

adventure risk challenge a leadership and literacy program

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My Life

I ask myself who I am
In Asia for fifteen years
Never knew my life
Would evolve so drastically

The first day in America
IOM bags on my hands
The IRC took us to an apartment
Five years to become US citizen

I am an immigrant in California
Arnold says California is
Emergency State
I live in Oakland
Tough city of gangsters
I live on High Street

One day
Four police were killed
I heard it
The gunshots
Boom boom boom boom
Still echoing through my ears
We planted the trees
To remember the four police

The same day
My classmate's father
A Latino
Was killed
We didn't do anything
When brown skinned people are killed
No one cares

Who we are
We are Karen people
Others know we are refugees
We do not have jobs
We do not speak English

We do not have food to eat
Lost my friends, community
Spread across the world
Motherland
Ripped apart
I never give up
Like a river never stops
Like a blessing from God
God provides new community

I start my new life
My family hopes for me
To become a helper
I help immigrant students
Tutoring and translating



Summer search is like water
Plant my life near the river
Now I can grow like a tree
Always be green

The water woke me up
Helped me to find the ARC
Which allows me
To learn
Be a strong leader
Work in a diverse community

My voice represents my life
Who knows
One day
I can be the one
To change community
Change my world

I ask myself who am I
Create goals
Breathe and learn
Thank God for everything

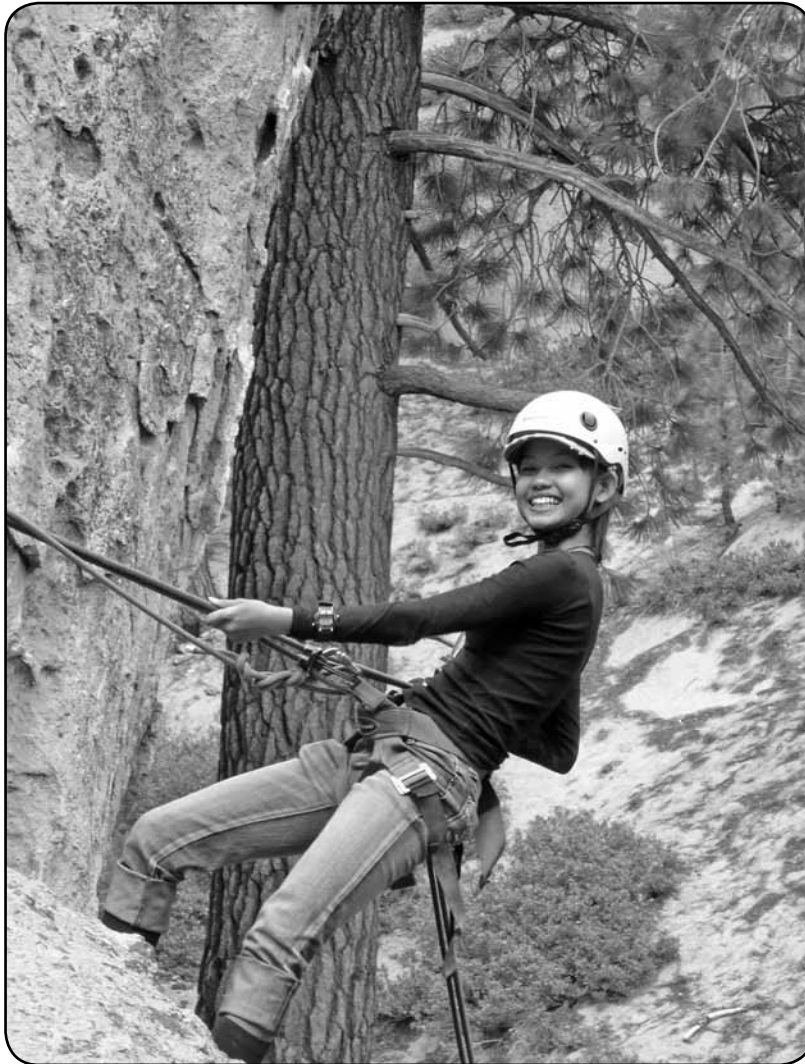
A Big Change

Forty days ago, I was very busy with school and work. There was not enough time for me to connect with other people. I had too many things to do and not enough time. I was the type of person that always looked for help because I was not confident in myself. Being in the United States was a big change—like being born again. Life in this country asks a lot and yet I still hold my cultural values. However, this summer I started learning about myself and how to stand alone. In forty days I have faced huge challenges that I never thought I could meet. Being in the ARC program, I have opened myself and faced all the challenges that have been presented.

I am involved in a program called Summer Search. This Summer Search is like water. They woke me up and planted my life by the river. This summer my mentors told me about the ARC program. This ARC program combined academics and the wilderness into one program, and Summer Search suggested I participate. I was really excited to improve my English skills and myself. I wanted to change my life so I decided to attend the ARC program. I believed ARC would make a huge difference because it included adventure, risk and challenge. With ARC I have met many challenges and felt more confident everyday.

This summer, one of the challenges that I had to go through was backpacking and hiking. I felt nervous to go to

the forest because when I was three years old I had to run away from the war and climb a mountain in the forest. Before the course I did not like to go to the forest. Hiking with my tiny legs, my feet hurt and my waist felt like fire. My hair was sweaty and my mouth and my nose dry and this pain reminded me of my life that I had before. I felt like a homeless person without my family



and afraid of wild animals in the forest. I straightened my legs, my steps pushing me. My mind and my body wanted to go to the top desperately. I kept on hiking with a strong faith. People's encouragement made me even stronger. The brutal sun mercilessly beat down on me. The backpack on my back was too heavy. I ignored it. I looked down to

the shadows and saw the trees and the wildflowers. They gave me new energy. My mind had changed when I saw all this nature is so wonderful and I felt like I fell in love with wilderness. These forty days gave me strength because I was able to complete the hiking.

The community of ARC is very strong and colorful like a rainbow. We come from different places and we share our different ideas while working together. We trust each other and encourage each other every step of the way. We have grown to be like a family with a beautiful friendship. I believe this ARC community is very helpful for students and can change the world. I have learned to be a strong leader from living in this diverse community.

Now I am not the same person as before. I am not afraid to face challenges. I found inside myself that I am very positive to other people and willing to try everything. I am a person who cares about other people. I am a person who started a whole new life. My goals after this summer are to go back home and tell my family, my church members and youth in my school about how I have been in the ARC program. I will tell youth that they are important people for the future. I will improve my English and continue making a better life.

eduardo lopez-herandez

The Life of a Mountain

I am an immense and towering mountain,
Full of life,
Full of sequoias, ponderosas, white pines, red firs, and
Animals—
Bears, deer, marmots, chipmunks,
And so many more that make me complete
Sturdy,
Tough.

I am never alone,
Always full of organisms living beside me,
Like my parents,
Always supporting me,
In school and what I want to be in my life.

Taking care of my brothers makes me strong,
By letting me know that I have to do the right thing,
So they can do the right thing too.

My parents lead me,
To be steady,
By teaching me to never yield to drugs and gangs,
Always finding the right way like a group of hikers,
Finding their path to the peak.

But even strength,
Can't halt the disgraces.
Losing a friend,
Feels like a great fire going on in the heart of the mountain,
Being burned alive with immense and red pulsing flames
moving frantically everywhere,
Sucking every piece of life it finds on its way,
But even in those moments,
I return more powerful than ever before,
Ready to oppose and protest every betrayal or lie,
Throughout life.

I am an immense and towering mountain,
That leads creeks into rivers,
Rivers into lakes,
And lakes into oceans,
Like leading my brothers,
Through the same path of respect, determination, service,
and self-esteem,
In school and outside of school.



I have a lot of mysteries,
Like who I am,
I am a person full of determination and respect toward my
parents and everybody else,
But when I really want something
I fight for it until I have it.
And the only way of revealing my mysteries,
Is by reaching my peak,
So you can see,
What I offer to the world,
Like intelligence,
My involvement in school, like playing football, having excel-
lent grades
And being a role model for my brothers and other younger
people in my community.

Inside of me, there is a rich mine
That when you get to the heart of it,
You get to see all my precious gems
They are my abilities and my core values.

Nobody can say who I am,
Until you reach my peak,
And see my beauty like my valleys,
My rivers that flow like determination, service, and my admi-
rable example for my community.

I am an immense and towering mountain
There is nothing that can destroy me.

What Forty Days Have Done

I was lying down on a rock, staring at the blue, cloudless sky and the large green trees. I was in a small spot, with a small green meadow in front of me, enormous boulders around me and snow as white as the clouds. I was there for a reason; ready to face somebody I had never faced before: myself. I had twenty-four hours, and the countdown had just begun. The solo was just a part of all the challenges that I faced during ARC. ARC (Adventure Risk Challenge) is a program that took me and nine other students from around California to go to Yosemite for forty days. In those forty days I could not talk with my family or friends; I could just send letters. I do not know how ARC found me and chose me to go for the forty day course, but I appreciate every ARC staff: Cha, Jen, Colin, Sarah, and Dylan. This forty day course forced me out of my comfort zone, made me face challenges and helped me understand how I am going to use the ARC core values in my everyday life.

