

adventure risk challenge

developing youth literacy and leadership



Yosemite

Writings of Summer Course Alumni 2016



Tahoe

**TAHOE
PARTICIPANTS**

Abraham Martinez
Amalia van Peborgh
Augusto Pablo
Drenese McCloud
Isel Angulo

Jose Ponce
Joseph Li
Keiran Barron
Melany Ricardo
Rosa Mendoza

TAHOE - PAGE 3



YOSEMITE - PAGE 26

**YOSEMITE
PARTICIPANTS**

Eriel Gonzalez
Gerzayr Alapizco
Gustavo Garcia
Jesus Dominguez
Jose Aguilar
Lilly Sanchez

Linda Yang
Prisila Gonzalez
Rosenda Sanchez
Sandesh Maurati
Vannaleze Barcelos
Weiping Huang



tahoe

BASECAMP LOCATION:
Sagehen Creek Field Station, Truckee, CA

PROGRAM LENGTH: 24 days

TEAM NAME: MT Peaks

INSTRUCTORS

Aaron DiMartino
Aixa Correa
Jesus Alejandro
Melissa Hoffman

abraham martinez

Being an Owl

I am a Great Gray Owl
That looks for prey and for my future.
I am a bird that spends a lot of time with my family.
But, I am over protected all of the time.
My parents do not let me open my wings and fly away
Now that I am a man.

My mom left for this country when I was six years old
And I could never count on my dad.
Not having the love of my parents,
From my incubation period until I started to fly
Caused my yellow eyes to be surrounded by darkness.
I was alone and I didn't have love when I needed it.

But I am a strong owl that can survive in different climates.
I learned to live without my parents guiding me for nine years,
Relying only on myself.
I didn't have a beautiful space to live,
And didn't have that love that I needed.

It was one of my dreams to come to the United States
I felt like an owl silently flying through the night towards a better place,
Feeling excited about a new world with my beautiful imagination.
I could picture my life with my family together again.
Then the time came for me to leave.
I disappeared like an owl during the day
I had to leave very quickly, only a few family members knew that I was leaving.
After a few weeks everyone asked where I went.
I am a Great Gray Owl that flies with no one seeing me,
Only hearing about me and all of the challenges that I had to overcome.
I felt proud of how far I had traveled.

Now that I feel happy and strong,
I would like to experience new things.
But, I still feel caged in, like I won't be able to get out of my comfort zone.
Now my mom is trying to be that female owl that is aggressive and protective of her first child
It's hard for me –
I don't feel that love that she wants me to feel.

But I am going to fly like the Great Gray Owl that I am.
I want to show off all of my hard work.
I have already gone the furthest in my family academically
And I want to graduate high school and have a career.
I will set a record in my family for success.
I am one of the few Great Gray Owls,
And I will fly around California
With my beautiful,
Colorful,
Open wings.



Looking Forward

Every day was fun without any worries in Mexico. I woke up listening to my grandparents cleaning the house, and went to school with my all cousins and friends. My favorite parts of going to school were being with all of my friends in a room for the whole week, having the same classes every day, and betting on soccer games. After school my neighbors came to our house to play games at night since we were living 12 in a house with many kids. This was my normal everyday life and I was used to the routine.

Since I was eight years old, my eyes looked around my town and there were a few families that were well off, but most of them were not. My family had a lot of kids, and not a lot of money to take care of them all. My uncles and aunts stayed in the same town they grew up in, and they didn't look for other opportunities. Because of that, my goal was to come to the United States. I realized that if you stay where you are, you won't be able to grow or have better opportunities. My mom was in the U.S. already and my wish was for her to bring me there because I heard that if you are in the U.S., you are rich and you are living the good life.

Then one day, I received a call from my mom telling me to get ready. My brothers and I would come to this country after waiting nine years. My heart almost exploded from happiness because finally my dream was going to come true.

When I arrived in this country, I looked at every detail; the houses made of wood and the big markets and buildings. I was so happy to see my mom and her partner, my stepdad. I had millions of questions to ask them about their cars, house, and their life in the U.S. But, while we were going to our "house" my mom started to explain to me that not everything I heard

about the life in this country was true. She said we didn't have our own house, but we would be living with other people and all of us need to share a room. At the time, I was a little disappointed, but my positive attitude didn't go away. I knew there were going to be good things about coming to this country, and I was excited to make money in this new place.

My stepdad told me, "Never wait for what you want in life," but at the time I didn't understand what he meant. Going to middle school was hard for me because I didn't have someone helping to teach me English. I felt really lonely, not able to learn while the year passed by. I didn't have the resources I needed, and I didn't



know how to find them. In high school, I was finally placed in an ELD class, but I lost the positive attitude that I had because I spent so much time not learning and not understanding. During my freshman year, I learned a lot and felt the motivation return. I felt proud that I did not give up during those two years before I got to high school when I finally started to improve my English.

In my sophomore year, I was selected by one of my teachers to join Summer Search. I went to meetings and I thought

it would be a good program to help me follow my goals. In my recommendation letter, my teacher pointed out my love for this country, and I was accepted. Every week I talk with Chano, my mentor, about how I'm doing in school and my goals for the week.

Through Summer Search, I got involved in the ARC summer program. ARC helped me prepare physically and mentally, and challenged me every day. From 6:15 am until 9:00 pm, I found out how strong I am. In these past weeks, I've learned I need to work as part of a team, not only physically, but mentally. In this 24-day program, getting to know my teammates in a short period helped me realize that I am not the only one in this country with struggles. Now that I know more about myself, my goals are to go to college and follow my dream. My dream is to have a good career. Now I realize that I like the outdoors and nature. There are many opportunities in my life. I want to find my own path, work hard every day and face any challenges in my way.

My biggest challenge in the past was waiting for resources and language help that I couldn't find by myself and not knowing anything about this culture. Now I know that I can do these things by myself. I know how to take care of myself. I feel capable to find the resources I need. Before I came here, I thought I was the only one having these troubles in life. But coming here, I realized that there are more people that also have the same problems as me. When people support you a lot and they want you to be successful by believing in you, they help you to have the right attitude to succeed. This is what I feel here at ARC and what I want to take away with me.

amalia van peborgh

Night Sky

I am the night sky.
I am the moon and the stars.
For different people I am one
And for others I am another
The moon doesn't show you its dark side
And the people who see it
only choose to see the light
I cannot find my true personality twice
Just as you cannot find the same star twice.
I pretend to smile and laugh and be okay
When really, inside,
I am not there.
I pretend to not care
When people talk about me.
He said, "You're ugly".
I laughed and said, "I don't care".
I did care
And you will not see me cry or care
Unless you help,
Help me to find myself

Sometimes, I am invisible,
A glimmer in the corner of your eye,
A ghost on the edge of humans.
Sometimes I'm fine with it,
But sometimes, I wish
To be someone else
Someone important.
However,
When the new moon comes,
And the night is dark,
I disappear, altogether.
The stars will always be there,
Until they die
And even then people don't see it
And don't care
They don't see
The way their words can hurt
That really,
They are tearing me up,
Bit. By. Bit.
They say
I am ugly and fat.
I believe them.
For it is easier
To believe in the cruelty of humanity
Than to believe in myself.
Now,
When people say that I am beautiful,
or talented
I don't believe them
Because of the people
Who tore me down,

I have created a space,
A black hole that has sucked out all the light
And when confronted with the darkness
Grows stronger,
Tougher.
But maybe one day,
Someone will come
Who will give me the light I need
To destroy the infinite darkness,
Perhaps that person is me
And perhaps it is not.
The sky between the earth and the stars,
The infinite space keeps getting bigger,
Stronger,
Tougher.
Partly because of me
And partly because of other people
who add their darkness to it
They don't know
Their words hurt
It's too late
Too late for second chances,
Too late for the star to come back,
Too late to take back the tears,
But not too late to save me.

What led to not knowing who I am?
I don't know if I am the moon,
Or one of the billions of stars
All I know is that I am here
Belittled by people who put me down
People who left
when I became less interesting to them
People who tried to help, but gave up
I am hidden,
Waiting for the time when
I will emerge,
brighter, stronger, tougher.
Because I was darker,
Weaker,
More pathetic.
Darker because of my hardships,
and my tragedies.
Weaker and more pathetic because
From an early age
My light
was smothered by the black hole.
But the black hole's darkness
only made my light grow brighter
The brightest star
Anyone has ever seen
Brighter than the moon,
Perhaps even the sun

I will be a good person
Someone who people will want to trust
Someone who works and does well
And looks forward to each day
If I am patient,
Perhaps I will be exactly that
Perhaps I will be one person
My truest self

Whatever lies ahead,
I am prepared to face it all
Prepared because
I have already faced so much
I am strong and I am powerful
I want to explore the world
Go traveling, and learn
I want to be unique
To stand out
To be noticed
For who I am
Not what I was
And to be all of the people inside me at once

I want to be perfect
Perfect as the stars that glimmer and gleam
in the night sky
Perfect as the full moon,
a perfect circle in the sky
I know that's not possible
So I'll be the best I can be
In hopes that someday,
I'll love myself
For who I am
Inside.



Light to Dark and Back Again

Everyone is laughing. Even me. But I'm not really laughing. Inside, I am embarrassed. Embarrassed and afraid. Afraid that, because of this, I will be even less popular, and more humiliated. I pretend to laugh to seem normal and not just some emo kid. I wanted to be liked, but I wasn't. I wanted to be pretty, but I wasn't. My classmates were the ones who made me this way, made me so that I am afraid, and sad. Or perhaps it was I, thinking that they cared enough to ridicule me every day. I made myself analyze every comment, every gesture, looking for something that could put me down further. I should have been happy, and confident, but I wasn't. I wanted to stop undermining myself, but I couldn't. I couldn't because whenever I tried, people still put me down, again, and again, until, finally, I stopped trying, and gave up. I am now changing again, into someone who I want to be. My whole life, people have put me down, and my self-esteem has been lowered dramatically, but I am changing, not for them, but for myself.

When I was younger I loved color. I loved picking out clothes that suited me and made me blend in with the people in my class. I was normal. I was happy. However, my peers changed that. I talked a lot, and tried to fit in most of the time. I'd wear shorts, skirts, t-shirts; I'd tame my hair, anything to fit in. I still didn't fit in. People loved to mess with me, to change my opinion on what's right, or what's wrong, and I believed them, and changed for them even though it wasn't my style. I wasn't popular, and some people even took precautions to avoid me. I tried to be happy. I tried to not care what other people thought. It didn't work.

Instead of having my own style, I began looking to other people for inspiration. I'd say what they said, do what they did, and basically copy them. I did all of this to be liked, but instead of raising my popularity, all it did was get people to call me out on it, saying "Stop copying me!" even when I wasn't. I started to not talk at all. I'd shrink back when opportunities were given to me. I'd let other people walk all over me just to make them happy. I stopped caring about myself, and smiled less. I wasn't happy.

So, I decided to change. I decided to have my own style. I stopped wearing color and started wearing clothes that were just black. I started wearing jackets instead of t-shirts, and I wore tank tops. I started wearing makeup to make myself look prettier, and darker. I'd wear black nail polish, and let my nails grow really long. I'd draw on my arms, and write as well. When my

teacher told me to stop writing on my arms, I had everyone in my grade sign them at recess. I started cracking my knuckles, and my neck. I was the darkest person in my school, always wearing black, and talking about death and what comes after. I'd put on a scary and intimidating persona, but I still wasn't happy. More people avoided me, and I pretended to like it that way. I still talked, but only when necessary. I still cared about other people more than myself though. I hated my appearance, my body, my face. I hated how fat I was, and how I still ate a lot, and did nothing about it. I hated how whenever I could, I'd eat candy, and junk food. I hated how, because of the candy and makeup, I had serious acne, so I wore more makeup to cover it, but that only made it worse. I hated how I came across as uncaring, even though I cared a lot. I became more insecure. So I hid. I hid it all behind a mask. A mask of uncaring, of coolness, a mask made from my peers, from their jokes and insults. They didn't know that they were the ones who had changed me.

Each day, I'd come to school wearing that mask, and each day more and more people believed it. I wanted to smile and laugh, but I didn't let myself. I didn't let myself talk to new people. I stayed with my old friends, even though I knew I didn't belong with them anymore. My old friends wore color, pushed boundaries, tried new things, liked trying out for sports teams, and learned new techniques for art. I pushed boundaries as well, but in a different way. I pushed the boundaries of society, by showing my classmates that they didn't control me with their words. They didn't control who I am just by saying that I shouldn't do something that they deemed wrong. I pushed the boundaries of their normal world, where nobody wore just black, and everybody tried to fit in. They didn't push me away, because they were too bewildered to do anything.

Then, I decided to change again. I was tired of the same old thing, because I had forgotten how being happy felt. So I decided to try laughing, and interacting with new people. I went to the teen center, where I met new people, and acquired new and better mentors. The mentors were the people who watched over the teens and went on field trips with them. They were there when you needed to talk, and when you didn't. My new friends were more like me, and understood. They understood what it felt like to be an outcast and be ridiculed by the people closest to them. They understood how it felt, wanting to change but not knowing how. It's difficult to change once you have

something going, but I did it. I changed. In eighth grade, so many things changed. I started to wear color again, but I still wore a lot of black. The black represented the hardships in life, I guess, but it was more me than color was, so I kept it. I met people more on my level, who understood my vocabulary, and didn't care about how weird I was in other people's eyes. I left behind people who made fun of their friends to fit in and didn't care how they felt afterwards. I had a boyfriend for the first time, and while that only lasted a little while, I was happier. More people came into my life. I started to care about myself again. I took better care of my body, and my face. I talked to people who were there for me when I needed it and abandoned the people who weren't. I cared less for what others thought, and started to change some things that I had wanted to do for a while but was too scared to try. I shaved the side of my head, I bought clothes that were more my style and ditched clothes that weren't. I started to be proud of my paintings and sketches and started to stop being ashamed of my voice. I started wearing t-shirts again and maybe that was a big deal because wearing t-shirts was something normal people did. My friend Eva even got me into a play, which, in turn, led to more plays, and more self-confidence. I still have a long way to go, but I think that someday I'll make it, and be who I want to be.

I want to be a good person, someone who does the right thing no matter what and helps people. I want to be confident with myself, and not want to shy away from opportunities given to me. I want to be a person who travels the world and gets new, better experiences than people who stay in one place. I want to look how I want to look, and not be afraid of other people's opinions. My journey is about self-confidence, and me changing to be who I want to be, and not someone people expect me to be. I am still working on this, and it may take a while, but I know that I will make it one day, because already, things are getting better. Better because, I tried again, and this time, I succeeded. I succeeded by not listening to the people who put me down to lift themselves up, and by listening to the people who have encouraged me. I have succeeded by at least changing one thing about me to fit my liking, which was shaving my head. I was scared, but I did it, and I will continue to succeed until I am who I want to be. Me.

augusto pablo

My Family

I am a Rock Dove; a brilliant gray and violet bird.
I am always together with my family.

My dad traveled to the U.S. when I was three years old.
I was sad.

It was difficult for me because I missed him.
When my dad flew home,
He always made me feel good and happy.

I was only three and I didn't understand
Why my dad was gone.
When my dad was so far from me,
I was a Rock Dove singing a different song.
I saw the world differently:
Darker and harder.
I wanted to know my dad's plan for the future and my family.

My dad traveled again, leaving me in the nest.
I was sad and alone.
But this time I understood why he flew away.
I became a stronger Rock Dove because
My dad promised I would be with him and have a good future.
As the oldest son
My dad told me that I needed to take care
Of my brothers and my mom.
I had to teach my brothers all the things my dad taught me,
To stay out of trouble,
And fly straight like a good Rock Dove should.

By the time we were able to move with my dad,
I was so excited and proud of how hard he worked for our future.
It was difficult for me to leave my grandparents,
But I promised that one day I would visit them.

When I came here I felt like a Rock Dove
In a strange group of trees.
I felt confused because everything here is different.
The biggest challenge for me was to learn to speak English,
But my dad gave me the opportunity to go to school
To focus on learning English.
In one year, I learned to write, speak,
and read a little bit of English.
I was so proud of myself
Because I thought that I would never learn.

The best thing my dad taught me is to play soccer.
If I feel sad, soccer always makes me feel happy,
like a Rock Dove flying high in the sky.
Being happy is how I will reach my goals in the future.
In the future, I want to help my family
the way they helped me when I was a young bird.
I want my family to feel proud of me.
I will be the first one in my family
To graduate from high school.
I was a young, small Rock Dove who missed his dad.
When we moved to U.S., I was given the freedom to fly.
I will make the happiest life for me and my family.



Moving to the U.S.



I was born in Guatemala, and I lived there for 15 years. I felt happy because I was with my family. Sometimes my dad traveled to the U.S., and I stayed with my mom and my grandparents. I felt comfortable in my school because I knew a lot of students there, and we had been friends for a long time. We helped each other with homework, and sometimes we got mad with each other, but we stayed friends. Guatemala is important to me because I grew up there, and I have many memories of fun things that I did with friends, family, and people I knew. In the town where I lived, a lot of people were kind but some of them were hurtful. I don't know why, but most of the people were helpful.

In April 2014, my dad called my mom on her cell phone and they spent a lot of time talking. I looked at my mom and saw she was excited. She gave me the phone, and my dad told me that my mom, my two brothers, and I would move to the U.S. I felt excited too but, at the same time, I felt sad because I would have to leave my grandparents. It was difficult for me to leave my grandparents because I spent a lot of time with them. My grandparents told me that moving to the U.S. would be good for my future, my family, and my education, but it was still

hard for me to leave. My grandparents said, "Do not worry about us. Focus on your move and your future." I decided to accept my dad's decision.

When the day came to leave Guatemala, my grandparents came to the airport. I saw that they were sad, and I was sad too. They gave me one last hug and they told me, "We will see you when you visit." I remembered all of the good things that I did with them, and I started to cry. I said goodbye and we walked to the airplane and when I looked back, I saw them looking at me.

This was my first time on an airplane, and I was scared. We flew for seven hours but I didn't sleep. I was thinking about my grandparents and my friends in Guatemala. We arrived in San Francisco and I saw my dad, my cousins, and my uncles. I hugged them and was excited because my cousins were there.

