

# adventure risk challenge

a leadership and literacy program



**Yosemite**

## Writings of Summer Course Alumni 2014



**Tahoe**

**TAHOE  
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**YOSEMITE  
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# tahoe

**BASECAMP LOCATION:**  
Sagehen Creek Field Station, Truckee, CA

**COURSE LENGTH:** 23 days

**TEAM NAME:** J.G.F.F. (Jiātíng, Gia đình, Familia, Familia)

**INSTRUCTORS**

Anna Greenberg  
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# andrea bravo

## Sequoia

Who can I trust?  
How can I trust?  
Baby Sequoia tree in an enormous layer of mist  
Confused and unknowing  
Strong Sierra Nevada redwood tree  
withstanding -25 degrees and wild fires  
Vigorous thunderstorms  
My mother and father were the ominous clouds  
ready to strike with thunder  
Insults and punches roared, as thunder and lightning

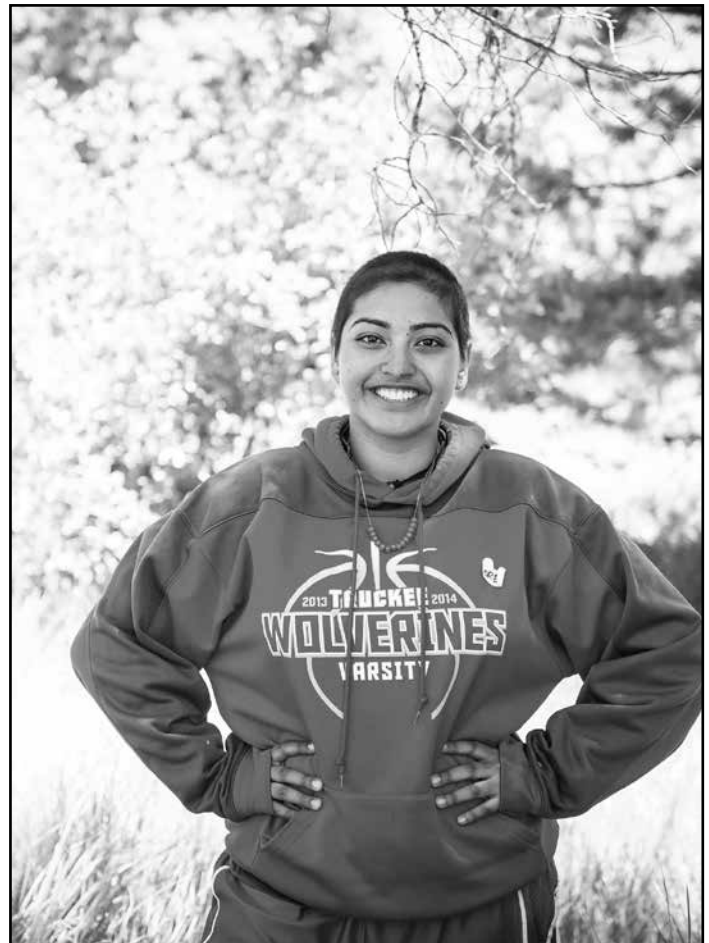
Who can I trust?  
How can I trust?  
Even though lightning struck me  
Leaving physical and emotional scars,  
I kept growing  
But getting older only led to more problems  
Dad's drug abuse  
Defenseless teenage redwood tree  
It messed me up

Who can I trust?  
How can I trust?  
I have been struck by everyone I know  
My brothers and sisters and people around me  
The day of my 13th birthday  
Lightning struck again, this time by my sister's interference  
She invited the thunderstorm into my house  
I had to face a bully from school  
Once again I was left with another scar  
But I kept growing

Who can I trust?  
How can I trust?  
A year after I moved out  
I extended my roots  
Finding Mel and Sean  
I went on a weekend retreat backpacking.  
In a sunny and giving environment  
Full of happy and giving people  
Who can I trust?  
How can I trust?

Now I am learning to extend my branches  
Towards my ARC family  
JGFF  
Gia-Ting  
Yeh-den  
Familia  
Family  
I am a giving Sequoia  
Providing shade

I CAN TRUST  
I CAN TRUST  
I CAN TRUST



## Hopes and Dreams

I have been struggling with authority since I can remember. As I was growing up, I never had anyone to regulate on me. No one to say go to bed, come home early, or even to give me a kiss and hug goodnight. So when it came to school, I was very hard-headed and never wanted to listen. My junior year I had a U.S. history teacher name Mr. Mazzie. He and I never saw eye-to-eye, and I was a very rebellious teenager. I would disrespect him during class. I was late every day. Sometimes I just wouldn't attend his class at all. On numerous occasions, I cursed at him. I ended up failing his class with a 30%. In the beginning of my senior year, I had to face a huge challenge in passing the U.S. history class with the same teacher. This time it was for better or for worse. This class would determine my graduation status. I was determined to pass the class. I decided that I wanted to attend college, so I put all my negative attitudes aside for a better future. I would show up on time and turn in my homework on time. I chose to bite my tongue and listen to his lessons. I ended up passing his class with 104%, an A+. I was the top student in his class. One sunny morning he pulled me aside and asked me if I would be interested in a summer program named ARC. He told me that he loved my writing pieces in class, and he believed that ARC could help me strengthen my writing projects. I felt so surprised at the fact that my hard work and dedication was being acknowledged. The fact that Mr. Mazzie believed in me made me believe in myself even more. So I decided to take a chance and sign up for ARC.

When I got picked up by one of the ARC instructors, I was so nervous. I felt my stomach sink when I heard the doorbell ring. As I walked towards the door, I was expecting to see Mel. I was shocked to see many ARC members at my door. The blood rushed to my brain and I felt

hot. I was full of fear, realizing I had never actually had a conversation with any of these people. Seeing a familiar face, Santiago, made me happy, but still weird because I didn't ever really hang out with him. It was so quiet in the car, that I could hear my own breath shorten from nervousness. I could hear my heart beat accelerate. When we got to base camp I thought everything was going to be peaches and cream, little did I know that enormous challenges lay ahead.



My greatest challenge in the beginning was following instructions. For example, I was very challenging towards the instructors, as well as to all ARC members. They would ask me to be quiet; I would talk louder. They would say simmer down, and I would walk faster. On the first expedition, I was very inconsiderate of how others felt. I wanted to walk fast and didn't care if others couldn't keep up.

It was challenging to trust myself as well as the ARC family. I wanted to be helpful and work to my potential but I was scared that others would take me for granted. I was very stubborn. In my

mind, it was the strong survive and the weak fall behind. Throughout I realized that without the weaker people we all would fall behind, because we all have amazing qualities to give and receive. For example, I was very annoyed by the way one of the ARC members would hike. She would hike like a snail in my eyes. One day I was very frustrated at base camp and I was lashing out at anybody in my way. I lashed out at the slow hiker about 10 times. Even though I lashed out at her, in her heart she was very concerned about me. Her endless giving heart made me realize that she might not be the fastest hiker but she had a lot to give me and others around her.

After the second expedition I had more trust and appreciation in my ARC family. I realized it takes more than just me making it to the camp site, it's called group effort. Everyone had very different and unique way of helping one another. I also realized that all anyone wants to be is accepted. The greatest lesson of all is that everyone is unique and amazing in their own way. I was the leader on the first day of our second expedition. As the leader I had to help myself grow, and others as well. I decided to make one of the slower hikers the point. That day I realized the meaning of compassion. I cared enough to make the person feel supported and included. The people who I once distrusted and disrespected were now a big part in my success at ARC. They are now my chosen family.

Tomorrow, on July 16, 2014 I will graduate and become an ARC alumna. I have many hopes and dreams. One of my greatest goals is to move to San Diego and begin my college career. In a new and unfamiliar environment I will need to have compassion and trust in myself and others.

# anh phan

## The Snowflake's Journey

Born as a snowflake up high,  
Blessed with happiness and appreciation  
The calm and tender cloud - my mom -  
and the thoughtful wind - my dad  
Gave me life and a place called Home  
A mountain with a pointy peak covered with snow and clouds.  
A real life fairy tale.  
We lived our life to the fullest.

But then everything changed  
The sun covered the range with its brilliant light  
Without shelter and the nice cold weather, we were forced to move.  
My family, our family, slowly departed  
Turned into snowmelt then left.  
"To the ocean, our birthplace!"-they said  
"Let's all be reborn, together?"- we made a promise  
Our dream and future

I ran away from struggle, like any other.  
Drowning with thoughts and fear of being alone  
Like a pond of water lonely on the road that nobody notices  
Evaporating into the air without a single care  
Its smoke calling for help  
But again, not a tear was shed for the pond.

I began to talk  
With rocks, with trees, fish and soil  
I made some noise for everyone to notice me  
To save me from loneliness and vanishing from life  
To acknowledge me, trust me, comfort me  
But all in vain.  
I was too young, too naïve and too selfish.  
I wanted to be noticed.  
To be loved like a tree keeps water inside itself.

Far from home and friends, I became part of a lake.  
A bigger place, a brighter future, but still lonely  
We were all flowing without a word to each other  
Not even a look or a warm greeting from a friend

Like a phoenix rising from the ashes  
and starting a new life with great changes,  
Before I even noticed, I have changed.  
For the first time, I have learned to be in a new place  
I find myself quiet and more understanding  
People come often to my lake, some for relaxing  
Others for comforting  
They throw rocks, some are big, some are tiny  
But they are all the same: heavy.  
They scream and cry when they throw  
They call out the one they love, the problem they have to deal with  
Their rocks are soaked with tears and struggles.  
They throw them into the lake, forget about it, and live on.  
I was quiet, I couldn't comfort them.  
I was unable to talk with them, to resolve their problems  
I lacked the courage to do it  
My heart shattered,  
I felt like I was betraying their needs with simple comforting words  
All I do is whisper through wind and waves.

Living, adapting and learning everyday  
But all of it wasn't enough  
I'm still a little kid, still childish like before  
"You have to grow up"-my fellow lakes confessed  
I decided to move, through rivers and creeks  
To a bigger place, bigger home, bigger life  
To complete a promise, to the promised land: The ocean.

Days, months, years, I kept moving forward  
Through rocks, through trees, through dead animals,  
Through any challenges that mother nature threw at me  
Kept moving toward my goal and my promise  
I found myself emotional  
Unable to withstand all the challenges, I snapped.  
I cried through rain and storm  
I raged, I destroyed, I screamed through pain and anger  
"I wasn't ready, I don't belong here"-I thought  
Throwing tantrums is all I could do.  
I was exhausted afterward,  
But became calm again  
And ready to face my challenges  
With courage and trust in myself

Days, Months, Years, Decades  
My journey is still going  
To keep the promise  
To the Ocean, the birthplace of all things  
To where I can be "Reborn"  
Where I can be mature and wiser and be independent.  
Where I can go around the world, connecting, growing.  
So when someone asks what have I accomplished with all that time  
I'll answer with a smile "To be helpful and spread love everywhere"  
Until I have been to the last continent, to the last country  
To the last living being.  
Then I'll be reborn, to the clouds  
To be, once again, a little snowflake.



# I Am Strong

“To have courage is not to be without fear, but to act in respond to one’s own being.” - Unknown

ARC was my greatest experience during the summer of 2014. In ARC I have learned many new skills and developed my own existing skills. Among them are: map reading, staying positive, being a leader and facing challenges.

In my normal life, I have an ordinary routine from home to school. No challenges or space of my own, a lot of boring homework and all I did every day was surf the internet. Since I was no longer in my country where I could ride my bike around the city all day, my house turned into a pleasant prison. Hearing about everyone’s adventures and outdoor activities made me jealous and I always want to be free from this “prison”. Gaming and surfing all day poisoned me and it changed me completely from an active and hyper kid into a quiet teen.

This routine kept on going until my English teacher, Mr. Loomis, introduced me to Summer Search which is associated with ARC. Later he nominated me along with my math teacher, Mrs. Finlayson. I remember that Mr. Loomis said, “You’re a potential leader and this program will help you develop that skill. I know that you can do it.” I immediately accepted this opportunity and through several interviews and a lot of paperwork, I was accepted to the ARC program.

When I got off the Greyhound bus with my fellow ARC student Tam, ARC instructor Sean came shortly after that and drove both of us to Sagehen. Everyone was just staring at each other and so was I. It took me two minutes to break the ice by a simple “Hi” to them. My mind was full of questions but the one that stood out the most was, “Is this my new family?”

We started our expedition the day after, and just as I thought, it was scary as hell. Even though I trained every day before I came, trying to run for 3 miles, carrying my backpack and walking for 3 miles non-stop, doing push-ups and sit ups, it all seemed

like it wasn’t enough. The heavy backpack and long distance hikes exhausted me very quickly. I still remember the day when we hiked all the way from Tamarack Lake to Aloha Lake, six miles in total if I recall it right. My legs were fighting with my body’s weight, trying to make it balance; even worse, my lactose intolerance came up at the wrong time and I had to hold it for nearly three hours. We camped at Aloha Lake for one night. It was raining all day and the strong winds made my second day on expedition my worst day in 2014. To be honest, that day is the only day that I wanted to go back home. Mind you though, the hiking wasn’t my true reason, the ice cold is what weighed me down the most. All I could think of was my room with my bed and nice warm blanket. However, I learned how to use the map at Tamarack Lake, and estimate distance and time along the way based on individual stamina and mile times. The skill of navigating would become another tool in my toolbox.

The day that impacted me the most of the whole ARC program was the ropes course. My worst fear is my fear of heights, and the ropes course brought it to a different level. We had to jump off from where we were and grab onto the trapeze bar five feet away. It sounded pretty easy, but to me it was like jumping off from Mt. Everest and grabbing onto the wing of an F/A-22 Raptor flying by at Mach 5. However I knew that each element to come would be harder and harder, so I had to take a risk to get to the next element. I just closed one eye and said, “Here I go.” I jumped and before I even noticed I was grabbing onto the trapeze bar and hovering in the air. I felt scared but accomplished and I

knew all I had to do was let go and trust my team on the ground. The next three elements weren’t that scary anymore, however they required a lot of teamwork and trust in each other, two qualities that I lack. The last element, the Tower of Power, was the one that broke through my fear of heights and helped me trust in my belay team. Not only did I have to climb to the top of that pillar, I also had to jump and once again grab onto the trapeze bar. To make it worse, I had to do it with a partner.



My partner was Santiago, one of the most supportive friends you would ever want to be with. We both made it to the top, even though I stopped spontaneously along the way. Using each other, we stood up and faced the trapeze, ready for an epic jump. Before the jump, he said, “That trapeze is our goal, now all we have to do is go for it, you with me?” I gave him a nod, counted to three and said, “It’s now or never”.

The moment we made the jump was epic: my heart pounded rapidly, my hands reached out as much as I could, everything turned into slow motion and so quiet that I could hear my own heartbeat. We both grabbed onto the trapeze at the same time with a smile on our faces. On the way to the ground, we gave each other a fist bump and complimented each other. In that moment, I knew that our bond would be stronger than ever.

When I return home from ARC, I will be stronger than before. I can run more than I originally could. I will be independent and trust in myself and others. I will be strong enough to recognize my negative thoughts and control them or erase them. I will be able to manipulate my mind and strength to where I want it to be. I can now see all that my family taught me about courage and strength, and I appreciate everything I have and my family gave me.

# cazandra rangel

## Moon of My Life

I am a shining star,  
I provide light at night  
when the Moon is gone.  
I offer a kind of beauty that everyone sees  
But I am too fast to sit and live.

I am a leader,  
Always helping others  
instead of helping myself.  
But I realize  
I am no longer connected to the shield,  
Where my family and I were known as a  
constellation.  
I feel regret.

I am a lonely star,  
As the universe expands  
the stars spread out as well.  
Little did I know  
that my dad would be the first to leave.  
I was told he grew tired of shining for us.  
So he disappeared for ten years.

I am a lonely star,  
The second one to leave  
was my little sister Rocio.  
She was the dazzling star of us all.  
But her dad decided to become a black hole  
and ripped her from our lives.  
Not wanting us to connect with her anymore.

And once again I am a lonely star,  
My mother, having motherly instincts  
got depressed from the loss of her daughter.  
So she dozed off  
and forgot to live in the present moment  
with me and my brothers.  
She tried to be part of the constellation  
But she would disappear on the new moon cycle.  
So I would stay up the whole night, flashing.  
I signaled her that my brother Cristopher,  
Ivan and I were waiting.

I began to forget I had schoolwork,  
and felt alone,  
Forgetting that I still had a life of my own.  
I had the fear that my mom would leave  
and disappear in a black hole  
Just like our dazzling star.

As I grew older I grew tired of my jefita treat-  
ing me differently.  
She would treat me like I wasn't worthy of her time.  
I would always get in trouble for nothing.

Then one day my brother took the spotlight.  
He became so handsome

That even Taylor Lautner himself  
Would be amazed to see his reflection that fit.  
And as Cristopher grew stronger  
And outstandingly bright,  
We began to be compared.  
Many asked me why I wouldn't be strong like him.  
Why I wouldn't be outstandingly bright.  
Everyone even questioned why  
it looked like I was burning instead of shining.  
Sometimes my brother even wondered why  
I wouldn't be just like him.  
I felt like I was Pluto,  
A misunderstood planet  
that nobody seems to care about.



When my mom would leave  
on the new moon seasons I would be upset.  
But when my mom would be home she would say  
"Why are you so different?  
Why can't you be just like your cousin?  
She's normal. You look like a freak  
when you glow red flames.  
How do you think I feel when my friends see you?  
Why are you a rebellious star?"

Then I saw a stellar star.  
Death opened my eyes because it made me  
realize that I don't have much time.  
I must do what will benefit me in the future.  
I must do what will help my family in the long run.  
I started to work for an education  
higher than what they offered any other kid.  
I was cramming in anything I could in high school.  
Taking advantage of everything.  
From running a club  
Doing community service, boxing, homework,  
advancing to college classes, working in law,  
even a barber shop. I did so much, so much.  
That's when my mom disappeared  
and so did Cristopher.  
Even my little brother Ivan with autism who I  
was his micky mouse  
and he was my honey bee disappeared.  
I stopped glowing and began  
to illuminate the sky every new moon.  
I studied hard and made sure that no matter  
what I will make everyone proud.  
I didn't want to see my mom sad anymore.

I wanted her to look forward to the next day.  
But no matter the work I did  
it was never enough.

One day I realize, it's Rocio, our dazzling star.  
I found out what happened.  
She wasn't sucked to a black hole.  
My mom opened the door  
to the black hole for her.  
I found out that she was living life in regret.  
That's when I started to pay attention  
to the moon.