I have been out of my comfort zone during many occasions in this course; some of the most powerful moments were on the solo. I was alone in the wilderness for twenty-four hours. I remember when Colin was taking me to my site—I thought I could not do it. I made it by pushing myself. I was scared. I was alone and did not know what was behind a tree or a rock. I had never been alone in the wilderness before. I had no one to talk to—all I had were my own thoughts. I was stuck with them for twenty-four hours. Despite all the things I feared, I finished the solo and now have the confidence to get out of my comfort zone.

I overcame many challenges in this forty day course. Being without my family was a challenge for me because they support me everyday when I am with them. Before the forty day course I was a kid at home that helped, but I always needed something in exchange or had an excuse to not do chores I was assigned. I was a kid that did not



value his parents and became upset with them for anything. In these forty days I learned how valuable my family is for me and how much more I can do for them. By living in a community of strangers it made me recognize how much they do for me. I have learned that I do not need anybody to tell me to do something. I can do it alone. I have climbed many mountains, led my group through many miles of trails, taught science to little kids, and learned that I am capable of much more. With all of these new skills I will value and help my family more.

This course also helped me understand

how I can take the core values of ARC into my every day life. One thing I understood in the course is that I always need compassion and need to help those around me. During ARC, I have always been the first to help with extra chores, carrying extra weight in my pack, and helping my peers when they need it. I will now help and serve people in my community when they need it by forming clubs to stop gang violence

and providing an ear for those that need to talk. This course also helped me understand that facing challenges and being determined will help me in my future because I will never give up when presented with a challenge. Next time I know I will complete the challenges given to me. Integrity has helped me understand that I should try my best to never do anything wrong. That is why I will follow the phrase that I heard “Don’t act first, Think!” These core values are values that I will now follow in my own life.

Thanks to this course, I will be a better person. I will try to make fewer mistakes and do the

right thing. I will be more determined to face challenges that come up in my life. I will help and listen to my community. Finishing ARC has made me stronger, more confident, more helpful, and more compassionate. This forty day course has helped me in many ways, by making me do things that I would never think of doing in my entire life. After these forty days I am an entirely different person. I am so grateful for all the ARC staff and all the people that are supporting ARC for choosing me to come to this course. This forty day course is something I will never forget.

elena martinez

Enchanted Library of Life

I am the Enchanted Library of Life
Occupied with books,
Prepared to portray them
When someone is willing to listen

Adventure, Comedy, Romance, Horror, and Fairy Tale
Are the stories that happen in my life
From living that happily ever after to climbing those
High Mountain peaks
And discovering all these journeys this wonderful world
has to offer



Don't get your pages flipped
And 'judge a book by its cover'
You'll never know what fortune you're missing out on

I'm a lover not a fighter
But I will fight for what I love and believe in

I am harmless, calm, relaxed
A great companion
Who gets your attention
When my story is told,
A mental picture is created
One that can embrace you
And take you to a new fascinating universe
That expands your mind just as much as it can
Unfold one's heart

I am a novel
Published
Contributing hope to people

By bestowing advice
And presenting Compassion for feelings

I have three main themes:
Generosity
Loyalty
And I respect those who deserve respect

A problem always seems to drop across my path
Like when a book reaches its climax
Sometimes when I feel criticized I take it the wrong way
And respond angrily
As any human being would
Because of stereotypes there is a lot of hatred
Between race, religion and even gender
This hatred will never end

Thinking I'm so out of place
Looking for that place to fit in
Wondering why I was even put on this earth?

I keep on searching, patiently for a solution
Knowing 'good things happen to people who wait'
Then again time is passing and I feel as if
I'm running out of time
But I have to finish what I start
I have to keep moving forward til I reach my destination
I have to complete my story

I still believe every thing happens for a reason
And only God knows because he was the one that sent me
I was sent with good reason
So I'm planning to grant that will he had planned for me
on Earth

I see myself picking up people when they fall,
When they cry because they want someone
to love, care and provide for them
I know I can include them in the chapters of my story
I will work hard to see a smile on every living soul's face
You'll never want to put this book down
You'll remember the good and sad times
You'd spent with me
When I love and care for you
You will always want me to be by your side
Because you'll feel lonely if I'm not the bedtime story
you read in the night
I will always be waiting
Here, there, anywhere, and everywhere
Just if you're that person who's interested in reading
the books of my life!
I am the Enchanted Library of Life

Me, Myself, and Everyone Around Me

I was never so sure about my life when someone would ask, "What are you going to do after high school?" I never really cared to help someone when I saw him or her in need. It never mattered to me if I was late anywhere. I would never push myself to do the best I could whenever I had a job to do. I was really careless about every choice I would make and nothing was ever important to me. Life was really hard to understand.

I was not clear on how I could better myself to actually think about my future – ARC was my solution. The instructors here are extremely supportive and they push me to give my best effort. That is helpful because it actually shows in my work how much I improve. ARC has transformed me into a better person through determination, teamwork, and setting goals for my future.

My determination over these past few weeks has been put to the test physically and mentally. Facing challenges has always been a problem for me even if that meant working as a team or helping others. I would choose to climb monkey bars any day over rock climbing a 100-foot cliff with only rope and a harness. Fear of heights has always been a challenge for me to face. As I made my way up a Clark Canyon cliff, that all changed while fear looked me straight in the eye. That cliff was intimidating me as I started to make my way up. I was frightened but determined to get to the top when I saw that my teammates had already made the first climb and had moved on to the next cliff. I told myself, "If they can do it, so can I." I used plenty of physical strength to find a way to grasp on to rock and pull myself up. Half way up, I turned around to look at the view and noticed a lightning storm a couple of miles away. I began to tremble when I felt my face getting sprinkled on by the small drops of water falling from the sky. As the trembling had gotten worse I felt I had gotten stuck. At that moment I wanted my belayer to lower me back down, but I knew she wouldn't since I was almost there. I am glad she did not because I would have felt like a failure and would have regretted giving up. I stood still for a moment listening to the cheering of my fellow peers and instructors, "Go Elena, you can do it, yeah!!!!!!!" That was probably the little

help needed to reach the top because in a minute I could already see my destination. I reached for it like a baby desperately reaching for its bottle, grasping the hook at the top and yelling, "I made it!!!" After I rappelled back down, I felt joyful and relieved to have overcome that difficult challenge. I have learned that feeling afraid is okay and that if I push myself out of my comfort zone and try my best, then I can overcome all the challenges that I will face in life.



It was rare for me to have a good quality of communication to lead and help a group of strangers before I came to this program. The only person I would give orders to would be me, and I would not follow anyone else's orders. My communication was poor and always disorganized. Since then, I have transformed into a more helpful person and learned new leadership skills. I am a good communicator that can easily talk to others and help them. The day of the ropes course in Oakhurst was a day that my leadership skills improved. My team and I were given a task; we had to cross three fake islands with only two wood planks, one longer than the other. The islands were about the size of a small desk and we could barely fit four people onto one. As we began, we all had our ideas about how to make it to the other side. Everyone started talking at once and shouting out his or her opinions. I noticed that we were not going to get anywhere if we were all were just talking over each other. So I decided to take charge and I got everyone to calm down and be quiet. Once they all listened I made a plan that we talk one at a time and discuss our ideas. Then I told them that we should all begin. We all did our part in helping and sooner rather than later we all were to the other side. That goes to show that communication is truly important skill for a group to have. I felt great when my peers paid close attention and I felt like a leader. I was genuinely comfortable telling them what were the best moves we should make, as a team, because they

all agreed and were cooperative. Now I know to step up as a leader when I see things out of place, even when it is not my obligation.

I hope to take what I learned in ARC and put it to good use to make a difference in my community, my family's life, and also my life as well. Back in the days before I came to ARC I would not accomplish the goals I set for myself. Opportunities would walk right past me and I wouldn't care to follow them. Being here in ARC for 40 days has cleared my mind and actually has me thinking of my education first. Now my goals are larger than life for me. The first important goal for my future is to push myself into getting into a superior university. I know I can do it. My determination to succeed is very high because I want to make my parents proud. Another important goal to really accomplish is to be a fine role model for my younger brothers and sisters. I will push and support them in any way possible, because I know that when they are older, they will be as determined as I am to also make our parents proud. I would also like to help out with community service. I am going to search for places where I could help, and ask our school counselor or the ARC instructors to help me find places where there is help or change needed. The goals I want to achieve are going to be challenging, but I want to follow my dreams to become a successful woman and to help others.

The Adventure Risk and Challenge program is an amazing experience that changed my life in a positive way. Most of the great skills I have were developed here at ARC; like determination, working united, and setting goals that will be valuable for my future. I appreciate the ARC program for giving me the opportunity to be a part of this forty-day course, and I feel fortunate to have been one of the ten students attending this year. I am honored to know that there are a great number of people who want to support me and watch me become a teacher or role model to other kids in my community. I recommend this program to everyone. Because "All men are created equal," and I finished this program with hopes, goals, dreams, determination and appreciation, anyone is capable of doing the same. I will never forget the summer of 2009, because now I am certain about what I want to do in life after high school.

ernie rubio

Slithering to Justice

I am a rattlesnake.
Laying under the heat of the sun
to get warm, to have the energy to defeat
inequality and hate
we have in the world.
With my long slim body coiled up
Waiting for my prey to pass by
So I can snatch it with a fast
venomous strike.

