

# adventure risk challenge

## a leadership and literacy program

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### **The Unstoppables**

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## A River to My Heart

I am a river  
Made up of tears of a mountain  
One by one  
The tears roll down slowly  
Of happiness  
Sorrow  
And pain

I started off small and weak  
Like a little creek  
But as the tears rolled down  
Gently caressing the cheeks  
I got bigger,  
Stronger

My body of water flowed  
With such a rush  
Just like my childhood,  
I had to grow up quickly  
With no time for the light of the  
warm sun,  
The happiness and joy of nature,  
To hit my water  
And reflect  
Taking up a new life style  
Living with separate parents  
Listening to over heard arguments  
The tears  
Especially  
Those of my own.  
Taking up a parenting role  
Caring for my siblings  
And mother  
All new to me

I carved my way down the mountain  
Leaving traces,  
Leaving things in the past  
Yet they stay as scars  
Leaving my mark in others hearts  
Leaving only the hidden pain  
A shadow in my heart  
In my being  
In my tiny being,  
All my life and my self  
Scar-ing  
Emotionally,  
Mentally,  
Physically.

I feel free  
Yet a strong pull  
Towards something bigger  
Yet unknown  
That pull is too strong  
I just wish to slow down

Many living feed off of me  
I provide life and hope  
They depend on me  
Stretching their roots into my water

Taking shelter within me  
Just like the trees and fish  
The giant and small  
The old and young  
They needed me.  
I'm not the mother of nature  
But I do act as if I  
This river, gave birth  
To those living things

Big boulders and dead trees  
Get in my way  
Family problems  
Self doubt  
Pain  
Loneliness  
Draping over my body  
A heavy weight upon me

My tears build up  
And yet for some strange reason  
I cannot flow through  
I think I'm going to die out  
Yet that's not what I want

All the emotion is too much  
Till I finally burst through those  
obstacles  
Feeling relief  
Letting myself break through  
I move fast  
And rapid  
Since I had so much holding me back

I survived.  
Just like I do every day.  
I think and hope  
That I am  
Strong enough to push through.

In the past I've given up  
But I give thanks  
That I  
Decided on keeping my life.  
There's still times  
When I think it's too much  
And I want it to stop  
End.  
But taking my life is not the solution  
Or a way out  
I've realized that

My family are tributaries  
Helping me push  
and reach the unknown  
They bring happiness and pain  
Support and love  
Everything they give into me  
Allows me  
To grow  
And become stronger

My mother being mother nature  
Giving me the most  
She's the main tributary  
The soil  
The trees  
Everything around me  
She is my best friend and companion.  
Giving up everything for me  
and my siblings  
So that we  
could have a better life  
Making us feel loved  
And that we  
Are something greater  
Her reason

Later in my journey  
My father became noticeable  
He was always there but unheard  
The thick leaves of the trees  
Hiding him  
muffling his voice  
As I continue flowing  
I listen to his song  
Stronger and beautiful  
Than it was before

I've realized  
I am  
Beautiful  
and strong

For the longest time  
I've ignored  
Everything in my body  
In my water  
Those precious tears  
Of happiness and joy  
Of love and care  
I've been stuck  
Far too long  
On the negatives  
Not on what really matters  
The positives.  
I treasure those tears  
As a pirate treasures his gold  
I see that those tears  
that I've ignored  
are what makes everything  
Better  
Brighter  
Bearable  
Worth living



Friends are like the whispers in the wind  
Helping along the way  
Constantly reminding me that  
I can push through  
That I will.

The way down is too far  
I am scared of that journey  
But I know  
It's the only way  
So I let myself fall  
Just like I did in life  
Even if it made me sad at first  
I was glad that I brought happiness  
to others  
They see me,  
Now a waterfall

As I look far ahead  
I know I will become  
Something bigger  
Stronger  
And more beautiful  
With my family alongs sides me  
I know I am unstoppable,  
Beating the odds everywhere I go.  
I AM a river made up of tears

# The Person I've Always Wanted To Be

Trapped in my cage of solitude, doubt, fear, and negativity, I was always thinking the worst. I remember deciding that I didn't want to apply to ARC anymore, but my mom still wanted to look into the organization. My mom encouraged me to go, since I had interest in it. I didn't want to go, but a part of me felt something weird and told me to go. I wasn't quite sure if it was because I was tired of life: the life I felt no part of, as though I was just floating by; the life from which I tried to run; the life I hated; the life I've tried to run away from multiple times with the help of blades, pills, suffocation. I always felt like if I died no one would really care, and life would be the same without me. I felt insignificant. I was just a little toy for society that was always pushed, made fun of, or hurt. I was just a bother to everyone. I decided to go to ARC not knowing what wonders were in store for me. Adventure Risk Challenge seemed like just a mere summer filled with fun and classes. But now I realize it's more than that: it is life changing. ARC has changed me for the better.

I was known as the quiet and nerdy girl at school, the one who everyone ignored. If you saw me, I was always alone. I wasn't your stereotypical cheerleader who had friends, was popular, and went to parties. I was always very shy, especially when I was younger. This year I took baby steps and actually made some friends. I decided that by joining ARC, I was going to take a risk and a giant step. I wanted to change and not be shy around people. I was tired of always being alone and on the sideline, always watching everyone else. ARC allowed me to crack my shell and just let myself out. It was fairly easy not being shy around "strangers," because they had no clue who I was before. Being around my fellow ARC students and staff made taking my giant step so much easier. They were all easy-going and I thought, "Hey this isn't bad." I gained confidence in my interacting skills. Now they see me as the outgoing person that I've always wanted to be. ARC has opened my eyes to seeing that I have to move past my shyness in order to experience greater opportunities in life.

Before, I tended to keep everything bottled up and sealed, but now that's changed. ARC helped me with my bottle, slowly opening it up and healing me. All my life it was hard to talk to people. I just wouldn't tell anyone my problems or issues. If you looked at me, you would have thought my life was perfect and nothing was wrong. I would always bottle up my emotions. I knew that keeping all my emotions to myself was bad. I didn't want to end up sick, and it was doing more damage to me than helping. Every ARC student had something, something they have kept in or something that has hurt them in their own way. Little by little we all started opening up. One didn't have to worry what others thought. It was safe here. I couldn't keep it in anymore. I opened up so much that I told my biggest secrets, my darkest secrets, my pain, things that I haven't told anyone. Opening up was like letting myself be taken by the breeze. All my emotions would spill out, but in the end I would feel so much better. It was as if this group, who I thought to be strangers, now my family, had taken everything and patched up my wounds.

I believe that a big part of being able to open up is having trust in others. I have always been the kind of person that didn't give their trust to others. I guess a lot of it was because I was afraid of getting hurt. Because of ARC, I now can trust others. I can trust others because it comes easier. Being able to trust was a hard process. But here, it's very crucial to have trust amongst ourselves. The time I gained full trust in others was on our rock climbing and rappelling expedition. It was just something that we had to have. Since I was afraid of heights it was hard to climb. Nevertheless, my group showed me that they were there to support me. They were very supportive and let me know that they had me. All I could do was trust them with my life. Ever since that day, I have been able to trust.

Rock climbing and rappelling, the hardest challenge for me, allowed me to learn many things. I learned how to trust, how to get past my greatest fears, to believe in myself, and I learned that I am proud of myself. I was first up in my group, and on the 3rd hardest climb. I felt the harness

hugging my body. All I could hear was my heart beating and my brain repeating "You can't do this. You're going to fall," like a broken record. I checked to see if they had me and I started going up the mountain of rock. I got one fourth of the way up and I started crying. I felt my legs starting to shake, my hands slipping, my lungs gasping for air, and my tears falling down. It kept getting harder and harder as I went up but I heard everyone cheering for me. They motivated me to keep going and reach the top. When I got back down, I was still crying, but my team rushed to give me high fives and hugs. They were proud of me. Rappelling was a lot harder for me; I started crying right away. My life was hanging over a cliff on a single rope! My feet were dangling under my body that was in mid air. I was so terrified. I couldn't help myself from looking down even though I already knew it was a bad idea. I looked down. I started to get paranoid. I cried and sobbed loudly, so that it was all I could hear. Doubting myself, I stayed put. No, I couldn't think that way, no. I couldn't stop there in mid air. Again, all of the students, my new family, were at the bottom cheering me on. I reached the bottom and was still crying but somehow I laughed. Excitement fills me. I pushed my comfort zone and grew and reached the bottom alive. I looked up and thought, "I made it!" I am proud, so very proud. I pushed through all my obstacles and did what I thought was impossible. I felt so happy, human, and alive.

Happiness is a great key in life. Happiness is one thing people thought I had by just glancing at me. In reality I didn't. I always put this fake mask that said, "Hey, I'm happy, my life is perfect." I used it because I thought that no one could help me. I was in a place where it was pitch dark. That was all I felt - dark, dark, and more darkness. I felt like there was no escaping this place that I've known most of my life. Everything that I went through made me feel this way. It was always

one bad thing in life after another, struggle after struggle. I was never happy, only in pain. I always dreamed about being happy. It was one of the many things in life that I really wanted. ARC has made my dream come true. The whole time here I felt light. I don't necessarily know specifically what the light was, but it was just ARC in general. I felt something I thought I couldn't feel, I felt happy and complete. I found myself laughing all the time and having this smile upon my face. This smile and laugh of mine didn't feel fake. It was all mine and truthful. I started to laugh and smile all the time while just talking to others and during the expeditions. It was an amazing feeling obtaining this emotion of happiness. ARC has helped me discover the happiness I've dreamed of and always read about. I am very thankful for that.

I am also thankful for all the skills I have learned. In ARC I have learned to be a great leader. Many things make up a great leader such as compassion, service, integrity, trust, and empathy.

Through this 40-day course, I have gained many leadership skills. I was able to be there for others and become a great leader. When I was first head honcho, leader of the day, it was at base-camp. I remember being scared since I thought I was a horrible leader. It was hard for me because we had a barbecue and many people attended. I was still scared to speak up but I was determined to get through the day strong. The group gave me wonderful feedback and I used that to improve my leadership skills. The second time I was head honcho was during the third expedition. I was in a bad mood, but I still manage to do a great job. I was able to put my emotions aside and do my job as a leader. I encouraged everyone since it was a hard hike. My last and final head honcho day was on teach the youth day. I was able to be a leader to about 30 kids including ARC students. I was stressed but I was able to handle it. It was a great experience because I was able to apply my skills to other people other than those in ARC. I started off as an ok leader and worked my way up. I am now a confident and strong leader, which I thought I could never be. ARC allowed me to acquire all the great skill of a leader.

Adventure Risk Challenge is an amazing organization. It's not only a leadership and outdoors program, but a home for many. It's a place where people find hope, happiness, confidence, love, and many other great things. ARC isn't just made up of staff and students, but of a family. I am very grateful that I decided to come. ARC has transformed me to who I am now, a person I am proud to be. Everything I've learned here I will take home with me. I will be more open with my family and will trust others. I will have the state of mind that I could do anything if I believe in myself, just like I did during rock climbing. I am now a happy person and I will try to have a positive outlook life. I hope to find many new opportunities because I have now opened up my shell and moved passed my shyness. ARC has helped me discover the real me and create the person I am now, the person I've always wanted to be. I am forever grateful for ARC.



I am a black bear

As a baby cub  
Becoming an independent bear  
In a place where people judge in how you should act  
Such as mature and strong human beings  
Not knowing how it might be  
When I pop out  
Of my mother's den that  
She has built for me to protect me  
From predators

I am a black bear

With strength,  
Trying to push all the way through the rock slides of life  
Set to slowly block my way to success  
By means of shortage  
Covering the berries that sustain me

Overcome my obstacles  
And be something to shatter the rocks  
Clearing the path for those who follow me

I am a black bear

I'm surrounded by strong roots and evergreen leaves that  
Have seen me grow,  
Filled with goals and determination  
To being always a better person  
They've been carefully teaching me how  
To survive in the wilderness

Showing me where the berries and nutrients are  
To use the wind to  
Find the direction of success  
In having no worries of how its going to be in this cruel  
world

I am a black bear

I have my moments of shine  
During the spring  
Full of warmth  
And coziness

When pride and courage take place  
To fulfill the pursuit of happiness  
With no rejections that will catch up to me



Experiences tell me that  
Persistently trying my best I can conquer anything from  
The highest peak, to the lowest fracture on earth  
From my journey occupied with struggles  
To being  
An excellent English speaker  
With hope it will open more doors for me.