My mom always left every New Moon,  
making it hard for me to find her.  
I realized that she was always there  
when I took on a lot.  
So I started to slow down.

My dad reappeared  
when Waxing Crescent Moon came.  
That after 10 years he wanted to make it right.  
So I started to slow down.

My older brother Cristopher also started to  
approach me when the First Quarter came.  
He was always there supporting me when I cried.  
So I started to slow down.

And my honey bee Ivan, the Last Quarter.  
Even when I stayed up writing papers,  
He laid there waiting for me to fill the bed  
with love and unicorns.  
And that's when I stopped.

As for my little sister our dazzling star,  
She might be older, and not remember us  
But when I look at the Waning Crescent,  
I see hope.  
That one day we'll be reunited and be a family again.

But when the moon is full.  
That's when I really stop and think.  
I hear messages being shouted to me.  
"Slow down! You have your whole life  
to enslave yourself to education!  
Live in the moment  
and enjoy what happens now!"  
But the one recognizable voice I hear is  
"come home."  
And now I've realized that I've been putting  
my family aside for the future.  
But the future is a long way from now.  
And as I hear that I realize  
I'm growing closer to the moon.  
I'm becoming part of the Lunar Eclipse  
I'm home.



# Striving My Expedition

“If your stomach feels tight, it means you’re doing something right. Embrace the feeling, and jump.” - Caz

In September 2013, one of the advisors at school came up to me. He said, “Hey have you ever heard of the program NOLS? There’s a program similar to it but in this type of course you learn literary skills. I feel like this program will be good for you and your brother.” Xico Gonzales, a Sophomore teacher and Mechista mentor thought that I would qualify for Adventure Risk Challenge (ARC). The moment I heard that I felt like I would be able to handle it. But, I didn’t take it seriously since it was a long time from then. I thought “Well, it’s in the summer so why should I stress about it? Plus there might be a lot of people on a list waiting to be chosen. So why worry?” But September went by and next thing you know it’s already February and I got confirmation that it might be possible for me to join. It started first with an application, then an interview. Little did I know I would get the scholarship and when I heard the news I was in awe. My legs were numb and my heart pounded like a drum. The feeling I’ve been trying to avoid came back. I started to over-think that I wouldn’t be able to handle it. I never knew I would get accepted, and I acted like it wasn’t a big deal until David Berg handed me the papers. I had a talk with my mom, my advisor Philip, and David. I began to get a bigger picture of what the program was about. I started to learn that this was something serious and I must represent my school highly to give others this great opportunity I was given. When I sat in that talk with my parent and teachers I thought to myself “This is a bad idea, I feel it in my gut.” It sounded like a good opportunity. But I also lacked confidence and thought that I wouldn’t succeed.



The night before heading out to Truckee, I was packing. I couldn’t believe I signed myself up for this. I felt a lot of pressure because I have to represent my school, family, and city. I didn’t want to let anyone down. I felt even more pressure when my teachers pushed me forward to it. I wasn’t sure if it was something I wanted to do. I was afraid I would choke, along with letting my anxiety conquer me. I feared not eating well and always throwing up. But I also felt that it would be a good opportunity to finally face my eating anxiety. A skill I learned was to sit down and breathe in and out. To not focus a lot on the issue and move forward. I tried to look at the bright side and not be negative. I can grow so much if I’m open to it, I said to myself constantly when on the train.

Everything that ARC offered: Amtrak train tickets, white water rafting, rock climbing, sleeping outdoors, hiking, and even being part of a group was new to me. I didn’t feel like I fit in with anyone. I felt alone and misunderstood at ARC. The first day was the beginning to a new adventure. I didn’t even eat because of how nervous I felt about trying something new.

When I first came to Truckee, the first person I met was Christine. She was honest when she said she was nervous about backpacking. When we left for our first backpacking trip I saw her writing in her notebook. I went up to her and asked, “What’s the matter?” She replied, “I miss my parents.” I understood her completely and we began to vent to one another at Lake Aloha. When we left the lake all wet and cold, we buried our sadness the same way we dug a six-inch hole in the ground. I started to open up more and more each and every day. Mel was a great support when it came to my eating anxiety. She would tell me the good things that I have improved on and to look on the bright side to my actions. I fully opened up to Sean about my past. I explained in full detail my issues. I said why and how I got eating anxiety. I also cried a lot when it came to leaving home with my step dad still mad at me. In my home we don’t talk things out. We move on with life. Even if it gets hard everyone picks themselves up. But being at ARC, for the first time, I opened up to

people I never really thought I’d connect with. Everyone here has been great and all I had to do was open up and be accepting of new ideas.

Everything that was offered to me at ARC was amazing. Before I learned to live in this moment, I felt a spark when I rock climbed. For the first time in a while I was doing something that made me feel alive. I felt good and I didn’t need to be strong or tall or even smart to achieve that. But what I truly enjoyed was the white water rafting. I remember sitting next to Tristan and listening to music. Tristan is a laid back fellow. He always made sure to have fun and laugh with our colleagues. When I sat next to him, he just started to mess around with the music. He would say, “Try this.” And I would begin to sing along and fist pump. Everyone in the car felt that vibe and went along. I cannot stress how much I took

“go with the flow” seriously. I let go of my over-thinking, stopped worrying about time, and just went with what the day offered me. From July 3rd all the way to the 17th of July, I’ve been living life to its fullest potential. Every day I thanked Tristan for what I began to experience for the first time. I felt like I belonged in ARC. I felt like people actually wanted me to be in their life for once.

But then there was my solo day. We were at Needle Lake. I was in the wilderness with no shelter: just snacks, water, and a sleeping bag. When you entered my “home,” to the right of the house was rocky. If you gently glance to the left of the “house,” there was a soft meadow. Flowers were gently growing out of the soft soil. There were about thirty two trees marking my “home.” On the very end of the meadow there were large boulders that marked the edge of my home. And to the right of all those big rocks was a small path to hike down. In my solo I had a living room, bathroom, even a bedroom. I had 24 hours and I wanted to take advantage of every hour. I started off by taking off my shoes. Being bare foot made me connect with nature more. I felt the crunchy leaves, the moist soil and even the soft rocks. I laid on a big rock and sunbathed. I began to reflect on how soothing it was not to be in the city. I had so much time on my own and it felt great. Even though it rained, I still managed to sleep well. The next day, I started to work out early in the morning. I was shadow boxing and I found a tree trunk and lifted it up back to my sleeping bag. I felt like Rocky Balboa. I was very proud of all my accomplishments and connecting myself with nature. I felt beautiful even if I was full of dirt. I didn’t have to dress to impress, or even try to say anything to fit in. Being out alone helped me reflect that this is something that the city won’t offer. A time for peace and finding yourself.

At home I got used to always being serious. I felt like I didn’t have time to make friends. I also didn’t think it was necessary to get closer to my friends. Kai and Zach might have always been there for me. At the beginning of junior year, I learned what sarcasm is. What I learned about sarcasm was to not take the comments seriously. Being at ARC made me feel very grateful for my best friends and who they are. Not only do I value them more, I also know a thing or two that my friends and I can do for fun like rock climbing! At ARC I realized that I don’t always have to be prepared for what’s next. Life unfolds itself when you follow the wind.

# christine kuang

## I am a Nighthawk

I was a little nighthawk  
Lived happily and steadily  
With my family in the tree  
Every day I went to school  
Hung out with my friends  
My life was like copy and paste  
Simple, no worries, predictable

I stayed in the nest  
Smelling the freshness of leaves  
Waiting for my parents  
To bring me delicious food  
For many years  
I lived in the protection of my parents

Sometimes I would look up and stare at the sky  
It was always attractive to me  
In my heart  
I believed that was freedom  
There was where I belonged  
But I was not brave enough  
I was afraid I would get lost

My wings were not strong  
I could not soar wherever I want  
Every step I listened to my parents  
They gave me suggestions  
And I just followed  
I never made decisions by myself

One day my parents decided to leave our country  
And moved to U.S. for a better education  
My heart tore into half  
My brain left with fear  
The tree where I lived for a long time fell down

In the new school  
Everything had changed  
I didn't have friends  
I couldn't communicate with others  
Nobody spoke my home language  
I had no direction  
I was a bird who sang different songs than others  
Helplessness went through my blood

I felt tired and frustrated  
To face this new environment  
The only thing my parents could do  
Was comfort me  
Because they also couldn't adapt to this kind of life

Sometimes  
My mom cried in the living room at night  
I knew what she was thinking about  
She worried about me  
I really wanted to stay next to her  
And cry with her  
But I didn't  
I thought it was time for me to step out

I started to be independent  
I started to open my wings  
Searching for food for my family  
No matter  
Rain, wind, or fog  
I never changed my mind

Flying through the rainbow  
A rain drop dropped on my feathers  
It was shining under the sun  
I realized that I was not fragile anymore  
I was ready to take on every challenge

I am a nighthawk  
Living happily and freely  
With my family in the tree  
Every day I have different feelings  
Colorful, exhilarating, unique



# Turning Point

Growing up and living in the same place is as normal as breathing; however, stepping out and challenging myself made me find my real personality. I've learned to be independent and cooperative through my experiences.

I lived in my home country for 13 years. Everything went smoothly. My family was like a nest, and it always protected me. I didn't have to worry about anything. In school, I always got good grades, and I was also the leader of the class. From my classmates' and teachers' perspective, I was the person to look up to. I enjoyed this kind of life. One day, my parents told me they decided to move to the United States. I didn't understand. I couldn't leave my grandparents, I couldn't leave the country that I was familiar with. My mom tried to comfort me. She said they did this for me, for a better education, for more job opportunities. I really appreciated my parents did so much for me, but on the other hand, it was a burden in my heart. I know that was a difficult decision for my parents, so I decided to accept and respect their choice.

I never left my home before. I didn't even know what I should bring. In the airport, my grandmother held my hands. She said I needed to work hard and cherish this opportunity. After a long and complicated process, we got on the airplane. I could not sleep in my seat. My heart beat was jumping in my throat. I was so nervous. Finally, our sixteen hour flight ended. We arrived in San Francisco International Airport. The sun was shining in the sky, and the wind blew lightly on our faces. I felt so comfortable. My aunt picked us up and helped us settle down. I was grateful that she helped us so much.

Three days later, I went to the new school. There were so many differences than my previous school. The classrooms, structure of the school, the environment, the people, and the atmosphere were new to me. My counselor was very nice. He led me around the school and explained some details to me. I met my homeroom teacher. I was very excited that she could speak Chinese. I didn't know too much English, and I didn't know any of the



students. I found out some of my classmates came from China, too. That made me feel better. I tried my best to learn English and the culture of this country. I found out the people were full of compassion and empathy. My neighbors said hi to me every morning. They were glad to help me if I had a bad time. During these two years, I met so many diverse people who cared about me and gave me advice.

I met my mentor through a program called Summer Search. She is a lovely and responsible lady. I talk to her on the phone once a week. She recommended me to another program called ARC. My mentor said I would spend twenty-three days and experience a different kind of life with ten students. I was very nervous and excited. My parents helped me pack my clothes and the things I need. I was ready for the trip! I like nature, and I love

traveling. I thought it would be a meaningful experience this summer. I didn't know that there were a lot of challenges were waiting for me.

The second day after I left home, we started to backpack in the wilderness. We had to carry a heavy backpack and hike under the hot sun. Every step I moved, I could feel the pain from my knees, ankles, and shoulders. My t-shirt was all wet. I was very tired. At that moment, I realized that family was so important to me. Without the comfort of my parents, I felt helpless and lonely. Even though it was very hard for me, I would not give up. I kept reminding myself that it was time to prove that I could be independent. I started to open up and face all the challenges. Time passed so fast. Each day, everyone in JGFF became closer and closer. We formed a big family in such short days. We helped each other and supported each other. I learned how to work as a team.

Everyone has one or more turning points. I realized that all these experiences gave me so many life tools. Those are the keys that help me open the doors of challenges. I will not forget the accomplishments and the obstacles I met forever.

# eduardo barrera

## I Am a Dammed Lake

I am Lake Mead  
I used to be free like the aquatic ocean.  
I am now a prisoner just staring at trees  
and people who walk around me.  
I feel trapped with the people in my life with nowhere to run  
I can't do nothing about it but try to have fun.

I used to run free, like a cascade not having a care in the world.  
Unrestricted from flowing where I want  
I had my family and that's all I needed.

I didn't have money but had love.  
I didn't have a big house but I had companionship.  
I didn't have food but I had someone who actually cared.

That was all taken away from me  
Since my dad got deported everything went downhill.  
My walls fell apart, my heart shattered like a broken mirror,  
I felt like my other half was torn apart from me,  
Because that led one thing to another.  
My sisters were then being placed in group homes  
with people I didn't even know.  
I was so mad that I couldn't do anything about it but cry.  
Now I am stuck at this place feeling dazed and confused.  
What's going on?  
What did I do to be living this hell?

They tore my family apart; now the sun doesn't shine on me.  
I am burdened with all these responsibilities of which I cannot escape,  
But just how some water drips out slowly escaping the Hoover Dam,  
I am manning up and trying to not slip  
because I got my mom and sister to look after.  
I took my dad's place at my house,  
working for money and contributing to the house.  
I had to end my childhood early.  
It isn't something easy but I had no other choice.  
I can't let my mom down.  
It feels like their world is on my shoulders and if I mess up  
I'm giving up on them when they need my support the most.

As I get older I get wiser.  
I strive for my freedom and success waiting patiently  
for my stream to be released.  
Keeping in mind that my achievement in life is to get my education  
and be wealthy and someday raise a family of my own.  
I taught myself the things my dad never could.  
There was no one there to teach me how to drive, how to fix my car,  
how to work and take responsibilities.

I am Lake Mead,  
a lost lake that is secluded from my rivers and creeks.  
The only thing I got left is the moon and sun.  
My little sister and mom are the only ones there for me  
at the end of the day.  
They make me feel like there will be brighter days even if it rains be-  
cause I know they will never leave me.

I am Lake Mead,  
a prisoner of Hoover Dam  
but one day I will break free of the penitentiary.  
I will be reunited with nature.  
One day I will become a man of my own,  
Having no one to look up to,  
I learned from my families mistakes which gives me the strength to  
build my own strong family.

I am Lake Mead, a lake that used to be dammed,  
a convict of Hoover Dam.  
I will now be happy that I'm free.  
I will have my family of my own who I will love and protect  
with all I can until I can.  
I am wild, feeling free going down a lake or stream  
was all that I have ever dreamed.  
Having freedom and being loved by my family is all I really need.

I am Lake Mead, reunited with my lakes and river.  
You can try and stop me but you won't succeed  
because I will have my family right beside me.  
My lakes and rivers can finally flow free in and out of me.



# To Change Is To Realize

“Real eyes, realize, real lies” - Unknown

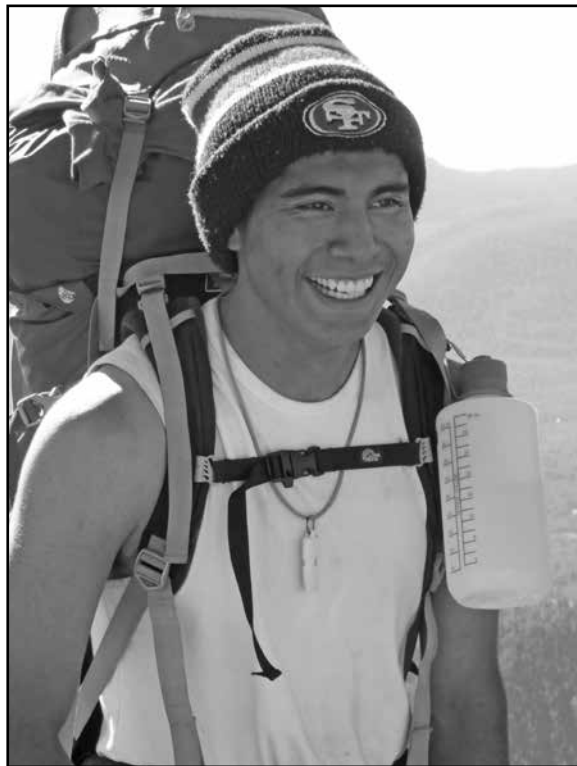
I was at home being bored, working, having nothing else to do but play Xbox, check Facebook, drive around doing nonsense things and at times I would work on my car. I would get so impatient with how bored I was that I literally tried looking for anything that at least sounded fun to do. I had no desire to be home at all. It was so unusual that I couldn't keep up with the day. I had no idea what my emotions were. I was losing hope for myself. I felt lost within myself, unsure of what my goals in life were. I kept getting frustrated because I did not even know who I was anymore. It's as if I were living a lie that wouldn't end.

I was just messing up, not caring about anything, taking everything for granted. I was fed up with the people around me and the problems; everything was just coming down on me, making me feel depressed. I felt trapped in a hole that I dug myself in. What was going on? I did not know. It's as if I was here, but my mind was gone, having no idea about what was going on. That's when an advocate that goes to my school every day encouraged me to consider going to ARC for an amazing experience. I agreed to go since my uncle, mom, teacher, and I saw that I did need to make a change quickly before stuff began to get ugly.

The papers were signed; I was ready to go to ARC. My stuff was packed and Sean pulled up to my house ready to take me on a 23-day course. I felt excited, but nervous to be away from home because I knew I would miss my family. We arrived at Sagehen Creek on Highway 89, meeting the other students that we would be with for the rest of the course. I didn't know them so I did not know what to expect of them. It was a frightening, exciting beginning. I was

scared at first. I felt like I wouldn't make it through the whole course, but I was excited at the same time to meet new people and get away from society for a while.

This new experience was different, I was interacting with new people I thought I would never really talk to. We all shared our thoughts and feelings. We respected one another and what we had to say. Since we were all out on an expedition alone with each other, we had to look out for each other and put our selfish thoughts away. We couldn't take as much food as we desired because we were limited on food. We had to be compassionate toward each other. We found out what our strengths were as each day went by. Now that we know more, I feel like we are all



a family that cares about one another and it just feels good to know that they are there for me. All the drama that was back at home seems to have disappeared in some way already.