Three months later I went to school. I didn't know anyone. I felt alone, and I didn't have friends. My teacher came and she said "wel-

come" and I said, "thank you." That's all I knew how to say in English. My teacher asked me more about myself, but I didn't understand. In my classroom, some of the students spoke Spanish.

They helped me with what my teacher was asking. One of my teachers spoke Spanish, and he helped me to learn English. Another teacher gave me a computer program to learn English faster. But that program only taught me simple words. English was hard to learn but I made new friends who helped me to learn new things.

This experience will help me when I go to college because I will be leaving my parents. Just like when my dad came here to create a better future for my family, I will go to college to create a better future for myself. I know that even when I am away, the distance will not change the love that I have for my family. I also have learned how to make friends just by introducing myself and asking about people's lives. I know that at college it will be the same as when I came to the U.S. I left my grandparents in Guatemala and I met new people and made new friendships. I know going away from my family to create a better future for myself is a good thing and that my family will understand. I am excited about the challenges waiting for me in the future.

drenese mccloud

Questions of a Cloud

I am a cloud.
Shaped like a cheerful bunny,
Resting in the middle of shapeless clouds.
We are a family of storm clouds.
We pull closer to make each storm stronger.
We push apart to make each storm wider.

My mother would always seem happier when my dad wasn't around.
And my dad would seem happier when he was with me.
The fights,
The arguments,
They seemed like the little that held the clouds together.
But the fights were breaking my mom apart.
And I became the piece of cloud that my dad no longer needed.
He turned away from our family but continued to grow it.
He gave us life
But gave up trying to be in our lives.
And my mom just faked her love,
So she could hide the way she really felt,
Fed up,
Done.

Mom:
You snatched me from everything I've ever known.
You did it all wrong.
Bringing me to unfamiliar faces with hearts so cold,
Minds so closed,
You didn't consider our feelings.
You gave up.
You ran back to your mother,
Who reminded you of the mistakes you made,
Instead of comforting you with arms wide open.

My grandmother was uncaring,
And so judgmental.
How could she turn us away?
So we ran away,
And we ran away again,
We ended up at the storm
Where we began.
Standing in front of a family of strangers,
Siblings I didn't know.

Are we the same even though we never met?
Do I absorb your rain into my cloud?
Do I get sucked in by the negativity around me
Or do I embrace the happiness that suits me?

My tears are the rain falling from the clouds,
These tears are overwhelming.
Images pass through my mind
Of myself as my mother

A mother with dreams, but no ambition.
A mother so strong to settle, but weak to strive.

Mom:
Why did you stick around
If you were unhappy with the fighting and the arguing?
Why did you keep growing this family
If you would only see us as disappointments?
What does your love mean today?

You believed that by having more of us
You would not need anybody else
That we could be clouds to enjoy the light
And never have storms.
You ran so many times.
But you ran for us.
You hid for us.
You settled for us.

You didn't know that you were selfish.
You didn't know that you were weak.
It's like you never knew that you were a role model.
But I want you to know that I strived because you ran.

I am now the cloud that understands the storms.
I now recognize that I won't be you.
I will be stronger,
And push forward.
Running away isn't an option.
I will be the cloud that knows it is okay to rain
And sticks around after each storm passes.
I will not doubt my abilities.

I am the cloud
Not the storm.



Becoming an Adult

I was a person who felt that it was natural for me to overpower any emotion with positivity. I liked pleasing people for my own needs. I felt that if I wasn't making others happier than I was, then I must be failing. I jumped and sacrificed myself whenever I was told. I didn't care how I was told as long as I felt that I had a purpose. I'd feel guilty when I chose my own needs over someone like my family and friends who needed my help. I was too worried about the thoughts of others and how I portrayed myself. I'd feel that I had purpose if someone needed my assistance. Leaving was an issue because I was scared to be hated for going away; I was selfless but selfish for myself. I needed to make a change and focus on my education, my priorities, and my mindset.

I missed many days of school because my job schedule was not flexible, but I couldn't give up either. So during lunch, I stayed on campus to collect all my missing assignments. One day was different; it had something new to bring. There was a male standing in the library, and I knew for sure that he didn't go to Los Banos High School. He was going to present and he stood with confidence. At that moment, I knew that I wanted to stand with the posture he held, waiting to enlighten others with sureness of myself. He attempted to draw others in, but I was already interested so I sat in his area. What really caught my attention is that he explained how he went through a program called ARC and it helped him become a better person. I was completely for it all, every step that came next.

I was so excited when I was leaving the house for the ARC summer course, seeing my mom's face so proud. I went to all my siblings, waking them up to say "I love you". Driving over to my high school, my mom was still so happy. Then the most unexpected bomb dropped. I got a call from a job I had just interviewed for days before. I didn't have much faith in myself; I didn't think I'd actually get a word back so soon. This is when I had a battle with myself. Do I stay and take the job and be the same person? Or do I continue to push myself, to not be a better me, but

to be the best me? With Jesus waiting for me to decide, I thought about my own needs. I said to myself that if I leave, I will come back as someone I am proud of with many more opportunities than before. This would be really beneficial.

It was challenging as soon as I saw the other teens. I started to mentally compare myself with them. I started to question myself about all kinds of negative reasons why I wouldn't build friendships, and why I couldn't add up to them, and why I wasn't even capable of staying positive. That was all temporary, as soon as I saw all of the instructors in the same zone. I noticed that they were all diverse, as well as the group of kids I stood in. I started to feel more comfortable when I noticed that we all had different personalities as teens. This made me realize that maybe I was not the only one mentally making myself an outcast.



Relationships got slightly less difficult and my first physical challenge almost got the best of me. We began to pack our bags for expedition one. Gathering our clothes and seeing these neat things that we needed as a group was amazing. My mind began to turn and I thought to myself I'm not going to be able to haul all these items up a mountain on my back for longer than five minutes without instantly passing out. That night I dreamed about the hot sun burning my neck while I was caring my backpack. When I awoke that morning, I was prepared to quit and be sent home, but that was no option. My first backpack-

ing trip didn't get the best of me. Even when I was wheezing out of breath, when my knees felt shaky, I loved to remember that I was not alone at any moment.

When conversations got deeper, I got quieter. When we began talking about ourselves and topics that were personal, it was more difficult than my physical challenges. My state of mind held me together, it kept me controlled. We had a moment when we were at Gilmore Lake and the group started to discuss their heavy and light rock. While everyone mentioned things that frustrated them, I named nonspecific things that I had no feelings for. I told myself that the next opportunity I would be honest with myself, but it was easier said than done. An opportunity came when we wrote our poems and I was honest with myself. I realized that holding back what I really felt only made me feel worse. So I let it flow; I cried; and I didn't feel guilt. I embraced that I could be emotional, because I'm not perfect, and life has not been easy.

Before I came to ARC, I never realized that I lived for the needs of my family and friends. I now feel like I am ready to take on a life where I live for myself. Where being frustrated, getting angry and saying no does not make me think of myself as a bad person. I don't need to please people to feel at ease with myself. I will go home with every core value strong in my heart. I will go home as a role model to my siblings, staying strong and positive, while remembering that I am only human. I will keep in mind that as long as I strive for the best, there is no need to be perfect, but I will always be better than the day before.

My life journey will never come to an end. I will have many observational stopping points where I will learn valuable keys to my life. ARC has helped me realize the potential I have. I will never give up on challenging myself to push harder and further. I can now take on risk, be fair to myself as well as others, and release emotions that I have held in and kept bottled up. The Adventure Risk Challenge program prepared me to be the adult I've dreamed of being.

isel angulo

Delphinus

I am a star who is trapped inside a constellation named Delphinus.
We are five stars who are always connected by a line
And nothing more.

Visible worldwide during summer nights
There are only four stars who stay united
While one always manages to stray away
And leave the rest behind
Due to his selfishness.

We are now four stars
That have been abandoned,
Left behind to shine on our own
While the other star fades,
Millions of light years away.

As we struggle to keep our heads held high
And keep the best foot forward
We find out that each one of us faces different inner challenges.
We struggle to adjust to the fact
That we no longer have a provider for the family.
Now my mom is obligated to step up and have a job for the first time
And figure out how she is going to pay the bills.

Being the youngest star I find it hard to shine the brightest
In the darkest night.
I find myself lost,
Wondering



Whether our constellation will ever be able to shine bright
As it once used to.
I feel like I have limitations,
Limitations that will prevent me from having the best future.
I fear that I will not be successful in life
Because I have seen my family fall apart right in front of me.

Day by day the stars seem to drift away;
My sister who I look up to is just too far.
She is out in the Bay,
Distracted from the opportunity to have a career
Because one star decided to leave.

My brother is at the point in his life
Where he needs to grow up
And join the military.
He is forced to go because he has no financial support.

As time goes by I come to the realization that
We will always be together at night.
Even in the darkest moments,
Our light will shine brighter because of our bond.
But during the day, when our scars are brighter and clearer,
We will always fade away.

I am a star who has learned that in order to shine the brightest
I must work hard
To no longer fear the unknown,
I must embrace the challenges placed in front of me.
I didn't choose the family I was given.
I didn't choose the challenges placed before me.
But I can choose the future I will have.
I can choose how bright I will shine.
I will be the star that lights up the Delphinus constellation.

Behind the Scenes

I was in little old Dos Palos where hardly anything happens, in a town that has a population of 1,000. Everything was the same as always, there wasn't anything that quite caught my eye in that town. I felt stuck. I didn't really want the summer before I graduate high school to be a boring one. I felt the urge to make my last summer as unique as possible. I needed an opportunity to grow as a person.

I had a plan to avoid another boring summer vacation by joining a 24-day course with Adventure Risk Challenge. I was very familiar with Adventure Risk Challenge because I had participated in many weekend retreats. I remember falling in love with the program immediately on my first retreat when I accomplished a 6 mile hike to Nevada Falls in Yosemite. The view from the top of the falls was just so amazing and astonishing that it left me eager for more. From that point forward, I was determined to do the summer course.

June 22 finally came and it was time to pack my bags and get ready to leave for a place unfamiliar to me. After a long four hour drive, I finally arrived at Sagehen, my new home for the next couple of weeks.

I remember getting out of the car and seeing so many unfamiliar faces, faces that would soon be my friends. I felt so awkward those first few hours being with strangers; so much disbelief was going through my head, trying to wrap my mind around the fact that I left my old run down town and my friends.

Many things were so unfamiliar to me. I had to meet new people, remember their names, get used to a routine of waking up at 6:15 and having breakfast, lunch, and dinner at a certain time. The first day waking up at Sagehen was the hardest. I woke up exactly at six o'clock to the sound of chainsaws nearby. I remember dreading getting out of my bed and stepping into the cold world outside where stretch circle awaited to punish me. Adjusting to this environment was tough, especially because every day was jammed pack with so many new things to do in just a short amount of time.

I remember reading in the pamphlet that many challenges came along

couldn't imagine myself continuing another day with this pack that seemed to weigh more than me.

The poem that took four days was the hardest challenge of all. Having the drive to say every emotion I felt these past sixteen years was like opening a book that had been closed for just too long. It was time to brush off the dust this book had been collecting and share my story with people willing to sit and listen. At Needle Lake, I shared my poem with twelve close people; they got to see me vulnerable with tears running down my face. Knowing they weren't going to judge me felt like a weight lifted off my shoulders.

I took the challenges placed before me and made it a great growing experience. I have learned to step out of my comfort zone by getting to know strangers and turning them into friends. Waking up early was a big challenge, but very rewarding once I got to see what I got done. Carrying a 50 pound backpack has pushed me to my limits but it has taught me to not give up when things get tough. Sharing a

poem that said so much in nine stanzas has helped me realize that other people can see me at my most vulnerable. Overcoming all these challenges both mental and physical has been painful, but has contributed to my personal growth.



jose ponce

Wolverine

I am a wolverine.
A solitary animal that spends its time
Alone.

When I was a little kid,
Like a wolverine I started in a pack.
I always wanted to be around my group of friends.
I was never alone.
I was always with someone,
Whether it was my mom and dad or my friends.

But when I moved to the US,
Like a wolverine, I had to adapt to my surroundings.
I made three close friends.
One by one they all moved away.
In fourth grade, my friend's parents got divorced
And he moved to LA.
Then in middle school,
Another friend moved away with his mom after his parents separated.
And then my third friend's parents got divorced
And he moved back to Mexico.

One by one, I felt like I had no one left to hang out with.
When those friends moved away,
I had a hard time making new friends.
I adapted again.
I gave up trying to make friends.
It felt like so much effort because I was so shy
And my English wasn't good
And I stuttered
And no one could understand me.
It was hard communicating so I stayed away from other people.
I felt like it didn't matter, that being alone didn't matter.
I started getting used to being alone.
I started to feel like it was better to be alone.
Being alone is part of a wolverine's nature.
Now, I like to be alone,
To spend time by myself.

Like an adult wolverine,
I want to learn from my mistakes and adapt.
I want to gain experience without someone showing me what to do.

But without people,
I feel negative.
Like a wolverine, I can smell my own potent self-doubt.
I doubt that I will get in to college and that I will achieve my dream
of being a robotics engineer.
I am afraid I will fail high school and not graduate.
I don't have friends around me to get me out of my negativity,
I'm just inside my own head.
The friends I do have around me don't respect my choices.
Choices about not smoking, not partying.
Choices that I know will make my parents proud.

I want to have connections with others
And create a new wolverine pack.
I will make new friends who respect the choices I make.
I will graduate high school and get accepted to a good college.
I will not be a solitary wolverine anymore.



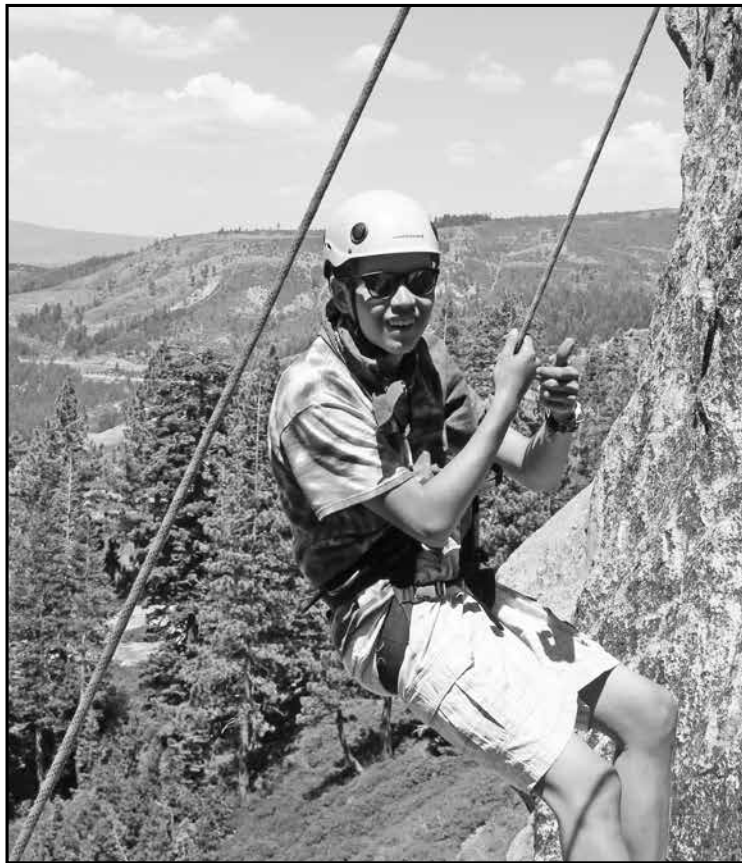
Adapting

I was born in Zacatecas, Mexico. I grew up on a farm with my family. We lived close to my grandparents. My family was poor; we didn't make a lot of money. When I was three years old, my parents decided to move to the United States. They told me that we were moving to the U.S. so our family could have a better life. I said my good-byes to my grandparents and uncles. We got on a bus and crossed the border into Texas. Then we got on an airplane and came to Truckee, where I overcame many challenges and learned from them.

I was excited to get off the plane. I saw buildings that were taller than ones I had seen before. They weren't made from cement, bricks or wood, but from steel. It looked like this country was financially better off and would have more opportunities for me and my family.

My first challenge in the U.S. was leaning a new language. It was hard for me because, at the time, I only knew how to speak Spanish. Learning English wasn't easy for me, I had to translate the words from Spanish to English in my head. I had a hard time reading and writing English. I stuttered a lot in school and people didn't understand me. I had to repeat what I said multiple times. I felt like no one could understand me because I was pronouncing the words wrong. It kept me from talking to others. It kept me from making new friends.

Another challenge I faced was in fourth grade when I had my first seizure. I wasn't diagnosed until seventh grade. I went to the hospital to get a head scan and went on different medication. I got a CAT scan to check if my brain was okay. The doctor checked to see if the



electric pulse in my brain was normal. I went on six different medications. Some were too weak, some too strong, and some I just grew out of when it was no longer enough for my body. I felt exhausted going to the hospital and taking all of the medications.

From these challenges, I learned and gained skills. I learned to be determined and not give up. I worked hard on my English skills so I could communicate with others. I have been in a speech class for eight years working on my stuttering, breaking down words into sounds to get each syllable right. I worked on practicing presentations, speaking in front of the class, and training myself to sit up straight and not cover my mouth while I spoke. I spent many years improving my speech and never gave up. I have improved to the point where I won't be in speech class next school year.

I now have a great sense of memory. I remember how much medication to take, when to take it, who prescribed it, and when to go to my doctor and hospital appointments. My memory skills have been helpful with homework, keeping track of legal appointments, and my personal belongings. I also use my illness as an excuse to avoid peer pressure. I say no to smoking, drugs and alcohol, saying that it's because of my medication or because I have to get a blood test.

In my future, I am going to use the skills of memory and determination. I will be determined to graduate high school, go to college, remember to do my homework and take my medication. I am determined to go back to go Mexico and visit my grandparents. I will strive to be a robotics engineer and live a happy life.

Joseph Li

Face My Life

When everyone was laughing, playing, and enjoying their dinner
We just stood near his tomb
Looking at him, and wanting to cry
But I couldn't
Because I knew that there was no more shoulder that I can borrow.
Like a great fire, trying to burn my heart.

Negative things surrounded me.
My teachers gave tests every day
Even though we had not learned anything yet
But the answer that they would have
When we tried to object always was
"Work or get out!"
I felt scared
About my parents seeing my grades
I don't know what will happen.
Like an earthquake, I don't know when it will start.