I am a black bear

I have my ups and downs  
When the sun is too warm  
The water too cold  
Wanting to give up

People would just look over me  
See my size and claws  
Think that I'm a ruthless animal  
When I would be scared of a hovering bee

Wanting someone to  
Share my salmon with  
Or my honey  
Napping in the falling sun too

Wanting my footsteps to be printed in  
The heart of the valley I walked in  
With confidence  
And determination  
I am a black bear!!

# Transformed Into A Better Person

The Christian I knew before coming to ARC had plenty of things going on in his life. He had never gone rock climbing or been away from home for 40 days before. When I first did the weekend retreats I was thinking this wasn't as hard and that the 40 days would be easy. I thought that the 40 day course would be easy because during the retreats I didn't miss any of the things that I had when I was at home. I knew that I was going to be leaving things behind, such as family, friends and the activities I would do back home, but I had to challenge myself more and move out of my comfort zone. I was ready to change certain things that would make me into a better person and come with new lessons that I could apply to my daily life style. When I was at home, I wouldn't be appreciative with my parents. I was especially unappreciative with my mom. I decided to go to the 40 day course because I had made a promise to Owen, one of the staff members of ARC back in Truckee, that I would go because I needed to try something new. The obstacles that I have pushed through over the 40-day course have transformed me.



The first challenge I had to do was to meet new people from different parts of California. This wasn't really hard, but it took time to know each other more. I had a feeling that I wouldn't be able to get along with some of the guys that were there. It came out to be that the guys that I once thought badly about became my new friends and would soon call one of them—primo. After a while, I felt like they were my brothers that had gotten lost and got reunited back again. Also I noticed that the old me still had his moments where he just wanted to be alone and would try to separate from the

group. I would feel home sick and wanted to be alone to remember the things I was missing out on. Some of the time I would feel like I didn't belong in ARC. I would try to separate from the group during the first days of the course and would always be quiet around them. Now I try my best to interact with everyone and not pull myself away from the group.

The other thing is that we needed to gain each other's trust. We gained trust by telling each other that we had their back while we were rock climbing. With that trust we had no problem and we started to get along great. My life depended on them because they were the ones belaying me while I was rock climbing and once I reached the top I had to rely on them to lower me down from the cliff. If they dropped me I would be splattered like a squashed bug. We motivated each other when we faced obstacles such as backpacking off trail. Also

we gained trust by having compassion with each other. We showed compassion by make making each other feel happy and loved.

ARC gave the opportunity to have more confidence in myself when I interview people. When it was the day to interview a unfamiliar person I felt very nervous and wanted to go back home, however once I got to know my interviewee more I got more confidence to talk to him. One of the things I liked is that the interviewee opened up to me and showed trust in me. I had to present a science project to the boys and girls club and read my poem to random people in Yosemite. ARC gave me more confidence by trusting more in myself and showed me that being confident will take me places I would never imagined myself.

When I was at home I wouldn't be able to open up with my family because I

wanted to prove is that I was strong and it would be hard for anyone to try to bring me down. I would never share my feelings with my friends like I do with my ARC friends. I would just put a smile on my face and pretend I was happy. It would be hard for me to share my feelings with my family because they came from a culture where men aren't suppose to cry, where crying would only show that you're a weak person. I had kept all those feelings inside me and then would take them out on those around me by getting in lots of fights. At the beginning of the 40-day course, I wouldn't open up to the ARC students; I would only share a few pieces of my background. ARC has taught me that being vulnerable is okay and that's how you show who you really are. I needed to show vulnerability in my poem and when I would open up in order for people to get to know me more.

Being independent has always been something I would face sooner or later. Before coming to ARC I was lazy some times and would want things done for me. When I would come from school I would always have food ready for me to gobble up, but now I have to make my own food because my mom would have to go to work and didn't have time to cook for me. Every time I would be told to do something by myself I would need someone to help me. At home I would depend on my mother or family to bring my food to the table. Now I have to do everything on my own, wash my own clothes and clean my room.

The experiences I had with ARC during the 40 day course will always be something I hark back to. I had to sleep out in the wilderness, with no bed and roof over my head. I had to trust people during the rock climbing and when I was rippling down the peak. I went kayaking which was a whole new thing to me because I had never had the chance to try it. When the 40 day course is over I will treat my mom better. I will be more appreciative with the things she does for me and my little brothers. Also I will get out of my comfort zone more often than usual. All these things I want to do are because I want to be a better person and ARC made me realize that it's possible. The transformation that I have experienced here at ARC is something that I will never forget.

## The Lone Wolf

I am a lone wolf  
Patiently searching for a pack  
To call family  
I am feared by others  
When they see the anger rushing through my veins  
They stumble to get away  
Never wanting to accept me  
For who I really am

I am an injured wolf  
Left to die  
I lack the love  
Of the pack  
Protection from my loved ones  
And the strength to live  
They all think I am a carnivorous  
Blood thirsty animal  
Always thriving for the kill  
In reality  
I provide so much love  
For family  
I will hunt for family  
Till my last breath of air

I am hard to break  
Like an alpha wolf's strength  
Never give up  
On what I believe  
But the wise part of me  
Knows  
I will survive  
With a pack

Because I'll have friends  
To support me  
On the choices  
I make

I burst into rage  
When I see someone  
Trespass my territory  
Grasping my belongings  
My prey  
I am a raging wolf  
Protecting its kill  
When it comes  
To my friends

My dreams are prey  
I wait patiently  
Choose one wisely  
Which one to pursue  
Then I strike

I am a lone wolf  
Howling at a full moon  
Yearning a close family  
To make me feel  
Wanted  
I have felt  
The feelings  
Of togetherness  
The joy of laughter  
Playing around  
In the pack  
The trust that  
The pack  
Will never give up on  
Each other

But when I have  
My pack  
We will fight  
For our dreams  
Through any struggle  
And I will finally  
Be wanted.





# Rising Up

It was a hot sweaty day. I was at my friend's house doing a Spanish project when I heard my phone ring, and I answered it. It was Greg, one of the staff members of ARC. He told me that I was accepted to ARC. I was going to the 40 day course! I was excited to participate, because I was going to be away from my family. At the same time, I was worried because I was going to miss out on so many parties. Nonetheless, I sucked it up and came. After 40 days I realized I had made the right choice. My time at ARC was a life changing experience. The activities we did and my fellow friends at ARC made me realize that "You only live once;" I want to make the most of every moment.

My team helped me build my confidence, and that made me stronger. This allowed me to continuously feel better about myself. I would always doubt myself, never leaving my comfort zone. I would hold on to the put downs people told me, which increased my self-doubt. I would take out my anger and sadness on my friends and family by shouting back at them. The anger and sadness blinded me; I could not see the little things they did for me in my life. I have learned to believe in myself more. Before I came to Adventure Risk Challenge (ARC), I was mentally weak. I never thought I could do anything that was worth being proud of. I would tell myself, "Don't even try; you will fail." I was tired of putting myself down, so I challenged myself and came to ARC. I have faced many challenges in my life, but not like the ones in this program. After the 40 days, I realized that I should stop doubting and start believing in myself.

Trusting others has always been one of my major difficulties, because a few close friends that I have trusted in the past have abused my trust. But, thanks to ARC, I can trust people again because I can be myself in front of others and not care about what they say or think. When I came to ARC I saw all of the other students that were also accepted this summer, and I said to myself, "Don't trust them; they will just use your past mistakes against you." I realized I was listening to the closed off little boxed boy that would

bring me down in life. I started telling them about my troubles and accomplishments; we soon went from strangers to friends. But, I worried every day and thought, "Today is the day they break my trust." But that day never came. They were different: they would listen to my problems and give me advice to help me overcome them. We are always together, and we are a team. I have learned that trusting people can make a stronger and healthier friendship. That lesson has brought me closer to my friends here at ARC.

Sharing my failures and achievements has made me realize that I am not alone in the world. There are people out there that have experienced similar problems as mine. Before I would keep all my problems bottled up. My depressing past would always be on my mind, haunting me. I tried to take my own life, because I felt as if I was not needed in this world. I thought that if I squeezed the belt just a little bit more, I would be free of my problems. Although I brought this depression with me to ARC, one day I got tired of carrying it and I opened up to my fellow ARC friends. I told them things about me that I had never told my closest friends. This felt like the chains that were holding me from escaping my past were broken. I was free; we all started talking about our past. We could relate to each other. This opened a new door for all of us. We became a family, and nothing can break us. I had never felt wanted by others in my life until that moment.

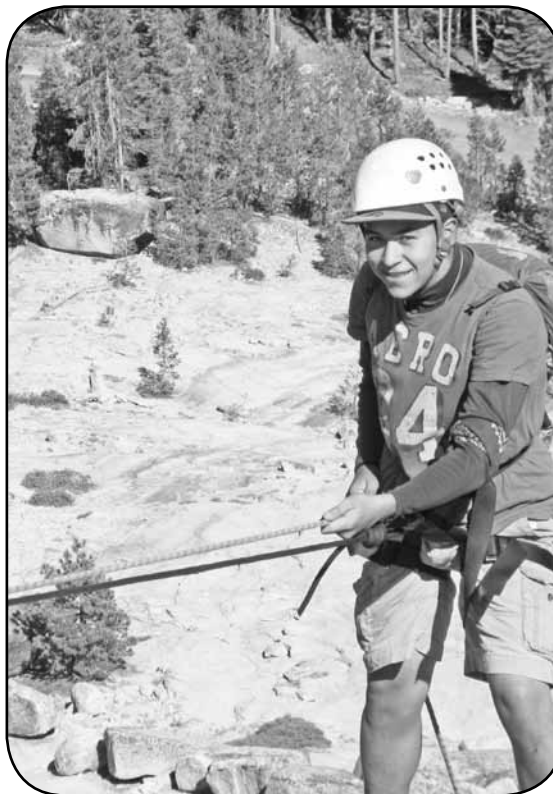
Sharing my experiences with others also helped me realize that I should not let what people say control me.

People's words have been hurtful and powerful but that will not limit me. Because family and friends would always make fun of me and tell me I could not do anything in life, I felt like I had no purpose. Now, I ignore those put downs because I have found out that they don't control my life, I am not a puppet, and I can do anything I put my mind to. For example, after my experiences rappelling I felt that I could do anything. It made me realize there is no limit when I put my fears aside. Even the fear of death didn't stop me from rappelling and rock climbing. It was then that I realized if death can't stop me, why I should I let judgmental people bring me down in life.

mental people bring me down in life.

I have discovered many things about myself I never knew, thanks to ARC. I am very compassionate now; I care about others and like hearing their life stories. I have become a stronger leader, ready to motivate my team on choosing the right decisions. I am determined to never give up on them. Being surrounded by nature has changed me

drastically. It gave me the feeling that I disappeared from the world for 40 days and became one with nature. It also made me find my true self. Now when a new challenge comes my way I will no longer back down. I will face it and overcome it, because I am unstoppable.



# epifania guzmán

## Letting Go

I'm an Alpine Shooting Star  
Next to the river  
Giving me protection  
No rapid can drag me down  
Knowing the river will be there, giving me life  
Letting its sweet sparkle enter my stem  
The river is like my home  
A place  
Where I'm so jubilant  
And, supposed to be.

A place where there's no need to hide  
To be free, crazy  
No Shield to cover  
To protect  
The water flourishes me to blossom  
But once it stops there's no flower to be seen  
Nowhere to be found  
The time has come  
For the river to move on

So desolate from my own  
It's inane  
How I can survive through this,  
Without any protection  
The sand has softened my capricious emotion  
I'm an Alpine Shooting Star  
Ready like the bright sun everyday  
Hearing the tumult of the river  
Makes me rise up as a new plant  
As tall as I can be  
Finding the seed in me ready  
With fortitude  
Prepared for the world





## As I Became A New Person

It was 5:30 am when I heard my mom come in my room she had spoke to me how she was leaving for work, in my mind I was thinking how much I was going to miss her. I knew that this day was going to come. As she spoke to me I watched every word come out of her mouth, and it just made me be strong for her. As my role model stood up and left my room I suddenly broke I couldn't hold it in any longer. I knew in my mind that was going to be the last time I would see her. As the morning went by I felt the rush and the time get to me I couldn't handle it. That's when I realized I didn't want to go any more; I had this feeling that was like stepping out of my comfort zone where I read comfortably and no one judged me, a safe environment I am used to. My siblings told me, "no you should go, we'll be here when you need us." I thought A.R.C had forgotten about me, I don't need to go any more. I heard the phone ring and started thinking it was A.R.C calling to cancel. My thoughts were interrupted by the doorbell as I opened my door I saw Sarah asking if I was ready. I said my goodbyes with no excuse to not go, we drove off I felt the tears get to me "no more crying Epi this is for the best" what was I thinking? I can't do this. I need my family. These people in the car are going to be my new family. That's when Adventure Risk Challenge started making an impact in my life.