Scaring my enemies with my rattle.
As I would tell them to stay away.
To let them know I'm around.
My enemies are hate and
inequality
I am a peaceful,
fair and just person.

If you are an enemy maintain
your distance...
look at me but don't come near
if you approach me you'll regret it.
I am silent like a rattlesnake,
stalking its prey
and ready to bring another
injustice
down to the floor
with me and fight.
I will not be defeated,
I will not quit, I'll fight
until you cannot escape my grasp.



You may encounter me and not
have much luck.
I may be a lot smaller than the others
But don't trust your instincts -
that's no sign of weakness
as I will give a fast and painful bite
when you least expect it.

I am like a rattlesnake
When it sheds its skin
I can change from one phase to another
In just a matter of seconds.
I can be happy in one moment
and disappointed the next.
I like being happy when I'm
around friends.

But when you show disrespect
and say something
that makes another person feel
like they're less,
that will change my whole way
of thinking.

Family and friends come near.
I will not harm you,
I admire true friendship.
If you need help
come to me
I will help you in any
way necessary,
and shelter you as long as you need it.
You can count on me.
I am compassionate, kind, and helpful
unless you decide to turn on me.

I am like a rattlesnake
Watching my surrounding environment
and protecting it from others
that try to take what they didn't
help me to get.
What I earn is to share with friends and family.
Because of them I learned what I know
and earned what I earned
with the knowledge they taught me.

I am like a rattlesnake
I strike
against inequality and hate.
Someday
turning it into peace.
I will not rest until
we can come together,
work together,
live together,
without one offending the other
and be united.

A Totally Different Person

As I hung there in mid-air terrified of falling, I kept repeating “do it for my family.” Suddenly a wave of energy burst through my body; I looked up to see where I could grasp the next rock to pull myself up. The rain pounded down on me, stinging my eyes and blurring my vision like smoke. I used all my strength, and thought, “I can do it!” Back in the time before I started the course I never valued my family much. I always wanted to spend time with just friends. I was the “always play” person. I never really helped my mother with house chores. When my mother told me to do something I would always tell my brother or sister to do it, but never really pulled my own weight around the house. I also argued with my parents most of the time. At some point I even wished I could run away or somehow disappear and never return. I also never trusted the people around me. I hid in the shadows because I was not confident and scared of trying new things without knowing what the outcome would be. This summer I had a chance to get away and spend some time with new people and away from my family. This course has changed me by expanding my comfort zone, encouraging me to help others, and to have gratitude in my everyday life.

This course has helped my comfort zone grow by giving me challenges that I did not feel confident doing. An experience that changed me was the rock climbing. It was day fourteen of the course and the weather was cloudy. I was strapped in and ready to climb. I did not feel confident, not one little bit. I was terrified with the height we had to climb, and my legs felt really weak and wobbly like noodles. I was scared of heights but I never admitted it because I did not want to be humiliated. I reached for the rock and started climbing. On my way up it began to rain. I was scared that I might slip or step on a rock that would fall and I would fall right along with it. I also did not trust the students that were belaying me. I thought, “What if she drops me?” or “What if one of the carabiners fails and unclips itself from my harness?” That is when I started getting really perturbed. Then I heard shouts from my friends pushing me, saying “You can do it!” That is when a phrase went through my mind, the phrase my mother always told me when I was feeling scared or unable to accomplish something. She always said “Anything is possible as long as you try.” So I decided to keep going and I finally reached the top. Then I realized the next challenge: getting down. I came down easily and slowly. When I touched the ground I felt relieved and proud of

myself. This experience helped me expand my confidence in people and in myself. It made me realize that I can do things that I would never imagine I could do; sometime it was just slothfulness that kept me from doing it.

The ARC program has showed me how to be involved and help. It has helped me change my ways. At home I would always sit around the house just letting my mom and sister do all the chores. I never stood up and asked “Do you need help?” Here I have learned many things, it is nothing like home where I could just lay in bed and wait until dinner was ready. Here, we the students, cook our own food, clean our own plates and do our own laundry. These are things that our mothers would normally do for us if we were back home. All this made me realize all the hard work and effort my family has made for me. After I complete this course I plan to go home and do chores and help my family out more. I especially plan on helping my mother, because when I get back she will have a baby to occupy her most of the time. I plan to show her how much knowledge I have learned in this course. I will help her cook, clean, and do other things she would normally do. I have changed thanks to this program that has taught me how to be helpful in many ways. When I get home my mom will see the help I will offer and encouragement I will give to others. I will also wash the dishes, mop the floors, clean the restrooms and other things she will need help doing. She will see the metamorphosis I have gone through and appreciate the ARC program for changing her child. She will notice how much I have missed them, and how much I love my family.

In my lifetime, I never realized how important family and friends are to me. I never really appreciated my friends and family for being there for me, especially when I most needed them. Though sometimes I became so angry with them I just wished I could flee

or somehow vanish and never return. I was a selfish and stuck up child. Here in the ARC program, during the solo, I realized that family and friends are important in a teenager’s life. During the solo I felt lonely and frightened and just wished I could have someone to talk to at that moment. Many people do not realize what they have until it is gone. I thought I was not going to miss my friends and family, but I was wrong. I cannot wait until I see them; I am going to love and appreciate them. I will let them know that I am never leaving them when they most need me, because I know they will always be there to support and help me pass through obstacles and challenges I will have to face someday in my life. I will appreciate my family and friends by helping them from now on and being there for them. I miss my family and wish that I could have them here with me in this moment to tell them how much I miss and love them.



I am sure they love me and are waiting for me with a big hug, and I will show them how much I missed them and appreciate them for the hard work they’ve done for me.

This course has changed me in many ways. This course has taught me how to be helpful in my community and helped my comfort zone expand. Now I am a totally different person, not the same boy you saw back a couple of weeks ago. I have turned into someone who wants to help his family and friends, who is confident in himself, and appreciates his family and friends. One of my favorite quotes is, “You don’t know what you really have, until it’s gone.” This quote can be

related to me in many ways. I will appreciate what I have, because when it is gone, that is when I will miss it the most. I will make choices and think about them as I do it. I will think, “am I going to cause harm to my friends and family?” I am ready to start my new life with my family and friends and share with them how I feel because they will always be there to encourage me for whatever comes up in my life. I am ready to go through the obstacles in life with my family by my side. I am ready to go through the hardest part of my life no matter what it is, as long as my most prized possession, my family, supports me. I am ready, I am the person I was always supposed to be. I am the soul that hid inside of me. I am Ernan Rubio.

eugenia santiago-garcia

Living in a Big World

I am a Jeffery Pinecone,
Born from a Jeffery Pine Tree,
I belong to the wilderness, the people.

Can a pinecone be able to ease the pain of others?
Or merely be just another pinecone in the wilderness?

As a pinecone, when touched, I can be rough or smooth,
Every piece of me represents all the active choices I've made.
Building the strength to walk,

Assembling sounds to speak,
Learning two primary languages before kindergarten.
Educating myself later in two other languages,
Going to school with older generations,
Looking up to my eldest,

But then following shocking influences,
Changing for the "in" crowd,
Leading to appalling grades,
Uncovered, showed selfishness, prejudiced thoughts,
The goal of striving with nothing else in mind.
Losing things worked so hard for,
Isolation
Struggling to be average again,
Working harder to be above average,
Learning other diversities
Accepting thoughts and beliefs of others.
Beginning to understand the difficulties
and conflicts in the world,
How whole governments ever kill
and endanger humans for theories,
Militias forming to fight injustices in corrupted countries,
Mothers crying
accepting thoughts that their child has no future,
Will no longer come home,
has fallen and no longer will stand up.

I am in a quest to see what a pinecone can do in its life,
Among birds, redwoods, pine trees,
Rocks, pebbles, boulders,
Predators, prey, wonders,
Wounded, loaners, compliers, owners,
Dictators, boasters, precise,
Decent, modest, rebels.
Can this pinecone be able to ease the pain of others?
Or merely be just another pinecone in the wilderness?

Not me -- I will change the world.



To Let Go

“I’m almost there, just a few more hours more.” Seconds later tears fell down my face. When I noticed wet drops on my lips I completely let go. It was only the second day and I had lost the desire to take charge of my life; what was I now suppose to use to keep going? What happened to my desire for conquering the world? Was this it, only fourteen and finally giving up? What will my life look like? My mind completely shut off and I began to drag my weak body uphill over snow. Within that day, I had a strong wish to become someone else and change who I was; I changed through a powerful want to strive for hope, learning, and love.



Minutes before I gave up, I looked at my surroundings and thought, “Who am I and why am I trying so hard?” I kept trying to pretend I had a few more hundred feet to hike. The weather made my breath cold, panting harder with each step taken. I never had to carry extra weight on my back, my spine hunched, my knees, calves, feet, and hips ached to stop; I didn’t understand what kind of people did this for pleasure. My main goal was to do it for myself; how proud would I be at the end and how much more will I have accomplished. I knew if I just made it up to Evelyn Lake, with my common sense it would all be worth it. I was too tired to keep looking at the scenery, my eyes focused on each step. When the instructors began to cross snow I slowly drifted away mentally. I just did what they did. Hiking up snow was evil. In the middle of a snow covered creek

we crossed, everyone made it to the other side safely, everyone but me. In the middle of crossing my foot did not step securely into the base. I slipped and fell. My weight and the impact was not supported. The snow dissolved into the water and I fell into the creek. The water alerted my senses, but I had no energy left to pull myself up. I silently cried while I was being pulled away. That was the moment I gave up, though there were three other falls I still awaited. In my community I always found a way out of troubles. Here there were only ten students, three instructors, and the wilderness. Giving up was the easiest option. No one there knew how I felt, although they tried to sympathize.

