

# Adventure to Leadership: Youth Development Program with ARC

Adventure Risk Challenge is a year-round program which takes underserved high school students through an intensive course that links wilderness to academics, and builds a foundation for a life-long relationship with the outdoors. Participants are mentored through a range of academic and outdoor activities, including backpacking, hiking, rock-climbing and wilderness experiences, while focusing on team-building, public speaking, and poetry and essay writing.

Here is a selection of poems from the 2014 ARC participants:

## I am a Wildflower

By Carla M.

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

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

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

**Striving to have some of their  
characteristics  
Determined to provide the best for my  
niece and nephews**

**Loving, always putting others  
before themselves  
Trustworthy protecting my secrets so I don't  
get hurt**

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

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



# **I Am a Mountain Chickadee**

By Kwok L.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



# Quaking Aspen

By Alondra J.

I am a Quaking Aspen  
I come from a poor but strong family  
My parents taught me how to be the person  
I am today. They are the best teachers

I could  
Ever have. From the outside it looks  
Like we are all individuals but beneath the  
Surface we are all one.

They taught me that sometimes its better  
To hide emotions. I have leaves that are  
glossy green

On the upper surface and dull  
green underneath.

Sometimes I get stuck with my own feelings,  
I don't know if I get gloomy or angry when  
They give my sister more privileges than  
They give to me.

I get stuck but at the same time I am  
happy for her

Because I know she is a little Quaking Aspen  
That is barely starting to grow up.

I prefer comfortable, familiar,  
Moist soil, people that are going to be there  
whenever I need

Someone to talk to, someone that  
hugs me and

Tells me that they love me but especially  
A shoulder to cry on.

I can also grow near  
Desert springs.

I can learn to get out of my comfort zone  
and talk to new people.

I may not be the best person you could  
ever have met

But I am an Aspen  
and they are remarkable and unique just as  
they are.

Each day I am growing more and more,  
As a person and student  
Learning from my mistakes,  
My bad choices and bad experiences.

I used to skip school

I think it was resentment because I would  
Never have my parents' permission to go out.  
I lost all the trust of my parents and teachers  
Like a tree without its leaves.

It has been hard to rebuild the relationships  
We used to have but I am close to get there.

I stopped thinking

Just about myself and now every time I  
Make a decision I think about myself and  
Also my surroundings because we are all  
Connected and it will have a big impact  
In everyone else's life. I want to be part  
of the forest,

Before I was just lost

And did not know what to do

I chose the easier path but now

I would give up everything,

To gain the trust of all of those people

I've become a stronger tree

Because I am starting a new season in my life

I am stretching my roots and branches

More and more but this time I am

going through

The right path.



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

By Lievin O.

