

“I get to be part of this larger goal, to work with people who believe in preserving and sharing Yosemite.”

— MOSES CHUN

Park Ranger, Yosemite National Park



Q&A

WITH A
YOSEMITE
INSIDER

Alejandra Guzman (top) and Moses Chun (bottom) pose outside the Wilderness Education Center.

National Park Service rangers Moses Chun and Alejandra Guzman were inspired by Conservancy-funded youth programs to pursue park-service careers. Both joined the Wilderness Education Center at University of California, Merced, as students; participated in the Yosemite Leadership Program (YLP); and now gain valuable career skills through Yosemite internships. Chun works in the superintendent’s office and assists with event planning for the National Park Service’s centennial. Guzman provided translation assistance for the Chilean delegation from Torres del Paine National Park when they visited Yosemite in 2014; she currently works with the education department to teach the next generation of park stewards.

Q :: How did Youth in Yosemite Programs make a difference for you?

GUZMAN :: As a young child, I had never been to the outdoors. I thought trees were useful for paper and lumber. I didn’t know about conservation. When I saw Yosemite for the first time, I had an instant connection. It was the most beautiful place I’d ever seen. I now see how valuable places like this are for visitors to meditate,

to vacation, to heal after tragedy; for students to learn firsthand and for scientists to conduct research. Yosemite has so much to offer.

CHUN :: It clicked for me during a YLP trip to the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias. During a discussion about the Yosemite Grant Act with park ranger Shauna Potocky, the conservation ideal became real to me in a personal way — the idea that these places are protected for everyone. I realized what it means to protect a place for the sake of other people — even people who haven’t been born yet.

Q :: What did you learn through the Yosemite Leadership Program (YLP)?

CHUN :: I owe a lot of my personal growth and friendships to YLP. People have this idea that leadership is about a few people out in the front, but we learned that leadership comes from anyone who is willing to contribute and be responsible. I grew as a person and as a good citizen, all while using Yosemite as a classroom.

GUZMAN :: I was blown away by YLP. I used to be really shy, and I had low self-esteem and no confidence. Through this program, I realized that shy and quiet people can be leaders, too. I can offer a nurturing leadership style.

Q :: What was the best part about your program experience?

GUZMAN :: I found a sense of purpose. Before, I didn't know where I belonged, or if I had a future. I grew up in a bad neighborhood with drugs and gang violence, and I thought I'd give in to that eventually. Yosemite offered me a different path. It opened up a career. It's given so much to me that I want to give back to these wild and beautiful places — to protect the national parks.

CHUN :: It was empowering. In the beginning, I wasn't sure if I could take on these projects. Now I know I am a very capable person. Many people here have helped me realize my abilities. I have gained so much confidence and perspective, and that has set me up for success.

Q :: Why do you love working in Yosemite?

CHUN :: I get to be a part of this larger goal, to work with people who believe in preserving and sharing Yosemite. My co-workers are kind, supportive people, who all believe, deep down, in keeping Yosemite strong.

GUZMAN :: This is where I belong. I want to live in these beautiful granite walls, to enjoy the pine trees and to teach students about Yosemite like these rangers are teaching me. I feel so lucky to be a part of it.

Q :: What would you say to someone considering joining a youth program?

GUZMAN :: Go for it. You might not know what to expect, but once you come out of it, you gain so much — such a great appreciation that you may not have had



Moses Chun (third from left) on his life-changing trip to Mariposa Grove.



The Wilderness Education Center at UC Merced provided early career training and inspiration for both Guzman and Chun.

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— Alejandra Guzman
Park Ranger, Yosemite National Park

[before]. People come out of these programs having an idea of what conservation means, actively promoting these beautiful outdoor places. There's such a transformation, seeing students come out as stewards. It's pretty awesome.

CHUN :: I would say, with the right attitude and the willingness to invest, you should do it. There's no reason not to. A lot of people might just come for the professional growth, but it's more than just work experience. What I value most are some of the personal experiences, the intangibles. I would highly encourage someone to really give it their all. It's left me with some of the best lessons learned and life experiences.

Q :: How would you describe the Conservancy's impact on youth programs?

CHUN :: We're incredibly grateful that we have donors who believe in us, who value sharing Yosemite with young

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people. For those people who really connect to Yosemite, there was someone else in their life who brought them and facilitated that profound connection. For many youth, this is the crucial role donors play to support these students. We appreciate being able to meet the people behind our opportunities, so we can share with them how much they have contributed to our growth.

GUZMAN :: These experiences change students' lives — to find a passion they would never have discovered otherwise. Donors play an important role in making that happen. I've been able to find a new future. It's something I will never stop appreciating. It's inspired me to provide the same opportunities to other young people. [Conservancy] donors have an exponential impact: They inspire us to continue helping the next person, and the next, in perpetuity. ■



Learn more about Conservancy-funded Youth in Yosemite programs online by clicking here: yosemiteconservancy.org/youth-yosemite

TOP Chun remembers visiting national parks with his family, but he found the true meaning of conservation through Conservancy-funded youth programs. **BOTTOM** Alejandra Guzman is grateful for her Yosemite experience, which taught her that trees are "more than just paper and lumber" and that "there is value in their beauty."

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