Overcoming fear was hard, but when I went rock climbing and to Project Discovery that all changed because I learned to trust and work with people. I was scared to jump off the platform because I thought they would not catch me, but I was wrong because they were there 100%, ready to have my back since my life was literally on their hands. Another challenge I had at the ropes course was when we had to communicate with each other when we were setting up the teepee to get it at the right angles. The flying squirrel was one of my favorite elements on the course it was really fun to have my ARC familia help me experience that. When they said huskies ready and I heard them howl, my heart dropped because I knew I was going to be up 30 feet high in the air! The scariest element was the Tower of Power, which was when we had to climb up a big pole and then jump off to a bar where we swung. When I got to the top I was scared to stand up, but my friend Hebert gave me confidence. I couldn't give up on him up there so we both just went for it. Thanks to that course, I learned how to have more confidence in myself.

When I get back home, I am going to try to contribute more to my family and give my mom more support. I will be a respectful mature adult who will stop being selfish and only thinks of things he needs, not things I want. I'm going to be the man my mom wants me to be so that she can see that I am a man of my word. I will stop taking everything for granted and actually enjoy things and people while I have them in my life. I will be a new man, the man that ARC helped me find within me. I thank ARC a lot for giving me an amazing experience that will help me throughout the rest of my life. I will hold on to this change and experience because it is easy to let go. I will look at my scars on my hands that the mosquitoes left on my skin and remember this great experience.

# hebert cisneros

## Familia Cisneros

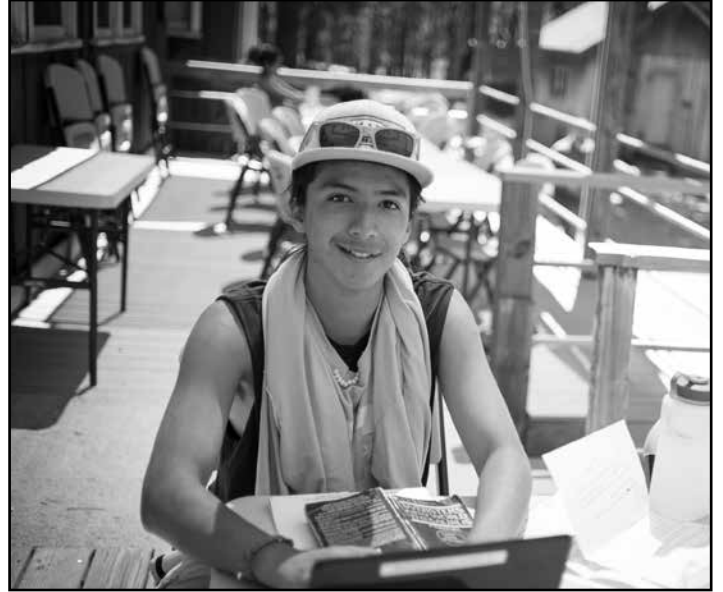
I am a cumulus cloud.  
Together with my family  
we make what's called a cumulonimbus cloud.  
We were over 50,000 feet high, very well known.  
As a littler cloud my family's confidence made me feel assured  
And eager to do new things

Like floating across the world  
and seeing different parts of the planet and meeting new clouds.  
The courage that was given from my family made me feel ready,  
ready to take on life.  
I was humongous and full of water.  
Greater than any cloud I have met.

One morning I got woken up by unfamiliar shrill noises.  
As I turned around to look at my family  
so I could see what was going on.  
I soon realized  
It was the only thing my people have always been scared of.  
It's the toughest wind of them all.  
My people know it as ice.  
It took me a while to realize what was going on.  
It was all a big blur, a storm  
As soon as my vision was clear of confusion  
I realized that my family was getting taken away by this monster.  
I thought about doing something but it felt like I was stuck.  
I guess you can say I was in shock  
as if a lightning bolt had struck through my heart.  
All I could do was sit there and watch my family get blown away.  
I was miserable.  
I then realized  
my older brother was blown in the same direction I was.  
It was the best feeling in the world to realize that I wasn't alone.

Why does the wind tear us apart?  
Why can't it just let us be clouds?  
So it's me and my brother, lost.  
Not knowing where to go next.  
Both scrambled in this mess together.  
We had to make a plan to get my parents back.  
He tells me not to worry that he'll get them back.  
I knew he was going to succeed, I just didn't know how.  
He escorted me to my aunt, a kind, loving cirrus cloud.  
That's who I would spend the time with  
while my family was gone.  
The only things I could feel were weakness, emptiness, and fear  
Like watching myself evaporate before my eyes.

For a whole year my brother spent his time searching for them,  
trying to get them back  
Asking around if anybody's seen them.  
Until one day.  
Some foreigner heard about the situation  
me and my brother were in.  
He located us and told my brother he knew my parents  
and he knew where we could locate them,



but he asked for something in return.  
He wanted the rain we owned.  
My brother had a funny feeling about this,  
but we needed our family back.  
So without thinking about it, my brother gave over the rain.  
Little did we know, this cloud was a liar. He knew nothing.  
I clenched my fists, nails digging into my palms.  
I could feel my ice crystals burn,  
when every ounce of me wanted nothing more than to scream.  
I was mad, not mad for the rain,  
but because our family was still missing.  
We couldn't waste any time; we still had to get our family back.  
We were doing everything in our power to get them back,  
But I had to rest for the night.  
I spent several sleepless nights just thinking about them.

All of a sudden like a miracle out of the blue,  
I saw that my two brothers and dad were together!  
Now I was so happy! I thought I was dreaming.  
I didn't even ask my brother how he did it.  
I was just happy to see them.  
It didn't take me long to realize  
that my mother wasn't with them.  
It was awful when I realized that my mom was still missing.  
But it was me, my two brothers and my dad now,  
an even stronger cloud than just me and my brother,  
ready to bring my mom back.

Then the jet stream came through, bringing my mom back!  
My family's smiles are like a sunrise casting light across my valleys.  
I can't help but radiate warmth and joy.  
Now we're together again and even stronger than ever:  
A bigger, denser, stronger cumulonimbus cloud!

# Willing

All in one day, everything that I valued got taken away from me. Immigration took away most of my family. My life became a very lonely one, with only me and my older brother. We were all alone. I packed up my stuff and moved in with my aunt. That's the moment that I realized nothing was ever going to be the same. I felt loneliness, fear and frustration. Even though my aunt was living in the house where I grew up almost all my life, I felt like I had never been there before. I saw everything differently. I even saw people differently. I felt like I couldn't trust anybody or anything.

I had to face several challenges during my time alone, I felt lost and my emotions were messed up. I didn't know when to feel happy or sad anymore. I felt like being serious all the time would help. I had to learn how to be happy without my parents. I had no idea if I was ever going to see them again, which made me not want to trust anybody anymore, not even the people that I was close to. I was scared of everyone around me.

The day my whole family was back together was awesome, but I instantly knew things were never going to be the same as they were before; a lot had happened. I was now very shy and I didn't know how to express myself. I felt like a ghost just floating through life. This all changed when I met Sean and Mel, the ARC instructors. I got inspired by my brother to go to ARC, to learn about life and about myself too.

Before the course, I had a huge fear about not being able to complete the backpacking expedition. It seemed really hard and tiring, maybe because I was always lazy and never wanted to walk more than 2 miles, especially with a backpack on. Here at ARC, I had no other choice than to keep going. I kept telling myself, "I'm not pushing myself to my limit until I faint." So I kept pushing! Sure enough, I traveled six miles with a huge backpack on like a champion!

My greatest hopes before the course were to gain self-motivation. I felt like everyone I knew believed in me except for myself. On the 19th day of the course, I met a guy named Hector. Hector really inspired me with a story about how he came to be who he always wanted to be. He told me, "Where there's a will, there's a way, you just have to be willing to pay the price." For some reason, his words really motivated me and made me believe in myself. I've never felt so motivated in my life.

ARC is where I got my self-motivation back, and where I came out of my comfort zone. I regained my confidence and I learned to express myself again. I learned to not be afraid of doing what I think is right. In other words, I learned to be a leader.

Every day we pick a person to be a leader for the day. They are the one in charge of letting the whole group know what to do and make sure the group is on time for everything. At the end of the day they get feedback from their peers. As the leader of the day, I felt nervous and at the same time excited for this leadership opportunity. It was fun to be a role model to my peers, but it was hard to get them to do what we had to do. I tried my hardest to be a good leader; I made my voice louder, and I made the best decisions that I could for the group. When it was my turn for people to give me feedback on my leadership, they gave me good feedback and made me realize that I

am doing something that I've always wanted to accomplish. They told me I know how to express myself and for a long time I've wanted to do that. It felt great to realize that I'm finally confident enough to express myself. Meeting all these awesome new people through ARC has really opened my eyes to something good.

For me the most challenging part about the course was being away from my family. I've always been so close to them and really didn't like the idea of being away from them. My new friend Hector also told me, "Problems don't exist, there are only challenges." He was right. I decided to take on the challenge and I realized it has only made me stronger and more appreciative of my family.

Throughout my experience at ARC, I learned not to wait for things to magically happen to me. I learned to make the time to do the things that I want to do. I learned that if there is a will, there is a way, I just have to be willing to pay the price. It feels more than great to realize what I have gained here at ARC. I feel blissful. I have now left that old Hebert, who was still scared from his family's deportation, to a new, confident, wiser, stronger, longer-haired, much-dirtier Hebert.



# karla hernandez

## Something or Nothing

I am a yellow pond lily  
Bright yellow neon color  
Heart shaped leaves

When people walk by me,  
I get their attention  
By the bright colors that I have  
And how happy I always seem

When I was little I started under the water  
So afraid of everything  
I did not want anybody  
I felt like nobody would understand me  
I felt like if I let somebody else into my life  
I would eventually regret it.

I always had my family around me  
Protecting me and taking care of me  
They are the green leaves that surround  
My gentle petals  
But sometimes the water gets choppy  
And my parents begin to fight  
When I watched their leaves sink around each other  
It made me think that everyone in the world  
Eventually gets hurt

Protection, that is all I need  
Protection, that is all I want  
Protection, that is all I have

And I thought their protection was so big,  
So much that nobody could get near me  
But I was wrong

I made friends with beavers and ducks who promised  
To never eat my leaves  
But I was blind to see  
That all they did was fool with me  
Animals take advantage of me  
They just don't understand that I can give them shelter  
And anything they need

Awesome! Bullfrogs are coming to me  
They understand the big heart that I have  
And all the help I can give  
I can't stop smiling

No! Where are you guys going?  
Don't leave me just like this  
I'm all by myself  
It makes me feel like I'm not good enough  
Just when I finally thought I was good for somebody

I need somebody  
Snakes and rats are attacking me  
My yellow flowers are falling into the dirty, muddy water  
I cannot deal with this by myself

It's the time of the year when everything is so dark  
The time of the year when flowers die

People's words bring me down  
My family is there but they cannot do anything about it  
They try and they do try so hard  
But it is not enough

I'm so afraid of everything  
I don't want to be here  
Wild animals keep attacking me  
And they don't stop

What do they want from me?  
I'm just so confused  
And their words are killing me little by little  
As my petals fall one by one into cold, dirty water

All the heart that I have  
And feeling I can share  
Are gone and under the water  
With my silent leaves

There is no other place  
Where I think I can go but down  
To the dark and lonely place  
Deep deep under the water

People's words have killed me so much  
That now I'm nothing  
I don't even exist

And for a long, long time there are no more pond lilies to be seen

But the moon light  
Starts to hit my eyes  
I am alive  
I had enough time to think to myself, and ask the question:  
Why do these animals keep lying to me?

Oh! I get it I should act another way  
Not a target for them to use  
When they get near me I will attack them  
That is what everyone is doing so why shouldn't I?

This is working so much that now  
Animals don't even use me as shelter  
Okay! I can deal with that  
I have my friends who keep me happy and they understand

Wait a minute, this is not the real me  
I have feelings for others  
I love everyone who wants to come close to me

Am I strong or am I tough?  
Am I something or am I nothing?  
What is a pond lily anyway?



## Taking More Risks

Tijuana, Baja California, my city, my home. I had everything I needed. It was kind of a violent city, but that did not matter. My friends lived close and we would always hang out. I felt that as I would get older, I would still be with the same people around me.

When I was just five years old, my parents got divorced. That was a really hard time for me. I had to see my momma go and was not able to see her every day, not able to hug or kiss her whenever I needed some love from her. She moved away very far from home. I didn't understand why she moved to another country, to a place called Lake Tahoe. Four years later my father found a new girlfriend. Everything was going so well, even though I did not like the fact that she was replacing my momma, but I couldn't do anything about it but just ignore it. One day everything felt so different. She started being so rude to me. She would make dirty faces at me. She would try everything to keep my father away from me and my older brother. That's when I knew I couldn't handle it anymore and needed to ask my mom if I could go live with her.

Three months later I finally moved in with my mom. I was in a different country where I didn't know anybody or speak the language that everybody did. At that time, I was thinking that I would never learn English and I wouldn't make any friends. When I was in school, I saw kids playing with each other laughing and talking, while I was standing in the corner with my mom feeling all confused and lost. When the school bell

rang, I saw every kid running to get in line. That's when I knew I had to walk and get in line and say bye to my momma. When I walked into the class everyone was staring at me and they would whisper to each other "Look, that is the new girl." The teacher introduced me to the whole class. The faces that the students made were really scary. Their looks seemed like they wanted to attack me.

When the teacher gave us directions to go have a seat, I was looking around and noticed that the school was way different from my

your name?" At that time, I was too scared to answer her back. After that day though, we kept talking every day. We would hang out in her house and have a good time with one another. She was the one who made me feel more comfortable talking to other people even though sometimes they wouldn't understand me and I wouldn't understand them

Little by little I was feeling more comfortable and willing to take more risks. My goal was to adjust to the new country that I was in, which meant learning to be more open with other people. School was still challenging, but luckily I found the most awesome teacher who helped me learn English, Ms. Adams. She always tried her hardest to teach me English and never gave up on me.

I am a totally different person now. Looking back just makes me think that I am able to do whatever I set my mind to. Life is hard, but I am able to do anything. I had to work so hard to be in the place that I am right now. If I wouldn't have set my mind to learn English, I would still not be able to speak to the people that I know now. Sometimes I would get frustrated because people would talk about me and I wouldn't understand. I gave up a lot of times and I never thought that at some point I would actually accomplish my goal, but I did.



old school. The girl that was sitting next to me kept staring at me but not say any words to me. Finally she said to me "Hola, como te llamas" meaning "Hi, what is

# santiago espinoza

## Wolverine

I am a wolverine.  
My size doesn't intimidate others until my anger awakens  
like a dormant volcano,  
A flow that's continuous,  
that inflicts pain not just on others but on me,  
A violent hunter that would prey on emotions,  
Everybody's feelings were my hunger  
Appetizing, juicy and filling,  
Mine insipid and hollow.

My wolverine story wasn't always like this.  
He was preying on bigger dreams than himself  
like a deer in sight,  
A wolverine to a dear family that was happy,  
It was me, my four sisters, my dad and my mom in our den.  
When we used to get together,  
there was a lot of laughter, and happiness.  
Me and my sisters used to play around,  
they would dress me up and put make-up on me.  
I was really angry at the time  
but I realized they really did care about me.

Until one day, the little wolverine kit was wondering  
why her adult sister Elisa was gone  
My head was spinning,  
a tornado leaving confusion and distortion.  
It appears my sister was snatched up  
by a pack of wolves  
and from there nothing was known.  
Doctors just gave results,  
questions were not answered.

A new dawn,  
a new day began for a long  
and arduous year for the wolverine family.  
Sustainability was out of reach.  
Everyone was dealing with the pain  
in their own way.

My other sisters through  
all the disarray took me out,  
distracting me from the fact that my sister  
was never coming back home.  
They were all goddesses of their own planets, colliding worlds.  
Miscommunication with mother moon and father sun,  
They no long turn to them for guidance.  
All the while, this kit wolverine sat in his cave,  
watching depressing snow and never-ending rain,  
A witness to all the tension.

In under a year, the kit had to grow into an adult.  
My hide grew thicker for my cold and lonely nights.  
My constant fights with myself,  
My nails sharp as a knife, cutting through butter  
My skin being the butter as I held the tool  
To escape the pain with pain.  
My self-infliction was an attempt  
to get the aches out of my heart.

Luckily I sought happiness through my vast lands.  
This wasn't a race.  
I learned patience, taking on the steepest mountains,  
and each was a journey for the wolverine.  
A wise tree, my therapist, was there to stretch out his branch,  
leading me to the next step.  
But one day I said some lines that were misunderstood,  
Next was what I feared most – CPS opened a case.  
From there trust was just a word.  
So I deleted it.  
Now I feared to trust everybody.  
The wolverine was lost through the woods  
until he found his trail again.  
ARC showed him the gates to his inner thoughts.  
He went up and down mountains,  
and finally learned to embrace his real emotions.

He was tested  
through a series of challenges.  
He needed communication, strength,  
kindness, and trust in others.

Risking everything I valued,  
I gave it all away to my teammates.  
Now I stand side by side  
with my new JGFF family.  
Through all the adventures,  
We stood strong and finished stronger.

My sister was the one to care for  
all of my nieces and nephews,  
The one everyone looked up to, especially me.

Now I'm the one who's responsible  
and takes care of my sisters' kits  
Now I'm the one who everybody looks up to.

I am full of empathy now.  
I am trusting and courageous.  
I am a wolverine.



## A Journey to Be Finished

“You were given this life, because you are strong enough to live it.” - Robin Sharma

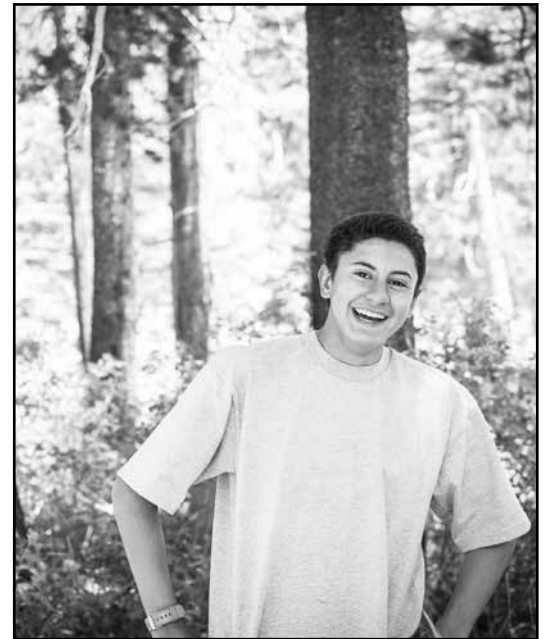
I came from home, where I felt my thoughts were entrapped, so busy with a lot of my so-called agenda goals that I usually forgot everything and continued with disappointment of not completing any of them. My journey began at about the age of twelve, right after my sister's passing; I traveled with thoughts of negativity as I surrounded myself with bad habits and fake enjoyment of life's greatest treasures. Fear of trusting others was always a state of mind I had. To clarify the confusion and have acceptance in my life, I told myself that my sister was somewhere better. The reason behind this was that when I was younger, I attended some therapy sessions to alleviate the pain. During a session I said something that was misunderstood and led to a CPS case. The fear of losing my family, fear of getting taken away from my house, fear of trusting others overwhelmed me.