After reaching Evelyn Lake I didn’t care how the other students were wowed by the sight, I wanted the forty days to be over. I’ve never felt so petty and mad. It only took the second day to break me. I assumed many people thought, second day only and there are tears. When I felt myself shattered, there was relief. Of course I didn’t realize that all in that same day. It took about 48 hours to process a reflection. I knew there were going to be other hard days like this yet to come. So if my will to be in charge of my life vanished what was now my motivation? That day I realized and set a new goal for myself. But reaching that goal failed the moment I fell into the snow asking God to take me back to my mother and father. I realized at that moment how young I am, as to only think about a high standard of living. I have acted on these thoughts to fulfill all my

wants. And my life was destined to be known as success. But, something as innocent as words was turned into paths to selfishness, yet it was encouraged. Many times I thought I knew where I wanted to go; I began to set goals and accomplish them at any cost.

Here through many hardships I learned to accept the talents that I own. Earning a lot of money and living in a materialistic world isn’t the success to life. But one of the most important lessons here has been riding my deep desire to succeed at any cost.

How long does it take a person to change? It only took me one day. Hiking transformed me because it was really difficult and made me feel that there is more to life than financial success. Life has to do with loving people. Sarah, our instructor, taught me how important every child is and that became an encouragement. I also noticed a step in change when rappelling. I had to let go of the rock, it was the only safety I held on to. But I had to let go, when I did I felt the support of the ARC team. I am reminded constantly of my memories with interviewing Chancellor Kang of UC Merced, the passion and love of strangers for a better tomorrow, and dedication of a whole faculty at ARC to change students one by one. How fortunate I am to know what I know, to love what I love, and to think for who I am. I no longer want to be full of knowledge that I can not share.

I have been really excited to go back home and educate my community. If more people became involved with change imagine how diverse we would all be. I have so much to show the world. Before ARC, I slowly began to let go of who I was, but now after 40 days, I know exactly why I wanted to change who I was. Because of my thoughts and assumptions on life I look forward to a change.

jonathan martinez

I Am a Sequoia

I am a small sequoia

Growing
To heights no one has ever seen
To be the most massive organism
Who is going to be someone
That shines above the rest
Because of my compassion
People will recognize me
For who I am.
I am helpful
Assisting people

Fire,
For those who are cold
And comfort to those that need it.

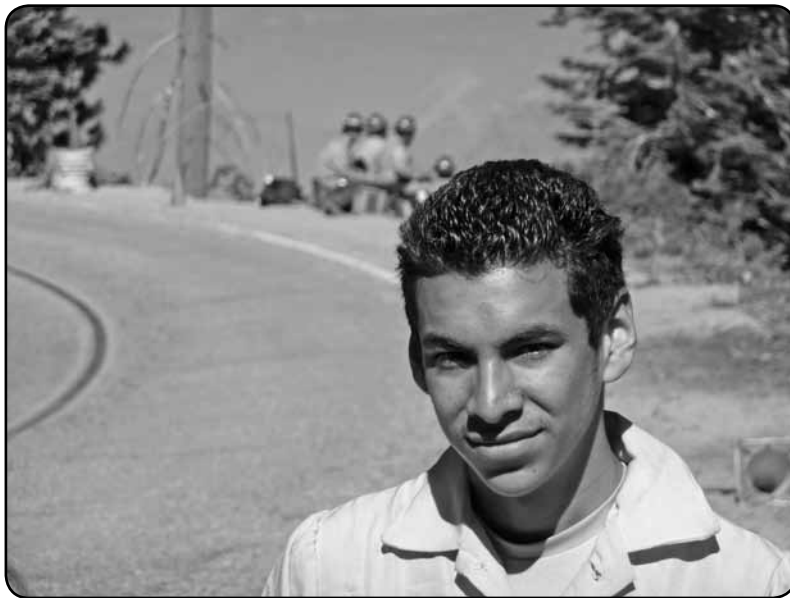
I am tough
I am able to survive
The strongest wind
The biggest fire
Like learning a whole new language
I tell everyone else
That they have no control over my fate

I have people against me
People who say that I “can’t”
People trying control my views
Or people trying to use me.
I stand in the way of the wind,
The people who oppose me.
The bigger I grow
The more wind that hits me
But one day
I will be massive enough
Growing in friends,
Family,
And hopes
Not getting disturbed
Or stopped
And I will say to the wind
That it is powerless
Having no control

Over me.

I am unique
There is no one like me
None with my compassion
None with my strength
None growing like me.
I will shine above the rest.

Out of their troubles.
I provide
A breath of fresh air
As a sign of relief to others
A place to rest for those who are tired
As a shoulder to cry on.
I provide
Shade,
For those who are hot
And calm those that are disturbed.



A Broken Cycle

I looked 60 feet down, hanging from a rope and harness in midair. I saw all the people who pulled me up, running away with the rope in their hands; I thought “What will this feel like?” waiting for the worst. But all I could wait for was to freefall, swing and feel the adrenaline. When I started falling, I felt so scared. After, when I got down I wanted to do it again, because of the rush I felt and the excitement. But before I came to ARC, 40 days ago, I was this ungrateful, lazy videogame-addicted son, who avoided helping out every chance he had. Every day would be the same—sleep, eat, play videogames, and watch TV—that was my cycle. I came to ARC to change, to improve, and to take every chance for a better future.

In my school time I had a regular life not thinking what I was going to do next until I heard about ARC. I knew about ARC thanks to my history teacher; he told our class “Who wants to spend their summer camping and studying about science?” I became interested. The thought of not having the backbone to apply made me apply; the irony. I applied not even thinking I would even be a good choice for it. Every time I had gotten more paperwork or interviews made me feel closer to coming to ARC, until I got a final call saying “Do you want to come to ARC?”

Behind every big decision there are people. My family would be those people. Before I signed up for it, I thought of what might be some of the consequences: missing parties, holidays, and most of all, missing my family. My mom always showed me compassion, always showed me affection, and always showed me love. I thought that if I would leave my mom I would understand all that much better, because of the absence of all those feelings. My dad always showed me love, but in addition to that he was also very strict making me push myself in school and sports. He did not force me to come to ARC but the words “I want you to do better mijo,” always stayed in my head, and I chose to come by my own hand. My younger brother is not a source of inspiration, but a reason to surpass myself and be a greater role model for my brother. I

know now from where I got the backbone to apply to ARC.

When I was in my own house I was very comfortable, because that was my life, my customs and my way. In the ARC program I have been outside my comfort zone numerous times. My comfort zone was minuscule before I came to this program, but over time, challenges and risks helped me increase my comfort zone. Before I came to ARC, I would be fearful of what might happen if I tried anything at all. I thought of what might be some of the consequences of my decisions. I faced challenges, became a leader, and I know I will face more challenges in the future when I am the person in charge. I exceeded all the risks by my courage, my strength, and the help of my friends.

Before I got into ARC, everything in the course seemed equally exciting, except for one event: the solo, which is spending a whole day without the presence of another person. All my life I have spent with other people. I cannot remember a whole day on my own, with no family, friends, or simply another human being. And there I was on that day, where I spent 24 hours by myself, 24 hours of solitude, 24 hours of looking into the mirror, and 24 hours of hunger. The solo helped me understand my life, the behavior I would have at home, and the assistance I did not give at home. Not helping at home would be one of my issues, because both my parents work and I would just mind my own business. Being in the vast emptiness helped me realize that all the objects I have at home are worth more than a “thank you.”

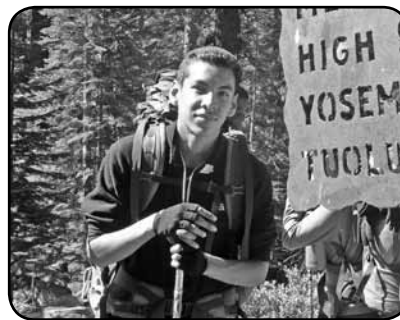
At home, backpacking and rock climbing were two of the last things I would want to do. Hiking approximately five to ten miles a

day, preparing my own food, and setting up camp is extremely difficult. There are many ways you can get lost in the wilderness, other than being lost by location; for example, communication between friends can be challenging. Rock climbing is another activity I was troubled about. I offered to be the first; I realized that that would assist my self-confidence. I thought, “What if I slip and fall?” I feared that if I fell, that I would shred my leg open on a razor-sharp rock, dripping blood, getting a shrill of pain up my spine. But I trusted that I would not fall with my friends cheering me on. I would not let them or myself down. When I was on the ground again, my confidence grew; I felt powerful and almighty.