I tried to protect myself by crying like a baby
I tried to protect myself by destroying something at home
Like a crazy guy
I tried to protect myself by staying quiet
as a person who can't say anything.
But I still lost to the negative
Lost to my eyes that became totally dry and couldn't cry anymore
Lost to destroying everything but I still felt uncomfortable
Lost to my heart that still couldn't be quiet
Even though I was in a quiet place.
Until one day, I changed my life by smiling
I kicked out all the negative things that were in my heart.

I grew up
The little bamboo that lived in the ground changed
Became bamboo that could face nature and protect myself
From everything that seemed terrible to me
When I was still in the earth
I could now protect myself.
But one day
I still fell down
All of the unhappy things came together
I sat on the ground and cried like a baby again
And stopped my smiling
I felt my heart was almost broken
It made it hard to breathe
I felt the world just threw me away and kept hurting me
So I wanted to give up

When I felt crazy
A hand with love, care, and worry appeared
A hand that warmed my heart and
Fixed my broken heart again
That was a hand that I will never forget
Because this hand's owner gave me life and taught me everything.
My mom gave me her hand
She supported me the most.

I found myself
There is nothing that will make me crazy or mad again
Because I found someone who understands me,
Supports me, and helps me
That is my family.
Even though I felt the whole world gave up on me
I still have a place to go

Which is a very simple place but full of love
A place that I will go to every day,
And is easy to forget but is always in my mind
A place that I can return when I'm tired or upset
And want to get help from someone
That's home,
A home where my parents and family live inside.

I am bamboo who is not alone
There are a lot of bamboos who live with me
Grass and flowers live around me
Animals live and play next to me
That is nature
At first it looks cruel,
But it is full of opportunity to help people survive.
Like bamboo
It looks weak at first
But there is a lot of bamboo around me
They will protect me until I can face my life
Face my own life that I pick for myself.



Run For Time

Time is cruel, like a runner, it passes faster and faster, you can't feel it passing, then it is actually gone. Six years sounds very long, like it will never end, but it is a very short time. For me, the six years in my elementary school is a time that I won't forget, full of memories, love, and true friendship. In China, the transition from elementary school to middle school affected my life in many ways.

In elementary school in China, I spent six years with same classmates, even though some people went to other schools or some new members joined our big family. Everyone was the main teacher's children; no one is the king or the queen in the classroom. I was a student who had good grades at that time, but not the best. My knowledge increased every day, and we had new challenges to work on. The days were very fun and everything was full of love. This was my second family; I could communicate with everybody there about anything. No secrets. Everyone was a brother or sister.

I wanted to live in this big family forever, but one day, the saddest thing happened. Our Chinese teacher came in, the teacher who was like our mother. She was a little bit fat, a little bit short, and had black glasses on her face. Her warm smile was full of encouragement. I won't forget her. She said, "I have bad news, we all lived with each other almost six years, I know you guys all think here is your second family, but it's time to say goodbye to each other. You all need to graduate from here. Of course, you can stay in contact with each other, but I also suggest you find a new life. Don't stay the same with the same people at the same school. I will also miss you all, but I still need to leave you. We don't have a choice, we must accept it." I couldn't believe it. Why must we graduate? Why must we leave each other? Why must we find a new life? I felt sad. I lost something that was very important in my life.

My heart was empty, and the world was cruel. I wanted to stop time, but I wasn't a god, I was a boy who lost my second family. I closed my sad, wet eyes, and cried on my parents' shoulder.

In China, I spent the summer before middle school taking a difficult test. I was twelve years old; the summer like this was not fun for me. But luckily, I was accepted by my first-choice school. I felt happy about that, but also a little bit nervous. I didn't know what would happen next; maybe I would be the worst student there.

Time was cruel, but the world wasn't. If the world closes a door on you, there must be a window that opens. At my new school, the new main teacher was waiting for us, and she was a woman who had a funny face, a loud voice, and was a little bit heavysset. She, like my Chinese teacher in elementary school, was always



smiling. I felt like I went back to my old school. I saw my friend in the same class with me. My teacher said she would teach us history for the next three years. History was a subject that I never learned in my old school. My old school just had three classes: Math, Chinese, and English. Then she showed us the schedule of the rest for the year: more new classes like biology, physical education, computer, foreign language, language, and governmental system. After the schedule, she let us know that she was the teacher who would take care of our life in this

school with things like lunch, sleeping, and after school. The whole rest of the schedule made me feel very nervous, not just because of all the new classes, but also because of my lack of knowledge. Everything was harder and harder; I needed to learn more things and work harder than before.

I went to every class every day except the weekend. Time passed very fast, and my knowledge increased every day. I felt I became more independent. Half a year passed. I met many new friends in my new school; I earned a good grade on every exam; all of my teachers were very kind to me. Like my old school, I got a new family again. But almost at the end of the school year, my parents decided to go to the United States. As before, I can only accept it. Because it was not my first time to leave a family called school, I already learned

one thing when I left my old school. Everyone's life was full of leaving. Whether we went to another place or not, if our hearts were connected to each other, no matter how far we were, we would still be connected. Another half year passed like a second. I left China on July 1, 2014. I landed at the San Francisco International Airport. I took a deep breath because I knew my life already changed. It would be a new life without anything I knew. I needed to meet new friends and speak English. The road is dark; the only thing I can do is walk and keep walking until I can see the light.

Time is running fast; it forces everybody to move. No one can stop it because if you stop, you won't grow up, you won't be successful, and you won't have any chance to look at the whole world. So everyone also needs to run, run for time, run faster than time, and learn things while we run.

keiran barron

Water

I am water
On my way to finding my true purpose and my true self,
I find myself flowing from idea to idea,
Not ever finding one single stream to follow

Many different tributaries make up my stream,
All flowing towards my end goal: the lake.
If I have too many different streams running into me,
I will not have the reserve to make it to my end goal:
Finding my true self.

Each little stream that flows into me represents
Something that I am trying to achieve:
Succeeding in dance,
Finding a great job,
Managing my ADHD.
When I get too overwhelmed
I give up.
When I give up on a goal
First I feel relief,
Then regret,
Then self-doubt and disappointment.

ADHD has been a blessing and a curse;
It is a blessing because I can find something that I really love
And I can put all of my energy into it,
Like water surging through a canyon with maximum force.
It is a curse because I get discouraged easily
From tasks that don't interest me
As water is halted by a dam.
My thoughts are twisting, turning and churning,
Bubbling into any crack or place that they find.

My family is the hydrogen and oxygen
That make up my chemical structure.
They have helped me throughout my life,
Teaching me what I should and should not do,
Always guiding me to set goals
And helping me keep myself on the right path.
My friends are the insects and plants that reside in me;
They are a part of me.
I provide safety and they eat the bacteria in my water,
Keeping me clean.

I am water
Ripping, roaring, crashing, surging towards my goals.
In the final moments, I crest the very top of a waterfall
And before I know it I am falling;
Falling so fast to my final goal, the lake
And before I know it,
I hit the surface,
The end of my journey.
It is calm and peaceful
And I am done.
Having completed my journey
I find that I have everything I have always wanted.
I am the best person that I can be.



Transformations

Seventh grade, the roughest school year for me; I was getting in trouble at home, not contributing anything to our family, always being really irritable and an overall jerk. At school I would get sent to the office every day, sometimes even more than that.

My mom saw I was just wasting opportunities and knew that something needed to change, so she started looking for things to involve me in. She found dance, and I started immediately. I went in to the first class and I remember not wanting to do anything. I started off as the most lazy, unmotivated kid in the class; talking, not practicing or paying attention and just being disrespectful. As the year moved, on I was setting records on pushups for talking. My teacher, Ryan Curren, saw nothing special in me. Later in the year, I broke my collarbone and I was out for a good while. In the months that I was out, I started to realize how much I had been given just to keep me out of trouble and how bad of a student I was being. By the time I was back, I began to self-correct and I stayed a little bit quieter. I was still one of the worst students in the class, but I was steadily improving.

After the season was over, it was summer and I got my classes for the

next season; level one again, not surprisingly. As the first season of dance started, my teacher noticed several large changes, including that I didn't talk at the wrong times and I practiced a lot over summer so I knew many new moves that hadn't been taught yet. With my newfound knowledge of new moves I could help the other kids in my class. My teacher quickly talked to my mom about putting me in levels 1, 2 and 3. There were older kids in the higher levels that were a lot better than me, but instead of being discouraged, I learned from them, trained with them and took pieces from their styles and made them my own. I learned so much from these experienced dancers, not just dance, but how to talk, how to dress, and how to hold myself to a higher standard. They taught me uncountable things they didn't know they were teaching me, just by being in their presence

Without realizing how much these kids had rubbed off on me, I went into classes, not just dance, but also school, with an open mind and a closed mouth. I didn't get into trouble; I was focused and found myself putting more energy into things.

For the past four years, dance has taught me so much. My teacher Ryan is the best mentor that any person could have. He teaches not only dance, but a lot of life skills too. He is someone who both gives and demands respect. He has taught me focus, endurance and, of course, how to dance. Under Ryan's mentorship, I learned maturity and found myself loving dance and he started seeing potential in me.

All of the changes I underwent, including maturity and growth, were an intentional and conscious effort that I implemented myself. Growth was heavily pressed on me because I moved up levels so quickly that I had to rise to meet the standards of being in higher levels, or else I would fall behind. Dance has impacted so much in my life and I don't want to think of the path that I would be on right now if I had continued living the way that I was.



melany ricardo

Fire

I am fire,
As a young girl, I'd say things that were wrong
In other people's eyes I was rude
And the hushes that I got
Made me not want to talk anymore,
I was a flame extinguished by the whispering wind.

Always doubting myself and my abilities,
Never feeling appreciated by others
Always looking for approval,
I let myself be used for other people's needs.
Like the matches that spark a flame,
I was a tool that could be flung at any moment.

Never a leader, always a follower
I followed the wrong crowd.
They taught me that to make myself better,
I would have to put other people down.
I was a wildfire that would burn anything in its way.

Making fun of people,
Humiliating myself for the sake of others,
Treating people horribly even though I knew it was wrong.
I would do anything if it meant people wanted me around
Always full of self-doubt,
I was a small flickering ember looking for anything to fuel my fire.

Then I moved to a different city
A different school with kids from an unfamiliar world
That I didn't know how to fit in to
Where I wouldn't know what I could do to make them like me.
I was a small flame on top of a candle,
Creating dancing shadows in the dark,

But then, out of the dark came a spark
New friends, who showed me how to be better
Teachers, who showed me my potential



Awards, certificates that made me and my mom proud
Recognized for my efforts and achievements
My fire was relit
A miniscule flame that was steadily growing brighter

Even though I was improving myself
I still made mistakes.
Thinking nothing of the
Small words or phrases I said here and there,
That had a hurtful effect on my friends.
Putting on a show of confidence to hide my sadness
I was still fire; I was still able to burn people

To some I was a blazing fire
To others I was a luminous orange flame
But they couldn't see the melancholy blue
Within the happy colors of orange and yellow

Again I moved to a different city
Another new world, with new people, and a new life
I was very closed and reserved,
Thinking I was better than them
Because I came from a high end city
I spent my time alone, in the library, away from other people.
Confused about how to choose the right friends
I was a flame, not knowing which way to sway

A new year rolled on, and I made new friends
I became a leader in my classes
I reached out to friends who needed guidance and counsel
They'd stand by me as I discovered my own fire
The fire was no longer burning around me,
It was burning inside me

I am still fire
Sometimes I burn bright and proud, confident
Sometimes I flicker in the wind,
Doubting whether I am bright enough.
Every day, I try to become better than the day before
Learning to love myself and others around me
I want to become better, and I will be,

I will be relit from a flickering flame
I will be the match that sparks a fire
I will be the wildfire that brings new life
I will be the small flame that still brings light
I will be the candle flame that guides in the dark
I will be the fire that brings warmth, but does not burn
I will be the fire with bright colors including the blue
I will be the steady flame that knows where to go
I am fire.
And I will keep burning bright.

The Hardest Best Parts of My Life

Ever since I was young, I never really looked for any kind of challenges. I simply wanted an easy, placid life. I couldn't control what happened around me though, and challenges soon found their way to me. What I could control was how they would affect me. The challenges I faced throughout my life have all affected me, but the following were the most challenging of all.

When I was 4 years old, my mom brought me and my sister to the U.S. We moved around a bunch of times to different houses and schools. When I was 9 years old, we moved to a city called Fremont, where we lived for 5 years, the longest we stayed in one place. I made two best friends, I had great teachers, my grades were good, and I thought my life was pretty great. My best friends lived very close to me and I visited them all the time. My friends and I always walked and bought snacks in the nearby liquor store, and then just walked around the neighborhood. There were some things I wanted to change about my life though. I wanted to have my own room instead of sharing with my older sister; I wanted to have more time to myself instead of baby-sitting my little sisters. I didn't want to ask my friends for carpools to and from school every day with nothing to give them in return. Part of me wanted to change my life, the other part wanted to stay the same and not worry about losing my friends.

Suddenly, my life did start changing. When I was 13 years old, my parents started talking about getting a new house in Los Banos. I never thought we were actually going to do it, but a year later, we started looking for houses and I realized that it was really happening. I felt distressed, but excited at the same time. I didn't want to leave behind my friends, but I also wanted to meet new people and have my own room. I could tell that it was going to be challenging for my parents too, not just me. The owner of the house we rented had sold the house and only gave us three weeks to clean it out. I wouldn't be able to finish my freshman year in the school I was accustomed to. I had to go to a completely different school in the middle of the year.

Soon, we found the right house and we started to move. Over the weeks, we loaded our cars and made many trips to our new house, left the stuff there, stayed for the night, and then returned to Fremont. One time, while we were away, our new house got robbed. The bath-

room had trash in it, most of the boxes of clothes we had were stolen, and my mother's wedding rings were stolen too. I was scared. I wasn't sure whether I could handle living in this place, but we made it work. We were extra careful and added an alarm system. The last time we got in the car with our stuff from our old house, we didn't go back. We stayed. My room was small, but it was my own, and I liked it. I had a queen mattress and my TV and PS3 were on the floor. The house was much bigger than the other one, which was good for my hyperactive little sisters.

We moved at the end of February and I had two weeks off before I started a new school, which was very challenging for me. My classes were different than what I was used to. I didn't have integrated science; I had biology. I didn't have Algebra 1; I had Integrated Math1. We weren't doing a year-long project; we were just doing homework. The people were so different; I didn't know how to choose the right friends. A group of people said I could join them, which I did, but I didn't feel like I fit in. My counselor, Ms. Cortez, was super nice and very helpful. She was always glad to see me and answer my questions. The next year I made new friends, some of whom were also new to the school, and I felt comfortable with them.

At first, I was arrogant and thought that this new school wasn't good enough for me. Throughout the year, however, I realized it's not about the school; it's about your attitude. My attitude started changing, and I became friendlier. The following year, I felt happy about going to school because I knew I belonged. My mom and I grew closer in this city; we even bonded over Zumba, dancing to Spanish Pop in the living room.

Then I found ARC, which was also challenging, but really helped me learn new ways to become a better leader, figure out who I am, find myself, and overcome physical challenges. I found out about ARC through my school and decided to sign up. I didn't think I'd make it, I thought my chances were slim because of the fierce competition. One day I was on an Art Club field trip at the San Francisco MOMA when my phone rang. It was Michael, telling me I made it! I was so happy I wanted to

become very self-aware. The physical work of ARC—running, backpacking, rock-climbing—has been the most challenging for me, but I know it makes me stronger. Going to ARC has changed me for the better. I have become more appreciative of the things that I already had and the new tools I've learned. Tools I can use in life, such as ways to communicate better, have more patience, be more open-minded, strive to have compassion, integrity, determination, and do service. I learned new skills, and new ways to become a better leader.



screen, but I didn't because I was in a gallery. A couple of months later, at ARC, we went on two expeditions, the first one for six days, and the second for five. We hiked about 60 miles in total, and faced many challenges, such as hiking up Mount Tallac. I learned new things I didn't know before, like setting up a tent, how to set up a bear hang, which plants to use as toilet paper, and so on. We rockclimbed, something I had never done before, and I did it-- even if it was an easy level! We also did a ropes course with a program called Project Discovery, which really helped improve my cooperation and communication skills in a team. Then we went water rafting, something that I also had never done before, but realized was super fun and actually came naturally to me. Having a different job each day and being

ing a leader gave me a lot of responsibility; my peers shared great constructive criticism. A piece of advice my peers gave me was to be more confident in my decisions. I'm improving as a leader and as a person by listening to what others say. Writing a poem that was about me and my experiences also made me become very self-aware. The physical work of ARC—running, backpacking, rock-climbing—has been the most challenging for me, but I know it makes me stronger. Going to ARC has changed me for the better. I have become more appreciative of the things that I already had and the new tools I've learned. Tools I can use in life, such as ways to communicate better, have more patience, be more open-minded, strive to have compassion, integrity, determination, and do service. I learned new skills, and new ways to become a better leader.

Through my journey, which not only gave me many mosquito bites, I also learned a lot about myself and others. Moving from Fremont to Los Banos has shown me many different perspectives and made me less self-centered and more selfless. Participating in ARC has shown me that I have many positive qualities. I am not lazy, like I thought I was; I am determined to do things right. I am a good leader and have the ability to become an even better one. All the physical challenges in ARC like rock-climbing and rafting made me feel so proud of myself. Moving houses and joining ARC were both very challenging but I believe that the end result is worth it.

rosa mendoza

My Mother's Wings

I am a Yellow Warbler,
A light green and yellow bird with skinny legs and tiny eyes.
When I was 9 years old,
My mother left me with my grandmother
And came to the United States.
I had to learn how to make my own decisions,
How to take care of myself,
How to become strong.

Most of my life was difficult.
If I was hungry,
I had to cook for myself
Like a Yellow Warbler looking for a caterpillar.
If my clothes were dirty,
I had to wash them
Like a Yellow Warbler bathing alone in a pond.
I tried to ask for help but people ignored me,
Even my grandmother.
She turned her back on me,
When I really needed her to take care of me.
She preferred her other granddaughters, and I didn't know why.

