remind myself what I have learned so I try to test myself by using the words with the students. Using difficult vocabulary words was also fun because it made me think that I was becoming someone important. Writing more personal stories helped me see the big picture of my life. I also wrote a poem in class and showed my friend how it sounded. It also helped me a lot when my editor told me if there were grammar mistakes that I made. This entire ARC experience has changed me by challenging me with reading and writing practice in class and outside of class. ARC has taught me to look forward, to be strong, independent and to work hard in school on everything that I need to improve. ARC showed me how to learn to enjoy the company of others and also to be open with them.

ARC has taught me to be strong for the future, and I don't need to be scared of challenges and working independently. Before I got accepted into ARC I was more down on myself,

and I never gave myself a chance to work hard to succeed; also, I used to give up before allowing myself the opportunity to improve my reading and writing skills as much I have improved my skills right now. As I experienced my fears, I was able to grow and change my skills. It was very hard to climb the diagonal rope ladder because it was moving. When I got to the top of the ladder, it started shaking which

caused me to shake. this made me feel like it was going to break. At the end I had to jump off from the diagonal to catch the trapeze. In class, I used to put my self down by saying negative things about myself like "I can't do that" or "I don't even deserve to be with students that are better than me." Back in San Francisco, in class, I never used to be a hard worker. If it was too hard, then I didn't do the work. But ARC has changed me by giving me challenging activities that will help me to work as hard as I did this summer.

salvador meza lemus

I Am A Sequoia Tree

I am a Sequoia Tree
powerful, awesome, and natural.
Always trying to grow up
and never look down.

Reaching my expectations
getting taller and taller each time.
Feeling the breeze of the air
moving my branches
and learning new skills everyday.

The skills that I learn
all the time are the roots that
hold me in place.
Like the education and the confidence
that I have in myself
trying to make the right decisions
to support these roots.

That's what I'm building
A hard surface,
that keeps me from falling
or braking into little pieces.
Trying hard to perform
and put into action
the things that I learn each day of my life.

But not everything is easy,
there are also rocks in the way of my roots
and these are the fears that I have
like not being able to understand the English language.
The pressure that I have as a teen
challenges me to make difficult decisions
so I can take the right path
and not ruin my life with a mistake.

Some of the problems that affect my growth
are that I'm not very serious in the things that I do
or I don't put that 100% in my work
and that always leads to even more pressure.
But I also make good decisions,
as a Sequoia tree grows straight
I'm growing straight too.
When I study hard and get good grades
I then feel proud of myself
and I keep going, and going.

Expectations,
every Sequoia tree expects to grow and be healthy.

Respecting its surroundings
and gaining strength from its community.
It's hard to find a good spot to grow,
but there is always help from my family and friends.
My family, the best thing in my life,
expect me to grow and be healthy,
without them I would be weak.



My friends are always
there for me,
as squirrels are there
for the tree.
They give me support,
and motivate me to reach
my highest goals.

Through the process of
growing and getting strong
I gain knowledge
and awareness
This I will use
to be a medical doctor
and save lives.
Helping everyone, including
the trees around me.

Trying hard and never giving up
is one of my characteristics,
it may be hard to be physically active
but at the end it's worth it,
because I maintain myself
happy, healthy, and strong.

The water that touches my roots
and gives me life
is the blood that runs through my veins,
and through my heart,
So I am able to create
and plant new seeds,
which someday will also have healthy, growing hearts.

Despite obstacles to my growth,
light returns and enables me to continue
growing and supporting my community,
making a positive difference.
I am never afraid to learn and ask questions.
Those are my goals
and that's what I am
a Sequoia tree reaching the top of the sky.

The Trip To My Growth

When I came to ARC I felt very excited and I knew that I was going to gain confidence in myself. I knew not everything would be easy; that there were challenges I may have to face. I define ARC as my accomplishments, risks, challenges, highlights, sacrifices, goals and dreams. I feel accomplished every time I finish a hard job, or a scary moment. Rock climbing, rappelling, hiking and the ropes course have all presented risks and challenges. I felt a sense of accomplishment after all these challenges. It is incredible the feeling of accomplishment after taking daily risks and challenges. I expected to gain a lot of knowledge through the 40-day course, but I didn't expect the trials to be so hard. White water rafting and getting letters from my family and friends were highlights. My greatest goal is to graduate from the course and see my family again after forty days. I want to earn good grades in my sophomore year, finish high school, and go to University (Stanford or Fresno State). This course has taught me that nothing is impossible. I know high school will be hard, like hiking uphill, but I am hopeful that there is always light at the end of the trail.