Coming to ARC helped me become a better, more confident leader. I changed my voice, by speaking louder and stronger; I gained more confidence by trusting myself more and knowing that I am more powerful than I thought I was. I increased my participation by serving my friends and instructors more. All my friends made me feel like a real leader, even though at the time it did not feel good to boss them around. Being the leader meant being in charge of the timing, making sure that all the people were doing their respective jobs, and leading the evening meeting at night. I know that all that I have improved on will help me in the future when I become a real leader. I

felt good telling people what to do because I know that in the future I want to be a leader, and getting prepared for the future will put me on the right path. It felt good that people relied on me because of the responsibility I had over them.

Today, I look in the mirror and no longer look at the same person I was before. I look at a better person; I look at a more responsible teen, I look at a more respectful person, and I look at a smarter boy. I look in the mirror and wonder “Where did the other kid go?” Now at the end of ARC I am no longer that lazy boy, playing videogames and doing the same old routine. I feel reborn, not having the same life, not being the same person, not being the individual I was 40 days ago. I feel completely changed, and I know that when I get home I will have broken my cycle.



ricardo amancio

Flying Towards the Light

I am a bald eagle
Flying free from my tribulations
As I hunt for food,
I also hunt for ideas,
Ideas which evolve my mind
Using my vision
To watch over those in need of help
Having a unique way
Of standing up for my family and friends,
Whose language, skin color, and religion
Aren't the same as people around us.

I am like no other:
With charisma,
Stalwart and compassionate.

While I live on the top of the world
I also live for the challenges in life
And thanks to those challenges
I learn to overcome
And endure my agony

The anguish of being criticized
For not believing in God
To say that we were just merely
A bug at one point,
Evolution.

To be known as an Atheist,
The one adversary to God.
To be called the son of the devil,
The Prince of Darkness.
But I prevented the criticisms,
With my auburn wings

But I rose from my dark abyss,
Thanks to a man
Who had hope in me,

When no one else did.
Gave me a second opportunity,
With God,
Our Lord and Savior.



For his acceptance of me
No matter what my past
Thanks to him
I was able to get up,
From the green, shiny meadow
Wipe myself off
And continue to fly.

To soar through life
Without a doubt in my mind
Like no other:
With charisma,
Stalwart and compassionate.

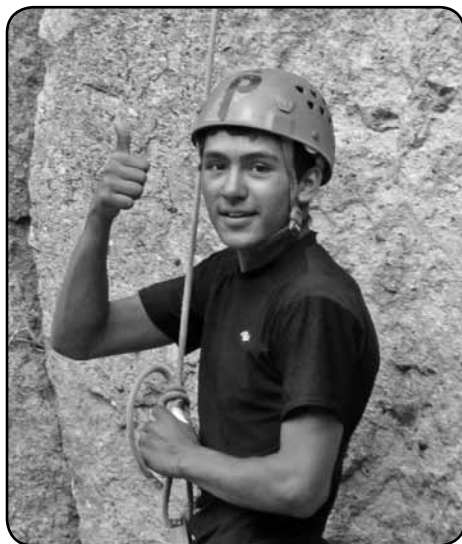
Another Flight, Another Story

“What has big ears, is grey, and has a trunk?” was the riddle I asked the ropes course instructors, while I hung 65 feet in the air. While they tried to figure it out, I waited, hoping they would not let me fall toward my death. I looked at the trees I was attached to – my only surroundings. I was in a swing that would eventually take me for a wild ride. I could feel the breeze hit me as if it were a bullet, ready to knock me down. Finally the ropes course instructors gave up and asked, “What?” I responded, extremely frightened of being released and free-falling, “It’s a mouse, going on a vacation with a...” While dropping I finished my answer, but didn’t yell it out as loud. I didn’t have the energy to scream it out; only to say it as if I were just talking to myself. While I swung back and forth, I felt as lonely as a Sequoia after a wildfire had just burnt down the rest of the Sequoias.

The ropes course was just one of many tests I had to confront this summer, and although there have been numerous other challenges that I have taken throughout my life, there has been nothing as astonishing as the ARC program for forty days. But there are several other adventures, risks, and challenges that have improved my character, and I plan to use this experience even after the ARC program is all over. I will leave ARC transformed into the person I am meant to be: helpful, supportive, and caring.

Back home, I was a selfish teenager who did not assist in the house. I would just lie in bed, be on the computer, or eat until I could not stuff the final speck of my mother’s cooking into my mouth. I made it difficult on my mom because she did most of the work around the house. I would fight with my little sister for no reason, just for the pleasure of making me laugh. I would ask if I could go to my friends’ house, but go no matter what their response was. I was living in the house as if I was the sovereign over my fatherland. But now, after the forty days, I feel as if I was a failure. I was a failure for not being the son my parents wanted me to be: responsible, caring, and helpful.

I would tell my mom that I would walk my sister to school, but I would sneak out so I would not have an extra task. I now know that when I return, I will serve my family, giving my assistance when washing the dishes, folding clothes, and making sure my mom does not even lift a finger. I was able to learn about helping thanks to the ARC program. Here, I had a new family, and I was going to have to care for and lend a hand to each and every one. I learned to help others and not leave anyone behind. If one member in my gang was tired, we would stop for a water break and let them catch their breath. Helping was something that was not my style, but now when people ask me to describe myself in just one word, I would say, “helpful.”



I have also learned to be supportive with my crew here in ARC. I would cheer them on if they were rock climbing or on the ropes course. I showed compassion when they were depressed or just tired of hiking. I would encourage them by saying, “We are almost done,” or “Come on guys, you’re doing great.” The ARC experience has really impacted me. It is an impact that I can learn from and spread out. I can also use it to improve my community in many ways. Back at home I would not support my brother in his decisions. He would ask me for support and I would just blow him off. The only person I cared for was myself, and no one else. I now know that my family is important –

and not just them, but everyone else in the world. I will encourage them and support them if they are in trouble, or just need help in their personal choices, or in any other decision that they would make in the future.

Caring is a characteristic that every human being has in themselves. I only had a few specks of it in me before I came to ARC. Now I think that 99.9% of me is caring. I have improved so much, and I can help improve my community in so many ways. For instance, I can offer to pack up packages without getting paid in the local store, I can offer to tutor the little kids from elementary school in the afternoon to help them improve their knowledge, and I can teach them how important it is to recycle in our community. I will care more for those that I love, especially my family. I will take what I have been taught here in the forty days, and spread it to my family as I have done here in ARC. I have shown a lot of kindness here to my entire crew. I shared my compassion if they wanted to play basketball, if they were required to clean the bathroom, or just needed to talk. I care for everyone here as much as I care for my family, because here in ARC we are one big family: the Bears on Fire!!!

The ARC program has done me an enormous favor and helped me to be more helpful, supportive, and caring. This program really changed my personality. I came here as a cool teenager from Dos Palos, and I will be leaving it as someone who is going to be even more involved with my community. I was taught here that you can accomplish anything you want to if you set your mind to it. The program taught me that I am not the only person here on the planet Earth, and that everything is better if you have a group of people helping you out in every step you take. It has shown me that there are more important people, such as my family, friends, and many others. I learned that if I want to make a positive impact on my community, I can be the one to do it. With the help of other students I can have a huge impact, not just on my community, but the world as well. That is why I would like to be part of the ARC program for the rest of my life.

sara rivera

Lost, But I'll Find A Way

I am a river
I could be as calm as the wind
On a warm summer day
Or I can be as dangerous as a thunderstorm
When provoked.
I change over time.
Twisting and turning
Raindrops pelt my body
Feeding my hungry soul
Filling it to the brim with knowledge
I flow through life
Not knowing where the next end will cease
All I know
Is that every time I come to a junction
I'll have to choose a path

I am a river
Determined
Confident
I have no fears
Except for failing my family
There are times when I believe
That all of the effort
Pain
And suffering
That my parents have gone through
Will be for naught
That I will disappoint them
Fail them
Or just not exceed their expectations
There are times I just feel lost.
That the path I chose is incorrect
I'm at a crossroads
And three paths stand before my eyes
One being the path my mother would like
for me
A lawyer
Another being a doctor
The path my father would choose for me
And the third having a huge sign
And right smack in the middle
A huge word saying "UNDECIDED"
It's scary
Because my parents trust me
They believe I'll pick the right path
The path that'll benefit me the most.
I close my eyes
Open them back up
And all I see is myself
In a dense forest,
Dark and cold
No one can hear me,
No one can see me
I'm lost for all eternity
And I can't do anything about it

I just paste a phony smile on my
face
Hiding the pain and troubles
Never letting anyone in
And pretending everything will be
all right
But it's hard
It's hard for me to let anyone in
To trust
To talk
To listen
I can't

I am a river
I have traveled a difficult and extensive path
And in my course there have been obstacles
I've gone through many different schools
Never having a real friend to talk
or confide in
But there was one time when I did
I had a close friend
She was my soul sister
I could trust her
I could talk to her
No worries could go unsolved with her
by my side
Until that day.
That night she called me
Crying
Weeping like the world would end
I felt this helpless, powerless feeling that I
had never felt before
That I hope I'll never feel again
I couldn't do anything to help heal her pain
She explained to me what happened
Her brother was involved in gangs
That morning he went out to the store
Just to buy milk for his baby boy
He got shot
Right there
Right outside of his house
Boom!
Just like that
Their whole life did a complete 180
His wife was husbandless
His child was fatherless
His parents lost a child
And her,
My soul sister,
She was brotherless.
Just like that
Everyone's life changed
Including mine
The one person I thought I had
finally found



To be able to trust
Talk to
And finally let close
Left.
The dream I was in crashed
onto the ground
Broke into little pieces
But with that I gained a little

My feel touched the ground
And I dealt with reality
I found out how the world really is
There are bad people out there
And he decided to take that wrong path
He chose the path with death and danger
for his own family
He got involved with trouble
And because of his choices his family had
to deal with the consequences
They dealt with the pain and anger
That was the first time my eyes cleared
to the outside world
It's not just pretty and pink
Life also has its gray and black
But I survived.

