

adventure risk challenge a leadership and literacy program

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University of California, Berkeley | Yosemite Field Station



Writings of the Pacific Fishers

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Me, Porcupine

I am the porcupine
Always carrying spikes
Blocking others from knowing my mind
Because I'm too weak to be attacked without any spikes

When I was a little kid
I didn't know how to use my soft spikes
Like the infant porcupine
I once was so welcomed when many classmates were around
But their mocking faces impress on my mind
"Pork chop" "Nerd" "Loser" "Tomboy"
Swords and knives stab emotionlessly and directly toward my heart
Like the aggressive bites on the baby porcupine
But I didn't know what to do
The baby porcupine can never leave its mother's sight
My parents told me,
Their crying girl
Sweep your tail and erect your spikes
To your enemies

Bullying didn't happen again
Except my best friend
Who betrayed me, lied to me, and teased me
The biggest nightmare presents
With the gang of previous enemies
Pain and sadness exploded rapidly from my broken heart
Just like a huge wound bleeding from a porcupine's belly
The wound is hard to cure
And I started to closed my heart
No one reads my secret mind
No one knows my little wish
The vigilant porcupine

As the time flies
I immigrate to San Francisco
Confusion gradually storms into my family
Stress, language, being misunderstood
They can't read my closed mind
And I don't receive their hidden love
Tons of problems pile on and collapse
On the day I decided to leave far away
Going far away for 40 days
The wall of pretending crashed
They state I'm rebellious
I fight back with coldness
Once again
I erect my sharp spikes
But guilt and sadness emerge
Day by day toward my heart
I long for their letters

I pray for their forgiveness
But it's already too late

Although the porcupine is an herbivore
She is not a silent sheep
Waiting to be eaten
But I'm not born to be a porcupine
But experience has taught me to use my spikes
I can't wait to throw out my past
My past of bullying
My past of sadness
I'm waiting for one day
The day of owning a strong mind
The day of being a strong porcupine
Without relying on my spikes



My Track on A Growing Road

"I see a new April. I see an April who has determination. I see an April who keeps trying when she is afraid, who doesn't give up, and who has conquered many challenges. Gradually you have already changed a lot. I have noticed a significant and evident change in you since we started this course." When I first read these sentences from Ann, the ARC instructor, my tears were unwilling to stop. I was surprised by the huge change in myself during ARC. In April 2013, I decided to leave home for 40 days to go to ARC. 40 days are just a tiny time in my life journey, but I know my metamorphosis is happening: from a coward porcupine who's ignorant of herself to a gradually confident and strong porcupine that's tearing out the cage from around her heart and facing the world.

Compared with the April from 40 days ago, I now possess a lot more confidence. Without participating in ARC, I would never have experienced so many challenges. The most memorable challenge was rock climbing. I was stuck on the huge rock on my first attempt at climbing. A painful feeling filled my arms. Helplessness and terror stormed into my mind. The teasing words and the mocking laughs of my past flew into my mind. And the way toward my dreams seemed extended unlimitedly with silent coldness. Is it real or my imagination? I didn't know. I only knew my heart was messy and my face was wet. "I'm a loser and I'll never overcome challenges," I thought and then my mind crashed. I felt like I totally lost connection with the whole world until Sean, an ARC instructor, comforted me. I can't forget his question, "You can't see the people who teased you now. How come you still care about what they said?" The mocking laughs stopped. I suddenly realized that accepting negative voices and self-criticism is hopeless. The seed of success is in my heart. It's always there waiting for me. It's the voice in my interior, escaping from my cage. I want to try again, but I'm afraid, afraid of falling; afraid of failing... The cheering suddenly woke me up. It's for Vanessa, who just got to the top on her second attempt at rock climbing. Her smile of achievement and happiness warmed me up like the sweetest spring to a thirsty traveler. I smiled back and told myself, "I also want to taste the sweetness of success. I know I'm never a loser!"

After that, I finished my second attempt at rock climbing completely. The destination wasn't important to me, but the act of overcoming my fears gave me such an incredible sense of accomplishment. Besides, the most important thing I learned is to have self-confidence and expand my comfort zone.

Without so many challenges in ARC, I might still be locked in my little cage, blinded and deaf to my heart. Prior to this summer whenever I thought of myself, I always have to battle my dazed feelings. Until the solo day, the letters from instruc-



tors finally cleared my foggy thoughts and stopped my running tears. When preparing this transformation essay and answering the questions in the English journal, I stared at it but I couldn't concentrate. There's nothing except the questions for myself in my mind. Did I change? Am I being myself or pretending to be the April who everyone wants? I had no idea at all. Crying silently, I looked at the clouds that perfectly represent my dark interior. Confusion and frustration jammed in my heart

without any spots and ruptures. Words and sentences expressed my feelings on the letter to instructors, but the feelings didn't change a little bit. Although I felt better after reading the returned letters from Will and Ann, these questions still annoyed me until the conversation with Ann in the next day. She told me how I can't please everyone; she was so proud at how much I changed and the growth I'm facing. The cage around my heart was crashing, and the voice from my interior got louder and louder. I knew it! I always knew what my heart is chasing for! A warm sunshine lighted up my dark side, and the clouds seemed not that dense anymore. Now it's the time to face my interior and walk through my road.

I always know I'm a porcupine facing my family with spikes, but now I start to use my heart instead of my spikes. Before I came to ARC, my parents once asked me, "Why do you treat us so polite, just like you would treat stranger!" I responded with silence and didn't dare to tell them that it was on purpose. At the time, I felt messy every day like the robot that can't follow itself. I knew I cared about my family, but my body didn't listen to me. Coldness and spikes were usually facing outward toward them. But I changed immediately during the first expedition in ARC. I realized that I love them so much and I miss them every day and night. I regretted treating them poorly and I even wrote a 2-page long letter to apologize. I can't wait to see them again and to apologize to them face-to-face. But when the graduation becomes closer and closer, I felt more and more nerves. I'm afraid of their misunderstanding. But I'll prove to them: their little girl has already grown up physically and mentally. At night, I dreamed back to the porcupine hugging its parents, who are very proud of their growing up kid.

The happy times in ARC are slowly turning into memories. I grew up and changed a lot: facing challenges bravely, living by my heart, and walking out from rebelliousness. Walking through the glory road toward my future, the encouragements and admirations are still in my ears. Now I'm not the timid porcupine anymore, but a mature porcupine that smiles at her challenges and follows her heart.

I am Yosemite creek beginning
From two strong independent mountains

My parents

The parents that feed me when I'm hungry,
That care for me when I'm sick

They keep me as I'm growing
And release me when it is time

I'm going to be ready to start my journey,
A journey so far from home
But I can't help but stop and think of my academic struggles,
The struggles that will be with me forever No matter how hard I try to escape them
It feels like I am in a whirlpool surrounded by equations, formulas, letters and numbers
They keep circling me, tangling me up and won't let me go

I am Yosemite creek trying to reach my destination but I'm stopped by a rock
A rock that been stolen from my creek like I was stolen from my family
The family that stuck with me through tough times
It feels like a dam is placed right in between my family and me
We can't see or hear each other most of the time
The fear is running through my mind
The fear of getting stolen from my family again getting stolen for no reason
The fear is telling me not to worry. But I'm not listening
It reminds me not to forget. but I'm always trying

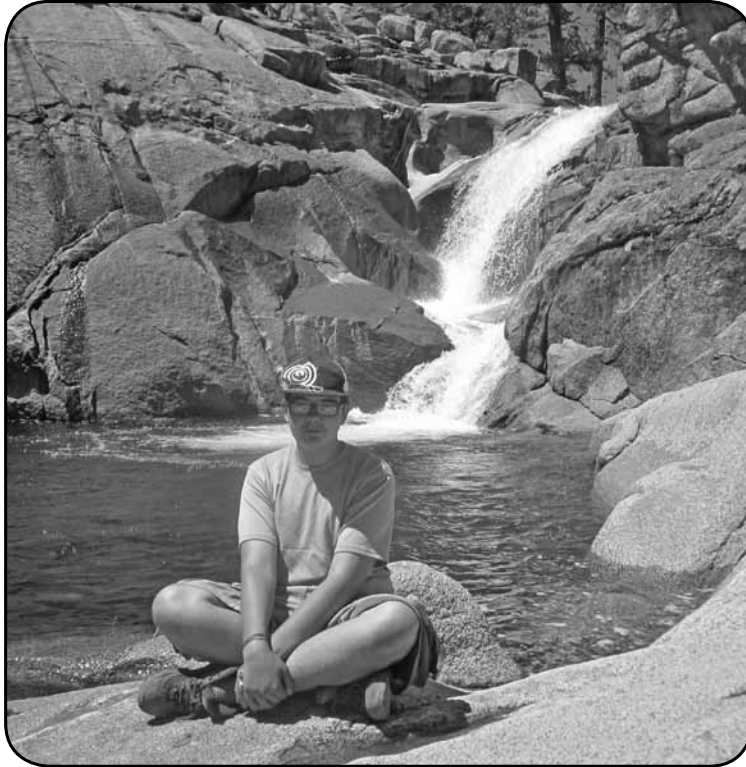
But when I'm finally placed on the right side of the dam I continue my journey
I get up right away and start doing what's right
But in the end I know where I belong and that is back where I started
Because I am Yosemite creek



How I Changed in 40 Days

When Adventure Risk Challenge (ARC) accepted me in the 40-day course, I was really not looking forward to going. My friends were not going to go. My mom was about to get married for the first time. My mind was set on “NO.” However, the ARC instructors kept on encouraging me (and even offered to bring me to Dos Palos so I could attend my parent’s wedding). Somehow through their encouragement, it finally hit me! A little voice told me to call back and say “Yes, I’m going!” Before I called, I said to myself, “Am I really going to do this?” I asked myself, “Am I doing the right thing? What am I going to get out of this?” Soon I forgot about all the voices. I called the ARC instructor and the word was out I am going to the 40-day course. I’m really glad I made the choice of coming to this course. I learned this summer how to be more independent, more appreciative of my parents, more confident in myself, and how to address conflict with others.