I fell a lot of times like a fledging bird flying for the first time.
I tried to fly, but I was shaken.
I didn't know what to do, how to keep going, or what to think.
I was a small, fragile bird who spent most of its time inside its nest,
Alone.
One day I found a beautiful place where there were a lot of flowers,
A little river, a bunch of trees and grasses.
Each time when I felt that I couldn't continue with my life,
I went to that beautiful place and started to cry
I tried to release all the things that happened in my life.
I cried like a baby bird that lives without parents, who feels alone.
I lived as an orphaned bird for four and half years.

But one day the sun shined brighter.
I saw my mother get off the airplane,
I couldn't say anything,
My tears came and I started to cry.
I never thought I would see her again and begin a new life with her.
A beautiful life that I never imagined.

Everything changed, like winter changes to summer
I didn't have to worry anymore about what to eat,
When to wash my clothes and what to do with my life.
I didn't have to be responsible for myself
And I didn't feel alone anymore.
I felt as free as a bird flying safely in the sky without limits.

Now I am a protected bird who sings sweet songs every morning
And flies in the fresh air without worries.
I have a beautiful mother whose wings protect me.
I love her so much.
I wouldn't know what to do without her again.

But, I am still missing another piece of my happiness --
My two older brothers.
They teach me and support me with a lot of love,
But I am far away from them and do not talk with them every day.

I want to be an American Yellow Warbler,
Who speaks better English,
Graduates high school,
Goes to college,
And become a nurse.

I will be a beautiful Yellow Warbler, flying in the fresh air,
Full of happiness.
And I will keep singing sweet songs.



Exploring New Worlds

I was born and grew up in Guatemala. I had a beautiful life. I studied in a good school. I had one best friend. I was happy with all the things that I had. I didn't need anything. Every day I learned new things in my school and I got good grades. I didn't have any worries. I really loved the town where I lived; I knew everyone in my neighborhood and I talked with them every time I saw them. Huehuetenango is a beautiful town full of friendly people.

One evening my father called my mother to tell her that we just had one more week to enjoy our country and move to the United States. In that time, everything changed in my life. I thought that the United States is so horrible because people speak English. I didn't know how to speak English. I felt that my beautiful life in Guatemala was finished. I started to cry, but my mother told me that we were going to move for a better life with my family and a better education. I couldn't do anything to stop my parents' decision. The next day, I woke up so sad. I started to prepare my stuff and went to school. I tried to not think about my trip to the United States, but I couldn't stop thinking about what the United States would be like. The days passed so fast and Friday came, my last day in school. At that time, I faced a big challenge to leave my best friend and tell her goodbye.

Saturday morning, I woke up at 3:00 am and I saw my grandmother and my uncle crying. I started to cry with them, but I had to pack my stuff and get ready. My uncle took us to the border between Guatemala and Mexico. I saw the Mexican flag flying in the air. I asked my mom, "Mom, what we are doing here? I don't want to leave our beautiful country." My mom didn't say anything, just smiled. I didn't have enough time to think about my home, so I started to follow her and started to think about my new life in the United States.

When I came to California, I saw a beautiful place with a lot of buildings. I felt happy because my father was there, but at the same time I felt sad and started to cry because I missed my home. One of my older brothers and my father were waiting for us at the bus station. I ran and hugged them. We went to my father's apartment and ate some food. The next day, my father made a delicious breakfast, but I didn't eat too much because I was so sad.

Four months later, I faced my biggest challenge when I went to school. I met new classmates, new teachers and had a new language to learn. English was so hard. I didn't understand what the teachers said, I didn't know any students, and I felt alone. A week later, a girl came and talked to me in Spanish. I felt so happy because she spoke Spanish and I thought that she could help me. I was right. She did help and we became friends. I focused on studying to learn English. I started to understand some words and to read. At that time, I started to like this place because I started to understand what people said. I didn't feel confused anymore.

I felt so happy when my counselor told me to come to ARC. She told me that ARC is a strong program where people discover many things about their life, where people learn how to become a leader and how to overcome challenges by working as a team. I was as happy as when I started to learn English. I couldn't wait to join ARC because I really wanted to meet new people and



learn new things. When the day came to leave, I felt the same as when I was leaving for the United States. I felt so happy, but at the same time, I felt sad because I didn't want to be far away from my family. I knew that I had to go because I wanted to improve my English and learn new things. When I came to ARC I felt weird, like how I felt when I went to school on the first day because I didn't know what to do. But I started to talk with the other students and tried to work as a team. I faced a lot of challenges the same way I faced challenges in school during the first month. I had to wake up at 6:15 and hike 6 to 7 miles every day in the first and second expeditions.

One of the biggest challenges was in the second expedition when we hiked to Needle Lake without a trail. I felt angry, tired and hurt because I didn't know where to go and how to find a safe way. We were so confused because we didn't know where to go. We got stressed because we didn't know what

we had to do. This challenge was similar to the challenge that I faced when I came to the United States. I was so confused with everything because it was all so different. I didn't know how to speak in English, but I overcame it by focusing and reading books. In ARC, we overcame the challenge of finding a safe way by communication.

Another challenge I faced was our day of rock climbing. At the beginning, I passed the first level. It was easy. I passed the second one. I passed the third level. The fourth level was so hard because it was so high and the rocks were so slippery. I almost fell down. It was hard because my back hurt a lot and I was scared of falling and hurting myself. I tried two times, and I almost fell, so I didn't do it again. I wish that I had tried a third time, and maybe I would have been able to climb to the top.

I learned that if I face a challenge and I try again I will overcome it. I learned that if I try my best I will achieve something just like when I gained a beautiful life with my family in the United States. It was hard to leave my country, but I did. I would say to myself at that rock, try again because then I would be able to enjoy the view on the top of the rocks as I enjoy this beautiful country. I discovered that I am a strong person when I cross the top of each mountain as when I crossed the border between Mexico and the United States. I never thought I could climb the highest rock, and be able to move to another country. I never thought I was able to put my life in danger while having an adventure. These experiences helped me to open my brain to new possibilities and my own potential.

When I return to my home, I will feel so happy, as happy as when I learned English, to see my family and my friends again. But one of the important things is that I got a lot of experiences in ARC. Those are the tools to overcome each challenge in my life. I learned many things in ARC. I learned how to be a good leader and how to overcome challenges. I discovered many things about myself. I am a strong person who tries to do the hardest things. I have a team who supports me to accomplish my goals.

I would like to say that I'm not the only person who has problems and obstacles in their life. We all had to share our stories of obstacles. Everyone has a problem and everyone has a goal. All the students at ARC never give up. They try to keep going even if it hurts, just as I tried to learn English even though it was hard. ARC is an example that I will remember as the keys to open the doors of my life. I will never give up on the biggest challenges that I face in my life.



**scenes from
tahoe 2016**





yosemite

BASECAMP LOCATION:
Yosemite Field Station, Wawona, CA

PROGRAM LENGTH: 40 days

TEAM NAME: Y.B.A.

INSTRUCTORS

Hillary Landers
Mandy Beatty
Michael Dominquez
Michelle Lee

eriel gonzalez

Rushing Waters

I am a waterfall
I fear that my water will take me so far
From my family of lakes, which scares me at times.

I feel that if I stray so far away from my path,
The people around me will be correct,
That I am not as strong as the other waterfalls
That I am just nothing but a dried up creek
Who shouldn't pass through the current
Life has chosen for me.

While I was slowly growing from preteen to teen
My mind wondered so far to a place of fun
And no responsibility or care
For the duties I should have been set on.

That I wasn't for sure if I could stick to my goals
Of graduating high school and going
To a four year university of my choice.

It will always be a little tough when my whirlpool
Makes the same mistakes more than once
That drain into a dark hole of failure,
Which makes me feel frustrated,
Like I don't have the capability to change my path.

I got shocked by the creatures around me
When they told me I wouldn't succeed in life.
But as my waters flowed they changed
From cloudy and confused to clear and determined.

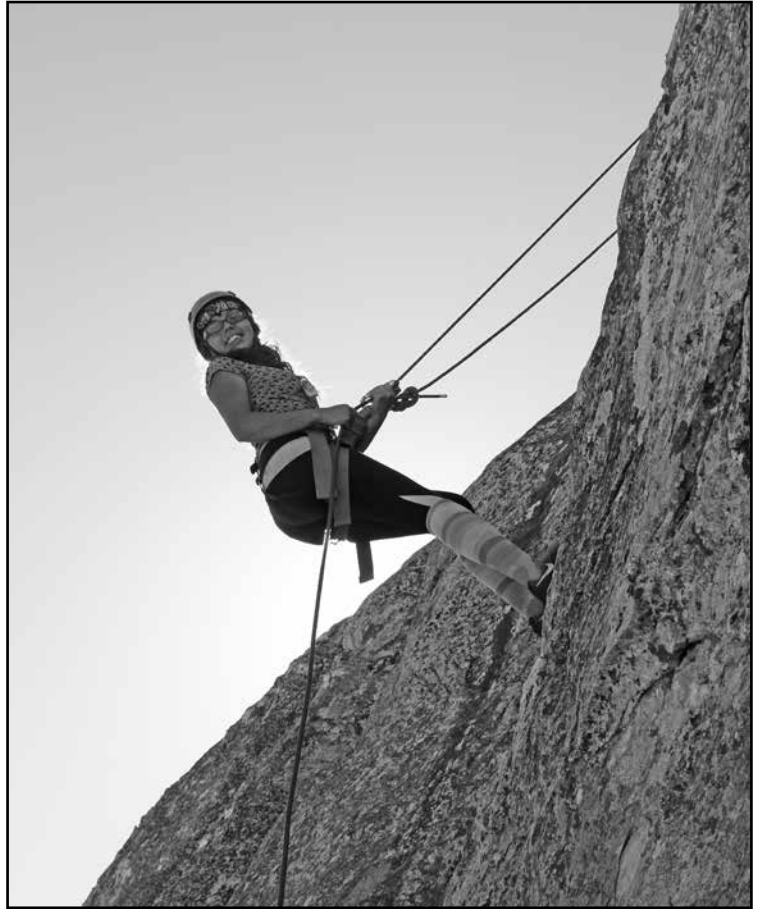
I then decided to get help from my teachers
To get back on stream with my course.

Being a waterfall I will experience creative ways to succeed my journey.
Even though I fear where my career flows, I will keep rushing towards my down point.
Now my waterfall is like a never ending adventure because as a waterfall I am always flowing.

On my journey I will end up being a successful person
Who is responsible that lives on their own without the help of others,
Having the confidence in all that I do without any doubts in life.

You will not only see me as a cloud of mist but a full river with pride.
I may be loud while you hear my water rush through the current
But I feel beautiful and at peace with myself.

Now I am worth letting my water pass through the current life has chosen for me.



The Hidden Spirit

Laziness is a trait you give yourself; you are not born with it. At home, I was described as the lazy sixteen year old who was selfish, unreliable, and childish. Every day I was nagged to do chores but I knew if I didn't want to do it eventually someone would get pissed off and do the job for me. My priorities were chilling with friends, video chatting, playing sports, and partying with friends. I was scared to grow up but inside I knew that I was a person who could be mature and responsible. I just wasn't sure how I could find that side of me.

It wasn't until a few months ago that I got an email from my counselor about a program called ARC; I watched the video and thought, "Wow this is cool! I can have more excitement in my life if I go and just maybe I can find a way to change." After discussing the program with my mom and showing her three videos, she too became hooked. She wanted me to go so I could be the mature person she knew I had deep inside of me. I was happy because I was going to go on this cool adventure. But a few days before I was about to leave, I got into a big argument with my dad. He had yelled at me for "not getting off my butt and cleaning the house." This made my happiness grow even more at the moment because I wouldn't have to hear his annoying voice for 40 days. But despite the fact I left the In-N-Out Burger in Merced upset, I truly was sad that I wasn't going to see my parents throughout the course.

The first weeks of ARC I was challenged to clean the pots and pans in the backcountry with my finger. It disgusted me that I would have to put precious fingers on scraps of food everyone in the group had eaten. It was so hard for me to adapt to cleaning with my finger knowing that I hadn't liked cleaning at all. I slowly started to be okay with the fact that I had to clean because it was a very kind way to appreciate the other students who had worked hard to cook the food. After having the challenge of cleaning the dishes, I later found out that I would soon have to navigate the group to our next destination. This made me nervous; I had only ever looked out for myself, but now I had to worry about keeping fifteen other people safe. It really made me wonder how in the hell I could be selfless and walk at a pace where no one was left behind because I really wanted to just run up those peaks and get to camp as fast as I could.

While I was learning to accept that I would have to deal with my challenges, I later became a little more confident with being a mature person. I then came upon the biggest mistake I could have ever made in the backcountry. There was a beautiful sunset I just had to take a picture of so I got my camera, I then ran back, tripped on a rock, hit my right knee on a boulder, and the rest of my body hit the rocky ground where we were camping. This was my biggest challenge at ARC; I went from having more confidence in doing things on my own to

now feeling like I had went back in time and I needed everyone to help me again. I was in so much pain; I would lay in my sleeping bag crying, thinking that I would hold everyone down from getting to our next destination on time. I couldn't put my shoes on, get into my tent, or go to the bathroom. I felt weak, like I was that same lazy person as I was at the beginning of the course. Once again I was confused on how to become a productive person. The next morning I was navigator once again. The day was very difficult, we had a lot of tension, and for a hurt person I was walking pretty quick that I forgot to make sure that everyone was fine with my pace.

It was this night that I realized that everyone has feelings too and that I should be open to how they feel because they might feel just as terrible. I've learned now to not just worry about myself, but the people around me. I've also learned that I am capable of surviving on my own without the help others. I have the ability to do it on my own, and though I might not exactly know how, I have to put myself out there and take the time to challenge myself and be one with nature. In addition I have discovered that I don't have to be afraid to reach for the stars as long as I'm aware that I can hurt myself.

There have been a lot of great academic lessons and life lessons that my ARC family has taught me. And I will forever appreciate the knowledge I now have.

When I get home, my goal is to keep the side of me that isn't afraid to take challenges in life. The girl with the bright rainbow sock personality that likes to cook, be responsible, and help others that are in need is the person I intend to be every day. I will not let my judgmental side stick a wall between me and the people I love anymore. I will walk into my town with the confidence I had every day with my ARC brothers and sisters. No more will I hide my mature spirit.



gerzayr alapizco

Rising Mountain

I am a mountain
Surrounded by ranges of family and supported by many
But one day a glacier hit and carved my whole life
My dad left to America
To find us a better life and home
My mom and I followed a year later like hikers on a social trail
Not knowing what lay ahead of us,
Blindly following the footsteps of others

With every summer, winter, spring, and fall that passed
I became lonely
I had become strange, different from the rest of the hills
It was rough at first, trying to make friends
I related more to the adults than kids my own age

In fourth grade, a kid tore my book up
Because I preferred to read than to play with the rest
In sixth grade, I was teased for my weight,
Called a fat cow that should be in a pen
In seventh grade, a girl told me that I was weird
And everyone would be happier if I just ended my life

The people that I had considered friends began to resent me
I was teased, called names, bullied, and made to hate myself
They lifted a mirror to all the cracks in my rocks,
Exposing my insecurities, imperfections, and limitations
Hidden beneath my sedimentary rock
It felt like people were trying to carve me with their drills
Into a normal mountain that would conform to the rest

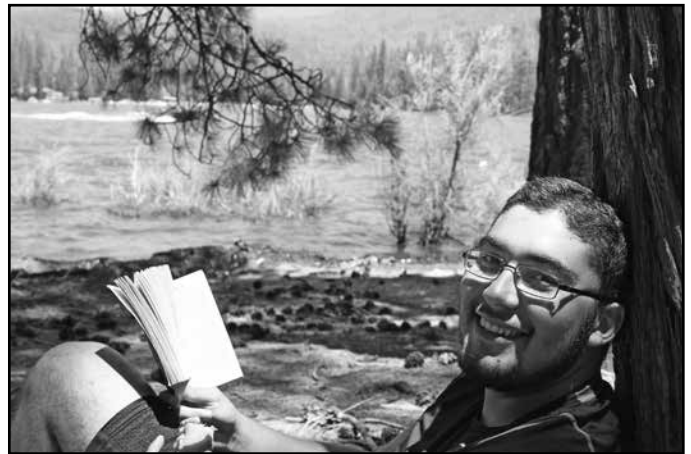
I felt that I was worthless, that something had gone wrong with me
A barren, ugly peak amid an ocean of hatred
I began to wonder what if I wasn't here anymore, if I didn't exist?
What if the eruption that had formed me had never detonated?
Everyone would be happier
And I wouldn't have to burden my parents
They had worked so hard to support me

I thought it wouldn't hurt so much,
To let water erode me until there was nothing left
To want to leave this earth at age 12 is a strange sensation
Like the crushing weight of a mountain
Could be lifted by one simple choice
It wasn't the last time the wind challenged my resolve,
Nor the hardest
But I wanted to cleanse my peak of all the litter tossed my way

I wasn't going to let others bring me down
To strip the dirt, the rocks, the trees that make me who I am
I embraced who I am and not what people told me I had been
I went from a trampled and maimed mountain peak
To the proudly standing Half Dome

Slowly people were drawn to me instead of away,
A mountain to be marveled, not wrecked
I became the intelligent, successful,
And popular athlete that I am now
Instead of looking at the future with fear,
I see it as full of opportunities and a challenge I can overcome

I will go to college
And make myself the life I have always dreamed of
To make my parents proud and give back
What they have lovingly given to me
And when I feel down, when I feel like I can't stand against
The wind working hard to knock me down
I will always remember, I am not alone in my struggle,
My parents and true friends are with me
For I am Half Dome, standing proudly above the rest



Slowing Down

My world was very different before I came to ARC. Back home, I felt like I was suffocating under pressure and stress. My life was always busy. There was never a break from working on school, sports, and clubs. When I did get a reprieve, I was always worrying about what I had to do next. I had all these responsibilities, yet I was messing up, procrastinating more and more as time passed. I began focusing more on my phone than on my family and friends. It felt like time was slipping from my grasp and I was losing opportunities to accomplish my goals. My busy life back home was keeping me from evolving and reaching my full potential. I needed to get out, to find a new experience that would allow me to think clearly and to make the changes that I wanted to make in my life.