I remember the day of our first hike like it was yesterday. Through the course, especially the opening day, I learned to never give up, to push myself beyond my limits because hiking is possible. The phrase "I can't" does not exist in my vocabulary. The first day in ARC was unforgettable, I would never forget how tired I was during the hiking, through the whole way I thought over a hundred times about giving up because I struggle uphill. I remember that my backpack weight was horribly heavy. However, there were also highlights from the first hike, like crossing the bridge under the waterfall. It felt like heaven. I would never forget the motivation that I received from my friends and I saw everyone trying their best. I remember that I was "Pro-lific Pen" and on my first hike I asked my friends for their accomplishment of the day. Jairo said, "Hiking a lot without stopping," that was my accomplishment too. On every expedition we challenge ourselves to do activities that I would never do alone.

I didn't really know there was a Salvador inside of me that could do unbelievable things. I can't recognize myself because I feel that I'm living a dream, 30 days ago I was another person. I would never challenge myself to do: rock climbing, white water rafting, rappelling, hiking, running, cooking, and leading. Now I know that I can do all those tasks, I will still try to grow more physically and mentally. I may still feel tired but I'm not afraid.

Through the course I grew mentally and physically. I remember in our second expedition we kayaked, white water rafted, rock climbed and the rappelled. When I was water rafting I was afraid of the rapids, and thought that at any minute, or any second I was going to fall off the boat, and no one would notice. Slowly, I gained confidence in the water, the boat, and my friends I felt it was the greatest thing I had ever done in my life. I wanted to do it again, especially going into the rapids because those were my favorite parts.

Kayaking, I was very frustrated with the kayak because it didn't followed directions. My hands were tired and the water was very hard to push, the sun was on my

face and I thought hundred times about jumping into the water and refreshing my body. Jesus and I were far behind the other kayakers. We tried our best all the time, and no matter how hard we tried the boat was going to the left, to the right, backward, but never straight forward. I learned that patience is important if you really want to succeed.

Rock climbing, I will never forget that either and I hope I challenge myself to do it again. I remember I was tired and scared at the same time, and I didn't trust the harness on my waist. I thought I was going to fall and hit myself on the rocks, and I didn't want to look down. It was hard to find the holds to grab and pull myself up and keep climbing. My feet hurt and my hands were tired, but I still challenged myself to do it again on a harder route. This time I wasn't as scared as the first time, and I even took a minute and looked at the nice view behind me and one second to look down. I felt accomplished.

Rappelling, I think the hardest part of it was climbing up the mountain especially the obstacles that were there like the big rocks and the parts where I had to get help from other friends so I could keep going. The creepy and excited part was when I got to the top and they told me now I had to go down. I was scared, I wanted to be one of the first ones so I wouldn't get too nervous through the process of seeing my friends go down. My face was of a determined fifteen years old who was so excited to rappel I tried to look strong, but inside of me I knew I didn't mean it, I was so scared. I start doing it with the motivation that my friends gave me; I was shaking, going slowly down doing the break strategy trusting the hardness this time and enjoying the last thirty seconds of repelling in the rock and then turned to be hanging on the air. I was scared of

looking down into the canyon and look the view, but then I dare myself to do it. Behind me there was a wonderful view, trees, mountains, the sky and the clouds made an awesome combination like a very peaceful time. I heard my friends motivating me not to be scared, but I wasn't scared. I was amazed. When I got to the bottom I wanted to do it again. A week after I did the ropes course and I wasn't scared of heights anymore.

The ropes course, I never thought it was going to be that challenging especially going up the ladder, and keeping my balance. The least important thing for me was the height, I wasn't scared any-

more but I did want to keep my balance and don't fall. It was a very hard process for me putting a lot of strength into it and set my mind to get to the exciting part where I get to slide in the zip line. Finally I got there and I slid down feeling overjoyed, the sliding was awesome and I believe I overcome my panic of roller coasters. Everything is in my mind, if I set my mind to do extraordinary challenges I know I'll do it. I can't wait to go home and share my experiences with my family and friends. They are going to be amazed and they are not going to believe what I did in ARC.