In continuance to my beginnings, I passed and graduated Alder Creek Middle School, still learning and gain-

ing resources throughout summers and little moments that helped me grow. I started my High School year with an elusive mind; I didn't care about credits or whatever I needed for my future, so I completely blew off my Freshman year. I already had a reputation for giving the finger to all authority figures, so with this attitude imagine how far I'm getting. I'm setting myself up for a bright future. Sophomore year began, but wait a minute, I had a clearer conscience. Is it because I left some vices behind and decided to mature, the feeling of a young man thriving to a better life?

One day, on a regular school day in my 2nd block in Ms. Streckers class, a man walked in with a ponytail, a backpack - a word to describe other backpackers: “scruffy looking.” Sean was the man's name. He passed out a clipboard and said sign up for this program. This is what I needed: an escape.

I just wanted to get away; I wanted a new perspective on life. My teachers and others said it would be a great opportunity. I took it through the help of Sean and others who helped me get approved and participate in the program.



# tam nguyen

## Without My Family, I am No One

I am a salmon.  
Started as a small egg in a stream bed  
From the moment I opened my eyes,  
Family was always next to me,  
They tried to bring all the best in this world for me.  
Always they helped me solve problems,  
Didn't matter if I was right or wrong,  
And I knew if I fell they would pick me up.  
They tried to make me see the light from the darkness.

But when I got older, my mom always followed me  
even when I hung out with my friends in the stream,  
She sat on the edge of the current and always kept her eyes on me.  
She made me feel embarrassed and annoyed,  
I just wanted to make a hole and get into it,  
Like the salmon trying to hide in their gravel nests.

I didn't understand what my parents tried to bring for me.  
When they forced me to do my fish homework  
before I could go out,  
I got frustrated and confused,  
Whenever they told me not to touch something that was dangerous,  
All I wanted to do was swim down there and touch it.  
They told me not to go to the ocean,  
that the big fish would eat me,  
But I didn't listen.

I wanted to grow up and be more independent,  
I wanted to be able to accomplish challenges,  
Have my own thoughts and listen to my heart.

I wanted to swim away,  
And spend a couple of years to become smolt,  
I got ready for a challenging trip to the ocean,  
To become a part of the ARC Family.  
I left everything behind,  
Family and friends,  
And I headed out to the sea.

From the rivers to the Pacific Ocean,  
Only one month but it felt like a year,  
I felt alone but I couldn't turn back.  
I tried to go back upstream but I got blocked by a dam,  
I just hoped that there would be friends next to me,  
As I swam down these rushing rapids  
To the vast sea.  
Swimming down the rocky river...  
For the first time in my life I got hurt.  
Just some small scratches,  
But it reminded me of my family.



When I finally reached the lonely ocean,  
There were a lot of strange fish I didn't know.  
And I didn't know if I could trust them.  
I appreciated all the things that I had back at my old pond,  
A caring family that was always there,  
Even when they knew I could solve my own troubles,  
I felt my heart break when I realized that they weren't next to me.

I just wanted to give them a hug,  
A small thing but one that might fill up the empty spot in my heart,  
Without my family I am no one,  
I am stuck in the never-ending ocean without the people who love me.  
All I can feel is anger and pain  
Just like someone tore open my heart and cut me in half.  
And I know that no one would be able to heal that cut.

I tried not to think about it,  
Put the mask on my face every day,  
Smile and control my emotions,  
And try not to cry in front of others.  
But the feeling of missing my family keeps coming into my head.  
I ask myself what I should do to become positive,  
And let go of regret.

I found the answer in the moment that I met ARC.  
I learned to be grateful for everything my parents did for me.  
I decided to swim back to where I was from.  
With a hope that I would change myself,  
Become more helpful,  
and appreciate what I get from people around me.  
Overcome my fear of being alone, of being away from my family  
Overcome obstacles and challenges to become more mature,  
And know what is right to do  
before getting stuck or falling back into the dreaming world.

When I get home I'll be ready to listen to my parents...  
Do my homework before I go out without complaining.  
Be grateful for everything at home,  
Especially the delicious foods that my mom cooks!

## Be a New Person

When I was a kid, I used to be afraid of darkness, heights, animals, getting hurt, and being away from my family, the people who I love. I was selfish, couldn't work with others, and never had appreciation for the things that I got from the people around me. Also, I wasn't a social person so I had a hard time communicating with others. Because of these issues, I had a difficult time understanding people around me. For example, when my friend was kidding with me, I got frustrated and was rude to her. Because of that misunderstanding, my friendship with her was broken.

From the moment that I got on the bus at Greyhound Oakland to Truckee, I was freaking out because of all these fears. I was really nervous, and I could hear my own breath because that was the first time I got onto a bus with strangers all around me. All I could do was just wish that I could be at home, sitting on my bed next to my lovely six year old brother. After six long hours, I finally reached Truckee and got picked up by a guy name Sean. Then he took me to a place called Sagehen, and all I could see there were just people that I didn't know, that I had never talked to.

The next day, we started backpacking for six days in the Desolation Wilderness. I had never been there and it was my first time backpacking. It was really hard and challenging for me, having a really heavy backpack and living with the people when I didn't even know their names or anything about them.

I'm not a social person, not really good at communicating with others, especially strangers. I don't know when and how I started to open up to those strangers, and even share things that I had never told my family before. I got closer to them day by day. I started to think more about them, care more, and even put myself in their situation. I almost gave up on my first expedition when I realized that there were many unexpected things I saw, such as rocks, trees, grasses, weird animals that I had never seen before in my life, and mosquitos, which seemed big like bees attacking me everywhere. I started to get used to how everything was here, especially the role of jobs. During my first time being leader of the day, I was worried because I didn't know what I should do; should I be



more strict or just be myself? And what should I do to make others listen to me? At the evening meeting that day, I got a lot of feedback from the group. I got frustrated but still listened to them and tried to improve my leadership.

After our first expedition, we went back to basecamp. For the first time, I got hurt at Donner Summit while rock climbing. It was just some scratches, but my heart felt empty when I realized that my family wasn't next to me. People around me encouraged me, but I still felt hurt. They tried and they tried but they just couldn't fill in the emptiness that my family can fill.

On a Saturday at the ropes course, the weather was sunny and pretty hot. There were a lot of challenges for me. But the most difficult thing that I knew I would have to face is my fear of heights. After lunch, all of us were getting ready for the Tower of Power. At the beginning, I thought that the Tower of Power's height was around two feet, so I decided to jump off from that with my partner Tristan. But I couldn't believe my eyes anymore when I saw the Tower of Power, because it was like 4000 feet from the ground, as high as the sun. I was staring, frozen with fear, dizzy, and I couldn't breathe when I looked at the top of the element for a long time until my turn came. And I climbed to the top of the Tower with no problem. At the moment when I accidentally looked down, I was shaking, my eyes were closed, and it was like my body wanted to fight against me. I kept telling myself that I couldn't move. But my partner Tristan encouraged me a lot, he showed me the view of beauty around, and held my hand while we jumped off. He was the one who broke my fear and I couldn't believe that I really jumped off of the Tower.

With Tristan's encouragement and the encouragement of JGFF, I finally found the way to reach success, to overcome my fear of darkness, heights, and getting hurt, and of being alone, away from the people I love. I learned to be more independent, to trust others, be less selfish, work with others, and open up to others. Also, I learned to put myself in people's situations, and understand more about them. I especially learned to appreciate everything my parents did for me before. When I get home, I'll be ready to listen and behave more at home. I'll try to be more helpful, caring, and trust the people around me....and always keep my positive attitude.

# tristan deatherage

## Fall Seven Times, Stand Up Eight

I am a juniper tree. I am unique.  
Twists and turns make me who I am.  
Losing my brother due to custody orders at a young age  
Has influenced me a lot,  
My father's previous marriage took my brother  
and my dad did everything in his power to get him back,  
But he had no chance, she had already brainwashed him.  
A branch has broken.  
Just as the branches of the juniper tree crazily disperse out of  
Its unique tree trunk.  
As the juniper tree twists and turns it still reaches for the sky.

The ups and downs of my life have taught me to dig deep  
As my roots mine into the course granite rock.  
With every new and rocky challenge, I stand strong.  
I emit a certain compassion to others even if I am in a bad spot,  
Like the roots of a juniper tree reach into bad soil,  
The tree becomes weak, sad and non-living.  
I reach into bad soil.  
But now that my grandmother has passed,  
I have no one to turn to.  
As if her passing was yesterday,  
It didn't hit me,  
But when it hit me, it hit hard.  
A branch has broken.

I try to depend on friends and sometimes they're there for me  
and sometimes they're not,  
If I express my problems with them they think of it like this,  
Not my problem.  
But with my grandma and my brother, they were always there.  
A branch has broken.

I am a juniper tree,  
As the tree has lived through bad drought  
I have lived through bad things in my life,  
My grandmother's passing hurt me a lot,  
her not being here has broken a branch.  
The thought of her not being  
here has led to many tearing eyes, sleepless nights.  
But the juniper tree survives and thrives from the drought,  
just as I do.

I try not to mourn about her passing,  
but I try to celebrate her loving life.  
She taught me many things, to help out, enjoy, and love,  
She has grown my branch.

Just as juniper trees  
Are influenced by water, wind, and drought  
And if they lose one of these,  
they lose their inimitable personality,  
But when it grows strong and alive again  
it remembers how lucky it is to live on the earth.  
It grows strong  
and becomes unsurpassed with compassion,  
peace and interest.  
Growing up without a brother  
made me independent and selfish,  
Not looking for help, not giving help,  
or thanks or respect.  
I never got to experience a sibling there  
to help and support me and show me wrong from right.  
By losing my brother, I lost a branch,  
Just as the juniper tree does when it is in fierce storms.  
A branch has broken.  
As the juniper's seed falls to a different place  
it has to learn and grow to be stronger.

I miss my grandma,  
and now that I'm closer with my brother  
I'm reaching for the sky more than ever.  
And I can't wait until his soon-to-be-wife is part of my family,  
to start a new and better branch in my life.  
I never really thought about how he wasn't there for me,  
I was born by his side, in his arms,  
I played with him,  
learned from him,  
My brother will be here more than ever for me,  
and my grandma is there in my heart,  
Unseen, unheard but always there.

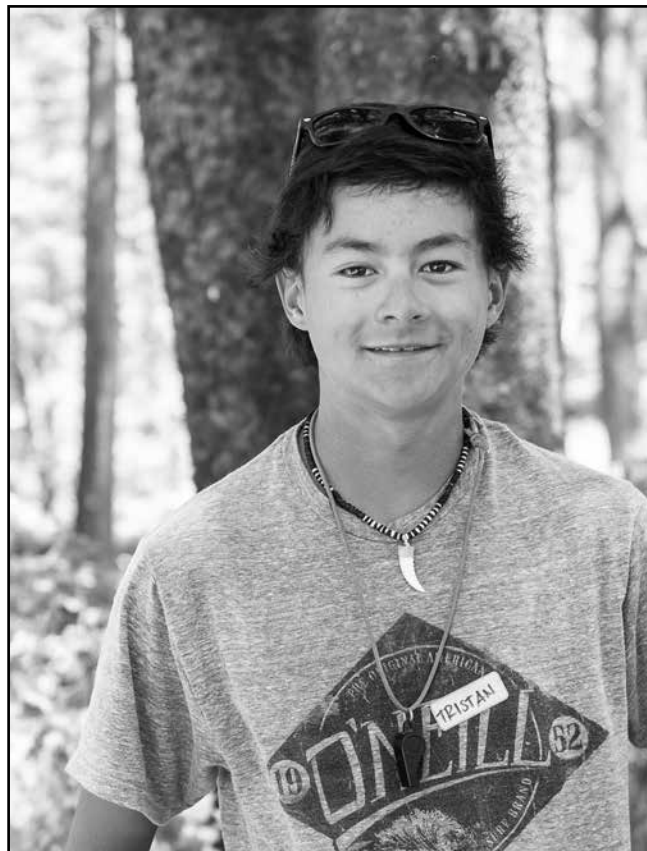
I grow a new branch in my life,  
a healthy, unique and happy branch.  
Grow your branch, mine has.

## Everyone Works Better, Together

In the beginning, I was selfish, independent, and I couldn't work well with others. My home life was fun and exciting, hanging out with family and friends. We went to the beach and we went out boating. We had barbecues and went swimming. I felt happy, but I wanted to be a better person. My parents thought that ARC would be a good thing for me and at first I disagreed. I didn't want to waste three weeks of my summer. I didn't want anything to do with ARC. But then I thought, I can get a lot out of this for my life. New faces and new challenges, like overcoming my fear of others. I love a challenge, and I had a desire to change as a person, but still wanted to be my lazy, wake-up -late Tristan self. I wanted to please my parents, so I decided that it might be fun. I also wanted to change for myself. I really wanted to put being selfish out of my life and to start helping others more. I wanted to be more respectful. I really wanted to think of others before myself, and ARC gave me that chance.

ARC helped me change by being away from home. I was going to face my challenges of being selfish and not being a good team player. Stepping into the vehicle, leaving my parents in the parking lot, I felt like I was walking into the eyes of fear. I got to Sagehen and saw new faces and smelled new scents all

around. Immediately I felt homesick, shy, and scared. I wanted to be accepted, but I didn't know if I would be accepted. In the first couple days I was shy and scared; I tried to do everything myself. I was in the wilderness for six days with complete



strangers, and I thought, "Man I don't know if I'll ever be friends with these people." At first, I didn't know what to say, who to talk to. I learned that teamwork is the key to success at ARC, that if I really wanted to stop

being selfish, I would have to make a change and try my hardest. Then it got better. We started laughing and having some fun. I thought, "This is worth it." After a week went by, the camaraderie that ARC gave me was exciting and fun. I met awesome people, and I faced the challenge of opening up to them. I found myself. I now see myself as loving, respectful and everything I wanted to be before this course. I found that am very capable of being myself.

After ARC I hope to be a changed person in a good way. I want to be full of life and full of love, not be selfish and not be independent. ARC has given me confidence and the will to change. I feel stronger with every day that goes by, mentally and physically. I can't wait to share my new perspective with the world and spread the word. ARC has helped me be the Tristan I want to be. ARC has opened new doors and new passions to me, doors that I will walk through. If you take life with the mentality that you are thankful and happy, you can conquer anything.

Just be confident.

Fear is your body's way to tell you that its dangerous, adrenaline is your body's way to deal with that fear. Inhale adrenaline, exhale fear.



**scenes from  
tahoe 2014**







# yosemite

**BASECAMP LOCATION:**  
Yosemite Field Station, Wawona, CA

**COURSE LENGTH:** 40 days

**TEAM NAME:** The Triumphant Turtles

**INSTRUCTORS**

Aaron DiMartino  
Ann Reynolds  
Shelby Takenouchi  
Will Fassett

# adriana meza lemus

## I Am a Golden Eagle

I am a Golden Eagle  
Growing into a strong powerful bird

I was born in Mexico  
As a small and fragile bird  
My body and mind were not fully developed  
I was not strong enough to fly to my distant father's arms  
My dad being away in the United States  
Looking for food to bring back to our nest  
And I, as a small and fragile bird, was just waiting for the day  
to become independent and fly across borders

I have a large supportive nest  
Depending on my mom and grandma  
to show me the right paths in life  
Like a Golden Eagle showing their young bird the right way  
always being patient and compassionate  
Both of them doing everything they could  
to have my brothers and I well-fed and dressed  
They worked every Sunday  
to provide us with a higher quality of life  
Making the ingredients for tortas and tostadas  
Which took them a day and a half  
Worn out by all the food they needed to prepare  
Exhaustion in their faces and body was visible  
but masked by their smiles  
Always working hard to make sure I would be ready to depart into  
my hard but extraordinary journey in life

I am a golden eagle  
Slowly unfolding my wings to take my first flight

Starting my long journey in life... fledged out of my nest  
Scared that my wings wouldn't be supportive to be able to fly  
Scared to not be able to fly as well as others  
to not being able to adapt in the new environment  
Scared to not being able to fit in with the new people  
What if this unfamiliar environment was too hard  
to be able to adapt

Years passed and my dad said  
you're ready to fly to the United States  
I was overwhelmed with emotions  
Happy, sad, nervous and scared  
My heart, pumping up and down like a radiant happy child  
Crying sad to leave my grandma behind  
who always stood by my side  
My palms cold and sweaty of how nervous I was  
How was I going to do it without  
my most comforting family member by my side?

I am a Golden Eagle  
That flew to the United States  
Crossing border's to get to this new place  
A place with more opportunities  
But these opportunities didn't come as an easy package  
It came with a whole new environment and language  
An environment with so many new rules that seem dumb at times  
A whole new language that was hard to understand  
The next few years were the hardest ones in my life  
I used to cry at times and beg my mom to let me fly back  
But she always said no and said that this was for the best  
I didn't understand...  
I didn't want to understand all I knew that I wanted to go back

I am a Golden Eagle  
That wanted to give up  
To give up the power that she had...  
but my family never gave me the chance to give up  
My hardworking dad always encouraging me to be #1  
All he wants its the best for me so I won't end up like him  
Working a full time job that doesn't give him enough time  
to be with us

For him and my family I grew  
I grew into this powerful and beautiful eagle  
who is never going to give up  
Strong at hunting... hunting down the goals in my life  
I am a Golden eagle



# I am an Independent, Confident, and Trusting Girl

My phone buzzed in the middle of class. A substitute teacher was standing right in front of me. I was receiving the call from Will, an ARC Instructor, to inform me that I had been accepted to the 40-day ARC course. It was a phone call that changed my life. This summer, I've seen and experienced the beautiful place that is Yosemite. Waking up at three in the morning to hike up to Tuolumne Peak was astonishing. From the top of the peak, I saw the sparkly blue lakes reflecting the trees that surrounded it. The clouds in the distance covered enormous mountains. I've also seen two beautiful waterfalls, many crystal clear creeks, and dazzling lakes. I've not only been in a beautiful places and had fun this summer, I have also grown to be more independent, more confident, and more trusting.