When I learned about ARC from a friend, I leaped at the chance to have an adventure. It sounded exciting and I needed a new experience to get me out of my stressful life – a chance to think clearly and act freely without the distractions present at my home. I also left my home for ARC because I thought it could provide a thrill that I was seeking. ARC was an opportunity to feel what it's like to live in the wilderness and face challenges every day. I knew it would be a lot of fun, but I also knew that I would be pushed to my limits too.

It wasn't easy for me trying to get through all the challenges ARC presented. I had a hard time opening up to my group. I didn't want to share how I truly felt because it scared me to be that exposed with people, especially ones that I had only met days ago. I didn't want to feel vulnerable. It took me two weeks of knowing my peers to finally share my experiences and to shed that facade of bravado that I always wore. As I shared my past, I was met with care, affection, and understanding from my fellow peers. I learned that many of my new friends had gone through hardships too, and it felt good to be around people who understood what I felt. Opening up was difficult for me, but it wasn't the most arduous challenge I had.

My most challenging moment came at the beginning of the trip, during the first expedition. On the 4th day I had gotten a rash on my thigh from not being accustomed to hiking and it hurt like hell. That day, I also experienced a wave of homesickness that I had never felt before. Those two things, combined with no bathrooms, bedrooms, normal food, and droves of mosquitoes, made me feel completely miserable and sure that I would not be able to make it through the program. I was in a very low place and thought I wouldn't get out. Then, I received help from the instructors who knew how I was feeling and made me feel safe. During debrief, everyone in our group shared their experiences of discomfort too. I felt that I wasn't alone in my ordeal and that I had eleven other people who would help me and make me feel better. As we all shared our experiences, I felt for the first time in four days that I belonged there and not at home. Because of that day, I learned that, however dark the night may seem, dawn will always come. That experience also taught me to not condemn things before I get a chance



to truly experience them. This marked the start of my transformation because it was the last time I felt deeply homesick and it was when I accepted and started enjoying the program. Overcoming this challenge not only opened my eyes to the program, but to my own faults as well.

I realized many things while being at ARC. Being away from home gave me a birds-eye view of my prior self. I saw many things in myself that I needed to change: being more open with my parents; valuing my home a lot more; and sharing my feelings with my friends. I also realized that there were many things that I kept doing back home that distracted me from my true goals of being accepted into college and enjoying my life. I have decided to get rid of these distractions as well as devoting more time to things I really wanted to accomplish. Due to ARC, I also changed drastically on the inside. I became open and trusting with my emotions, something I had never done before in my life. I climbed mountains and hiked for miles when I previously would not have been motivated to do so. I overcame my self-doubt and found a way to believe that I can triumph over every challenge I face. Because of ARC, I now feel truly independent and that I can take charge of my life.

When I return home, I know that I will go back a different person. The me who first entered the woods is not the same person who came out. At home, I will act differently and start implementing all the changes I want to make in my life. First, I will finish all the homework I still have so that I don't keep stressing about it every day I am back. I will then begin bonding with my family more because, for a long time now, I have been pushing them away from me. I will also try to be truthful with myself if I start becoming distant from the person I want to be. Living my life in the present will be one of my biggest goals, as I previously always lived life worrying about my future. And when I fall or feel that a challenge is too big, I will remember what I achieved in ARC and will face the new challenge with excitement and not dread.

gustavo garcia

Another Layer

I am a young Ponderosa Pine tree
In my infancy I was just one of many
But as I grew it was apparent that I had a problem
Everyone had loving parents that helped them grow emotionally
To mature and learn how to love life and all of its mysteries

I grew in a meadow, a beautiful landscape, but terribly lonely
Feelings of abandonment plagued my youth
All around I saw others mature faster than I
In their own forest along with their own trees for support

As time passed I grew more layers of bark
Making my own toys using twisty ties from grocery stores
Pretending to be someone rich and happy
Another layer

Getting a whole bag of twisty ties for my sixth birthday
As my mom said "That's all I could get for you, I'm sorry."
Getting sick of twisty tie toys and going to Wal-Mart to shoplift
Another layer

Having sleep for dinner
Because it would make the hunger go away
Until I could get breakfast at school
Another layer

These layers of bark, shaped like puzzle pieces,
Were buried beneath one another
But the constant chipping by people visiting my natural habitat
Has left me jaded by cynicism

Some layers were left exposed and it hurt to give them air
Being made fun of



For not being able to afford the newest gaming system
Being told that I was a pig
For wearing the same clothes three days in a row
My bark became heavy and weighed me down
To the point of exhaustion

I'd beat myself down before others could
So I could save them the trouble
I sacrificed my limbs so others could walk away from me
And I tried but couldn't talk to people, instead I made fun of them
Brought them down to the bottom of the soil
Where I was most comfortable
Dropping pinecones that cut like daggers so they knew not to visit
But on the inside of these painful pinecones,
Through the jagged exterior
Were seeds that yearned for connection and growth

And still, I have trouble with expressing myself,
It creates a drought that slowly withers me away
All of the old habits that I still have,
The emotional wall that I still put up
My tendency to hurt others before they hurt me,
My emotional immaturity.
These habits still keep my roots knotted and limit my potential
These gnarled roots hurt my chances to grow,
And I want to untangle them

But I want, I need to be able to feel that I am in control of my life
That I will continue to grow, endlessly absorbing as much as I can
Have my branches reach toward the sky

I won't care how many layers they expose
Rather I will proudly show how tall I can stand
How deep my roots are, and how well I function
Everyone will see what a strong, healthy,
And determined tree looks like
It will bring hope to others and inspire them to try to grow like me

Becoming a mature tree may take a lifetime to achieve
Someday I will be able to look at the puzzle of my life
And although some pieces are missing, the picture is still complete
My branches
And the roots that I have grown will be something to be proud of

Afterwards I will be able to relax
And feel the euphoria fall over me
A calming rain washing away all of my worries
And leaves me in a state of bliss
And I will finally open my eyes to realize
That a Ponderosa could not only survive in harsh environments,
but thrive

Rising Above Mediocrity

In the dull streets of the hum-drum city of Merced, I was an average person living in a beat-down trailer park. Living in a confined space and left alone with my thoughts made me feel like there wasn't very much to life. I felt like I had no opportunities and that I really shouldn't bother to put any effort into things. I would just end up staying in trailer parks all of my life. The fear of trying my best and still failing weighed me down so much that I became complacent with my mediocrity and it was apparent in my school work. I had the most average grades possible. I've always wanted to leave this state of mind, but I was just too scared to try my best and not make it.

Everything changed when I found out about ARC. I wanted a break from everything, all of the boredom and unhappiness in my life that I did not take any initiative to get rid of and all of the feelings of inadequacy. I just wanted to leave it all behind and get a fresh start. I didn't want to stay in my house the entire summer. Instead, I wanted to go out and explore my love for the outdoors, while at the same time, exploring the vast, uncharted wilderness that was my psyche. I wanted to change my inability to open up to others; I wanted to feel something more than empty. I had no aspirations or interests other than just existing. I felt like I was a lost cause.

Forty days to find meaning in life can seem very difficult. My first challenge was being the first leader of the day. It was terrifying because I have never had to be in charge of so many people and I felt like I'd probably kill someone. I even wrote in my personal journal "Manslaughter is not something I want happening on the first day, especially with me as the leader." Fortunately, I didn't end up killing anyone, but we did get lost along the way to our campsite. It was a very stressful day because I had no idea how to do anything; I didn't have an

example to guide me. I was the guinea pig for the next leaders. I was completely fine afterwards though, because I learned what not to do when leading and I could bring it over for my next rotation as leader. I felt



that a big part of me enjoyed being a leader and I was determined to change more about myself.

Although being a leader changed me significantly, my biggest moment was when I interviewed a man named Fred. He was an inspiration to me because no matter what seemed to trouble him in life he was able to pull through it and become someone. A genetic predisposition of depression coupled with neglect by his parents were merely obstacles to him that only pushed him to want to become a doctor and learn how to be happy. During the interview, Fred told me to enjoy life in the moment and to not try to plan every one of my steps ahead of time, otherwise the future would consume me and I would not be able to experience life and all of its beauty. In that moment, I had an epiphany. In the past, I focused too much on the future instead of living in the present. I had become lost in my own mind because I wanted to avoid my own present; I built a mansion in my thoughts and lived there even if it hurt my chances to experience life.

I realized, because of ARC, that I was able to find the person that I truly felt comfortable being. I enjoy being open and understanding towards others. I changed as a person because I found that opening up is an act of complete trust and if I learn to trust myself I can trust others in the process. Then I can make friends and connect with them on a level deeper than just acquaintances. I will finally feel that I have made a significant contribution to my friends' lives by having me there and that will feel amazing. I learned how to open up when I read my poem to a group of strangers. It was really difficult because I was afraid that I would retreat back to my mind and ignore the world. I decided the night before that, whatever happened during the

poetry reading, I'd be able to find it in me to express stories of my difficult past. While reciting my poem, I viewed myself in a different way. I was no longer the person afraid to open up and hiding inside of my mind. I tore down my walls and allowed people to get a glimpse of my life. While they were telling me how they felt about my poem, I got an overwhelming sense of pride. I finally made something worthy of being recognized. I felt that I was finally the person I set out to be.

Returning home will be strange to say the least. I will go from constant emotional openings and challenges, to silence and isolation. This will be jarring. However, I will be confident and more outgoing. Connecting with others will feel easier and I will strive to be a better person. My situation will be changed by the fact that I will feel more comfortable with myself. I will be able to express myself more freely and be accepted by others. I will finally feel at home.

jesus dominguez

Weather the Storm

I am the weather running through the Sierras
Falling into the windy sweep of wrath
Blaming everybody for my own mistakes
Making people around me feel guilt
People like my family and friends

Attacking without thinking of the damage done
Fighting for light but heating up my own heart
Thinking that my family is not part of my life
Not knowing that loneliness would soon come

I see my mom's heart drop
I see my dad's faith die
I am flooding my parents with sadness
I am drowning them in depression
Causing worry for their son's future

Is college the reason?
Is seeking a better future too?
Or does my ambition have more to do with it?

I am cloud waiting without love
Ready to drop tears without something to fall on
My heart isn't able to see the sun
Because everything that was once joy stayed in the storm

I feel winter has come
It surrounds me with a deadly cold.
I cannot keep warmth with anger in my soul

All my friends and family are far, far away
I blew them away with my strong-vile wind.
All my dreams and memories went too
My heart did not resist the wind my mistakes blow

I miss my mom's laughter when I was wrong
I miss dad's advice to my every error
I feel the thunder strike my heart
I feel lighting all over my body
I feel shock in my brain
I feel guilt for causing pain

Another thunderstorm has begun
This time only in corner of my mind
I forgot about my precious parents
I didn't notice their happiness matters

Aiming so high I came so low
A cloud of confusion surrounds my mind
Showing clearness of loneliness
Presenting the blindness of help
Reaching all the way to my heart

If love would only be the reward
During the rainstorm I would not have soaked
Dampening the shamefulness of who I am

I shall apologize and do what's right
Answers to calls for help have come
I shall say sorry and lift the shameless fog
A truthful cloud has rose

I am the sunshine
I am the light my own darkness
I can brighten my own path
I can illuminate my own heart

I am the weather that comes and goes
My parents will always wait for me
Still believing in the good person I will be
I hope for a better future but with love
I hope someday I am next to my parents
Being the son they wanted to have



No Longer An Island

In the past, I thought I was a hard-working guy that did not need help. I thought that independent achievement proved that I was sturdy. I would refuse to receive any help that was offered to me. This act made things worse because denying help caused me to work harder and put in more effort in my projects. This was a selfish way to behave. Sometimes in stress I felt that not achieving my goals meant that I was an incapable person. This feeling of incapability led me to work individually rather than collectively as a team. I did not want to continue with that mindset. Understanding what it was to be supported was hard for me. Being a part of ARC encouraged me to seek help if I needed it and always appreciate the people who helped me.

Joining ARC became an opportunity to learn and to appreciate help. I was inspired to attempt the challenge, work in a team during ARC expeditions, and gain confidence on accepting help. At the start I knew that creating friendships and maintaining them was going to be a difficult task. Noticing this deficiency (a lack of team-work skills in myself) I applied to ARC. The thought of meeting new people who were selected with the same criteria made me excited. The program would teach me skills to become a better person. I envisioned that in the summer I would create friendly relationships. These relationships would guide me into becoming more familiar in learning to receive help. I never doubted in getting selected for my capability but I felt that my anti-cooperative behavior would disqualify me.

At the inception of the course I had difficulty communicating with people. Physically, I never minded getting tired and dirty. Mentally, I was afraid to depend on and trust strangers. I felt that many of my

ARC peers did not take safety seriously. Many times I would avoid talking about this issue. I was uncomfortable to discuss the way I felt. I disagreed with their perspective to resolve conflict. The real challenge began when I remembered that I promised I would be open-minded and tolerant to other people's opinion. Dealing with this challenge was difficult because I started to act foolishly. This made me think I was a fraud because I failed to keep my promise to seek help.



The rockclimbing expedition was a turning point in my life. I knew most of the ARC participants and I had interacted with them in every activity before the rockclimbing. I enjoyed their presence and their friendly personalities. But I was still not ready to trust them. I felt discomfort, because in order to rockclimb you need

two people, a belayer and a climber. Although I knew that my safety was taken seriously, but I still doubted their commitment. When working on my goal, asking for support, I flopped. I failed to rely on my supportive friends. But during the rockclimbing challenge I recognized that I could trust people. Seeing my ARC peers demonstrate compassion persuaded me to accept support when I needed it.

I learned that everybody needs help in their lives. My experiences with ARC taught me to acknowledge that although I'm capable of being independent, I was not a "solitary island". I needed to learn to ask for help and appreciate it. Struggling in hard times alone will only make my situation worse. I understood that I have the power to ask for help if I need it. If I fail to ask, I am the person to blame. Fearing is the only obstacle that stands in my way. ARC impacted me because it gave me the opportunity, the rockclimbing expedition, when I needed it. Getting through this was hard, but I feel proud; I accomplished it. This skill changed my personality because I feel happy to help people who also need help.

When I return home, I will practice my communication skills with my schoolmates and friends. I will also ask for help whenever I feel pressured by a challenge. I will show more gratitude and appreciation for the people who help me. I will increase my determination to create lasting friendships so that my friends will be there to help me with my struggles. I will confront trust issues with humbleness and support and this will change my life.

jose aguilar

More Than Just An Ant

I am an Ant, always working,
Trying for the better of the colony and Queen.
And to be accepted.
I was always trying my hardest
To make my parents proud.

But like an ant struggling to bring food,
I was struggling to be accepted.
No matter how hard I tried, no matter what I did,
I was never good enough and could never do the right things.
And ended up as a large disappointment to my parents.
In their eyes I could not see myself

I could not shape myself into what they wanted me to be.
Having failed my parents I wandered, lost, scared, and worried.
Looking for a new Queen and colony to serve.

Having failed such a seemingly simple but truly difficult task,
I spiraled into a new world of fear and confusion.
A small, insignificant ant in a large world,
One bigger than I ever could have imagined.

Being lost, the world around me twisted and turned
Left and right, my world of misery expanded as I grew older.
With more tasks and responsibilities to fail,
And more people to disappoint,
My pit of despair was being dug deeper
Even after meeting multiple queens, I still failed to be relevant.
Throughout my life, I met many people
Who I wanted to impress and be a part of their life.
But was abruptly pushed away and trampled over.
Claiming that I was useless, irrelevant, not needed.

When I finally found food,
Something that I could use to redeem myself,
That would help me be accepted, I was cheated out of it
They took it for their own gain leaving me completely empty.

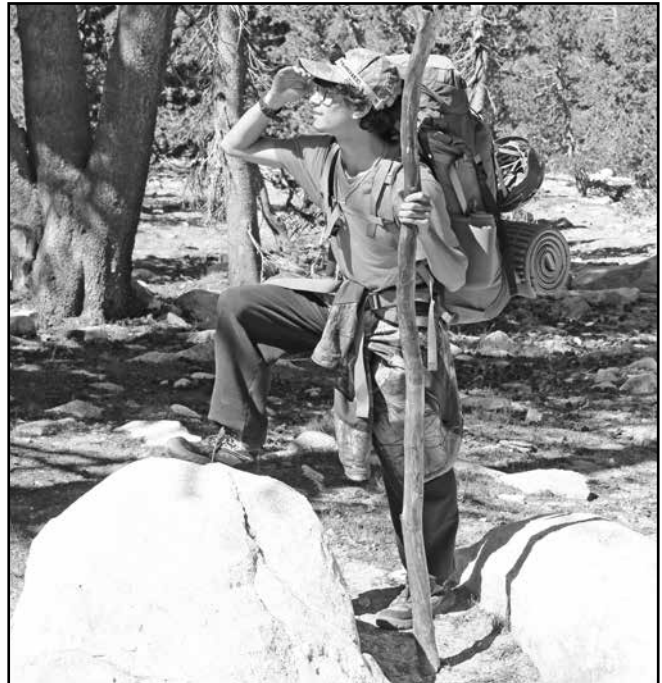
I was constantly greeted
By taunts, jokes, teases, and hurtful remarks.
Bullies or whoever passed by would stop
Just to have fun, like a little kid who leans over an ant
And burns it with a magnifying glass.

I could never have a lasting friendship,
A lasting ant hill that I could call home.
When people didn't want to be my friend,
A fake one was good enough.
But when I was alone, they swarmed, numbers rivaling an army.
I would let them push me and beat me and laugh it off with them.

But then there would come a time where the punches that I ignored
And the kicks I became numb to, would really hurt and I realized
That a fake friendship isn't good enough.
Like a colony of starving ants who encounter some food,
I was so desperately drawn to what I desired - belonging
I forgot my loneliness but didn't consider the outcome.
Being alone again

When time had passed and I had given up,
Having grown tired of all the deceit and false hope,
I had grown distant and distrustful of people.
Until one day someone accepted me into their life.
Like God himself came down and greeted a sinner into heaven.
A Queen walked up to the little ant
And accepted me and didn't care if I succeeded or not,
They gave me purpose.

I will look my hardest for food and work my hardest
To not let my Queen and colony down.
I will look for and take any opportunities
To get them to notice me and see any particle of worth
That I have floating around somewhere.
Then maybe, I would be worthy of my Queen
And colony and make them proud.
And finally be a part of something, be significant.
And rest satisfied,
Maybe even have happy dreams of what it would be like to be
Someone's Queen.