I am more independent here at ARC because of the packed schedule and the many responsibilities we have. At home I really lacked independence. I would not do what my mom told me. I would not follow a schedule and I would do whatever I wanted. It really meant a lot to my mom when I did what she asked, but I often did chores so fast and did not do them well. I moved on to what was important to me like going to my cousin’s house. I did not recognize how much she would have appreciated my help. Now that I’m here in Yosemite, I have had a lot of time to reflect on the hard times I have put my parents through and my negative attitude toward them. For example, one day at home, my mom asked



me to do the dishes. I told her, “No. Tell someone else. I’m busy.” I realized it hurt her feelings because her own child disrespected her. When I get back home, I’m going to make her proud by doing what she asks. ARC has helped me appreciate my family.

Another way I am successfully changing is in my confidence level. In school, I felt like the work was too hard for me and I was not good at anything because the only way for me to pass a test was to cheat. I also felt writing was hard for me. Before the course, my writing was dull and repetitive. After ARC, I feel that I can do better academically. In ARC I had the chance to develop my writing skills and I surprised myself in that I was able to show strong feelings in all of my writing, especially my poem. In my poem, I wrote about how much I love my family and how they care for me. I also talked about how I felt being away from my family. When I finished

writing my poem, I felt a new appreciation for my family and I had more confidence in my writing. Since I joined ARC, I have improved my writing skills. I think this will help me in school because my growth during this course will inspire me.

During these 40 days I also had to confront conflict. It was difficult for me to hold in my negative emotions. For instance, on our fourth expedition when we were hiking to Buena Vista Lake, I stubbed my toe and one of my ARC teammates was trying to push me to keep moving and I was so frustrated that I lost control. After everything happened, we used a conflict resolution tool called V.O.M.P., which

means: voice, own, empathy and plan. Through this exercise, I learned the importance of communication with my teammates. This conflict resolution tool was an easy way for me to address conflict and let go of negative emotions. This particular experience helped me become more communicative, not only with my ARC team, but also with people I come across throughout my life.

As the 40-day program comes to a close, I am able to see how I transformed. I have become more independent in my way of living. I have improved my attitude toward my parents. I increased my confidence level. I learned how to address conflict. In the beginning, I told myself I didn’t think I would get anything out of this course, but I realize that I learned more than I ever expected to. In the future I am going to be a changed person thanks to Adventure Risk Challenge.

Yosemite Falls

I am Yosemite Falls
In a precipice of academic failure

As I sit
In this horribly long lasting
English class
All I can think about
Is how much time is left
Not about the message being taught

I think to myself
When will this help me in life?
Outside of this brick room

I just meander through these two hour classes
Like Yosemite Creek
Thinking what I will do when class is over
As the water begins to move slowly
I begin to day dream
I want to move on to the edge of the falls
Not be stuck in this eddy of failure
These thoughts take over
My grades drops quickly
A, B, C, D, Failure
The falls are getting close
The water begins to form rapids
I try to write these research papers
But get stuck in yet another
Spinning vortex of disappointment
I lose confidence in myself
The pressure is immense
Too immense
The river turns to failure

The river of failure
Smashes into my parents
The massive granite boulders
who urge me to succeed.
All the way till the end
Until I take the plunge
Down, down, down
To Success
Or to failure

As I approach the edge, the water only gets faster
Even more rapids form
The final is on the desk
I jump into the test as

The river goes over the edge
Last chance to succeed
I fail to succeed
This class has turned to mist
Before the bottom

Now to make my way back through
The water cycle once again
Where I will make the plunge
Once more next year
Down, Down, Down Yosemite creek

My parents are disappointed
I neglected their hopes
For my success in school
I knew inside I could pass
But did not pull through
This is the pollution that flows through the crystal clear water
Just knowing this is the first class I have failed
Failed, Failed, Failed
Gives me chills

Shoulda, Coulda, Woulda
Goes through my mind continuously
This pain motivates me to try harder next year
Maybe next year

Summer has passed
I'm ready to pass



The Compelling Ways I Transformed In Just 40 Days

In the last 40 days with Adventure Risk Challenge (ARC), the most amazing program I have ever joined, I have gone rock climbing up many challenging rock faces and rappelling down a 150 foot cliff. I drifted down the Merced River while looking at Yosemite Falls in the distance. I experienced the Mariposa Grove with the largest trees by volume in the world. I backpacked through dense forests on four expeditions totaling 60 miles all across Yosemite. These experiences have all taken place with my Adventure Risk Challenge family, in my newfound favorite place on earth, Yosemite National Park. In my time here I have learned more about myself and how to respect my surrounding environment. I have increased my patience in order to work with a team while at the same time I have worked on being more self reliant.

One way ARC has helped me learn more about myself is by pushing my patience to the limits. At the beginning of the 40 day course, I started off on an eight day backpacking expedition with nine other teenagers. I did not know or understand their weaknesses or strengths. When we were hiking throughout the day, each hour people would begin to move more slowly. At these times, I would think to myself "Why can't we move faster?" In order to try and hike faster I asked Ann, one of our instructors, if we could split into two groups, one group of people who wanted to hike quickly and one group who wanted to hike slowly. The response from Ann was we all needed to stay together. When I was leading the group I would constantly hear the words "Simmer down!" This meant some people were far behind and the group was like a slinky. I would think I was not going fast when really I was. Throughout the hike, I found a balance in the speed I was walking. Inside I would think it was slow but I realized we as a group would get to our destination eventually. I learned to enjoy the beautiful views and time I have in Yosemite instead of making it a race.

I have also gained more independence while on this course. Before I had the opportunity to do my first 24 hour solo expedition, I had no idea I could be alone for such a long period of time. I overcame

the challenge to live, build a shelter, and be alone with my thoughts for 24 hours. During this time, I enjoyed going deep into my mind. I was able to reflect on my independence in this world and know how important independence is for me. Soon I will be able to move out and go to college. I am going to move from beautiful Incline Village to the city of Sacramento to go to the Cordon Bleu Culinary Arts Institute. There, I will need to be independent and work hard in order to follow my dreams of becoming a chef.

In the time I have spent with my new ARC family, I have learned to respect my surrounding environment by using a strategy called Leave No Trace (LNT). These guidelines help me do my part in keeping Yosemite beautiful for future generations. The LNT rules taught me to make small changes that, until recently, I had never thought about. One of the guiding principles I now follow is: do not drop even a crumb of foreign food in the backcountry. This is important because the animals that live in that environment will slowly become reliant on those crumbs. If they become dependent on our food, they will not know how to get their own food naturally. Before going through this course, I would have said few crumbs do not matter; after all, animals need to eat too. Now, I carry a bandana around with me everywhere in the backcountry and pack out even the smallest crumbs. Another course of action I am practicing is to watch my every step. As I

walk down the long single track trails or camp in the lavish forests, there are large trees and tiny delicate plants all around. Previously, I would just walk on through the forest not thinking about the tiny, fragile plants on the ground. I have now realized that once I step on these plants, they eventually die simply because of my lack of concern. Now, I can say with a certainty that I watch my every step to help preserve the existence of all life in the backcountry. Outside of this course, I will continue to practice the LNT method and pass the knowledge on to my friends back home.

In conclusion, my time here in Yosemite for 40 days has been truly life changing. I now know how important patience is in my life. I know in order to understand people I will need to

be patient. I will need to take the time to see what their skills are and not rush into any judgments before getting to know them. Furthermore this course has made me realize the importance of relying on myself and independence. I will make the effort to spend more time with myself and my thoughts in nature. While in naturally beautiful places like Yosemite, I will practice the lessons I learned through ARC regarding the LNT policies. My time here has transformed my way of thinking about myself and nature, and I believe it will be extremely beneficial to my future. I hope other high school students can continue to benefit from the transformative experience Adventure Risk Challenge has to offer.



