

adventure risk challenge

developing youth literacy and leadership

2018 WRITINGS OF SUMMER COURSE ALUMNI



YOSEMITE



SEQUOIA



TAHOE

Dear ARC Community,

Our youth participants often speak about Adventure Risk Challenge as something more than a leadership and literacy program. "These friends I've made are more than friends; they're family," said Jorge Diaz after his participation in a 2018 summer course. His teammate, Virginia Coello, shared a similar sentiment: "ARC is a family for me." We, as a staff team, also know that the ARC community of volunteers and donors is an extended family. I'm grateful for how many of you took that responsibility seriously this year: as writing coaches, as event coordinators, as hosts for our retreats, as donors, and much more. Without your generosity we would not be able to provide these life-transforming opportunities to deserving young people.

Thanks to you, we celebrated our 15th anniversary this year. In 2018 we are proud to have engaged more youth in one summer and to have held more academic-year programs than ever before. We now facilitate summer programs in Tahoe, Yosemite, and Sequoia National Park, and during the last academic year we hosted 17 weekend retreats for Central Valley and Tahoe/Truckee students. Trips included wilderness, camping and lodging adventures to Malakoff Diggins State Historical Park, Yosemite National Park, and Carmel Valley, along with activities like skiing at Northstar in Truckee, backpacking in Sierra National Forest, and kayaking in Bodega Bay. During a retreat of camping at Bass Lake and hiking the Mist Trail to Nevada Falls in Yosemite, one participant wrote of her experience: "I did not think I could make it to the top of the waterfall, but I did it! Next time when I face something difficult, I'll know I can get through it."

In this memory book, you will read about the journeys of six ARC youth. You'll learn about their experiences during ARC adventures; you'll gain insight into the challenges they've overcome; and you'll appreciate their strength and resilience. We are excited to share the sense of belonging, purpose, and self-confidence that is so evident in their writing. As the ARC community, we will continue to provide deep and meaningful engagement and learning in the outdoors. Thank you for supporting each of these students and for being a part of ARC's mission.

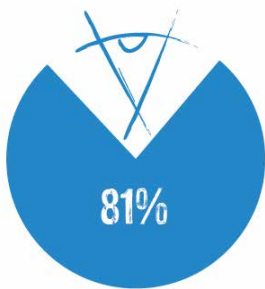
With sincere gratitude,



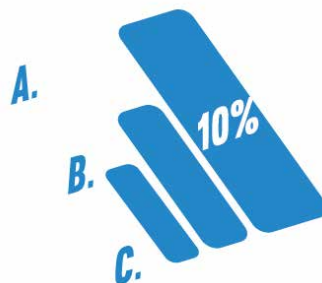
Sarah Ottley
Executive Director
sarah@adventureriskchallenge.org



Share your story.
Find your best self.
Write your future.



81% OF ARC SUMMER IMMERSION PARTICIPANTS GO ON TO ATTEND A 2 OR 4-YEAR COLLEGE



STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENT OF 10% ON S.A.T. ENGLISH QUESTIONS BY ARC SUMMER GRADUATES ON A PRE- AND POST-SUMMER ASSESSMENT