Allowing Change

I had lived a pretty boring life back home. I was usually by myself and everyday was the same. I tried to play games, go outside, get a hobby, and browse the internet to find something to entertain me and make the day pass by faster. Eventually, I would get tired or bored of doing all of those things as well. At school, it was also boring and repetitive. I finished tests and classwork before everyone else and was left with nothing to do but wait. The lessons would bore me and each class seemed to last forever. Living through the seemingly endless cycle of boredom and repetition was very tiring. So my search for something to keep me busy continued indefinitely.

Summer vacation was approaching and I still was looking for a way to spend my time during that unbearably long, boring period. It was then that my eldest sister brought up the concept of joining ARC. She had done this program a few years back and seemed to enjoy it. It seemed to have impacted her and changed, so I thought that maybe it could do the same for me. It seemed like a good way to spend the summer: it was away from the boring place called home and would have me do plenty of things, maybe something that I might find enjoyable. I thought that it was an idea worth trying out, so I applied and hoped for the best.

Funnily enough, my challenges didn't start during ARC but before it even began. After the orientation, I felt a bit stressed that I wouldn't be accepted. I felt like I hadn't done a good job during the orientation and I had not been interviewed for the course like the rest of the applicants. Eventually though, they figured out their mistake and interviewed me later on over the phone. I then waited for a long period of time to be contacted and be told whether I had been accepted or not. As time progressed and the course was only a few days away,

I wondered if I was forgotten again and I wouldn't be accepted. Thankfully I was contacted in time and had not a lot of, but enough, days to prepare. I did have some trouble, however, with printing and filling



out the necessary forms. My printer and computer were having some problems, but somehow I got the forms printed. My mother and I filled out the forms but the post office was closed on the days we had to send them, so we scanned them and sent them via email and I took the printed forms with me when I was to be taken away. I was very lucky and the ARC staff was very understanding and flexible.

During the course, however, the challenges that I faced were way harder than just a few errors and small timing mishaps. Hiking had proved to be a tough challenge since we were hiking and walking more than I was used to, with heavy packs and bad knees. I felt that I did not fit in and was not understood. I also felt that I was slowing the team down and I was wasting their

time. One of the biggest challenge that I faced was opening up to a group of strangers and expressing how I felt, whether it was verbal or written. I just couldn't seem to express or talk about my thoughts or feelings.

The hardest challenge that I faced was being open. No matter how hard I tried, I just couldn't express my thoughts and feelings. I fought with myself and wrestled with my mind for it to surrender just a few words for me to say or to put on paper. The stress and pain was sometimes too large and I had to be separated from the group a couple of times. My inability to express my thoughts or feelings began to create distance between me and the others and added to my difficulty to fit in or be understood. But, sometimes I would win and I was able to wriggle out words and sentences from my head. From my mouth I was able to speak to the group about what I thought and felt, even when tears flowed. And with my hands, I was able to write out what I felt and what I thought into poems and essays.

Although I have gone through these hard tasks and overcome them, I still feel like I have a lot to overcome. I still have the same difficulties. I still continue to have a hard time expressing myself, and I still feel like I am not understood. Yet, I have gained friends and experienced new things. I have accomplished things that I wouldn't have done if I had stayed home.

Going back home, I fear that I will go back to my old life and self. I will go back to being bored and live a repetitive life. I will go back to being tired of my life's situation and slowly forget about what I have gotten from this program. That is, if I let it. That is, if I do not get up, become more active in my searching for something that I enjoy, have a more active relationship with my friends, let my life be enjoyable, and look at it with more optimistic outlook. I will not stop trying and I will not give up.

lilly sanchez

Free Flowing

I am a waterfall that goes with the flow.
I was once little. I had to start somehow
I wanted to be a waterfall that is strong and breathtaking
But the way I started was not as easy as you think

I struggled so much to get to where I am now
I've tried to push myself but wasn't strong enough
To break the boulders in my way

I want to be able to understand things the first time
Instead of having to do things over and over and still not get it
But I'm afraid to take charge
I might mess up and I don't want to mess up
I want to feel free and not trapped in the bubble I can't pop
I want to do things on my own without having to rely on others
But instead I chose to let it be and keep going
I let it go when I should have caught on and tried
Tried to overcome it all
But I let it float away

It makes me feel like I can't do anything
Like I'm not picture worthy, like I just take up space
Like I was never meant to be here
I was drowning in my own waters, my own rivers
How would I save myself?
I don't know where I will end up
I don't know how I will end up

The day I realized I'm different,
That I can't get things as easily as others
Was the day they called me worthless
The day I became a river going slow, going nowhere
Like I'd always be the fall that doesn't have enough water
To keep itself going
They called me worthless
And I became a little creek getting walked over and trampled on

I realized that word sunk me further than I could've imagined
No one saw me for who I am
They just knew me as something in their way to better things
But I'm not going to just give up
I am a huge waterfall
That struggles to get by
But that's what life is
Not knowing what's coming your way

All I do know is I will overcome this all
By doing what I do best



I WILL TRY
I will keep going
I will fight to be great to be an extraordinary waterfall
That everyone wants to see

I will push for what's mine
Push for not only me
But for the others in my life that actually do care
I will flow with the strength that can break rocks
And move boulders
I will wash away my fears

I will let me be me
I am a person I want to be
Nothing will drag me down anymore
Not now
Not ever again.

Leaving Doubt

Back home, I did nothing all day and spent countless hours on my phone. I didn't feel like doing anything. I wanted to lie in bed and eat with my phone screen glued to my face. It was fun at points because I loved to be on my phone and watch movies but I also got bored when I kept doing the same thing, being on my phone twenty four seven and watching the same movies over again. I felt tired and I did want to change and try new things; I just didn't know how or what to do because I was so used to the same routine all the time. I was getting tired of being bored because being bored is boring.

I decided to join ARC because I thought my boyfriend and I could do it together but he couldn't come after all. However, I decided to still leave because I spend half my summer in bed all day; I really wanted to experience new things. I had many previous weekend trips with ARC. Every time I came along, I really enjoyed the times I had meeting new people and trying many new things. My original goals for the forty day ARC trip were to not want to go home and and to not give up. Before ARC, when I had a difficult tasks in my way I wouldn't try my absolute best, just because I thought I couldn't.

When I first came to ARC I didn't think I would change who I was and how I thought, but I did change. I changed for the better. I believe change is good when it means you can be happy with who you are. During the course, I faced many physical and mental challenges like when we had a long day of hiking. I told myself I couldn't do it, but really I could. I was just too afraid to admit it because the thought of actually trying then failing scared me. In the

past, I had many experiences where I actually did try but never made it. So I eventually quit and didn't want to try anymore; I got tired of failing at things in life that mattered to me. I also struggled with saying how I really felt about things because I normally don't like to talk about my feelings; I never thought it really mattered how I felt. I just went



with it and lived with it. I had trouble trusting people I didn't know because I think it's quite difficult to trust someone you just met and don't know a lot about.

During the forty days, however, I was most uncomfortable with the idea of staying somewhere new without my family. My family has

always been there for me and not being able to have them nearby scared me because they are my world. They are my motivation and my happiness for everything; I never really showed appreciation I was home because I felt like I didn't need to. I really do miss them at times but I know when I go home and share all my stories they will be proud of the person I'm growing to become. I've been away from home for so long and it is a strange realization to recognize that I can be happy without needing to be near my family. As ARC continued, I realized I can be very independent and make very good decisions with the help of others and on my own. I now know I am capable of so many things as long as I put my mind to it. I have changed in a way I thought I couldn't; I realized I have learned to follow through without giving up even when I really want to.

When I return home it will be more than amazing because I will be able to be with my family and won't have to wait four days to receive a letter from them. I believe I will be different because I will value the little things in life. Now knowing the littlest things can make me very happy and enjoying the great things that make me who I am now, I can return home and will not bring myself down the way I used to. I will also be more open to new things that will make me happy and get me closer to who I want to be. I also believe I will be way less doubtful of myself because I now know, for a fact, I can do anything I put my mind to with the help of my family and friends.

linda yang

Mother Nature

Growing up Hmong, I was limited, I was looked down upon many times, I was labeled as weak, I was told to keep quiet at times when I wanted to scream. For thirteen years I became familiar with words being shoved down my throat, I forgot how to speak, but today I remember, today I am not a struggle, I am not weak, I am not limited, I am Hmong, and I am loud.



I am the Yosemite River,
I am never-ending tears of Mother Nature,
Who cannot speak,
Her voice buried under years of erosion and rock slides,
Weeping silently from men
Who were too stubborn to move aside,

As a child,
I was taught that girls were weak and fragile,
Years after years,
I embedded this idea in my head that,
Being perfect meant being strong,

I wonder,
When did being a woman mean you were limited,
Living in a society where you were a diseased outcast,
Understanding you can be freed became a sin,
I do not understand, when I became worthless,
Perhaps it was the time I spoke my mind,
When the dam broke loose,
And I became alive
I was labeled a catastrophe,
Mother Nature was held to the bottom of the riverbed
Polluted with toxic words,
I am the outcome of a mess I cannot control,

A mess that men have created,
I remember when I was young
There was a time when I was fresh streams,
I was innocent, untouched by the force of men,
There was a time,
When I would never let anyone wade in my waters,
Therefore I am sorry; I will no longer be silent,

I am the Yosemite River,
I have visitors, that I have never welcomed,
I am sorry that I cannot keep them away,
I travel in a path that was carved into her
I have a past,
In which I do not want to remember,
But I am not forgettable,

I am runoffs of Mother Nature's face,
Every time she cried silently, I cried loudly,
So I am scared. I am terrified that one day,
One day, I will disappear without a trace,
I will run dry

But every day, acknowledging that she is my mother,
Makes me strong
Hearing her tell me that it is okay to be different,
Makes it okay
And I forget that this is a shitty world we live in,

I know it's difficult
But I understand her struggles,
There are times when I too will have droughts,
But today, I am courageous, today I am free,
I will not let a label keep me dammed,

Hmong woman struggling
Will not be written in bold on my forehead,
I am moving, I am raging waters,
I will never let anyone tell me
I am worth nothing more than dirt,
I am not slow, I am not small,
I am my mother's river.
And she is Mother Nature.

Losing Linda

The world I lived in was a deep dark hole filled with negative thoughts and excuses. As time went by I realized I didn't like who I was, but I felt it was too late to change. I was scared of stepping onto unknown land, fear of adapting lingered in my mind. I was afraid of what others would assume of me, of what I thought of myself. I was uncomfortable and couldn't imagine changing myself for the better. Unable to free myself from the hold of others, I decided to become a follower. I felt fearful to face myself, to actually get to know who I was. However, this summer, I decided it was time for change. I was determined to find myself and change my view of things.

As time progressed I knew I had to take action. Luis, a friend from home, told me about ARC and his amazing experience; I knew I had to give it a try. Luis inspired me to open up to new opportunities and adventures. When I signed up for ARC, I had many self-doubts: I was afraid of doing something new for the summer. Therefore, I set goals for myself: adapt, persist, and be at ease with working with others.

During the summer course, a challenge for me was hiking and exercising every day, but with the help of one of my peers, Lilly Sanchez, I improved. I wasn't sure if my body could withstand what I was putting it through. Rockclimbing was a terrifying experience but like many things in life you just have to know where to hold on and keep moving. While rockclimbing I realized how comfortable I was with being so high up in the air. I had to trust my peers with my life, and trust myself to just keep going. I wanted to be more flexible and sympathetic of not only others but myself as well. However, I wasn't able to speak up for myself. My self-doubt weighed me down many times. During the third expedition, when I went on my

solo, I was afraid of opening a door to a room in my head where I did not feel calm. Opening up to 11 other strangers and having them accept me for who I was felt nerve-wracking. I was afraid that I would force them away with who I really was. What made it hard was being away from home. It was a challenge because my parents are always there for me. Knowing that I'd be away from them for 40 days made me overthink many things. I wasn't sure if the idea of being away for so long would be acceptable to my parents. I began to worry about who would care for them and about who would care for me. I thought to myself about how difficult it would be to connect and cooperate with other ARC participants. Although I felt I was different from them, it wasn't until I actually began to interact with them that I learned I was wrong. Over time, I realized that I had impacted them just as much as they impacted me.

But it was Mandy Beatty, an ARC instructor, who has impacted me the most. She taught me that going at my own pace was all right. At times, when we'd come across switchbacks, which were the most dreadful things, she reminded me that every little step counts. She inspired me to step up to new challenges with an optimistic mind. During third expedition, I committed to speaking up for myself. However, I didn't and kept my voice silent. That day, we had a lot of tension, therefore we had a VOMP session, which includes voicing our opinions, owning up to our responsibilities, making sure we are considerate, and planning a resolution. When I was chosen to speak up for myself, I choked

as warm salty tears ran down my face. I couldn't make a sound, and I was disappointed in myself. Emotionally, I struggled from not being able to face my inner thoughts. I struggled with being away from home, being away from the comfort of my family. Although, I realized that I am independent, that I am capable of doing what I thought I never could. I realized that teaching and learning can both be positive. I learned that I am my own leader.



I came to realize that I am in control of my own life. I realized that I am my own hero in my storybook. Even though there will be steep

mountains and switchbacks, I know now to never look back and confuse achievements with disappointments. I now know that it doesn't matter how I start, it matters how I choose to finish. After my experience in ARC, I've learned to trust myself and others. My entire adventure has empowered me to become more concrete in my voice and opinions. I've become stronger from within and as an individual.

When I return home after the 40 day course, I will be more self-sufficient and responsible. My surroundings will consist of more positive and loving people. I will be more solid when making choices. I will be more open to others and their idea of me as an individual. My situation will have changed because instead of living in the dark hole of insecurities and flaws, I will overcome it. I will learn to love myself for who I am, and who I will be.

prisila gonzalez

Starting Over

I am Nevada Falls.
Starting from the mountain top as snow
As a high school freshman I had no sense of direction.
The only way I am able to reach my goal
Is by carving my own path towards the waterfall.

From the shaping of boulders to the abundance of trees in my way
I only tried to help my friends,
To show them what the right path was.
I tried to convince my friends
That ditching school to do drugs was bad.
But my friends insisted
I was trying to destroy their natural habitats.
Slowly my environment was affecting my plan to reach the fall
I couldn't get pass the dam that they had created

Bit by bit I was making decisions to satisfy my friends
Ditching school led to failing my classes.
Despite the fact that I never laid a hand on drugs,
My friends decided I should take the blame
For the drugs they had on campus.
I will never forget the feeling of being held against my will
By an officer when I hadn't done anything wrong.
I had reached my breaking point,
I felt trapped in their dam, nowhere to go.

Friends are supposed to be the sisters you choose
Someone to rely on to when you're having a hard time
With my friends I had the chance to share peace
But when that deep connection had been broken,
I felt like my whole life crashed down,
Water clashing against the vast boulders.

I thought there was only one stream to get to my destination.
On the contrary I didn't need my friends
to help me get through the mess they got me in
but it is up to me to create my own separate stream

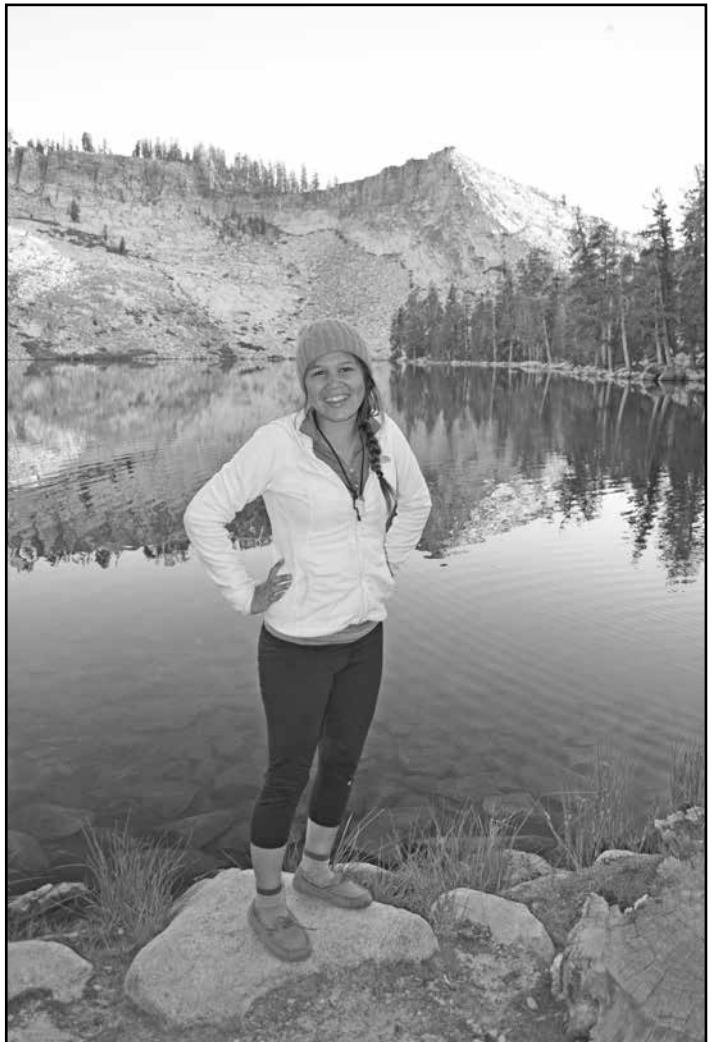
I went back to the beginning where snow had first melted
To trace where my sense of direction had gone wrong
Soon enough I realized
That it wasn't me but my choice of friends
That led me through the wrong path.

From that day on,
My life felt like I was on the right path to reach college.
In order to have a new beginning I had to start somewhere.
I felt like I was flowing through the right streams and creeks
The right streams where the friends that encourage me
To take college courses
And come out of my comfort zone into clubs around school.

The bottom of the waterfall was my fresh start
Where I truly started working for my goals
To do whatever I could to go college and make my family proud.

ARC has been my Merced River;
The water Nevada Falls descends onto
From now on I am going to make sure I get to my destination.
The Merced River will help me will flow to Sacramento State
Where I will have the chance to study forensic psychology.

I am Nevada falls I want to be seen up close
And not through a postcard
I want to show people my real self and not some a summary of my
life because I still have so much to do in life.