I am a river
Strong and determined
Never letting anything or anyone stop me
I'm not sure where I'm going
I don't know whom I'll meet
But I'm here
And I'll gladly face anything
that comes my way
Head held high and proud
I will never let problems such as
gangs and drugs
Get drawn in with my brother and sister
I won't let them be led astray
from the right path
I may not know what I want just yet
But I know
For a fact
That my brother will never
go down that path
I will not stand with people that believe that
bringing pain to others is right
I've gone through a lot
in such a short life span
And I'm not about to give up now
I will flow with the river
Where ever it may take me
Down it's winding paths
But I won't stop
Until I reach that one stunning waterfall
Knowing that that's where I belong.

A Challenging Summer

I thought I was going to die. I was higher than I ever believed possible, feet dangling, and my only lifeline was a rope that I was hoping would not snap. Down below, the person holding my rope yelled up to me, "Will you sing me a song? Will you do a dance up there for me?" and I thought, "Is she serious? I am up here, 65 feet off the ground and she wants me to dance and sing?" I was getting angry at that point when suddenly, without any warning or countdown, I felt wind whooshing by my ears while my heart started thumping faster and faster, and my body felt all of this adrenaline rushing from the top of my head to the toes on my feet. I felt like my body was going to explode. Suddenly I heard the rope make a loud noise. I felt like I was falling into an abyss of nothingness, wind slamming hard and fast against my body, my heart thumping loudly in my ears ... but then I felt the harness biting into my legs, propelling me back, and I knew I was still alive. I kept swinging for a while longer until the instructors were finally able to stop me. I was glad to be on flat surface. I am never getting on this swing AGAIN, I thought. All of the emotions I felt: scared, not being able to see my parents for these last couple of weeks and all of the challenges I had gone through came up to the surface at that moment. When I thought back on all of that it just made me cry, knowing that I had gone through a lot and it has just been difficult for me. Afterwards, I felt so much better knowing that I had overcome my fears and I felt relieved knowing that I was not afraid to face new fears. Looking back on that experience I now feel stronger and more confident. This summer has been full of challenges and each new challenge has had an immense and different impact on my life; and all of it started with a simple poem.

No one has limits; my only limits are the ones I set myself, which is something that I learned throughout the ARC program. I have been pushed and pushed out of my comfort zone every day; having to conquer all of the challenges and activities that come my way. My first actual challenge was writing a poem about myself. It has always been difficult to put my feelings and thoughts on paper, especially when the instructors wanted us to dig deep into ourselves and write about something emotional that transpired in our lives. I was not sure what I could write about. I ended up writing about the way I feel towards my future and about a problem that happened a few years ago that affected my life drastically. It was complicated because I have never talked about it to anyone, not even my family. Therefore writing about it and knowing that I would have to read it out

loud in front of people made it even more difficult. After it was done I just looked at it, hoping it was all right. When I was told I only had to change and add a few things here and there I was so glad. Rereading my poem I felt proud of myself knowing that I was able to accomplish that one small feat; knowing that writing about my feelings is not as hard as I thought it was. I thought it was difficult to open up and get comfortable with complete strangers but I learned that it is not that hard. I also learned that there is always a next step to writing. Before this course I had believed that my writing skills were good enough, until the instructors gave me feedback telling me that I could push my writing to an even higher level. When I go back to school I am going to try to be above average, because one simple sentence could carry a lot of emotion and power.

Another challenge that will follow me throughout my life is the solo experience. In that challenge we were left alone for 24 hours out in the wilderness with no one to talk to, limited food supplies, and only our journals and thoughts for company. The spot that the instructors chose for me was spectacular. The view was amazing with huge mountain peaks on my right and big boulders on my left. I was sleeping in the middle of a clearing between some trees and at night I was able to look up at the sky and see shining bright stars and huge, dark clouds. Not only did I have a magnificent view but I also had the opportunity to reflect on life back home and life throughout this 40-day course. Looking back, I noticed enormous changes in myself.

Before this course I was a girl that had a low confidence level and a major trust issue, all thanks to high school, because that is when hardships in life start leaving a mark. I also reflected back on how I used to be at home. I would depend on my family all the time, never doing anything without them. I tried being respectful but then there were always those times when I exploded at whoever was around and I could say some mean things. Looking back, I also noticed that I could help out around the house more often. My parents are always willing to support me in whatever choices I make, willing to do my chores so that I am able to finish a project or go to one of my swim or tennis meets, but I never do anything in return. So now I want to go back home and start making a difference there – I want them to notice how I have changed and be as proud as I am of these changes in me.

Also, in those 24 hours of the solo I reflected back on life without my family and I started crying. I cannot imagine a life without my loving mother, sweet and caring father, cute



brother, and my crazy sister. I cannot stand them but I cannot live without them; that is how I see life. I love my little brother and older sister and I really want to go back and build a new relationship with them and not miss any part of their lives any longer. I now know I have to change when I go back home to my community. We all have to go back and do 40 hours of community service and I am really excited about that. I want to make a difference in this world, as small as it may be, but I want to be able to pay it forward and help out other children in their schoolwork and life or motivate them to keep trying even harder. Involvement in my community and the difference we children can make are things I have never really thought about before this program, but now I want to take those values that I was taught and teach them to other younger kids. I really appreciate life for giving me this opportunity to be able to come learn, have fun, and for giving me this desire to want to change my future life.

Now, not only will I want to change my life with the way I treat my family, but I also want to change my life towards my community and school. During this course I have learned to love nature and our surroundings; without them, we would be nothing. I have noticed the difference between Yosemite's clean community and my community back home and I know I do not like it, not one bit. I want to start a club that will teach children the proper way of recycling and its importance towards our community because that is part of the problem; people are not educated about the topic. I have also now set myself higher standards towards school. I used to not care much about my grades because in my classes it has always been very easy to get an A, but after going through with this course I have learned that there is more to writing. I will always think back on this summer whenever I have a college essay due or an environmental science project; these are valuable skills that have changed my life and my future.

I have had so much fun this summer. I know, for a fact, that this is a summer I will never forget and will always look back on it when times get tough. I was able to learn more about myself, about my life, and the most important thing is that I am much more confident now than I was before I came to this program. I learned to rely on my teammates and instructors, and I have learned to be a very strong leader. I thank all of the instructors for helping us when times got tough and also all of the students because we all became very close and I feel like I have a second family; Sarah was our second mother. I also appreciate all of my family for supporting me before and throughout this course because I know I would not be here without them. So now, after going through with this exciting summer I feel like I am ready to go out and conquer anything that comes my way. There is nothing or no one that can stop us if we really want something; so just do it!

teresa barriga

Metamorphosis of a Monarch Butterfly In Migration

I am
A monarch
A monarch butterfly
I'm free
I go from here
To
There
I undertake migration
From Mexico
To California.
What is hard for me is
The separation
From
Friends and family
My grandmother was in Mexico
Now she is gone
I'll never have a chance to
See her again

Here in school
I am in a crowd
With too many people telling me
That they are
My friends
Hard to trust them
Hard to choose who your friends are
While I think they are my friends
They are not loyal to me.

I am beautiful
I am Strong
When I swing
My wings on
The sunlight
They sparkle
And
I shine on my
Way.

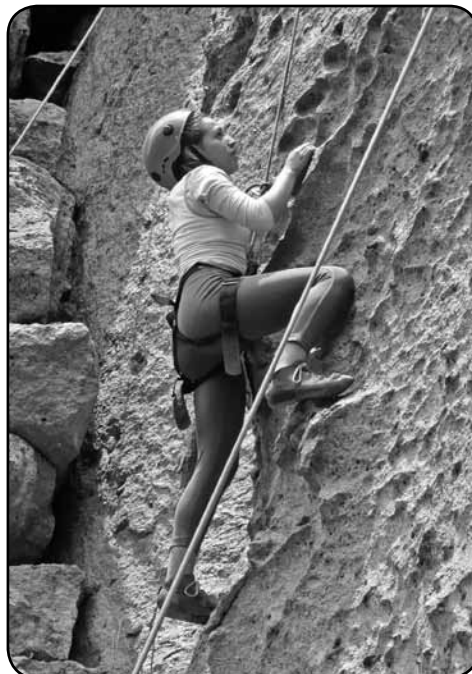
You think
That
I'm beautiful and fragile
You
Don't know
Or have any idea

That
I am beautiful and really strong
Inside

I always stop on
My way
To see the panorama
That surrounds
Me

I also like
To take a break in
Mama's garden
I am who
Pollinates her
Colorful flowers
And vegetables
I help to carry on
The cycle of life
I am beautiful
I am strong
I am harmless
That's why everyone likes me

My life is a
Metamorphosis



Changing over time
When I was born
I was a
Caterpillar
I didn't have any idea
Of how life would be
I wanted to feel protected
From predators

So I took one step forward
Growing into my second
Stage of life
A pupa.
During this time of my cycle
I learned at
Home and at school
Gaining knowledge and
Preparing
For the beginning of
My third stage

Becoming a
Butterfly.
Here is where I will
Be
More independent
More capable and able to deal with
Struggles in life.