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

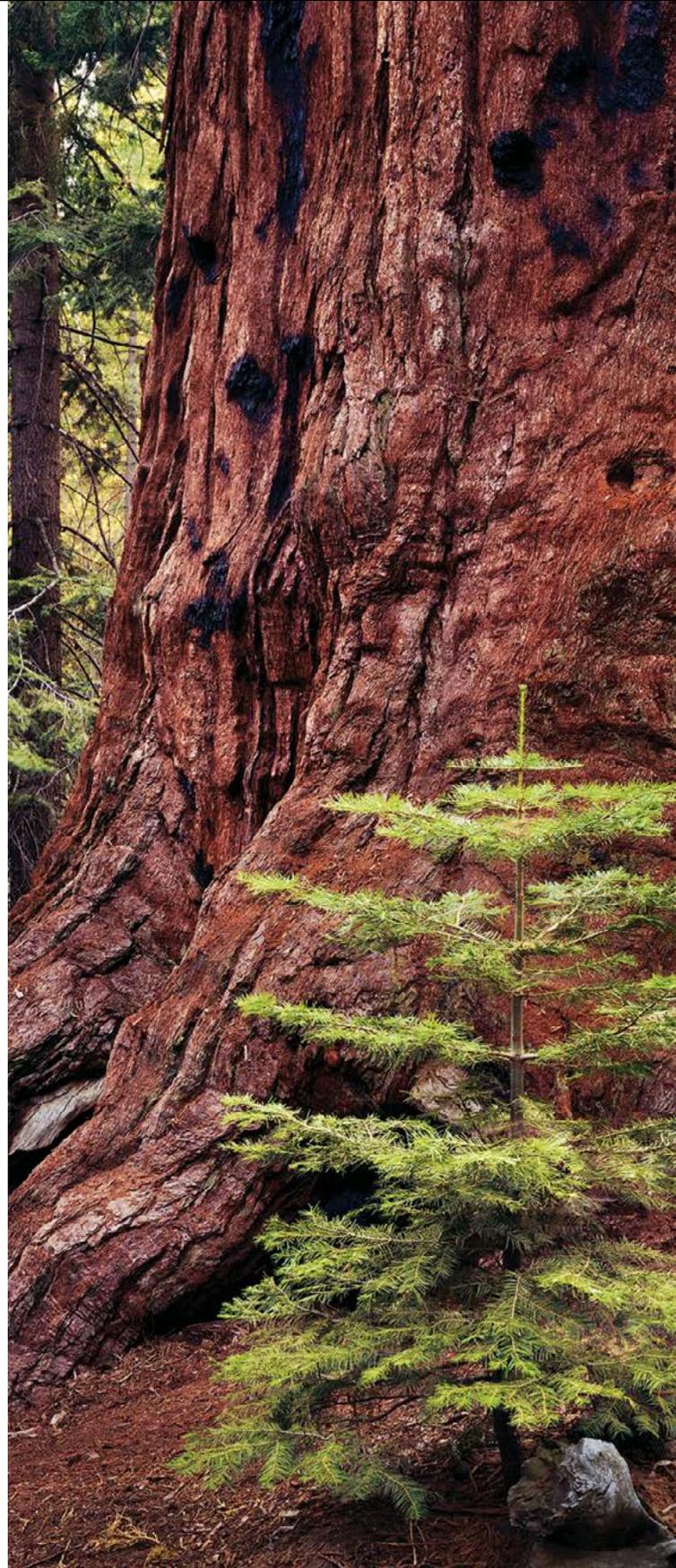
**I was born in the Congo.  
Ready to emerge to the U.S,  
leaving all my precious family members  
and all my memories I shared with my siblings  
and friends.**

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

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

**Although they had the same problems  
as I did by being bullied by others,  
I accepted those negative judgments without  
defending myself  
and just moving on with my life  
because all their negative thoughts about me  
meant nothing to me.**

**And although they touched me,  
they couldn't hurt me or break me  
and even if I fought back it wouldn't be worth it  
because it might start a cycle of hatred and pain  
like a world without trust and confidence.**



In the U.S,  
My parents, teachers, and family members  
were trying to make me fit in with others  
without realizing that I had my ways of doing  
what I know  
I should do to make them proud without them  
forcing me to do so.  
When my grades reports would come home  
they wouldn't look at me but only judge my  
grade's level  
if it was good or bad  
and if it was good they would congratulate me,  
giving me their gratitude  
and if it was bad reports  
they would express their anger towards me  
without thinking of all my effort.  
I felt like there is no trust similar to  
friends with benefits.  
We know each other very well but only  
from the benefits  
we will get from each and every one of us  
in the family.

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

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

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

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

# I Am a Black-Tailed Fawn

By Emma P.

## I am a Black-Tailed Fawn

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But, at the very least, I am healing.  
I am finding the grace I need to stand tall.  
I am recovering the pieces of myself that I lost.

With every breath. Every hour.  
I am one step closer.  
Growing stronger.  
Surviving.  
Enduring.



# Cold Waters

By Diego V.