OVER 36,700 STUDENT-HOURS OF SUMMER LITERACY-RELATED INSTRUCTION SINCE 2004





sequoia

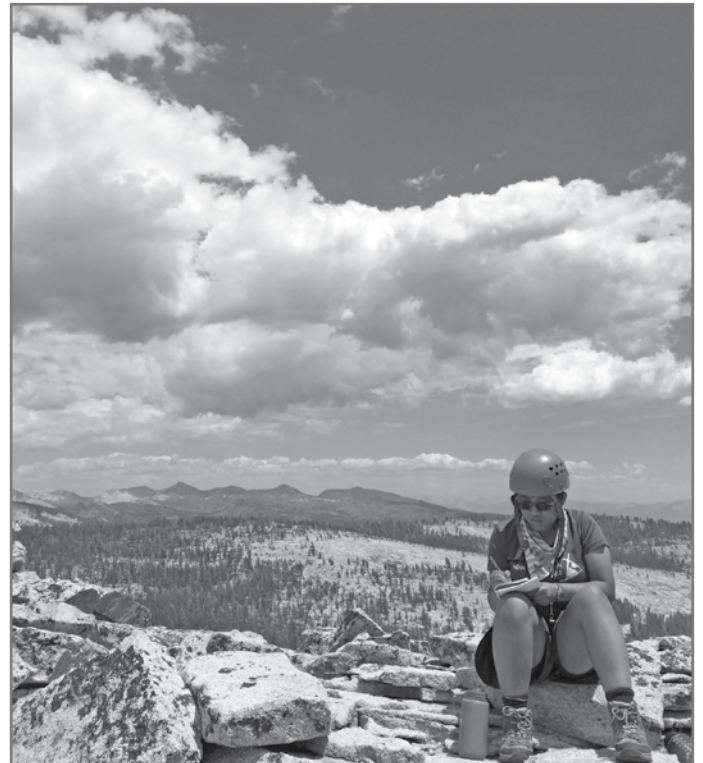
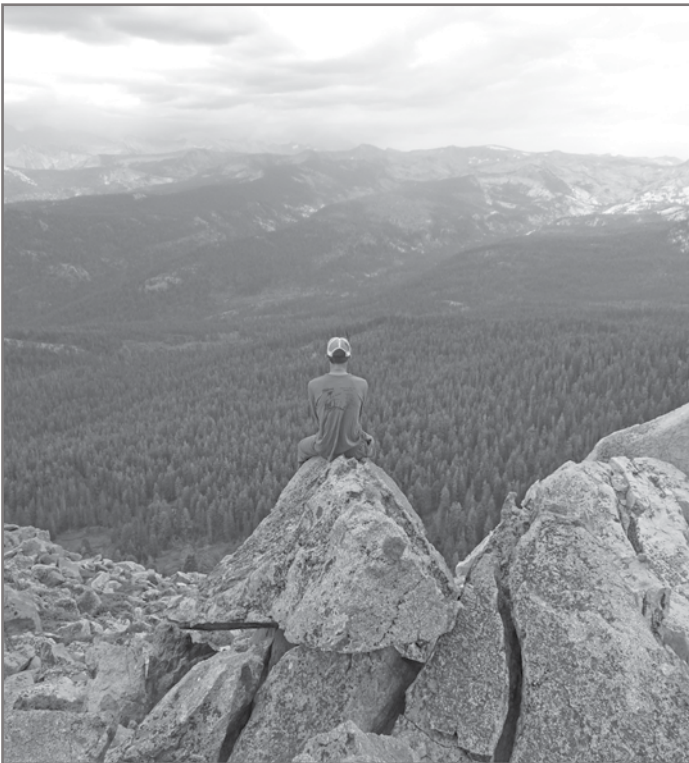
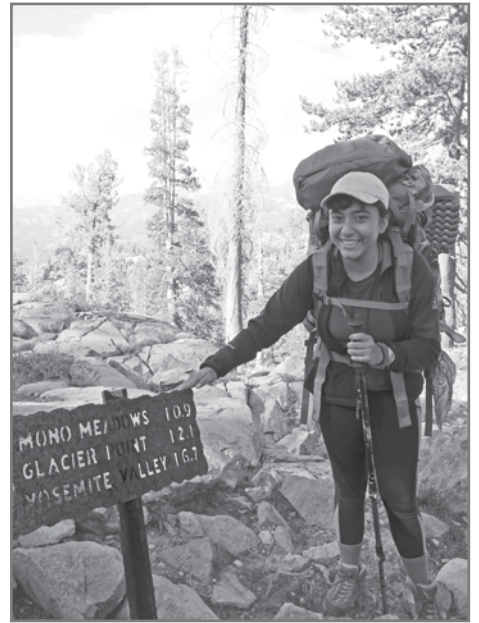
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INSTRUCTORS

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Mel Hoffman
Henney Sullivan



TEAM NAME:
Sekweewah

BASECAMP LOCATION:
UC-Merced Sequoia Field Station & Santa Teresita Youth Conference Center

COURSE LENGTH:
25 days

carla gutierrez

Wish You Would

Two birds hatched one after another,
Comforted by the fact that we had each other.
He was my protector and I was his
And every time you unknowingly compared
My small successes
To his disability, it challenged me to
Choose sides, yours or his

The worms you fed me were thicker, longer than his.
I began to believe I needed the extra food to conform
To your idea of success.
Your uncertainty about his migration cornered me
Into pleasing you, making you proud

I knew I could make you proud
If my flight led to a prestigious school
Or had a direct route,
One omitting the dangers of crashing into tall buildings
Or damaging my wings from a journey too arduous

As a nestling your body was present,
But your soul unreachable
You fled away from your family to find yourself
And in doing so, you created a situation
Too complicated for a ten-year-old to understand
One that continued for six years
The muddled separation had my claws clenching
For love and support
I found myself with my mom, lost and alone

The pressure grew as I got closer and closer
To the edge of the nest
But you were no longer there to feed me your
Success defining worms, that previously resonated with me
And my brother figured out his path,

Away from us

I saw my mom change her views for me
Us two against the world,
I figured out how to comfortably fly short distances
By untying the knots of my family's expectations

You saw me flying and you came back to visit the nest
We reached a point of comfort that felt vaguely familiar
I let you in and you let me down
Your judgement pierced through my feathers,
Slowly fading away my colors of comfort and security

How am I supposed to feel supported?
When I know that what I envision for myself,
Collides with the identity you give me

How am I supposed to feel secure?
When I hear the things you say about him could easily
Be about me

Your words get passed around and I listen carefully
Whether or not you believe it,
The doubts about my brother
Are the same doubts you will have
When I soar away,
From the person you have idolized

You tell me staying close is what you want, what's good for me
Tell me what the point of listening to you is.
Tell me how you will help me grow
Towards a path that calls my spirit and not
The one you have created in your head

Going away doesn't mean leaving forever
My migration will bring me home, always
I know you're afraid of me not coming back
Because you realized the hurt you caused
And you see me as a second opportunity to do well
But by pulling me closer,
You are making my absence inevitable
I know what you want for me is a close migration,
One that certifies success. But that is not the path that calls
my name

I might not know what my future entails
But, dad, I want to hear your affirmative words
Tell me you are proud
Tell me you will support me
Tell me I will be okay

As much as I'd like to hear those words,
I don't need them.



rashel cazares

Perfect in My Eyes

He was perfect in my eyes
No standards, no shame, just love.