My family is not going to believe that my friends and I hiked with our backpacks 10,000 feet above the earth. We did it because we are hardcore mosquitos and we never quit. Being in the wilderness for eight or five days is awesome, everyday I saw new things: new trees,

new lakes, and new animals, and I got to learn new names like Ten Lakes, the yellow belly marmot, and Sequoia and Ponderosa trees. I will always remember the confidence I gained from interviewing a person that I didn't know. Speaking in public is a challenge that I plan to face. I don't want to shake or cry when I read my poem in front of my family. I'm going to try to do my best, because I feel like this is going to be the biggest challenge in the course. I'm going to be very happy and emotional to see my family again after forty days. There was a day when I stop and think about how valuable they are. My Solo was a moment of reflection about my family, my friends, nature, and me.

During my "Solo" in the third expedition I thought about my family, I missed them and I feel like this ten days left are forever. I remember when I was away from my family just two days in Mexico, I was crying when I saw them again after two days so I really think that this is going to be the biggest challenge in my fifteen year old life during the 40 day course. My mom, my dad, my brother, and my sisters are very especial and I know that they loved me as much as I loved them. I also thought about my ARC family, my hardcore mosquitoes brothers and sisters and how we have been facing our fears challenging ourselves to grow and never giving up. We are a family and I'm part of this family that helps me grow and motivate me to reach my goals. I feel so lucky to be here with them challenging myself everyday of my life. In the "Solo" I took some time to look at the view around me, it was a totally awesome view I was wondering if my friends were looking at the same mountains or the same trees. The mountains covered with snow, the beautiful green carpet on the mountains, and the little animals that were passing by me like the chipmunks, and deers, they were so special, the fresh air, and the bright sunlight that led time for the moon to come out. During the night I was wondering if my family was looking at the same moon, the same stars, that maked me feel connected with them, I felt that special connection between all the people that I love. I would never forget this night, and the days I been through. I wanted the instructors to do one more Solo day because I wanted to keep enjoying the peace that I felt and the view.

I bet I'm going to be talking about ARC all the rest of the summer, and the whole school year. My friends are going to be so excited to heard about my experience in ARC and I'm going to be so happy to tell them. I learned to be a very determined person, never giving up and reaching my goals. I learned to have service and help my friends in the jobs that we do at base camp, and the backcountry. I learned to have Integrity doing the right things and learning lessons about it, and I also learned to be compassionate with everyone in the group. I'm so proud of myself and of the core values that we have in ARC, this core values are important and they are going to help me for the rest of my life. Sarah, Jen, Alyssa, Aaron, Tim, Dylan, Andres, Sierra, and Bee have been great helpers and I feel so thankful because they had helped me a lot through the course; they have pushed me to challenge myself to go beyond my limits. Every peak, each step that I took, all the decisions that I made were very helpful. It motivated me to succeed in life, in the course, to finish my essay, to finish the rock climbing, the repelling, the kayaking, the hiking, and the running in the morning; it helped me to keep going and to don't ever give up. Not everything was easy, not everything was hard but all the little challenges and highlights in the course were awesome in the whole word extension a...w...e...s...o...m...e. Now I know I'm awesome too, and I can do all the challenges that I face...I'm a "HARD CORE MOSQUITO."



vera reyes

I Am What I Want To Be

I am a Sequoia Seed
Ready for that wildfire
To set me free.
The unexpected and the unknown await ahead of me
My only fear
Not ever becoming a flourishing and independent tree

Inside that pinecone
I shared my life with other eager little seeds
Patience and hope took over
Very few seeds would survive
Life is all about taking chances
I asked myself, could I be the one?