The ARC course has increased my independence. At home, I was used to my mom having everything ready for me. She did most of the work around the house. My only chore was having my room clean, which most of the times it wasn't. My mom had to keep reminding me that it was my responsibility to help her clean the house on weekends and school vacations. During the ARC course, I have learned to be more responsible with my chores. No one has to keep reminding me what my job role is. I make it happen myself and I also contribute by helping others with their job roles around camp. Depending on my mom to have my food ready to eat, I hardly ever cooked for myself and others. But here, I learned to not only cook for myself, but to cook for 16 people. I didn't have my mom to do everything I didn't want to do. I know that being independent will help me later on in college. I will be able to do things for myself without needing to rely on somebody else to do my chores.



I am a person that usually lacks in confidence. Sometimes I feel that I'm unable to achieve any of my goals. That changed this summer. When people meet me, they think I'm a person that knows what she can achieve and has her mind set on grabbing it. Well, that wasn't me before this course. I was a person that might show confidence on the outside, but I was terrified of failure and not reaching my friends' and family's expectations. During each expedition and activity, I have found confidence in myself. The first expedition is where I grew the most. At the beginning of the course, I was afraid of not meeting the group's expectations. Everyone knew I was a wrestler. I felt that I had to be strong in every challenge I faced. On our first expedition there was a day that we hiked almost 6 miles. This was a challenge for me. I was hungry, tired, and I felt that I couldn't continue hiking. I told myself "You're not going to be able to do it and everyone is going to make fun of you." Each step I took drained my energy more and more. When we were close to the top, I slipped and fell. I thought I wasn't going to be able to stand up, but with the help of Carla one of my teammates who was hiking behind me I was able to get up and keep going "We're almost there you can do it" she said. I then felt more confident in myself and I was able to reach the top. Since that day, I'm more confident in what I'm doing. I also know that my mind is stronger than my body. I'm more confident in achieving my goals to attend college and make the world a better place.

This summer, I have learned to trust myself and my group. Rock climbing was an adventure that helped me

develop trust in both myself and my teammates. At the start of the day, I was scared that my teammates were not going to be able to support me while I was rock climbing. I was afraid that I wasn't going to be able to find a safe path to follow and hurt myself. When we got to Jackass Wall, the rock climbing instructors showed us how we were going to support each other. I was really excited and decided to go first. There were four routes lined from easiest to hardest. I chose the hardest route to challenge myself. The instructors tied me into the rope. "I'm ready to be supported" I said. "We are ready to support you," my teammates said. I started to climb up and fell multiple times developing more trust in the rope and teammates that were there to support me. However, I was still unsure if I was going to be able to climb up. "Come on, girl, you got this" an instructor said. "Come on, Adriana, just follow your instincts, trust yourself!" I told myself. With each step, I took I felt more comfortable and it became easier. I reached the end surprised that I had accomplished my goal and, when I slipped, my teammates were there to support me. This was the day that I fully developed trust in myself and others.

I am grateful that I decided to come to Adventure Risk Challenge. This summer course changed my life for the better. I have learned many valuable lessons. I am now more independent and able to do things for myself and my family. I am more confident in achieving my goals in life and trusting myself and others. I am going to miss all the adventures I had this summer and the friendships that I have created. I wish I could take my ARC teammates home, but I can't. However, there is something I will always keep with me, which are the memories of how I became a more independent, confident, and trusting girl.

# alondra juarez

## Quaking Aspen

I am a Quaking Aspen  
I come from a poor but strong family  
My parents taught me how to be the person  
I am today. They are the best teachers I could  
Ever have. From the outside it looks  
Like we are all individuals but beneath the  
Surface we are all one.

They taught me that sometimes its better  
To hide emotions. I have leaves that are glossy green  
On the upper surface and dull green underneath.  
Sometimes I get stuck with my own feelings,  
I don't know if I get gloomy or angry when  
They give my sister more privileges than  
They give to me.  
I get stuck but at the same time I am happy for her  
Because I know she is a little Quaking Aspen  
That is barely starting to grow up.

I prefer comfortable, familiar,  
Moist soil, people that are going to be there whenever I need  
Someone to talk to, someone that hugs me and  
Tells me that they love me but especially  
A shoulder to cry on.  
I can also grow near  
Desert springs.  
I can learn to get out of my comfort zone  
and talk to new people.



I may not be the best person you could ever have met  
But I am an Aspen  
and they are remarkable and unique just as  
they are.

Each day I am growing more and more,  
As a person and student  
Learning from my mistakes,  
My bad choices and bad experiences.  
I used to skip school  
I think it was resentment because I would  
Never have my parents' permission to go out.  
I lost all the trust of my parents and teachers  
Like a tree without its leaves.  
It has been hard to rebuild the relationships  
We used to have but I am close to get there.

I stopped thinking  
Just about myself and now every time I  
Make a decision I think about myself and  
Also my surroundings because we are all  
Connected and it will have a big impact  
In everyone else's life. I want to be part of the forest,  
Before I was just lost  
And did not know what to do  
I chose the easier path but now  
I would give up everything,  
To gain the trust of all of those people

I've become a stronger tree  
Because I am starting a new season in my life  
I am stretching my roots and branches  
More and more but this time I am going through  
The right path.

## The Old and New Me

All twelve of us are seated in a circle in Bowler Campground just outside of Yosemite. We are getting ready for evening meeting or what we call “ABC News.” During evening meeting, we all share our appreciations, hopes, and challenges. Even if we argue, we become a better team. Evening meetings is my favorite part of the day because it makes me feel joyful. It’s the time we feel closest to each other. We are working things out, agreeing and disagreeing, and always talking as a group. The meetings also make me think about all the things I accomplish. The ARC course, along with the evening meeting, has changed me into a more confident, independent person, a stronger student, and a better leader.

During the ARC course, I have gained more confidence in myself. Rock-climbing was one of the hardest activities I have done this summer. I remember when I was in 8th grade, I tried to climb an indoor wall and I couldn’t get to the top. I gave up too easily. The day we were going to rock-climb with ARC I did not want to do it. I was worried I was going to fail like last time and it was terrifying. It was my turn and I was shaking, sweating, and my heart was beating rapidly. I couldn’t climb the first rock and I was going to give up, but there were people supporting me and giving me tips about where to step on the rocks. If a route didn’t work they would say, “You can try the rock on your right! Alondra, come on, you can do it!” Their words encouraged me and gave me the strength to keep on going. I persevered until I got to the top! While climbing, I was just thinking, “What if I fall?” I needed to trust the people helping me and mostly I needed to trust myself. It took time, but I did. Once I felt the ground I was the happiest girl in the world because I had finally made it. I would not have expected to learn to have confidence in myself in such an unusual way. Now every

time I step, I feel confident in where I’m stepping, not only in rock-climbing, but in my life.

I have grown into more independent person in the ARC course. At home, I would never help my mom do the chores. I would only do the things I had to do for myself. Now not only I clean after myself, but I clean after others as well. This has made me less dependent because after this course I am going to rely less on my mom and help with anything she needs. Also, I have grown to be more independent because I don’t have my family to help me with decision-making. In the solos, for example, I knew what I had to do and at what time I had to eat. Every little decision I had to make on my own. I will translate this to my life at home by having a plan for what I have to accomplish.

ARC has made me a stronger and better student because I used to go to class and not pay attention. I would just talk with my classmates. ARC has taught me that there is time for everything. There’s time to have fun, but there’s also time to pay attention and learn something that can help you in your future. When I go back home, I am going to use this knowledge at school and at home by focusing when I’m in class or doing homework and by having fun at the appropriate time. Being more independent and being a stronger student is helping me to see the world from a new perspective.

Throughout the ARC course, I have developed my leadership skills. I now have the capacity to lead a group and I have learned to work with different people. Working as a team is something

I wouldn’t do at school. When I worked with groups, and people I usually don’t talk to, I would do all the work or do nothing at all because there was a person that thought he or she was smarter than me. Here I’ve developed a different mindset. Working in a group has a different meaning. Now I think that if you have the capacity to work within a



group, you are capable of guiding the group. Before when I worked with new people, I would never say a word even if I knew the answer. Here every time we work with groups I always express my point of view and I even say if I dis-

agree with something. I do my part and nobody stays behind not knowing what to do. We all help each other no matter what situation we’re in. Being able to talk to people you don’t know and working as a team is going to help me a lot. When I go back to school, one of my goals is to share all my leadership skills with my classmates and let them know that if I have the capacity to be a leader, they have the capacity to be a leader too.

Before this course, I was a different person. I thought I would never change. However, I have transformed into a confident, independent person, a stronger student, and a better leader. When I go home, I want to take all the things I learned and share them with my friends, community, and especially my family. I want them to feel proud of me and I want my sister to have a person that she can look up to and say, “I want to be like my older sister.” I want to be role model. Thanks to ARC, I’ve become that person I had no idea I could be.

# anadi zuniga

## A Flutter of a Spark in the Winds

I am a Calliope hummingbird.  
I am colorful, elusive, a wandering spirit  
With my multi-colored wings I soar for answers about the world  
Ideas only fuel my desire for knowledge  
Just like a hummingbird thirsting for nectar  
I move with a quick, but steady pace  
Forever searching for the elixir that will sate my aspirations

As a tiny hummingbird, the smallest of my kind,  
the world seems so large  
The winds are ominous, constantly shoving me down  
Trees are skyscrapers, rocks are mountains  
I am but one fluttering heartbeat in a sea of pounding hearts  
As a hummingbird, I am weak  
The only thing keeping me aloft  
Are my strong, long wings  
But even they, however, cannot withstand  
Blow after blow after blow  
Thrown at me by the winds

The strong winds clash against me,  
As elusive as I am, they send strong negative vibes, thoughts  
Discouragement, anxiety, a hatred for myself,  
They choke me and toss me off course,  
And prevent me from searching  
They whisper these ugly things to me,  
Tears flowing like rain, I feel powerless

The winds within keep me from migrating  
They fear change; they want me to continue to circle  
Just that spot  
Creating and maintaining that horribly perfect storm  
That I want to break free from  
I flicker furiously to get by the tornado  
But can only break down  
My own self drags me, holds me by my tail  
And says, "You need to do better, to be perfect."  
The other winds attempt to whisper, "Perfection isn't all."  
But they get drowned out by  
The seemingly endless tormenting hurricane.

Darting about is all that I really know,  
My only sincere defense against the harsh winds.  
And from the outside looking in, it seems that I am simply  
Enjoying all the colors, smells and sounds of life  
In a rapid and dizzying pace.  
But in reality, only I know the reason for darting to and fro,  
And it's to keep the winds away,  
to distract myself from the pain of the winds with  
The colors, smells and sounds of life,  
To make every single wave of wind thrown at me  
Seem a little bit softer.  
So I distract myself, cloak myself with the colors  
The effect only weighing my wings more



As I carry the burden of pretending  
That everything's fine

There's one thing, though, that the winds cannot deteriorate,  
And that is the flame of curiosity, buried deep inside  
So the winds do not touch it  
It's the place where my true colors shine,  
Changing, dazzling, burning,  
It's the perch where I can truly rest,  
The flower where I can fill my belly with knowledge,  
It is true nirvana.  
The flame, the bright little star,  
Is buried far too deep, hidden, unreachable for the winds,  
And in some ways I can't touch the little spark within, because of  
how far down it is,  
Buried like long lost memories within a box of old heirlooms.  
Reaching it requires so many bright hues,  
To clear away the dark shades up above it.  
Only slowly and with patience will the winds wither away,  
To become only wisps, small words in the night.

One day, I wish to be able to free myself from this cage,  
To stop the constant torrent of winds  
From tossing, stretching, wounding me  
And I wish for that one day, oh for simply one day  
In which I can be myself again  
Be that shining flame that everyone perceives me as,  
As the one buried deep within myself,

Be the beautiful Calliope hummingbird that darts to and fro,  
That experiences the world so gracefully,  
with such a carefree attitude,  
I want to one day be the person that I am  
Deep, deep inside, away from the winds, away from the troubles  
So in the meanwhile,  
I work my way out, put the key together piece by piece,  
And work to make change the fruit of my hard labor.  
Messiness is a guarantee;  
organizing emotions coated with a fine dust after years of storage  
Is almost never easy  
But I do it, one soft flutter at a time

## Turning Dust Into Stardust

The beginning is almost always the hardest part, especially when it calls for you to step outside of your boundaries and into a whole new environment. This was how it was for me on the first day of the ARC summer program. Before arriving to our camping destination, I had spent the few hours travelling in the car, sitting in suspense, anxiety, and curiosity. When we arrived, these feelings were increased tenfold. I was finally taking my first baby steps of the course, and it was terrifying. I was extremely unsure of even wanting to begin it, and I was contemplating quitting while I was ahead. The cram-packed schedule and all the miles we were going to hike scared me. All the new people I had to get to know just added to my terror. Eventually, though, as we shaved away at the days and took everything one small step at a time, all the laughter and fun times washed away my fears and molded me into something much stronger. I've grown to have more confidence in what I say, do, and feel, an accomplishment that I never expected to have achieved during this course.

One significant change I noticed within myself over the duration of this course is how I am more willing to take risks. I am much more confident now in raising my hand and saying, "I'll give it a try." Whereas before I would always hang around and wait to see other's results before testing myself. I never took substantial risks, especially without knowing the outcome first. Now that I am in the ARC program, I've been shown that taking risks can bring amazing outcomes, even if it may be scary and unknown to me. Take, for example, the time when we all did the ropes course. We were shown the entire course, save for the zip line. I managed to slide through the course with relative ease, until I came upon the finale: the line. I had, honestly, no clue what was going to happen, and it terrified me greatly. After several moments taking deep breaths and gathering my nerves, I made my decision. Without further ado, I pushed off the platform and, screaming my head off

along the way, zipped down the line at a rapid pace. The ride down was not only terrifying and exhilarating, but fun! It also taught me just how much I could do if I challenged myself. I redrew the boundaries of what I thought I could and couldn't do just by that single experience.

Another area in which my confidence grew was my social skills. Coming into the course, I was rather shy. I never raised my voice unless others did and sort of stuck around in the back when it came to making decisions in a group. I conversed very little with others and only really made light conversation when I did. My



reasoning for hiding was one I had engraved in my head: talk only when asked. In the past, being listened to was a very rare occurrence for me. People heard me, but never listened to what I had to say. So, eventually, after being shut down for so long, I just stopped giving my two cents on anything. After a while, though, I realized just how open minded our ARC group was, and began to come out of my hermit shell. My opinion was heard, respected, and very much welcome, a thing I haven't sincerely encountered in real life besides debate club. The openness in the group made me feel very at home and that snowballed into me becoming more confident in what I say.

My final area of growth would most definitely be in the emotional category. Be-

fore the course, I was emotionally distant with everybody in my life. Venting was something I never sincerely learned, so I kept all of my negative emotions bottled up and sealed tight. I never talked to people about it, the only exception being if I was overloaded with pessimistic feelings and didn't know what to do with the overflow. Now, though, after talking with not only my instructors, but a very kind semi-retired therapist, I have begun to learn how to deal with these emotions, and slowly I have begun tearing down the walls that held my feelings back. The bottled up negativity used to weigh me down, and now that I have the tools to cut it out of my life, everything has become fuller. Many of the things I used to use for distraction from these bad feelings have slowly turned into simply interests and hobbies, such as writing and drawing, and I have overall begun to enjoy life a lot more.

ARC has sent me on a bigger journey than just hiking and exploring Yosemite. Many of the experiences I've had while going through the ARC course have made a very big impact upon what I do, how I do it, and who I am. The course has made me a much more outspoken and certain person and has helped me develop skills that I never had before. It has made me more willing to try new things and has re-instilled that sense of curiosity for knowledge and experience. I have transformed to want to do things and to learn about them in the process, instead of simply learning how to do something and never doing it. ARC has also showed me just how easy conversation is and has given me the tinder box to start up the spark of future conversations, a tool I lacked beforehand. It has also taught me the language of emotion, and even though I am still learning the basics, I have already made a great deal of progress in that section of my life. Despite the hardships I am certain to face on my travels, ARC will always be a highlight in my life that I will be constantly turning back to and an opportunity I will always be grateful for.

# brandon estrada

## It Has Just Begun

I am Yosemite Creek,  
Tumbling and smashing with the struggles in my path  
Slowly but smoothly making my way  
To one of the biggest challenges in life,  
The large river of growing up

I started in the safeguard of my parents  
Grant Lake is my beginning  
The presence of my parents was always comforting  
Showing their constant support  
But they always knew they were fortifying me  
for something bigger

I started to flow in a new country  
A new place already means facing unwelcome crashes  
with unexpected rocks  
And the beginning of a new language was difficult  
And many times my words would split and  
Take two different paths like the movement of my waters  
And were the first of many bumps and struggles

English slowed me down  
And it would often bring me to a complete halt  
Like a motionless creek is stuck in a  
Small pond of disappointment

But I knew perseverance was key  
And that's exactly what made my current continue



I was given the opportunity to a new life  
But everything has its consequences  
And I was separated from my family by a change in nature  
That felt like I had lost something  
And could never retreat it  
A dry spell  
That prevents me from enjoying their warmth and familiarity

But hearing their greets and shouts over the landscape  
Is joy that can fill any sense of loneliness

And not long after,  
I am again opposed by a colossal challenge.  
Staying ahead of the sharp turns of academics  
And having the courage  
to go through the first steps of independence  
In high school  
Which is as towering and perilous  
As Yosemite Falls

But I've so far had the strength  
And support from my origins, Grant Lake  
To claim any dream that I have to be my very own  
Which made the freefall a whole lot easier

And finally  
I cruise through what's left of my trail  
And my destination is not far  
The Merced River is at eye distance  
And I can feel the sense of triumph  
That makes college a huge step  
less terrifying

I thought I had bumped and crashed  
But I know my struggles  
have just begun  
And just like my flow has pushed me  
through many things  
With strength and growth  
So have these two factors  
begun to mature as well



## The Adventure of a Lifetime

Expedition two is when all the risk-taking challenges started and the adrenaline began to pump. All the activities pushed me further than I have previously experienced: rafting, kayaking, rock climbing, repelling and the ropes course. Every single one of these challenges was difficult in its own sense. Each endeavor was hard on the physical scale, but it also pushed me out of my mental comfort zone. They helped me realize my new potential and the capability of my body and mind. Each activity showed me more of who I am. Expedition Two, along with the other expeditions in ARC, have made me grow as a leader, fall in love with adventures, and learn to benefit from failure.