I am a snow plant
Fragile and weak
Constantly learning from my surroundings
Collecting fungi for its nutrition
Curiously spreading my roots
Until my roots reached unknown territory

Wrapping me with a relentless grip
My parents expected me to be a typical woman
To stay home in the kitchen
Because that's where I belonged
I cleaned, I cooked, I washed, I swept
I mopped, I wiped, I dusted, and I vacuumed
There had to be more than exhausting work in the confinement of
four mind-numbing white walls
Walls that closed in on me when I had my back turned
Walls that trapped my solitude
So I could perceive the reality that I lived in
Walls that I wanted to demolish to let my roots grow
Dreary lifeless white walls that suffocated me
Suppressing me 'til I renounced my defeat
Giving up was not an option

Didn't matter if I had support from my mom, dad, family,
and community
Like the soles of the hiking boots compressing me to the ground
Preventing me from growing
I wanted to do what I loved
Rising up through the thick layer of dirt, rocks, and sticks
I realized that I should be playing softball

I had no experience
I did not sprout with the knowledge of the game
But it all came naturally to me
Grounding the fluorescent ball
Launching it to first base was electrifying
One way or another
I would make everyone
Everyone see
That I was born to be a ball player

Being on the field felt like home
My terrain that I fortified from trespassers
It fueled me
I was nourished with bright knowledge
coming down from the intense rays of the sun
It made me feel like I was blossoming
in just the right spot
I felt comfortable
Too comfortable
Where did my talent come from?

Skills passed on through generations
Energized by the soil
Through the thick grass and bright horizon I discovered
My grandpa was a baseball player
He became my role model
When I walked out onto the lushes' field
I was playing for him
For the magnificent gift that he gave me

When I needed nutrients I looked to my grandpa
Looked
If only I could look at him
Look into the glossy whites of his eyes
Glistening, shimmering in the waves of the sun
He's passing took me back to the lifeless white walls I once lived in
The walls that wouldn't let me go

I am as rare as the scruffy crimson bandana that my grandpa owned
Visible from miles away
Walking the trails of Snow Creek Trail you could spot it with ease
With every catch
With every throw
His wisdom and direction flowed fluidly from the bandana
Tickling my delicate skin as it escapes from my finger tips
Following the ball 'til it reached the other glove receiving the last
and final out
My grandpa is my inspiration

The snow is starting to melt
I know now that my time is approaching
People are starting to notice me
University of Hartford showed great attraction
to my vibrant red glow
Being held back from my true potential and suffering
from the agony of my loss, I've grown
I made a decision to reject the offer
the University of Hartford had presented to me
A decision I will never forgive myself for
Sleeping has become a task for me
My dreams are lost in the tangle of my struggles
I took responsibility for my actions
And I know that all will go well for me
Keeping a bandana on my wrist
I know I have protection from my angel up above
The stars gleaming in the night skies keep me from wilting



I always knew I was different
It was difficult to confuse me
with other plants
My bright luminescent color standing out
in the piles of pine needles,
Dirt,
And forest litter,
Growing as the snow melts

I am a plant with no chlorophyll
I am a plant that does not photosynthesize
I am different
I will always be different
I am a Snow Plant

No Longer Lost

The sky turned into dusk and the clouds became dim. Rain was slowly approaching, waiting for its moment to strike like a bear ready to attack its prey. I stood on the side of the mountain with one foot on the lip of a rock and the other dangling on the side. I was petrified that my foot would slip and my hands clenched onto rocks trying to prevent myself from falling. I used my hands to feel my way around, anxious to find a crease in the rock, so I could grab onto it and climb. I caught a glimpse of a rock that would fit my hand seamlessly but it was out of my reach. I glanced down at my belayer and realized how high I was and timidly whispered, "I can't do it." I hoped my belayer would hear me, so I could rappel down. My voice was lost in the wind and escaped without being heard. Every muscle in my body stretched out towards the rock and grabbed it. I continued on with ease as the sky became clear again. I was thrilled that I had reached the top. I told myself I couldn't do it, but I did. I learned that with confidence I could do anything I set my mind to. During the Adventure Risk Challenge course, it has taught me to be more independent, be a more capable woman, be committed to what I want, and be more open to failure.

The program has transformed me into an independent woman who is self-reliant. Before the course, I depended on others to help me accomplish my goals. I never did anything for myself and expected to get what I needed in my hands without working for it. Through the ARC program, I understood the importance of being an independent individual. In the past, I had never cooked for myself, much less for a family of twelve or sixteen like we do at ARC. Back home, I confined myself in my room until I could hear the clattering of the forks being set on the kitchen table. At ARC, every day for forty days, I would wake up at 6:30 (a time I didn't believe existed before this program). At home, I would wake up to sunlight seeping through the blinds. I have realized that there will be moments in my life where the only person who will do anything for me is the person I see in the mirror. I am a person who no longer relies on the outside world for help. Throughout the past forty days, I have grown to be a self-sufficient woman who depends only on her own skills and strengths.

Another insight I've gained during the course is that I am capable of doing things I thought I could not do. Commitment is a word that has stuck with me since I embarked on my journey in ARC. Before,

"commit" was just a word rather than an action. I would start to clean my room and never finish it. The word had no meaning to me and I never grasped what it meant. Coming to ARC, I have faced many challenges and learned that, with devotion and dedication, I can accomplish anything I set my mind to. During my rappel, I had to commit to letting myself slowly drop from 150 feet and hang from a sturdy rope. I couldn't turn back because I was the very first to volunteer and rappel. With each agonizing step of fear that I took, I was walking closer and closer to the edge of a colossal cliff. I imagined that with one wrong step all my dreams would come tumbling down. The instructors strapped me into a harness that wrapped around my legs like a slithery snake. I started to let my body take steps back to begin rappelling. My hands began to tremble from sheer terror of dropping 150 feet. I thought to myself, "I am halfway and I have yet to fall to my death." I took deep breathes, and without fully realizing it, I was achieving my goal and I reached the bottom. I learned that with faith in myself I could do anything, and rappelling is just one example of how far I can go with a strong mind. My accomplishments can be endless. I know now that I need confidence in myself and endless commitment to finish what I start because I am a capable woman.

Throughout my life, I've struggled to accept failure; however, being a part of this course has made me realize that failure is essential for learning and growth. I am the type of person who is unwilling to tolerate any sort of disappointment. After losing softball games, I would beat myself up and drown in the feeling of disappointment. Many thoughts and negative judgments would flow from one side of my head to the other. Failure was always in the back of my mind. When this program started, I brought the same harmful, pessimistic thoughts with me. They would prevent me from trying something new. Then I did the perch jump, an activity that was the biggest turning point for me in the course. At the

perch jump, climbing up the wobbly pole, my mind went blank. I cannot recall what I was thinking about. All I remember is that split second leaving the platform on top of the 30 foot pole and reaching for a rubber chicken that hung from the top wire. It was there, teasing me, and taunting me to grab it.



As I was in the air, I reached out and had the chicken on the palm of my hand. I deliberately let it go because my fear got in the way. I failed. I felt disappointed because I knew I could do it but I unintentionally let it slip out of my hand. The chicken symbolized my future and everything that I ever wanted for myself, especially my desire to be a Health Service Technician in the United States Coast Guard. It made me feel that in the future I'll quit and let go. My determination drove me to try again, to achieve my goal, and grab the rubber chicken. As I stood at the top, I looked not at the chicken, but at my future, hopes, and dreams. I leaped for it, leaped for everything that I had worked for, and that I am striving for. Once again, I was afraid, but this time I grabbed it. I seized it and held it up with triumph. I learned that failing is okay. Although I don't like it, it is a part of life and all I can do is learn from it. The difference between who I was before this course and who I am now is, instead of being disappointed and not moving on, I will now try again and succeed. I will not move on until I have succeeded and feel accomplished. I know now that without failure, there is no lesson to be learned.

Adventure Risk Challenge is a program that I am forever grateful for. It has transformed me into a person I am proud to be. I no longer fear the future nor do I hide from it. I have turned into a person who is more open-minded to failure and the lessons it can teach. This course has made me realize that I am capable of doing so many things that I previously didn't believe I could accomplish. ARC has also taught me to be independent. I feel comfortable continuing on with my life because I no longer need to rely on anyone else. I can do things on my own. I was lost before I came here. I felt like I pretended to be who others wanted me to be. Now I know who I want to be. I am no longer lost. I have been found.

I am a Giant Sequoia Tree,
I am Big,
Huge,
And Afraid,
Afraid of Falling,
Disappointing my Parents,
My Father the most.

This year I got home,
With an all time low GPA,
I saw the disappointment in my father's eyes,
Felt like I needed water,
But it wouldn't rain,
Choking,
Not knowing what to do,
Failing a class,
In danger of being ineligible,
And not playing Tennis this season.

The sadness in my Father's eyes
when I walked in with the report card,
Burned down my branches,
So much disappointment in them.

The Giant Sequoia Tree he was looking at,
The one he loves
And cares for,
Who he taught how to ride a bike,
How to kick the ball in the back of the net,
The one he would take to the park every day,
After work,
After his long 12 hour shifts in the hot sun,
Has weakened.

Instead of seeing me as a strong Giant Sequoia,
He looked at me as if I were sapling,
Instead of letting me be independent,
He had to look after me all the time.