Yes, of course
I had waited so long
Such an anxious little seed I had been
Determined when the fire came and opened this pinecone
And all the leaf litter was cleared
I would leap to the soil and begin to succeed

The fire then came and with it life's opportunities
My pinecone had been my protection
But blinded me from seeing the real thing
I never realized how fragile and small I was
All the time I was expected by everyone
To become something they weren't able to be

Being Mexican with very high grades
Expected to make the most money
To never burn my face in the fields
Like my dad is now
Unlike my mother who cleans
Be the one who sits and works in the office

Being two similar trees
They wanted to form me into a Cedar
Embraced for its lumber and commercial value
Remembered only by the planks and boards it produces
I don't want my worth to be determined by how much I make

Unforgettable, appreciated,
And protected in its own ecosystem
This little seeds wants to grow up to be a Sequoia tree
No lumber will ever be used to remember me
I can always be happy
Without having to be materialistic
Like an insensitive machine

Walking into a boring office everyday
Making the most money
Might sound convenient
But as my soul will soon die
So will the chances of being who I am destined to be
I don't want to be their Cedar tree

Expectations drug me deeper into the soil
The fear of failure
Was like a rock above me
I could never sprout

People tried to step on this little seed
Tried making a trail where I didn't want one to exist
I was always told who I would grow up to be
And I was never given the chance to express myself

My mom, my hero, my best friend
Nurturing me with her sun and the rain
But she can't always do everything
Because sometimes the forces of nature
Will alter what she had in store for me

People don't realize
I am the only one who can decide
What I want to be
The one who will sprout to become a Sequoia Tree
The one who will still make her parents proud

I am a Sequoia seed
Ready for the soil to push me free
Future forest fires await ahead of me

My only fear
To become what they all want me to be.



I Am No Longer That Child

"I can't do it!" my enemy told me. I didn't want to listen to her, yet the words came through my mouth as I rappelled 200 feet down The Toad. I wanted to forget the word regret. I usually quit when I left my comfort zone but this summer, I no longer wanted to be that child. Forty days without my loved ones and overcoming many challenges without them made it a new experience. Thanking ARC for enabling me to find myself isn't enough. The program helped me transform into the person I longed to be. The memories, challenges, lessons, and transformations I experienced, will help me give back to my community.

You failed me. You told me I couldn't when you knew I could. Never letting me trust others even myself. It was hard to ignore you; hard to let go. But it wasn't the person I wanted to forever be. Back in the sixth grade, I faced rock climbing and heights. Not everyone made it to the top. As I climbed, my hands ached and sweated. Everyone looked at me. Scared, I couldn't take the frustration and the pain anymore. I gave up. I didn't want to keep going. As they lowered me down, I didn't feel an accomplishment as the other students did. As time passed by, this memory haunted me in my head. I felt ashamed and weak.

When I came to ARC, I waited to face my fear of heights again. When my chance to rock climb came again I desired to reach the top. Tired, sweaty, and full of desperation I reached the top. I realized that strength and determination made me reach the top. However, trying to rappel turned into a nightmare. "I can't," my head made me yell. I knew I could, but I couldn't bear to look down. Thankfully, I received help from one of the instructors. Coming back down with someone made me feel safe. It felt better to face my fear of climbing up a mountain than to live with another regret. However, trusting people proved more challenging.

I discovered that first I needed to trust myself before I tried to trust anyone else. We were faced with trying to accomplish the Spider Web. Everyone had to go through the web without making the bell ring and becoming dinner for the spider. I remember encouraging others to trust me when it came time to pick them up and take them safely to the other side. However, when my turn came, I freaked out. I couldn't imagine anyone trying to pick me up. They all counted on me to complete the Spider Web. I stood there for five minutes trying to convince them not to pick me up, but I felt deep inside that I wanted to trust these people who were my family and friends. After I allowed myself to trust them, we all passed successfully. I felt like I crossed a line where I could now trust my team.

Like a child, that fears many things, I came to ARC with a phobia of lighters. As a small girl, I received my first burn with a lighter, and as I grew up, I didn't want anything to do with them. When we hiked in the backcountry, we used lighters to cook. The first two times I cooked, I felt safe to ask the counselors or my friends to light the stove for me. Eventually, Aaron asked me to light it by myself. Scared and embarrassed, I didn't want my team to know how I felt. They soon noticed something wrong when I just stared at the lighter with tears coming out of my eyes. At the age of seventeen, I hated to be crying at that moment and mad because I never overcame my fear of lighters. Aaron soon asked me to spark the lighter

with him as I held his hand. I remember closing my eyes as I lit the stove for the first time. I did this many times until I felt comfortable and now I can light a stove by myself. There were still many hard lessons and challenges to come.