During the ARC course, I have grown in confidence and in self-assuredness, which have helped me develop into a better leader. I have always been afraid and intimidated by leadership roles because I have been troubled by responsibility and failure. On the second day of the course, I was designated the Leader of the Day. I worried and stressed. I would ask my instructors what the schedule was and only followed what they told me to do. During the evening, I was relieved to have finished the day without a big dilemma. Days passed by and I soon became comfortable with all the jobs, but when I heard my name being called as the Leader of the Day a second time, I told myself, "Oh, not again." My second time as leader, though, I realized I was less panicky and terrified and it became clear to me that it wasn't so dreadful. At the end of my second day as Leader of the Day, I had come to understand that as a leader all the responsibility isn't completely on me, but on the whole group. My job is just to organize the day and make sure that all the responsibilities are being taken care of. I haven't been intimidated by leadership role ever since and hope to challenge myself further in the future. I will continue to take the role of leader

in future presentations and tasks such as science assignments and church projects.

I've always loved the idea of an adventure and have wanted to have the rush of adrenaline and suspense run through my body. When day fifteen arrived, that's when the adventure truly began in ARC. The rocks were warm and solid. It was a perfect day to go rock climbing. I'm mortified by heights, but I wanted to face the unknown so badly that I started my climbs with the most difficult route. I accomplished the most challenging route of the day with my first climb, but it was my third climb that made my blood cold and my skin cringe. I was halfway up, when the ropes crossed over each other and got stuck to a rock. I was up over 40 feet in the air holding on to the vertical face of a mountain and I felt a rush of despair go through me. After a couple of minutes, though, I told myself that if I didn't untangle the ropes I would be stuck up there. That's the last thing I wanted. I rose above the occasion and was able to finish the climb by trusting myself and my belayer and by stepping close to the edge and untangling the ropes by hand. As soon as my feet hit the ground, relief and accomplishment flooded over me and gave me enough strength to finish one last climb. At the end of the day, I realized that an adventure is everything I had experienced that day: excitement, danger, adrenaline, and accomplishment. I loved every single minute of it and really hope to continue an adventurous life.

Throughout the course, I have learned from a lot of advice and experiences. The importance of failure is definitely something I learned throughout the course and came to completely comprehend it the day of the ropes course. I had to climb a telephone pole and reach for any of three objects. There were two trapeze bars and a rubber chicken. I stared at the furthest trapeze pole as if it wasn't much.

I knew what I wanted to achieve. Grabbing that distant trapeze bar was all I wanted, but it wasn't until I was at the top of the pole that I actually saw the trapeze and the length between it and myself. At that moment, a couple of thoughts ran through my mind, "I underestimated you, trapeze," and "This is too high off the ground." Doubt started to fill my mind, but a surge of determination gave me the one leap of faith that I needed. I was in midair and my fingers were just about to grasp the pole when I started to sink. I felt gravity tucking on me and I grasped for anything my hand could grab a hold of. I was able to hold on to the rubber chicken, the consolation prize. I hung there somewhat disappointed in my attempt. As I was lowered, negative thoughts flooded my mind. I reflected on my weakness and fears. Even after I stepped down and was congratulated by my peers for snatching the chicken, failure was going through my system. Soon through a new thought rose to my head. I didn't get what I expected, but since I gave it my all, I was still rewarded by my attempt. I hope to continue this mindset in the future and I won't let failure weaken my positive attitude and determination.

My experiences in ARC have helped me expand my knowledge and potential. Every activity in the course has taught me something new and has showed me that I truly love nature and adventures. The second expedition was a great time in the course because that is when I began to uncover my true capabilities. Every obstacle I overcame gave me further strength to conquer the next. All the activities have taught me that I am a capable leader, that I love adventures, and that I will learn from failure. Many of these qualities were hidden in my life before this trip, but I'm glad I discovered them and I will continue to develop as a person and student back home.

# carla martinez

## I Am a Wildflower

I am a wild flower  
They call me a shooting star  
I am a beautiful fragile plant  
Eager to grow even though everybody steps on me

To some I am a remarkable treasure  
But, to others I am nothing  
Depressed  
Microscopic bombs of rain hitting every inch of my body  
Fighting to come out from the shadow the hovers over me  
Memorizing the lyrics to suicidal thoughts  
Contemplating to  
Slice until the beds completely red

I am a shooting star  
Expected to be like my sisters  
Strong and independent

Striving to have some of their characteristics  
Determined to provide the best for my niece and nephews  
Loving, always putting others before themselves  
Trustworthy protecting my secrets so I don't get hurt

I Am not them and never will be  
I may sprout on the same patch of land  
But I will hold myself back from growing too close to them  
So our roots won't interlock  
Sweet, funny and an outgoing girl with the raised eyebrow  
I am my own person

I am a shooting star  
Ready to stand tall and let my colors gleam  
Prepared for the miraculous journey ahead of me  
Where I will finally be happy  
I am a shooting star



## Discovering the Beauty Within

I felt the blood rushing to my head. I was next. I was honored to be chosen to read my poem in front of 60 strangers but I was also a bit frightened. Walking up those four, navy blue stairs, I wanted to turn back, hide my face, and run the other direction. When I got onto the stage, I felt like a crumb surrounded by giants fiercely looking at me, but it was all in my head. Trying to make them laugh, I finally got giggles out of the audience. I was satisfied. I read my poem like it was the last breaths I would ever take, quietly gasping for air. The loud applause hit me from every direction and, before I knew it, my smile had extended from ear to ear. The ARC program has brought more than just smiles, I have grown as a leader, discovered many interesting things about myself, and learned new strategies that I can apply at home.

I've become a more confident leader during the

ARC course. Before I heard about the course, I always wanted to be a leader. However, back at home, it was very difficult because people were always judging me and not paying attention when I had important information to present. I was not given any encouragement or support from peers; I assumed I was not made for a leader role. When I arrived to the Yosemite creek campground on June 17, I was frightened. Sarah announced the leadership role of Head Honcho which included waking everybody up at 6:30 and making sure that everyone was aware of the tasks that were expected to get done. Everybody in the group was going to take on this role a couple of times during the course. I was not mentally pre-

pared; I dreaded hearing my name called out for the first time. When I first was designated Head Honcho, something inside of me clicked like solving a rubix cube for the first time. I had instincts I never knew existed. When it was time for Head Honcho feedback, I was taken by surprise when my peers had almost no negative reports of me. I was loud, clear, and took charge without sounding too demanding. I was very pleased with myself. This gave me confidence and a sense of achievement. I can now take pride in saying I am a leader.

I have discovered that I have a strong mind. For me, it's mind over matter be-

cause when my body wanted to give up on the difficult hikes uphill, my mind wanted to keep going. It really was not that difficult to hike the long exhausting hours. I was just never used

to pushing myself out of my comfort zone. Back at home, although I was motivated to go for a run every morning, I would stop as soon as I would get tired. I thought I would hurt myself, but it was just an excuse for not taking the next step out of my comfort zone. Now I am more open to challenging myself and discovering the great assets that I hold within. From now on, I will listen to my mind and push my body aside when I know that the goals I am working hard for can be achieved.

The ARC instructors have taught me valuable information that I have taken to heart and hope to apply at home, at school, and in my community. The sci-

ence instructor, Aaron, has taught me the importance of water and what we can do to conserve it like taking shorter showers and closing the faucet when brushing our teeth. I am very inspired and motivated to conserve water in my community and educate others. Another incredible instructor is Will. He has inspired me to continue with my writing and has also helped me learn new things that at home I would have never been able to comprehend like the importance of punctuation. Will made it possible. Now I can go back to school and be confident with my writing. Ann is like a second mom, guiding me through my journey. She is a person that I can go to with my troubles and will hear me out when needed. From her, I have learned how to seek people out and have patience. Finally, Shelby is an intern for the ARC program, attending college and being a part of two leadership programs at the same time. She is the most genuine, hilarious girl ever! Shelby has no clue, but from her, I have been learning many things about college that in a year will be very helpful to me. She has given me lots of insight into where I will be standing in a couple years. The ARC instructors have made a vast impact in my life.

I will soon have another opportunity to read my poem. This time I will walk on stage with confidence. I will not be petrified to take the next step. My natural leadership qualities will emerge from within. I will read with a loud voice and pronounce my words clearly. I will make everyone who listens to my poem cry puddles under their feet. I will stand tall, look my audience in the eyes, and tell myself I can do this! I will read my poem beautifully. I will go home and I will honor my family, do well in school, and get accepted into UC Santa Barbara. I will become the person I want to be.



# diego villareal

## Cold Waters

I am a river  
The Merced River  
With smooth waters exploring wherever they go  
Crashing and clashing against the rocks ahead  
Too often I find something in my way that stops me  
A mountain I must sail through to find my destination  
But a river always finds its way through  
It will channel across the smallest cracks  
Rise up until its strong enough  
to pour over the sides of any mountain

All throughout life  
I have had high expectations weighted on my shoulders  
that drag me down like anchors  
From the day I was born  
my dad wanted me to be the best I could be  
For him that was a hard worker, a great student,  
to be someone in life,  
but most importantly to follow my dreams  
But my dreams could never satisfy his standards  
He wanted a doctor, a lawyer, a professor  
He never understood that the man he wanted me to be  
wasn't the man I wanted to become  
I wanted to find my own path, be my own man,  
someone I could look up to  
But he only wanted to lead me  
in the direction he thought was right  
To steer the river

At an early age I found a large dam ahead of me  
that held me from my potential  
He was the rock that stopped me  
The obstacle I would have to overcome  
to find myself and keep growing  
And even though his intentions were for the best  
I could not be who he wanted me to be  
I had bigger plans than being a man made reservoir

His hopes were in me, his only son  
I would be the one to carry the family name  
The one who was suppose to make him proud  
by being a hard working student  
Yet I only brought disappointment to his eyes

He grew up in Mexico to a poor family  
that could barely sustain itself  
His childhood consisted of working as a kid  
to help support his family  
and coming to America was a new start for him



He could give his children what he never had  
A beginning full of possibilities  
And a life full of opportunities

When I was born he wanted to guide me  
Make me his ideal son  
But you cannot lead a river  
Rivers are meant to run freely  
I knew where I wanted to go  
I wanted to stretch for miles  
Take in everything I could learn  
and discover the world ahead of me  
To carve my own course  
To find who I am  
A river  
Strong, free, independent

To this day I can tell he hasn't lost hope in me  
He knows I'll make something out of myself  
Maybe not the perfect student  
and hard working son he wanted  
but what I've always wanted  
To be a musician and share my love with others

Now I move with roaring waters  
Quickly ascending mountain tops  
Progressing toward a valley I have waited for  
I know there is a rough ride ahead  
But I have no worries about the future

## Taking the Next Step

My heart was pounding in my chest and every time I looked down, I was more afraid. The ground seemed to be 100 feet away and I was trembling with fear, but there was no turning back. I couldn't walk away from the opportunity in front of me. I jumped and reached for the trapeze. For me this jump represented the risks in life I will commit to in the future. Adventure Risk Challenge has pushed me to become a better person, to take advantage of the opportunities presented to me, and to take on the obstacles I will come across later in life.

During my time in ARC, I encountered many challenges I thought I couldn't overcome. The first challenge I faced was being away from home. I have never gone more than a week away from my family, so 40 days was extremely difficult. I was in a new environment with people I had not met and felt outside of my comfort zone many times. I constantly missed my parents and thought about home all the time. Not having them there when I needed them was a big change in my life. Yet after being away from home for so long, I have become more independent. During ARC, I looked out for myself: cooking, cleaning, and taking responsibility for my actions. Although I will always want my family and friends by my side, I can now depend on myself. I no longer need someone to cook for me, do my laundry, or tell me when to wake up and go to school. Now that I am more independent, I can make my own choices. This learning experience will help me decide for myself where I want to go to college and which career I want to pursue.

Another challenge I faced while on the course was the adventure activities we did. Rock climbing, rappelling, and ropes course, were all hard for me. For example, I can remember the time when I wanted to step away because I was too afraid on the trapeze jump. I was about to let fear stop me from enjoying life for the first

time in the course. I saw the 40-foot high pole and wanted nothing to do with it. I wanted to remain on the ground where I felt safe, but my instructors didn't let me pass up the opportunity. They encouraged me to climb up and take the leap. Before I did, I thought about my life back home and the challenges I would face when I returned, including entering my senior year of high school and becoming an adult. I took this as an opportunity to promise myself that I would take challenges head on, just like the trapeze jump. I won't try to run away next time.

Repelling was the next time I was seriously challenged. It also taught me a great lesson. Before I descended the 150 foot mountain, I was anxious. At the time, every move ahead of me seemed impossible, but I found the courage I was looking for. I made my way down with a new found confidence in myself. I now felt comfortable to face challenges ahead of me in or out of the program.



My last major challenge was climbing Tuolumne Peak. We woke up at 3 a.m. to start hiking and the sun had not risen yet. We made our way up slowly, taking each step one by one. We were all tired and exhausted, but eventually we got to the top. I was overlooking the valley with the sun shining above me. It was a magnificent scene. I had a realization on that peak. It was recognizing that despite how hard something is, it will always pay off in the end.

On my way to the summit, I was worn out and started to question whether the view was worth the trouble, but when I got to the top I had no doubt it was. It was an unforgettable moment. Just like climbing Tuolumne Peak, the challenges back home will be worth the struggle someday, whether it's studying for school, practicing to become a better musician, or training to be in better shape. If I keep working on these goals, they'll pay off.

My experience with ARC has given me the tools I need to succeed in life. I will apply what I have learned here to life back home. Before I came to ARC, I was lazy and procrastinated several times when it came to school. Now I know I need to be on top of my school work and that school should be my first priority because slacking off won't get me anywhere. ARC will help me tremendously with my senior year of high school. With the leadership skills I learned here, I can do more in school and help out my community. Being here at ARC has inspired me to make the most out of my life. When I return I will get involved more at school, my home, and my church. I plan to volunteer at the Poverello House, get a part-time job, and join sports teams that keep me busy. I have big dreams worth chasing and my experience at ARC has helped me get much closer.

Now that I am almost done with the course, I see a different person. I see someone much stronger both physically and mentally and someone more confident and outgoing. I now know I can take on any challenge if I just put my mind to it, whether it is college, accomplishing my dreams of becoming a poet, or flying the great blue skies as a pilot. Additionally, I am no longer afraid to take risks, set goals, and make my own choices. I know I have more to grow and learn. I look forward to the person I will one day become with the help of Adventure Risk Challenge.

# emma ponce

## Black-Tailed Fawn

I am a Black-Tailed Fawn

Born out of the happy warmth of May  
Thrown into a world of cruel sound.  
A world of stunning vibrancy.  
A world that made me fold into myself.  
High school.  
I was still struggling to stand on unsure legs.

Where would I go, and how would I get there?  
I was hesitant and clumsy  
As I received the first crushing blow.  
A blinding light that flashed before me,  
Burning its image straight into my eyelids,  
Through my brain,  
And into my memory.

I don't know how...  
But in the light,  
I lost myself.  
The entire sense of who I was or  
Wanted to be.

This light, a comet amongst stars,  
Left as soon as it arrived  
And an emptiness ensued.  
It was all-consuming; devouring my thoughts,  
Leaving me stunned and breathless.

Losing something so suddenly  
Began my transformation.  
My colors changed and then I wasn't who I was before.  
I grew resilient.  
I picked myself up off the ground, and though I wobbled,  
I was more determined; I refused to let myself break.

Over time, I learned how not to stumble.  
I latched onto the grace I observed and admired in others.  
More cautious than before  
Jumping at the slightest sound I heard.  
Skeptical of the world around me.

Because suddenly everything became a danger.  
A peril. A predator.  
Everything was questionable, different.  
At any moment other pieces of myself might be ripped away,  
And I was still bleeding, still wounded,  
Still healing.

But, at the very least, I am healing.  
I am finding the grace I need to stand tall.  
I am recovering the pieces of myself that I lost.  
With every breath. Every hour.  
I am one step closer.  
Growing stronger.  
Surviving.  
Enduring.



## A Further Transformation

I woke up in the morning to the sound of the Head Honcho's voice. It was 3:00 am and we had a mountain to climb. We had a quick breakfast of GORP (Good Old Raisins and Peanuts) and granola bars, gathered our things, and began the ascent in the early-morning darkness towards Tuolumne Peak. The climb was grueling. We were all groggy and still tired from the previous day's seven-mile hike. Yet, we reached the peak around 6:30 am. It was an unbelievable experience, as well as an immense accomplishment. As we got to the top, the sun was rising and its rays billowed across the tops of the mountains. The view that we encountered at the top of that climb is only one of the many fond memories I've created on this course. If I stayed home, I would never have felt that feeling of exhilaration. I wouldn't have met the amazing people I've spent the last 40 days with. I am definitely stronger, braver, and more capable because of the ARC program.



Throughout this summer and because of this course, I've become stronger both emotionally and physically. I have become emotionally stronger because of all the sharing that we do here at ARC. I am able to convey thoughts about things that bother me or concern me in a positive and constructive way. This is something I feel I can take home and use to my benefit so that I keep improving the way I handle my emotions. I have also learned to be patient with others and to ignore small frustrations. I have become physically stronger through hiking on expeditions and during fitness on basecamp

days. Every expedition, the hiking got longer, but in some ways it also became easier. As we progressed, we became more accustomed to it. Fitness at basecamp set a routine that I was comfortable with and, after a while, I didn't mind the daily exercise anymore. My body and mind grew stronger every day of this course, and they wouldn't have grown at all if I'd wasted this opportunity by staying home.

In addition, I've also become a much more courageous person. On the day we had to rappel, I climbed up The Prow with every intention of challenging myself to do something as scary as letting myself drop 150 feet.

I got to the top. I was harnessed and ready to go and I couldn't do it. I couldn't let myself go off of that edge. Knowing my limits and refusing to go any further showed a different kind of bravery. It kept me emotionally stable and helped me challenge myself while making sure I didn't push myself too hard. If I would've done it, just because everyone else had, I could've pushed myself too far and could've even hurt myself. When we did the ropes course, I also demonstrated bravery by attempting the chicken jump. You had to climb up a 25-foot pole, stand on the top, and leap for a bar, or in this case, a rubber chicken. The chicken jump involved me letting myself fall, except not nearly as far as the rappel. This jump I did successfully complete even though it was frightening. Seeing that I could overcome this fear made me realize how far I'd come and how much braver I was. I managed

to triumph over this fear and follow through with the jump. This will affect me in the future by reminding me that fears can be conquered, no matter how scary or challenging a task may be.

