

# adventure risk challenge

developing youth literacy and leadership

## Yosemite



## Writings of Summer Course Alumni 2015

## Tahoe



**TAHOE  
PARTICIPANTS**

Alondra Soto Bernal  
Carolina Pacheco  
Cassiopeia Dalsey  
Christian Lopez  
Esmeralda Barajas

Jesus Nevarez  
Mariana Mosqueda-Gonzalez  
Max Tewksbury  
Pedro Vargas  
Zhanna Perry

**TAHOE - PAGE 3**



**YOSEMITE - PAGE 26**

**YOSEMITE  
PARTICIPANTS**

Alexis Angulo  
Alondra Sevallos  
Andrea Briceno  
Ashley Byrum  
Asia Navarro  
Bingbing Liang

Daida Rivas  
Felix Rivera  
Jesus Sanchez Orozco  
Jorge Ortiz  
Luis Higuera  
Pablo Morales



# tahoe

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

**PROGRAM LENGTH:** 23 days

**TEAM NAME:** The ARCanators

**INSTRUCTORS**

Alejandra Dominguez  
Melissa Hoffman  
Merrilyne Lundahl  
Raquel Rangel  
Sean McAlindin

# alondra soto bernal

## Beautiful View

I am a rock  
I lived on the tallest peak  
with a beautiful view of Lake Tahoe with my family.  
My family was the happiest,  
Nobody could ever reach our level of happiness.  
Everything was good for a while  
Watching all the pretty sunsets together.

As we watched sunsets every evening,  
I wasn't aware that erosion was also going on  
Little by little  
Constant fighting, coming home late, disagreements,  
Not coming home at all.

I am a rock.  
I never listened to my parents  
because I'm hard-headed and selfish  
Never thinking of how my actions hurt my family  
They told me not to go too far off the edge of the peak  
But I still did it  
I did it because it looked fun  
I did it because I wanted to be on my own  
I thought I knew what was right for me  
I thought I didn't need my parents anymore.

I tumbled down the peak more and more each time.  
It hurt.  
It was painful.  
People who I thought would never leave my side  
Left.  
They left because they thought what I was doing was wrong.  
I didn't know how to save myself  
I was all alone  
Nobody to hold me tight  
I kept going down the peak.  
Parts of me were breaking  
My heart was breaking  
because I had let down  
a whole bunch of people who I cared about.  
Part of me was gone  
My happiness was gone.

Everything was taken away from me  
I kept crumbling down  
I wasn't part of a family  
I didn't have anything anymore  
I never thought I could get back up  
I gave up, I was done  
I was at the bottom for a very long time  
I kept on making mistakes  
Nothing could change my mind about my actions,  
I didn't want to change  
I thought I was right about everything and everybody else was wrong.

I didn't think I could be a better person.  
I tried rolling up the peak but I kept getting stuck  
I was doing good some days,  
Then other days it would be the same thing over and over again  
I thought it would never end.

When I was at the bottom my grandpa and brother saved me  
They loved me no matter what  
My grandpa told my brother that everyone deserves a second chance  
My brother grabbed the rock and told my grandpa  
that the rock was so broken  
But he wanted to save it.  
My grandpa and brother tried their best  
They were patient with the rock  
They watched it grow into something big  
Into something happy.  
They carried the rock all the way to the top of the peak and  
Left me there

I was on the top,  
I was confused  
I didn't know where I was  
I looked around and my family was there  
They cheered me on, they encouraged me  
They took me back, they didn't give up,  
They loved me unconditionally.

Being at the top, I want to continue to learn  
I want to listen and not take things for granted  
I want to feel like I'm on top of the world again  
I want to get closer with my family  
I want to get their respect back  
I want to be the rock that has the most beautiful view again.



# Alondra Is The Best

I was born and raised in a small town called Kings Beach, California, a beautiful and safe place to call home. The beach was only five minutes away. What else could I ask for? It felt good to be there. I felt comfortable, happy and excited. But sometimes I felt the opposite. It felt as if I was living in a dream, always feeling dazed and confused, never really being aware of my surroundings. Living in a small town sometimes gets boring unless you're doing sports or something fun. My friends and I would look for stuff to do, but most of the time we didn't make the best decisions ever. I kept getting into trouble. My parents did not like it, but I always rebelled against them. In school I wasn't always the best, but I did have B's and C's and perfect attendance, then my sophomore year all of that changed when I wasn't at home to be encouraged. I went from B's and C's to F's and I would never show up to school.

One day, I was sitting in class, bored and daydreaming, when I heard the door open. It was my principal, Mrs. Mitchell. She looked at me and told me to get up and go to the office. I was nervous. While I was walking down to the office, I was trying to remember if I had done something bad, but I couldn't remember anything. I sat down and she asked me if I wanted to go to the summer program ARC. I really did not want to go, but I said yeah, sure, but it was only so she would hurry up and let me go to lunch. She told me to talk to my parents about it. She gave me two weeks, but I just put it aside like our conversation never happened. I didn't want to tell my parents because I knew for a fact that they were going to make me go. I didn't want to at all, I thought I was smarter and I wanted to enjoy my summer with friends. A few weeks later, she called me into the office again. Through the window, I saw Sean sitting there. I sat and they started talking about ARC and how it's a great experience and it would really help me. But I still didn't want to go. I kept making excuses of why I couldn't go. They didn't seem to get the point. They called my mom and that was the first time she heard about ARC. My prin-

icipal and Sean gave my mom information and right away she said that I was going. I had no option. My opinion didn't seem to matter! My parents wanted me to go for my well-being. They thought I needed a break from my hometown and struggles.

June 23rd of 2015 at 4:01 PM was when it all happened; Mel knocked on my door and asked me if I was ready. I wasn't ready, I didn't want to leave, but I had signed all the papers and there was no turning back. I just smiled and said yeah. I thought that she couldn't tell that I was about to cry, but she knew. While Mel drove away I had tears in my eyes and watched my family wave goodbye. It was hard but I kept hearing my mom's voice in my head, "You can do it, Negra! You got this! You are strong. You'll be home in a couple of weeks and everything is going to be okay." It made me feel determined. I waved back, holding back my tears. We drove to Truckee. On the way there, I was looking out the window thinking about all the good times and everything I was going to be missing out on. We got to Sagehen and ten people got out of two different cars. Almost everybody was happy to be there. They were excited to start this 24 day course. I wasn't. We all introduced ourselves then went up to the camp they called



Leo's. There were two tents; girls went in one, and boys in another one. There was a little house with one couch, a shelf of books and no electricity with a never-ending forest. The girls went in the tent and fought over who wanted the top bunk and who wanted the bottom bunk. It was funny watching that, but I didn't care what bunk I got because I just wanted to go home.

We went on our first expedition, seven days in Desolation Wilderness. It was the hardest thing I had ever done. It took the best of me. Every time I tried to quit, my ARC friends were there cheering me on, saying, "You got this, Alondra. You can do it, don't

give up." This was a challenge because we had to hike three to five miles a day with some really heavy backpacks. I could hardly walk one mile without complaining. Up and down hills we went like marching ants. I was always angry, hot, tired, and sore but I had to keep going no matter what. I had to finish what I started to make my parents proud.

The second hardest thing that I did was the ropes course. I never thought I would be scared of heights until it was Max's and my turn to climb. We went up the 50 foot power tower. I was scared out of my mind, but I had to do it because Max was cheering me on, telling me that I could do it and to not give up. I kept going even though the voice in my head was telling me I couldn't do it. We finally made it to the top and we had to jump off and catch the trapeze. I didn't trust the equipment. I thought I was going to fall and die. Max said, "You can do it, just think about something really important to you." So I did, and he counted down 3...2...1. We jumped and we both grabbed the trapeze! From that moment, I knew I could do anything I set my mind to. When I get back home, things will be different. I will spend more time with my family and not take them for granted. I will ask my family for help when I need it instead of keeping it all in. I learned in ARC that you can't always do everything by yourself. I hope to not be negative and resistant with my parents. My goal is to recognize what I can and can't do. Like at the ropes course, I told myself I couldn't do it, but I did it. In my life when I think I can't do things, I will be able to do them, just like I did in ARC.

Throughout this challenge I learned a lot of new skills. I learned how to be patient with others and to always be positive because being negative never gets you anywhere, it just makes the journey harder. I also learned that not everybody has a perfect life. Just because someone has a smile on their face, it doesn't mean that they are happy. Another really important lesson I learned was to always try new challenges even though you don't want to, because good things could come out of it. Even though I really did not want to come to ARC, I am really grateful that my parents made me come. I accomplished a lot. I never thought I was going to be able to do this. I am proud of myself and my parents will be too.

# carolina pacheco

## My Seeds As Dreams

I am a white bark pine.  
I was born strong,  
Strong with the protection I received  
A seed that my parents planted  
In hopes of me achieving whoever I wanted to be: Me.

But as I grew up, I became lonely.  
A strong tree on top of the mountain always seeking affirmation  
But no one listened.  
I have survived storms alone,  
wishing I had someone there to help me.  
I reached out my branches for connection,  
But there was no one.

Now in the forest, I am detached as people pass by me.  
They only see my twisted silhouette and keep walking.  
They notice my sister, the beautiful wildflower,  
Always contemplating her beauty and her perfect way of being.  
Being compared to her  
Hurt.  
In the middle, I stand between her and my younger brother,  
the only boy in the family.  
I am the third option.

I grow only in the highest and toughest parts of the mountain  
I take on storms,  
Reprimanded for showing who I am:  
social, independent, determined  
Put down for speaking my mind  
Often feeling absences in love and support.

Surviving my storms in isolation,  
I have dug my roots deep into the rocks.  
They give me the strength  
to know that whatever the weather brings,  
I will survive.

Throughout the years,  
family and friends have come and gone,  
in and out of my house and sometimes my life  
Like my cousin who showed me how to be myself  
And then was ripped away from me,  
Like a branch broken off in a storm.

But, I am flexible  
I bend through situations,  
sometimes stronger sometimes weaker,  
I handle the problems the wind throws at me  
And I still stand tall.

The Clark's Nutcracker is essential to my life,  
These birds are my father, my cousin and my only best friends.  
They let me know who I can be,  
Whatever and whoever I want to be  
They open my cones so I can spread my own seeds.

Seeds as dreams I know I will achieve,  
Dreams of being free of any storm,  
Judgement and isolation.  
My seeds will fly in different directions, allowing me to explore.  
I will flourish,  
Fulfilled with happiness, compassion, and love.



# Tied Up

I was climbing the tree. Forty feet in the air and that's when I realized – I was afraid of heights. I was afraid of being alone. I was afraid of having to go through the obstacles by myself. The first obstacle in the Ropes Course was that we had to move from one end to another with the help of our teammates. I realized that with teamwork everything was possible, but when you are alone things get more challenging. ARC taught me that teamwork is important, how to trust others, and in order to grow, you need to find out who you are.

When I was three years old, I moved from Stephenville, Texas to Kings Beach, California. Moving from Texas was hard because I had to leave most of my family behind, but with the help of my parents I knew that I would be okay. For a while, things were good. I liked

Kings Beach and my parents, my sister and my brother and I were together and happy. But then we had to move again. This time we moved to Truckee. The hard part was that this time, I didn't receive the same support. My family had started to drift apart, and we didn't help each other adjust to another new place.

After moving twice and starting a new life again, it was hard to make friends. Living in Truckee was not easy, especially because everyone already had known each other for many years. Once we were settled at the new house, everything became a routine, a routine I did not like. It consisted of waking up, going to school, getting home from school, and babysitting my brother for the rest of the day. On weekends, we would spend Saturdays at home cleaning and Sundays in Reno. Living in this world for over two years was not the place I wanted to be. I wanted change, I wanted to express what I felt, but I was always shut down by my parents. After many tries of wanting to express myself and everyone pushing me away, I became depressed. Then I started to push everyone away. I would go along with the "flow" and not express any feelings.

After two years living in the same town and hardly making any friends, I found a person who helped me. My cousin from Mexico came to live with us for a whole summer. While he was here, we began to hang out and talk all the time. We spent our time talking and taking walks to the park. During these walks we would talk about our challenges and our futures. Our biggest



challenge was our family. While talking to him, he helped me understand what was worth living for. He encouraged me to be who I wanted to be. He let me be spontaneous and caring, loving, and most of all...myself. He helped me overcome all of the judgmental comments my family made and any other situation in which I was put down.

During this time I saw very little change at home and faced many challenges. It began with my parents' attitudes and the people who I met. The people who I began to get involved with changed the way I viewed everything and everyone. My family disagreed on every new friend I made and every new person who came into my life. They always told me that they weren't the type of friends I needed. I wanted to be myself and go out and hang out with friends. But the reality was that I wasn't allowed to even go to the store. I would lie to talk to my friends. It was sad seeing my two worlds conflict. My beautiful family became my rivals and people who were bad influences became my best friends. After a few months of constant fighting, my cousin was taken away from me. I was left alone and without support. I was forced to fight any battle on my own. I was forced to be alone. But I soon met two amazing best friends. They were there

to support and guide me. They allowed me to be the person I had dreamed of being and in return I listened and supported them. I received a lot of help from them.

Towards the end of the school year, I heard of a program called ARC – Adventure Risk Challenge. It sounded like an adventure to help me out of my world full of conflicts. ARC was the perfect escape and excuse in order to be out of my house. It sounded like a place in which I would be able to free myself from any conflict and a way to make friends.

In ARC we had the opportunity to bond as a team. In the Ropes Course, we had to help each other get from one end of a zip line to the other. We had to land in hula hoops. The first two tries were hard, but then we all understood how to push each other and get the disk back to the other side. After we successfully finished our first obstacle, we were introduced to another one called the Sextopus. On this obstacle, with the help of teammates and hours of trying to complete it, we succeeded. With trust and support, we helped each other understand and listen more.

My biggest challenge at the Ropes Course was the Tower of Power. We had to climb over a ladder and then up a tree hanging from only three wires 100 feet into the air, and then we had to jump off in order to catch a trapeze. With the help of a partner, I was able to not only complete the challenge, but I was able to understand myself. This is the moment in which I knew I could trust him, and not only him, but everyone who was holding me and cheering me on. It tested my limits and fears. I couldn't get myself to catch the trapeze, but in my head I trusted my partner enough to know he would help me get through it.

ARC has helped me to build a team I can count on, to trust others, and to understand who I am. With the many challenges we faced, I was able to realize that I can trust people and that there is always someone whom I can lean on. This program helped me understand that I will receive help from my team members and it doesn't matter how tall I have to climb, I will always have their support.

# cassiopeia dalsey

## Bright

I am the sun  
Burning, shining, illuminating  
With fragile light  
Nervous and unsure because of the  
Perfection  
Constantly demanded of me

The child of a soldier and a perfectionist  
I was expected to take orders from birth  
Marching towards a place in the sky  
I was built for  
Maybe a different child  
One better suited for our life of  
Chaotic orbits from place to place  
Was what my father desired

In the past, I have changed,  
Morphed to the ideals of my creator  
My commanding officer  
My 'dad'  
Who ordered my light into what he wanted  
Not my natural state  
That person was a disappointment to him

He forced me to shine  
So bright  
I nearly burned myself out  
In desperation for some escape  
From his rule

Perhaps, I thought  
He might realize  
He could only make me burn so much  
Before I used up my fuel supply

My mother,  
The spark that gave me life  
And brought it back to me fourteen years later  
Is the reason I can still glow for the world today

I am the sun  
Made of babbling words  
And smiles bright enough  
To cover a desperation for  
Some sort of close contact  
With everyone,  
Anyone

Unfortunately,  
I have traveled too far  
To expect to stay in one home,  
And form a bond I cannot break  
Without agony

Better to be distant,  
I have thought,  
And love them too much from  
Far away  
Than allow myself  
Closer than an arm's length and  
Suffer in the process

An independent, lonely sun  
I can only be admired from afar,  
Burning any who wish to love me intimately  
With solar flares of rage and depression  
But my life-giving,  
Protecting rays  
Will always surround those  
Who can bear my flames

I am the sun  
A proud star  
Whose light will never again bend  
Or contort to the whims of my father  
The criticisms and demands  
For his ideal of perfection  
Can no longer alter the brightness  
Of my mighty rays

One day I will be surrounded by planets  
Interstellar bodies  
A family of my choosing  
Not the one I was born into  
But a select group of the compassionate and loyal  
Who gaze to the sky and  
Love their sun  
In its natural form,  
Inspiring and bright.





## Love ‘em and Leave ‘em

“Have you lived here your whole life?” A miniscule smile tugs at the corners of my lips, my answer to the routine question well-rehearsed. “No,” I say, over and over and over, “I just moved here.” Enterprise, Alabama. Ft. Bragg, North Carolina. Clarksville, Tennessee. Ft. Rucker, Alabama. Ft. Wainwright, Alaska. Truckee, California. I have had a lot of houses, but never a real home. I am always leaving, always moving, always changing locations. It has become the norm for me. While most people might consider a move difficult, the hardest challenge I have ever faced in my life is adjusting to living in one place, and not leaving.