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

All throughout life  
I have had high expectations weighted on my  
shoulders  
that drag me down like anchors  
From the day I was born  
my dad wanted me to be the best I could be  
For him that was a hard worker, a great  
student,  
to be someone in life,  
but most importantly to follow my dreams  
But my dreams could never satisfy his  
standards  
He wanted a doctor, a lawyer, a professor

He never understood that the man he wanted  
me to be  
wasn't the man I wanted to become  
I wanted to find my own path, be my own man,  
someone I could look up to  
But he only wanted to lead me  
in the direction he thought was right  
To steer the river

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

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

He grew up in Mexico to a poor family  
that could barely sustain itself  
His childhood consisted of working as a kid  
to help support his family



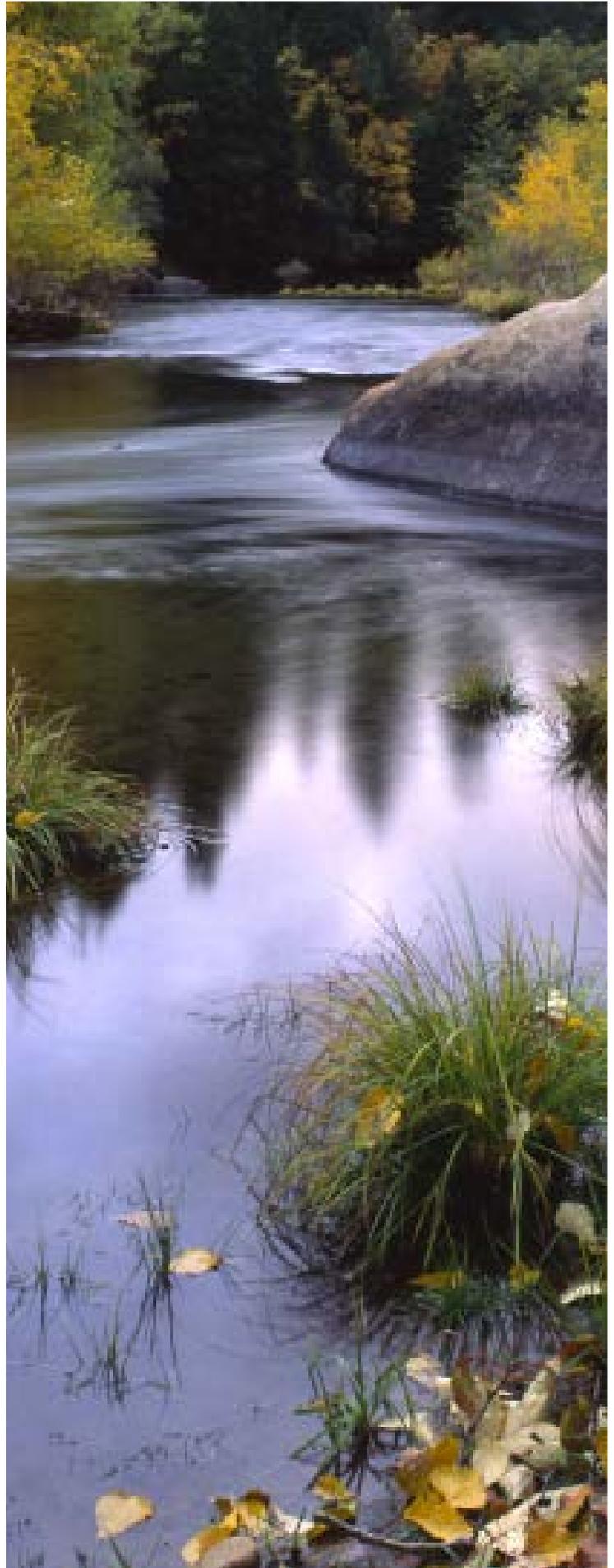
**coming to America was a new start for him**

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

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

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

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



# I Am a Golden Eagle

By Adriana L.