I feel that because of ARC I am a much more capable and responsible person. The hiking and other challenging activities that we've done have showed me that I can do a lot more than I think I can. Through basecamp jobs I've learned that when others depend on you to do something, it is better to be responsible and get the job done as efficiently as possible instead of procrastinating and then rushing to finish the task. Through various leadership roles, I've learned that I need to use my voice and make it known when I am the leader. Although I still struggle with being a leader, I have gotten the chance to improve. I believe that the responsibilities and skills that I've gained this summer will definitely contribute to my life by helping me realize that I am capable of lot more than I think I am. ARC has also provided me with a level of responsibility that I hadn't reached yet. After the course, I hope to start helping out more at home and having more challenging adventures. I now know that I can do whatever I set my mind to.

I may never do anything as challenging as rappelling. I may never see anything as beautiful as a Tuolumne Peak sunrise. I may never be as exhausted as I was after the seven-mile hike. I may never again meet people as amazing as I've met this summer. However, I will carry the bonds and experiences that I've forged on this course for the rest of my life.

# enrique guzman

## I Am a Thunderstorm

I am a thunderstorm  
high up in the sky  
working my way towards the peak  
to see what people see in me.

fast like a falcon  
or slow like a snail,  
I go my own speed,  
selecting my own pace  
importance is the only thing that drives me  
to help my family in need.

inevitable,  
like stepping on an unbalanced rock  
you may stumble upon my sight,  
I see the fear in the eyes that look at me,  
there is no avoiding me.

like some who avoid me  
they fear me at first sight  
startled by my roar,  
thinking of my history,  
who I was before does not change me  
a crazy kid with crazy problems,  
you may find it insane  
I see it as life changing

day after day,  
hoping someone would notice me  
and try to help.  
even something as simple as asking  
how my day is going.  
left unnoticed, unloved  
a huge piece of my heart  
left and forgotten by the same people  
who tore at it  
the problem of my childhood  
not wanting people to see the little kid  
inside that was left out of everything,  
trying to show the other side of me.  
the side that was and still is a lie

changing my course and making me  
who I am today  
history that is tainted by enemies  
enemies who interpret my beliefs as a  
negative influence,  
beliefs that everyone is equal  
influences that other may find joy in.

I believe no one should be left out  
feeling left out year after year,  
it was a struggle  
trying to fit it  
when everyone wanted me out  
a thunderstorm without precipitation  
no one to support and care for me  
leaving this thunderstorm without hope  
struggles that people face today

socializing with everyone,  
meeting new people and looking over them  
trying to keep them from feeling  
what a young boy once felt  
the feeling that no one can ever forget,  
protecting those who are family  
and giving them a life  
they can look forward to

the electricity begins to rise.  
check the barometer,  
it reads off the chart  
I'm getting closer and closer,  
I reach my target.

I'm near you  
ready to help  
it's the way I am  
a dark cloud in the sky  
with a ton of love to rain down upon you.

was it my appearance?  
the feeling in your gut,  
telling you to run?  
or the smell of danger?  
maybe, just maybe  
the shocking sound of anticipation

Stick around and see  
I'm not as bad as you thought.  
my intensions are good  
no need to fear me  
I just want to help.

animals, my friends  
plants, sending me inspiration  
trees, my motivators  
creeks, flowing with wisdom  
they are my family,

people who have picked me up  
when I was down  
giving me love and kindness

I support them  
at times I am generous,  
but I can be destructive  
destroying those who fill me with anger  
lightning shooting down  
at those who stand before me  
those who bring down the best of someone

the results may be shocking,  
you might not have expected me  
to be like this.  
close friends or new ones,  
they once thought wrong  
wrong about who they thought I was  
I hold no grudge, instinct guides me.

I control the rain,  
not to mention the thunder.  
rain is my way of showing gratitude,  
gratitude for what you have done  
thunder is my way to reach you,  
letting you know I'm close  
giving hope to those who want it.

I'm close  
my goal is near.  
doing what has to be done.  
seeing the best in those  
who have been neglected by society  
you may want me to come back,  
all you can do is wait.  
wait for the one who you judged  
one who was a dark past,  
with a bright future  
you looked through the clouds  
now you know the real me.

the peak is in my sight,  
passing over rough terrain  
steep mountains  
enjoying the view, taking a look at life  
before I let my love crash down  
filling all the cracks,  
sealing all the gaps  
and moving forward.



## Out Of My Turtle Shell

The ARC team arrived to the parking lot after two long hours of being in the van. Once we all got out and stretched, I collected my life-jacket and paddle. I wasn't delighted to get the pink, broken paddle. We dipped our toes in the water. The wind whispered into my ear as I looked down into the vast lake. I climbed into the kayak and paddled away working with my partner Carla, who is a fellow ARC student, to get across the lake. Soon, my hat fell off and reaching for it, we capsized. I picked my head up from underwater and saw Carla splashing at me as we tried to flip the kayak over. We struggled to get back on, but we eventually did. Looking back, ARC was responsible for this unforgettable memory, along with many other experiences that have pushed me. Thanks to ARC, I have transformed to be more independent, more determined, and a better student.

Being here with ARC has helped me be more independent. Back at home, I listen to music with friends and do not help with chores around the house. When we arrived at basecamp for the first time, I was surprised to hear that students had to clean up and cook. At first, I was furious. I didn't want to clean up someone else's mess. After a few days, I started cleaning the multipurpose room, the restrooms, and the kitchen. Not only did I clean, but I also cooked for sixteen people. At home, I cooked for myself, but not for my family, so cooking for a large group was frightening. I would depend on my mom and brother to do all the work at home while I lay on the throne of the house and did nothing. Now I know how to cook for a large group and clean without anyone telling me to.

Another thing I gained during this course is determination. Before when I had a problem, I would stand aside and hope the problem solved itself. When I

reached a challenging task, I would tell myself I couldn't do it and I gave up. One day at school, I took a test for biology. I didn't study for it and, when I looked at the answers, I immediately gave up because I didn't understand the questions. I did not try to pass the test. I thought I was going to fail anyways. Here at ARC, there are many challenges you have to push yourself through. I can't stand and do nothing. All the students and instructors help you through difficult tasks. They motivate you and push you in order to see what you are capable of. When I went through the ropes course, rock climbing, and rappelling, I was afraid to fall. I thought the rope would snap or the carabiners would shatter. I let fear get in my path. I was afraid to rock climb because I thought I would get to a spot on the wall where I had nowhere to go. I was petrified on my way to the top. I thought about the people who were watching me. The way down was the most frightening part. I was afraid the harness would slip off of me and I would fall to my death. When I finally reached the ground, I felt triumphant. Fear did not stop me and it was worth the climb. I felt a warmth come over me and I felt accomplished. Ever since that day, I've been determined to pass each challenge that I come across and get that same feeling of triumph. I plan to use this new sense of determination back at home to find a job, take my first steps to leave home, and continue with my life.

Being outdoors has changed my perspective on learning. Back in high school, I did not do work in class, even if it was as simple as a multiple choice worksheet.

I did not care about what the teachers tried to teach me. The only thing I can remember at school is waking up and going to my next class day after day. When I heard that the ARC program had English, Science, and Leadership classes, I wanted to stay home. I did not want to participate. When the day arrived and it was time to go to Yosemite, I was thrilled about the adventures, but not the classes. Having classes during an expedition changed my perspective on learning. I enjoyed being in



the wilderness, learning about creeks and where they lead. I also found joy in learning English on top of a peak or next to a cliff. Not only did I pay attention to what I was being told, but I also took notes and remembered exactly what I was taught. I enjoyed writing a poem, a biography, and an essay. The learning environment here has been keeping me on task and made me realize how important it is to use my knowledge. I plan on using this information to get good grades for senior year and to attend college after high school and become a mechanical engineer.

Adventure Risk Challenge is a program that has changed my life. I have transformed into the person I have always wanted to be. I have become more independent by taking on new responsibilities. I am now determined to pass the most difficult challenges in my path and say that I tried my best. ARC also helped me realize how important school is to having a promising future. I feel proud to continue my life without having to depend on anyone else. Thank you ARC, for opening my eyes and helping me realize how to enjoy and appreciate life.

# imelda malaca

## Being a Granite Rock

I am a Granite Rock  
Striking an old soul  
Going through many challenges at just the age of 16  
Being told I will be nothing  
Because I am an immigrant  
The best would be to drop out and get a job  
From these messages  
What motivation can I get?  
Other than being discouraged  
Until I am finally brought down  
Like sand slipping through hands hopelessly

Learning to become independent is what nobody sees  
Feeling a millstone hold me down by my neck  
Because everyone comes with a purpose  
But not to lead your life  
Yes that's all I have learned  
By not expecting anything from others  
Especially not relying on my surroundings  
Not even water, sun, or even food  
To allow nature make a path for me  
To become a Granite Rock

With a heart as big as Half Dome  
Helping out on whatever I can  
To be a support for my parent's shoulders  
Finding different paths to bring money back home  
Become one less heavy weight  
Like a rock which upholds a mountain  
But allowing half of my heart break down by a racist stranger  
Who enjoys throwing my hopes downhill  
Not many care to realize what I held inside  
So delicate and strong all at once  
I can tumble down with one little quake  
But still be ready to tell that stranger,  
"no you will not crumble me down"

Stranger, I will not forget what you have done  
Every word spoken will be carved in me forever  
Swallowing the sour taste of what you said  
Observing you from the top of the hills  
Waiting patiently for the perfect moment to arrive  
Seeing you regret all you have done  
I will bring out the success I have made  
Showing the crystal I am forming inside  
Yes I am a Granite Rock



# My Transformation

For the first time, I was about to face my fears on a ropes course. I would be walking on a rope where only my balance would prevent me from falling. The only thing going through my mind was to not give up and to challenge myself. I was focusing on my own goal and not competing with others. As I walked through the ropes, with every step, I started to gain more confidence and believed I could complete the course, along with other challenges in life. Then suddenly, I noticed I was too short to unhook from one rope to another. I was terrified of making a mistake that would lead me to falling 30 feet. Suddenly, I got to the point where it felt like I had to make the biggest decision of my life. It was either making the choice of going the harder route or taking the easy way out. While I was shaking and dying inside, I decided not to let my fears of failing stop me from challenging myself. So I stepped forward and crossed the line to the challenge zone. After every step, I needed to think ahead to what my next move would be. On the challenge course, I was capable after all and my insecurities went away. This is one of the many activities in the ARC course which have impacted me and allowed me to grow more confident, and more mentally and physically determined. In the course, I have also learned to appreciate the people around me more.



I have noticed I became a more confident writer during the course. I remember this past year, as a sophomore, I would sit in class trying to get ideas on how to start writing an essay on a book called, “Things Fall Apart” that I could barely understand. We had timed writings every Friday and most of my grade was based on understanding that book, but I could never comprehend it on my own. As a result, I started to score very poorly on my writing which eventually brought my grade down. I felt frustrated because I thought I was never going to improve no matter how hard I tried. But then my advisor/prin-

cipal heard of ARC and told me about it. She said this program focused on Science, Leadership, and Literacy, which would be very helpful for me. At the time, I felt like it wouldn’t be beneficial for me. Now that I’m here I can see the growth that I’ve made. By the end of this course, I will have written a poem relating myself to a granite rock, the biography of a former librarian named Twila Stout, a science poster, and this essay. With this practice and growth, I am sure next year as a junior, I will be better prepared for more challenging writing.

I have also realized that I have become more comfortable around people after the ARC program. Before this program, I wasn’t open with people I didn’t know. I would usually only spend time with the same people. Most of the time I was afraid that maybe I wouldn’t get along with them and I was also very shy. When I got here, I didn’t have my friends or anyone that I knew. I began to think, “What am I going to do now?” The first few days, I was extremely shy and wanted to just blend into the background so I wouldn’t be noticed. With the help of the staff, I started to feel very welcome and as if I was at home. Everyone was always so nice to each other, and this helped me fit in much more easily. I didn’t feel as alone as I thought I would be. Now I’m thirty days into the course and I feel comfortable with everyone and we have some really fun times together. In the future, I hope I can do the same everywhere I go.

I have become determined to face my fears and future challenges with the support of my family in the ARC program. Before, I remember I didn’t like to step out of my comfort zone. If I thought of doing something like going hiking or going swimming, I would automatically think, “I have never done that so I am not even going to try it,” or “That sounds like a lot of work and it might be boring.” Eventually, in the end, I would not even

try. When I got here, we did adventure activities like rappelling, rock-climbing, rafting, ropes course, kayaking, hiking, backpacking, and many more. I learned that they weren’t as frightening as I thought they would be, and it actually brought all of us closer together. Now, in the future, I will set bigger goals than what I think I am actually capable of doing. This will make me push myself to do more than what my mind says I can do, for example in school, job, and life overall.

Throughout my life, I have never really appreciated the people in my life, but now with ARC I have learned to not take for granted my family and friends. Before the program, I didn’t notice or appreciate all the hard work my parents did for my siblings and me. For example, my mom works during the nights to support us. My dad is always thinking of doing extra jobs in addition to his full time job. My parents have inspired me to be a hard worker. I can only be appreciative for all they do for me. When I return come back home after the course, I will be more helpful. For example, I will take care of my sisters so my parents can rest and I will be mindful of all the stress they have in their lives. I will be aware of how much they work, every day, endless hours. Knowing this, I will show them appreciation for all their hard work and offer to help as much as possible.

I really thank the ARC Program instructors for encouraging me to step out of my comfort zone and into my challenge zone. The instructors have supported each and every one of us to go past our mental limits. They believed in us that we can keep going, whether it’s on a hiking trip or a morning run during fitness. Because of their encouragement, I can now apply this determination to my life, especially when I am going through tough situations. I have also learned to enjoy my time with my family and close friends and appreciate them. In addition, I will now know how to get along with many different people and not just those who I am comfortable with. Thanks you to ARC instructors for their caring.

# kwok man hou

## I Am a Mountain Chickadee

I am a mountain chickadee  
Who was born in a forest  
But exists in the sky  
Who was tiny but travels diverse mountains

I immigrated to US when I was sixteen years old  
I was scared and confused  
But No one cares about what I feel  
Parents just push you to the sky  
No one cares who's making jokes at you  
because you don't know how to fly

As People put the seed inside the soil  
Though the seed will grow up to a tree  
But  
Rain will soak the seed  
Lightning will burn the plant

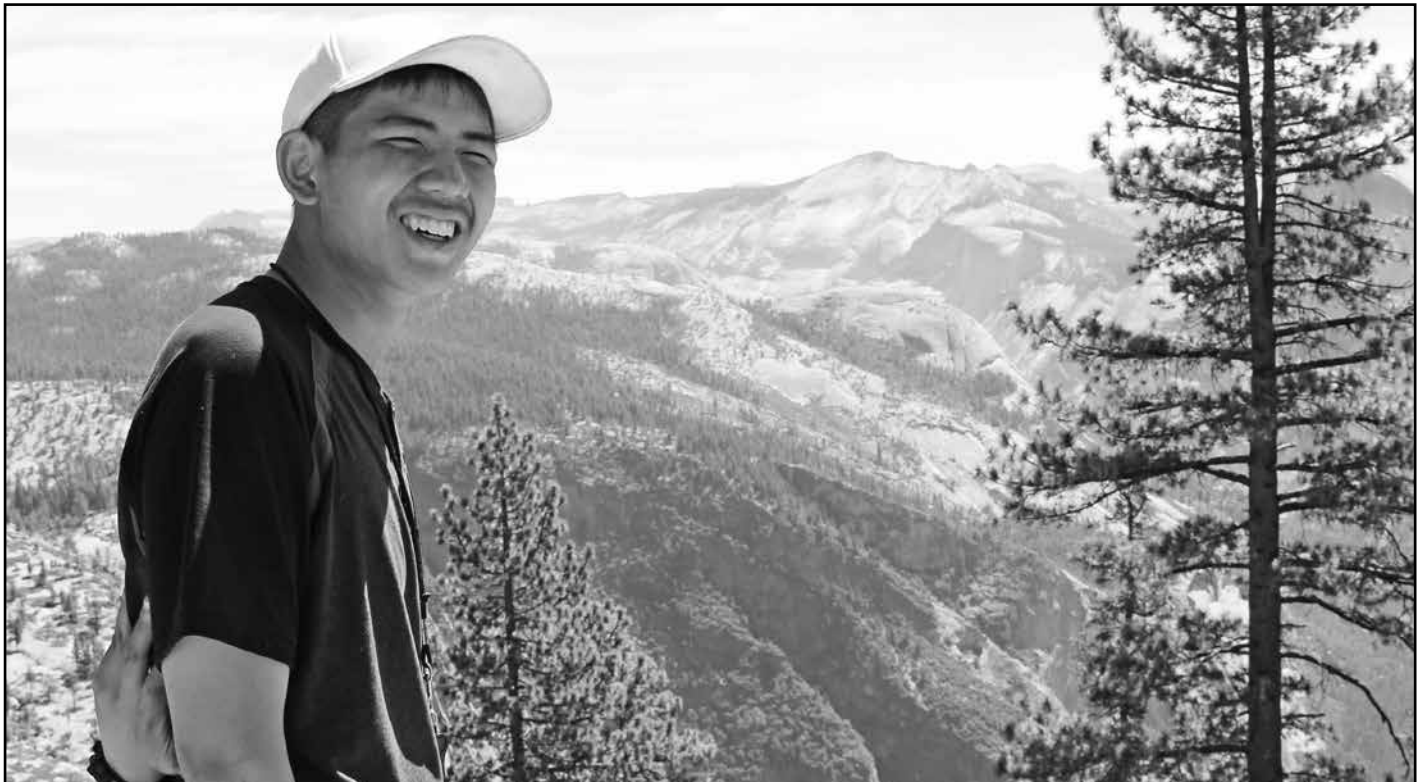
I lost everything in my life  
Language, friends, school, culture  
Like a bird re-entering its egg  
Helpless, weak, tired  
Who doesnt want to grow up again

I am a mountain chickadee  
Who has become a little bird  
Making friends with different birds  
Trying to fly everyday  
Being a part of the sky

Family tries to help me  
People try to care about me  
School tries to grow me up  
Community tries to be closer  
I am not alone to take on any challenge

I am a mountain chickadee  
Hopefully to be a genuine bird  
Being stronger and stronger  
Like a horse runs in a race  
Like a tree protects all birds from rain, snow.....