I don't know
No one knows
Where my destination will be.
I am not afraid to die
As long as
I am doing what
I
Love
Constantly being challenged
I feel pure adrenaline
Gaining more experiences
Like a
Butterfly flying in loops
Like a
Butterfly singing on its way
To its next long journey.

Prepare For The Future

I came to ARC to learn and to be very prepared for the future. Before I came to the ARC program, I was told that during my 40 days trip I was going to be in challenges, risks and adventures and that is what we did. I have experienced many things like being out in the wilderness going backpacking, being by myself on the solo day, working hard in base camp and going on trips to do a ropes course, water rafting and rock climbing. During ARC, I have learned to be determined, live in an unfamiliar community and face all upcoming challenges.

I constantly stepped out of my comfort zone during this 40-day course. I am away from my family, but here I meet people that help me to improve and show me how to be a stronger person with more courage running in my blood. The first time I felt this courage was on the second day when I had to hike up a tall, steep hill. It was hard for me because I got a really bad back pain; a headache and the heavy backpack that I was carrying kept me from going as fast as the others. That day I was exhausted. I started to see the difference between being at home and being challenged here in ARC. I realized that I was challenging my mind as well as my body. That helped me to go through the rest of the course because I knew that I was able to do any other challenge. I still remember the hot sunny day that was the biggest day of my life. On that day, I demonstrated determination and bravery to keep going as I hiked up two tall, steep hills. I also showed determination that day because my team and I were on our first solo team day. We were by ourselves without our instructors to help us and tell us what to do and what not to do. We gained 1,800 feet in elevation. Even though the first hill was bigger, the second hill was harder for me. It

was only 600 feet in elevation. The heat made me feel exhausted. There was no way to get water, and our water bottles were mostly emptied. For me it was terrible because too many things came into my mind. I considered giving up! I heard so many of my teammates cheering for me by calling my name, but in that moment my legs were shaking and my breathing rate was too high. I tried hard to catch up with them. I felt relief when I could see the top of that mountain. I felt the wind blowing on my face and all around my body. When my team and I got to the top we were so excited and we started screaming, because we were full of joy. I felt proud of my team and myself for such a huge accomplishment. Those two days I was most determined to accomplish my goals, and I learned that I can do anything I set my mind to.



During the ARC program, I have learned how to communicate with others and how to have a better conversation. Whenever I have the privilege of being the leader of the day I get a chance to work on my communication skills. I communicate with others by helping my team and keeping them informed of what is on the agenda for the day. I also make sure that they are doing their assigned jobs. Every time I know that I improve, and I feel more confident doing my job as the leader of the day. I have learned that communication is the key that I need in

order to succeed in life. It is difficult to live without my lovely family, but at the same time, I get a chance to live with and learn from a different community. In this community I learn from my instructors, park rangers and from people who come to help us. I learn how to maintain and clean the environment and that we humans do not always make the right decisions when we try to help the environment. For example, for too many years the community of Wawona used to put all the fires out. During this course I have learned that when making decisions regarding nature, it is important to sit and discuss the problem with many people to come up with the best solution. It might take days, months or even hundreds of years to know the answer or to make the right decision. Being involved in this community is like being born again.

Before I participated in this course the present was more important than the past or the future. Now I have changed my way of thinking; I know that the three of them are really important in my life when making decisions. From now on I will use the lessons I learn from past experiences to do better in my present and future. This course has made me want to pursue higher goals for myself and for nature. I have started thinking far into the future about what I can accomplish.

I feel more prepared, and I have more courage to face the challenges in life. Summer Search and the ARC program have helped me to step out of my comfort zone and be more determined to follow and accomplish my dreams. After being challenged and being excited in adventures, I feel more capable to continue being a leader in my community and making changes that will help my community to have a healthier neighborhood. I know that from now on I can go through any challenge; all I need is to be a determined person who never gives up!

valeria mijares

No One Stops the Animals from Crossing Over

I am a bobcat
Able to roam free
No borders can stop me

In nature
There are no restrictions
Yet some people are not allowed
Into this exquisite country

“Too many people stealing work
Don’t let them in!
They are different
The country is full of aliens!”

Why is it that people discriminate?
Say hateful things to us
Just because we are different
Maybe it’s skin color
Or maybe it’s the way we talk
Or for no good reason

Some cousins here
Many more there
Unable to come for a simple visit
Because they are unwelcome

You don’t have a green card
A visa, a pass
Why don’t you go back home
That is all they ask



But do you stop the animals
From crossing over?
A bird can fly across
A bobcat strolls through

Are we less than animals?

Then why can’t we have that freedom, too?

Immigrants and their descendants
Are not inferior
Was it not said
“All men are created equal”?
Even the people who call themselves natives
Have a family history in a distant land
So in the end
No one should hate others for wanting to belong

A bobcat has many spots
Each symbolizing a part of itself
I am a Chicana
Born here
But my heritage comes from over there

I have two very different cultures
Intertwined
English at school
And Spanish at home
Sometimes I get them mixed up
But I enjoy speaking them both

Imagine the opportunities I could have:
A lawyer
Or doctor
Being able to assist those in need

To be the first in my family
To graduate from a four year university
Is my goal, my prey
It is not out of reach
If there is a will
There is a way

I will help people
I realize that everyone belongs
They should be as free as a bobcat
To cross over
To benefit our country
Discrimination, racism, and hate must stop

Falling into Transformation

How do I get into these things? I thought. I held onto the minute piece of granite I had an ungainly grip on. I peeked down, and the world seemed to spiral forward. I feel like a cat, I thought. They can climb trees, but then they get stuck and can't get down. From below, Ricardo and Eduardo shouted at me, "Let go of the rock!" I shook my head violently. Sure, Eduardo and Ricardo were holding onto the rope that held me. Sure there was a chance that they might let go. So, sure there was a chance that as I rappelled down, I would plunge down and the fall might be fatal. Way to keep up the optimism, I thought. It was not that I did not trust them, but it had just been a couple of hours since they had learned to belay. I was not at all nervous when Peter or Tobin, the rock climbing and rappelling instructors, belayed me. After all, they had done it millions of times. Eduardo and Ricardo? Twice. As I tried to calm down and slow my breathing down so I was not hyperventilating, I thought, You can do this. Prying my hand loose from the ledge, I fell abruptly. Startled, I clung onto the closest section of jutting rock. "We won't let you fall!" Ricardo and Eduardo yelled up to me. Whimpering, I glanced down at them and tried to smile. All I managed to do was grimace. For a moment I wondered if I could just hang there about one hundred feet in the air and get a helicopter to pick me up. Laughing at my unrealistic idea, I grew more confident. "Okay, I'm ready!" I belowed down to my belayers. I stared intensely at the slab of rock and held onto the rope. Slowly, I made my way down the route. As I descended, I realized that I was brave to climb the rock, but even braver to face my fear and rappel down. This encouraged me to continue, despite the fact that I was frightened to even peek to see how much farther I had to go. When my feet finally reached the ground, I turned around and grinned at my friends. They congratulated me for completing the hardest rock climbing route. "The hardest part was coming down, not climbing up," I responded. I learned that I could push myself not just physically, but mentally.

Before coming to ARC, I was almost timid about pushing myself. I was already being taunted with names such as "overachiever" and "nerd." But in reality, I turned in assignments that were barely above the minimum. As long as I completed the assignment and it had everything the teachers wanted, I received a good grade. So when I came to ARC, I tried to do the same with the writing

and science assignments. But somehow, it did not seem to work. The ARC instructors wanted more. They seemed to me like a Hummer; always having to keep filling it up, but never satisfied. I was confused and frustrated when I was handed back my papers with the usual, "I know you can do better than this." Sometimes I would feel like screaming, "Why can't you just be pleased with what you have in front of you?" Every time I believed that I had done my best, there were always changes and edits to be done on my paper. My head would plead to stop; I had given it my best shot, but it was useless. But that was not really an option. I forced myself to think and reflect after I had completed my work to see how I could improve my writing. Slowly, I began to realize that there were things I could improve in my writing skills. I came down from that cloud in which my papers were perfect. I took in consideration the instructors' suggestions and worked harder to push myself. It was a difficult internal struggle. I would want to simply finish and forget about the assignment, or sit down on the ground and pout. But I overcame what I know seemed was mostly limitation and laziness. I now see that I have a great deal to improve on in my literature.