I learned many things about myself. On expeditions, we were often late waking and getting ready. I wondered what caused our delay. I would wake up and pack all my stuff in time and we were still late. I soon realized that I only cared about myself and not my group. I decided to pitch in and help the iron chefs who needed help packing and people who were folding tents. I noticed a big change after that. Selfishness wasn't the only thing that I learned about myself.

I then started to notice my immaturity. I didn't focus enough on my job and found myself messing around in the kitchen when I was suppose to be washing dishes. When it came to backpacking or doing something that I least wanted to do, my mood immediately soured. The expression on my face didn't help encourage anyone at all. The feeling of going uphill with a forty pound backpack, running out of air, dirty with sweat, feeling the pain in my back and legs drained me. Unfortunately, it took a long time to think of backpacking in a positive way. It proved to be a difficult challenge that took endurance. In the past, I always got way from doing things I didn't want to do. Here at ARC, I had no choice. I got homesick and became very unhappy. I tried to overcome this mood by getting closer to my team. They cared for and supported me. However, this mood made me take an extreme action. I was about to learn my hardest lesson yet.



Homesickness sometimes felt unbearable. I found myself crying during many events. I never missed my family like that before. I hated it even more that when I came to ARC, I didn't say goodbye to them because I argued with them the day before. I was scared of their anger with me and afraid that they wouldn't miss me or show up to graduation. Once again, regrets came into my head. After several days, I used the computer to email my sister an apology letter. I never received anything from her in response. I felt guilty for breaking the rules by using the Internet. Worse yet, I got into a habit of checking to see if I received anything from her. When I didn't, I gave up. I knew that the counselors would find out. When they did I felt so low and no bigger than an ant. My family and I always value integrity and respect. I disrespected the counselors and I lost their trust. At the moment

of my confession, I felt ashamed of myself. As one of the oldest participants in the course, I considered myself an example to everyone and I let my team down. I didn't get in trouble but I knew that these types of mistakes could ruin opportunities in the real world. I learned to challenge myself to never again lose someone's trust. This helped me realize that we won't always receive a second chance. I regretted what I did but I knew they forgive me. It still hurt me.

The ARC program helped me appreciate my family and my community. ARC has four core values: integrity, service, compassion, and determination. I saw myself full of integrity, always doing the right thing but when I broke one of the rules I no longer felt like I knew the meaning of it. I learned from my mistakes and never again did the wrong thing again. Service was my favorite. I found that I enjoy washing dishes. At home, I hated to wash dishes after dinner. It soon made me upset that I never liked cleaning the house. At ARC, I volunteered to clean up. Though I received a lot of compassion from my team, I also learned how to give. We all found ways to care and motivate each other when we were faced with a challenge. No matter how tough the challenge, I was always determined. I feel like in these past weeks I accomplished more than anything I ever did in my whole life. As we prepared for our final meals for the last week, we decided to thank our California farmers, who live a life of service, by preparing something that was in season. I want to go home and value my dad; he is also a farmer who's committed to what he does. As I write this I miss my family so much. Being the most days without them made me value them even more. I learned that I shouldn't wait till it's too late to show service and compassion to my loved ones.

I feel as if I have wasted 17 years of my life being so ignorant, closed by regrets, selfish, and so closed up with my community that now is the time to give back. Throughout this 40-day program, I seized the opportunity to become more responsible of my duties and myself. I want to go back home and help my mom with chores without complaining or finding an excuse. I want to take the four core values with me and set an example for my younger siblings. I'm going to think of others before I only think about myself; for instance, my school, family, and friends. Since I know much more about recycling, once I go home I want to start composting in my own back yard. I missed my family so much I also want to form a stronger bond between them. More than just reuniting with them, I want to play a larger role in their lives. I truly love my family and all this time I knew they loved me as well but I never took the time to care.