Throughout my childhood, I moved constantly, so often that nearly half my things would live in the boxes they were packed into, waiting expectantly for the next time they would be sealed up and shipped to a new location. This sort of semi-nomadic life was normal for everyone I knew – we were all Military Brats, children of the American Legacy in its true form. My father was a helicopter pilot in the army, and when he received orders to transfer to a new location, my family had no choice but to follow. Leaving, moving, scrapping the life I had and rebuilding in a new place was expected, almost routine. The only constant figures in my life were my mom and father – but truthfully only my mom, since my father was deployed overseas, fighting a war, for more than half my childhood. Leaving shaped my behavior. I was given constant opportunities to reinvent myself and present a new person to the people I met. I had a sort of social immunity. There were no consequences if I did not ‘fit in’, and nothing could follow me to my new location. Still, I was not the only weird one. All my peers, every kid who grew up the same way I did, had a bucket full of attachment and emotional issues. Military bases were a whole different world of fast-paced order that forced kids to grow up with a mandatory level of maturity and an attitude of toughness. We never learned how to correctly express our emotions, especially the negative ones. Even among the people that might have understood me, I kept to myself. I was angry, scared, and conflicted, but I shoved my feelings under a mask of indifference, buried them so deep I almost forgot they existed. I was so detached, even from my small group of best friends, that I could leave them behind with few noticeable emotional consequences. I remembered them, but I never cried for them. I was a self-contained unit with no social ties. ‘Committed’ was a foreign word, one I would never use to describe my relationships.

I was abruptly yanked from my shifting world by one word: retirement. My father was leaving the military, which meant my family was leaving our normal. We would stay in one place, would never again have to think ahead to our next move. Truckee, California, was chosen for us by my father’s need for a job, and his desire to live in California. I was excited for our move, and to start high school in a new place, but I realized I had actually become a little bit attached to Alaska. I did not want to leave behind the best place I had ever lived in, and some of the most amazing things I had ever gotten the chance to experience. It was going to be strange, I thought, to not move again. I worried that I would not like the place, or the people, and a thousand other things that I had never had to think about before, because before, houses were always temporary. I had no choice in this, but I never had a choice in any of our moves, so I was able to convince myself this was almost the same.

School began a little more than a week after I arrived in Truckee, but cross-county running practice had already been happening since the middle of summer. I joined immediately after registering for school. Having always gone to school with other Military Brats, I was shocked at how openly the team welcomed me, their instant displays of camaraderie confusing to me, who had only ever been given casual greetings. It hit me then, and again on the first day of school, that this was a whole different sort of social jungle. These people were a foreign species, one who never migrated, who spent their whole lives, birth to death, in one house. The concept baffled me. Everywhere I looked, there were faces I knew would become familiar, voices I knew would call my name, and for the first time, I was terrified to meet new people. These same faces would be constants in my life until I graduated. I realized I would have to be careful of the way I behaved and spoke, because there would be no chance to leave my actions behind this time. Every mistake would stay with me forever.

I had no idea how to react to the interest my peers displayed in me. Normally, I would have to work to make friends, but here, in a town where everyone knew everyone and their mother, I was shiny and new. My classmates

were surprisingly talkative, and I, who had spent half my life reciting my own name and the basic facts of my life to strangers, conversed with them automatically. Ca-ssi-o-pei-a, Ca-ssi-o-pei-a, Ca-ssi-o-pei-a... but you can call me Cass. I said it a hundred times, conscious of the fact that on this occasion it would be remembered for years. There were no second chances. I had to be the me I wanted to show to the world. No one behaved in a way I was used to. They were too friendly, too nice, too caring. I had to learn how to respond to the random displays of affection. My mom became a sort of an unofficial therapist, but the most surprising source of help was my new friends. They ushered me gently – sometimes without knowledge of their actions – into a world they had lived in all their lives.

Even though I had a foot in the community’s door, some days I still expected – and sometimes wanted – to just pick up and leave. On a deep level, I was still distant enough to be mostly okay with never seeing my friends again. I could just load all the boxes I still had not unpacked after a year in Truckee into a U-Haul and walk out of the life I had built. The first time I truly felt as though I was a part of the world was when I attended the Adventure Risk Challenge program. The pure, unfiltered love shown to me by my fellow students brought tears to my eyes and a lump to my throat on multiple occasions. I wanted, so very much, to return that affection, and slowly, haltingly, awkwardly, I managed it. I opened up to them. In showing them my world and my pain, I fully realized how much I was still holding back. ARC helped me understand what it felt like to care. It was not, and still is not, easy to change my deep-seated ways, but ARC has given me both the reasons and the means to try.

I do not know if I can ever think of a single place as home. In the future, I may choose to constantly move around, or I may stay in one house. I hope to always have friends who I keep in contact with. I may leave them, but I will never leave them behind. I will become close to people emotionally, I will learn to commit, and I will form attachments. On good days, sometimes I feel close to the people I have gotten to know in this place, this world that does not seem so foreign anymore. I enjoy the warmth that swells in my chest every time I receive a friend’s message or a smile from across the hall. I want to keep that feeling. I want to be close. I do not want to be scared of commitment. I do not want to be able to leave my life behind with no consequences. I want to look at people and know for a fact that I will miss them.



# christian lopez

## The Way the River Flows

I Am Water.

A young boy born into a life of sorrow.  
A river forged by my father,  
A monstrous snowstorm.  
And a beautiful ray of sunshine,  
My mother.  
Like a ray of the sun melts the snow into free flowing water,  
My Mother helped melt me and  
Allowed me to flow into the person I am.

I Am Water!

Out of desperation,  
My mother felt it necessary to escape from my father.  
“Bye Dad”  
This started the river to angrily crash down the mountain.  
My family fled to the United States,  
to begin a new life without the snowstorm  
I asked myself,  
“What is life gonna be like without a father figure?”  
“Why did this have to happen to my family?”  
“Will life ever be the same?”  
“Will I be able to make it through the rapids  
and to the big, calm lake at the end?”  
The thoughts that went through my head were  
like waves crashing into the rocks in the rapids.  
Rain storms came in, sometimes torrential,  
with lightning strikes and rumbling thunder,  
They filled the river and created my vicious rapids.  
As a river discovers its course, I discovered myself, as a person.

I AM WATER!

The rocks in my rapids mirrored the struggles in my life,  
There didn't appear to be anyway around them.  
I struggled with the relationships in my household,  
And so my river flowed to calm pools,  
The homes of friends where I always felt welcome.  
Even so I started having trouble at school,  
Arguing with teachers,  
achieving poor grades and receiving constant suspensions.  
Trying helplessly to find my way around the rocks,  
I got into sports, I tried out for basketball,  
but the ball hit my head more than the hoop.

I am water

My river had no steady flow, I was stuck in an eddy.  
I got into bad habits, grew bad morals.  
From tagging up walls to smoking pot,  
Because it's “the cool thing to do”.  
I would ditch school, argue with elders,  
And avoid going home.

Because it's “the cool thing to do”.

I put people down to make myself feel better.  
I gave out a front, frightened that the real me wouldn't be accepted.  
“JUST TO BE COOL”

Sadly no realizations came,  
I wasn't happy with where or who I was  
Until a year ago.  
My river suddenly found its way out of the eddy,  
And started to meander downstream.  
Thanks to the support at Sierra High School.  
My goals felt in arm's reach,  
Now I can see the beautiful horizon.  
With a little determination and commitment,  
My river will flow into a tranquil glassy lake

MY GOALS WILL BE ACCOMPLISHED!

I AM WATER!!!!



## From One To The Next

I have been to hell and back, experienced the best and the worst. My life has not been that of a normal teenager's. I've had an ordinary lifestyle, I've had changes in my life, and I've had to make a life of my own.

I used to live in a mundane world; it was always the same routine. I would wake up at 6:15 am. I would have a 10 minute walk to school; I got to school and met up with my best friends Santiago and Brenen. As school came to a close, I would hop on the bus with Santiago and make our way to his house, where I spent almost all my middle school life playing video games or at the park hanging out. If it wasn't a school night, I would wake up and make breakfast for my little sister and myself, because my mother would wake up at the break of dawn for work. Around noon, I would walk for an hour and spend the rest of my day with Santiago and Brenen. I felt that my life was somewhat great.

Unfortunately, change was forced upon me. My family decided to move to Reno. I was forced to adapt to a new school, like a wild animal after all its resources are taken away. It was my first day of school at Robert Mc Queen High School. As I made my way up the steps, my anxiety grew; sweat dripped from my face. It was tough – I didn't fit in. I was constantly cutting school and taking the public bus elsewhere. I spent my day in the streets. "Hey you! Why aren't you in school?" an officer said. I stopped and stared at him with

a blank expression on my face. "I don't know, just because." Then he quickly replied, "Does your mom know that you're not at school?" "No," I whispered to myself. He sat me on the sidewalk and went to his car. He got back out and came my way, handcuffs in his hands. I was scared as he tightened them on my hands. "Am I going to jail?" I asked with a quivering voice. "No," he said. I was put in the back of the car as he took me back to school.



Administration at school forced me to call my mom and tell her what happen. I was terrified to go home, scared of getting in trouble. I didn't show up that night. It didn't change anything; I still acted up. I wasn't the person I desired to be.

I was sitting outside. It was the middle of the night. Gazing up at the stars. Little voices in my head started talking to me: "Reno is trouble." "You were doing better in Truckee." I was committed to moving back to Truckee, even though I knew it came with dramatic changes. I knew I needed more opportunities. At the age of 14, I took action and left home, and there was no turning back. It wasn't easy at first: no

money in my pocket, no roof over my head. I came across a small diner, Jax at the Tracks. It was easy money; now the challenge was having a set schedule to live with. I moved in with my grandparents with the condition that I would pay monthly rent.

Above all that, school was difficult. I was never a successful student and I was still getting in trouble and cutting some classes. Truckee High was not helping my situation. So, I moved to a smaller school with about 50 kids. Sierra High School – it was perfect. I found trusting adults who supported me with everything. Mr. and Mrs. Zapata encouraged me to try new things with my summer, like a Rotary Youth Leadership camp and Adventure Risk Challenge. Both were amazing experiences and life changing. They allowed me to develop leadership skills and also connect with kids who I never talked to. I grew little families with the other kids.

All in all, I feel that my life is in control. I met people who care for me and are willing to help me pursue my dreams, helping me get through everything and anything. I am finally an active student and engaged in my learning. I am making money, and not the easy way. I work hard, seven to twelve hour shifts. All these little things help me become more responsible. I would like to thank ARC, RYLA, Sierra High School, and myself for allowing me to realize how far I have come in the past three years.

# esmeralda barajas

## Blooming in All My Glory

I am the Wild California Rose  
Eagerly waiting to blossom once again into my full glory  
Utilizing my unpolluted nutrients.

We used to be a happy family  
We would all sit down at the table and eat;  
there was laughter and love.  
We'd go on adventures  
and we expressed our happiness by caring for one another  
With the family love we grew  
into a thick Wild California Rose bush.  
We were carefree.

Then the storm came in and all my leaves fell off.  
My brothers said they weren't going to get into trouble,  
but they got into trouble again anyway.  
They made the water toxic,  
poisoning me with disappointment  
Now, I can't trust them,  
they are reckless with their actions and with my love.  
They don't care how they pollute my mother; my nutrients.  
They don't care what happens to us  
My hopes were shattered.

I felt broken, betrayed, and devastated.  
My life turned from what I thought was a perfect life  
to a cruel nightmare.  
I became prickly, having nothing to show but thorns.  
I didn't like people making me feel pain  
I wanted to feel that love we had before.  
I didn't like the power they had over me.  
I became angry  
I poked and scarred anyone who tried to admire  
or get close to my delicate petals.

Now, if I talk to people  
then they have the power to make me sad,  
Therefore, I don't talk to people  
to take away their power  
to send me on an emotional rollercoaster ride.  
If people see that I'm wilting,  
they will stomp all over me because I'm vul-ner-able  
and not worth saving.  
I don't want to be perceived as weak,  
If I don't talk to people, they won't know I was ever weak

Normal for me now,  
is being cautious with who I let past my thorns.  
People have to prove themselves to me  
before I think they are trustworthy  
When people make me feel safe,  
I am willing to trust them.



When I trust people now,  
I feel happy because I actually let someone in  
Since I have started trusting people, good comes out of it  
such as good grades and positive influences.  
When I look at trusting in a new light,  
it's way brighter than the one I've been looking at.  
Now, since I have started to regrow my leaves and flowers,  
My plan is to keep looking at that bright light.  
And trust people.

Trusting people opens up new doors for me  
and makes it possible to grow stronger with my nutrients.  
With more opportunities,  
I know I'm going to get somewhere in life  
Making my mother proud.  
She can feel success because she gave me the nutrients  
and I used them in a positive way.  
I want to fully blossom in my life, as opposed to my brothers.

I will finish school, get a career and not mess up or end up in jail  
I will graduate from high school and go to college  
I will be in control of how I feel  
Not everyone is the same as my brothers,  
so new people deserve a chance.  
I'm going to learn to trust more people.  
Maybe one day I can forgive my brothers.  
In doing so, not only will I bloom,  
but I will become a thick luscious Wild Rose once again.

## It's Complicated

*"You wouldn't ask why the rose that grew from the concrete had damaged petals. On the contrary, we would all celebrate its tenacity. We would all love its will to reach the sun. Well, we are the rose - this is the concrete - and these are my damaged petals."*

—Tupac Shakur

My life is complicated. I have so many emotions and struggles and happy moments that I don't know how to take everything in. I want everything to slow down and I want to control the speed of change. Even though I've come through a rough patch, I can use it as strength and become a stronger person with the sadness and pain that life threw at me. I'm learning to be my own best friend instead of the enemy.

My cousins Bryan and Edgar and my aunt Carmen were my happy place. They helped me escape when I was in hard times. I would go to Sacramento and meet Bryan's mom and together we would go to San Francisco because Bryan was in the hospital as a baby and we would visit him. He would bring me so much joy because he was trying and fighting for his life, and he taught me to fight for my life and not give up, even though he was just a baby. Edgar was someone I could talk to, who was funny, and who didn't care about what people thought. He was a crazy person. Carmen made everybody happy just by being there. She would bring joy to a room through her laugh. She would dance happiness through the room. Having everyone alive was my happy place, making jokes, going to parties, having pointless conversations with them and knowing they were safe warmed my heart. Seeing them smile brought so much joy to my life. I never thought I would lose them, but I did.

Within two years, I faced the reality of losing all three of them. It felt like a nightmare I was never going to wake up from. I didn't want to believe anyone; they would sit me down and tell me over and over, but I just shut them up. I didn't want to believe them; I would drop down and cry endlessly, feeling like my world was falling apart.

I pushed people back and I didn't let anyone get close to me. I hated the fact that Edgar, Bryan, and Carmen were out of my life forever. I was in denial, telling myself they were on a long trip and they weren't going to be back for a really long time. I would lay down and send Edgar text messages and then cry because I knew he was not going to answer. I still tell myself that my aunt is on a long trip in Colorado, that Edgar is in Mexico, and that Bryan is in the hospital. When I go to Bryan's house, I still expect to hear the sounds of medical equipment and see the nurses coming in and out.

I fight against myself. I am hard on myself and constantly put myself down. I hate feeling emotions. When I cry, I tell myself, "Only babies cry" and "Stop being such a wimp." When I'm sad, I tell myself to get angry instead of being sad, because when you're angry you have more power and more strength so people will be scared of you and won't get close to you. I've gotten hurt so much that my brain is rewired to scope out the worst in everybody. I tell myself that I'm not good enough and everybody's better than me and I can't do stuff as good as other people. I stop myself from reaching my full potential.

My mom has been the most important person in helping me through life, and has proven to me that even if there's a big bump in the road we can get through it together. No matter how big the bump is, she is not going to leave me. I am trying to learn there isn't a rulebook for grief and to be patient with myself and not judge my grief. I can let myself cry and

experience these losses powerfully. As I come to terms with them, I have gotten better at showing my emotions instead of pretending they aren't there. I have talked to people about my problems and have learned that crying isn't a bad thing, but that it helps to let emotions out.

I want to feel more at peace and be happy when I think about Bryan, Edgar, and Carmen. I want to make Carmen proud by doing something with my life, not going to jail and ending up like the rest of my family. I want to celebrate their lives by doing things they never got to do, such as finishing school and visiting places they didn't. Like Bryan, I should be fighting for myself, not against myself. I want to appreciate my life and the people who surround me by being positive and not taking stuff for granted. Even though I get angry at my family, eventually I want to forgive them, because if you don't they'll either leave without a goodbye or, even worse, you'll know they're alive and not in your life. I want things to go back the way they were, except I wouldn't give up the relationship I have with my mom. I know I have been through a lot and I still have a lot to learn.