It felt like torture,
Like I was removed from this Gigantic Forest of Freedom,
With a great view,
To a small reduced place,
Where no plants grow,
Where the sun doesn't shine,
Where all my plans of going out,
Having fun,
Are crushed,
Spending lonely nights in this shrunken space,
With my thoughts spiraling in my head,
I did this to myself,
No one else,
But me.

I hate this feeling,
It is deep inside of me,
Deeper than this thick Fibrous Bark,

This feeling wrapped around my throat,
Like termites are eating my timber.

But when I left for this 40 day course,
As I saw my dad with bags under his eyes,
Leaving to work,
I vowed to myself,
When you look up at me,
I'm going to make you smile.

Now that I'm here I've looked in the mirror,
And my personality is growing in a positive way,
I can finally see the sun during the day,
And the stars at night.

I feel like I took my Father for granted,
How could I do such a thing?
The Giant Sequoia that dropped the cone full of seeds,
And gave me life,
I have stepped on him,
Made him feel like I didn't care,
And neglected him.

I'm even more determined than ever,
From now on every conversation,
Every interaction,
Will show how much I appreciate him,
Because he is my Father,
I will raise my grades up,
For myself,
For my future,
And especially for my Father,
I want him to see me as the strong Giant Sequoia Tree I am.



A Big Step Towards a Better Future

It is 9:21 A.M., Tuesday, June 18, 2013. As I hear the car start up, I say one last good-bye to Pastel, the chocolate Labrador I've had since I was 13. I hear the annoying little honk of my mom's kid-sized car. I walk down the hallway to get my suitcase. I get sidetracked and walk into my room to look at everything I'm leaving behind... I look at the pictures on my wall of my sister, my parents, and my buddies. I take a look at that beautiful Club Santos Laguna flag hanging on top of my bed. I put my hand up against it, and tell myself "It is for the best, forty days and I'll be back here." I grab my suitcase. My eyes felt like the Pacific Ocean was ready to release its massive waves onto my face, but I held them back. I let the door slowly close shut behind me and I took a step forward. I took a step forward toward a new beginning: to becoming a more disciplined, appreciative person who has a better idea of his future.

I would never have become the disciplined young man I am right now if it wasn't for Adventure Risk Challenge (ARC). Before my twenty-four hour solo, I was an undisciplined child in school who would not study for tests. If my homework didn't get done, it would stay that way. It was during the solo that I realized I was a changed person. I made a promise to myself two nights before the solo, I was going to fast and not going to eat. I was sitting there without food in my stomach, but food in the bear can 50 feet away from where I was sitting. I was tempted to open that bear can, tempted to tear open the wrappers of food, tempted to demolish the food with my teeth... but I couldn't. I wanted to prove to myself that I had changed and I was a more disciplined person. Prior to coming to ARC, I would wake up in the middle of the day, without thinking of what my goals for the day were. Now that I'm here, I wake up at 6:30 a.m. or earlier, get ready for stretch circle, and start fitness in basecamp or start my day by hiking in the backcountry. When

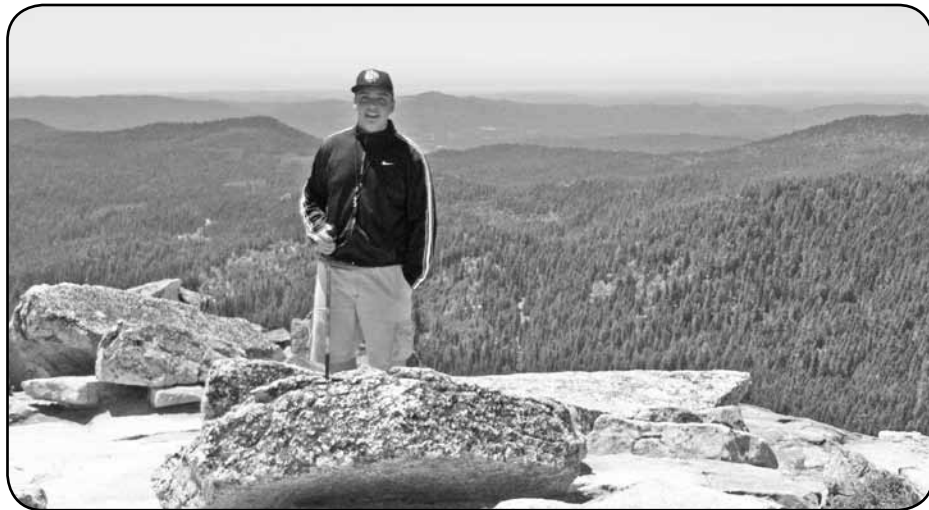
I go back home I plan to keep a schedule, be organized, and do my best in school. I have changed from this undisciplined child to this disciplined young man.

During these forty days, I have become aware of how I have not been very appreciative of my parents and family. At home, I would stay out with my friends and not come back until my parents were asleep. I would not get to have dinner with them. I did not get to tell them goodnight. I would be at a friend's house playing cards or going to the movie theater. I used to take my parents for granted. Now that I am here, I have a feeling that those nights will be rare, and when they do happen, I will be back in time to say goodnight while everyone is still awake. Instead of laying around all day while my mom is at work, I will make sure she comes

While at ARC I decided what my main goal for the future was. I have come to realize that I want to be a broadcast journalist. During an evening meeting, we were going around in a circle talking about what we want for our future when I realized I did not know what to say. The day after that, while we were hiking, I was thinking about how much I missed watching SportsCenter. Then, I thought to myself, "Being on TV must be nice... and talking about sports on TV would be outstanding." Reflecting on watching SportsCenter, the news, and soccer talk shows made me decide what I wanted. I talked to several people and they all gave me advice and told me to follow my dreams. Angel, a volunteer that came to help us with our poems, told me about his interest in broadcast journalism. He is studying journalism in college and he recently got a job at

a local radio station in his hometown El Paso, Texas. The encouragement from the people around me has shown me what my goals can be for the future.

I have taken steps toward a new beginning, I have transformed myself into a disciplined man who appreciates his family and has a better idea of his



home to a clean house. The house will have no dishes for her to wash, no floors to mop, and no dirty laundry to clean. ARC has taught me how to do all these things and do them the right way. When my mom comes home to a messy house, I see this look on her face that just brings her down. I can already see my mom feeling more grateful when she comes home to a clean house this fall. At home, I also had a sense of disappointment when my father would tell me I didn't do something right. Now I am going to go back to Dos Palos and I won't be hearing that as often. As I return to my home in Dos Palos I will appreciate my parents even more and help them out.

future. These are steps I will never regret. After ARC, when I return to my home in Dos Palos, I will keep this up. I will be disciplined by doing my chores, finishing my homework, and taking responsibilities for my actions. The next time I go out I will make sure I come back on time to say goodnight to my parents. My goals for the future are clear and I will be dedicated to them. If it wasn't for ARC, I would have been sitting on my couch all summer and regretting not coming up here to Yosemite and changing my perspective on life. I'd like to thank ARC for giving me an opportunity to change my life and help me become a strong, disciplined man.

kiwana conger

True Colors

I am a Blue Jay
Growing quickly and uncertain
Not knowing what the future will hold for me
From a young age
I was with a different caregiver
Known as the momma bird
The only thing that mattered to me
Was fitting in, it was the hardest part
I didn't care what the future had in store for me
I didn't care what direction I was flying in.
My struggles mostly began in school
When I finally found friends
Poisonous friends
Dangerous friends
Like a hawk staring me down
That's when I began not caring.
Because the other girls didn't
Not caring about school
Not caring about that voice in my head telling me right from wrong
My GPA was dreadful
There were limitless opportunities, but I couldn't reach them
I changed my appearance I grew an outer shell
But, there were true colors inside

Then that all changed
When I moved in with my daddy bird
In a different nest
With a whole new atmosphere.
My dad put me in the right direction
Showed me how to soar through the sky.
He pushed my limits
When before I was not given any direction

Nothing can possibly stop me now
Although it was hard at first to adapt to a new environment.
With a new school
Having to choose the right friends
But I found them quickly
They were always there when I cried out for help
They were my strength, when I was weak and couldn't fly
Today I see myself as a changed person
Growing more confident and independent
A whole new me
From who I once was

Now I'm like a blue jay
Soaring through the sky
And never touching the ground
I can't tell you my future
But I can tell you this
One day I will leave the nest,
Flying toward my hopes and dreams
Soon I will be attending college
With infinite confidence
A self-determined woman
Showing my vibrant true colors