Being alone was something I will never get use to. The solo day I was scared because I didn't have anybody to calm me down when I have my panic attack. I'm so used to having my parents or sibling around. This was one of my biggest challenge hearing my heart beat go faster and faster calming myself down with the wilderness helped me a lot in distracted me by looking at the trees,insects,clouds helped

f from my fears. I've learned to take care of myself a lot here and how to handle my emotion not just burst into tears when I felt terrified. Now I know I don't need my parents as much as I needed them at the beginning of the forty day course. During the time I spent time with the other students we became closer like family and that helped me open up.

Opening up is something I was used to doing. I always open up to my mom but here it was something different, I don't know these people by heart I can't just tell



them my life and let it sit on their palms to hurt me in the future. "It is not possible that I would open I though" I would think "for me to open up". I was always afraid of what people might say and then stare at me with a "she's dumb" face. In my home town people would look at you and talk and say yeah she sounds so stupid. That's one of the reasons why I don't open up or speak to new people and I tend to care so much, that's a fear I need to let go of. In A.R.C I have learned step by step even If I still have that fear within me because I've learned that is good to be wrong and there no shame in being different. It was during English class when Krissy and I went into the office and I just began open-

ing up. Something I'm not used to, I never opened up to any type of teacher, and I know I won't but she was different gave me the secure that she won't tell anybody. I felt tears roll down as I spoke it was a good feeling letting all the emotion out and not let it consume me little by little. Letting the rest of the group become part of me wasn't really that hard but meeting them was a hassle. It takes me time to meet somebody that I've never knew. As I got use to them, during expedition I felt like they carry heavy rocks as I traveled with them.

Not being perfect in my hikes was something that hurted me. Letting my group down hurted me the most because it made me think if I hadn't complained we could have been to the place sooner. I felt that if I didn't go with their pace I was slow and slowing them down. I kept going even if I tripped a couple of times. I was out of breath but kept going, not letting myself down by thinking about how much I'd accomplished. Stopping was not happening. I became so inspired by my teammates that I pushed myself to the finish.

As time went by I became in love I wanted to explore more and see the more challenge that where in my way.

A.R.C has given me so many opportunities to view the world in a new way. Not just how people judge; it has made me be more out there taking challenges more risks and trust myself. It has improved my life in so many ways. If I was at home, I wouldn't be the new Epi that I am now. I will use my courage that I showed here at home and at school. All the responsibility the instructors gave us I will take home and show these values in my school and take more leadership skill in my school. I have so much potential to give to my school and A.R.C has helped me become this person.

# jesus alejandre

## Just Call Me Carpenter Ant

I am a Carpenter Ant  
My family  
Is my community  
I'm a slave in a society  
Trying to fit in  
Living in a culture where every one is the same  
We all want power  
So greedy for Power

In a society  
Where the strong  
And brave survive  
Because the weak and  
The ones that believe to be untalented  
Are ignored  
Where the powerful Queen Ants rule,  
And the rest become slaves  
Slaves that work hard  
And gain little  
I once felt like a slave  
I tasted dirt  
When I desire to fly  
Discrimination dragged me to the floor  
Because I took my first breaths in a foreign country  
I was tangled to a rope that said failure  
But I grasped the branch that gave me life  
And lept out of the burrow were I was stuck

I might not be the tallest  
Nor the most efficient  
But I'm still an ant  
An ant that has the power  
To change people's lives  
Thanks to the little grains of sand  
Grains of sand that I proudly call values  
An ant the no matter how enormous a tree might be  
I will climb it  
Excitedly  
Despite the great weight on my back  
To feel taller than the Queen Ants and their politics

I am an ant  
I am not terrified of humans  
Or their carelessness  
I gather the crumbs they toss aside

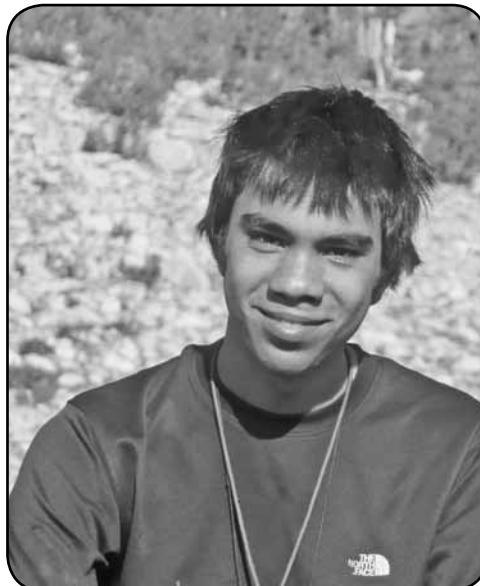
The crumbs humans believe useless  
And with great pleasure  
I transform them into banquets

I am an ant  
That doesn't complain  
When rocks become boulders  
And pine needles  
Change into heavy logs

I am an ant  
A leader  
A community of one  
Unstoppable  
Even when the winds of discrimination  
Blow against me  
I look small  
But I take down huge trees

I am an ant  
A life source for my community  
And yet  
Just another hand  
For my team of slaves

I am an ant  
And I know one day I will leave my family  
Like a pupae hatches out of his egg  
I might get eaten



Or even squashed  
But staying home  
is not an option  
Because my community  
needs me  
To break them free  
From slavery

I am an ant  
Petrified  
Of all the roads  
But only one decision  
But I'm an ant  
And ants are strong  
So for now  
Just call me Carpenter Ant

## It Became, It Is My Legacy

I once met this child whose life was flawless until the day he transformed into a teenager. He had freedom and everything he wanted. He believed that everyone should think similar to him. This child depended on his family for everything. This child was scared of life. That child was me, not knowing what to do or how to act. I spoke little because the fear of saying the wrong thing crushed me like a can under someone's foot. Yeah, that was me alright, but everything changed in an amazing summer. I became the person I wanted to be. Thanks to Adventure Risk Challenge (ARC), a program that became my life for 40 days, I made the hop into independence.

Independence was one of my biggest wishes in a million. I supposed that I would never accomplish independence. ARC

grabbed that thought from my brain, and tossed it to the furnace where it belonged. It gave me values that I could comprehend. Now, I have learned to take care of myself in so many ways. I took on chores that needed to be done. When it came to it, I became a machine that kept on task. I started to make food for myself and for others. Every bite of stir fry tasted so much better when I remembered that I had cooked it. I even took on a 24 hour solo, which

became my friend. In the solo I had to survive with only a bag of G.O.R.P. and my body. There I met face to face with independence. It wanted to run away from me, but I caught it just in time, just in time to take it home in my pocket. That solo didn't just help me face my fear of independence, it also introduced me to a fearless reflection.

To me, "fearless" was an unreachable trait. "To become fearless, what would I have to do?" I asked myself. I had trouble defining fearless, yet I knew what it was. I rock

climbed. Afterwards, I asked myself, "Is this considered fearless?" "No!" I responded in my mind. Then I moved on, I had jumped from a telephone pole to a trapeze. Before I took the jump, I looked down and wanted to quit. I wanted to, but some thing took control of me and I took a deep breath. The next thing I knew, I was flying in the air. That's when I grasped my first definition of the word "fearless." From then on, the encouragement of my peers and the support of my instructors helped me define fearless even more. It wasn't until I my solo where I looked back and found out that the person with no fear, was right in side my head and he was there to stay. I had gathered all the definitions from all my past achievements and laid them in place until my final definition read: "A man with no fear is a man who overcomes

challenges." Now, with independence and fearlessness walking side by side next to me, I had gained confidence. I am now fearless!

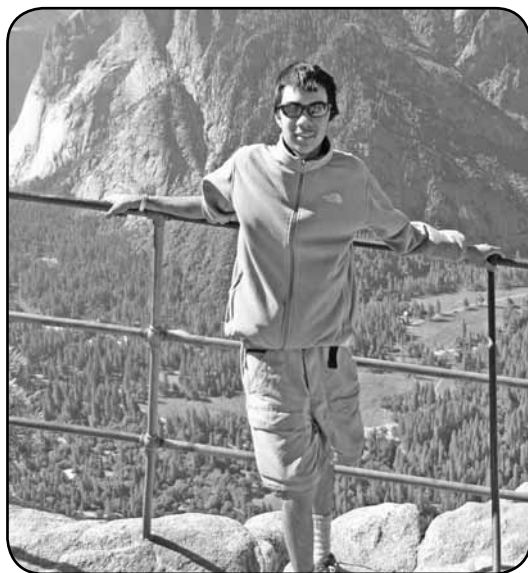
In my world, confidence faded when I needed it most. I became shy, thanks to a bad experience as an

immigrant, not knowing how to speak English. I introduced myself in my fifth grade class with an "I don't speak English" statement. Everyone laughed, causing an unbearable embarrassment. After that day my brain and embarrassment covered my mouth, inhibiting words from flowing through. Thanks to my mouth being covered, many opportunities walked right by me with out even noticing me, but that changed. Now I can speak English well. ARC gave me the encouragement that became the container where I could place my

confidence. ARC also has shown me that if my container leaks, thanks to people's words, I have a repair kit with glue that allows me to challenge myself outside my comfort zone. That glue works just fine, because after accomplishing that challenge I feel proud of myself. That glue also creates a permanent seal for my container and confidence doesn't fade away. That glue has a strong scent that penetrates my container. It is a sweet scent filled with encouragement from peers and positive feedback from the strangers. So now, every time I open my container, I smell the everlasting scent of encouragement that never fades away. With my confidence I became motivated to become a leader of my own.

I had always been a follower. I followed orders to the letter, even when I didn't agree with them. I followed them because I was raised that way. "Don't complain, just do it," my parents used to say. I followed for years and years until the day that I realized that I didn't want to follow anymore. Although I didn't want to follow, I didn't know how to stop following. So I decided that I needed help, and the ARC program was the only one that had the wisdom to help me with my problem. ARC took my trait of a follower and gently made a 180 degree spin. Thanks to their leadership class I became more and more comfortable with the role of a leader. The program gave me advice on what I could do when it came to leading. Every day they gave me a new challenge, and every challenge became a new step towards my goal. Being a leader was the last puzzle piece of my puzzle. I was finally complete.

Now with all the new traits in the palm of my hand I had transformed into the person I dreamed to become. I had fought a battle with four great opponents: Independence, whom I took down during my solo and caught him just in time; Fearlessness, the trait came to me in pieces, which I laid back in place; Confidence, the one that kept fading away until ARC gave me the container to place it in; Leadership, the opponent that was easier to conquer but harder to comprehend. Thanks to that battle now I have a story to tell a legacy and a new beginning.