# jesus nevarez

## The Calm After the Storm

I am a Jeffrey pine  
I am strong, different, free  
Yet trapped in the moment  
I didn't choose the struggle  
The struggle chose me  
My father didn't leave; he was taken  
Not only from me  
But from the rest of my family too  
I was left standing alone  
With my mother and my sister  
High on Donner Summit  
In a harsh and never-ending winter storm

I was frozen  
My family struggled heavily financially  
But my mother worked hard  
Like the Jeffrey pine  
Resilient enough  
To grow strong and prosperous  
In poor soil and dry conditions  
Meanwhile all I was able to do  
Was cling to my roots  
And try desperately to stay warm

I became selfless  
I started working  
When the opportunity came  
I wanted to be able to provide for myself  
So my mother could rest  
Not just to make money  
But to help my mother in her struggles  
My branches began to grow stronger and

Further out of the storm

I am stress-tolerant  
The stress of my mother is still in effect  
I know she worries for me,  
My sister, and the welfare of others  
I worry that if I don't work more,  
Her stress will continue  
Helping is hard  
I want to branch out and do more  
But I'm tied down by the need to help  
Although I love to care for them  
It can still be stressful having to worry  
I find listening to the music of the wind  
Helps me calm myself and make it through the storm

Now I am optimistic  
My open-mindedness  
Allows me to step out of my comfort zone  
And try new things  
But thinking of how I have to help my mother  
Sometimes sets me back  
Half of the time I get to do  
Something new or explore,  
Try new things and expand my knowledge  
The other half I am at home on the mountainside  
Taking care of my responsibilities,  
Growing taller, and strengthening my roots

The storm has not disappeared, but is now  
Just a flurry in my life, circling my branches  
And giving me space to grow.



## Good Vibes



On top of Donner Summit, my home resides in a long blue building in a two bedroom apartment. I was satisfied with my life. I would get up in the morning and get ready for school. I rode the bus to school, ate some breakfast from the cafeteria, went to all my classes I had that day, then went home. It got a little too repetitive for me though, and it wasn't the most exciting life to live. I wanted to try something new, something different from anything I had done before.

My teacher Mrs. Kuttle told me about ARC, a leadership program for high school students, and she told me how it could help me become a leader and earn five high school credits. So I agreed and applied for ARC because of the opportunities for the adventures it offered such as the ropes course and backpacking. Sean, ARC's coordinator, came to my school, talked to me, made sure I understood, and gave me the application so that I could apply to come on this amazing experience.

When I went to orientation for ARC, I realized this journey would be challenging because of just how long and hard the four mile hike to Smith Lake was. I had never done anything like it before. I struggled with the hike, but the people there supported me and kept my mind off just how tired I truly was. The random conversations I had along the way with my two friends Matt and Guiliano helped keep my mind off the physical struggle, stay positive, and keep going. I was excited; all the people I met had kind and positive attitudes. This is the motivation that made me want to go to ARC and make the most out of every experience I had – even the day it hailed on us and we were wet and cold, with the goal of getting to a campsite a mile and a half below the ridge of Tinker's Knob.

Once I arrived at the 24 day ARC summer program, I faced both the mental and physical challenges that this course had to offer, like dealing with the emotions of not being with

my family and reflecting on my life, as well as the extremely steep, off-trail hike to Needle Lake. Staying positive was hard because I usually complain, but I was able to find positivity even when the mosquitoes were swarming and I was freezing and soaked. I loved to see the positive and understanding mind sets of Mel, Alé, and Sean because they always brought the group together so we could work at our best. This helped me to build myself up. I had to tell myself to power through and accomplish whatever goals I had, because at times when I was exhausted from hiking or down from being homesick, I needed that motivation from myself and my team.

I hope when I return home I can spread the positive energy I've found in myself to help my family and others in my community, such as my friends. I want to let them know I am stable myself and can support them to become stronger individuals, so we can build ourselves up together and hold onto what we need in life.

# mariana mosqueda-gonzalez

## Spreading My Wings

I am a Western Tanager  
A vibrant yellow and red bird  
A bird who spends most of its time quiet  
And chases away intruders

I'm always waiting patiently to be fed with opportunities.  
I'm always waiting for things to be brought to me or  
Waiting to be told by others what's best for me.  
I always make decisions in hopes that they will benefit others  
More than myself.

Like a Western Tanager  
I live in such a beautiful and open place  
But stay hidden in the canopy

I was ripped from my home in Mexico  
When I was only five years old.  
Everything was so different.  
I struggled communicating



I was a bird singing a very different song  
Adjusting myself to these new and strange surroundings  
was also hard  
Like a bird who is captured  
And put in a zoo cage for everyone to look at

I am hard to talk to and push people away,  
Like the bright colors in animals signal  
that they're dangerously poisonous.  
I have grown apart from certain people in my life  
who cared about me.

I was so insecure that they wouldn't like me  
because of who I really am,  
A scared and awkward person  
Who is afraid of rejection and pain  
But hides it all behind a smile  
So I slowly departed from them physically  
And emotionally.

What people don't know is that  
My colors are not a sign that I'm poisonous  
My bright red and yellow colors also represent comforting fire.  
A fire that burns bright if you talk to it,  
Trust it,  
And spend enough time with it  
You will be able to see my flames grow and get warmer

I want to leave my nest and put aside my big and small fears.  
I want to soar through rapid winds  
full of new possibilities and opportunities.  
I'm going to make my own choices  
and grasp every opportunity that's available.  
Like a Western Tanager, I will migrate at night  
In order to recreate myself  
So when daytime comes I will be a whole new person.

I want to graduate high school as a valedictorian  
I want to be able to attend the college of my choice  
And I want to be able to have a career doing what I love  
I will no longer make choices that benefit others  
while putting myself last  
I want to step out of my comfort zone.  
I will no longer be a silent bird,  
I will embrace my bright colors and  
I will sing at the top of my lungs.



## The Pieces of My Puzzle

I remember holding my mom's hand very tightly. The kids were lining up against the green wire fence when the teacher came up. My mom walked me over to the line and I didn't want to go. "Andale" or "go ahead" she said but I was hesitant and hid behind her. All of the kids were talking and laughing around me but I did not understand what they said. Finally the teacher came up to me, and luckily she spoke Spanish. She asked me what my name was and when I told her, she introduced herself as Mrs. Munio. She was a tall and large lady with short blond hair and blue gray eyes. My mom gave me a little push to go and I didn't want to, so I started crying. Mrs. Munio took me by the hand and we walked together to her classroom. Moving to a whole new country was hard for me but it molded me into a new person and a much prepared one, too. I learned a new language and a new culture as well. Even though I struggled along the way, I managed to learn new skills and a new way of living.

Growing up in a small town that was non-existent on the map in the state of Guanajuato, Mexico, I was very comfortable. Even though my dad spent only half the year with us and the other half working in another country, I felt sad but happy and safe as well. We had our own house, our own backyard to play in, and a loving family everywhere I went. Although we had a five-room house, my mom and my siblings and I only slept in one room with two beds. Walking to my cousin's house across the street became a routine of every day. Her mom and grandparents would make us play "who can eat their food the quickest" in order for us to finish all of our food. I always lost. In the mornings, I walked with my friends and their parents to my kindergarten "Moises Sainz Garza" and I would show all of my friends what my dad brought me from where he lived. Our neighbors were like family and always watched out for me and my family. My grandma owned a store and I eventually developed a sweet tooth, a consequence of all the free candy I got. Every weekend we would drive our red-interior Oldsmobile ten minutes through a dirt road full of rocks and bumps to my mom's family house and we would spend the whole day there. I played with all my cousins and we would taunt our grandpa. Everything was great and I felt like my life puzzle was complete until I heard we were moving to be with my dad in the United States.

At the age of four, I was confused. Where would we go? Wasn't my whole world there in my town? My mom told me we would be getting on an airplane and going up until we got there. Eventually, I learned that going up meant we would go north, and not to a land that was over our heads. My dad told me that where we were going "nieve" or "snow" would fall from the sky but I interpreted "nieve" as ice cream and I always told him I would eat it all. He would always laugh, but I was sure it was going to be a piece of cake to do it. My dad had also told me that we would only stay in the U.S. for two years, just enough for me and my siblings to be able to learn English. I still remember my last day at my kindergarten in Mexico. The teacher informed my classmates that I would no longer be going to school there because I would be moving to the U.S. Then, she put me in the front of the classroom and told everyone to form a line. One by one, they came up to hug me. I saw their faces; they were a mixture of sad faces, crying faces, and blank ones.

January 21st, 2001, was the day of my departure from home. I felt like my puzzle had been wiped out in order for me to start all over again. We got in my dad's white Toyota and drove for about two and a half days. Everything went by in a daze and then we arrived at my aunt's house in Los Angeles, California. Instantly I loved it there. At the time, I could barely get my head to reach over the window, just enough to see the outside of her house. As I was drawing smiley faces out of my breath on the glass I asked my aunt, "Does it snow here?" She chuckled and said no because it was too hot. After spending a night there we began to drive to what would be our home for the next eleven years. As we arrived, the trees became denser and the skies darker. We were about to turn on Brooke Street in a town called Kings Beach when I first saw the piles of white snow on the ground. Then, we came to a stop in front of a green house. We met my uncle and his kids. He had one son, a daughter, and a pair of twins. We would be occupying their second floor. We lived in a little house with just one big room and a bathroom. I guess I was already used to sleeping with everyone in one space so I became used to it very quickly.

Time in the United States went by rapidly, two years passed and we were still living here. My first friends were Estrella and Christian, who talked to me as soon as Mrs. Munio walked me to her classroom on that first day of school. I became closer to my cousin Ana, and her son, Gilbert, who was like my big little brother. Throughout everything, my family was right there next to me to support me and provide me with everything I needed. I sometimes did cry on the first days of school



because I didn't understand what everyone was doing or because my sister would rather hang out with her friends instead of me. I had to go to summer school in the summer before first grade because my English and test scores were really bad. Trips back and forth from the U.S. to Mexico became a tradition every year during Christmas time, so

I wasn't in one place the whole entire year. Along the way, I picked up a little piece of knowledge every day, and they soon accumulated to build an improved version of myself, an improved puzzle. I soon began speaking English and doing well in math because of all of the teachers in my life who took the extra time to teach and re-teach me new things.

Now I have progressed past that five-year old scared girl, and I keep building myself up. I thought I would never be good in school, but I always enjoyed learning new things. Now, I'm taking AP English classes, and I'm doing well in school. I learned to adjust to a new place in order to be able to get along and make my parents proud. I have new friends who have become more like family and I never take my real family for granted. In the process of going back and forth from Mexico and the U.S., I have learned to love both of my homes and the people that surround me. I'm fortunate that I can have two places that feel like home. Snow is not my favorite anymore, and I learned that it is impossible to eat all of it. I love the summer and the community in Tahoe and in Mexico. My life experience opened up a whole new world for me. I now want to discover new homes and new places so I can keep picking up pieces for my puzzle and paint new art on my canvas of life.

# max tewksbury

## A Dam River

I am a dammed river  
Becoming what they want me to be  
A lake  
A lake that is useful for many things

The dam is holding back my dreams of  
Running free and becoming a reservoir  
And forcing me to flow where they want me to

I am a river  
That has dreams to finish school  
As a free flowing river  
I want to go to college for photography  
I want to travel and take professional photos  
In England, Russia and Eastern Europe  
Then I would live and work in Canada when I get citizenship

When my parents separated  
My dad became the rocks along the bank supporting me  
But my mom still wanted me to be successful  
So she kept her dam  
She wants to choose my college  
She wants to choose my job  
She wants to choose my friends  
She wants,  
She wants,  
She wants...

The dam is containing me  
Containing me for college and financial success  
And the rocks help me choose my path  
I want to be a free river  
But I need to go through the dam  
I want to be my own river  
A free river

I am now angry water  
Angry that I couldn't break the dam  
Even though I tried to break it  
With a big storm



A storm that raged with anger  
Just so I could feel free  
Free from my school  
Because I live in the moment  
And not in the future

My dad is now starting a new family  
A kid and a wife  
This makes me happy  
Because I've always wanted a brother  
And my dad is happy so that makes me happy  
My mom tries so hard to help me  
And push me in the right direction  
But I want her to listen to what I want  
I am a free river.

## Moving Changed My Life

I was born and raised in Vermont until I was about 11. We moved to Truckee because we wanted to live in a ski town. My family was so happy in Vermont. My dad was a bartender and worked at a ski shop. I would help him at the ski shop sometimes, doing things such as tuning skis. My mom owned her own daycare and after school we would go there and help her with the kids. Our house was amazing. We had chickens, a garden, and cats. Then we had to leave everything behind. Moving was harder than we wanted it to be; in fact, it changed my whole life.

We moved because we were all really into skiing and we love the ski resorts in Truckee, California. It was all of our decision to move to Truckee. But it was hard to leave close friends and family. When we moved, my dad drove a truck two weeks earlier with all of our furniture and personal stuff. We rented out our house and began our journey. We wanted to take our time getting from Vermont all the way to California, so we drove our car up through ten states and it took us two weeks. Moving to Truckee was a big change.

Then my life changed even more. My parents were always arguing with each other. They would argue about money, school, work, etc. We knew that they were arguing a lot, but we didn't know that they were separating. They sat us down in my sister's room and told us that they weren't happy together

anymore. They got divorced. My dad moved out that day and lived in his uncle's house for a while. He wasn't happy anymore. He was always working or trying to find jobs. He always tried to make me happy, but I knew deep down he wasn't happy.

It was so hard to overcome the divorce. I was always depressed inside, but I never showed it. I could never get away from the pain and fear that I felt. It was so hard to keep it in and not show the anger that I had. People would always ask me, "How do you like your parents being divorced?" I would always say, "I'm fine with it," but I wasn't. I started smoking weed to get away from my emotions that would sometime hold me back. When I thought about how I didn't have a perfect family, with a perfect house, and a perfect relationship like my friends have, I would get frustrated and emotionally angry. I had fears that people would treat me differently because I had two

homes. I talked a lot about the divorce with my sister but it didn't solve any problems. My sister didn't mind the divorce. I haven't talked to anyone about how I really feel about the divorce. I thought there was no one who would understand.



Then I went to ARC and they all listened to what I was feeling and helped me to realize that I love my family in different ways. Being in ARC, I have thought a lot about my parents and how my life will never be the same. My dad now has a really nice fiancée, and she is about to have a kid. This makes me so happy because I always wanted another sibling and

I love that my dad is now happy. My mom is also getting married, and she is so happy so that makes me happy. I am still figuring out how to be happy myself and I will try my hardest.

# pedro vargas

## An Evolving Wolf

I am a small wolf in my pack  
A runt in the family,  
Always behind the line in our adventures  
Always the one who is afraid of making mistakes

Self-confidence was my obstacle  
I was shy around people  
I was the lone wolf in my pack  
I wanted to be part of the pack,  
But I was too uncomfortable  
Because my body felt tight  
As if my fur coat was too small  
I was heavy and thought nobody wanted to talk to me  
Because I was the fat kid

My mom always told me that if you put your mind to it  
You can overcome anything  
I began exercising, telling myself  
I can do this  
I can be the strong, powerful wolf that I know I can be.

My Alpha dad helped me lose weight  
He told me to keep on running  
He said "Echele ganas, Gordo"  
"Give it your all"

The more I ran, the more stress I released  
The more I ran, the better I felt.  
I started lifting weights.  
With every pound on the barbell,  
I gained confidence to reach my goals  
Every lift gave me power and motivation to reach my goals.  
Everyone has their dream body,  
My dream body was fit and sculpted.

Every mile gave me confidence to achieve my goal  
Every push up gave me more strength to never give up  
Just as a wolf works to make themselves stronger,  
I am a wolf who's getting stronger every moment.

Losing weight helped me be more positive to myself  
Everyone started to look at me differently  
They gave me respect  
Joining the pack made me happy

Every opportunity I have gotten  
Every door that I open  
Every goal I have set for myself  
Every obstacle I overcame to achieve my goals  
I have been slowly hunting my prey, my goals and dreams  
But I never hunted my prey alone  
I really appreciate my parents who supported and encouraged me

My fur coat fits me now  
It's the right clothes that I always wanted to wear  
The clothes that I always imagined myself wearing  
I'm no longer shy and scared to be the first one for everything  
No more because  
I am a Wolf  
A strong Wolf

Starting my next journey will be hard  
I want to be the Alpha leader for the pack  
Graduate high school early and go to college  
My parents will see me as a first in my family

I know one day I will evolve into an Alpha leader  
I won't be afraid to make mistakes and learn from them  
I won't hesitate to follow my gut feelings  
All of the struggles that happened in the past  
Will make me a great, majestic, independent Alpha leader.