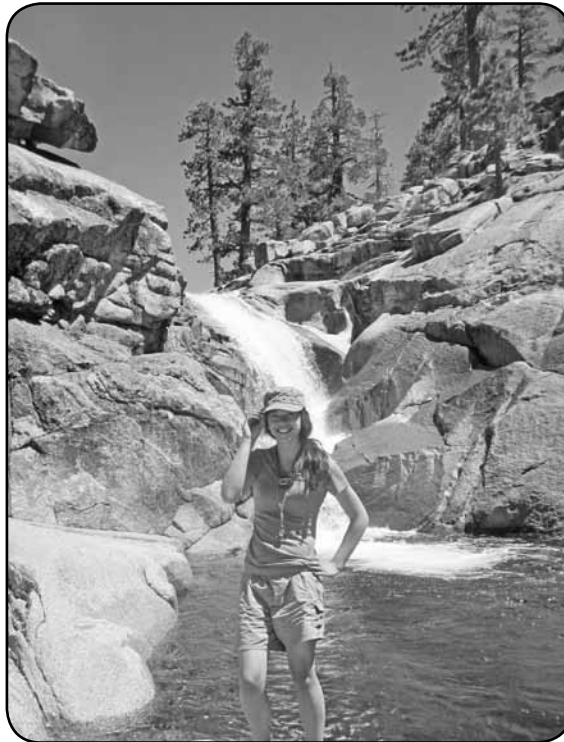


Seeing the New Me

"I don't want to do it. I don't want to go to the 40 day course", I told my mother the night before leaving for Yosemite. But I knew I had to go. If I didn't, I would see the disappointment in my parents' eyes. I didn't know what to do because I was confused about my future. I didn't know what I could gain over the summer. I couldn't even pack my bags without getting frustrated with myself. After a long night thinking about myself and my future, it was finally morning. I kept on asking myself, "Who am I?" and "What is my future moving toward?" At that moment these questions had no answer like a lost bird trying to find its nest. That morning I woke up with tears filling my eyes. I had a strange feeling that I was letting go. I was letting go of my daily life, seeing friends and family, my phone and my beautiful, wonderful bed. I was also letting go of everything that was important to me and going to Yosemite for 40 days. Through the 40-day course, I have gained more confidence and independence. I have a greater appreciation for my parents and I've become physically strong and more mentally aware.

Adventure Risk Challenge (ARC) made me into a self-determined young woman who I had trouble finding before. Before ARC, it felt like I was giving up on myself and on other people. I even pushed people away who tried to support me in achieving my goals. ARC taught me to not give up on myself and not let myself down. For example, rock climbing was, frankly, the scariest thing I have done. I kept telling myself, "Something is going to go wrong. I am going to die!" Even climbing to Tuolumne Peak, I kept saying "I am going to trip, then tumble, then die". I just kept pushing myself and saying "I can do it" and tried to believe in myself. ARC has a new challenge every day for me, even if it is just sitting in the classroom writing an essay or working on a science research project. From hiking, having a solo day, or climbing up peaks, it is always an adventure. I know that I cannot be perfect, but I want to try to do my best at everything I do. Maybe that is why they call the program "Adventure Risk Challenge".

Being away from home for 40 days has made me appreciate my parents more. It felt like I took everything they did for me for granted. When I was in Yosemite, I felt like I needed them more than any other time in my life to help me face my challenges. I remember the one thing that I miss most about my parents was the sound of their voice. When I was hiking, all I thought about was home. It was hard for me to keep moving knowing that I wouldn't be home for a long time. I kept looking at the clock, knowing what my family is doing back in home, sweet home: Dos Palos!



When I got my Dad's letters, I could imagine him telling me this, simply because he always did: "I hate going to the gym, but when I am finally done working out, I know this will pay off in the long run". I look at this quote, referring to the 40 day course, "it might be challenging and difficult now but in the long run you will gain so much from it." I would like to thank my Dad for helping me realize this. I would also like to thank my stepmom, Lisa. She has always fulfilled the role of my real mom ever since I was four. Without her, I wouldn't have even found this course, let alone,

even participated. Without them none of this would be possible. I also appreciate my friends more, I cannot live without them. I realize that my friends and family are the water and I am the fish. Without their love and support, I would not be the person I am today. I did not want to make friends at the 40 day course. I did not want to get attached and let go. But instead, I found family that will be there to support me and encourage me, when before I wanted only to be silent. I appreciate them more than ever now. Both my family in ARC and the family back home.

ARC has also helped me to develop my physical strength by running or hiking every day during the course. When the course started, I could not hike a mile uphill or run for just 5 minutes. The improvement was so little at first, but then I started improving my stamina day by day. I started to fill my head with positive thoughts instead of all the negative thoughts. Telling myself that "It's just all in your head! Keep moving!" Back in Dos Palos, it seemed like everyone used to tell me "You have the perfect runner's body" with my long legs and skinny waist. I joined the school's track team, to test out my "runner's body". The coach always wanted me to be the one to run the long distance sprints, but I could only do the short distances because of my asthma problems and not being able to breathe. In ARC, they understand my problems with breathing and keep trying to help me to become a better runner, while pushing me to finish the 5 mile run. Today I see myself as a more competent person: a young, capable, strong woman.

Kiauna Li Conger was an indecisive girl who was afraid of heights, who now climbs large granite rock walls. She was a person who appreciated clothes, but now appreciates family. That's me! Before my eyes were teary for having to leave home and go to ARC, but now my eyes are teary knowing I will be leaving Yosemite. ARC has made me a stronger person inside and out. I am now a more compassionate young woman. I am very glad and proud that I did ARC. I am so thankful for my parents to push me towards participating in the program. I feel more confident and independent than I could have possibly imagined.

Where the Wild Grass Grows

I am the baby wild grass
Not knowing the name of my parents
Not familiar with the faces of my brothers
I am the baby wild grass
Living on a green mountain peacefully
Don't know where I come from
Don't know where I should go

I lived with my ancient grandparents
Who nourished me since my tiny, vulnerable roots jumped out of
the soil
I am the treasure of their palms
They carried me wherever they went
And protected me whenever I needed protecting

Time flies
In the year of 2009
I was thirteen years old
Everything changed
I immigrated to America
Without the company of my grandparents
I was totally lost in an enormous forest
Like the wild grass brought to another mountain unwillingly
By a strange hiker

I am the wild grass growing independently
on an American Mountain – uncertain and vulnerable
For the first time I lived with Mom and Dad
For the first time I said, "Hello!" to the people
instead of saying, "Ni Hao!"
The feeling of embarrassment of speaking English
in school or asking directions that I will never forget
Every night, my lips touched each other softly
Repeating the vocabulary words again and again
Until my brain was exhausted
The feeling of fear of socializing with my long separated family
haunts me every day
Like my mouth was choked up with rocks
I didn't know what to say
I didn't know what to do
In the quiet room, my mind was empty
I begged God to help me go back to my beautiful home country
I looked in the mirror
And thought – Am I dreaming?
I am in America. I live in America!
I am the wild grass
Trying to adapt to my new habitat
Slowly, the real Ling comes back
A friendly and energetic girl



I am as persistent as the wild grass, never surrendering to the storm
I always try my best to accomplish the goal I set for myself
No matter how hard it is
I will learn to dance and sing in a storm of rain
I am the wild grass
Still growing and changing rapidly
I hope my sense of alienation at home, in community, and in
America will vanish one day
I am the wild grass
I am both weak and independent
But grow stronger and stronger

My Transformation

“If you don’t go to Adventure Risk Challenge (ARC), I will buy you a new iPhone or Galaxy 4 right now!” my eldest brother shouted seriously and calmly without any smile. ARC’s forty-day course was going to be my first time away from home. My family was very concerned about my safety and wellbeing because I was going to be out of their sight. They didn’t want to lose me. To be frank, my heart pounded tremendously when offered this deal from my brother because a new phone had been my wish all year. I just needed to say “yes” and I would fulfill this dream. However, I refused this charming contract and told him firmly that I would never give up this opportunity no matter what he offered. The forty days in ARC proved that I made the right decision. It totally changed me. It gave me confidence, modified my view of success, and made me treasure my family more.

Confidence is the most valuable characteristic I gained in ARC. Self-confidence is a bright light in my unpredictable future path. In ARC, there is a role called Head Honcho in which we practice and train our leadership skills. I remember the first time I was a Head Honcho in the backcountry. I was nervous. I did not know what to do. I was too shy to ask the staff for instructions. I didn’t want to speak out in front of the group or ask the unfamiliar ARC students for help. Every time I spoke, my voice was like a bee’s buzzing. Nobody could hear me or understand me. I was feeling very frustrated and helpless. I felt like I failed. The second time I became a Head Honcho, I learned from my previous experience and listened to the suggestions and advice of my teammates and ARC staff. I tried my best to cover my shyness and spoke each word clearly and loudly. I told myself quietly to believe in myself: “Don’t let your friends and family be disappointed in you.” Eventually, I did it. After my second experi-

ence as Head Honcho, my confidence has grown stronger and stronger and I have become more and more successful. I established better relationships with all my teammates. I was no longer terrified to speak English. In addition, I have more confidence to do new things such as rappelling, rock climbing, and navigating the ropes course. I really appreciate ARC and all the people around me who encouraged me and supported me to become a more self-assured person.

Second, my perspective of success has now changed and become more focused on happiness and living without regrets. Before I came to ARC, getting a 4.0 GPA, going to the best college, and being wealthy were my goals for life. I never pondered my own definition of success. I just followed what my family told me to do and followed my community’s perspective of success. For this change, I want to thank my ARC interviewee, Becca Fenwick. After having a long conversation



with her, I understood money and honor are not the only important things in life. In addition, she said that we only have one life and it is short. “Don’t live with dissatisfaction and sadness. If you are a millionaire, but your whole life is painful, what is the point of living?” In that moment, I realized that being healthy and joyful are the simplest and biggest accomplishments and successes in life. Furthermore, Becca motivated me to challenge myself more instead of staying in my comfort zone where I might never grow. I was very grateful to ARC for giving me this great opportunity to talk to Becca who inspired me to make my life more cheerful and meaningful.