# joaquin garcia

## The Stem of My Life

I am an Alpine Groundsel  
Being held by the reliable foundation of my amazing parents  
The beginning of summer  
When I'm at my strongest  
When my parents are both home  
Supporting me  
Protecting me  
Showing me right from wrong  
My stem stands  
Boldly  
Thanks to them  
They raised me  
With so much care  
Not even thinking about themselves first  
They fed me with delight  
They waited patiently for me to sprout  
To be unstoppable



I am an Alpine Groundsel  
The bee lands on the flower  
Takes the pollen  
Without knowing  
Transfers that pollen to another flower  
I owe that bee so much  
Out of the billions  
Of beautiful flowers  
The bee chose  
To pollinate me  
We don't remember being born  
But we're grateful for it  
I was cared for  
Nurtured to be who I'm today

But you make the decisions  
If you want your life to be happy  
Or if you want it to be sad  
I once lived life sadly  
My brothers and I  
Were uprooted and taken  
From our beloved parent  
I was giving new parents  
That watered and cared for me  
But it wasn't the same  
When we were reunited  
Which took around a month  
My life became livable  
Out of the millions of beautiful flowers  
I was chosen to live  
With these incredible parents  
I am an Alpine Groundsel

I'm grateful everyday  
For the time we have together  
I will cherish everyday  
Like it's our last  
I don't know what the future awaits  
Anything is possible  
Life is too short to be sad  
Angry  
Depressed  
You do that when your life runs out of enjoyment  
I love the sun's rays  
Pounding on me  
But hate when the trees are stealing my sunshine  
I know I'm not immortal  
Any day I can get yanked from the soil  
Left there to rot  
I'm hoping for my future  
I'll become the stem for my child  
I will once again  
Be uprooted  
From my parents  
But this time  
It will be  
My choice  
I hope to care for  
Nurture  
And raise my child  
Just exactly how my parents raised me

# The Change Up Plan

Hearing Sarah speak of this amazing group called ARC in Mr. Catrina's class, I thought to myself, "Whatever, that will ruin my summer." Then leaving out of class Oscar asked me, "Are you going to ARC?" I said, "No, why?" "Well, you should," he replied. "It's an incredible experience." That got me thinking what would I honestly do all my summer if I didn't do ARC? I would just stay home playing video games and waste a perfectly good summer. Then and there I decided I would try ARC out and see if it was right for me. It's more than I could have asked for. It was full of funny and amazing people who are just like me. Many could compare to me and the thought of nature. Before ARC, I was lazy, I had no respect for nature, I would keep things to myself, and I just like to stay inside where it was safe.

As I arrived to the Yosemite Creek Campground, I thought, "Where's the TV? Where's the couch?" What I quickly realized was that we were going to have no luxury here. At home all I did was eat, sleep, and play video games. Here I learned to become a more efficient helper. I feel that I'm needed and the whole group benefits from my presence. My peers may look at me as lazy, but I have changed. At home I wouldn't help out. I would spend most of my time on my computer, phone, or PS3. Now I regret being like that; I want to help out more and work with my dad. I want to spend more time interacting with both my parents.

Before ARC I had no respect for nature. I would always tell myself, "Why not just cut down all the trees and make malls." When I hiked through the forest for the first time, observing the trees, my mind was blown. They were awesome and beautiful. I felt a connection with them. I remember talking to Ranger Dan; I told him how I use to think about nature, and how I think of it now. He was proud that I had changed my way of thinking. He explained how Yosemite is protected by the government and that we have a connection with nature because nature is where we all come from. Everything he said was interesting. He made me understand why we might have that connection to the glorious outdoors. Someone else who helped was Greg, our instructor. He has a rocking beard that he barley started growing this year. He told me that he worked in an office before. I was really shocked. He said he wasn't happy there but he loves the outdoors. As the wilderness lovers gave examples of how they feel about nature, they made me understand and respect nature more.

Because of ARC, my writing has improved. I've learned to be myself in writing, and write what I feel inside. I've never honestly tried in writing; I always found it boring and a waste of time. When writing my poem I opened up and said words that I actually meant. After finishing my poem and reading it I was amazed at what

I can accomplish. I tried my best and wrote what I felt on the inside. It opened my eyes and made me realize writing wasn't as boring as I believed. I have to thank the teachers for being supportive and understanding. At home, I have never written this much but now I can't stop. I have improved a lot and I don't complain when we have writing assignments. I'm just prepared for it now.

Being involved with ARC made me understand showing emotion doesn't make you weak, it makes you stronger. Before I would always keep things to myself. I learned to be more passionate and understanding of others' depressing emotions. I used to make fun of people who cried and laughed at them. Now I'm more understanding because I did a little crying of my own. I released my emotions and I felt more in touch with myself.

As I was becoming stronger, I realized that I had to face my fears. I have my fears, as I'm only human; one of those fears is a fear of heights. I heard that we would be rock climbing, and I thought it would be something very different from what I imagined. We climbed in groups and had four different climbing areas. My group and I began with the last one, the hardest climb. I was the second person to try, the person before me didn't finish it and quit, so it made me more nervous. I was halfway through when I began getting tired. I wanted to quit where the person before me did, but hearing the support of my friends, I pushed on. As I climbed it became easier and I reached the top. When I looked down my fear of heights took over. I just wanted to stay on the top of the anchor and wait for someone to help me. Then in my head I said to myself, "What would my dad do?" He would not think about it and get the job done. In thinking this I got the motivation I needed. Then Erica said, "It will be fine and you can do it." She was one of the awesome Summit Adventures staff. I heard her voice; it was sweet and full of compassion. She told me to lean back and walk down. At first I was scared, but slowly and surely, I made it to the bottom. Inside I felt accomplished, that I could complete anything if I put my mind to it. It made me trust people more and believing their truthful words "You're safe." Overcoming my fears made me stronger and more willing to try new things.

Interacting with people was something I to get adjusted to. I'm a person that likes to be by myself. None the less, in ARC I didn't have a choice; I had to talk to everyone. In the beginning I was a little nervous, because I'm a person

that doesn't like to interact with others. Then I started to be myself and spoke my mind. "The Unstoppables," the ARC student unit, are an awesome group to be around, and I really enjoyed them. I liked speaking with everyone. We discovered that we like the same good music, food, video games, and TV shows. I felt as I was welcomed. We all laughed and enjoyed each other; it felt like home. We all messed around, opened up, and all had being with each other. By cheering everyone on and giving moral support, I show that I really care for everyone here. The students, the instructors, they are a bunch of swell people. I missed my real family, but the new family eased my homesickness. The first night I dreamt of having a meal with the family then going to bed. Then I woke to a bunch of strangers next to me. I stared outside and wondered what my family was doing. After awhile, I adjusted and became fond of everyone here. I found out meeting new people is awesome, and an incredible experience. It helped my speaking and just opening up, and being myself to new people. When we had to present to kids, I was really excited. I felt confident with myself and prepared. I just talked to them all; this feeling of teaching the younger youth was just unbearable. I felt so proud of myself, and help me realize, I just might want to be a teacher in my future.

My goals in life is to be more interactive, try more in school, and be more understanding of people's emotions. I'm a person that is better off alone, but I changed. I want to be more outgoing makes more friends, and go outside more. In school I never tried at all, I would just sleep during class. I began talking to Claudia one of our instructors who is really remarkable; she got me thinking about my future. She has traveled and been in interesting parts of the world. Her words in how she got to where she is now really were significant. She tried hard in school and has been around the world thanks to it. Hearing she was in Africa and her stories there were funny, and helpful in knowing that she was in the Red Cross helping out. I want to try in school so I can travel and explore our beautiful world. Going to college will make me wiser and have more money in my pocket to travel. In the future I want to travel to Brazil in 2014 to watch the world cup. I told this to Claudia and she said, "Me too!" She told me she was in the last world cup for Brazil. In inquiring this I want to do the same as her and travel the world and help the people in need. Another reason I want to try harder in school to make my mother and father proud, to be able to put their chin up high and say proudly "that's our son." I'm improving in all my subjects in school to benefit me and my bright future.



# michael bañuelos

## Wind Beneath My Wings

I am a Peregrine Falcon  
Adventurous and thriving  
Exploring the world around me  
Being gently aided by the  
Powerful parental winds  
Trained to survive

Eagerly leaving to ARC  
Courageously leaping from the  
Comfort of my nest  
The familiarity of my surroundings  
To nervously spread my wings  
And gradually soar

To earn the ability to survive  
By challenging the challenges and  
Coming out victorious  
To gather strength  
Forever proud  
Forever courageous

The feeling of sadness  
Longing to reunite with family  
When fretfully leaving my nest,  
The insecurity of the outside world  
Not knowing if I would be accepted  
Wanting to fit in

The feeling of precisely slicing  
Through the air  
However fast my heart desires  
The feeling of self reliance  
Is extraordinary,  
The experience of self motivation  
Freedom is incredible

Sometimes going fast  
Isn't the way to  
Travel peacefully  
If you rapidly race through life  
Without a care you will miss so much,  
It's possible to even miss your own life

By trying to get everything in life fast  
If you do  
Slow down  
People have a chance  
To get to know you  
How nice you can really be  
The emotions you hide behind walls  
Created by insecurity



It is nice to think that  
You can trust everyone,  
When you have complete trust in someone  
You think they are your true friends

Some people will abuse  
Your trust  
And aggressively shoot you  
Down

You can cautiously hide  
Deep in the cliffs of despair  
To guarantee  
Safety from being hurt

Or  
You can proudly

Spread your wings  
And prepare  
For an adventurous Life,  
Taking risks and accepting challenges

There are different  
Peregrine Falcons  
Some are more protective  
Of themselves and their emotions  
While others would put  
Everything on the line,  
Life, family, friends  
Just for a little rush

I am the middle  
Peregrine Falcon  
I have been shot down,  
I thought I could be myself  
and people would accept that  
Or that I could trust people  
I have put everything on the line,  
I have risked my life on the cliffs of  
redemption

But I have intensively survived,  
Through everything life has  
to throw at me so far  
I have learned the skills,  
I have obtained the knowledge needed  
To stay constantly flying

To any Falcons out there  
I have been shot down  
But you will recover

In the future I see falcons  
And many other people being themselves  
Where everyone can say  
what's on my mind  
Forever proud  
Forever courageous  
Forever independent



## Tears of Joy

ARC has been one of the biggest stepping stones in my life so far. I have learned so many things in just 40 short days. I was aware that ARC existed; I just never knew how to get involved. It started off like any other day. I went to school as usual, but in history class Mr. Catrina told the class we were having a guest speaker. I was curious. Near the end of class a woman named Sarah came in and began talking about a summer program called ARC. She started off talking about all the English classes in ARC, and she lost me. Out of nowhere, she put on a video that immediately grabbed my attention. It was all the outdoor activities happening in ARC. I was hooked. I said, "This could be fun, and I am not too good in English anyway." I could learn immensely from this. So, after class I walked up to her and asked her some more questions. I was hoping that when I left Mr. Catrina would tell her that I'm lazy.

I have slacked off a lot in many areas of my whole life. I never took my responsibilities at school or at home seriously. I would try to hang out with friends or play video games all day. I didn't like that life, but I did it anyway. At ARC, I chose to take my responsibilities seriously. For example on our last expedition, I was to hold the first aid kit. I could have put it near the bottom of my back pack in order to make it more comfortable; nonetheless, I placed it near the top to have it accessible. Although it was hard on me, I knew if somebody got hurt we would need the first aid fast. It was my responsibility to ensure their safety. I have learned to be more responsible by putting others needs before mine. In addition to becoming more responsible, I have learned to accept that I can show emotion.

Because I don't want to seem weak in the eyes of my peers, I would try not to let my emotions affect me. Throughout my life I have tried not to show my emotions, I still try not to do so. When I was little, I was told crying was for girls and that showing emotion made me weak. I don't want to be weak, so I stay emotionless, only showing happiness. I know that happiness is an emotion and if I'm happy, people around me can be happy. With ARC, I have been asked to show emotion in my writing. That has been one of the major challenges for me. When I wrote my poem, I realized that emotions are a true reflection of me.

I also found that my peers accepted everything that I shared when I tried to show emotion in my poem. I now know that if I open up and make myself vulnerable people, can understand me better. I am now trying my hardest to show emotion. That is one of the biggest things that I have overcome here at ARC. I have realized that showing emotion and opening up to others is what makes me strong.

Being strong is one of the key aspects in my life. In physical activities, I want to be strong because I believe I have failed in everything else, so I might as well be strong physically. At ARC I realized that being



physically strong is not everything. I also need to be mentally strong. During my 24-hour solo I had to keep myself entertained by using my imagination. I had to be alone with just my thoughts and come up with ways to build my own shelter.

Eric Henderson is an inspiring man. He told me, "Nothing can be achieved without hard work and education." At ARC I have learned that I must work hard in order to get what I want in life. During our science project, my partner and I had constantly started over because we had misunderstood the instructions. In spite of this challenge we continued to work and therefore had a successful presentation.

My parents have always had to push me to

work hard; I was lazy and never wanted to do my work. I thought that was the only reason. Then I realized it's not an unwillingness to work, it's me telling myself I might not even try I will just fail, me being scared to fail has been holding me back.