Finding a New World; New Girl

Back home my life consisted of my family and friends without any other insight into the world. Every day was the same old boring routine: go to school, go straight home, then spend every weekend with the family. Each day felt like a continuous cycle. Deep down in my heart I felt like I had so much to live for and places to go all throughout the world. However, the limited resources I had in a small town, Merced, had been holding me down.

Growing up, I set goals for traveling around the world and experiencing new things. Therefore, I wanted to know the world outside of Merced that I never knew existed. When I had first heard of Adventure Risk Challenge at school, I was very interested in the program since it would give me a new insight of the wilderness. ARC would allow me to have the ultimate experience of hiking in the backcountry. With ARC, I had the chance to travel around Yosemite, not in the regular tourist places, but exploring the Sierra Nevada and summitting peaks.

Not only would ARC help me explore a new world outside of my everyday routine, but leaving my parents for 40 days made me acknowledge that they won't always be there for me. College is just around the corner. When I told my parents about ARC, they weren't thrilled that I would be leaving for 40 days without being able to speak with them. I felt the same at first but it's a great feeling to be free to be myself without them smothering me.

My parents still think I am their little girl; they haven't come to terms with the idea that I am almost a young adult. There's a cutoff point when my parents should stop telling me to



brush my teeth every night and stop trying to protect me from the outside world. All my life, I relied on my family to always have the solutions to all my problems. I truly appreciated their help although they were slowly hindering my life by not letting me figure things out on my own.

I was terrified any moment I would decide to leave ARC and everything else because I couldn't stand being away from my parents. But the day I received letters and care packages from my family, I realized how proud they were that I had the courage to get out of my comfort zone. My transformation was grasping onto the idea that family isn't always blood-related because now I have an ARC family. After all the late night heart-to-heart talks, I realized that I have learned to trust people other than family and friends. From the beginning of the trip, I didn't know much about the eleven other students other

than the fact that I would be living with them for forty days. I felt like it wasn't necessary for me to trust those eleven strangers because after spending forty days together I will not see them again; I was wrong.

Those eleven strangers proved me wrong by showing me over time that I am able to trust them. Rock climbing was the moment in particular that I noticed it; I have to let go and trust everybody. Rock climbing is an interesting hobby that many people enjoy doing outdoors but it's only possible when you can trust the people

that are belying you up to the top. I felt that just because I knew them for 25 days I shouldn't be able to rely on them to hold me 30 feet above the ground. It took lots of courage to have confidence in them not to drop me. From that moment, I handed them the ropes of my trust.

I will be my same, old self after I go home, but with new knowledge that I will apply to my life. When I return home, I will not be the same girl that only talks to the same group of people. I will be the girl that has learned to trust other people and make new friends in high school. I have gained an insight of what the world has to offer. I am hoping to plan my own backcountry trip in order to expand my horizons beyond Merced. This trip has led me to believe that you shouldn't let your self-doubt drag you down and you shouldn't let your dreams stay dreams.

rosenda sanchez

Free as a Bird

I am a bird.

I was brought up in freedom
And have always been one to soar where I belong.
Through different changes of weather,
I am meant to change direction.
But somewhere along that path,
The direction that I was meant to continue on,
No longer gave way to the breeze I wanted to follow.

All I knew was that I must follow the decisions of those I loved
Because they knew what was best for me
They thought that what made me happy would lead me nowhere
They didn't think there was such a thing as "friends"
I wanted to use my own judgment to decide
Who is allowed to take the branch beside me
But I didn't want to say something that might disappoint others;
I would have rather disappointed myself

The things that gave me joy were ignored by others
And eventually by me
The chirpings of those I followed into the path of oblivion,
Became a melody that made me lose myself
Until those chirpings were all I could hear.
Until it became impossible to feel the pain

I started pretending because I was scared
I never learned to trust my own choices
They always seemed like a mistake
I looked to the opinions of others
When others spoke of confidence and pride, I felt nothing.
Those feelings did not exist in me, but I craved it.
I wasn't being free, I was following.

Every second of myself that I hid away
Amounted to a loss of wind that could have been beautiful.
I should have felt free to learn from the mistakes that I created
And free to follow the everlasting blue sky to where I chose
I want to be seen for who I am
And sometimes I am broken

Sometimes what bothers me is myself
For not trusting or believing in myself
That my thoughts and words are unworthy
I did not know I could be weak
I did not know how to change it

But now, now I know I can
I know worthiness comes from within
My words are my wings and they will carry me
They will carry me to where I feel free
I have been and I have felt lost.

But I am a bird.
And I will soar to the highest peak that follows a raging river
And it will calm with the chirping of a song of my own creation.
I will create my own happiness with what I am.
Because it is enough.
Because I am worthy.



Open to the World

I had spent seventeen years protected from the world. My parents, wanting the best for me, decided to hide me from many sad and dangerous realities, which stopped me from gaining experiences. I spent years of my life being focused solely on school, family, and friends, but I never dared to try new things. I formed a comfort zone that stopped me from reaching out and made me afraid. Under certain situations, I was unable to speak out for the fear that it would create change that I was unprepared to handle. This became an obstacle when making choices related to my future, when meeting new people, and when taking opportunities.

At the beginning of junior year, a friend told me about a summer course called Adventure Risk Challenge. At first, I said I was uninterested and that it was not meant for me. I had never been camping or backpacking and I was not prepared to leave home for 40 days. I didn't even have to think twice about it. But it started coming up more often at school and while I did my best to ignore it, I learned more about the course anyway. Against my best efforts, I became interested in the program. It seemed exciting and overpowered many of the fears that I was accustomed to. I chose to apply and desperately waiting by the phone hoping I had been accepted. I had begun to realize that I was missing out on many things and I knew that ARC would give me experiences that I may never get otherwise. I entered the program knowing that I wanted to learn more about the world and myself and that I would be able to gain the independence that I needed. I was prepared to challenge myself in any way possible.

I almost did not give challenges a try because of fear that I did not know I could control. I had never gone through the process of explaining my thoughts and emotions and when I had to write a poem about myself, I did not know how to be honest with myself. I was scared of speaking and I did not know how to deal with it, but by witnessing everyone else in ARC be brave, I decided to take a

chance and just say what I had to say – it felt right. At first, not speaking made it difficult for me to meet and trust a group of students that were strangers to me. Having to make friends has never been an easy task; I thought that I would not be liked and possibly feel excluded during the 40-day course. I allowed everyone else to lead while I simply followed. It dropped my confidence, but I was surprised when I was supported instead of made to feel insecure. I was able to gain



the motivation to become a leader. The challenge of having to overcome fear and vulnerability arose on several occasions. I became vulnerable during the light rock/heavy rock activity and while writing my poem. I realized that I was insecure and that I had trouble accepting it. I had to come face-to-face with insecurities that were holding me back from expressing myself and from believing in myself. I had to learn to say what I had to say without overthinking the response I would get. That fear almost held me

back when I thought that some activities would not be worth attempting if they led to failure. When the group went rock climbing, I went through the climb doubting that I would make it. I avoided looking around until I had reached the top and even debated quitting right there and then. But I reached the top and I realized that the fear does not define me unless I allow it to control what I do.

All of the experiences I was able to go through because of ARC gave me the confidence to go through different changes in my life and with myself. I learned to trust others and how to be someone that others could trust as well. The group helped me become brave enough to speak without fear of being wrong or judged. I was scared to put myself in a position where everything was new, but having done so, I learned things about myself and what I am capable of doing by simply trying. Although I was with a group of students and instructors, I learned to be independent because the choices were mine. It was my choice if I reached the top of the mountains or if I was honest in my poem or if I got through the challenge course. Having choices opened my mind to the opportunities that I can take through my life during and after ARC.

I will be a new person when I go home. I will have grown into someone that I did not know I could become. I will be more confident and less afraid. I will view everything I do differently because I now know what can and can't come with taking chances. I've learned that making mistakes isn't something to fear; it is an opportunity for learning. I will remember every person who encouraged me and whom I encouraged because it proved that someone believes in us even if we lack confidence in ourselves. Having broken through the shell that my family created for me, I now want to put myself through experiences in which I can be open and learn from what I do right and what I do wrong. My new confidence gives me the power to be someone who I am proud of.

sandesh maurati

Unrooted

I'm a tree; born with the help of Nature
With the help of my motherland, my family
And I'm born with leaves, branches and roots.
Leaves to be happy,
Branches to take responsibility
And roots to make my life strong and comfortable.

When I was a young sapling, I was weak
But nature gave me support through sun, rain, and soil
At age six I was suffering from pneumonia
I was unable to survive and was left to die

But my grandma carried me from village to village to save my life,
She sold everything to pay for my treatment
She never let me feel like I was a burden
Even when she was having hard times herself.
She made sure that I was safe and protected.
She never doubted me and always thought
That I was on the right path,

But the days never remained the same
At 13 years old, I lost my grandma
She was the one person I cared about the most.
I lost all my hopes and faith in my own life.
I feel like I was covered in a black cloud with heavy rainstorm
Where I could easily be carried away

I tried to become stronger
Because growing up lots of people used me as broken branches
Put me down into a fire where my life turned to ashes
High school freshman year,
Everyone laughed at me when I spoke in English
Because it wasn't good,
Because they didn't understand what I was saying.

I wasn't the same person as I used to be
And still I'm not that person
I lost everything I had
I started to realize that I couldn't get my memories back
I fought myself not to cry every single night.
Because the truth was people were tearing my leaves
And crushing my branches and purging my roots

All the people put me down when I was a sapling
My grandma was the one who always picked me up
But now I'm like a dead tree
Because she is no longer here to pick me up
In places I was moldy,

People found my weakness and put me down.
It was hard to believe in myself
To hold on to all the leaves and branches
And thinking about how to succeed
But I need to overcome my fear from droughts and fires
I have to learn how to put myself in a strong position
I will find a place of happiness for new life to grow.

My leaves will change into new colors,
I'll be strong enough to make my branches strong
So I can give other creatures something to hold to
Give them support even if I'm having a hard time in my life.
I will help my family tree grow
And connect our roots by fulfilling my dreams as a firefighter

And even though her soul is in my heart
I will make my grandma proud
I will make myself proud



Goodbye to Old Me

I used to live in a dark room, where I could never see my dreams, hopes, and new people. I was putting myself down. I had nothing to do because I had self doubt. I never had confidence. I had trust issues and I was always comparing myself with others. Once I entered that negative space, the same things would go through my mind: "How will I survive my life after high school? Will I get chance to meet new people?" I always wanted to change the room color but I never could. I felt like I was a sloth just hanging on the wall trying to reach for my goals, but never being able to. My parents were tired of me not doing anything, not helping them around the house, being lazy, and not having good grades. They never knew my struggles in school like having a hard time concentrating in the class because of not understanding the teachers. I wanted to show them how hard I could work to get my grades up. I wanted to prove them wrong, but I couldn't.

I grew really sick and tired of that dark room, so I planned to hammer through it like shattered glass. Thankfully, the day came where I got the call from ARC. For a long period of time, I said to myself, "Someone is giving me a chance to be better and be adventurous." I was happy. I felt like I was in another world when I got the call. I felt like I would rather participate in this program and risk my life in the wilderness instead of risking my life in that dark room.

Finally, the day came when I began the ARC program. We started the first eight days backpacking. I felt physically and mentally sick from carrying the heavy backpack because that dark room still had a hold on my life. It didn't let me free. It just made me feel like I wanted to go home, so I wouldn't need to worry about new challenges. I started to think negatively about ARC because this wasn't my home and I felt like I didn't

belong here. When I joined ARC, the most uncomfortable moment was to be close to friends and share feelings with them which I never do. I used to like to meet new people and share feelings that I had but they never kept those conversations secret. It happened when I was a freshman in high school. I trusted one of my best friends. I shared every part of my emotional story. But that trust was broken when I found



that he was just playing with my feelings and making fun of me.

I also compared myself to the ARC team and I felt worthless. I felt like they were better than me by looking at their behavior and their braveness. They were ready to do everything. It didn't matter what came in the way. I always felt the same: I will not be successful. I turned off those negative thoughts and started to think positively like how to get close to the ARC team and make my goals and challenges easier. The goals and challenges that I set for myself were easy to imagine, but hard to achieve. I was putting myself down because I wasn't able to achieve the goals that I had dreamed about of making new friends and exploring the world.

There were many struggles and challenges standing in my way preventing me from

achieving my goals. During the course, I went rafting, rock climbing, and hiking. These activities were really hard for me because I was scared of trying new things. For example, while I was rock climbing, I was scared and stood on the edge like a coward. I had the same thoughts like, "I can't do this. I'm not good enough. This isn't what I want to do." These kinds of thoughts didn't take me anywhere. Two of my ARC friends, Gus and Vanna, were cheering for me. They were inspiring and motivating me. I started to push myself up without looking back. I went straight forward and took a deep breath and threw my negative thoughts away. I realized my dark room which was holding my life back was shattered like glass. My two ARC friends helped to find a better place for myself and my thoughts.

I started to notice that something had changed in my daily life. I realized being weak, scared, and having negative thoughts wouldn't take me down the right path. I needed to push myself up no matter how hard it was. After all these years, now I feel like I am someone who I always wanted to be. I also got lots of advice and stories from leaders and friends that will inspire me to be a leader in every school activity.

Once I finish my 40-day course, I might run to the train station happily, but my soul will never leave these 12 amazing people, 5 amazing leaders, and this small school where I learned new stories from new friends. After I return home, I will remember what I learned from the ARC program. I will make a change within myself. I won't bring that dark room back. I will create a new room with beautiful wilderness colors where I can connect myself to nature. I'll also make my family proud and bring good news to them every single day of my life. I'll be proud of myself and who I am. I will dedicate myself to a busy life for the next two years of high school and my future career.

vannaleze barcelos

I am the Merced River

I am the Merced River.
Cutting through miles of mountain ranges and deep valleys.
Father Granite – strong and silent – carries me.
But he is eroding; he will not be with me forever.
Mother Glacier carved me the path that makes me the strong river
I am today.
She leaves remnants of herself to remind me of who I am,
And where I came from.

They tried so hard for me
To have a life filled with opportunity and freedom.
I wanted my path to include the world, even in all its ugliness
But they sheltered me, kept my view of this land so tiny, so distant.
I relied on their guidance so much that I couldn't be free myself.
I could not carry myself; I needed others to push me forward.
I realized I wasn't my own person, my own river.

Seventeen years gone by
And I couldn't tell the difference in what I hated and what I loved.
Whether I loved the chill of winter's breeze
Or hated the heat of summer's sun.
I was torn between being myself or being accepted.
I wasn't following my own current, I was following theirs
So I completely diverted my course.

I avoided others to escape being polluted
By their thoughts and ideals.
Cut off friendly streams, romantic creeks, and concerning brooks.
Friendly streams were unsteady and often shared too many secrets.
Romantic creeks were intimidating and overwhelming.
Concerning brooks suffocated me with interrogations and judgment.

I took out my frustration on the ones closest to me



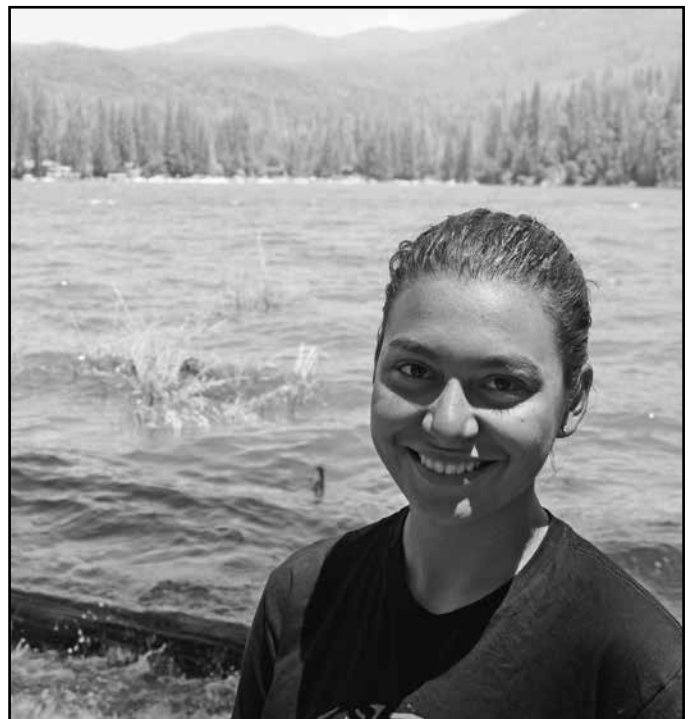
I drowned out my family and friends until they washed ashore.
I became alone, secluded, stagnant
I began to only hear the noise I made.
But in my calmest waters,
The lack of trust and affection still bubbled
I couldn't love and trust myself
Any better than I could love and trust others.
I was scared

I was polluting myself with doubt.
I need to be purified of fear and insecurity.
I must strain myself of the waste:
My own cloudy judgment and invasive negativity.
I must try, even if I tumble over boulders and fall over sharp cliffs.
I must move,
Even if I travel in the wrong direction I won't lose myself

My water will no longer be toxic.
My beauty will reflect to anyone that looks into me.
My mind will be crystal clear water.

Love and trust will overflow.
The streams and creeks and brooks
Will always be welcomed instead of pushed away.
And I will dance around the grandest forests and the tallest peaks.

Finally I will accept myself for the river I truly am.



I lived in a world of constant comparison. There were so many things I thought I should live up to: being a good daughter, a supportive sister, a cool friend, and an exceptional student. But I didn't understand my purpose as a daughter, as a sister, as a friend, and as a student. Even further, there were expectations I held for myself. I wanted to become the person I thought I would be when I was younger. Whenever I felt I didn't live up to this conformed idea of what I should be, I shut down and shut out. I knew what I was doing to myself was bad, yet I continued this cycle. I was unable to change my perspective of how things ought to be, and what happiness was supposed to look like. Everyone seemed to know what their direction was moving forward besides me. I felt so discouraged by the world I was living in. I refused to participate in any kind of socializing or activities that normal high schoolers usually would enjoy doing. Memories that should have been made passed me by. Instead, I had memories of scrolling through my phone, comparing my life by the vague outline of others on social media. Maybe it was my cheekbones, or my inability to be truly interested in anyone other than myself. I told myself everything else was irrelevant to cope with the fact that I was actually missing out. Three years in and my high school experience was like flipping through an empty photo album.