## Path, Journey, Adventure

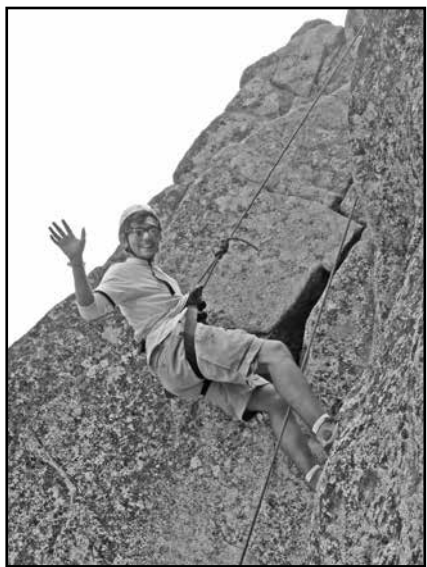
My journey started my eighth grade year. It was the year to apply to a high school of our choice. I was excited; I wanted to go to high school at West Campus. It was the school that I dreamt of going to. I saw myself being on the soccer team, joining clubs, meeting new people, being there for four years and graduating with my friends. The big day came; it was the moment of truth. I opened my application, and unfortunately I didn't get accepted. My dream shattered. I was rejected. Hearing the news that all my close friends got accepted, I felt deep in the blues.

There was one person who changed my whole life and that person was my principal, Maestro De Leon. He encouraged me to apply to MET High School. So

I went to shadow day at MET and the first thing that popped in my head was, "It's too small and it doesn't feel like a high school." Maestro told me, "Try it; I know this will be the right school for you." I accepted.

The first day for me was exciting. I felt astonished hearing the principal give an inspiring speech to start off the school year and take the whole entire school to walk around the park. It was amazing. I would never have thought it was going to be this great; I thought it would have been boring, sitting in a quiet class

room. The first couple of days were so fun because my advisory teacher took the entire class to a small store and then we went to the park. He took us to a restaurant to eat a delicious breakfast and to Old Sacramento. The whole entire school was unique, especially my teachers. Pat, my advisory teacher, lets



us listen to music while working on our assignments, and sometimes he plays instruments during class and at times he can be flexible. David is another teacher; he taught me science, but what was amazing was he took me and a group of students on a camping trip. It was breathtaking, seeing the beautiful views of the mountains

and lakes. My classes are small, and it is very fun learning while talking to my peers.

My whole school year at the MET was phenomenal. The people I met there are now my greatest friends with a strong bond that I know I will keep for the rest of my life. We have had so many adventures that I will never forget. The MET gave me new incredible opportunities such as being in the poly club, learning dances from different cultures. Being in the yearbook club, I learned the process of making the yearbook. I was also in

the music club and learned how to play the guitar. I was a chaperon for the students of David Lobon to go to Sly Park for a week, and while I was there, I met an amazing person named Steve who shared with me his amazing life stories. The Makers club gave us the tools to turn our invention into reality. We went to San Mateo to be part of the Makers Fair, showing our inventions and seeing other amazing inventions that I would never have imagined. Also being in the HCD class and passing with an A gave me the chance to be enrolled in a college course at the Sacramento City College campus.

Looking back and reflecting, my whole school year at the MET made me realize that, if one door closes, another door opens for you. I would never have thought all of these great opportunities would open up to me. I'm glad that I followed the advice of my principal. If it wasn't for him pushing me to go to the MET, I might not have gotten the chance to come to ARC. ARC is a phenomenal program. I connected with people, and each of us really trusts, cares and provides a lot of comfort for one another; we're truly a big strong, unique family. With some of them, I made a strong bond, and I know we will keep in contact for the years to come. The entire staff team is incredible. They are always supportive, having our backs and teaching us the beauty of nature. MET and ARC have both helped me gain a new perspective on life – to cherish nature, be more social, get out of my comfort zone and be more confident in myself.

# zhanna perry

## Unstoppable Wind

I am a Ukrainian mink,  
I love to play,  
Travel and explore,  
Create new drawings  
Be inspired by nature,  
And create music.

I am a territorial animal,  
Protecting my own space.  
I separate myself from others  
When I feel I might get attached  
And experience a loss afterwards.

My territory used to stretch  
Along the Dnepr river,  
That divides Ukraine  
Into two connected islands.  
Separated but friendly neighbors  
Until, one unfortunate day  
When my river was attacked  
By a storm sent by the wheel of history.

We felt displaced  
And unprotected from the storm  
That was polluting our waters  
Jealous that we were such good swimmers,  
The river current  
Couldn't over power us;  
Although this time it did,  
Our souls were broken  
And the storm left scars on each of us.

Most of us who were lead  
By the alpha of our pack  
Had to make a territorial movement,  
To a new place near Donner Lake  
Which doesn't feel like Home to me.

Minks can leave their home  
For a while,  
Not forever.  
I can be so far away from home  
Some might think that I'm lost  
But minks are smart,  
I remember every tree,  
Every hill and every creature  
I have met on my trip.  
Because of that  
I can find my way back home.



Now at new place  
I spend more time  
Investigating my new territory.  
Maybe some day  
I will find that river in the USA  
Which could feel like Home.  
But before that day comes  
I will encounter a lot of dams  
That might block my way to success.

I will meet a lot of new people  
That will try  
To be a part of my pack  
But before that happens  
I will test them  
So I can see  
Who is a friend,  
And who is an enemy.  
Because out there  
There are so many people  
Who hunt for my fur.  
But, it's hard to stop  
Or trick the mink;  
Because, we guard our inner world.  
We think like a wild  
Unstoppable wind.

We always find a way out  
No matter how bad  
A situation can be.  
And that's who I am.  
I am a mink.

## New Chapter

Seeing death and feeling unprotected. Hopeless and lost. For a teenager, for anyone, experiencing this trauma in their own country is a struggle that can push them over the edge. For a developing teenager, who lived with a smile and no worries for the future, I was challenged, just as my Jewish ancestors were during the Holocaust. I feel like I was challenged by life and death. I survived, and that is my first and biggest accomplishment. The following accomplishments were meant to be the beginning of my new life chapter. I am still getting used to the place that one day may become my home.

My home, sweet home. I lived and still feel like all my heart is in Ukraine, Kiev – my home. It is a country that is filled with love, smiles, and support - respect. Even though Ukraine counts as a third-world country, I believe that there is no place like Ukraine, where people all work together, save history and pass traditions to new generations. My country is not surrounded with technologies and that makes us a live nation, where people always interact and we are always in action. Every time I would go outside, I burst with energy from the clean air and smells of plants the wind carried with it.

Everything changed very fast; it felt like there was no order to what was happening. Ukraine turned from a peaceful, lovely country into a country in war mode; everyone transformed because war is not something you can escape - war would happen sooner or later anyway. I saw people dying, and our country falling down, literally: houses on fire, or bombed from inside, or overtaken by others. My town became an ugly mess that was very hard to take control of. That was the day when my parents decided that it was time to move... to a new place, safe, protected, and full of opportunities, with peace. To a country that is a first world country – the United States of America.

I was getting ready for departure, all alone, to reunite with my parents who were waiting for me in a first-world country. Packing clothes, getting all my documents ready, signing out of my school and other programs that I was planning to attend. But I never got together with my feelings. I also forgot to say a REAL goodbye to people I LOVE, my family that stayed behind, and my best friend who still waits for me to call her back. When I was sitting on the plane and it started moving, all the emotions that I didn't realize I felt covered me like a waterfall. I was crying, and at some point I wanted to stop the plane, but... it was already too late.

When I opened my eyes, I was already in the sky, looking at my city, my country that was almost destroyed, yet so beautiful you could see and feel the power of Ukraine. The power of history and memories it carries in centuries in itself. I believe that my country will stand to the end, and ending will come soon. Ukraine, all the people who love Ukraine will overthrow any obstacle they meet.

I was in the air and I felt attacked from inside, with my memories that I wish I could forget. But there was one that will always stay with me and keep me warm. My grandma and grandpa, aunt, and Lera - best friend. I will never forget the voices of my grandma and grandpa, how they cooked, smiled, supported and never gave up on me. They believed, and still do, that I will get the best of my life. My grandma's favorite phrase that I still hear is: "After struggle, comes success."

Sitting there in a plane that carried me to a country that I had visited a couple of times but never pictured as home made me feel sick. I felt like a white bunny surrounded by wolves. I was cold and hot; I was panicking. When a woman asked me: "Are you okay, darling?" I answered, "I have no answer to that... sorry if I made you worry." That was the only conversation I had on that plane.

After ten hours I felt much better, better because I felt like I made the right choice and I will be supported by my family. Only after that I realized how much I missed my momma, my pa, sister and brothers, especially the smallest one, who all were waiting for me at our "New Home." That was when I felt like it would take me forever to get to the USA. I was ready. I was ready to start a new chapter in my life.

It was August 27th when I finally saw my family. I felt happy and sad. Sad because in four months I missed a lot of what they were doing, growing and how they were changing. I wished I was there with them at some points, but I don't regret all that time that I spent in Ukraine. I felt happy – because finally I'm on the ground, with my fam-

ily that I missed so much, and now I can change together with them. I had a hard time imagining how it would be in America.

When it was the first day of my school, I felt like going nowhere. I was scared. What if no one will accept me and I will be a freak in some way? I got out of my pa's car full of hopes, positivity which my pa carried to me, and fears that I still had in my head. I did a step, two, three ... then I turned around, smiled to my pa, waving, and I tried my best to show him, which was not true, "I'm good, you can go." He left, and that's when I was all alone, yet surrounded by all people I didn't know and most of whom I still don't know. But it turned out not as scary as I imagined it. I found friends in about 15 minutes after entering Truckee High School, and they helped me a lot throughout the year!



Halfway through the school year, I met Sean – a person who showed me a program that would change my life. The ARC program made me feel safe to "open my wings" and try myself out: What are my limits and what is my "best"? This program also made me think a lot and overcome many struggles. The biggest struggle that I faced in the USA and at ARC are language struggles.

When I speak, it works like this: I think in my native language. I translate the thoughts to English. I speak. And in backwards order when someone speaks to me. Because of language, I still feel like I'm tied down to the ground, a bird that still tries every day to open its wings and someday to fly.

Because of the Adventure Risk Challenge program, I know that there are people to whom I can reach out in order to get my education to flow in the right way and to improve my English skills which will open more doors with opportunities for my future. I feel like ARC is something I needed to truly start my new chapter in life. The feeling that I was ready, which I experienced on the plane, was just a final period, and ARC gave me the inspiration to start my first sentence of a new chapter, and now I can start writing. Someday this chapter will be a main part of my book – "Book of My Life". Thank you, ARC! I was lucky that it was my destiny to be part of this program.



**scenes from  
tahoe 2015**









# yosemite

**BASECAMP LOCATION:**

Yosemite Field Station, Wawona, CA

**PROGRAM LENGTH: 40 days**

**TEAM NAME: The Redemption Squad**

**INSTRUCTORS**

Anna Santoleri

Jake Blessing

Jesus Alejandro

Michael Dominguez



# alexis angulo

## The Determination of My Roots

I am the roots for your soil.  
The support for your stand and your branches  
You step on me everyday  
While I provide food and shelter

A lot of people live around me  
I am just here by their side  
Listening to and caring for their everyday life.  
People feel lonely in this world  
Their roots are submerged  
Not seeing the brightness of everyday  
Not allowing their strengths to strive.

I am willing to allow people to dig me up  
But no one seems to dig enough to uncover my secrets  
I'll let them extract my rich elements  
My dreams, my stories, my sensations  
But all they care about,  
Is extracting my rich elements for the better of themselves  
I was blown to this shelf by the actions of others  
By their inhumanity and their unawareness.  
I scattered through the wood to make myself more visible.  
To be considered thoroughly, just like any other element.

I have gone through so many things  
If I tell you, you won't be able to think.  
But my trees have showed me  
That being out in the open makes the trees feel better.  
They've encouraged me to show you my roots  
The side that isn't really smooth.  
I was created to be a witness of existence,  
Looking from below as the roots that try to withstand your blows.  
I have adventured through this world.  
I remember when México used to be my home.  
I have traveled many miles to get to where I am  
Thinking to myself that there is a happier land.  
But there are still things that I don't quite understand  
Such as equality and equal rights,  
Aren't we all humans, don't we all deserve the fight.  
The fight to be happier  
The fight to withstand  
The fight to search for a better future  
The fight for a dream,  
A dream that we've committed ourselves to achieve.  
Just like my roots are committed to see the bright sky.

It was hard to get to where I am  
I feared this enormous gate, across which I now stand.  
Laying down underneath a bed of a trucker  
Is the way I first attempted  
I was just six, not knowing what I was doing,  
My curiosity led to some fury in me,  
I decided to peek out and let my roots expand

This action led to the capture of not only myself  
But my family as well.  
I felt unsure of myself,  
Whether it was me, or it was meant to be.

There was no hope, never before had I stood inside a jail  
A little bit worse, inside a place where it looked like a cage.  
There was no room nor space for my roots to try to dig themselves  
out and see the bright sky.  
A place that looked like the home of my pet at the vet.

My family's fingerprints were taken  
To ensure, their records are permanent  
To mark them for life, just because they tried to find a better future.  
Three times the same thing occurred,  
We really didn't understand how this world became obscure.  
At the fourth time, our roots saw some light.  
We looked back at the fear that once stood in front of us.  
The barbed wire, the fences  
But we still remained defensive.  
We wanted to accomplish our goal.

I moved in search for a better future  
Thanks to that I have encountered many great friends  
Without them I don't think I'll ever be the same.  
I thank my great friend sun  
For shining upon me every day,  
For letting me know that brightness is the way.

That should be a goal set by everyone  
Enhancing the environment where we live  
Encouraging others to give their best,  
Offer support, breathing space and soil  
So they can grow being themselves  
Not caring if others are around viewing their actions.  
There is no fear and nothing to neglect.

I want to wake up when times are better  
When judgment day has occurred  
And equality isn't absurd.  
We hurt others without noticing  
We go on with our lives taking no note  
Of the damage that we could've controlled.  
Let your roots grow, tell me about it because I do know.

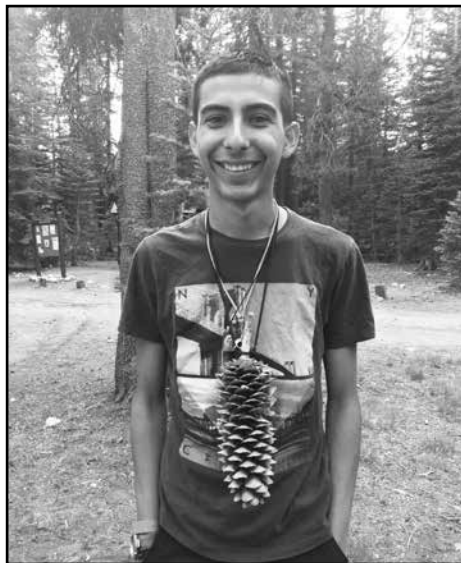


## Who Are We?

What is home? According to the dictionary, home is one's residence, plain and simple. Yet, society has created a connotation for the word "home" stating that it is a place where we can feel loved and be happy. Is this really the case? We all live at home; regardless, many are still unhappy. Problems reveal their presence and angry discussions arise. I will not blame society for granting home such a connotation because I have also believed in it. At age 14, I saw the dark side of home. I realized the connotation for home was a misunderstanding. People seemed like robots, walking around with no feelings. At home, I was just another living creature that didn't understand its purpose in life. What was my goal? What was I sent to do? As I grew older, I started to feel lonelier. I thought all hope was gone. I felt like a bee trying to pollinate thousands of flowers by myself, trying to implant the bright side in humans: the loving, caring and compassionate. I felt like I was unable to change the way people acted and thought, because I was by myself. I needed to change things for myself. I wanted to escape the metal chains of depression. I wanted to find a friend. I needed to know that there was someone willing to listen to me and be by my side whenever I needed them. I had gone through many hardships by myself. I had friends that cared about neither my presence nor my absence. I had no one to tell my problems to, to motivate and encourage me. I was by myself and felt like I was stranded on an island. I had hit a wall of confusion and uncertainty. All I saw was failure in me; I was not aware that I had obtained some skills while I was trying to become someone better. I had learned how to speak in public, how to make friends and how to face challenges. I decided that it was time for a change. I was tired of being depressed because I was alone and my purpose was unknown to me. I became involved in school and sought leadership positions. I attended many leadership conferences, club meetings and camps in search for a person that was willing to be my friend. I came to Adventure Risk Challenge in part to get away from society and in part to meet new people and find this friend who I've been in search for for a long time.

At ARC, I began to learn about myself from other people's descriptions of me. During Expedition 3, Sarah approached me and told me that I was a great public speaker. It was hard for me to believe that she was correct. I had previously participated in many public speaking contests and not once did I achieve my goal of obtaining first place. I used to tell myself that I should stop competing. I thought that I was not good at it. Yet, I kept trying. I put myself down all the

time because I wanted to develop a talent but was unable to master it. When Sarah mentioned that she was impressed with my public speaking skills, I did not believe her. It was hard for me to. To prove her thought, Sarah mentioned my first poetry reading during the open house in Wawona. I didn't understand how such an event made her think that I was a good public speaker. I looked back to the event only to see imperfection, mistakes, uncertainty and shame. The thought that someone appreciated something about me made me feel better. It made me feel like I had found a friend, an actual friend.