I compare myself to my father a lot I want to grow up to be just like him and make him proud. I want to become big and strong both physically and mentally. I have been small my whole life. I have been taunted because I was skinny. Whenever kids would make fun of me it would make me feel worthless. I would look at myself in the mirror in disgust; my body was so tiny and weak. However, a wise man, Jesus Alejandro, once told me, "God gave you're your body for a reason it was made just for you". Don't get me wrong I love my body. I just want to make a few modifications. I don't mean by using enhancing drugs or surgeries. I want to be more muscular because when I'm big people won't want to mess with me. I know see myself strong and perfect the way I am.

I would trust people a lot and sometimes I trusted people to much, I ended up getting hurt in the end. Ever since then trusting other people is another big issue I have. I would rather have to depend on myself, than rely on other people. However, I soon realized that when I trust people a lot of weight is lifted off my shoulders. When rock climbing, I felt unstoppable when I flew up the rock face. The fact that I had to rely on other people made me feel uncomfortable.

I have changed a lot in this ARC program. I want to show emotion, I am just scared of what people will think of me. I now realize that being open with people and showing emotion will make people want to be with me. I was really lazy and did not want to work at all. With ARC I had to work every day. It has made me responsible and trust worthy, in getting what is asked of me done. I had problems trusting other people with even the smallest things. Throughout my life I have been self reliant, but now I see that having some trust in people can be a really good thing. While being on the face of a huge rock and having to be lowered by a team frightened me, I knew if I wanted to get back down and look good doing it, I would have to trust my team. I am "UNSTOPPABLE".

## I Am an Ant

I am an Ant.  
I am a bother to the grasshoppers  
“Why?” You might ask.  
“I don’t know” is what I would say  
I’ve been trapped in my dark ant hole for years  
And I’ve been told how to feel and how to do things  
That I’ve lost my emotions  
My honest self,  
I’ve lost my trust in emotions  
That I go with the flow

I am an Ant.  
I am small  
And compared to the grasshoppers  
I feel weak and worthless  
But do I really feel that way?  
I’m still not sure  
Because I’ve always been told how to feel  
So I tend to be content with the emotions  
They give me

Grasshoppers have brains  
Grasshoppers have strength  
They can jump super high up  
In to the sky and all the way back down  
In to the little dark ant hole of mine  
They say I have two weak arms  
They say I am two week legs  
Do I really?  
Should I try out the weak arms  
And the weak legs they say I have?  
I would say to myself  
“Oh wait, never mind, I’m not going to try  
They say I can’t do it, and I would die trying  
To do what they can do  
I’m not going to try,  
I’m content with myself in this dark ant hole of mine”

Is it self-doubt?  
When I think I can’t do the things they can do  
Is this really how I feel?  
Content?  
I know I am strong  
I know I am strong  
I know I am strong.  
But why do I feel so weak?  
Why do I care?  
Why do I care?  
Why do I care?  
Why do I care about myself feeling weak?  
Do I really feel this way?

Do I really feel content with what they say?  
“YOU ARE WEAK!”  
“YOU ARE STUPID!”  
“YOU ARE OVERREACTING!”  
“YOU CAN’T DO IT!”  
“YOU ARE MEAN!”  
“YOU ARE A BITCH!”  
“YOU WILL GET OVER IT!”  
“YOU ARE JUST THINKING TOO MUCH!”  
Am I really?  
I guess I am, if the grasshoppers say so.

Trapped.  
Lost.  
Confused.  
Angry.  
Why do I FEEL that way?  
Why do I know how to feel that way?  
I was in the dark by myself.  
And I was always told everyday by the grasshoppers  
About how I should feel, and what I should do  
So how is it possible?  
For me,  
To know what those feelings are?

Then I finally got it.  
My first real feeling  
NO.  
NO.  
NO.  
I can’t feel this way!  
But why is my heart pounding so fast?  
What is this feeling I have?  
Why do I feel free all of a sudden?  
After knowing that I felt trapped, lost, confused  
And angry.

Is this happiness exploding out of me?



YES!  
YES!  
YES!  
I think it is.

# In The Process of Transformation

“Should I go?”  
“I don’t feel like going anymore.”  
“I don’t want to leave you guys!”  
“Should I just not go?”  
“I hate my family so much!”  
“I can’t wait to leave this damn house!”  
“I’m going to miss my friends so much.”  
“I’m going to miss out on so much stuff this summer!”

These were the exact words that I was telling myself and friends, weeks before leaving to ARC. Before coming to Yosemite National Park, I was always angry. I thought I was angry because I thought my family was very unsupportive and they didn’t understand anything that was going on with my life. I wanted to leave home; yet I wanted to stay because I did not want to miss out on the activities my friends might do. The morning Sarah came to pick me up, I didn’t say goodbye to my mother. I didn’t even look at her in eyes, neither did I hug or kiss her back when she said her goodbyes to me. I wiped my mom’s kiss off my face, rolled my eyes and climbed into the car to leave the place I considered ‘Hell’.

The first few days of the first expedition I wanted to leave. But luckily I didn’t because if I did, I wouldn’t have been the thoughtful and loving person I am today. I wanted to hurt myself on purpose, so I could go home to my friends, not my family. I would always try to think of ways to hurt myself ‘accidentally,’ but there was this voice, deep inside of me, that kept saying, “No, Michelle, don’t do that.” I remember being asked, “What do you miss most about home?” and out of the whole group, I was the only one who answered, “Nothing.” For days I thought about how annoying my family was and how free and relaxing it felt to be away from hell. That didn’t last long. One night when I opened up, I heard words that I have never heard before from someone. “I believe you,” said Naly, one of my fellow group members. I thought she wasn’t going to believe me, like everyone else that I had opened up to in the past. I got confused and super emotional that night, because I felt something I have

never felt before: love for my family. From that day on, I started to focus on myself more. I started to think more than I usually do, and I started to question my feelings. I started to feel the change coming on, but I tried to push it away.

After two and a half weeks of the course, I was furious with my emotions but ended up feeling liberated. I couldn’t take the emotions and thoughts that were going on in my head anymore. The truth had to come out. I’ve told my secret to my closest friends, but I was shot down because they didn’t believe me. It had become my worst nightmare. I had to tell an adult. For the longest time ever, I felt hated, hurt, angry, and confused. I thought Sarah was going to tell me that I was ‘overreacting’ to the situation I was going through mentally



and physically. But she believed and supported without judging me. I felt loved from then on. I felt as if I finally had people on my side. My shoulders became lighter than ever, and I became more free-flowing like the healthy rivers in Yosemite National Park.

Trusting myself had never really come into my mind before, until I came to ARC. In fact, I

had never, ever heard or used that strategy before until our second expedition: rock climbing. Never had I trusted people I’ve only met for a minute with my life. And never had I trusted myself with my own life. But I had to give myself a chance. “I GOT THIS!” was what I would literally scream out loud. Boom, Boom, Pow! The capabilities that I never knew I had, such as trusting myself and others with my life and climbing the rocks as if I’ve been doing it my whole life, came out. It was so unexpected to me and all the people around me that day. I found potential in myself, because I knew that what I was going through in my life was much scarier than being held by a rope 180 feet up a mountain. I had overcome the second step of transformation: trust.

During the fourth week I started to contemplate all of my thoughts and put them onto paper, and I felt a range of emotions.

I did not know what to feel or what to think about during my 24 hours alone. Being by myself out in the wild, with nothing to listen to but my own thoughts and the chirping bugs around me, was all new to me. My thoughts became as loud as my voice when I spoke normally, and my voice became as loud as an echo in the valley. I was so lost in my own mind. Even though I was trying to distract myself by making a spear out of a rock, words started pouring out like water into my journal. It was abnormal of me to be so expressive in such an open-minded way. As a result, when I got back to base camp to start my transformational essay, I started to freak out and have second thoughts about what I wrote. I had a really hard time figuring out the words I wrote, because it did not sound like the Michelle I knew at all. I felt as if someone else answered the questions instead, and I started to lose trust in myself again. But that didn’t last long, because Krissy came in and helped me sort through the thoughts and worries that were going through my head. Talking and listening to her, and having her be so understanding, made me realize a bunch of things about my life. It made me realize that those words on the piece of paper were real. I just hesitated to accept them, because I was afraid of what my friends and family would think of me. I was changing into someone more beautiful than ever before. I thought I didn’t learn anything from my solo, but I did. I learned that I’m a strong, independent lady who only needs support from the ones I love.

ARC has been the most life changing experience I have ever done. It has given me hope to be a better person and to not be afraid of who I am no matter what the situation is. They have given me the love and support that I had yearned for, and they have helped me through my most heartbreaking and terrifying moments in my life. If it wasn’t for ARC, I would not know who I am and where I stand in life. They’ve helped me trust myself and the emotions that go through my mind. They’ve helped me find the smile I thought I lost years ago. Through all of the experience this summer, I’ve come to realize that the ones who matters don’t mind, and the ones who mind don’t matter. Through the thick and thin in this course, ARC has shown me that if I just push myself, and take chances I can be successful; I can be a good role model for my loved ones at home.

## Giver of Life

I am the sky,  
Gently nurtured by the sun and the moon.  
My emotions so strong,  
They easily alter  
The mood of others  
Like when the seas are filled with sailors  
Assured  
That I  
Will not let a drop of rain that would leave them in distress  
But that was when I wore my heart upon my sleeve.

I am the sky,  
And years ago  
The mountains were golden brown,  
The valleys desiccated,  
And oceans scarce of water.  
The people prayed  
And wished  
Upon the stars that rest within me  
That I the sky  
Would give them life,  
Rain that would turn the mountains golden brown to emerald green,  
Valleys to meadow-filled valleys,  
And oceans plentiful of water.  
To give them life was to give them love.  
To give them life was to give them protection.  
To give them life was to give them purpose.  
I joyfully answered their prayers and wishes with my gift.  
I blissfully  
Watched the people climb up to the emerald green mountains  
Admiring the beauty of life.  
I merrily watched  
The people dance through the innocent pure meadows  
with irreplaceable smiles  
Worth more than any price tag.  
I relaxingly watched  
The grey bundle of dolphins soaring above the sea  
Casting silhouettes upon the stage that meets the eyes  
Of the sun and the moon.  
My gift was the rain that turned impossibilities to possibilities.  
My gift was great indeed,  
Endless like infinity,  
But with great gift came great trust,  
And with great trust came great frustration.

I am the sky,  
My gift, the rain, flowed through the creases of Earth,  
Continually giving life.  
I trusted the people to not take my gift for granted,  
For it is the key to every door.  
But people discovered my gift was gold  
And forgot my trust came along  
Factories, companies, and businesses soon  
Formed along the creases of Earth,  
And along its journey downhill,  
Came oil, chemicals, and waste.  
The people knew pollution was poisonous  
Yet they continued to pollute.  
My atmosphere became so polluted,

My clouds became cumulonimbus clouds.  
The chemicals of production and moisture  
Collided into one, acid rain.  
It was so heavy it weakened me.  
My shoulders, my legs, neglected me,  
Sending showers of deadly acid rain to the bases of Earth.  
It relinquished the wooden roofs above the childhood memories  
of many families.  
It forced a Mother Black Bear to sacrifice her own fleece to the acid rain  
As a shelter for her infants.  
It obliterated life on earth, causing thousands of species to go extinct.  
The people so angry,  
They stuck out their fingers at me, the sky  
And said  
"Monster."  
And even when I had collapsed to my knees,  
Carrying the intolerable weight of the labels placed on me,  
I still continued to give them life.  
These labels rapidly became unbearable,  
They struck me down deep into the ground like how electrons travel  
Down to the deep end of Earth.



I am the sky,  
Master of Destruction,  
A hideous monster lurking in the shadows of a deep, deep hole  
Impatiently lingering to demolish anything that provokes me.  
I was so inhumane,  
I devoured my own heart.  
My veins no longer thrusting,  
I became as pale as a lifeless white wall in an enclosed mental health cell.  
I am a corpse buried beneath my own anger, my own fear, and my own self.  
Wait, no.  
No.  
No.  
No.

My heart loves so much, it is vulnerable.  
My heart cares so much, it is vulnerable.  
My heart aches so much, it is vulnerable.  
To be vulnerable  
And feel life  
Is being alive,  
Being human.  
To give them life is to give them love.  
To give them life is to give them protection.  
To give them life is to give them purpose.  
I am the sky, giver of life.  
I am the sky,  
And I will continue to give love, protection, and purpose to life.