Until this day, I continue to reflect on myself and on things that I can do better. I know now that I can do anything. I've always lived with an I can't and now living with an I can. I am no longer the child who backpacked her way to Hetch Hetchy on day one and thought she would not be able to hike 6 miles. I remember the time I read something from a past ARC student who wrote, "My body could only walk 3 miles, but my mind could walk 6 miles." I leave behind the regrets and the old me, only taking the memories, accomplishments, challenges, lessons learned, pictures, and friends with me. Yosemite, my home, will always be in my heart. I will never look back on the should've, could've, would've because there is no time machine to fix it. I start a new life, giving a second chance to myself and my community, knowing that ARC has helped me realize that I can do everything I set my mind to.

community interviews

On July 2nd, halfway through our summer course, eleven community members volunteered their time to be mentors for our students. These are excerpts from the narrative biographies students wrote about their partners.

Don't Hold Back

On a warm morning I looked around and saw nature on all my sides. I could look at so many elements of nature but felt extremely nervous every time I saw my watch ticking closer to 10 am. I would listen to the birds chirping while they flew to different trees. I looked around and was amazed by the bright green grass. I heard the repetitive noise that the sprinklers made, and I felt excited for what would happen during the day. One by one I started seeing new faces join the circle. All of the interviewees looked so nice and polite. One of the adults caught my eye when she sat in the chair next to mine. The way that she smiled made me feel more comfortable. I introduced myself to her before anybody else. I felt like she was a very caring and outgoing person when she spoke about herself with such confidence. When I heard Jen announce the names, I wished inside me to have the opportunity to partner with the young woman. I wanted to be able to know more about the woman wearing a professional uniform. I wanted to interview Jenny, the first person that shook my hand.

- *Alma Garcia*



Going Towards Her Dreams

Once I started talking to Belinda I learned more about her specialty as an English teacher to make her grammar lessons fun, her way of staying happy even in the challenging moments in her life that she faces and her way of following her core value “integrity”, to her self because she doesn't lead a life she doesn't want to live and she goes towards what she wants and fights for it. All of this is what defines her strong and confident personality she owns now. Belinda chose to be an English teacher because she enjoys making learning fun for people who don't expect it, and wants to make a difference.

- *Angela Aguirre*

Faith

Teresa's wish is to one day be able to teach at a community college or on an online course, and if possible travel as part of her teaching job, to places like Maine. Teresa thinks that something that needs to be improved in her community is education, because they are trying to shut down the only high school in her town. If the district closes the school, the children would have to commute approximately two hours a day. She hopes to be able to play a role in keeping the school open. I know she'll succeed because she is an extremely determined person.

- *Cindy Chavarria*





Realizing Where I Am

Armando is a person that has strong emotion for nature and he believes that what he does has an impact that modifies the community. Armando serves on board of four different organizations that all are public education entities that promote understanding about human effects on the health of our planet. As his early career, he worked as a park ranger for 32 years. He was inspired to be a nature protector since he was a child; he did magnificent research on different types of bugs, birds and plants. He felt great when he told stories about the unexpected discoveries of nature. Armando has been working for the Development University Relations in UC Merced to help raise money and

support, leading his natural history trip and directing for the Water District. Teaching the natural history trip was his favorite interest; it often surprised him by watching youths in the moment of discovery. He is the kind of person that likes to give great gratitude to nature and teach people how to understand landscapes..

- Jason Wu

An Experience I Will Never Forget

One of Steve's core values is lifetime learning, because he believes it is a special gift given to people. We are a species that has a capacity to learn and no animal is capable of that. Steve's goals in life for the future are continuing to work with national parks and serve the University of California forever. And until the day he retires, he will still love to continue working with youth. "Nature livens your senses and reconverts back to making your life even better." Steve has a strong belief that nature changes people's lives and encourages us to enjoy learning how to learn. He inspired me to pursue my career as a nurse in national parks that take interns year round. And he inspired me to continue wanting to learn new things no matter how old I get. Steve has definitely made an impact in my life from that short hour I had to interview him. He's a great human being and I have a great feeling that he will change people's lives. I will take home with me his advice and his encouragement. For I have a feeling that one day I will grow up to be as successful as he is today.

- Jenny Hernandez



A Musical Match

Throughout our interview, Brian taught me so much. As we sat in the shade of the tall Ponderosa tree, we discovered our common love for music. He gave me great advice, telling me to expand my musical interests, which will be of great help if I want to go into a musical career. Brian told me not to let my passion for music die after high school because if I keep going with it I'll end up finding something wonderful. As for education, he told me to take every opportunity that comes to me; it will do me good in the long run. But the most important piece of advice that Brian gave me, as we sat under that tree was, "Take risks. Not fool-

ish risks, but calculated risks..." As he said this, I realized I take a lot of risks and often don't think of the consequences and this advice will help me think of my actions and also help me think ahead.