He was a funny and humble man.
He would give us a dollar if we said a bad word.
It may not have been the most ideal parent thing to do,
But he gave us precious memories.
He was my indestructible tree,
Towering over the forest,
Giving security and comfort to birds nesting in his branches.
His branches were always open for the birds to return
Filled with the sounds of the creatures he supported.

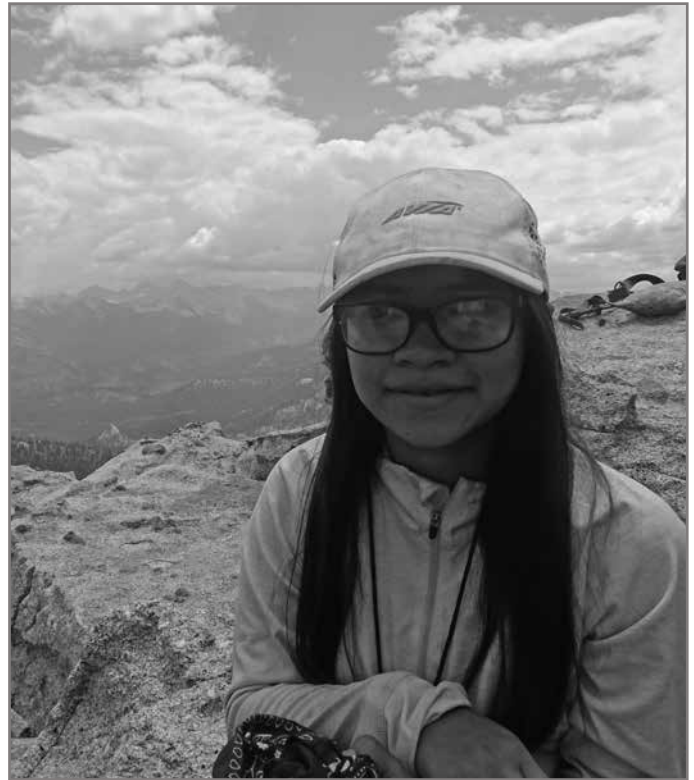
His outer bark looked strong,
But inside he was sick and beginning to decompose.
I remember the first time a nurse came into our home.
I had to translate to my parents what was going on
I discovered his sickness wasn't going to go away.
Laughs turned to worries
And the house started to feel more empty.
He had Alzheimer's, and I no longer understood
If he was living in the past or present.

What goes on below the surface?
Were his roots losing their grip on the soil of the present?
The birds and the squirrels grew quiet,
And the tree tried to fight the moles and termites
Eating up his memory of who I was
The shade provided started to vanish as the leaves fell
One last time.

He became paralyzed and spent most of his days in bed.
I thought he was tired and wanted to rest.
I didn't want to realize how quickly he was moving
Closer to the end.
I thought his decomposition would go on for years.
I didn't want to realize he was rapidly burning
In a ravishing wildfire that had no mercy in
Taking what was in its path.

I was awakened by a kiss from my mother
She had a soft smile
And I instantly knew my tree had fallen.

The wildfire surrounding us sparked questions
That opened old scars and formed new ones.
Was the last gasp of air not enough?
Why did they cut off his oxygen machine?
Why couldn't they have done more for him?
Why couldn't they have done more for me?
I felt betrayed and started to distance myself
From my mom and others I loved.



The wildfire silenced us all,
The only communication we had were hugs
Knowing that was the only thing we could grip on to.

Growing up it was always about my dad.
After the fire,
I started to notice a tall, resilient tree with thick layers.
She'd lived through a lifetime of wildfires.
We started the new year, without him
We started having 'firsts' without him.
Through the year we grew closer to each other.
New vegetation covered the ground
And we knew we existed in each other's lives.

The forest is re-growing from the ashes of the fallen tree.
Even with all the new life there are still burn marks
That can't be hidden.
They said pain doesn't last forever
But it does have a lasting effect.
He is our immortal tree that keeps on giving.
I promised him I would finish college.
I will make my mom proud.