# My Flaws Are My Beauty

In a very chilly mental health hospital, she lays there on a cold metal cot secured in a dark, gloomy cell with no windows, no lights. Her thoughts become louder than the story being told by a stranger placed in the same room. "Am I not good enough? Do they not see my love? Why do they hate me? Am I a slut? A whore? Why am I not good enough? Why? Why did they save me from suicide?" Tears of confusion and anger continued to stream down her face as the silent night becomes disturbed by the head-banging on the wall of a client down the hall. She is rushed and released in the morning because she couldn't stay there anymore. The next day, her classmates ask her, "Where have you been?" And because she is a diva, lips coated red, eyelids smoky black and white, and false lashes revealing the sweet grey contacts, she fakes a smile to hide her secret, her depression and says "Oh, I've been getting sick really easy." That diva is amazing at hiding her flaws with make-up, clothes, posture, and lies. That diva vanished into thin air 40 days ago and the queen that was trapped beneath these lies for years emerged. The queen that emerged during the past 40 days does not have to worry about the way she looks every morning, nor does she hide her true feelings, her darkest secrets. The queen appreciates and accepts her family, her boyfriend, everyone who helped makes her who she is today, and most importantly, herself. She also now approaches the obstacles placed ahead of her on her hike up the highest peaks without hesitation, even if it meant going alone. The queen now embraces and exposes her flaws with confidence. She now believes that those who matter will not mind and those who mind does not matter. She loves her life and suicide will never be an option in her life again. That queen is me, full of flaws. I wouldn't be who I am today without Adventure Risk Challenge. Lessons of long hikes, dreaded rock-climbs, terrifying ropes course, and everything we went through together as a family spoke to me, it silently whispered in my ears and gently stroked the chords in my heart creating a melody that was truly mine and only mine.

The very first chord that struck in my heart was called realization and it happened during an English lesson on Day 5. The ground I sat on was softened with brown pine needles like caramel sprinkles on a chocolate ice cream. My eyes were wandering around the canopies of the pine trees searching for the source of a sweet melody flowing in the wind. Suddenly Claudia, our English instructor of the day, groaned and rolled a boulder larger than my head over to the center of the circle. She asked us to compare this huge boulder to things that weigh us down in life and the tiny stone to things that makes us happy. I compared my anger, my short temper, and my low self-esteem to the boulder. My family and my boyfriend represent the tiny stone that makes me happy in life, but I realized that my relationships with both of them haven't been very healthy. Although I realized that my relationships weren't healthy, I didn't realize I was the problem why they weren't healthy. I thought that I was good enough, that I gave enough already and that I didn't need to fix myself; it was them who needed to do so. In result, my ignorance made a fool out of me the next day. That day we hiked to the top of Mount Walkins. On my left was Clouds Rest, in front of me was Half Dome, across from Half Dome was North Dome, and on my right was Eagles Peak. The emerald green trees, silky streams, and caramel forest floor looked like toys to me. Immediately, the chord of realization struck again. I realized that relationships are like this

beautiful view. Without the silky streams, the trees would not be emerald green. Without the caramel forest floor, the trees would not hold and the streams would not flow. I realized I cannot expect the same kind of love back from those who I gave my love to. Love comes in many different forms. People are not perfect but their love will always be perfect like the tree that absorbs the glistening water of a river and grows. Love to trees means sinking its roots into the river floor and to firmly hold the boulders and ground together to support the river's flow to its destination. I realized I only saw one kind of love, mine, and since I didn't recognize the love my family and boyfriend were giving me, I became angry, short-tempered, and developed low self-esteem. That night I made a commitment to myself that I will sink my roots into the river bend to firmly hold the boulders and ground together to support the river's flow to its destination. Mount Walkins taught me the art of love and my rage of misunderstandings quickly vanished. That night I made a commitment to myself that I will leave this huge boulder behind by the time this course ends so I can improve my relationships. The raging part and short-tempered part of the boulder fell off. The boulder I carried on my shoulders became smaller, it was called low self-esteem.

Our first expedition here lasted seven days, the longest I have ever gone without make-up and dressing up. I began my first day at base camp staring at myself in the mirror. My face was dotted with dusts of sand instead of the Sandy Beige foundation probably sitting in my bathroom cabinet at home. My lips were dried trenches stained with blood instead of the dazzling red Wet 'N Wild lipstick that caught the attention of high school boys back at home. My hair wasn't silky, but oily like a mop that was smothered with cooking oil. I no longer had two eyebrows but one, a uni-brow. As long as I can remember, I have never felt so hideous. I was disgusted throughout the first two weeks of the course until the girls here complimented me on my smile, my natural beauty. I didn't believe them at all. I couldn't bring myself to fully believe them. Then one night Michelle reached out to me. She expressed that she sensed low self-esteem in me. It wasn't a problem that I had realized before. I told her I was afraid of being myself since everybody back at school sees me as a "diva." She assured me that I can be myself here, and this place right here is not school. I felt like I was a butterfly, just like another victim, trapped in the sticky web of the wolf spider called "society." Others saw the beautiful vibrant colors on my wings but they didn't see that deep inside me was as dull as a black and white photo. That dull part of me became as vibrant as my heart wanted to be when I climbed up a twenty feet telephone pole during a ropes course on day nineteen of the course. Like the first flight a butterfly takes, I was afraid and unsure of my wings, my capabilities;

because society said I can't be the way I want to be if I want to be beautiful. But I thought to myself, I was never ugly before make-up. I was only ugly because I was brain washed by society's definition of beauty. I can be who I want. I can dress any way I want. I can look any way I want. I can be myself. I can be who I want. To be able to do what I want, is beautiful and that is what I am now whether I have make-up on or not. I am no longer strangled to the sticky webs of the wolf spider called "society."

Two days after our solo expedition, I was head honcho. Being head honcho has always been easy for me when I had the help of the instructors. But this expedition, I didn't have their help because they wanted me to grow. As usual, I woke everyone up at 6:15 in the morning so we could make it to our destination on time. During the day, someone came to me and said that I should be more patient and that life would be so much easier if I took it slow. This comment made me upset because I felt like the way I lead was being compared to the way I lived my life. My emotions got to me and I gave up on leading for an hour or two along the hike. As head honcho, I asked others to lead for me. I began to have flashbacks of prior failures. Last year, my family nominated me to be the very first leader of our family meeting. I was in charge of calling meetings any time there were tensions in the household. I was in charge of making plans for the family, as well. At our very first meeting, the different views and opinions of my father made me cry. He told me that I am not a good leader because I had cried. I had never felt any worse in my life than that day. I felt so badly, I gave up my position of family leader. Then, half way through the hike, I thought to myself about everything I've acquired here. I was given four core values to improve and learn about. They were service, determination, compassion, and integrity. I understood that I may not be a humorous leader or a sergeant leader, but I am an effective leader as long as I show service, determination, compassion, and integrity. I apologized to the whole group that I let my emotions get to me. I also informed them that when I ask for their opinions when it comes to making decisions, it's because they matter. When I lead, we all lead. I will make decisions based on what is the best way to go for the whole group, not just for me. ARC gave me these priceless core values to be an effective leader for the future.

Many will never realize the beauty of life until they take flight into the wrath of the world. There is no place better than the comfort of home. It is quite unusual for teenagers like me to understand the meaning and value of life and beauty but thanks to Adventure Risk Challenge, I have acquired the one and only secret golden chord to happiness. The first chord is realization, realize what you have. The second chord is appreciation, appreciate what you have. The third chord is leadership, give more and expect less. Adventure Risk Challenge steered me away from the distractions of society to the cliffs of mountains to test my capabilities and with their strategies, I acquired this chord, this secret chord that is only mine to keep for eternity. I will not be selfish and stop here. I will share this secret chord with those back at home, those distracted by society. "Man goes on a journey to discover that the comfort of home is golden."



# nolberto sanchez

## From the End to a New Beginning

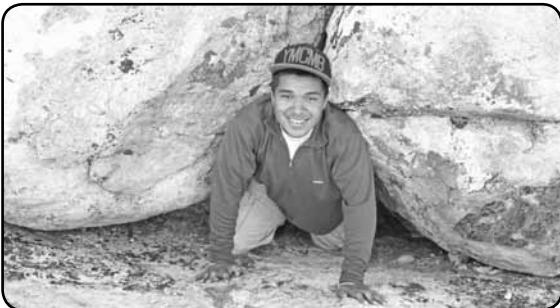
I am a Raccoon  
Tiny but mighty,  
Sneaky and tricky  
No matter what  
I'll be the raccoon that  
Keeps moving on and never stops fighting.  
No one ever expects my fortitude,  
Because I either look small or weak  
And I can get beat  
Down  
Easily  
But that's what they think and that's how they feel  
I am not going to contradict them  
Because I know what they think isn't real.

I get what I want and what I desire most of the time  
Hard work or easy I'll finish it right  
I build dens with family and gather the food  
Even when I am not in the mood  
Keeping a strong bond  
Yet no one expects that from me because  
I'm an unassuming raccoon  
I face my struggles with my family together

Their love is my castle and their support is my sky  
Throughout the Bountiful and the loneliness they were the ones  
Who helped me rise by being there when I would lose the fight  
As a raccoon I'm always so hungry  
I'll eat in delight through the difficult times  
When I get put down and I can't thrive  
With my small little hands ill sure put up a fight,  
For that bag of Hot Cheeto Fries.

Whenever I'm bored my friends tell me jokes  
Laughing inanely that I'll start to choke  
I live life to the fullest with nothing to spare  
I'll even go places others won't dare.  
When I creep behind by those huge buildings  
I look up and hear the music playing so loud  
It's intense in my ears.  
I just start to dance and never stop once  
It's my passion, My Life!  
It makes me feel  
Like I can fly  
Something that changed me  
Completely inside  
I can finally say that dance  
Saved me  
But throughout the years my life has been  
like that lonely cloud in the sky  
Always in a inexplicable disguise  
Wearing a mask hiding my interior Divine  
I am no longer in Pain  
The depression has gone away  
And my life has been made  
With my friends and my family  
By my side, I'll still be what I am today.  
I am a winner and for sure ill conquer my dreams,  
They said I wouldn't make it the ones who were my friends  
Those coyotes who would chase me and until the very end  
Throughout my life I've been so solitary  
And never ever have I had a best friend  
But look at where I am today I'll maybe rub it in their face  
Enough has been said  
It's time to make a change.

I glimpsed a treasure box  
I seen out on the street  
It looked very secure and impossible to open  
It stood there many years  
Looking very golden,  
I finally obtained the key and opened up and seen  
My life, my goals, Memories and Dreams.





# The Person I Never Thought I Could Be

It all started when I first heard of “ARC,” a summer program in Yosemite. I was at school and my best friend Dania came to me and said, “Hey Norbit, did you hear about the 40-day program in Yosemite? We should go.” I was excited and told her, “Of course we need to go.” The days went by quickly, and before I knew it, it was orientation. Three other friends came to orientation, but my friend Dania couldn’t come anymore, because she got really sick. I told her that I didn’t want to go at all and that I hoped I wouldn’t get accepted. She told me not to think that way, because the course would be fun. She suggested trying my best to get accepted. She asked me to do it for her and Andrea, my other best friend. I couldn’t let her down, so I did as she said. I’m so glad I followed through with the course, because I was able to open up to people and try new things.

I went to orientation and met the rest of the group, and everyone I met that day was really cool. I was shy and didn’t want to talk to anyone except for one of my friends from school named Epi. Those three days were unforgettable, because some of my shyness went away and I made friends with the rest of the group. As soon as I got back home I texted Dania, thanking her for her advice and telling her that if I did get accepted I would miss her a lot through the summer. She told me that I would have fun and that she would miss me too. I was sad to hear that, because she is like my older sister. I didn’t think I was going to get any advice better than hers. Time went by fast, and I got accepted. Dania was happy for me. I still remember telling her that I would bring her something back, and she said “You’d better!”