I am a mountain chickadee  
Who has brief life  
But working hard every single day  
Singing the lovely song  
Expending energy until the last second



# Becoming A Triumphant Turtle

The world is changing every second: people, culture, buildings, nature, and especially me. I never thought that one day I would live in America and have a chance to change my life. Personally, I was a lazy person. I didn't like to pursue anything, even if it was important to me. I didn't like to be a hero, even though people needed my help. My mind never altered until my teacher suggested that I participate in a program called Summer Search. I was scared and nervous when I heard that they only accept a few people from the many high schools in San Francisco. I couldn't imagine that I would be the lucky person because I am not the most hard working student or a perfect English speaker. My mentor gave me an opportunity to experience something different in my life: the ARC program. ARC has been a transformative experience for me to achieve my goals and have a better life.

During the course, I had learned about a lot of different things that I never had been exposed to in the past. I have learned about teamwork and caring for one another. We work like a family that is powerful and strong, stays together, and faces every challenge together. For forty days in ARC, I have been away from home. At first, I was missing my family and food very much, but ARC showed me how to form a new family with other people that I don't know. Now, I enjoy staying with them, making fun of each other, and sharing their life stories. Sometimes, we have arguments, but it makes us get to know more about each other and we become closer and closer. We accept and respect our different culture and lifestyles. When I get back to school or in the near future, I will be more comfortable being part of a team or being a person that converses with everyone in English.

English is the most challenging part for me in this course. At school, I always speak Chinese with my friends and even with my teachers. My teachers don't encourage me to speak English very much because I am an immigrant and I was OK with staying in my comfort zone. At home, I watch Chinese movies and read Chinese books. I also use Chinese to speak with my family. The only times that I use English is in the group reading for my English class. However, through ARC, I have met different kinds of people and use only English to communicate with them. In the beginning of the course, I was shy and quiet because

I was not good at English. I was scared of my horrible English and terrible English spelling because I don't know how to spell English words. I felt uncomfortable talking with other people so I would sit in the corner alone and look at the view by myself. The instructors came to talk with me and told me to be braver. Although I was confused, I was going to try. Now, I am less nervous when I talk to everyone. They are nice, helpful, and they notice I am Chinese and speak imperfect English. Now, they take care of me and use easier words to communicate with me. I became a part of the group.



Throughout my experience in the ARC course, I am no longer scared to try new things. My fear never allowed me to step out of my comfort zone and to give new things a try. When I moved from Hong Kong to US, I was only comfortable talking to people who could speak Chinese. I didn't think it was necessary to study English because I thought Chinese is my life and I spent more than ten years learning and using it. I was tired, and unable to change anything. I was also scared that people will laugh at me with my terrible English. ARC in many ways gave me a chance to face my fear of trying new things.

When we went rappelling, we needed to shimmy from the top for the mountain down one hundred and fifty feet. My legs were shaking and I couldn't control my heart beat. I didn't want to move down because it looked so dangerous and I didn't want it to be my last day in the world. I held the rope and didn't let it go. Suddenly, I saw my partner start going down, I didn't want to stay dangling in the air. I slowly started to move one step at the time. I was nervous to look down at the view and go down the cliff but I could not stop my

movement. My face was smiling, but it was just covering my anxiety. Recklessly, I looked at the ground and saw the instructor waiting for me. I felt their power of encouragement and support in my body. I was less nervous. Eventually, I touched the ground and I couldn't do anything to celebrate my success because I never thought I would land on the ground with my whole body.

After the repelling event, I learned about my weaknesses and ARC showed me that I am not alone to face any fear. It doesn't matter the place or the time, I can feel the ARC program carrying me and pushing me to be victorious. Now, I don't fear starting or continuing things that I was afraid of before because I have friends, instructors, and the ARC program that will be behind me and give me confidence when I need it. When I go back home, I will not be frightened to speak and learn English. I will work on my English by reading English books and watching English movies. In school, I will not just talk to people who can speak Chinese. I will try to push myself more and will not stay in the comfort zone anymore. I will be proud and say I am an immigrant, but I can speak English.

I've changed a lot of things from my regular life. In the ARC course, we wake up at 6:30am each morning and start to get our stuff together for backpacking. We would hike up to the peak of mountains, go through switchbacks, cross rivers, and sleep in the woods. These experiences were important for me to achieve my goals. I am now ready to move forward and to be a person that my family will be proud of and I will choose the road that I want to go.

Adventure Risk Challenge is a leadership and literacy program. It has taught me to look around at the world in different ways. It has made me braver in facing challenges in my life. I will not fear the first step of anything and keep going because my family in ARC will support me and stay with me forever. I will use the experiences that we've learned here to be a good leader and to help people that are like me. ARC has taught me that slow is smooth and smooth is fast, and that it doesn't matter how long you take, just as long as you keep up speed and move until you get what you want. I am not a pig, lazy and dependent. I am a turtle, a Triumphant Turtle, who is ready to take anything on my shell.

# lievin oyumbu

## Love Me for Who I Am, Not Who You Want Me to Be

I am born a sequoia seed buried in the soil  
As I wait for a wildfire to crack my shell  
and let me be independent and free

I was born in the Congo.  
Ready to emerge to the U.S,  
leaving all my precious family members  
and all my memories I shared with my siblings and friends.

Shy and feeling trapped.  
Looking like a loser who can't stand a second  
without giving eye contact to anybody  
and couldn't express myself  
everywhere I walked I felt caged inside  
like a person feeling stuck in jail and can't manage to escape.

I've been living stuck in the darkness  
and empty place of being judged by others  
how embarrassing  
I was to them like a awkward and unworthy person  
and all what came to their minds  
was to only try to bring me down to their level  
like a person who hates somebody  
because they have nothing better to do.

Although they had the same problems  
as I did by being bullied by others,  
I accepted those negative judgments without defending myself  
and just moving on with my life  
because all their negative thoughts about me meant nothing to me.  
And although they touched me,  
they couldn't hurt me or break me  
and even if I fought back it wouldn't be worth it  
because it might start a cycle of hatred and pain  
like a world without trust and confidence.

In the U.S,  
My parents, teachers, and family members  
were trying to make me fit in with others  
without realizing that I had my ways of doing what I know  
I should do to make them proud without them forcing me to do so.  
When my grades reports would come home  
they wouldn't look at me but only judge my grade's level  
if it was good or bad  
and if it was good they would congratulate me,



giving me their gratitude and if it was bad reports  
they would express their anger towards me  
without thinking of all my effort.  
I felt like there is no trust similar to friends with benefits.  
We know each other very well but only from the benefits  
we will get from each and every one of us in the family.

When it's time to keep up with schoolwork,  
my teachers would only help those she or he can see  
and seems to me that I was so invisible to them  
similar to a sequoia seed hidden on the leaves  
that would camouflage me without being noticed  
and cared about by anyone whose willing to bury me  
and give me water to grow.  
And when it came time for me to answer a question  
I would be nothing but a shame to the teacher,  
looking helpless like a sequoia seed struggling to sprout  
but the teacher expects me to be a full sequoia in a second.

And when it's my free time my brother would come to me  
and tell me how distracted and troublesome I am to him  
and only trying to bring up a conflict.  
I understand the parts of him being my older sibling  
and playing his role.  
He was born a sequoia seed before me  
and a wildfire opened his shell  
and already set him free  
like the difference between a sequoia seed and a pinecone seed.  
He has his way of living and I have mine  
but seem to me he wants to change me  
into someone I don't expect to be  
just in a snap of a finger,  
he expects me to be more like him;  
the perfect grade reports,  
the reward for being the student of the month,  
and a good sequoia tree everyone expects him to be.

I've learned to be myself  
and not accepting what others think and want of me.  
All the issues that were wrong were only me searching for the answers  
I knew all along and from that I lost my self in it.

And I learned that I've become wiser than ever,  
ready to give an advice to anyone in need of me,  
I understand now  
In the present I feel capable  
like a man who can do things, care, achieve, and accomplish more  
by facing obstacles and believing in himself.

# The New Me

The sky turned gray and the sounds of nature sang. The chipmunks chased each other like young children playing a friendly game of tag. I stood on my little area alone on a hill and I tried to find something that would keep me busy. It was solo day, when I spent twenty-four hours alone. There was nothing for me to do, but think and talk to myself about my past and why I would accept being challenged in such a way. The nature around me scared me at times with the noises it made. I heard the trees moving and the sound of footsteps walking toward me. I ended up realizing that it was only the noises that I made. From that point on, I enjoyed my solo day and the view of the flowers and rocks I was surrounded by. All thanks to ARC and the activities such as the solo, I am now a person who is excited to accept challenges and overcome them.

I've experienced true stress and overcome it. In the first expedition, we had to spend eight days hiking with our heavy backpacks, going up and down hills. It was challenging and it made me stronger every second and with every step I took. When I heard other student's experiences from Summer Search about how they carried heavy backpacks while hiking, I expected it to be easier for me. At school I'm considered to be one of the strong students. However, I felt like I was lifting an elephant on my back. It felt the same way as lifting gallons of water to bring back home when I was in Africa. Every step I took, I knew I was becoming stronger physically and mentally because I was becoming more capable of carrying weight in the future. The load on my back was getting lighter each day for me until it was the end of the expedition. I realized that it's been awhile since I lifted something so heavy. I was pushed into my challenge zone. I learned that there is always something out there that could

be challenging for me and that there is always an obstacle that will be in my way, but I will conquer it.

During my time in ARC, I learned how to overcome fears. Rafting and kayaking were new things for me. At first, when I got in the boat, I was a little nervous because I was frightened about falling in the water. I can't swim and the water was really cold, but I started feeling more comfortable when my ARC teammates didn't fear the water at all. They were splashing water at my boat mates and me. I felt like giving them a taste of their own medicine by splashing the water back at them. When I started to participate in the splash war, I realized that I no longer feared the water as much.

Another fear that I overcame in ARC was leaving my family for forty days without getting to visit them or talk to them on the phone. Sending them letters was the only option I had. However, soon I looked on the bright side. I had a team in ARC that supported me when I was homesick. My team even sent me a letter during the course when they realized that I wasn't receiving any. Leaving our families was a fear we overcame together. Conquering my fear of being away from home made me stronger because this will happen to me in the future when I go to a college far away from my family.

During the ARC course, I have begun to think of all the problems and issues I have back home. I have to overcome the distractions, laziness, and conflict. I am distracted when I turn on the T.V and watch it all day

without caring about my chores and homework. I'm also often lazy. I wake up really early in the morning just to use my phone for the entire day and then I go back to sleep after getting bored. When I don't participate in the house work, my older brother expresses his anger towards me which causes conflict. Sometimes when I try to go to sleep during the day, he'll pull the blanket off me so that I can stay awake and energetic. I never truly realized what he was doing it for me. Thanks to ARC, I realized that



I can stay more aware. After the forty-day course, I will try to be less distracted back home. I will avoid getting close to the T.V. I will turn off my phone and use it only when I need it most. I will participate more at home with the chores and avoid

conflict with my parents and siblings. ARC made me reflect on my bad habits at home and made me realize there is always something more that I can do to make my family proud.

In conclusion, from the solo day and other activities in ARC, I reflected on who I am and I grew stronger. I started to understand more about what I need to do when I get back home and to think about being more active with chores and homework. All thanks to ARC, I now understand what independence feels like. I have changed my ways. I found out that there is something buried deep inside me that will help me get out of my comfort zone and send me into my challenge zone. In the future I will be a good student, a hard worker, and somebody known to the world. That is the new me.

# valeria garcia

## I Am a Young Ant

I am a young ant  
Sometimes I am sensitive and strong  
I am responsible and helpful with others  
I am a hard worker, but I worry about my future  
What if I don't get an opportunity to become what I want  
What If being an immigrant, being Mexican, being a woman  
Prevent me from accomplishing my dream of being a doctor

I was born and raised in Mexico  
When I was two my parents decided to leave their colony  
My grandparents cried,  
"No se vayan, estan seguros de lo que hacen."  
With tears in their eyes they left everything behind,  
their culture and language  
They didn't know how to talk in English,  
"hi, welcome" was a new phrase  
I became the family translator,  
when my parents had to sign the insurance and bank forms,  
I would help them  
I was frustrated and I felt so much pressure

Sometimes I fear losing everything  
Being stepped on by others because I am a Mexican woman  
I'm afraid of getting separated from my family,  
I would cry every day and ask myself,  
"why are you taking them away?"

My family is everything I have in this world  
without them I am no one  
They're always there when I need them

to help me with my problems  
They're the ones, who support me through life  
If someone interferes in our colony  
I will be extremely aggressive,  
I will fight back

When I step toward the future  
I want to become an independent person  
That doesn't struggle in life,  
who does everything her parents tell her to do  
cleaning and school work  
I won't depend on my parents and others and  
I will always have a smile on my face  
And I will never give up in bad situations

For my family it has been hard  
I see my parents asking themselves, "what should we do"  
They pretend nothing's going on,  
but we could see it in their face that they have  
So many problems, I just wish I could help them  
Someday I will make their dreams come true  
as they make mine come true

I am a bright girl  
Who expects to reach her goals in life  
Making myself and my parents proud  
Who has the life of an ant  
that is going to forage individually and  
Nothing or no one can stand in my  
way from making my dreams come true





## Life Changing Opportunity

I had a hard decision to make: to leave my family behind or to spend the summer with nothing to do in Los Banos. I decided to go on the Adventure Risk Challenge program to Yosemite because my parents encouraged me to come and I felt it was going to help me academically, especially in Science and English. I also wanted to have adventures. When I left my family for 40 days, I saw that my parents had tears in their eyes saying goodbye to me. They were letting their little queen go away. They gave me big hugs and they told me that they loved me. I was excited, but I felt butterflies in my stomach as I left them. I never thought ARC would change my life. Before signing up for ARC, I was a bad influence on my brother and sister. I was a spoiled girl who didn't listen to her parents, who was lazy about everything, and who was weak. Now ARC has made me stronger, more responsible, and more independent.

After participating in ARC, I'm a strong person who doesn't give up and who is confident. The expeditions have helped me a lot. Through the first expedition, I was weak. I was exhausted and my legs were killing me. I couldn't keep up with the pace and I needed more rest. I thought I wasn't going to make it through. Days passed, and I felt

that I was getting stronger and stronger. We've gone hiking, rock climbing, repelling, and to a ropes course. I've become a different person. There were times that I wanted to give up, but I just believed and told myself that I could do it. I've been getting physically and mentally stronger and I haven't given up. I feel proud of myself for accomplishing every challenge I've faced.

I am getting more responsible for myself. Before, I was a lazy girl. I expected my mother to do all the cleaning at home. I didn't really ask her if she needed help with anything. If she asked me, I wouldn't respond or I would just tell her "No." I was too lazy to clean my room or the house. Now that I think about this, I was so stupid for not helping her. Here with ARC, I taught myself how to clean and how to cook with the help of others. Back home, I didn't have a job. Here at ARC I get to be the Head Honcho, an Iron Chef, a House Mouse, a Camelback, a Navigator, and the Prolific Pen. These jobs made me more responsible. I don't feel lazy anymore. This has helped me for the future. When I get home, I am going to be helping my mom with the cleaning and I also want to cook for my family the delicious foods we made here.

I am feeling more independent. I don't want to depend on my parents as much as I used to because I know they don't have a lot of money to buy me things. I used to be so frustrated about everything. If they wouldn't buy me the things that I wanted, I would get so angry and sometimes I would even cry. Now I feel so bad for all the negative things I have done to my parents. I know they want to buy us the things that we want, but they can't because of their economic position. They hated watching my face and my brother's faces when we want something and they couldn't buy it for us. In the future I would like to get a job so I could help them. Now I won't be that spoiled girl anymore. I will be nice with my family, especially my parents. I will also try to be more understanding and recognize what they are doing for us.

My time here in Yosemite for 40 days has been truly life changing. I am a person that has taken on many challenges. I became stronger and more confident. We went on so many adventures that impacted me. I feel like a new person. I will always thank ARC for giving me the opportunity to be here. I will also thank my parents for encouraging me to come. I know this will help me in the future. I want to become a strong, responsible, and independent woman.



Dear Family, Friends, Mentors, and Teachers,

Thank you for all your support and love, because without you we wouldn't have had this life-changing opportunity. Thank you for your encouragement to come to ARC. You made it possible for us by introducing us to ARC, supporting us to make the decision to go, taking us to buy what we needed, driving us to the train station or school, and investing yourselves and your time into our growth. Once we arrived, thank you for your continued support through your letters and packages and making sure we were doing well. It brought tears to our eyes to leave you, but it has been worth the sacrifice.

Being away from you for 40 days has made us appreciate all the things we took for granted. Parents & Family – Waking up to your voices, eating your wonderful cooking, and all the amazing ways you take care of us, like giving us a house to live in and cleaning up after us. Mentors & Teachers – Recommending and accepting us to this program, spending time with us to make sure we were ready, and walking with us every step of the way.

Looking back, we now see that we would have otherwise wasted our time this summer being lazy and not realizing how precious time is. Now, this course has given us the strength and motivation to reach for higher goals. ARC has been challenging, but well worth every moment of our time here.

We have grown stronger by facing all the challenges we've encountered – rock climbing, kayaking, working as a team, waking up at 6:30 every morning, and especially, leaving you. We have become more independent and more responsible. We have realized that if we don't make something happen in our lives, it won't happen. We have learned to take control of our choices and our lives. We have learned to face our fears, physically and mentally. We have come to trust our learning and experiences.

Thank you for believing in us – that we could do it. And now we have. Thank you.

Sincerely, The Triumphant Turtles

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Querida Familia, Amigos, Mentores, y Maestros:

Gracias por todo el apoyo y amor que hemos recibido de ustedes porque sin ello no hubiéramos tenido esta oportunidad que ha cambiado nuestras vidas. Muchas gracias por la motivación que nos dieron para venir al curso de ARC. Ustedes lo hicieron posible: unos por introducirnos al curso de ARC; otros por apoyarnos la decisión de venir; otros llevándonos a la tienda para comprar lo que necesitamos por llevarnos la estación de tren o a la escuela, y especialmente por sacrificar su tiempo hacia nuestro crecimiento. Muchas gracias por sus cartas y paquetes que nos dieron motivación para continuar, también por mantenerse en contacto para saber cómo estábamos. Dejarlos llevo lagrimas a nuestros ojos, pero valió el sacrificio.

En estos 10 días hemos aprendido a apreciar las cosas que antes tomaremos en vano: levantarnos al sonido de sus voces, comer sus deliciosos platillos, y las cosas asombrosas que hacen para cuidarnos como darnos un hogar donde vivir y limpiar lo que ensuciamos. También queremos agradecerles a nuestros mentores y maestros quienes nos recomendaron para participar en este programa, tomando su tiempo para prepararnos y estando con nosotros en cada paso del camino.







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