OPENING THOUGHTS

BY DUSTIN SMUCKER

Right now, we are all dealing with real challenge. Covid-19 has upended the lives of millions of global citizens - unemployment, social isolation, daunting uncertainty. This universal challenge has no clear end point, leaving us searching for unattainable stability and clarity. Right now, the need for real support has rarely been more widely known. Yet finding real support while socially distanced, sheltered in place and separated from familiar structures, has rarely been more difficult. But we have to search for it.

Only with real support can we expand our capacity for resilience to match the challenge.
Around here, we’ve developed an Adventure Model of Human Resilience. In short, this model can be summed up as follows:

Real Challenge + Real Support → Strength & Resilience.

“Adventure is Real!” has been a common refrain in our programs for decades. However, for the last six years, I’ve asked myself, “Real what?” Recently, I’ve landed on a possible answer. Real Adventure equals Real Challenge combined with Real Support. And these elements yield deeper understandings, in tangible ways, of the formidability of our inner strength.

Where and how will you find your support? Quiet moments on a sunny porch? Regular phone calls with family and friends? Steady daily rhythms. We genuinely hope that each of you are finding sufficient measures of real support to match the real challenge of this moment. And at the end of this crisis, we’ll walk forward stronger, more confident and more connected with each other and ourselves. In this edition of the Register, we hope that the stories of adventure, challenge and support spark within you a renewed awareness of your own strength and resilience. Be well.
WHAT IS A REGISTER? (A NOTE ABOUT THE NEWSLETTER TITLE):

BY DUSTIN SMUCKER

At the top of well-traveled peaks can be found summit register securely weatherproofed inside a wide variety of containers. These registers commonly include a small journal and a writing utensil. It’s there we write our names, record the date, and maybe jot down some words to spark laughter, tears, pensivity, or memories for an unknown future audience. That’s the register. When you get to the summit, I encourage you to take a moment to write in it. Remember the challenge. Soak up the support. Observe your strength. Log the miles.
It is an incontrovertible fact that being a Rec Leader has both enriched my experience here at UC Santa Cruz and my own personal development as a human. The Rec Leader job function has allowed me the opportunity to summit mountains of the Sierras in the summer, lead Big Sur campouts in the fall, snowshoe the Yosemite valley floor come winter, and whitewater raft down the Kings River in the spring.

Nevertheless, while fulfilling my appetite for adventure, I am also striving to facilitate a unique experience for students that aims to leave an indelible mark on their time at UC Santa Cruz too. Of course, my own position in Recreation is a single contribution to a much larger operation. One feature of the Rec is our Adventure Outings. Furthermore, the twelve of us who make up the Rec Leader team and facilitate the Adventure Outings have leaned on each other to speak freely of the incidents and feelings experienced in the field and collectively aid each other’s leadership styles as we move forward in this role. These conversations between our team have compounding returns; they allow us to reflect more thoughtfully, extract insight deeply, and expand our learning collectively. However, often these invaluable discussions reside primarily in the Rec Leader circle.

Hence, the purpose of *Learning through Leading* is to expose a wider audience to the introspective world Rec Leaders are often admitted to from the experiences they encounter in the field. In this edition of *Learning through Leading*, we explore these waters with Rec Leaders Kelly Franklin and Ky Lange:
Chapter One: Kelly Franklin

I have seen gender roles affect my interactions with others reach as far back as my earliest memories begin to appear. From my dad asking for my brothers’ help in the garage to the separate ways my friends and I would dress, there was always a category for boys and one for girls and never any room for the in-between. I didn’t fully understand differing societal expectations for men and women in the wilderness until high school, and not in greater depth until I began my role as a Rec Leader. A few years ago I read an article written by two female-identifying outdoor leaders who were dumb-foundedly challenged by leading their first all-male group on an ascent of Mt. Rainier. The sense of distrust they felt from their participants awakened a desire to prove the unspoken biases wrong. Personally, it began for me with small consistent comments, such as “Do you need me to carry that?” and “I just gained a whole new level of respect for you.”

Comments like these likely hold no intention of harm from the giver. Rather, they can be seen as simple common courtesies. If I’m being honest, I never took offense to these gestures before I stepped into the role as a leader, and I began to experience a constant need to prove myself in order to gain the respect that I thought I might deserve. Sometimes I even need to prove it to myself. Rec Leaders typically lead in pairs of two, frequently with different genders. The two of us have a vocalized set of tasks with one another on a trip: waking early to boil water, assisting others with cooking and cleaning up from meals, navigating a trail, driving the van, etc. I imagine that when you read this list you pictured someone performing each task as you read it. I also imagine that you assigned gender to each task that your subconscious saw to be most fit for it.