It was finally the big day, the day that was I was going to get picked up to come to Yosemite, and I was really nervous. I told my mom that I was going to miss her, the food and especially my little sister. I wanted to cry and I could tell she wanted to cry too, but my mother is a strong woman. She said to be really careful and that she didn’t want anything bad to happen to me. I hugged her and said my goodbye before I left. I wanted to say goodbye to my little sister, but she was playing with her friend somewhere around the park and I didn’t have time to go find her. I told my mom to tell her I’d be back really soon, to not worry about me, and that I would come back to watch Scooby Doo with her.

I needed to learn to let go of the city life and the customs I had at home and live the nature life. I got in the SUV and saw Ana, Naly, and Michelle. We went to pick up Epi.

We finally got on the road and drove to Yosemite. It was a pretty long drive, and I was excited to see the rest of the group. We got there, and I saw all my orientation friends: Diego, Joaquin, Michael, Tori, and Jesus. There were also two new students from Truckee, Christian and Quad. I was so happy to be out in the wilderness again with the fresh breeze, the beautiful smell of the trees, birds chirping and the sound of the river. I was feeling stress-free and calmer in the wilderness and with all my friends. I was sure that I would have a pretty good summer.

Here at ARC I’ve been taught valuable skills that no one has taught me ever before. Throughout the course I was taught how to backpack in the wilderness. I learned how to set up a tent and how to turn on a stove. By learning new skills, I gained faith in myself and believe I can do what I set my mind to.

It was expedition one, and I was told that it was the longest one we would ever have. Right away I exclaimed, “Wait, what!?” Knowing it would be a long week of learning backpacking skills, the trip ahead seemed really difficult. But I made it through, and it was fun and exhausting. I had faith in myself to make it to the end by keeping up with the rigorous schedule we had and knowing by I will eventually make it to my destination.

That first week was awkward because I would barely talk to the group, and I only hung out with the people I knew. Everything changed when we got to base camp. I felt something unexpected coming my way, and it did. I started talking to the rest of the group and I wasn’t shy anymore. I could say anything I had on my mind and laugh with them. I knew then that I felt glad I had met new people; over time they would become my family.

Opening up to others has always been difficult for me. I still remember that day when I started bursting out crying because of a leadership lesson titled, Alienated Immigrants. The lesson made me realize that I was part of the reason why my parents felt alienated from me. I hid my report cards and lied to them about when I would be home or where I was. I felt like I’d been a bad person who didn’t deserve to live, that I’d been a horrible

son. Opening up to others and sharing my experience with them helped me realize that I’m not the only one who makes mistakes, but it also helped me learn to trust others.

Throughout life I have never trusted anyone, and it’s hard to when a lot of people lie to you. Here at ARC I was taught to only trust someone if a person honestly trusts you. To me there are two kinds of trust: one of them is to trust people during a difficult task,



knowing they are there for you. The second one is to trust someone with your life and your secrets and to keep solidarity. Something I still need to work on is to trust more. ARC has taught me a good lesson on trust. I can only trust a few people on my team, and the reason is because I don’t know them well. I still think my teammates are awesome people to be with, and we have a fun time. But to life there is more than just fun and games.

Struggling through the hard times was another thing that kicked me in the face. I didn’t like doing any of the physical activities that we had to do. I hated the fact that we had to hike with a heavy backpack, go rock climbing, and do a ropes course. Every time I faced a challenge my group supported me. The only time I couldn’t keep on going was the ropes course day, when I was too terrified to go down the zip line. Everyone else had done it except me. I regret not doing it, even though at the time I felt like I was going to die. For the first time my fear overcame me instead of me overcoming it.

I am thankful to my friend Dania for telling me that I would have fun and experience something new. I love my ARC family and without them I wouldn’t know what I’d be doing now. I’m just so happy that together we are all getting through this and that we wanted this experience more than anything. We have all come closer to each other, and I know after the 40 days are over I am going to miss them all so much. This is something I am never going to forget, and it will be imprinted in my heart forever. Furthermore, I know that together we have become winners, leaders, and role models. We conquered, we thrived, we are the unstoppable!

# quad andrews

## Harsh Struggles of My Life as a Jeffrey Pine

My past was dark, soundless, colorless  
Nothing was able to spark my communication  
I couldn't find the happiness with in me

When I started to grow  
My trunk got big and stout  
With the smell of vanilla  
I am a jeffery pine

When i was growing  
I had to mentaly fight to stay intelligent  
I had to dig my adolescent roots deep  
So I could obtain water  
That was just the start of my struggles

My depression struck me hard  
Like snow weighing down my branches  
I struggled to shake it off me  
But my depression kept coming back  
I felt cold, sad, alone  
Like no one was there for me

The warmth of the sun comforted me  
As she slowly melted the snow  
Bit by bit till my depression was gone

I felt able to grow  
To offer my ability to feed life  
Loving to feed my family  
To bring food to my table

Wanting to live out my dreams  
To become the tallest tree in the forest  
To become the chef I want  
And would love to be

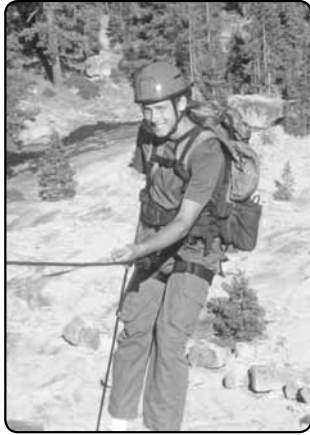
Four years of studying the art  
Then to open my branches for business  
Extending my branches out  
For birds to relax and squirrels to eat my cones  
To own my own restraunt

My next step is to improve my ability  
To taste the texture of my nurturing food  
Dropping my cones to see and hear  
The comments of the animals that taste them  
To keep my ingenuity growing



# Forty Days of Change

“When will you have time for yourself, when worrying about your own feelings?” I created this quote three years ago, because I always worried about my own feelings. When it came down to it, I just needed to stop worrying and start fixing why I felt sad and depressed. Being in that state made me stronger yet weak in many areas of my life. What I became was like a brittle structure of brass. I looked stable on the outside and well crafted, even though I was easily hurt and damaged to the point where I could break. At times I did and I slumped back into the same rut each time. I acted like a robot, never putting myself into anything, trying as hard as I can not to let my friends glimpse at the pain in me. My grades would drop; I wouldn’t help out around my house. My teachers asked me why I stopped trying in class and I would just respond with, “I am just not feeling that well.” “Either way they don’t really care about me,” I told myself anytime they would ask. My parents would rag on me about not doing my chores and just sitting around the house all day when I got home. I just wasn’t myself until I heard about Adventure Risk Challenge. I picked myself up off the ground and pushed myself to participate in the forty-day course. ARC has enabled me to practice some amazing new skills like independence, opening up to our group, and showing more emotion. ARC helped me turn around and realize I had so many things to improve on, especially my writing and patience.



In ARC there have been a lot of opportunities that has showed me how to work with more independence. To be independent is to be free. For most of my life I have been under supervision by my parents, teachers and my scout masters. They have all looked over me and told me what to do, but not how to do it better in order to become more independent. ARC has the support that shows me the right way and allows me to become more independent. For once I feel able to reach out and work by myself or with a small group. In the past, I have never done the laundry at my house. In ARC I have done the laundry for everyone else, while they work on the dishes or the bear canisters. Cleaning has become easier and I feel like I can do it without complaining or whining. I used to think that my parents would clean my dishes when I was done eating. When I return home I will bring this value of independence with me to show my parents that I will be more helpful around the house. Being able to help would make me feel like my hard work can be put into opening up to my peers.

The hardest thing I thought I could do was opening up about my past and my childhood, explaining to my peers that my childhood was full of struggles relating to my hearing and involving depression. I was deaf for about a year when I was six years old. When I was deaf I thought that everyone heard muffled sounds, and if they couldn’t hear what someone was saying they read their lips. When my parents realized I hadn’t been able to hear them. They took me in to the doctors to fix me up, but I never really healed, there was a big gap in my learning experience from not being able to pronunciation. It frustrated me to hear that I had the lowest reading level in my class, and after a while I learned to understand I was set back. When I hit seventh grade I got depressed I couldn’t really find happiness. I felt depressed because

all of my friends from elementary school changed and I couldn’t find it in my heart to respect them. Every day I would try to fake that I was all right even though I knew deep inside me that I wasn’t alright. Throughout the school year I put the act on so my friends never thought I doubted myself. I did this for two years. Some days I found a little happiness and would feel great other days I felt worse. When I came to ARC I really felt like I could be happy and everyone here brought me up, they made me feel good. Better than I have felt in a long time. Opening up to my peers showed emotion towards every one that has comforted me by telling them “thank you.”

I was a closed book with my emotions and how I felt about others’ emotions. ARC has taught me how I could show my emotions; they taught me how I could express my emotions effectively and how to care about others. The first time I expressed my emotions it was after a break up with my first girl friend that came back to me three years later. Once she dumped me I felt hurt; I trusted her and she broke my trust. I hated her reason why she dumped me; she talked about how I changed, as if I was a different person. I had all these emotions and I released them in the worse ways; I told my peers at school what we did over summer vacation, just to get back at her for hurting me. What I felt like was a raging monster. I hated it, from then on I tried to bottle up my feelings and how I felt with others. Like I put on a mask to try to hide the ugliness of the anger monster in me. Now since ARC has changed how I take my feelings and control them so I won’t feel like that monster.

Writing was a big struggle up until fifth grade I never understood how to write a sentence. From then on I have had to fight to keep my grades up. I have never quite understood how or why my writing is horrible for any essay I tried to write. Whenever I even felt good about my work I got low grades on the assignment. For every time I used to hear, “Ok time for an essay,” I always felt like I died a little inside, unconfident about my own skills. I write in bullet points—short choppy sentences that were never really clear. If I liked the subject I had to write about, I wouldn’t have been able to turn it in on time. ARC has guided me though the different difficulties; their style of work has been amazing, two hours of writing a day at base camp. I just love the structure that ARC has given to me. I will always pace myself out so I don’t procrastinate. With my writing I have to stop and breathe with every single essay I am confronted with and be patience with the feedback that I receive.

Patience, a skill I didn’t quite understand. Since I was young I always tried to rush to complete or to push others to go faster. My father was the person I pushed the most, looking back I now feel bad that I haven’t relaxed the good times that I could have had with him. Every time we took a hike to Five Lakes I rushed up the trail, and waited for him to catch up with me. When I first came to ARC I was hit hard with the fact that I have to wait because my group wasn’t as experienced as I was. Every day in the first expedition, I always felt like I had no freedom to go faster than the group or as my own pace. After the first week I learned to understand that outdoor activities come easily to me and that I should help others out that are struggling. ARC has been able to catch a speeding bullet, and slow it down to a reasonable speed. I think ARC gave me the repetitive instruction that I needed to help me understand other people’s strengths and weaknesses are much slower then mine.

The forty-day course has been a life changing experience for me. Before I came I never thought that the course would be able to change me from my old routines. Every morning, waking up early to stretch out and go for a run instead of waking up and flopping on the couch in front of the TV. I loved the thought of working out in the morning, although I never got up and did anything. The forty-days really opened me to think about my life and how I will go forth to succeed in accomplishing my goals. Now my thoughts are about taking the step on achieving the first goal: making my life more independent and paying back the debts I owe.

# victoria fipps

## Overcoming Me

I am a Pipevine swallowtail butterfly  
In my cocoon  
I used to be a caterpillar  
Just passively going with the flow  
Never truly expressing myself  
I never believed that I could be someone

The swift construction of my cocoon  
Is the end of my childhood  
I'm now in need of protection  
From all the changes happening in me.

I am unsure of what happens now  
So inexperienced for what lies ahead  
In my so called life

What do you do  
When you have doubts and insecurities  
About yourself  
Raining down  
On your Cocoon

When you don't even know  
Who you are  
I need to shatter free  
From all my self hatred

That hold so tightly gripped  
Like binding holding me  
To my cocoon



But when I do break free  
Will I tumble and plummet  
To the predators waiting in the gloomy shadows  
Or will I catch myself and try again

I may be unsure of what lies ahead  
But I know that one day  
I'll make sure to show you  
My stunning sapphire and white colors

To everyone who didn't believe  
I am a Pipevine swallowtail butterfly  
I may have a lot more obstacles  
To overcome

But no one can take away  
All my beautiful vibrant colors

# Goodbye to the Old Me, Hello to the Person I Want to Be

“There is no such thing as a weird human being. It’s just that some people require more understanding than other people.”