Getting to know the other ARC students' stories and life lessons inspired me to trust them and believe that they will be there for me. It was hard to open up. I didn't know if I wanted to express my feelings and my life stories. Did I want to inform the ARC family of my experiences? I didn't know what to do or who to look to for help. As my feelings accumulated inside me in a box, I needed to express how I felt to someone. I looked up to one of my instructors, Anna Santoleri. I didn't know how to tell her how I felt. I decided to express my feelings in the form of a written letter. On the bottom of this letter I wrote, "Discard after reading and do not ask questions." It made me feel somewhat better, but I still felt uncertain of what I was feeling. Later in the course, it was time for a checkup. Fortunately Anna was the instructor with whom I had to speak. During the checkup, we spoke about how I felt and what I could do to make myself feel better. She encouraged me to open up slowly to the group. She also mentioned that a great leader must be vulnerable to its group. This checkup encouraged me to seek for ways to

express my feelings. When it was my turn to be leader of the day, I decided to incorporate a new component to our ABC News, our daily meetings. With this new component, ARC students were given the opportunity to express their feelings or thoughts to the group. I took advantage of this opportunity and decided to open up. For the first time, I told ARC many of my stories, something I had hardly done before. I recited personal poems I had created before coming to ARC, I recounted my experience of being kicked out of college and, in addition, I explained the hardships of changing countries at an early age. "Who are we?" is the question I asked in a funny voice to my ARC family after we had done something that was new to us during expedition 4. "Who am I?" I secretly asked myself after thinking about this question deeply. I can almost hear the voices of the Redemption Squad telling me, "You are the person who opened up to us. You are the person who made us your friend; you wanted us to be your friend. You allowed us to become your family."

ARC has granted me the opportunity to meet incredible people. Most importantly, ARC has allowed me to create long-lasting relationships. I have finally found the friends I have been in search for in a long time. I have finally found a friend that is willing to listen, understand, and help me out with any issue: thank you Anna, thank you Sarah, thank you Redemption Squad for your care and your compassion. I now understand that vulnerability is essential. Everyone, even the hardest cookie, has found its soft side in this group. I now understand that my strengths are someone else's weaknesses. I went from putting myself down and feeling lonely to acknowledging my strengths while in search for a friend. I have found that public speaking, running and socializing are my talents although there is much space for improvement.

Upon my return home, I will continue to enhance and acknowledge my talents. Many friends back home might ask what changed in me, how I became more adventurous, risk-taking, challenge-seeking, determined, serving, compassionate and integrous. There is only one answer to all of their questions: Adventure Risk Challenge. We have enhanced our understanding of each and every one of these words, all of which are essential to the program. The first three are stated in the name, Adventure Risk Challenge, the last four words (determination, service, compassion, and integrity) are the core values of ARC that are commonly practiced throughout any activity. We have mastered the meaning of these words and have redeemed ourselves from many fears. "Who are we?"

# alondra sevallos

## The Truth

I am a mountain  
Enjoying everything in my path  
A path with a beautiful sunset and birds chirping  
Followed by a fresh breeze and feeling free like the wind  
But like in life everything ends  
Once the sun goes down and it's completely dark  
Everything you've been trying to forget and ignore  
Comes back in a flash  
You're alone and depressed

My whole life is a volcano  
I'm trying not to erupt as my emotions bubble up inside me  
All the ups and downs and around can become my biggest obstacle  
I am not a shy person, I say what I'm feeling  
But what do I say to my mother  
The one and only person I've ever trusted  
When she tells me my dad, my REAL dad  
Is in Mexico with no idea that I exist

I felt my world crumbling down in a rush  
It was a confusing moment  
After a while I felt unwanted and vulnerable  
I felt like my dad wouldn't love me  
Since he didn't even know about me  
And I didn't trust anyone to explain my feelings  
Feelings that are hard to explain but easy to show

The pain I felt was unbearable  
I was shocked and disappointed  
What bothered me wasn't that I didn't live with my real dad  
Because I knew that

What bothered me was that I never knew  
I never knew that my REAL dad was in Mexico  
In Jail - paying a sentence that only god knows  
Maybe he wonders if he has another daughter  
Maybe that's why I'm so scared of getting hurt  
Maybe that's why I am short tempered and upset all the time

I have a step father figure  
And I thank him for being there for all of us  
But no matter how hard I try to see him as a biological father  
I will never be able to  
I need to be connected to my father  
I know it will be hard to start a relationship with someone I don't know  
It will be weird knowing someone I never knew existed until now  
It will be weird knowing that someday  
I might call this person "Dad"  
I want him to know I exist



I need to see him, I need to feel him,  
I need to hear his voice  
I need to hear that he will try to be with me  
Like I will try to be with him  
Like the valleys, absolutely no spaces between us  
No secrets, no sadness  
Just redemption.

But I also don't want to talk to him  
Because what would I say  
I want him to feel the pain  
I feel about not knowing my father  
And him not knowing his daughter  
Please god help me, I am so confused  
Is that why I feel so unworthy  
Is that why I always doubt myself  
Whenever I meet someone new  
Is that why I feel so unwanted  
Whenever people don't want to listen

I am a mountain  
Unable to move and unable to talk  
I want someone to feel me quake  
Someone who will listen to me  
Not talk but just be there for me  
Who see me as Eagle Peak instead of a foothill in a desert  
Because when you reach my summit  
You feel like you are on top of the world  
When you get to reach my trust  
You realize that I'm a fun person

And I found that someone and it's even better  
Because there's 15 of them, 15 people who listen to me  
Those 15 people are my ARC family

These people are more amazing than I would have ever imagined  
They helped me through all my challenges  
They taught me the true meaning of friendship  
People who are willing to spend their time with me  
People who don't judge me  
When I spill my deepest, darkest secrets

It feels absolutely amazing  
It makes me feel better knowing  
That I won't face my problems alone  
Not only are they friends they're also family  
They're the family I've always wanted to have

It's pretty unbelievable how much people can mean to you  
These people have a different way of saying I love you  
They show you with actions not just words  
They wiped my tears  
As I told them my story  
My REAL story  
The one I've never told until now  
I've never felt so strong before  
But now I know the meaning of life

## A True Family

My name is Alondra Sevallos and I am not just some ordinary girl. I grew up on the rough side of town. My life was “normal,” depending on how normal is defined. Normal in my town meant to just go with the flow, without plans for the future. That’s the reputation of the people where I am from. I, on the other hand, am not like them. I do have plans for the future and I will be someone in life despite the troubles I face at home.

My life at home is horrible. I live in an ugly, old house that I call “home” though it doesn’t really feel like one. I have to be there so I have to call it “home.” There is never a happy moment. Everyone does whatever they want. Nobody, not my stepdad, older sister, younger sister, or my mom, lives by the rules. There are always arguments and yelling between my family and me. I feel like I have no control over my happiness because whenever I’m happy someone always ruins it. I feel like I’m in prison and I’m unable to escape. I’m not allowed to go anywhere; I see people my age having fun but I’m alone. I am always alone. The only thing I do enjoy doing is running. That’s the only thing that helps to clear my mind. I was done with my family.

I decided to leave home and attend ARC because I was tired of being home and being ignored. I was angry because my family thought that their life was much more important than mine. So I decided to leave home for a little while to see if anything would change while I was away. I also wanted to meet new people who would actually pay attention to me. There was no one at home who I could have a nice, open, and honest conversation with. My family pushed me away from them because of their attitude towards me. I needed space to do something on my own. I needed to be able to be without my family.

Family isn’t real when they don’t believe you. One of the hardest moments of the course was opening up and sharing a difficult story that happened to me. I was having trouble explaining the story; I didn’t know how to start. I was staring into space just thinking over my words, practicing over and over what I was going to say. After a few minutes, I finally gained the courage to get it off my chest. It was the first time I said this to anybody other than my mom. The only difference was that my new family believed me, while my mom didn’t. I told her about it before but she thought I was lying. I hated my mother after this incident. I know hate is a strong word but that is what I felt. A mom who does not believe her own daughter is unforgivable. She tells me she loves me, but I honestly don’t know if she means it. I always have thoughts of running away but she holds me back, tell-



ing me that she could make our life better and happy. The only thing is that she never does. She never keeps her word. She lies to us to make us think that she is setting an example that she can make it far without my stepdad, but in reality she’s just suffering at home because she wants to. I love my mom, but there are some things that moms shouldn’t do. They shouldn’t prefer other people over their daughters of a lifetime.

In ARC I realized a true family supports and looks out for you when you need help. I have grown to love a new group of people and to-

gether we have grown as a family. I’ve learned how to protect myself and how important it is to ask for and accept help. My ARC family has shown me that technology is not important when you have people who are there for you. I also learned that family is the most important thing that can exist in life. My only family that I love is my ARC family because they showed me that family doesn’t have to be blood. Family is a group of people who support you and encourage you to do the right thing.

When I return home everything in life will be almost exactly the same except for me; I will be different. I will know how to take care of myself and be responsible. I will be stronger - emotionally and physically. I will be more open to people I trust. My relationship with my little sister will change because she is the only one from my house that I miss. I miss everything about her: her smile, her laugh, and her eyes when they’re filled with happiness. We will be closer and I will enjoy her company. I used to push her away but now I will be with her whenever she needs me. My little sister is not to blame for any of the problems that the rest of us have. She doesn’t deserve the pain that the rest of us feel and cause. The rest of my family is just bullshit. Yes, they have done a lot for me and I appreciate them for what they’ve done, but they need to know the definition of love. They never show it. So I have to be able to love myself. I need to be able to keep myself happy.

Thanks to my ARC family, and their lessons, I learned what a true family looks like. I also learned what a true family talks about. They talk about the day and how amazing it was or how it can be better. A true family also supports you and encourages you. A true family can guide you to the right direction but at the same time can be your partner in crime.

# andrea briceno

## The Monarch Butterfly

I'm a butterfly and I know that I am no ordinary butterfly  
But I want to be more than just a butterfly  
It's just sometimes there are struggles in life  
that I need to overcome  
To be a big beautiful, majestic Monarch butterfly

And just like a butterfly in the wind  
Sometimes times are hard to control  
I believe that being a Monarch butterfly is going to take some time  
To fully develop into a beautiful butterfly

I think that it would be great to be out  
And free of this technology-ridden society  
You miss a lot when your eyes are glued down to your phone  
You miss so much - like the mountains, the river  
And being one with nature and it's such a beautiful experience  
You feel like you are flying in the wind without a care in the world  
And you can finally be yourself and feel a sort of connection

But I care how society thinks I carry myself  
I know that I shouldn't care what people think of me  
And sometimes I don't but then later on I contradict myself  
Because of my self doubt  
That's when I feel bad about myself  
I feel like I always let people down because sometimes  
I don't feel confident in myself and how I present myself

I was raised to not let anyone think that they are better than me  
But I feel like most people are, even if I say that they aren't  
I know that I shouldn't do this but I do  
I let people's opinions get in my head and I get upset  
I just want to feel more confident  
I want to feel important in society  
But I'm not sure that I feel like I'm comfortable in society  
And I want to feel comfortable in my own skin  
I want to be something great in life  
I want to stop hiding in my cocoon  
and flourish into a mature butterfly  
But just stay hidden from this harsh reality  
It seems like we can never escape  
I'm a butterfly trapped in a jar

Waiting to be put on a collector's wall  
Waiting to accept my fate  
So I stay closed up, this is why I'm shy  
Why I don't really like talking  
I'm worried that if I'm open  
If I dance in the meadow's air  
A bird would swoop me up and eat me

And I don't want to feel like this or think like this but I do  
I don't want to feel boxed in  
I want to break free of the chains that are holding me back  
I know that I need to change  
I know I can change my fate  
I know that once I want something I will try  
with all my might to reach it  
Not tomorrow, not the day after that, but today  
This very moment

I am a monarch butterfly no matter what people tell me  
I am me and I am proud of who I am





## A Journey to No Judgment

*“You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You are able to say to yourself, ‘I lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along.’ The danger lies in refusing to face the fear, in not daring to come to grips with it. If you fail anywhere along the line, it will take away your confidence. You must make yourself succeed every time. You must do the thing you think you cannot do.”*

- Eleanor Roosevelt

Because of ARC I went from not wanting to open up and being negative to opening up more and being more positive. On the first day of this 40-day journey to ARC, I was so excited to come and meet new people. However, I wanted to stay home because before I left, my twin cried and when she cried I felt bad and all I could do was think about how much I was going to miss our conversations. We have such a tight bond and we don't hide any secrets from each other. It could be 2 am and we can talk about anything. All I could think of was how long I was going to be away from her. All that I wanted to do was start running to her, hugging her and telling her that I was never going to leave her again. I knew that I really wanted to come but I also knew that I was going to miss her more than she was going to miss me, because of my fear of losing my twin. At home I would literally not sleep because I would just lie in bed and think of something bad happening to her. I contemplated whether or not I truly wanted to come to ARC. I really wanted to come here and find my true self but at the same time I wanted to stay home and make sure my sister was always safe and happy.

In the beginning of this new adventure, I was skeptical because of the challenges: trying to be more confident, asking for help, and opening up more. I honestly thought that the first time when we all opened up was just a waste of time because I felt like it made me look weak. Opening up and trusting people had been difficult because while people

in our ARC family had poured their heart and soul out when they spoke, I wouldn't say much. Instead, I would write what I truly wanted to say on a piece of paper. I find it ironic how people thought that I was always drawing and never truly paying attention because honestly I was always writing out what I was planning to say about a meaningful question. However, I never had the courage to say what I wrote down because I always felt like I was going to be judged. Especially when I spoke my true feelings, I felt as if I was carrying the world on my shoulders and



I felt as if no one was by my side, trying to help support the world because I felt that if I show that I am vulnerable or weak I would be a nuisance. I also felt that, if I asked for even the slightest bit of help, I would be a nuisance and people would think that I was always asking for help, and I don't like asking for help.

A time my opinion started to change was during ABC news, when one of my fellow peers proposed the question: what is one thing that you truly regret in life? While everybody else was thinking, I poured my deepest regret on a piece of paper and then I hid it underneath one of my drawings. When the fellow peer asked me the first time for my answer, I said that I had no regrets, but then I realized that I was lying to my peers which honestly at the time didn't both-

er me as much as lying to myself. Because my fellow peers were pouring their hearts and souls out to each other without the guarantee that others wouldn't judge them, I decided to put my heart on the line even though I was scared as hell; I didn't know how they would react to one of my deepest, darkest regrets. So I sat there facing my peers and began, and then I hesitated a little and I finally thought to myself that if they could do it, then I could do it too. When I was finished, I realized that I shared a part of me that no one ever knew about me. I felt so relieved because I truly expressed how I felt. I was no longer carrying the world on my shoulders and I could finally breathe and feel good about myself.

I have learned that you have to trust people in order to trust yourself. Here in this 40 day course, these instructors aren't just here to tell you what to do; instead they are here to mentor you and they are willing to express and be vulnerable with you. These fellow peers never judge you on your mistakes; instead, they make mistakes with you. They are truly family and why I say this is because family never judges you and here at ARC they never judge. They have taught me that being vulnerable as a family lets everyone share a piece of that burden with you, and when another fellow peer has a burden, then you should be there to listen and help them forget, or try to help them solve this burden. When I return home, I will not be afraid to express my emotions to both my mom and my closest friends, because honestly when I would have a bad day at school I wouldn't tell my mom anything. Instead, I would keep all my frustration inside. As for my best friend I will no longer be afraid of expressing my concerns on what she did right or wrong. Instead of trying to hide my emotions, I should express them more so that people can get close to me, because if people don't understand or know me they won't respect my opinions. Opinions are nothing when judgment day has occurred and everybody isn't afraid to be themselves.

# ashley byrum

## Free Flowing

I am a Waterfall. Free flowing  
It took me a long time to get downstream and become a waterfall.  
I would crash against the rocks and get discouraged  
By the things I would hear them say.  
They wouldn't want to drink from my river,  
Because I may have tasted weird or different.

I started to dry up as we went into a drought.  
This took up most of my time and delayed me  
From traveling downstream and finally  
Becoming the waterfall I know I am.

My friends and family would tell me I am fine,  
But the whisper of people's thoughts  
Just kept rising to the surface like bubbles.

It was a mental battle for me for a long time,  
Just thinking about what I have heard them say.  
I never told my parents, even to this day.  
I didn't want them to be disappointed or scared  
At the fact that I was hurting myself, but most of all  
I didn't want them to tell me to stop.