She is perfect in my eyes
No standards, no shame, just love.



yosemite

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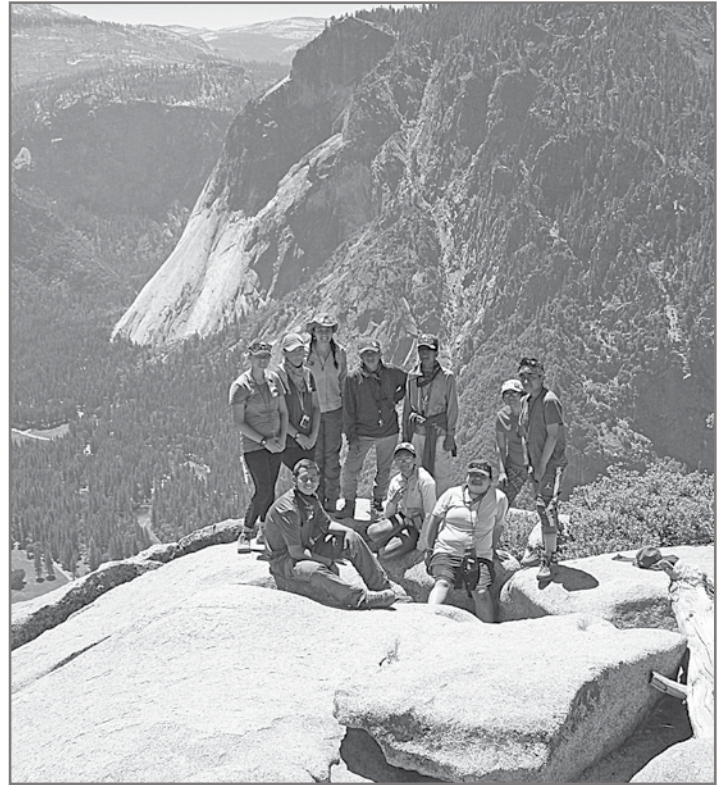
INSTRUCTORS

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TEAM NAME:
Peak Slayers

BASECAMP LOCATION:
Wawona Elementary School

COURSE LENGTH:
40 days

isaac camorlinga

A New Wolf: Changing Through Experiences

I am a lone wolf.
At the age of six I was separated from my pack
Thinking it was my fault
Not knowing how to cope
Not knowing why I had to leave
Not knowing that we would never be together again.

I hunted for more than prey but for a place I could call home
I wanted a pack that would take care of me
I wanted a pack that made me feel welcome and whole
Every night I howled and hoped to be accepted
For many days I kept howling into the moonlight

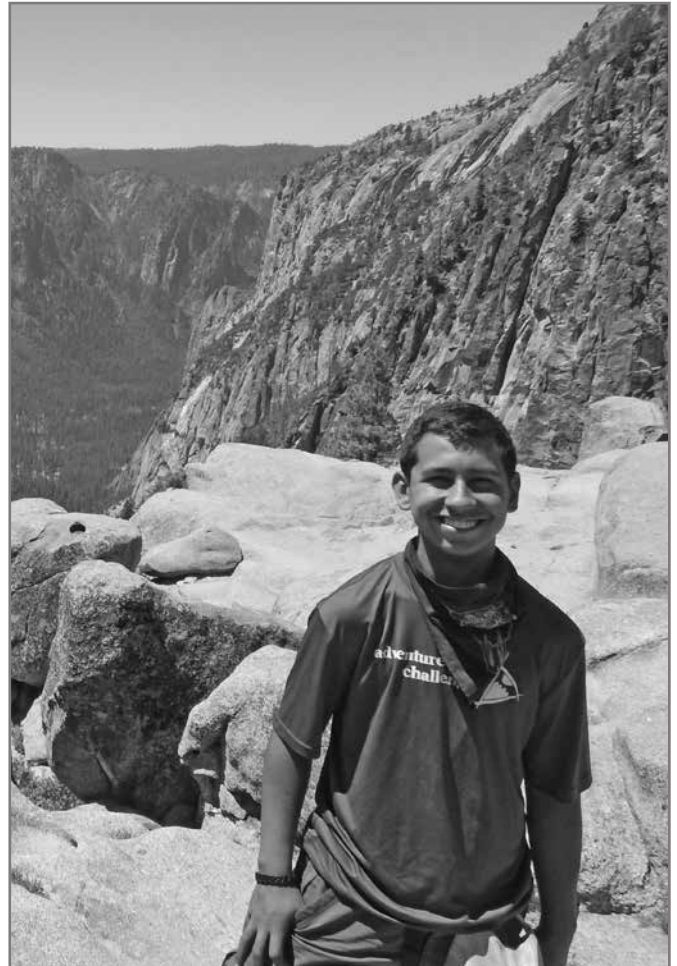
I stopped believing other people's compliments
I was always holding a grudge
I forgot how to forgive
I did not let people in so they could not hurt me
I licked my own wounds like a wolf after an unsuccessful hunt
I pretended that these things were normal and out of my hands
I always put on a smile no matter how hurt
I was a lone wolf

I was broken from all the pain and rejection
I was ready to stop searching for my pack
I was ready to stop believing I would get a happy ending
I was ready to believe that I would always be a lone wolf
I let out a cry for help
And I heard a soft howl in the distance.