Before I found out about Adventure Risk Challenge (ARC) and its summer course, I never really thought about doing something with my summer. I wasn’t the type of girl that goes backpacking or camping. Although I have never really liked camping, I have always loved outdoors. I didn’t really want to leave my family for 40 days, but my family wanted me to and they supported me coming to ARC. Since I had the support of my family and wanted to make them proud, I tried. When I found out I was accepted in the program, I was so excited and so nervous. My family was happy for me and hoped I would have an amazing summer. Yet, I still had mixed feelings when it came time to say goodbye to my family, and say hello to strangers. I remember saying goodbye to my mother when the tears built up they yearned to fall, and she said, “Don’t cry you’re going to have an amazing summer and I’ll be here when you come back.” Right then and there I just didn’t want to go, but I knew my family would be there for me. So, I stepped in the van and waited to meet my new so called “family.” I had doubts that these eleven other ARC students would understand me and love me. I always had a hard time opening up and showing the real me to anyone. Yet these wonderful eleven people became a family to me and are there to love and support me.

While on this 40-day adventure a couple challenges that really impacted my self confidence were backpacking and rock-climbing. Backpacking was difficult because I had never walked with a 40 pound backpack for miles and miles on end. Also I didn’t believe in myself and I keep telling myself, “You can’t do it. You’re not good enough. You’re bringing the group down.” I really thought I couldn’t do and when the miles keep getting longer I believed I was done for. I got frustrated within myself because I thought I wasn’t trying hard enough and I was letting everyone down. Nonetheless, my group was there for me the whole time and told me, “You can do it. You’re not bringing anyone down.” I knew I had to keep going not just for me, but my group. That helped me start building trust and respect for this group. Now I feel like I can and I hike seven miles no problem if I’m with these awesome people. This showed that I can be there for people and I should trust they will be there for me.

Another challenge that I faced is rock-climbing. Rock-climbing was tough for me because

I had to put faith in myself and other people I barely knew. As I started climbing, I didn’t really think about anything and I just tried to find places for my hands and feet. Soon I was standing and clutching to the side of a mountain, about 25 feet in the air, wiping my sweat off my face and I froze. My legs felt like jelly, yet I kept hearing my support team telling me I could do it and cheering me on. Right there, it became clear that these people cared for me and wanted me to succeed. I appreciated the people there for me because pushed me to be the best I can be.

I used to be so scared that no one would like me and that I would be an outcast. I used to be made fun of and not have anyone there for me except my family. I believed there was always something wrong with me but I discovered that people just didn’t take the time to get to know me. I didn’t like telling people how I felt and what my opinion is because I thought they won’t care. In spite of how I felt I tried to talk to everyone and to be myself in this summer. Now when we are at evening meeting or just talking about our future, I don’t hold back what I feel and I like showing people my feelings and sharing my opinion. I felt very strong about people sharing their feelings. I want to be the girl who’s not afraid of speaking up in class and talking to new people. I want to be myself—the one who’s funny, loud, and crazy. ARC has shown me that changes are healthy and you don’t have to be the same person your whole life. ARC has helped me realize that I need to do more in life and not just believe that where I am now is where I’m going to be in the future.

This summer has made me learn that I’m stronger both mentally and physically than what I believed I was. I can do anything I want if I believe in myself and not worry about what other people thought. I have pushed myself in so many ways. I started my summer not being able to jog a mile all the way through now I can at least jog two or three miles nonstop. I can do this because of the jogging partners I had, helped me push myself. I have not just had help with my exercising, but also I’ve had help with my English. I’ve not had an easy time with

English in my childhood. I have a form of dyslexia which meant I couldn’t read till about 7th grade. I had been made fun of for how I speak and how I pronounced words. I had to be in a special class because I couldn’t pronounce words right. ARC has helped me feel happier with what I can do and helped me get better at what I have a hard time with.

I see changes in myself that make me proud, like getting out of my comfort zone. I have gone rock climbing, backpacking, water rafting, and kayaking. I was so scared of deep water and ARC has helped me overcome my fear. I understand that it’s ok to have that fear, but I don’t let that fear control me and make me miss out on life chance. Another fear I had was meeting new people. I was so afraid when I had to meet all the college volunteers and the idea I had to interview someone. ARC worked so hard with me to get me ready to interview someone that by the time, I did I was excited, too. When I interviewed a woman, Laura, that helped me change how to think about my life in the future. I now think it’s really important to make connect and to get to know more people. I felt like I had a better understanding of how to deal with other and to be there for them.

I have learned that I don’t need to make up and awesome clothes to feel like I belonged. I don’t need to hide behind a mask of makeup, clothes, phones, and friends to feel like I’m important. I know what to show the real me and be proud of her. I want

to show the girl that laughs at her own jokes and love to meet new people. I want to get more involved in school and my community. I want to start helping in the animal shelters and hospital in my community. I’ve learned that there is a way I can make a difference in school and my everyday life. I believe I take things for granted and don’t help where I should. I learned that it’s never too late to make a change for the better. I need to start helping around my house and being there for my mom. I want my family to be proud of me. I need to show everyone that loves me or cares for me that I’m there for them. That everyone may not like but that to just walk away to people who care for me. I also need to give people chance to get to know just like I did in ARC. I know I can do these because of this summer and my new family showed me I can.



# community interviews

Halfway through our summer course, twelve community members volunteered their time to be mentors for our participants. These are excerpts from the narrative biographies students wrote about their partners.

## Stranger Becomes Influential

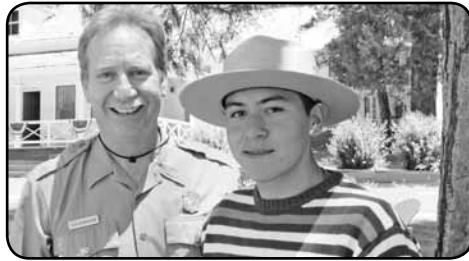


“Non Satis Scire.” This was one of the many things Tina Batt told me. It was Friday July 6, a big day for many of us. It was interview day. I patiently waited to know who my interviewee was. My heart was racing 100 miles per hour. As I heard my name called, I raised my hand and I heard Tina’s name. I saw who she was and I started to get even more nervous and the interview hadn’t even started yet.

- Ana Aguilar

## Working For A Higher Goal

Don has lived in California his whole life, and his parents are an important part of his life. While growing up, Don’s family moved from place to place, but he now lives in Yosemite Valley, and has a house in Point Reyes, CA. Don has two brothers and one sister, and although he loved them they would always give him a hard time. I can relate to Don on that one.



- Diego Pompa

## A Man’s Life On a Piece of Paper



Kyle Hoffman’s philosophy on life still impacts me. His wise words tell a story of his past. It struck me when he said, “If you love what you do, it’s not work.” When he said that I thought, “That’s true.” He also told me, “Success is finding contentment in what one does, and being loving with the ones [you’re] close with.” When I thought that it couldn’t get any better, he told me to “shoot for the stars,” and be determined with everything I do.

- Jesus Alejandre

## A Morning Full of Wisdom

I could feel the anxiety and nervousness flowing through my veins. The site where my interviewee and I would be able to ponder and have the opportunity to open up was awesome. It had sprinklers running along the green muddy grass, with a tree branch above us trying to reach for our heads. Before we started our interview, I saw a crowd of people starting to gather up where our circle was forming and in my mind I said “You can do this.”

- Christian Mendoza



## A Story That Inspired Me

Teri has managed to explore much in her life and I’ve been inspired by this. Her stories impacted my passion to return to sports. She is strong woman who loves her job and enjoys every day of it. Life may seem hard but remember Yosemite is a place where you can find yourself. For me, Yosemite is a place where I can find who I am, a place where I don’t have to hide. She



told me, “Be yourself, work on discovering what your goals are; what are the strengths and weakness in you and find the time to fix them.”

- Epifania Guzman

## Always Look on the Bright Side

The first thing that caught my eye was her glowing orange hair and her incredible bright blue eyes. She said, “Hi my name is Jenee,” and we began to talk. She told me she played soccer in junior high, she played in mostly every position. I was shocked because there weren’t any girls teams so she had to play on the boy’s soccer team. I asked her if she had



a favorite soccer team, she doesn’t have a TV so I chose for her USA, Chivas USA, and Chivas de Guadalajara.

- Joaquin Garcia



## Epicocity



Eric has taken some risky adventures in life. He has gone through war and served his four years in the military. He

has spent a lot of his life trying to recover from bad high school grades. After being in the military and in a war he realized school is not that hard. When he got out of the military he went to Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University to further his education. He got all of this accomplished by believing in himself and setting goals to achieve more. I am very impressed with Eric's life. He has wisdom that others can follow to succeed. - *Michael Bañuelos*

## Work Hard, Play Hard

Bernie now has his own thriving law firm, a wonderful wife, and two incredible children all because of his determination. In order to grasp his dreams, he put his head down and worked long, solid hours even if it meant coming out with a number of injuries. "Work hard, play hard" is his life philosophy,



challenges to him are part of the routine, and victories are when you approach a challenge without hesitation. Like my father, he taught me that

hard work and challenges pay off in the end with success, the kind that lasts for eternity. I will carry his wisdom in my heart and apply them to my everyday life routine. "I will be successful, Bernie. I will." - *Naly Thao*

## A Talk Between Two Guys

Like Andres said "every day has minutes and the next minute



you live is a new minute you can change your life in that one minute." These are words that he lives his life by. If he had been accepted to UC LA he wouldn't have been a

park ranger in Yosemite nor would he be sitting here opening up to me about his life. Andres was a major inspiration to me to live my life out to the fullest and that take every opportunity that comes at me. - *Quad Andrews*

## Making The Best Out Of Life

After graduating college, Gayle didn't really know what she wanted to do for her career, but that did not stop her from doing what she loved; telling stories and writing. That led her to apply to many different newspapers as a journalist. Gayle worked hard and had fun doing what she loves and she is still doing what she loves. As time flew by, she accomplished many goals, including writing two books: *Hard News* and *Building a Community*.

- *Michelle Lee*



## The Impact: Bob's Life Story

It was a sunny day, and a fresh breeze blew across my face. I liked it even though my allergies were killing me. As I sat in the circle of chairs my mind was thinking, "I better get someone interesting or at least someone who talks about dancing. As long as that person isn't boring I really don't care. I need someone serious that can be funny too." Luckily Bob was a very interesting person to talk to. I told him about myself too and that I love to dance, he said his son is a dancer and I was surprised because I didn't know he would bring up dance business into our conversation but we had really good talk



about it and I was happy with having Bob as my interviewee.

- *Nolberto Sanchez*

## Life's What You Make It

I hear the sweet, beautiful melody of birds singing in the background, yet I also hear the rushing of cars. I'm sitting here right next to a bundle of juvenile pine trees waiting for my



interviewee. I have never interviewed anyone in my life and waiting is so nerve-racking. I want someone that is easy to talk to and someone I can connect with. That's exactly what I got when I meet my interviewee. While Laura told me all about her life, all I could think was I wanted to know more.

- *Victoria Fipps*

Dear Parents,

Thank you for letting us come to the forty day course. We really appreciate you. Our biggest challenge has been staying away from you guys and the things you have provided for us in life. Throughout the forty days we have learned to appreciate you more. Now we realized that all your hard work is to give us the chance to have a better life. We also want to thank you for taking care of us. We appreciate your support and confidence in us. Thank you for showing us that you care for us by sending us letters. There are not enough words to describe your love for us. Every time we are facing a challenge we think about what you have taught us and that give us the strength to get through the challenges we have faced. Thank you for being our wonderful parents.

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Para nuestros queridos padres:

Gracias por darnos la oportunidad de asistir a los cuarenta días. Los apreciamos mucho. Nuestro reto más grande ha sido estar lejos de ustedes y las cosas que nos han provenido. Durante los cuarenta días hemos aprendido a apreciarlos más. Nos dimos cuenta de que todo el esfuerzo que ustedes hacen para que nosotros podamos tener una mejor vida. También queremos agradecerles el cuidado que nos han dado. Apreciamos el apoyo y confianza que tienen en nosotros. Gracias por demostrarnos que les importamos por medio de las cartas que hemos recibido. No hay palabras suficientes para describir el cariño que nos tienen. Cada vez que enfrentamos un reto, pensamos en todo



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**Without all of you, this extraordinary program would not be possible!**