After my freshman year of high school things began to return.  
I had good friends who made me feel confident about my image  
Which finally made me feel like rain  
Was starting to give back what the drought took from me.  
But just as a waterfall does  
Everything seems to fall back down the mountain.  
This time getting worse not only was it a mental battle,  
Now it was physical.



I did whatever I could to fit in.  
My mind was so corrupt by the image I thought was normal.  
I eventually started to think that what I was doing  
To my body was as normal as water flowing down a waterfall.

Although I was never satisfied when I was done,  
Those evil whispers kept rising to the surface,  
Always pouring contaminated water into me.  
As people started to see the effect the drought had on me,  
They started to compliment me on my image, I longed for more.  
A waterfall always longs for more water so it can keep flowing.  
It kept me flowing, kept me coming back for more.

Soon the current of it caught up to me.  
I noticed I would get dizzy  
As if I was inside the middle of a whirlpool,  
Still not letting my parents in  
Knowing they wouldn't understand,  
Little by little I would start to evaporate.

They see me as this perfect waterfall  
With the right amount of water in it,  
Healthy and purified, never thinning or drying up.  
I always knew what I was doing to myself was bad,  
But once you get into the current of doing it every day  
It's hard to stop, it just pulls me back  
And the bubbles suffocate me again and again.

I wish I could breathe, oh, how I wish I could breath  
And just ignore what my thoughts keep telling me.  
Hopefully as time goes on  
My waterfall will fill back up and I'll be okay.  
I will feel strong and hydrated.  
I will eventually reach the bottom  
And keep flowing into the future.

For now I am taking all the time I need  
To get to the top before I drop,  
But when I do I will be free flowing  
And those bubbles won't be the whispers of people  
Telling me I am weird or awkward maybe even too tall.  
They will be the whispers of people wishing they were me.  
A waterfall. Free flowing.



# The First Step to a New World

My life back at home is lonely. Not because there is nobody around, but because I keep to myself - it's hard for me to open up. I especially don't open up to my parents or tell them what's going on in my life. Never letting people in, bottling things up, and not talking about my problems is the reason I feel so lonely. I felt that I was never going to be able to change because I am so used to keeping everything to myself. Speaking about my emotions is a foreign language to me; I don't know what words to use. Not knowing how to talk about my problems feels like crap. I feel I am letting my parents down by keeping such a big thing in my life from them. I just can't work up the courage to open up to them. I feel I will let them down and break their hearts at the same time from just one conversation.

As I was starting to think about how I'll be leaving home and heading off to college, I couldn't help but get worried about having to leave my world: moving to a different town and living with people I never met before, just thinking that they will want to get to know me; and realizing that it will be even harder to hide what I am holding in especially when I will be living in a dorm. It scared me to think I would be entering a new world where I don't have people that I have known my whole life right in the other room to talk to about my feelings; just knowing if I wanted to I wouldn't be able to. I wasn't ready to leave home and face a new world. I wanted to join Adventure Risk Challenge (ARC) to prepare for my escape from home, that lonely world, and acquire the right tools in order to do that.

The beginning of my adventure here at ARC was easy. All the physical aspects of this course were easy for me. It wasn't until we started to get to know each other and had to start opening up that the challenges started to arise. I had to learn how to trust people and learn how to make that first step into opening up. It's a scary thing to take steps into a different direction than where I have been going my whole life. It's hard to leave my lonely world because I feel so comfortable there.

As our 40 day journey went on it was hard to watch everyone get so close and in turn want to get closer to me. If I did let them in, there would be 12 people I barely know walking around with my biggest secret in the back of their minds. That thought ultimately scares me half to death and gives me the chills from the back of my neck to the balls of my toes. I have tried to open up to them just enough that they feel like they know me a little bit. I wanted to show them that I was putting in effort to open up and that it was important to me that we get close so we can be a family.

While being in ARC, I have gotten glimpses of the other side of my lonely world. The first encounter of it was when I read my metaphor poem in front of my ARC family for the first time. Whether I wanted to or not, it happened. I can't really explain how it felt to let so many people into my life at once, when I can't even do that with my parents. Sometimes you just need a push to get a better view of another world. A world that I am not sure I want to be a part of, but am becoming convinced that it's going to be good for me in the end. My ARC instructors are the ones that have reassured me that it is okay to open up even if I fall, because if I do, I have a whole community who is willing to catch me and support me. No matter how much they reassure me, it's still a struggle and I am still not sure I like it.

During our ropes course day we all had to commit to doing something for the group and for ourselves. My commitment to the group was to open up more so that we can become a family. At times I regret ever making this commitment because I don't necessarily know how to do that. I get so close at times to opening up but then slip right back into that lonely place because old habits die hard. This is one of the hardest commitments I have ever made. I know that when I make a commitment to myself I never follow through, and I really don't want to let these 16 amazing people, whom I have grown to love, down. Although I love them, making a decision to open up to everyone at ARC was hard and scared me, mostly because I knew in the end that I wouldn't make that decision and I would let things just stay the same as I always have.

I come from a loving and open family so it's ironic that I am not an open person. I am so good at hiding my emotions, so well that you would never guess there is this huge thing wrong with me. When I am home I am always smiley around my friends. I am always the fun, goofy one. Being here at ARC and having to share brings out all my emotions and makes them noticeable. My emotions have turned me inside out; they brought how I was feeling to the exterior but didn't break my facade. It's all just depression, anger, and sadness now, inside and out. I walk around feeling lost like my personal bubble has just been popped and I don't know how to fix it. I can't seem to hide my emotions anymore and it scares me. Being vulnerable scares me. I have never felt so much sadness about my situation. I have always just let it continue. I never really stepped outside my bubble and looked at it from someone else's point of view. During my 40 days here at ARC, that's all I can do; look at it from other people's point of view. My parent's point of view.

After our forth expedition, I got a card from my mom. Inside this card it expressed how my mom was proud of me. How she thinks I am a strong, kind, thoughtful, caring, and an optimistic young lady with a beautiful spirit. As I was reading this card the only thing that was going through my mind was, "Would my mom be proud of me if she knew what was really going on? Would she still think I have a beautiful spirit? Would she still tell me she loves me? I mean how could she if I can't even love myself?"

The day of our solo was probably the most vulnerable I have been during my whole time at ARC. I learned a lot about myself in those short six hours alone. Two weeks later, we had our second meeting with Barbara Ilfeld, a group therapist. On her first visit I didn't want to share how I was feeling because I wasn't ready to share that part of me, but during the second visit I was able to talk to her beforehand and discuss how I was feeling. I told her I thought I should open up to the group because I thought it would be a good first step for me. It was the first time I started to open the door to another world I have never encountered before. It was a strange experience, because I am used to ignoring my feelings and not talking about them. I am so terrified of what they mean. I usually cope with my feelings by closing my eyes and forgetting they exist. Sharing my emotions with everybody, crying as I struggled to get the words out, was the hardest thing I have done in my life. I don't know how to deal with my emotions, and sharing to the group made me realize I don't know how to ask for help. All I know is that I need help.

Being here in ARC hasn't changed me entirely but has made me aware, aware of my feelings and aware that I can't keep living in my lonely world. I can't keep hiding behind my fake smile and telling people I am fine every time they ask if I am okay. Although I have realized this, I am not sure if I am exactly ready to leave my lonely world just yet. I am not sure if I have the necessary tools to adapt to a new world at this moment in my life. My experiences here have helped me take the first step, the first step into realizing that I can't stay in my comfort zone forever. I eventually have to let people in and not be afraid to ask for help nor be afraid to receive it. Every day of this course has led me to realizing this. My ARC family has helped me visit another world: a world that isn't lonely, where you have people by your side helping you through your toughest times. When I decide to leave my world, I will know what to expect and I won't be going in empty-handed. I will have a whole community of people who love and support me waiting to greet me when I arrive.

# asia navarro

## Liberation

I am a butterfly, who is still in her cocoon,  
I am not ready to go out in this world alone.  
I am still learning things that need to be taught to me,  
I still need to grow inside of my cocoon.

Days keep passing by and decisions I have to make  
About letting myself take control of my own life are getting harder,  
I am still very much afraid but I will continue to grow  
Until I am ready to let myself go free.  
I feel like I am trapped in my cocoon with insecurities,  
Insecurities of being loved or of being wrong trapped with regrets,  
My mind tells me that I am ready  
To go out into this world alone and be beautiful,  
But then there's my heart that tells me  
I need more time to fully mature.

I know what's right and I know what's wrong because as a kid  
My parents taught me to tell the truth and nothing but the truth,  
And that lying was never okay.  
But I don't know whether to go right,  
Neither do I know if I should go left  
Because I want to go out and make my own decisions  
On how to live my life  
But I'm afraid of taking a wrong turn  
And having everything fall to pieces.  
I'm always afraid of what's going to happen next.  
The fear of not being strong or wise enough to grow up  
And go out in this world alone.

I wonder if I am lost or if I am just alone.  
"Am I ready to be set free and spread my wings?"  
I keep asking myself.  
But the answer is still no.  
I just need a little more time to grow into my own skin  
To develop a stronger mentality and have more wisdom.  
I know I can't grow until I am perfect but just to grow enough til  
I'm ready for what the world has yet to bring me.

My brain starts to hurt  
As I try thinking these confused thoughts through,  
The thoughts of trying to decide how to be strong and wise,  
And if my actions of kindness are blind to the eyes of others.  
I feel my wings breaking before I even get to liberate myself.  
Why me, I ask, why must I feel so hopeless  
And confused of the thought of my own presence,  
Why do I feel so blue?

I am weak, I am tired but no one seems to notice.  
They think that just because I keep a smile on my face  
And my head held high that everything must be fine.  
But they can't see what lies beneath these eyes.

They can't see the hopelessness and pain  
That comes from not knowing how to do things on my own  
And not knowing how to fix my own mistakes,  
Nor can they see the shame I feel from feeling so lost.

But one day, one day I promise to myself that things will get better.  
One day I will come out of my cocoon  
Spreading my wings beautifully  
Showing off my beautiful designs  
Not afraid of judgment because of my unique colors,  
Yellow honesty,  
Red forgiveness,  
Black determination,  
Orange compassion.  
Being able to make mistakes,  
Adding more scars and cuts on my wings but still growing stronger.

I will liberate myself from society and enter the forest,  
I will fly to the highest peak on my own  
And fly against every waterfall  
Along with every creek  
Without being afraid of experiencing something new  
I will push forward without getting caught in a spider's web  
Taking charge of my own life  
I will fight whatever comes my way  
Not questioning if what I am doing is right.  
I am determined to fight till the end  
Without requiring someone else's validations.



# My Transformation

Before ARC, I felt like I was unable to change my relationship with my mother. I felt like all she was to me was my best friend and not my mom. The world I lived in before ARC was a place where I was worried about not being heard or listened to. Whenever I was home, I ate, went to my room, listened to music, and told my mom my plans for the day. I wanted to share much more than my plans, but I didn't know how to because the thoughts of rejection would always take a toll on me. She wouldn't really question what I would do because she was afraid to say no. It was weird to be home because I was used to being in the streets instead of at home. Every time I was home, I felt like I would trap myself in my room so I could avoid the tragedy of not being able to have a mother-daughter relationship.

A time I was able to leave my old life behind was orientation day for ARC. I decided to leave because I wanted to change myself. I didn't want to be that same girl who didn't encourage herself or believe in herself. I didn't want to be that person who made no effort to talk to her mom. What drew me away from home and led me to ARC were the new experiences. All the risks and challenges I was going to have to take seemed so amazing; it was something I knew I wanted to do. It was something I knew I had to do in order to be able to finally get the courage to talk to my mom about how I was actually feeling about her. Some of my friends and family didn't want me to come, but I told them, as well as myself, that it was for my benefit, not theirs.



My adventure to this new world was scary and overwhelming. The thought of having to live with 11 new students for 40 days frightened me. The thought of sleeping together, eating together, and starting a new chapter in my life with them for the course gave me the chills. I was also afraid of hiking with 11 other students I barely knew. I was afraid of slowing down the group because I was the slowest and the biggest one there. I was afraid of the things they might have said to me because I felt overweight, slow and out of breath. I didn't know how I was going to open up to people who I didn't necessarily trust.

After four days in this new world I thought I had made the wrong decision. When we hiked up to Eagle's Peak, I was the last one who stayed all the way in the back. We had started our hike up the mountain and I started to break down because I felt so tired and weak. I wanted to start rolling down and call it quits. Everyone was far ahead of me, not knowing I was struggling or crying because I didn't want them to see me that way. I was there thinking to myself what did I get myself into, this isn't what I normally do. I realized then that I was acting like the person I was at home, the daughter that never told her mother anything and kept everything inside, shedding tears but not knowing what was bothering her. I missed my mom so much at that point; I just wanted to tell her everything that I was afraid to tell her before. Right there and then I knew I could finally build up the strength and confidence to talk to my mom and not hold my feelings back.

After climbing Eagle's Peak I noticed there was a shift in how I handled myself. I had to learn to speak up when I was tired or whenever my team was moving too quickly. I also had to learn how to pace myself so that I wouldn't get tired as rapidly as I did. But with the help of my whole ARC family, they told me I didn't have to be sorry for feeling tired or asking them to slow down. They all worked with me to make our hikes run more smoothly for all of us. They usually let me lead the group so I could set the pace; this strategy worked well. I feel like those were the changes I had to make for myself so that I wouldn't hold in the pain from feeling weak any longer. I can go home and express myself freely. I learned that I am stronger than I ever thought I was. I can push myself farther than I ever thought I could. I discovered that I have the drive to push forward even if opening up can be hard. And even if I do take a big fall, I learned how to bounce back stronger and wiser. I have proved to myself that I have the self-confidence to tackle anything that comes my way. I can now fix my life and the relationship with my mom without having someone else fix it for me.

When I return home, life will be better in many ways. Life will be better because now I have a different mindset, a positive mindset. I will be more involved at home wanting to do more activities with my family. Instead of pushing away my family, I will get closer to them. I will tell my mom the problems or situations that bother me at home and the insecurities I need to get off my chest. That will change everything because as a family we will be able to grow closer to one another. We will interact with one another more, leaving no silence in between our conversations. All situations between us will try to be resolved by talking things out instead of saying nothing and being silent. I will be that helpful hand when they need it most. I will be the daughter they are proud to have.

# bingbing liang

## Open Waters

I am a fish  
A free fish shouldn't have to depend  
on their parents their whole lives  
I am still not free  
Like a fish living in the river  
Always staying in river mom's hug  
I am lazy to move, I don't want to change  
So if I joined a program that means  
I'll have to spend my time in the program  
I'll have to make a new schedule  
But I don't want to get a busy day  
I like to stay at home and lay in my bed on the weekend  
So I have time to go out with friends

But one day  
I thought I was ready to explore new oceans  
I had to go  
I did not have too much experience  
But I knew I could take care myself

Even though  
My river mom is kind and always cares for me  
When I said goodbye to her I just left for ARC  
She worried about me and wanted me to stay with her  
But still I left  
I knew my perfect adventure life was coming  
I looked forward to my trip

But everything is different  
Everything is difficult  
Sometimes I want to give up  
But I can't  
I have to change  
The water always put me down  
I am a baby fish  
I don't know how to feed myself  
But the situation forces me to do it  
The first day on my own in large lakes  
I was afraid I wouldn't have enough insects to eat  
But I still have the second, third, and fourth day to learn

I don't know how to swim  
With ARC, when I plunged into the river  
I cannot forget that moment,  
There was so much water all around me  
I thought that was my last day on earth  
When I got saved I felt my life was colorful  
How easy it is to die

I think I should overcome my fears to become stronger  
Baby fish will be grown up  
I have to go to the ocean  
And tell my mom, how wonderful the ocean is  
So I always go with a group  
Even though I don't know who they are  
I just swim slowly and follow them  
Kick out my fear  
Everything will be changed

If I always stay with my family  
I'll be scared to face this world  
Scared to touch different people  
Scared to try something new  
My life was like a fish happy in an uneventful river  
I did not really know about this world

But I overcame my fears  
I walked my first step to join ARC  
I got big challenges from ARC  
I had to forget "everything" and begin a new life  
I was just like a guppy  
Learning how to make friends along with many siblings  
Learning how family is important in your heart  
I, especially, found who I am from ARC

My mom hopes I can be a successful person  
That I will succeed in the future, do what I want to do  
But Mom,  
I don't know what a good job means in your mind  
In my mind, a good job should be what we enjoy doing  
Money is important, but money cannot handle everything  
I didn't like how you always compare me to other people  
You should trust me to handle my future  
Everyone was born to be different  
Everyone should have their own skill

Mom,  
Day by day I miss you so much  
But I never thought ARC was a mistake  
Because I want you to feel proud of me  
I just keep going



## Find Out a Real Me

I went from a quiet girl to an open girl. Now I am changed from ARC. I became stronger and confident, because I overcame my fear to share my poem in front of many people.