Lastly, I learned to value and appreciate my family more during this challenging forty-day course. Day 25, the solo expedition, was a special gift for me. On this day, you had to stay in one tiny spot on a mountain for 24 hours alone. No one talked to you or listened to you. At night, nobody told you it’s time to brush your teeth and go to bed. You were surrounded by speechless nature: trees, grasses and mosquitoes. The only thing I could do was think and reflect on my past. I missed my family, my talkative dad, my beautiful mom, and my humorous brothers. I missed their voices and everything they did for me. They are willing to spend their hard-earned money on me without hoping for anything in return. They have bought me a computer, a phone, and plenty of clothes. Besides that, they are always the first one to console me if I am in bad mood. I thought a lot about how lucky I am to have such a beautiful, warm home. “East, west, home is the best!” This proverb touches my heart deeply. Looking back, I realize my parents have shown me more love than I have been able to show them. They cook for me, pay school tuition for me, and support me unconditionally. However, I have done little to pay them back and I feel shame and regret. When I return home, I will cook dinner every night for my family and clean the house every day for my hard-working parents. All in all, I want to say, “Dear mom, dad, and brothers, thank you for everything you did for me. I will always love and appreciate you all!”

In a nutshell, I have made huge changes and improvements in Adventure Risk Challenge’s forty-day course. ARC provided me a chance to build my self-confidence, learn a new definition of success, and recognize the infinite love and support my family has given to me. I was so glad that I did not accept the deal my brother tried to make with me. The time I have spent in ARC has been extremely valuable. I feel so lucky and fortunate to have met everyone, know everyone, and understand all of the ARC family. I always feel joyful with them. I hope this positive attitude and these self-transformations will carry on into my future. I will continue to develop myself and share with others what I have learned while in Adventure Risk Challenge. I can’t wait to go back to San Francisco and spread the ARC spirit!

manuel beltrán

I'm a Monarch Butterfly

I'm a monarch butterfly
That fearfully immigrates from the south
to the north
having a lot of opportunities in this new country
opportunities to grow
opportunities to fly.

I'm a monarch butterfly
Trying to acquire colorful wings in a new language.

I came from El Salvador
one and half years ago
There I felt like a caterpillar
That couldn't move freely
That couldn't explore
Because of the gangs
That disrupt the peace of the country
A country that just wants a better future.

To get my wings to finally take flight and immigrate to the north
Took ten years
Ten years of desperation
Ten years of stories that my father always told me
After each of his seasonal trips to the north
My father told us stories that this country is the best in the world
Stories of the houses big and beautiful
Stories that work and money are easy here
Each year he told us that we will go
And each year it seemed more and more untrue.

If there is something that I really learned it was that
The good in life takes a long time to arrive
But when it arrives
It is glorious
And it is worth the long wait.

The moment finally came
I spread my wings,
I took flight,
And my whole family
Started a new life in a new country
In a new culture
In a new language.

I flew into a new opportunity
To get the wings that I want to have
To get the ability to speak English
An opportunity that at first made me feel like a cowardly caterpillar
Cowardly because I was scared to meet new people
People that maybe wouldn't understand what I tried to say

Scared that I would pretend to comprehend
And not really know what they tried to say.

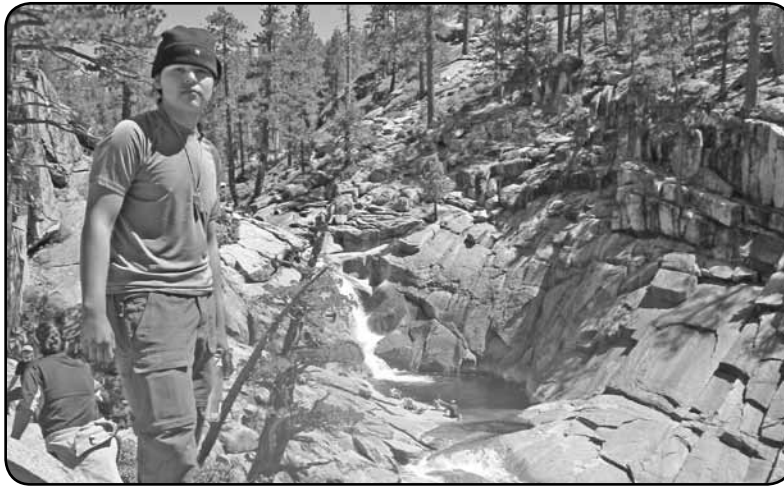
But, I know I am going to overcome it
I know I am going to stop being a cowardly caterpillar
I know I am going to get the ability to speak English
Because I will keep learning to obtain the wings I want
The wings that will assist me to fly
That will assist me to fly to college for almost 14 years
14 years of studying hard to become a surgeon
To try and save as many lives I can.

I'm a monarch butterfly



My Metamorphosis

Two years ago, I was in El Salvador without any idea of how to speak English. I never imagined that I was going to be in Yosemite National Park in ARC's 40 day course. In El Salvador, I never had the opportunity to kayak on a lake or climb a big rock. I never had the opportunity to hike to the top of a peak and to watch the sunrise. During this 40-day course, I learned a lot about myself, I changed my way of thinking, I resolved some emotional problems, and I improved my English.



On the 40-day course, my perspective of community changed. Before I thought that community wasn't important. In Oakland, I don't even know the name of my neighbors. I'm afraid to talk with the neighbors because they could be gangsters in such a large, dangerous city. The only community I am even semi-involved with is my school. I try to make the school look clean by picking up trash. On the interview day, Andres Reyes, the head of a non-profit arts organization in Merced, changed my way of thinking about the importance of community. He taught me a beautiful perspective on community. He believes that your community is where you have family and friends that are important to you; it doesn't matter in what part of the world they are. That thought made me think about my community in Oakland, El Salvador, here in Adventure Risk Challenge (ARC), and every place in the world where I have family and friends that are special for me. This thought made me want to try

to be more involved and try, at least, to know the name of my neighbors so I can expand my community.

This course helped me to overcome my feelings of disappointment. This was a feeling that I felt in my throat. It was the same feeling you get when you are about to cry. It would make me quiet and not want to say anything. I would feel this way when my expectations were let down, when somebody would tell me "no", or when somebody would make fun of me. For example, my brother often makes jokes which have made me feel this pain in my throat. It was something horrible. But everything changed when I talked with Barbara, an advisor from ARC; I told her all about how I was feeling. She knew what to do, who to talk to, and how to work on this problem. She gave me an acronym, AOG that means "another opportunity for growth" and I use it when I start to feel that negative emotion again. After I talked with her and used this acronym multiplies times, I started to feel this sentiment less each passing day. I am grateful to Barbara and ARC for talking with me and giving me advice.

During this course, I improved my English by speaking every day, all day. At the beginning of the course, when I just got off the train, I asked a girl if she was from Summer Search, the program that placed me with ARC. She didn't even understand what I said. That interaction made me feel terrible

and afraid to speak with anybody. After that, I was so scared to try to talk with new people because I felt like they were not going to be able to understand what I was trying to say. I didn't have confidence in myself to talk. I was very shy and avoided conversations with anyone I didn't know. I think being in this course changed me in a positive way because I finally faced my fear of talking. This is important because talking is how we connect with others and the best way to improve my English. I'm a better English speaker than before and I now have the confidence in myself to stop being a shy young man.

This course changed me in many positive ways. It helped connect me to someone who could address my negative mood. I met Andres who changed my perspective of community. Two years ago, living in El Salvador, I never imagined being the person I am now. I am now someone who is more confident in himself, who can do what he sets his mind to, and who has really improved his English speaking. Now, I am able to leave ARC more confident than ever.

sabin thapa

Golden Eagle

I'm a young golden eagle
gliding in the sky
Glancing at everything from above the sky
Curious about everything, trying to learn more

My past was not a delight, had gone through hard times
like a big giant storm ruining our beautiful nest.
When my dad left us and moved to the U.S
He moved for our future, and cared about our future
but it felt lonely in the nest.
Without any knowledge and unknown people, he moved there
He worked hard just to get us here.
My mom and brother, they are always so great, sticking together
Always comforting each other with sweet words
Family is always first priority of my life.

Don't wanna remember,
being away from my dad.
Felt like missing my wings
Hard work by my mom day and night
In order to survive
Responsibilities were harder being the oldest,
Taking care of brother, taking care of family.
Money management and others things

We used to miss our dad and those happy moments
that we used to have
Going outdoors every weekend.
When the "dashain" festival would come
All the kids with their full family
And we, only talking with my dad on the phone.
Wish he was here to celebrate with all our family
there was something missing in our nest.