I knew the world held something more than just the problems I was facing. When I was at home, I wanted to pack up and leave everything and everyone I knew. But, the only person I actually wanted to get away from was myself. In my environment, I was trapped in my own thoughts. It felt like every day I was forced to put on a mask of happiness. I knew leaving my hometown I would leave behind myself. I would leave behind my family, my friends, and my precious summer. And I was beyond okay with that. I loved Yosemite. My first experience here was in my freshman year. Yosemite is where I felt free from myself. Free from what I thought I had to become. I heard about ARC the summer before junior year. I didn't join because I thought I couldn't do it. Thus, I dismissed the idea as a whole, until my mom found about the program the following summer. She knew how much I loved Yosemite, so she convinced me to apply. Beginning ARC, I wanted to be completely honest with how I was feeling. I was such a mess coming into this program, and it wasn't hard to tell. What made me initially uncomfortable be-

ing here were the people. I was thrown into a pit of 11 strangers and our first experience together was an eight-day intense backpacking trip. No one I met was like the people I called friends back at home. My inability to become vulnerable and honest was difficult for me throughout my life. This all intensified when I felt like I had to open up to people I wasn't comfortable with in the first place. But then I saw that others started to share their stories: stories of their hardships, their experiences, and stories of overcoming themselves. This pushed me to do the same. I began to open up, and to trust others whole heartedly. I crossed my fingers that they would also share the same kind of empathy and respect that I expressed to them. In participating with the group, supporting others and allowing myself to get support, I learned a lot about why people are the way they are. My predisposed thoughts about these people's characters were so off track it made me question if I truly knew those closest to me. I began to reflect on a lot – my whole existence actually. I reflected on my past friendships and relationships with my family. I realized that I needed to apologize, and that I needed to change. ARC forced me to step back, examine myself, and examine how I was treating others.

Throughout the course, ARC became equally an emotional and physical adventure. By being outside of my comfort zone, I've realized that being a part of my own comfortable life can be just as confusing and exhausting. There was never truly a chance for me to step back, and just think about myself clearly without being distracted. I didn't realize this before coming here because I thought that my problems were too big to face but also too small to talk about. I was most challenged during a leadership activity where all of us shared some pretty dark stories that most of us never shared before. It was like we were ripping off band aids, band aids that were stacked upon one another to avoid tending wounds that have crippled us for far too long. It opened my eyes; you never truly know what a person goes through until you take the time to know them.

Since that night, I dropped my wall of doubt and I began to open up. They trusted me with their story, so it was about time I trusted them with mine. I was glad I did because I let go of years of my biggest fears and insecurities that I held behind my back, where I wouldn't be able to see them. From that point on I knew

how it truly felt to just let things go. I learned how to forgive and how to apologize. And somewhere along the way, these people actually started to become a part of my family and my closest friends.

I've learned that being away from everything I've known for my entire life allowed me to grow apart from my normal surroundings. At first, I hated it; I felt like I was losing myself. But then I loved it. I understood that I was given the opportunity to find myself apart from the usual hustle and bustle. I am seeing the person I am, stripped of all facades. Though I might not like it, I am becoming more comfortable with who I am. I no longer want to continue to fake my feelings, my opinions, and myself. I don't want to wake up one day, years from now, and realize that my life was a big lie. ARC pushes you to experience tough physical and emotional situations that are impossible to "fake" yourself through. Through this, it has showed me what my true colors are.

There are these moments here, whether I'm alone or with the group and I see something so amazingly beautiful. It can be something incredibly small or something grand, but in that moment I'm just happy I'm alive. It rarely happens where I'm from, but being in Yosemite it's an everyday occurrence. It gives me hope that whatever problem I feel like I'm dealing with is insignificant compared to the big world in front of my eyes. Being with these incredible people and being in Yosemite doesn't make me feel like I'm ignoring whatever I'm going through, it just makes me feel that I can get through it even if it might look intimidating. When I return home, I hope to remember these beautiful moments and be reminded of what values I held in ARC. I want to remember what kind of person I wish to be to those closest to me, and what kind of person I am when I stand alone. Finding out who you "are" beyond all the normal stuff in your life is difficult because you might feel that they are the most important parts of you. But I've learned they're not. It's key to remember your identity apart from your relationships, that way you don't lose a part of yourself when it ends, or when it's going through a rough patch. It's true freedom, knowing that I can find happiness within myself. Through ARC, I've realized the adventure was in me the whole time; I just needed someone to tell me to look for it.

weiping huang

Becoming a Strong Ant

I am an ant
Which was born in China
All my family worked hard every day
They built a cozy house
Looked for good food that was much bigger than us
Brought up little ants like me
I found I was a conceited ant
When I saw someone do better than me
I couldn't help making an effort to transcend him
And I was afraid to fail, to embarrass myself
But I always made mistakes
And I was growing up, growing up...

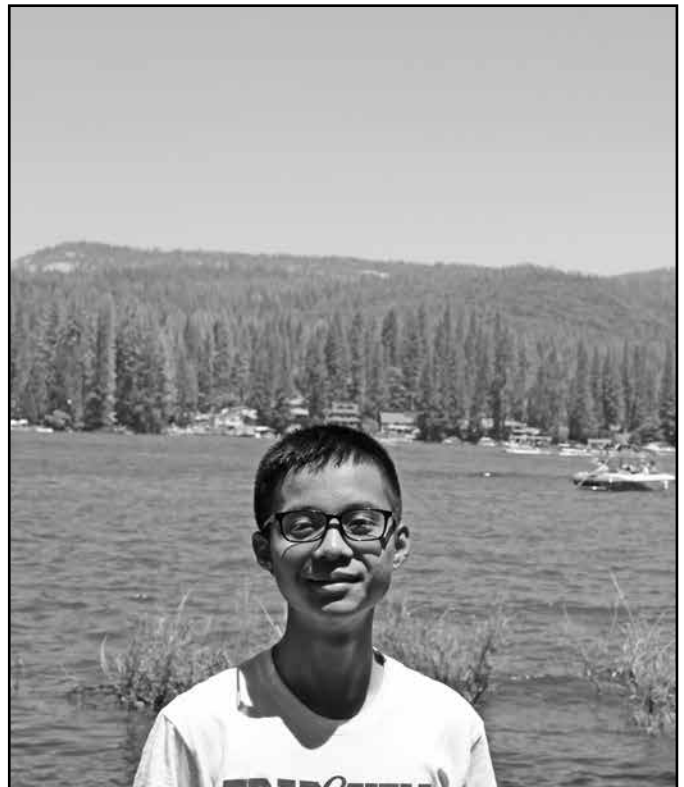
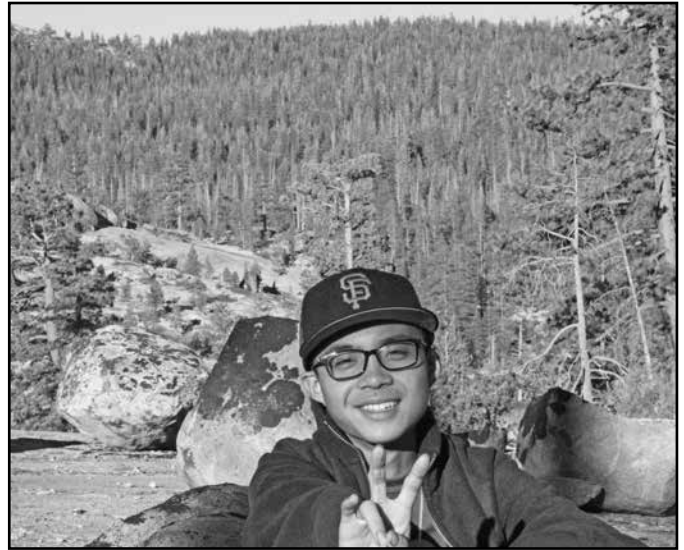
When I was 16
My family found a better place to live called United States
We immigrated to San Francisco, a beautiful city by the bay
However, a bunch of challenges came like rocks
They crushed us and we could hardly move
We were kind of poor, my parents could not speak English
They worked much harder than they did in China
But only earned a little bit of money

So they put their hopes on me that maybe one day
I would become a strong ant, adapt to the society
I had worked hard before, to get good grades
To make my parents happy
And though I had an English base
I always got lost in this strange environment
I struggled, I fought with the huge rocks
I made an effort, I worked hard, improved my English skills
Not only for my family but also for my bright,
Hopeful future

And after one year has passed
I begin to reflect back on myself
Although I usually worked hard
Sometimes I was lazy
And I also feared to talk with people who spoke English
I realize that I have wasted too much time
Many opportunities escaped from me
I have a friend whose English is better than mine
Even though she came here later
My past conceited heart begins to feel uncomfortable
Hustles me to do better, do better...

Now, I have to take action
Like an ant that works hard
I can talk with others in English bravely, I can!
I believe maybe one day
I will go to a good college
I will achieve my dream
I will be able to support my family

Become a strong ant
Adapt to the society
Help make the world better



I am from China and I came to the United States one year ago. I live in San Francisco. Back home, my life was boring and unhappy. I always stayed at home and felt bored. I usually got up at 9am and went to sleep after 11pm. It was kind of a bad habit. I rarely cooked meals for my family; my parents worked 7 days a week but they still had to cook meals for me, especially my dad. He had to get up at 5am and go to work. After he came back home, he cooked dinner for me even though I had the time to do it myself. I was so sick of my life; I was always bored, I had so many bad habits, and though I tried very hard I wasn't speaking English as well as I would've liked.

But at my school, one of my teachers asked me to join an organization called Summer Search because the program can help students a lot, especially when they go to college. I was accepted into Summer Search and the staff gave me information about ARC. I eventually decided to join ARC because I wanted to meet new people and experience new things. I wanted to see if I can find ways to change my life and make myself happy. I also wanted to stay with people who spoke English so I could practice speaking.

When I first came to ARC, the instructors took my cell phone and I was unable to send my parents a final message that I was going to lose contact with them for 40 days. I met new people but I needed to speak English better so that I could know all the students. The sky was getting darker and darker. I saw the surroundings near me: pine trees, the muddy road, birds and tents. I had a lot of feelings at that moment. I felt strange with this unfamiliar environment. I missed my family, as well as my friends and my comfortable house. But I also felt excited about hiking. I stayed with my new "family" and I needed to get on well with this ARC "family".

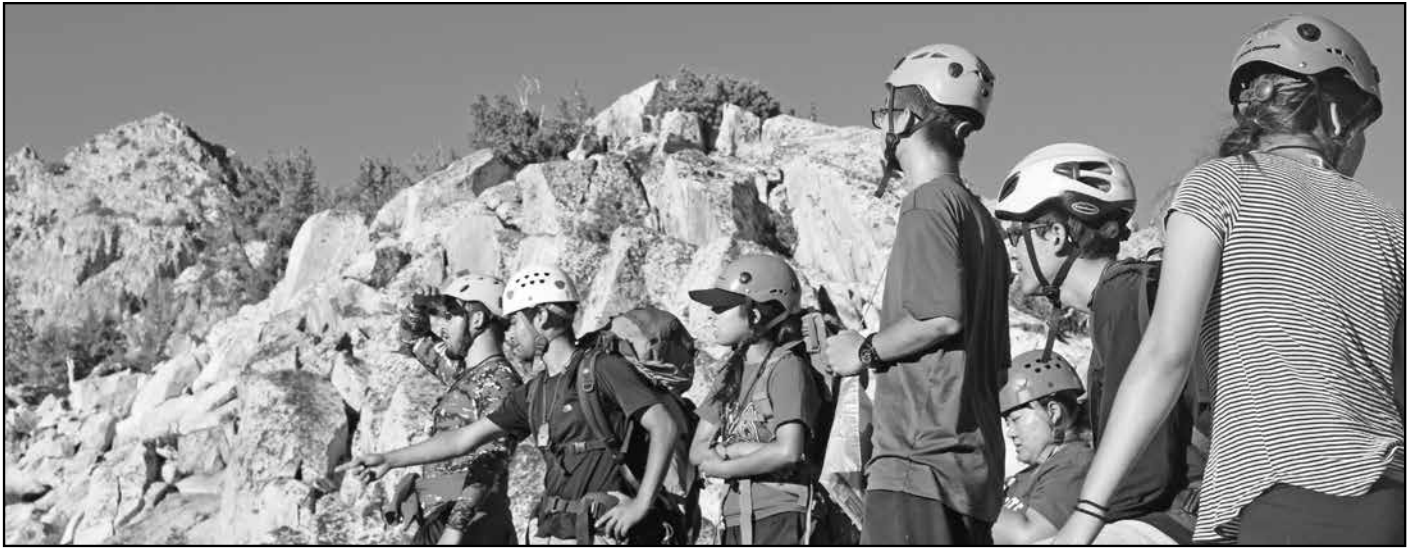
I think the second expedition was the most challenging for me. Rockclimbing! Rope course! They sounded extremely scary. When I saw the very high cliff and the ropes at a very high position I thought to myself, "Oh my god! I think I am going to die!" I felt like it was impossible for me to overcome these huge challenges. But when I saw friends doing them, I said, "I have to do it, I should not give up!" In the end, I finished climbing the rocks and finished the ropes course. I felt very proud of myself because I got over the challenges that seemed impossible to overcome. In my life, I will meet a lot of challenges; they may be small or very hard to overcome. I usually felt bored before I came to ARC. This is one of my life challenges. But I can definitely overcome it like I overcame my fears of rock climbing and the rope course.

The most helpful moment, however, was when I had a big conversation with an English language professor from UC Merced, Belinda. I shared my story in the past one year and she also asked me many questions. She asked me, "What percent did you speak English at school?" "30%," I answered. In the school, I took newcomer classes, but they were too easy for me. There were classmates that spoke Chinese. Belinda kept asking me, "So you spoke English in the classes, right?" "Yes," I said. "So when the classes were over, you started to speak Chinese to your classmates? That is the problem." The sentences she said to me are still very clear in my mind. They impacted me a lot, like a pin pokes the skin and the blood comes out right away. I had realized my problem about English. I had known the reasons why I could not speak fluent English, why I always got stuck and didn't know how to express my intended meaning while I was talking with someone, despite my time spent learning English at home. I feared talking with people who spoke English. I always avoided that. I also feared going to an American restaurant. My friends asked me to transfer to general classes,

which can help me a lot but newcomer classes were my comfort zone. That was why I didn't learn a lot of things. Many thoughts came to my mind at that time. "I am enough! I want to change!" I said to myself.

It was only during our third expedition that I was able to really think over the changes I wanted to make. We did solo and we could not talk to anybody in one whole day. It was a good time for me to think about myself. In my solo area, I could view many beautiful landscapes. At one moment, I felt really happy about myself. I felt like my life was not that boring. I have a good family. I have a house that is small but it is comfortable. I have good friends and relatives. My house doesn't have Wi-Fi but I can go to the library that is two blocks from my house. I can also go to the park and ride my bicycle. I began to realize I could totally try new things and make my life happy. I also realized that I needed to change my bad habits. We got up very early during the trip. Why don't I get up early at home and do some exercise? I could not use my cell phone during this summer but my life here still functioned very well. Why don't I use my cell phone less and do more outdoor activities? I also need to cook meals for my parents so that they will not feel tired.

Now, I feel very confident with my life. I have specific plans after this ARC trip. I feel like I am like a brave fighter with a sword, who will fight with my challenges and create a bright future. I will get into good habits such as getting up early at 6:15 and doing exercise and cooking meals for my parents. I will not fear to talk with people in English any more. I have to transfer to general classes, which is the only way for me to learn and grow. I plan to speak English with the people from the clubs I joined. I can try new things to make my life happy and exciting. I am ready to overcome my challenges! I am ready to achieve my goals!



**scenes from
yosemite 2016**







Adventure Risk Challenge in Tahoe would like to thank the following partners, organizations, and volunteers for their generous support and collaboration during the summer: Sagehen Creek Field Station - Jeff Brown, Faerthen Felix, Dan Saylor; S.H. Cowell Foundation; The Cedar House - Patty Baird; Tahoe Truckee Community Foundation; Vail Resorts' EpicPromise; IRIE Rafting; NASTC Climbing; Summer Fund - Cathy Kornblith; Summer Search - Jessica Stout; Tahoe Truckee Unified School District - Truckee High School, North Tahoe High School, Sierra High School; Aim High; Boys and Girls Club of North Lake Tahoe; Tahoe Food Hub; Project Discovery; USDA Forest Service; Tahoe SAFE Alliance - Kate Ruttenburg, Trisha Baird, Steve Hedrick, Christina Vaughn; our dedicated volunteers - Brad Altman, Jonathan Burton, Ryan Decker, Aimee Fuszard, Jamie Gemme, Eve Giovenco, Barbara Ilfeld, Kasey McJunkin, Karen A. Terrey, Liz Tucker; our Community Interview Day participants; and the ARC Board of Directors.



Adventure Risk Challenge in Yosemite would like to thank the following partners, organizations, and volunteers for their generous support and collaboration during the summer: Yosemite Conservancy; Yosemite - Wawona Educational Foundation; Wawona Elementary School - Esme McCarthy and Jess Stanphill; Yosemite National Park; Yosemite NPS Education Branch - Shauna Potocky, Chris Raines, Nicole Carbone, Alejandra Guzman, Robert Martin; UC Merced's Yosemite Leadership Program - Jesse Chakrin, Alexis Interiano, Mirella Gutierrez; UC Merced's Yosemite Field Station - Anne Kelly; Summer Search - Brian Mertens, Donanciano Botello Torres; NatureBridge - Reed Schneider and John Patton; Boys & Girls Club of Merced County; Calvin Crest; Yosemite Bug Rustic Mountain Resort; Sierra Vista Church; Southern Yosemite Mountain Guides - Katie Burns and Riley West; Dos Palos High School - Heather Ruiz, Susan Galindo, Stacey Swinney; Gustine High School - Melissa Estacio; Le Grand High School - Lou Ann Sakaki; Sanger Unified School District - Kris Boyer, Felipe Cobarruvias, Johnny Gonzalez, Rick Church; Los Banos High School - Debbie Arrieta; our dedicated volunteers - Alexis Angulo, Belinda Braustein, Karen Fruth, Barbara Ilfeld, Kelsey Lahr, Christina Olague, Vera Reyes, Jessica Rivas, Tom White; our Community Interview Day participants; and the ARC Board of Directors.

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