The howl of my adopted mom
The howl of the wolf that would set me free
From my prison of pain
The howl of the wolf that breaks my shackles of sadness
The howl of the wolf that would be my happy ending
The howl that told me I belonged
A howl I came to recognize as my own

Now I had a pack
A pack that showed me love that I did not know existed
A pack that would always be there for me no matter what
A pack that showed me to respect everyone
A pack that made me realize that family is all that we need
A pack that said you are no longer a lone wolf
A pack that told me I can make my dreams possible.
I ran with my pack for seven years and know more is to come
But in those seven years they taught me
How to trust people and open up,
how to control my emotions.
They taught me what a happy family looks like
And they are teaching me how to be an independent wolf

My pack has expanded greatly
I have made many friends that support me
Like my eight new friends at ARC
And my pack keeps growing.
I'm not the sad and lonely wolf that I used to be
But a new happy and strong wolf
A wolf that is independent
A wolf that is not scared to try
A wolf that is not scared of rejection
A wolf that faces his fears and obstacles
A wolf that is a great leader
Thanks to my pack,
I am becoming the wolf that they saw,
Deep within me,
All along.



daimar ponce

Climbing Half-Way

Throughout my life, I've always compared myself to others and never felt content with the things I could do. ARC has taught me to know my limits and be proud of what I can accomplish instead of comparing myself to others. From all of my experiences in ARC, I've realized different things about myself that I've never known or thought of before.

Compared to how I am now, I was very different in the past. In the past, I was an unsure, reserved, hesitant person. I only spoke my mind, opinions, and emotions with people who I trusted. I didn't have a lot of friends. I was quiet and hesitant to do new things and I was always trying to match or be as good as everyone else. I hardly left my house and stayed in my room. I was all alone. My parents were always working; my sister was busy with her own life; and I had no family to talk to. As a middle child, I always felt like I would never match up to my older sister and everything that I did would be overshadowed by her accomplishments. Oh! You won 3 reading award buttons? Your sister has a BAG of them. Oh! You got awarded a reading award medal? Your sister has 4 DIFFERENT ONES! From a young age every accomplishment and every goal I reached was upstaged by her because she had done it first and she had done it better. My parents would always compare the two of us and it felt like I would never be as good. Everything I did had to be perfect; it had to be the best. In school, for every class, I had to get good grades because if I didn't disappointment and nausea would overwhelm me. I'd compare myself not to my sister anymore, but my peers. I was extremely stressed with all of the expectations I had given myself.



My turning point happened during ARC while rock climbing. It was my turning point because it was the moment I realized how hard I am on myself. We went rock climbing on Monday, July 2, 2018 near Bowler Creek and Jackass trailhead. The day was warm with a slight breeze and clouds were drifting in the light blue sky. I was excited, nervous,

pumped full of adrenaline, and ready for an adventure. We hiked to our destination: a big boulder that we were going to top-roped up. The boulder was a 60-foot, uneven, rocky, grey giant. Its height was less frightening than what we all expected. We geared up, tightened our harnesses, put on our rubbery climbing shoes, and placed our turtle-shell helmets on our heads. We were ready to climb. The two outer ropes were known as the easy ones and the middle one was the hardest. Everyone dispersed into three groups of three people. In these groups, one of us would climb, one would belay, and one would be the backup belay. My group got the middle station. The middle station looked like someone had cut a long, jagged, triangle piece out of a boulder. As the belayer, I watched my teammates struggle to climb up the crevice, just barely stepping off the ground. I looked at the different ways they tried to get up and was confident that I wouldn't fail, but the minute I tried, I realized what a fool I was to think it would be easy.

The rock's surface was cold and rough with hardly any places to put your hands. At the bottom, there was a small ledge that you had to first pull yourself up onto to even start climbing. My other teammates being taller than me had a hard time getting over it. Imagine the hard time I had being shorter than them! I continued to climb slowly, my hands aching, and legs shaking from holding them in place for so long. I looked down, noticed how far I was from the ground, and panicked. What if I fell? What if the rope couldn't hold me and snapped? My chest felt tight, so tight my lungs didn't have room to expand. Each breath came quickly, burning my esophagus on its way out. Tears pooled in my eyes, blurring my vision and fogging up my glasses. I clung to the boulder in fear. In the background, I could hear the rest of the group. Their voices were mingling together in a furious chant that sounded more like demands and expectations than encouragement. Pressed against

the rock halfway up, I knew I wasn't having fun. I was more stressed than determined. I didn't want to do it anymore. I wanted so badly to touch the ground with my feet again. I looked out behind me and I saw the forest composed of trees and the clouds in the sky.