When we heard
That we could meet our dad, across the ocean
The moment became bliss, joyful
Like eagle flying, going faster
And it became the best moment of the past

We faced many problems
Just to come and see my dad
Filling out paperwork, to come in the U.S
We had no knowledge about it
There were no people to help us along
Government was corrupt
So were the people
No one willing to help us along
Taking more time, wasting our time
Taking more money, asking for more money
Money was more important than people in that town.
It was the hardest part of our life.
Rain stops eagle, trees, hunters

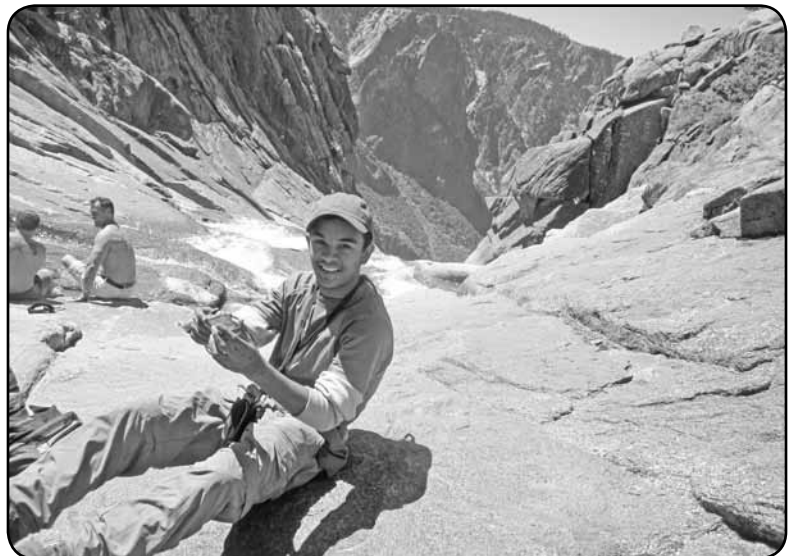
I was waiting and eager to fly
Like a baby eagle sitting in the nest.
I was waiting for opportunity to live a life to get to my aim
I was waiting and eager to fly.

Coming here to the U.S was like
Flying away from the nest
Discovering new places that I have never seen,
People that I have never met and cultures that I did not know about.
Seeing the people - how they live a life of joy, comfort and luxury.
It became the best part of my life.

Now in the present, happy with my life
Appreciating everything that I have got.
Living the life that I have not expected
But knowing new languages, people, cultures, and places
it was a bit hard for me
Learning and speaking english, connecting with people was hard for me
Struggling to fly, to be in the sky but falling down every time I try.
But still I didn't hold back, I just tried, I just tried.
I stayed focused and gave my best to understand
Stayed up all night reading for the test getting a higher grade thinking
of making my future a success

I have a dream to see my parents happy and proud of me.
So, they can say that's my son in front of everybody.
They have worked so hard just to raise me so,
this is my time to grab the opportunity
What I could do to make their life easier.
I will not leave them, I will always stay,
Taking care of them until my death.

I'm 16 years old
But I don't look like it
Small body, baby face, and no power of lifting heavy weight
But still, living the life of fantasy, having great parents,
lifting the weight of responsibilities
Heart filled with the feelings of luxury and eyes to see people equally.
Yes I can fly, way in the sky,
I'm a young golden eagle
Yes I can fly.



Turning Point

My life was the normal day-to-day routine of most people on the planet. Each and every day, I would wake up, eat breakfast, go to school, come back home, eat lunch, do my homework, go to dinner and go back to sleep again. On the weekend, I used to sleep almost a half day and then spend the rest of my day watching movies and playing games. My weekend would go by without doing anything creative and I was bored with my life. I had not experienced many new things but I wanted to do something new and different and have fun in my life. My life started taking a new turn when I joined a program called Summer Search. I met new people and made new friends. But the real change began when I was introduced to Adventure Risk Challenge (ARC). I did not know it at the time, but the turning point of my life was coming in ARC's 40-day course. ARC has helped me with my self-confidence, my appreciation of my parents, and my dreams and ideas for my future.

I had never imagined what I am capable of doing and my self-confidence on doing something adventurous and taking a risk in life. Just getting in this course, sitting with new people, and being away from my parents were the hardest parts in the beginning and it took lots of confidence to do it. As days went by, I became more comfortable with people around me and got a chance to know them by listening, talking, and connecting with each other. I started to meet new people who were engaged in this program and I felt more close to this big family. My confidence level has grown up so much that I have become a fearless person as I did all the expeditions like rock climbing, kayaking, rappelling, and the rope course. At the beginning I was nervous and uncertain about trying these challenges, but I did all of them very well without any problem, which made me feel I can do anything.

Rock climbing was the best expedition throughout the course because I found my natural skill when I was assigned to do the hardest one in the course and I had never rock climbed before. From the beginning of the first step I was feeling nervous and almost gave up, but a small voice inside of me said, "I can do it and I will do it." Each and every step I took from bottom to top and top to bottom, my confidence

level grew and I was enjoying it. From then on, I felt proud of myself. I have learned to live my life in a different way. Another thing that built up my confidence during these challenges was the people around me. I was surrounded by people like Yosemite Leadership Program (YLP) students and my friends in the ARC 40-day course who really care about me and helped me to identify my skills and gain confidence in myself.

During this 40-day course I have missed my parents and learned to appreciate them. There are so many things to appreciate about my parents I could not count them all. But some of the things are that I am here due to them and I'm very thankful for that. They have always cared about me and done so much for me but I didn't appreciate what they have done for me. Back then when they would tell me to care about my future and study hard I would not really care and I did whatever I wanted. But when I started growing older I started to learn how much they cared about my future. They have always worked hard so that my future would be much better than theirs. I learned that they didn't have a chance to make their future like they wanted; they see their children as their future and their dream. From now on my parent will always be the first priority in my life, since they have spent more than half of their life on raising us, caring for us, and building us up. Now it's my turn to make them feel proud, take care of them, and make their life easier. Therefore, in whatever I do, I want to appreciate them for everything. When I go back home, I will appreciate my parents more and our relationship will be stronger than before.

In my solo day in this course, I was thinking about my future goals and accomplish-

ing them. I have started to plan for my future by preparing for college, working hard in school, being more active, and making a schedule to manage my time. I also have many ideas and information about college from many different people who have gone through the process. Although I don't know what I'm going to take for my major, I'm more concerned about getting into college and focusing more on it. After this course I will talk and discuss with my counselor and my parents about my college preparation. I hope to start taking tours of nearby colleges and universities. I will also give my best on every class to understand all the things that teachers teach us. Thanks to ARC I am now more focused on my future goals.

This course has changed my whole life. Before this forty day course, I was stuck in my monotonous daily life routine.

Now I'm changing and challenging myself on doing new things each and every day. There are many ways the course has changed me, such as giving me a chance to explore the wilderness and be immersed in nature, giving me new experiences and learning something new, making me a more confident person, teaching me the importance of family, and teaching me to be independent. All the things that I have learned in this course will help me a lot in my future and will make my life easier

and more exciting. In conclusion, I want to thank ARC for making me an independent person and giving me this life changing experience.

"Each and every event, memory, and moment in our life is a phrase and in the end of our life all the memories of events and moments come together and become one beautiful quote that you have never heard, and that beautifully describes your life."

– Sabin Thapa



I am an Andalusian horse.
Smart, strong, and beautiful
My life started like a baby horse
At first I was with my lovely and strong mom
Always taking care of me
My mom, my beautiful mom
An excellent mother always protecting me
from people who can hurt me
Strangers, friends or family members
that just think about themselves
My mom, my beautiful mom
Always there for me
Worried about me, keeping me healthy to grow strong
For the day when she wouldn't be there for me
I felt protected when I was by her side
She's tall and I am small, her baby horse

But my life started to change
When I was 15 years old
I was moved suddenly from my mom to another stable.
It was dramatic for me
I would cry and cry but that didn't help me
Every night my face was covered with tears
I missed my mom
She showed me how to be a strong person in many ways
By never giving up,
by always being positive and by believing in myself
And to never let people put me down

I remember my first day of high school in the U.S.
I went to all my classes, I was confused
The teachers taught their lessons
and I didn't have any idea what they were saying
I use to get frustrated with myself
I felt trapped behind a fence with a beautiful view
I wanted to go out, trot, and be free
Communicate with my teachers
Express my feelings
Participate in all the class work
And not feel embarrassed because I didn't know English
I wanted to be with all my friends
Talk with them in English
And gallop through
the middle of the woods
Be surrounded by green plants
To feel alive
And enjoy my freedom



But I couldn't
It took me 2 years to accomplish my goal
I worked so hard
I didn't speak my native language
It was like I was pulling a carriage behind me
Weighed down by punctuation, grammar,
listening, reading, speaking
But every month I grew stronger and the carriage felt lighter
And now I read books in English
And I'm so proud of myself
Now I'm able to trot, dance
Able to communicate with everyone
Now I'm starting to think of my future
Of being a successful person
Becoming a nurse
And telling my parents
I did it!