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

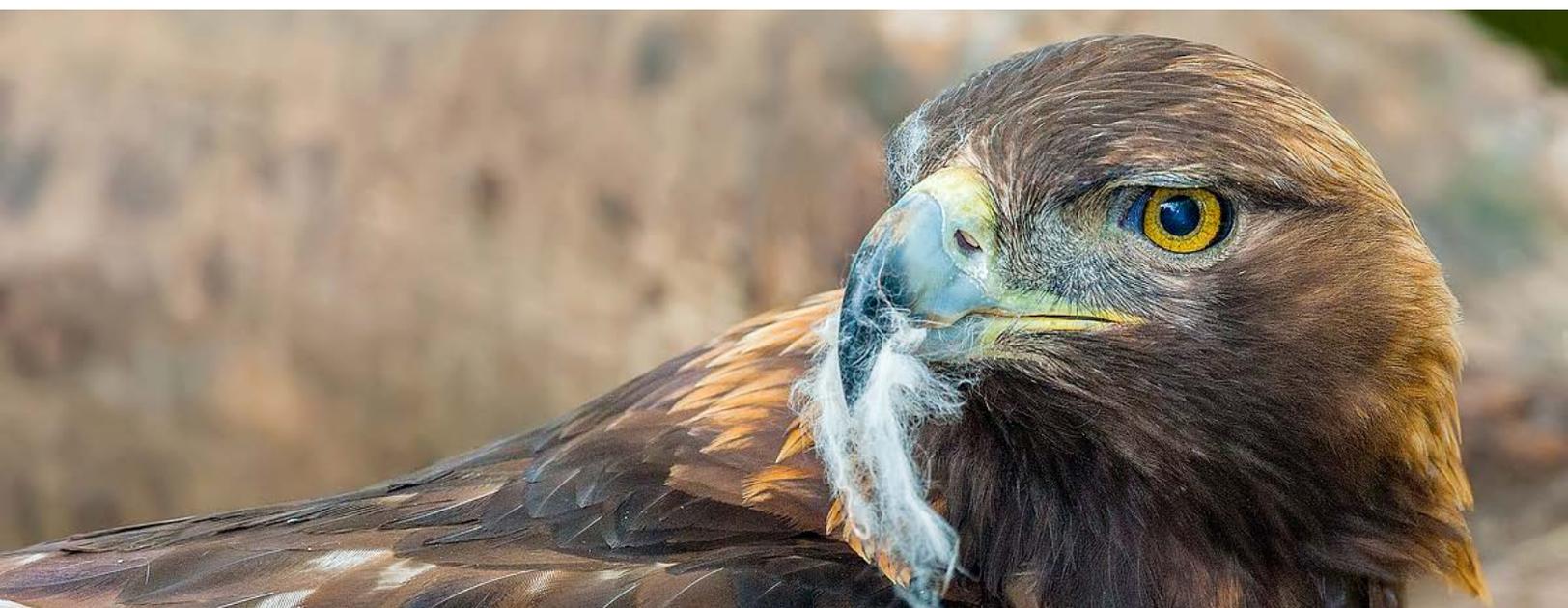
I have a large supportive nest  
Depending on my mom and grandma  
to show me the right paths in life  
Like a Golden Eagle showing their young bird  
the right way  
always being patient and compassionate  
Both of them doing everything they could  
to have my brothers and I well-fed  
and dressed  
They worked every Sunday  
to provide us with a higher quality of life  
Making the ingredients for tortas and tostadas  
Which took them a day and a half  
Worn out by all the food they needed  
to prepare

Exhaustion in their faces and body was visible  
but masked by their smiles  
Always working hard to make sure I would be  
ready to depart into my hard but extraordinary  
journey in life

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

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

Years passed and my dad said  
you're ready to fly to the United States  
I was overwhelmed with emotions  
Happy, sad, nervous and scared



**My heart, pumping up and down like a  
radiant happy child  
Crying sad to leave my grandma behind  
who always stood by my side  
My palms cold and sweaty of how nervous  
I was  
How was I going to do it without  
my most comforting family member by  
my side?**

**I am a Golden Eagle  
That flew to the United States  
Crossing border's to get to this new place  
A place with more opportunities  
But these opportunities didn't come as an  
easy package  
It came with a whole new environment  
and language  
An environment with so many new rules that  
seem dumb at times  
A whole new language that was hard  
to understand  
The next few years were the hardest ones  
in my life  
I used to cry at times and beg my mom to  
let me fly back**

**But she always said no and said that this  
was for the best  
I didn't understand...  
I didn't want to understand all I knew that  
I wanted to go back**

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

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