Before ARC, every single day was always the same: school, home, school, home. "Go get your book and read it until dinner starts," Mom would shout. I would put down my cell phone and walk slowly into my bedroom. Then I would sit in front of the window and look outside. Gray clouds would cover the sky, trees would look like they lost their lives, flowers' color would become darker, and walkers would look very tired. I would sigh, then would take out my English book and start to read.

Before I came to ARC, I decided how I spent my time and to do what I wanted to do. If I wanted, I lay on my bed and watched TV all day long. When I felt bored, I went out with my friends or played a computer game. I did not need to worry about too much in my life.

One day, I ate lunch with my friends in the cafeteria. One of the girls told us that she joined Summer Fund and told us Summer Fund's information. Summer Fund is a program that pushes students to participate in outside challenges. I felt it was a good program. Therefore I joined it too. Summer Fund's teacher told me about ARC. That was the first time I heard about ARC. I thought, "A forty day leadership program means I will be away from my family for a long time. But I am not a kid, and I can take care myself." I signed up for ARC.

My decision to come to ARC let me leave that boring world. I decided to leave it because I believe I am not a kid anymore and I can take care of myself. I also hoped my world would become more interesting and didn't want to waste time with my negative attitude. I thought I was a person who did not have any special skill. Before I tried to earn my own money, I did not feel like I had a bad personality. In the spring of 2015, my friend tried to find a job with me. She found a job working in a Chinese restaurant, and I had a chance to work at a Milk Tea Shop. The first day I came into that shop I saw a girl working. I felt nervous. The girl asked me, "May I help you?" I looked at the widow and told her, "Yesterday, your boss asked me to come here and try this job." Then she said

to me, "Yes, my boss told me there will be a newcomer joining me. Come in that door. I will tell you what your job is." When I came through the door, I saw a man making milk tea. He looked at me and said hi to me. I used my soft voice, without a smile on my face, and told him my name and that I was a newcomer. The girl explained to me that he was one of the bosses. After hearing that, I became more careful around him. I did not talk with him until I left. Even though I did not make conversation with that boss, I felt like I did a good job that day. However after one week, I did not receive a call from that shop. I knew they decided not to choose me. I felt sad. But I knew I still needed to improve. Around that time, I received another friend's call. She told me she worked at the Milk Tea shop where they decided not to pick me. I felt sad and angry. I was sure they decided not to choose me because of my personality. My friend is an active and smiley girl, but I was a shy and quiet girl. I hate being so shy and scared to express myself. I have often asked myself: because of my shyness, how many chances have I lost before? Why am I so shy? NO, I need to change. I want to be myself. However, this all changed when I decided to join ARC.

When I came to ARC, everything was new for me, including the other people. I had to become independent. Some of the specific challenges that I faced were opening up, leaving my comfortable life, and facing my fears. All of these made me want to give up and miss home. But when I tried to open up and share my life during the leadership lesson, I cried. No one laughed at me, and they gave me their hugs and their smiles. I felt like their hugs and smiles gave me power and encouraged me to not be afraid of shar-

ing what I would like to share. From them, I learned it is okay to open up and express myself, and to not be afraid of how people look at me.

Reading my poem for an audience taught me not to be afraid of opening up. All of the ARC students shared their poem in front of many people and took their first step into success. It was hard for me to take this first step. I felt nervous before I shared my poem because I worried that I couldn't do it or I would perform it badly. When I stood in front of so many people, I felt like I couldn't hear anything besides my heart.



I tried to open my mouth and say something, but I couldn't because my brain was empty. I looked at my instructors and group mates. I told myself, "I believe I can do it" because I didn't want them to feel disappointed and I didn't want to feel regret. Then I took a deep breath and started reading. During the reading, I could hear my voice become more and more loud. I also could hear my group mates cheering. Then I lifted my head up and looked at everyone. Through their

eyes, I could feel their encouragement. I continued reading my poem. During the last part, I was crying because I knew I got into my poem, and felt sad because my mom doesn't understand me. When I finished my poem, I carried my heavy body and walked back to my seat because I still had that sadness. Suddenly, my group mates gave me a group hug. I cried again in their warm hug. I knew I had changed in that moment.

I am a girl who feels proud of sharing her poem in front of many people because I opened up and was vulnerable. I am a girl who overcomes her fears and shows her emotion in front of her group mates. I regret too much from before. Now, I have become stronger in my mind and body.

# daida rivas

## Stay Strong

I am a rock strong and quiet,  
I am not easy to break because of the way I'm built  
Little grains of sand compressed constructed this rock  
Based on love, passions and challenges,  
I am special; I am different from other rocks  
I always try to do my best,  
I always try to handle any situation.  
I am a rock and I stay strong  
Even in hard times I won't give up.  
I am quiet but I am crying  
Just looking at people that are ignoring my presence

I feel alone but I am a rock and I stay strong.  
I try to figure out why I feel in this way but there is no reason.  
It might be my silence, the way I am  
Different and weird, but I like myself and I will stay this way.  
I miss you mom I miss you brother  
But I am a rock and I need to stay strong.  
Do not try to hold me it took a lot of time to be this rock  
Just let me go and stay strong.

These forty days are my challenge  
I thought I wouldn't miss you family, and the place I lived  
I came here for a reason; I came here to find myself  
This is hard, more than everything in my life  
But, I am a rock and I can stay strong until the end.  
Remembering to myself that I can do it - I want to do it

One day I will be back home  
And I will see who I was and who I am.  
I can see myself being more independent, patient, and open  
And this is my first step that might help me to  
Keep on track and grow up as a person  
And at the end  
I will say "I am a rock and I stay strong"  
this is my life and I'm trying to live it in the way I want

But I can't  
I feel fear of the world that is around me  
Because of the ignorance of people because  
What they see is what they see  
But they don't see what it really is  
I am afraid of living my life to please everyone  
And not myself  
I'm afraid to live a dull life,  
A life with no purpose.  
And I feel fear of my own fear

But my happiness depends on me,  
I decide what to do  
Even if its wrong I would accept it.  
I don't care what people say about me  
Sometimes they don't know what to do with their own life  
And they try to live another people's life.  
I won't let them live mine.





# felix rivera

## Evolution

I am an independent tree.  
Unsure of his future  
Expected to sprout the same roots as others have in society  
Getting a job and working until you breathe your last breath  
Without a meaningful life

My seed sprouted on a summer day  
Like most children I tried hard to make people proud  
I worked nonstop to push my roots through the dirt  
Determined to accomplish everything my parents  
And teachers wanted and grow as quickly as possible  
To become hard working, bright,  
They wanted a great prodigy  
But the money itself did not interest me  
The idea of being able to use it to help others is what did.

Often taking orders from my parents and sisters to become important  
Never digging my own path  
Pleasing my family and friends so they wouldn't dislike me  
This is not what I truly wanted.  
But soon I realized that I was only growing to be another stick on  
Earth's face.

Then came the day I changed schools  
It was different and new which is why it was scary  
More students and less help,  
More about your image than your intelligence  
Popularity rather than Personality  
I was frustrated that no one truly cared about learning  
Holding me back from learning  
But I was able to befriend young saps like me  
That wanted to learn new things  
That cared more about grades than about games  
Putting their classes before their friends

I soon realized in the later years to come that as a tree  
I could not escape the bonds that made us alike  
I submitted to the pressure  
And started to think and grow like those around me  
I saw no point in trying in school anymore  
I felt like I was just going to hang out with friends  
But in reality I wanted to go and learn  
I want to help the world; most of the students didn't seem to be  
Or want to become those kinds of people.

Instead of being true to myself  
I decided to adapt and care about my image



Changing my leaves so nobody judged me or disliked me  
Because of what I wore  
Or how annoying I was in my classes  
Being ahead of most of the other students  
I was following everyone else  
As a machine following instructions

But my roots have not changed  
I still want the best for everything and everyone in the long run.  
Although I want this I feel as though I can't  
Because I can't escape society's grasp  
I feel as though my life is not for me to take but for others above me  
I feel as though I can't control how tall I grow

But thanks to my evolution  
I have the chance to grow to be a different independent tree.  
No longer caring about what society wants  
Something capable of growing even fuller than the average tree  
Being able to become a genius that does not just have a career or job  
Being someone with the possibility to help everyone be happy  
To be able to convince and help change the way we see life  
Something that can flourish a new seed  
That is different than all of the ones he sees  
Anything but the usual bark that grows and withers without purpose.

# jesus sanchez oroasco

## Tiny in this Enormous World

I am an Ant  
Tiny and afraid  
Afraid of failure  
Unable to find what I'm searching for  
A quick snack  
A dead insect or a simple leaf  
Something that will satisfy my hunger  
My hunger for success  
Wanting to feel confident and pleased  
As if I had just filled my mom with pride

As confused as an ant  
I, myself, and only me  
Shall make it through this enormous world  
Even though I am not experienced  
Not ready for this surprising and unpredictable universe  
One that makes me terrified of losing my mom  
Because losing my mom also means losing myself  
Basically I am Nobody without my queen ant  
I need her  
But I know that grain by grain  
I can use my abilities to revive my identity

All my life I have been running from creatures  
Creatures that would love to devour me  
But I have learned to stop running  
I have discovered ways to face these monsters  
The one's inside me  
Using my six legs and two antennae

I will face my fears  
I won't let others stomp on me  
And assume that they could direct my life

Never again will I allow myself to show pity  
Nobody is asking for "help"  
Help is for the weak  
I know I will regret this one day  
But until that day comes  
My mind is set and it will remain unchanged

Respect is earned  
It's not just given because of a certain title  
And when you disrespected my mother  
You immediately lost my respect  
But thank you, Dad!  
If it wasn't for you and for your mistakes  
I wouldn't have realized  
How easy it is to let go

What am I doing?  
Why does it feel so good yet so wrong  
To not accept your forgiveness?  
I have no idea  
But just like an ant  
I will try and dedicate my time to survive  
To hope I overcome my future regrets  
And to see my upcoming self as a mature ant  
An ant that lives his life without doubting himself



## Accepting Reality

The person I used to be is unlike the person I am now. When I was home, I complained about all things as if I were imprisoned in my own life. I wanted to accept the person I was because not doing so made me feel trapped. I was a negative person that had no hope in positivity. I had always been a closed person; I kept all my feelings to myself and never opened up to anyone. I felt tired of living that way; I wanted to get away for a while.

I was tired of living in my room because my room could not hold in all of my confused thoughts. I needed my own space so that I could reflect on everything. Then I heard of a summer program called ARC. This program was supposed to help me become independent. The reason I decided to come to the program was because I felt that, in the near future, I would have to leave home and ARC could help me get used to being away. I also wanted to focus on better things, not just school. I needed to focus on myself and who I actually am. I wanted ARC to be beneficial, but deep down inside I didn't really expect ARC to have an impact on me. I felt like neither ARC nor anything else would ever help me.

Arriving at ARC, I saw how the things I was going to do were so different from the things I was used to back home. I thought that I was not going to be able to complete the course because I wanted to feel at home and ARC was definitely not home nor was it a family. To me, ARC was stupid. During our expeditions, I had to eat out of a bowl that looked like it was for dogs. I had to sleep outside in a used sleeping bag. There were no toilets or showers where we were backpacking. I knew I would hate ARC because ARC was not for me. Everything about ARC was horrible – every little thing.

My first challenge was meeting new people and trying to form relationships with them. When it came to meeting new people, I always felt nervous and scared. The moment I saw the people that I would have to be with for 40 days, I thought that I would not be able to survive. I felt like I did not fit in. My body shook and I felt like one mistake would give



them the wrong impression of me. The other participants were so different from me; they had more confidence and looked a lot more determined. I wanted to be like them but I couldn't. I wanted them to accept me but I did not have the skills to get out of my comfort zone.

My biggest challenge came during the commitment ceremony in the middle of the course. I have a hard time being honest with people and with myself. During the ceremony, I felt fake and disingenuous when I had committed to trying new things.

To me, commitment itself feels like it is impossible because I know that commitment dies. After the 40 days everyone will go home and their commitment will be over because they will eventually forget. I wanted to understand how people have faith in commitment. After a meaningful conversation with Luis, another ARC participant, I did change my perspective on commitment. He helped me understand how commitment doesn't end if you don't want it to end. As long as you desire it, commitment stays with you forever, inside your mind and your heart.

I realized that complaining held me back from trying new things. For example, when we had to go rock climbing all I did was complain about how it was going to be impossible to get to the top. However, after I finished and got back down, I began to observe my peers. I started to notice other people complaining about the same things I complained about. I saw how complaining holds a person down and doesn't let them reach the top. I learned that it's best to not complain because my attitude can affect my approach to new things.

When I return home, I hope I won't be the same as before. I hope I am more optimistic instead of pessimistic. I know I am going to miss the people here because I have developed bonds with them by opening up. But I'm scared that I didn't have enough time to understand them as much as they tried to understand me. Throughout the course my reluctance to open up burdened me. Now I understand that being reluctant was a mistake; in the future I will be more willing to express how I truly feel.

# jorge ortiz

## Running Free

I am running water

I run free to become as I desire in my own journey  
I was backed up to a puddle by multiple peaks  
Some of these peaks are making friends,  
Being smart with good grades on tests,  
Being good at sports, and impressing my dad  
I overcame the peaks to become a river  
But as a river, larger and harder summits arrive to obstruct me,  
So reaching a higher potential will be needed

I rush to anger very easily, eroding everything in my path  
If I am not angry, I would be still  
Learning from teachers that act as obstructions  
Friends also teach me and introduced me to technology  
But technology is moss surrounding me to keep me stagnant  
Impeding me from surpassing summits like awesome grades

I am playing games so much that I don't have time for anything else  
This slows my journey toward the ocean to learn as much as I can  
And my ultimate goal to become a doctor  
I am working to surpass this technology  
Or at least working with it so it doesn't hold me back  
Because it keeps me away from family and friends

I feel sometimes distanced from the watershed  
That my family is in or I am closed away in it  
I am always despised by my family  
For not doing anything except games on my free time  
I am sadder as time passes because I am not flowing as usual  
I am reflecting back to the time I could have had with my family  
I feel like I am hurting myself  
By thinking of all the bad that could happen  
Instead of thinking about all the good  
Being with the people I love and cherish

My body of water is being driven away by myself somehow  
This is a horrible deathly feeling  
I am making my own watershed  
Apart from the one I was born into and I love

These peaks are hard to surpass  
But I know that they will help me build character  
If I surpass these peaks no matter how high or hard  
I will be able to overcome others more easily  
These peaks will also build character because

I'll have more experience with more things

To stop technology from obstructing me  
I will make priorities and avoid playing as much as possible  
Technology has taken my time and evaporated my plans  
Of what I am going to do the next day and that same day  
I've become out of shape because of games

I will wash away two obstructions at the same time  
I will go out running with my brothers or mom  
So we can spend quality time  
While getting me away from the stillness of technology  
Instead of drifting away from my dad  
I will flow with him to roofs, horse stables, and inside houses  
And this will get me away from technology,  
So I will have more time to do my school work  
After I get over these obstructions  
I will be unstoppable and make it to the ocean in no time



## The Life of a Hero

Before ARC, I felt like I was weak and alone because I didn't have an occupation even if I wanted one. Before ARC, I didn't appreciate anything I had, like my parents' support, gifts, and lessons of what to value. I know I wasn't at the highest potential I could get to both physically and mentally. ARC taught me how to push myself past my limit and how much I appreciate the comforts I have at home. ARC taught me I can achieve my dreams even without money or high quality comforts.

I came to ARC to learn more about how nature is, how nature feels, and how to appreciate what is given to me. My brother came to ARC before me so I had an idea of what it was like and of what I was going to do. My brother was happy when he talked about ARC and told me that it was fun, but he said that I wouldn't last. My brother said I use and rely on my home comforts too much. To prove him wrong, I decided to sign up. I wanted to find out more about myself and what I am interested in. I wanted to see how living in nature would change my perspective. I also wanted to see if I would enjoy living in nature and if I would like having a job in nature.

At the beginning of ARC, I encountered a lot of challenges. Some of these challenges were: perch jumping, rock climbing, rappelling, not having electronics, not having a place to rest, hiking a lot, and pushing myself to my limit. Being in a place where I didn't have the comforts I do at home was one of the hardest parts of coming to ARC. I found out I am afraid of heights but I faced this challenge without showing I was afraid. My self-confidence skyrocketed and I gained independence as I pushed myself through my limits. I learned I can do a lot more than I think no matter what confronts me.