The Person I Never Thought I Could Be

I didn't want to come to this program at first because I thought it was going to be difficult and boring! I asked myself, "Why should I go to Adventure Risk Challenge? I have never gone hiking, kayaking, rock climbing or rappelling." I also thought, "What if I die or get lost in the wilderness?" However, my friend Sarah Rivera who participated in the 40 day course in the past encouraged me to come to ARC. She told me that ARC helps second language learners improve their English. I told myself, "That's exactly what I want." I felt that my English and my accent weren't improving at all and I wanted my English to be perfect. Now, I am so grateful to be here in ARC. If I hadn't joined this program, I wouldn't be the person that I am now. Throughout the course, I have learned to appreciate my parents more, to be mentally stronger, and improve my English. ARC encouraged me to change in many ways.

I discovered during the 40 day course that I appreciated my parents more than I had ever realized. Before the 40 day course, I used to talk to my parents every day, but now that I'm here in ARC, I don't get to talk to them. I have to send letters to my aunt to hear from them at all and I really appreciate that my aunt is helping me keep in touch with them. When I was living with them in México, I didn't appreciate all the hard work that they have done for me. During my 24 hour solo expedition, I couldn't stop thinking about my parents. I felt depressed because they used to give me so much advice about putting a lot of effort into my school work, but I didn't listen to them. Now, I realize they gave me that advice because they don't want me to

work as much as they do, with many jobs and no opportunity to have an education. I also realized how much they care about my future and how much they love me. One of the first plans I have for when I go back to México is to tell them how much I love them and how much I have missed them. I will also tell them that I am doing my best to be a successful person. I know that they are going to be proud of their daughter. I am so grateful for my parents and their unconditional love and support.

I became mentally stronger and determined during the expeditions. Before this course, I didn't have any experience in backpack-



ing or living in the backcountry. The first expedition was eight days long. It was a big challenge for me, especially when we didn't shower for eight days. We woke up early everyday for

stretch circle, to prepare breakfast, and get ready to start hiking. I never imagined that I was going to be able to hike more than 60 miles in total during the four expeditions. In our walk to Indian Rock, I felt like a fish outside the water gasping for air. I was tired and I couldn't breathe because I am asthmatic. I felt like stopping in the middle of the wilderness and telling the instructors, "I can't do this," but my mind was telling me, "Come on Vanessa, don't give up. You can do it." I felt like my body was tired, but my mind wasn't. We kept walking for many hours and I couldn't feel my feet. When I got to the top of Indian Rock, I felt so proud of myself because I didn't stop and I kept walking. From these experiences I became mentally stronger and I learned it doesn't matter what I am doing, or whether it is difficult or not, I am always able to do anything that I set my mind to.

Also during the 40 day course, I discovered that my English has improved significantly. ARC has helped me by encouraging me to feel confident about my English. When I was in high school I wanted to have interesting conversations with my friends, but I always felt afraid and embarrassed when speaking in English. I thought that my friends would not be able to understand me because of my strong accent. My aunt always told me not to feel embarrassed about speaking English, because the only way that I was going to be able to improve my English is by speaking it. I felt scared because I thought I was going to forget my native language. However this fear didn't come true because my Spanish has been strong since I was little. I really appreciate all the hard work and encouragement that my aunt and ARC teammates have given me. My aunt was right because coming to this wonderful experience has helped me to improve my English, comprehension, and confidence.

Adventure Risk Challenge helped me to be a different person in many ways. I learned to appreciate my parents more than I did in the past for their hard work and the support that they give me every day. I have also become mentally stronger and determined to believe in myself and to work through challenges that life brings me. I am grateful for the conversations with my teammates that have allowed me to practice speaking English. I am also grateful for their supportive friendship as I gain confidence in my voice. I really appreciate all the challenges and encouragement that Adventure Risk Challenge has given me during this 40- day course. I am really going to miss my friendly teammates and the admirable instructors. Adventure Risk Challenge is a powerful program that has truly changed the course of my life.

community interviews

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

My Interview with Caroline



I'll never forget the fantastic conversation and Caroline's caring and philosophical words. On a warm morning, I was surrounded by a weird feeling, mixed with anxiousness, excitement, and curiosity. But a comforting smell gradually emerged from the pine needles and soil, and the melody of serenading birds and insects surrounded me. My anxiousness was relieved. Maybe it was neither the smell nor the melody; it's Caroline's soft voice that comforts me.

- April Kuang

My Interview with Schuyler Greenleaf

Before I had the honor of interviewing Schuyler, I was looking for the perfect spot where we could both talk with no distractions. As I was walking out past the Wawona Elementary School, I noticed a set of ancient trees. I knew this would be the perfect location. As I looked around, a cool breeze came through, shuffling the fallen leaves and pine needles. As I began to walk back to the school, I noticed a fast, slithery movement in the leaves, below my feet. It was a snake about a foot long with a neon blue stripe all the way down its back. I knew it was a good sign for a great interview.



- Cody Cook

John Jackson

According to John, the three most important factors for success are to have passion, always go forward, and to surround myself with the people I love and respect. I agree with John that it is important to have passion because it fuels us to do what we want. John has passion for his work because he is committed to the wilderness. He told me that he "loved his job". I also want to find my passion, and the wilderness is a great place to start.

- Brock Sanders



Jen Gurecki Biography

Throughout my entire conversation with Jen, what I found most interesting was her involvement in her community and her noble acts to help everyone, especially women. When I was in high school, I had the opportunity to take a class called Women's Studies. It was the only class of its kind that was offered nationwide. In this class, we would discuss the role women had in society. Therefore, when Jen told me about her non-profit organization,



I was excited to learn more. The work she does amazes me. I would love to do something similar to what Jen does because I too want to help other women become more confident.

- Dahlia Santiuste

Jesus Dolores: His Journey

While growing up Jesus Dolores had a dream. His dream was to succeed in school, go to college, and have a better future than working in the fields as he did during the summer while in high school. He wanted to make his mother and father proud. Now he just has one more year to accomplish his goal of finishing college and having a better future. He has inspired me to go down the same path of succeeding in school and making my parents proud.

- Francisco Del Rio



Interview with Aricia Martinez



Aricia explained to me that when she was growing up, she lacked self confidence. She always felt like she wasn't good enough. This took me by surprise, since I would have never thought of her having a problem with confidence. I can relate to this in many ways. I don't feel confident when I try something new. In my mind, I worry that I'm going to make a mistake or embarrass myself. When she got into the Yosemite Leadership Program, she started to spend more time in Yosemite. I found myself learning from her as she said, "you can't do everything, you only have so much time and energy" I take this to mean "nobody is perfect". Aricia helped me to strive to become a confident, self-determined woman. - *Kiauna Conger*

Interview with Andres Reyes

Andres, like me, also immigrated here to USA to have a better life with his whole family. He moved here at the age of six. In Mexico, his family had a good life. His father was a History teacher. His mother was a secretary. When they moved here, his family didn't know any English, so his father worked in the fields. His mother didn't have a high school diploma, so she couldn't work here. They changed everything they had in Mexico for a better education and a better future for their children. This similar to what happened to me. Facing the challenge of learning English, I'm adapting to my new country. I know that I'm going to overcome my language difficulties because in the end, I'm going to be a good English speaker. - *Manuel Beltran*



His mother didn't have a high school diploma, so she couldn't work here. They changed everything they had in Mexico for a better education and a better future for their children. This

similar to what happened to me. Facing the challenge of learning English, I'm adapting to my new country. I know that I'm going to overcome my language difficulties because in the end, I'm going to be a good English speaker.

- *Manuel Beltran*



My Interview with Nancy

Nancy talked with me and told me everything that she likes to do in her free time. Nancy likes to go hiking, mountain biking, and she likes to watch movies and go to the Mill Valley Film Festival. I was surprised because we have so many things in common. I also like to watch movies in my free time or go running, but I don't go hiking or mountain biking. I don't go hiking or mountain biking because I would have to come all the way to Yosemite and in Dos Palos there's no place to go hiking or mountain biking. It was interesting learning what Nancy and I both enjoy doing in our free time. - *Vanessa Murillo*

What Makes Today's Becca

"Zi, zi, zi..." was the frustrated, strange sound that awoke my sensitive ears. I looked up at the giant trees. I saw tons of bugs chatting with one another and complaining about the flaming sun. Suddenly, my eyes were attracted to the smiling face of a country woman who was dressed in a thin, flower T-shirt and black shorts. Her name is Becca Fenwick. She was born in England and graduated from college in California. Becca was my interviewee for Adventure Risk Challenge. Because of her, I realized the value of serving the community, the importance of trying new things, and the real meaning of success in life. - *Ling Zhu*



Ben: ARC Interview Day

Positive thinking, sharing ideas, being open, and respecting everyone are some of Ben's ideas and values in his life. He likes to be open, share his thoughts, and listen to what other people have to say. It's also important to Ben that he respects the ideas of others and what are they saying. He enjoys interacting with others and sharing his positive outlook with everyone he encounters. He believes that time is a precious thing that should not be wasted. Ben's dedication



to staying positive and respecting others were both things that made me relate to him. The most important thing about Ben is that he wants to be true to himself and not be anything more. - *Sabin Thapa*



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