- Jesus Samaniego



My Interview with a Complete Stranger

Have you ever had to interview a complete stranger? I have. It was the interview day and as I roll up to the Wawona hotel I could feel my stomach turning. We sat in a circle on white chairs. As I wait patiently I could hear the rumbling cars on the highway and the mowing machine mowing the golf course. I see the beautiful foxglove flowers moving against the wind and the American robin looking for its prey. Without warning I saw all the interviewees walking towards us, with butterflies in my stomach I stood up and introduced myself to almost everyone. We sat back down and Jen started to call out the names we were going to interview. She called out my name then

Ruth's, the smile on her face told me that she was very excited and so was I. She was wearing a white blouse that matched her flowing brown skirt. I lead her to my interview spot next to a ponderosa pine tree and I started the interview. I loved talking to Ruth because as I started getting into greater detail with her I realized we had so much in common. Her compassion towards her family, job, and community are her top priorities. The challenges and risks Ruth has taken has made her the strong and intelligent woman she is today.

- *Liliana Zapata*

A Look into the Future I Want

Martin has overcome many challenges; one big challenge for Martin was to go to college. He was afraid to fail, afraid of new things or making mistakes, but he took a risk and went to college. He was scared of the big school where there were a lot of students and rooms. He didn't know what to do in that moment, but he knew a few friends and one professor that helped him. He liked to take risks, and he wanted an education for him and his family. He overcame the challenge and graduated from college. Martin didn't abandon his language or culture, but he gained knowledge and experiences. He told me that "knowledge is power, and power is knowledge." He speaks two languages and has two cultures. Martin is volunteering in his community by working in schools, talking to students, and supporting programs like ARC. He also is a volunteer who works with parents and school principals. Martin sees the greatest need in the comprehension of parents. He wants them to participate with schools, understand the opportunities of this country, and know how to support their children.

- *Luis Zuñiga*



Yes You Can Do It

Linda works as a professional with community politics. She also works with Congressman Cardoza. She started working on a farm and then she progressed to be a community organizer. The fact she did that shows a lot of strength. When she was young working with farmers she really didn't know if that job was going to take her into a higher level with more opportunities. She has worked for 40 years volunteering with people and as director of a nonprofit. She does all kind of community work. Linda

started to work with farmers in 1979 and now she also works with people like ARC and other kinds of groups of people that help any way they can. Linda said, "I love helping people and justice. I like to see everyone equal and caring for each other and sharing." It does not matter where a person is from or what they look like, Linda treats that person with respect.

- *Salmé Zemmo*

The Key To Grow

Bill said, “Someone that inspired me was a teacher, this teacher was very interested in adventure and he climbed Mount Everest. He inspired me because I wanted to do the same things he does.” Bill told me that the teacher’s name was Sir John Hunt, he was the leader of the first team to climb Mount Everest in 1953. Bill is also inspired by his wife because she supports him in everything he wants to do. Bill said, “My most challenging experience was to retire, because I love my job. But living here in Yosemite has helped me overcome that challenge.” Bill loved his job because it allowed him to take care of the Earth. Something that made Bill interested in his career was the challenge, “The challenge, to take care of the environment, was just interesting for me. I love the environment,” he said. Bill also said that Toyota in American realized that cars have such a big impact on the environment and that they had to work on minimizing that environmental impact.

- *Salvador Meza Lemus*



Settling Into Your Own Skin

“Someone can take your freedom away but never your education,” Jan Andow Mendenhal said as she told me about what her grandfather had been through. “My grandfather was my inspiration,” she said. “It took courage to come to a new country.” When Jan smiled her eyes would shine, showing smile lines and many years of hard work. Coming a new country also took bravery for my parents. Like her grandfather, my parents also valued education. This was one of many things that Jan and I had in common. The fact that she had accomplished so much has inspired me to follow her path. We met at interview day

at the Wawona hotel. The hotel waited for the arrival of the 4th of July, decorated by banners that hung on the front porch. Jan sat next to me, a complete stranger moments earlier, but now a friend. From the moment we shook hands, it felt like I had known her forever or that perhaps I had experienced my first *deja vu*. There was no doubt that we were both bubbly and outgoing, never being too timid to start a conversation. Along with that, she reminded me of what summer spirit should be. I don’t really know what it was. Maybe it was her white jeans that matched her white flowery blouse, her soft voice, or once again that smile that kept dominating the nearby sounds of the sprinklers, cars, and the mowing machine on the other side of the street.