I asked to come down. The moment I touched the ground again I felt a rush of relief. But that feeling didn't last long. I looked around to the other groups and saw how quickly and easily they climbed up the rock face. They yelled joyously from the top and I felt frustrated, sad, and disappointed in myself. I felt like a failure and a disappointment because everyone else could do what I couldn't. I watched others do the same climb that I did with such efficiency that it felt like I had given up, like I should've done more. In that moment, a couple of thoughts struck me. Why am I so sad? Why can't I be happy with the things I've accomplished? Why am I so angry at myself for not doing what others can? These thoughts taught me how unhealthy my previous feelings were.

In the future, I hope to do more things at my own pace. I want to be happy with what I can do instead of feeling disappointed in myself for not being the best or fully completing things. With a lot of work and effort, I know that I can, as a person, stop comparing myself to others. I know I can be truly content with the things I can do and not be overcome with regret. I will strive to understand and know my own limits. I will work to respect those limits once I've discovered them and keep myself from going beyond them in an unhealthy, rushed way. If I do decide to combat my fears, I want things to feel like a fun new experience, rather than a traumatizing event that prevents me from growing. I know that changing my old, unhealthy habits will be hard and it might take me awhile, but in the end, it'll be worth it.

From the new experiences and adventures that I've been through with ARC, I've learned things that will help me grow and be a better person. I will no longer be the reserved, quiet, lonely person I was in the past. I will be more confident, adventurous, and sure of who I am and what I can do. I will never forget or be unappreciative of this ARC journey. Without this program, I wouldn't be who I am today; I'd just be who I was.



tahoe

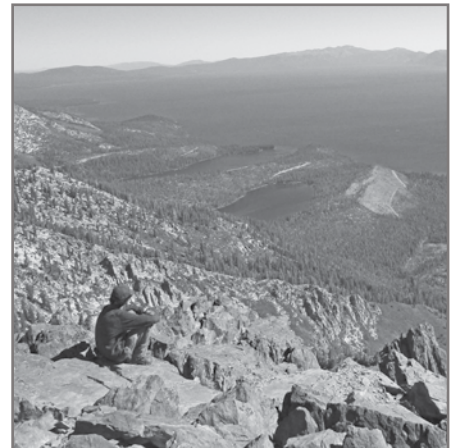
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Nathan Lima
Virginia Coello

INSTRUCTORS

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Scout Sorcic
Rachel Lightner



TEAM NAME:
Las Lagartijas

BASECAMP LOCATION:
UC Berkeley Sagehen Creek Field Station

COURSE LENGTH:
40 days

karina curiel

Look Up

i am the sky
clear and blue
like the reflection of the ocean
i am at peace, in a state
of calmness

i am the sky
i am constantly changing
a never-ending mix
of ever-changing emotions

looking up
clouds start to roll in
the sadness creeping,
yet i let the sun shine through
just enough for others
to see
that clear blue
that part of me always wanting to please others
letting them know i am strong

but i'm not strong
i have no control over the weather
these are my emotions

i let the rain
fall
from my eyes
the sadness, flowing
i doubt myself and my abilities



at times
i am lightning
my voice- ripping apart my mom
saying the most hurtful things
a daughter can to her mother
i cause damage
striking trees
that is the roots of my family

but then the wind picks up
blowing the storm away
i am back to a blue sky
showing my true self
for an unpredictable time
until the next storm rolls in

i let birds fly in my space
providing them with everything
these vultures
in my life
only take
survive off of my work
off of my own success
they take for granted
asking me, wanting from me, taking from me
i am not to be used for their self-pleasure
i am not to be used for what knowledge they lack
i am not to be polluted with the toxicity
that weighs me down
i will let them fly in my sky,
in return for respect
and trust

i am the sky
i will have control over these emotions
the weather conditions
that show me
i am sunny and clear
i am overcast with clouds that is my sadness and doubt
i am the anger that is lightning and thunder

I want to be strong
Shine clear as day when I want to
Suppress my rain when it is not needed
I want a healthy relationship with my mother
I never want there to be a cloud in my sky
when I am with her
I will not let others use me
And I will control that weather
I am the sky
And I am ever changing

john gonzalez

Silence

When I was younger, I never saw myself as a leader. In fact, I wasn't even a follower. Growing up, I found myself being alone for most of the time, thinking and reflecting about my life and my family. When I was around a group, I would stay quiet and simply observe. Going to a new school, I was shy and nervous about what other people would think of me, but as I got comfortable with my class and school, I started speaking up and cracking jokes to impress the class. I didn't want to be judged. In all honesty I was scared of what people thought of me.

One day, going into school, I was approached by a counselor who was recruiting students for this program named ARC; I was so honored when she said she thought of me. I almost didn't take this opportunity, but there's a lesson my older sister taught me: "There's some opportunities that only come once in a lifetime." I decided to sign up, and everyone was so excited for me. I didn't know what to expect, and I was nervous but curious about what was waiting for me.



Thirty days in, and looking back to the first day, I noticed I learned so much from the start. I realized many things about being a leader and how others lead. I thought about how important each individual is to the group and how each of their characteristics makes this group a functional machine. I learned so much and connected each challenge from every expedition to what I need to improve in life.