The perch jump introduced me to what taking a leap of faith is. It was like starting from the bottom with nothing to achieving the impossible or at least what you thought was impossible. I was two stories high on a cut tree facing my fear of heights. After getting to the top, I had to jump to try to catch a bar or rubber chicken and say what I was committed to while I jumped. The bar and chicken felt like they were an eternity away from me. I kept saying to myself, "It's too far; you can't do it. There is no one to catch or support you." I heard my friends shouting I can do it; then all the positivity came crashing on me telling me I can do it and I will do it. I yelled I was committed to getting a PhD as a doctor and jumped to catch the chicken. I felt accomplished as if in that moment I accomplished my goal to become a doctor. I had my friends support me the whole way so I knew I wasn't alone. The feeling of accomplishment and support gave me the confidence to know that I can accomplish any goal I set myself to and I will have help. I thought I wasn't going to have help as I followed my ultimate goal to become a doctor, but I had people help me the whole way in the perch jump. The feeling of not having the usual home comforts to help me accomplish what I want made me realize I have a lot of comforts at home to help me achieve my goals. I knew at the moment I caught the chicken anything is possible no matter what the circumstances are and whether or not I have home comforts to help me.



Because of ARC, I now appreciate what I have and know that what I get out of completing hard activities is character-building. I learned to tie different knots, kayak, support others in rock climbing, and hike with ease. I now face challenges, no matter how hard, knowing I can surpass them. The hardest challenges are the best because completing them makes me feel accomplished and powerful. The perch jump was one of the hardest challenges I ever faced, but gave me one of the best feelings in the world when I completed it. The experience of the perch jump showed me that struggles are not damaging, instead they are constructive. Struggles show you how to push yourself and stabilize you to push yourself. After jumping and grabbing the chicken or bar, I was relieved and complete, but without the chicken or bar the perch jump would be easy and feel like any other tiny obstacle. My parents taught me to always try and never give up but I never understood how that helped me. Now I know that I can get stronger mentally and physically when I continue with a challenge without stopping. After ARC I have gained a larger range of pursuits because I have completed harder challenges than I thought were possible. I also now appreciate all the comforts I have at home so will thank my parents for their help instead of complaining for more. Everything I have done in ARC has pushed me to increase my potential.

# Luis Higuera

## Growing Up

I am a black bear  
An adolescent cub, big and fluffy  
Afraid of the outside world  
I cling to mama bear like the roots of a tree do to the earth  
As if she was a shield that could protect me  
From the mightiest of storms  
While I have grown in stature,  
While my fur has become a blanket  
My soul and heart remain a cub.

But my wish to stay a cub  
Clashes with my rising responsibilities.  
The change from cub to bear is not an easy one  
There are many winding paths filled with colossal Sequoias  
Carved with the menacing looks  
Of insecurities and expectations  
That still seem to tower down  
In the form of stressful school work  
And worries of not being good enough,  
Of what I do not being enough.

I glance at mama bear and I see the sorrow in her eyes  
From the undeniable truth  
That her baby bear is now mature  
She senses that soon he will leave  
She must let go  
But neither she nor I can come to grasp that reality

Although I am now grown  
The baby cub who ran up hills and down trees,  
The cub who would go to grandma's and play  
The cub who asked if he can sleep in her bed  
Because he had a nightmare  
The one who still believes wishes  
Can be made on a passing star  
He is not gone, he is in our hearts.  
He will always be her cub

I know you'll miss the little trouble maker  
That I used to be  
But I have to grow



## My Journey to Confidence

At home, I followed the same routine, like a mouse running on its wheel. Exciting stuff would happen from time to time, but most days were just uneventful. I was lazy most of my time. I felt like I could not be self-motivated to stay committed to anything. I felt lost and clueless of how to move forward with my life. I asked myself, "When will my life change? What direction will it take? What will the turning point be?" I felt like I could not accomplish things because of my lack of confidence. I did not feel good about my progress in school. I was not getting the grades that I could feel proud of. I felt like I did not push myself to finish the important things first, like my schoolwork, and instead, I put them off for later. I realized that all these struggles happened because I did not believe in my ability to be successful.

My close friend and poetry instructor, Michael Dominguez, gave me the opportunity to come to ARC. He gave me the chance to depart from my everyday cycle. It was my call to adventure. I was thrilled by all the new and exciting challenges that would later become accomplishments. I knew that if I allowed myself to grow, it would have an everlasting impact on how I carry myself.

I knew that I wanted to overcome these challenges, but they seemed like they were out of my reach. They felt daunting. I was intimidated, but I could not allow myself to give up. I wanted to return home a new person, who could carry himself with his chin held high, someone who was not afraid of talking in front of others, someone who believed in his own abilities. My first time backpacking soon became a test because I was not used to carrying a pack that was heavy. I felt drained. I had to learn new ways of living, outside of what I am used to, like brushing my teeth with a small amount of



toothpaste and then frustratingly spitting into the air. As a storm approached, hail and rain began to test my endurance. The cold began to settle in, making everyone lose motivation to continue. As it down-poured, the raindrops drenched my pack, my shoes, and my sleeping bag.

Despite these hardships, I began to notice that I did not doubt myself. After every switchback, over every peak, I realized that although our goals seemed distant and out of reach, we persevered through every expedition. This proved to me that no dream is too far out of my grasp. With each step outside of comfort zone, I found that I do have the strength to accomplish my goals.

I feel like these experiences will influence me for a lifetime. They have become my source of strength. These memories will become my suit of armor that will reflect newly found confidence. They will allow me to repel self-doubt. My family, friends, classmates, and school teachers will perceive this change. My self-assurance will allow me to reach new heights in my schoolwork, jobs, and everyday life. I will be healthier in my life choices. I will plan my days to be organized and I will be more efficient in my schoolwork. My grades will soar, along with my communication skills. Giving speeches and talking with my teachers and supervisors will no longer be an obstacle. As long as I hold on to these experiences and emotions, my armor of confidence will never rust. It will be forever engraved with my ARC family's encouragement and support.

# pablo morales

## In Search of Happiness

I'm a raven  
Flying over a big valley,  
A raven that has for him  
Millions of places to sleep and eat.  
But I don't care  
Perhaps all those places will have inside of them  
Many strange people.

I feel scared  
Because I never flew without my family  
I just want to find a roost full of happiness and peace.  
I don't care if I need to fight with other animals  
or fly to the most biggest peak in the world  
I just want to show to my family, friends and all the world  
What I really want!

I just want two parents living with me  
In the same comfortable roost.  
I'm not sure if I will have this opportunity,  
But it is the goal that I really hope to achieve one day.

My mom, my dad and my brothers do not know all about me  
They don't know how many times I was crying  
They don't know "really who I am"  
I've cried, I've cried many times - I want the past back  
I want a photo with my dad and my mom  
I don't have a photo of them together  
I can't remember sharing moments with them  
Because my dad left us when I was 6 years old.

My big dream is to have just a few minutes  
A little moment in my life with my dad and my mom together.  
Because not every day is happy to me  
Because sometimes I flew over dark valleys with horrible storms

Storms like my middle school graduation  
Where I saw my friends smiling  
I saw my friends flying with their fathers  
But I didn't do the same  
I didn't open my feathers like my friends  
Because I just was waiting for a big hug from my dad  
I just was waiting for the words of my dad telling me  
"I love you son, I love you so much"  
But my dad was in this country "United States"  
Starting a new life, with a new woman and a new daughter  
I felt alone, I felt sad  
But my beautiful mom, my queen,  
Was always with me, making me laugh



I am a raven  
With an eagle's heart.  
I awake every morning thinking  
That each day is a new opportunity  
To learn new things.  
I really want to achieve all my goals  
Be a graduate from high school  
Study a professional career in a university.  
But I can't tell what I'll study  
After high school graduation  
Because I want to do a lot of things in my future.  
I want to be a professional baseball player, photographer,  
Musician, adventurer or doctor. "I don't know"

I don't know what to do  
But I know how to have a true family  
I know how to have a bright future.  
I know that happiness is the most beautiful feeling  
And I will fly and will not land until I find it.



## Becoming Responsible

Before I came to ARC, I felt exhausted, looking for an opportunity to grow. But when I had the opportunity to improve myself, I was not responsible and lost it. In Guatemala, I had the opportunity to be part of a program to learn about other countries and also to learn how to be a leader. They gave me the application, but in that time I was irresponsible and I lost the application because I preferred being in my bed sleeping and doing nothing. I regret not being able to take advantage of this opportunity and change my life three years before.

A few months before the end of 2014, Ms. Boshoven, my science teacher, chose me to get into the Summer Search program because I was one of the most active students in my class. I had my first meeting with Summer Search and I received their application. Days after I sent my application in, they told me that they wanted to interview me. During my interview with some staff members of Summer Search, I felt nervous and I almost cried because I didn't know how to speak the English language well. However, I thought about my family and my future and I put in all my effort to have a good interview. A month later, I received a letter and I read the first sentence which said, "Congratulations Pablo, you are accepted into the Summer Search program." That was one of the best moments in my life, because I knew that my mom and my dad would be happy just like I was. Every Thursday in the evening I called Will Hubert, my Summer Search Mentor, to know more about the program and talk about my life. One day, Will called to tell me that my summer trip would be in Wyoming. I felt

very happy because I would get to know another American state. After some days, Will called me again and he told me that he had a new option for my summer trip, which was the ARC program. He gave me that option because it would be an opportunity to keep improving my English.

Some days after I decided to come to ARC, I talked with my mom and I said to her that I will miss my brothers, my sisters, my dad and also her, but that I need time to be more responsible in my personal life. I decided to come to ARC for 40 days but lost the opportunity to pick up my mom and my sisters in the airport after they arrived in San Francisco from Guatemala. On June 14th, I still thought like an irresponsible teenager, but the next day I decided to prepare my backpack and just think about my new life trying to be more responsible



with the opportunity that Summer Search gave me to grow and improve myself. June 16th at 7:30 am, while going to Merced, I was sitting in the train thinking and asking myself: How will I change during the next 40 days in ARC? How will I learn new skills like speaking more English rather than Spanish? And what will I do after this experience? When Michael, Jake and the other students picked me up in Merced Train Sta-

tion, I just said in my mind: Who are they? I didn't have any idea of what would happen in the next few hours.

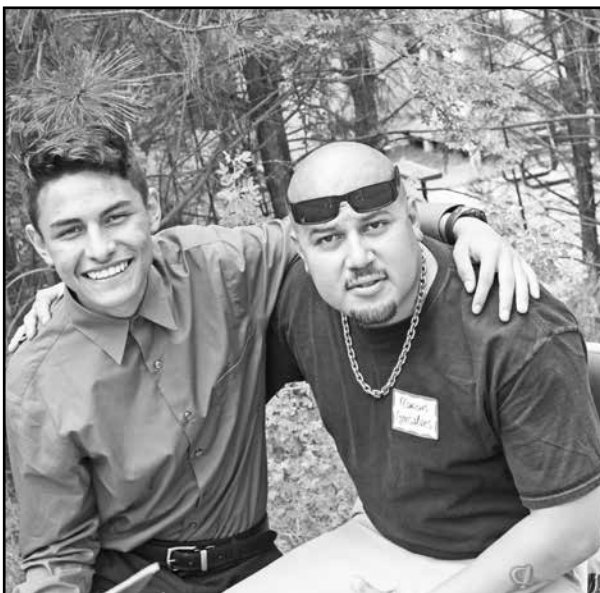
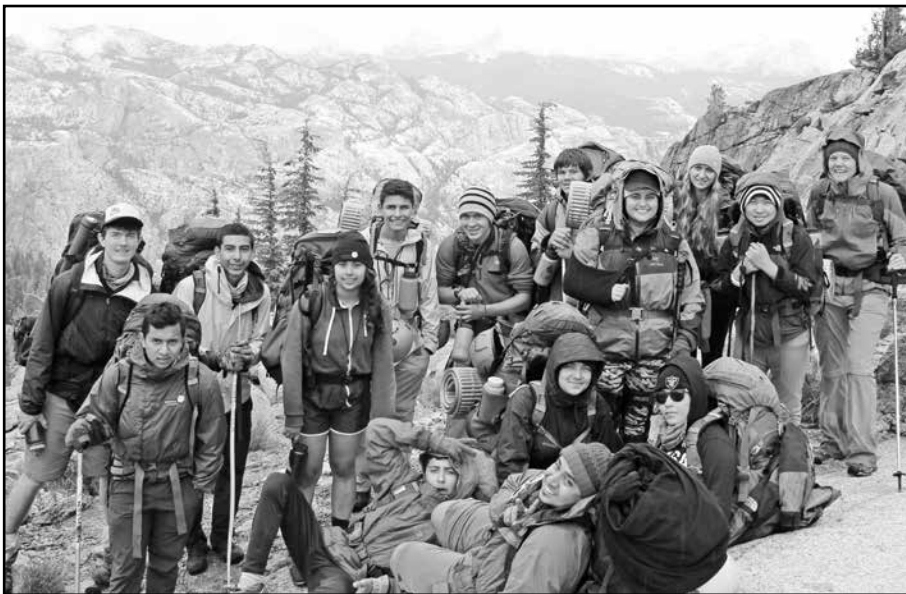
On the night of June 16th, dining with the instructors and the other students from Dos Palos, Los Banos, Livingston, Merced, Gustine, Oakland, Fresno and San Francisco, I felt confused and scared because all of them spoke English well. During the first expedition, I started meeting each person in my group: talking, sharing and knowing about their life. Day 35, during ABC News, the leader of the day Andrea Briceno asked: what college do you want to go to and what major do you want to study? The students talked about what colleges they want to go to and what majors they want to study. But I didn't do the same because I couldn't say what I want to study; thanks to my irresponsibility, I don't have any idea about what I want to study in college. That moment made me understand that I need to be more responsible with myself and think more about my future.

From my ARC family, I'm learning how to be responsible in my life. Every day that I have jobs like Leader of the Day, Broom, Camelback, Iron Chef, House Mice, Navigator or Prolific Pen, I have the responsibility of doing it well and showing my friends that I am a responsible teenager. I have realized that I am also responsible for learning how to speak English well and erasing the words in my mind: "I don't want to speak English because I am a Latin American and my language is Spanish." Instead I have changed them to new words: "Being a responsible person is the strategy to have a better life without problems."

Back at home, I want to show my mom, dad, brothers and sisters that I am a new person who is 100% responsible and who wants to do everything well in school, in my life, and in the new experiences that I have in my future with the Summer Search program.



**scenes from  
yosemite 2015**







Adventure Risk Challenge at Tahoe would like to thank the following foundations, organizations, businesses, and individuals for their generous support and collaboration: Our committed and engaged donors; S.H. Cowell Foundation; Tahoe Truckee Community Foundation; Placer County; Chintu Gudiya Foundation; Vail Resorts and EpicPromise; Lahontan Community Foundation; Martis Camp Community Foundation; Tahoe Mountain Resorts Foundation; UC Berkeley's Sagehen Creek Field Station; Cedar House Sports Hotel and Stella Culinary; Specialty Sports Venture and Any Mountain; R&D Events; Northstar Firefighters Association; St. Patrick's Episcopal Church; Summer Search; North American Ski Training Center – Jenny Fellows; Tahoe Truckee Unified School District; Community House; Tahoe Food Hub – Susie Sutphin; Tahoe Safe Alliance and staff – Kass Reisbeck, Kate Ruttenburg, Trisha Baird; Aim High; Sierra Nevada College; the US Forest Service; Trevor Jackson; our dedicated volunteers – Brad Altman, Barbara Ilfeld, Kasey McJunkin, Danielle Rees, Liz Tucker, Katie Zanto, Jennifer Morrison; Jessica Sheer, Devin Bradley, Skye Thompson, and Matt Stomper; ARC Alumni volunteers - Quad Andrews, Eduardo Barrera, Roxana Cabrera, Hebert Cisneros, Edgar Colmenares, and Zulema Medina; our Community Interview Day participants; and the ARC Board of Directors



Adventure Risk Challenge at Yosemite would like to thank the following foundations, organizations, businesses, and individuals for their generous support and collaboration: Our committed and engaged donors; Yosemite Conservancy; Wawona Elementary School - Esme McCarthy and Chad Andrews; Yosemite - Wawona Educational Foundation; UC Merced's Yosemite Field Station - Becca Fenwick and Kaitlin Lubetkin; Yosemite National Park - Don Neubacher; Yosemite NPS Education Branch - Shauna Potocky, Chris Raines, and Sarah Carter; UC Merced and the Yosemite Leadership Program - Jesse Chakrin, Jacob Croasdale, and Shelby Takenouchi; Summer Search - Will Hubert; NatureBridge; Boys & Girls Club of Merced County; Calvin Crest; Emerald Cove Camp; Yosemite Bug Rustic Mountain Resort; Sierra Vista Church; Feeds the Soul Food Truck; Summit Adventure - Nick Holliday and Kelli Stansell; Dos Palos High School - Heather Ruiz, Susan Galindo, Stacey Swinney; Gustine High School - Melissa Estacio; Le Grand High School - Lou Ann Sakaki; Los Banos High School - Debbie Arrieta; our dedicated volunteers - Belinda Braustein, Katie Burns, Jeff Crow, Caroline Fruth, Karen Fruth, Bill King, Kelsey Lahr, Charly Mijares, Jamie Moore, Vera Reyes, Sara Robison, Ben Speicher, our Community Interview Day participants; and the ARC Board of Directors

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