- *Vera Reyes*



Dear family,

During the past 40 days we have been on many adventures, with risks and challenges. We pushed ourselves to our potentials and came out of our comfort zones. Our biggest challenge was your absence. We missed our family's traditional plates back at home ... baked potatoes, enchiladas, injera, sopes... Not having your support while we faced our fears and insecurities made it difficult. An extra challenge for us in this course was having five minute showers (smell armpits) after each expedition. But don't worry, we took one this morning. One of our most emotional and physical adventures, was rappelling down a two-hundred foot cliff. As we lowered ourselves, we reflected on our memories back home and the person we used to be. Many of the times, we showed no gratitude toward you. Before leaving for ARC, we remembered the excitement that came to us as we thought about leaving everyone and everything behind for 40 days, but later realized that we needed you in our lives and more than anything, we depended on all of you. Most of us believed that we appreciated and valued you but we were wrong. When we came to ARC, we learned to be more appreciative of you and our community. Back then, we never appreciated the things you provided for us and we never realized how you broke a sweat to sacrifice yourselves to give us what we wanted. Now we know that we cannot give you too much love and support. The truth is that as we write this letter, there are no words that can explain how we feel about you and all that you have done to raise us and be the young adults that we are today. There is more we wish to say but we hope that our future actions will speak for our appreciation. We also want you to know that we love you and that you will always be a part of our lives no matter where our future takes us.

Thank you, The Hardcore Mosquitoes!

Querida familia

Durante los últimos cuarenta días nosotros hemos estado en muchas aventuras, con riesgos y desafíos. Nosotros nos hemos esforzado fuera de nuestros límites, y salimos fuera de nuestra zona de confortabilidad. Nuestro mayor desafío fue el vacío de la ausencia de ustedes. Extrañamos nuestros platillos tradicionales de nuestras propias familias...papas al horno, enchiladas, injera, sopes... El no tener el apoyo de ustedes mientras desafiamos nuestros miedos e inseguridades nos dificultó el proceso. Otro desafío era tomar duchas de un simple y corto periodo de cinco minutos (olerse la axilas) después de cada expedición, pero no se preocupen tomamos una ducha esta mañana. Uno de nuestros desafíos mas grandes emocional y físicamente, fue el descender de una montaña de aproximadamente doscientos pies de altura. Mientras nos descendíamos, reflexionábamos en nuestras memorias en nuestro hogar y la persona que solíamos ser. Muchas de las veces, demostrábamos ninguna señal de gratitud sobre ustedes. Antes de venir al programa de, recordamos la emoción de la idea de estar lejos de todas las cosas y de todas las personas por cuarenta días, pero realizamos después de que los necesitamos en nuestras vidas mas que nada, dependemos todos de ustedes. La mayoría de nosotros solíamos pensar que los apreciábamos y valorábamos pero estábamos equivocados. Cuando llegamos al programa de ARC, aprendimos a apreciar más a ustedes y nuestra comunidad. Allá entonces, nosotros nunca habíamos apreciado las cosas ustedes provinieron hacia nosotros, y nunca nos dimos cuenta del trabajo y sudor que ustedes ejercen para proveer nuestras necesidades. Ahora nos damos cuenta que es imposible de dar demasiado amor y apoyo. La verdad es que al escribir esta carta, no hay palabras para explicar como nos sentimos hacia ustedes y todo lo que han hecho por nosotros para hacernos las personas que somos hoy. Hay mucho mas que queremos decirles pero esperamos que nuestras acciones en el futuro hablen por si mismo sobre nuestra apreciación. Nosotros también queremos que sepan que los amamos y de que ustedes siempre serán una gran parte de nuestra familia, no importa hacia donde nos lleve el futuro.

Agradecidamente, Los Mosquitos Bravos



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