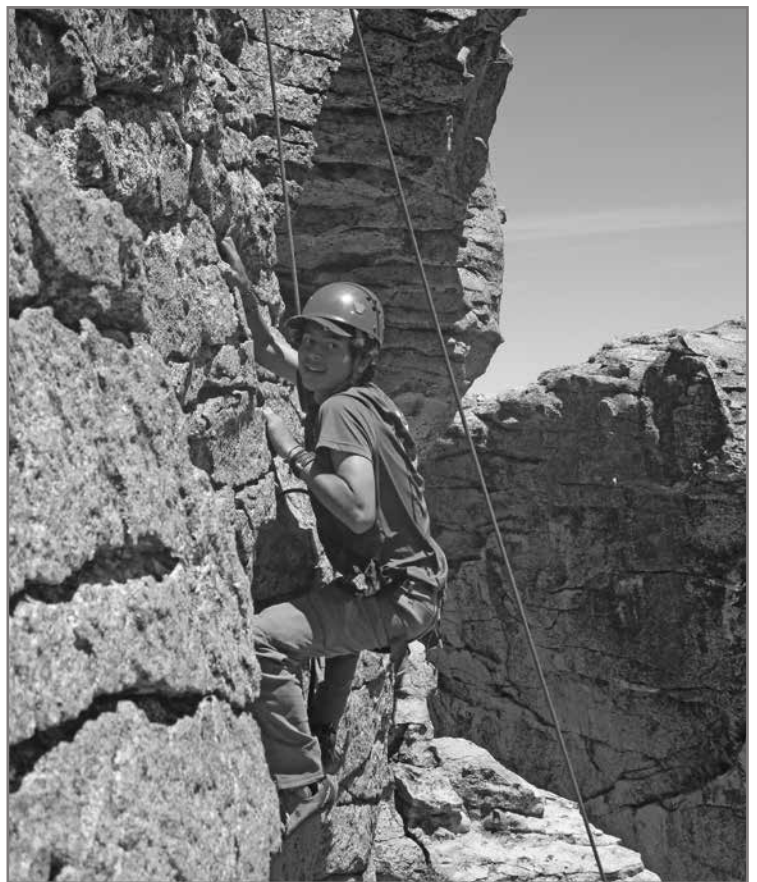
The solo expedition was when I learned most. On this expedition, I realized the importance of silence. Sitting in that solo spot, I was trapped in my thoughts. I was looking at myself from a third person's view, and how I would act while doing

group activities. I realized that I was going back to those bad habits of cracking jokes to impress the group. In that solo spot at Paradise Lake, I thought about different ways to improve myself so that, we as a group, could finish the expedition more efficiently. I thought and thought for hours and I remembered one situation on a hike to Aloha Lake, when I found myself unintentionally motivating the group to push forward and persevere. We were so determined to reach our destination, but the trail just kept on going and the lake was

nowhere in sight. I realized I was struggling as well and I heard the group motivating each other, which put a huge smile on my face. We were exhausted and seeing that lake in the distance gave us all a sense of relief and motivated us even more to continue. While resting that night, I realized something that made me so excited for the next backpacking expeditions. Being silent, I wasn't distracted, so my mind could think clearly. I thought that no matter how hard it is to walk on that path, or how heavy the pack is on your shoulders, if you are determined to finish, the destination is always worth it. This stuck with me throughout the entire course of ARC and will continue to for the rest of my life.

Sitting in my solo spot and reflecting on my past while connecting with the elements of nature, I realized silence is a perfect method for cleansing or filtering my thoughts. This is something that will stick with me forever and I will practice every day. Being silent and observing situations will expand my awareness so that I may stay focused, ignore all distractions, and get tasks done efficiently. As I was reflecting in that beautiful wooded area, I thought about when a good time is to speak and when to listen. I was thinking of the time and the place for jokes and when to get things done. Sitting there with no one around to judge my thoughts, I just felt so connected with the universe.

Accomplishing these activities in ARC made me realize how much I grew in a social environment. I am now a lot more confident and focused because of these experiences. I can speak in front of a large group and be okay with getting nervous. It's totally normal now. I am no longer that shy and timid person who worries about others' opinions. I can confidently speak with a group and I don't feel scared anymore because I understand myself better. It doesn't matter what others think of me. This experience here at ARC made me think a lot about my life. I reflected on the experiences we had and realized how much each activity connects to real life. Because of the adventures, the risks, and the challenges, I became someone I never thought I'd be, a person with power, someone who is respected but also kind and compassionate, who cares about others' feelings and is always out to help. Because of ARC I have become a leader, something I will take with me for the rest of my life.