Another internal conflict was lacking the ability to take feedback and criticism lightly. Whenever anyone suggested that I could improve on anything, I would sneer or scowl. "How would they know?" was my general thought. Even with adults, I would either ignore or be annoyed with their submissions. This impacted how I felt when my essays or poem was rejected and filled with red-inked suggestions. Whenever I was the leader for the day, I would dread hearing feedback from the other ARC students. I really did not believe that they would know how to be a better leader; they too were receiving suggestions on how to improve. I believed that no one really knew how it felt or that they were oblivious to how hard it was to complete that task. But when I looked over the criticism that people gave me, I realized that they were not trying to make my life harder, but they were giving me advice on how to improve it. I see now that all suggestions should at least be considered, no matter the source.

A different dilemma was listening to others ideas and opinions. I always believed I was right, no matter what. On hiking expeditions, I would even try to hush people up,

just to get my opinion across. My ideas were always the best, or so I thought. But ARC is about being able to work as a team, not one person dictating the others. Everyone has a voice and has the right to put out what they believe in. This would test me mentally. I would act sour if things did not happen the way I wanted. An example of this was during the fourth and final expedition. We had to get across a swamp and find a camping spot. But when we finally reached the other side, there was no water source, making the place an inefficient campsite. I suggested that we continue down two more miles to the next available river. Few agreed; some complained that they were too tired and that the mileage was too far. So we camped at the swamp. But there was an infestation of mosquitoes. We did not sleep comfortably and received vicious mosquito bites. I was in a foul mood and very temperamental. I refused to talk to those who had not wanted to continue and blamed them for a sleepless and un-restful night. I realized all the complaining and blaming did no good. We were stuck there. I decided to be quiet and let the others run their own show. After all, I thought, they'll see how right I am and will beg for me to offer ideas. I believed that they would eventually realize that my ideas were much better than theirs. But as I continued to let other people voice their opinions, I became more considerate of others and their thoughts. I realized that some people have a unique and interesting way of thinking, and that changed my entire way of thinking. Camping at the mosquito-infested swamp had a positive outcome in the long run.

The ARC program was such an amazing trip. I was able to learn how to become a better person. I have learned new values that will not only help me now, but in the future. I want to take these new ethics home and help improve the lives of people. Sometimes I would not even notice how much I have actually changed until I remember how I acted before. I now see that there is a lot more to life than just being part of the crowd. ARC shows you that you can still be a unique and inspiring individual while getting along with others. The transformation has been very dramatic. Though I was not a jerk, I was very inconsiderate of others. I was very self-centered. But now I have changed. I care more about others and their feelings. I hope people see how much I have transformed in such little time, just as I saw it for myself.



community interviews

On July 3rd, halfway through our summer course, ten community members volunteered their time to be mentors for our students. These are excerpts from the narrative biographies students wrote about their partners.

A Woman Who Changed My Life



I had the privilege of interviewing a powerful Asian woman, Jan Andow Men-

denhall, the Associate Vice Chancellor for Development and University Relations. The first thing I did to prepare for my interview was choose a pretty location near a tree. I placed two chairs among wildflowers where birds would fly around us. I felt a little nervous, because I had never interviewed an adult before. I was excited to ask her about her life.

- Bebe San

A Man That Makes The World A Better Place

I could tell Bill loves his family by the way he told me that he would not want to see his children or grandchildren have to go to war someday. Bill has many things to give to his family, things that can be seen and felt on the inside and out.

- Ernie Rubio



Never Give Up

Armando Quintero has had a variety of occupations. His first occupation was being lead ranger in Sequoia National Park and



Kings Canyon National Park. His job entailed taking tourists to show them parts of the park and telling them facts about the park. He was a ranger for twenty years and retired ten years ago. The amazing part was that when he was a kid he wanted to be a ranger and he really made it.

- Eduardo Lopez-Hernandez

Leading to Success

Many people go through life trying to make a difference in the world, but very few people succeed. It takes a great human being to have faith and take a risk for the world. Chancellor Kang has taken risks and chances throughout his life for the sake of others. He is a great example of vision, innovation, and perseverance.

- Eugenia Santiago-Garcia



Making a New Friend

All the important facts that Vice Chancellor Sam Traina gave me helped me imagine how involved he really is with UC Merced and how he got to the position he has. In my opinion Sam is an extremely intelligent man that follows his heart and does what's best for his community and self. He definably does practice what he preaches!

- Elena Martinez

The American Dream



Martin Macias had a very different life before he came to the United States. Martin was born in Zacatecas, Mexico. He lived in a “ranchito” in a small ranch with no water or electricity. He did not have many amenities like we have in the United States. Martin was brought into the United States when he was seven years old. And I know that having a dramatic change like moving into a new country takes a large drastic adjustment. I, too, had a hard time adapting to a new language and especially new customs. - *Jonathan Martinez*

The Inspirational Interview

“I owe a lot to my parents,” Alejandro Miró Co affirmed, “I don’t want to say something cliché....but both my parents have done a lot for me. My mother has not practiced being a doctor since moving from Puerto Rico. She’s made a big



sacrifice to be a stay-at-home mom. And my dad is nice to everyone. He gives it all to his patients.” This made me remember all the times

that my parents had done things for me, such as staying up half the night helping me through my Pre-Algebra homework in the sixth grade, or taking me to swim competitions hours away, or when they support me at every home basketball game. - *Valeria Mijares*



magnificent as Linda that could give that much inspiration in the entire world as she did to the ARC program. Linda was kind enough to give me advice, communicate with me, and say the wonderful things that enlightened my mind.

- *Ricardo Amancio*

An Experience I Will Never Forget

Steve Shackleton is the main park ranger here in Yosemite National Park. While interviewing him I learned all about his job and what it entails. One of his jobs involves managing fire. There are times when they actually have to start the fires themselves. Some may not like it, because of the smoke it creates....I think he is a very strong man for not giving up, and I applaud his desire to keep this park the way it is: beautiful

and healthy.
- *Sara Rivera*



A Role Model in our Community

If Victor Serrato had the possibility to go back in time, he would make changes to his past. He would take more risks, and he would step up more to accomplish the plans that he had in mind. For instance, if he had a really good idea, he wouldn’t wait for someone else to go before him. I learned from Victor that making mistakes is okay: if I learn from them they will make me strong and will help me to accomplish what I want. - *Teresa Barriga*



Everyone Needs Inspiration

Out of every person that I have ever met, Linda Lopez is the most caring, inspiring, and thoughtful. I knew she had more things to say to me that would inspire me even more than she had already done. I learned so many inspiring things from her that I was almost sobbing. I was inspired by her kindness that she showed me and all the ARC students. Linda spread inspiration in just a few hours. The love, inspiration, and kindness that Linda gave to each and every one of us, in the ARC program was astonishing. Linda was proud to talk to the entire group of ARC and say that we are all a blessing. There is no one as

To our loving families,

This course has made us realize how much we love and appreciate you all. We missed you so much, and we now know that being without you is a struggle. Thank you for always supporting our decisions and allowing us to come to the ARC program for forty days. Thank you for making the effort to be here today and always being present to show your encouragement throughout our lives. It is because of you that we are unique and strong individuals, and thanks to you we have made it to this day. Throughout this course we have come to realize how important you are to us and how much we depend on you for love and support.

We are sorry for taking you for granted. We realize we have caused you trouble and hard times, and we are sorry for often having bad attitudes. Thank you for putting your kids first and always being generous with your time and love. Because of your support and the ARC program, we have been able to discover the individuals we were meant to become. As a result we are now able to go home and give back to the community and help our families more. We hope that we've made you proud and continue to bring you pride and joy.

We love you for guiding us in the right direction, walking us through life, and always wanting the best for us. Thank you for loving us every day of our lives. We are all blessed for having such amazing families and parents.

Sincerely,

Your sons and daughters, Bears on Fire 2009

Para nuestras queridas familias,

Este curso nos ha hecho realizar tanto que los queremos y apreciamos a todos ustedes. Los extrañábamos mucho, y ahora sabemos que estar sin ustedes es muy difícil. Gracias por siempre apoyar nuestras decisiones y por habernos permitido participar en el programa de ARC por 40 días. Gracias por el esfuerzo que hicieron por venir hoy y por siempre estar presente y mostrar su aliento otra vez de nuestra vidas. Es por ustedes que nosotros somos únicos y fuertes individuos, y gracias a ustedes hemos llegado hasta hoy. Durante este curso nos hemos dado cuenta lo importante que son ustedes para nosotros y lo mucho que nosotros dependemos de su amor y apoyo.

Les pedimos perdón por no valorarlos. Nosotros nos damos cuenta que les hemos causado problemas y malos momentos, y les pedimos perdón por ofenderlos teniendo malas actitudes. Gracias por siempre poner a sus hijos primero y siempre ser generosos con su tiempo y amor. Porque por su apoyo y por el programa de ARC, hemos descubierto los personas que somos. Como resultado, nosotros ahora podemos regresar a casa y darle a la comunidad y ayudar mas a nuestras familias. Esperamos que los hagamos hechos sentir orgullosos y que continuemos trayéndoles orgullo y felicidad.

Los queremos por guiarnos en la dirección correcta, caminando con nosotros a través de la vida, y por siempre querer lo mejor para nosotros. Gracias por amarnos cada día de nuestras vidas. Estamos bendecidos por tener familias y padres tan maravillosos.

Sinceramente,

Sus hijos e hijas, Los Osos en Fuego 2009



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