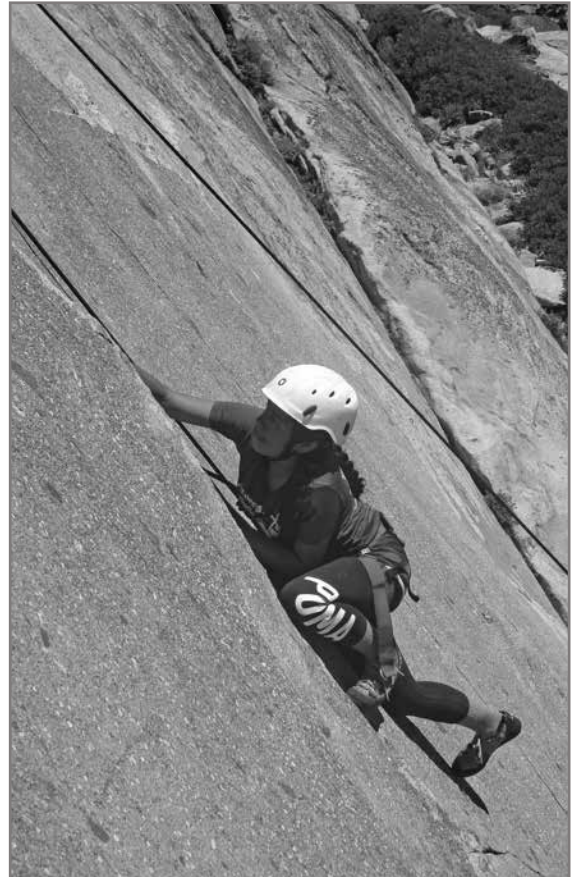


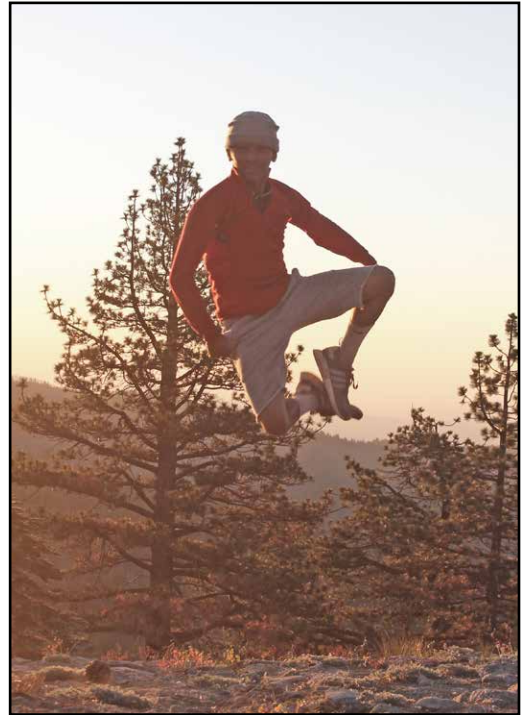
**scenes from
the summer**

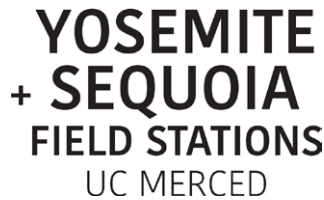




**scenes from
the summer**







Adventure Risk Challenge would like to thank the following partners, organizations, and volunteers for their generous support and collaboration during our Summer Immersion Courses in Truckee, Yosemite and Sequoia National Park: Yosemite Field Station and Sequoia Field Station - Anne Kelly and Marlon Spinneberg; Sagehen Creek Field Station – Jeff Brown, Faerthen Felix, Dan Saylor; Yosemite-Wawona Elementary Charter School - Esme McCarthy, Chad Andrews, and Karen Stansberry; Yosemite National Park - Heidi Edgecomb, Laura Goforth, Alejandra Guzman, Lissie Kretsch, and Martijn Ouborg; Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks - Christy Brigham and Jonathan Humphrey; USDA Forest Service - Don Lane and Gay Eitel; Sequoia Parks Conservancy - Savannah Boiano and Krista Matias; The Cedar House – Patty Baird; Calvin Crest Ropes Course; Project Discovery; OARS Rafting; NASTC Rock Climbing School; Southern Yosemite Mountain Guides; Summer Search; Tahoe Truckee Unified School District; Aim High; Tahoe Food Hub; Sierra Watershed Education Partnerships; Tahoe SAFE Alliance; Live Again Fresno; Arte Américas; Santa Teresita Youth Conference Center; S.H. Cowell Foundation; Yosemite Conservancy; Tahoe Truckee Community Foundation; Martis Camp Community Foundation; Lahontan Community Foundation; EpicPromise; our dedicated volunteers – Alma Alvarado, Annie Ballard, Katie Burns, Socorro Cardoso, Laurie Cussen, Jennie Fraser, Karen Fruth, Eve Giovenco, Ksenya Gusak, Anna Santoleri, Merrilyne Lundahl, Sean McAlindin, Kasey McJunkin, Lifeguard Mike, Kelsey Murphey, Barbara Ilfeld, Nalleli Isordia, Marianne Porter, Shanley Porter, Danielle Rees, Nicole Sayegh, Shirley Spencer, Chelsea Truax, and Liz Tucker; our Community Interview Day participants; the ARC Advisory Council; and the ARC Board of Directors.

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