One of my biggest fears has always been judgments others make about me that I have no control over. This feeling gnaws at me during simple interactions and eats away at me in leadership roles. This year, with each trip I have led, I have slowly begun to realize my overarching need to control participants’ understanding of me before they could make a gendered assumption about me. Heading out for a trip on a Friday, I volunteer to be the first to drive, I make sure to back up the trailer when others are watching, and I vocalize decisions in a group context. This need to prove myself did not reveal itself in the beginning. Rather, it started following my first trip. I remember the moment clearly. We were swimming in a watering hole when my co-leader decided to swim across the water to reach a popular cliff jumping spot. Shortly after, I
noticed where my co-leader had gone and decided to follow. It seemed like fun. After enjoying our time jumping into ridiculously cold water and swimming back to the rest of the group, a participant turned and told me that after watching me swim in the cold water and jump from the cliff just as he had, he gained a new level of respect for me. Initially, this felt incredible to hear.

Feeling worthy was extremely important to me at the beginning of my journey, so any positive feedback was appreciated. But then those words sat with me for a bit too long. I dwelled on them too much until I realized that he hadn’t made that same comment to my co-leader, who did the same as I had. Why had it only been me? Was there something I said that made my abilities seem questionable? Had I seemed fearful of cold water? With every question I asked myself, as answers didn’t seem to reveal themselves, I questioned my own abilities. As I reflected on the first half of our weekend, I realized that without noticing, my co-leader and I had assumed gender roles. He drove the van and I made the coffee, he started the campfire and I helped with dishes. Over time, I had allowed myself to fall back to how society sees I am best fit to perform, and through those decisions our roles as leaders were confirmed for that weekend. My abilities were presumed.

At some point after that first trip, I made the decision to limit others from deciding who I was going to be in the wilderness. I drove the trailer, I vocalized decisions, and I sure as hell jumped into the clear, cold water first. It felt so liberating to completely disregard every expectation society had for me as a woman. Yet over time, the more energy I put into proving those biases wrong, the less energy I put into who I actually was. I was so focused on being seen as strong that I no longer had time to be anything else. I began to miss the leader I know I am. What I have always known is first and foremost, I like to make those around me happy. Most often this feeling presents itself in the form of the support I can offer others. Cooking for them and filling up their stomachs with an honest meal after an
accomplishing day, asking questions and truly wanting to know the answers, but most importantly, adding to a group’s joy and laughter.

My goodness, what a feeling to experience joy and laughter with others outside. But how could I be this person who enjoys one form of human connection while still proving my physical worth? I want to be the leader who can give answers and also ask questions, who can navigate the trail while singing and dancing and making a fool of myself. How can I be this person when I feel a constant need to prove that I’m worthy enough to be out here, that I’m capable? I think I will always struggle with this balance, but the lesson I needed to learn from this experience is that there always is a balance. A balance between who I want to be and who I am, authenticity and worthiness. The most important part of the journey is by understanding how we grow through the process. Not too long ago I wrote, “I am me because this is exactly the way nature wanted me to be. Therefore, I will be me.” Maybe one day I will have a definitive answer of who I am. As for now, I’ll denounce stereotypes and figure it all out along the way.

Kelly Franklin is a 3rd year undergrad at UC Santa Cruz, majoring in Environmental Studies.
“Well, here goes nothing,” I thought to myself as I stepped one sure foot off the edge. “What did I get myself into?” I frantically pondered as my other foot left the rocky cliff to meet open air. Looking out over the valley, where toad-shaped boulders arose between forests of toothpick trees and far off mountains whose tops stood thousands of feet from their bases seemed minuscule beneath the enormous clouds and wide-open sky, I let go of the breath I had been trapping in. As soon as my feet made contact with solid earth once again, I was all fist pumps and “yahoos” and ecstasy. My participants gazed down at me with bugged-out eyes, and asked through their chattering teeth “How was it? Were you scared?” I whooped back “It was awesome, y’all! Not scary at all, you gotta try it!” A couple of them gulped and turned away from the edge, deciding at that moment that they just weren’t brave enough to do it. But the truth is, I was actually terrified in those moments before I lowered myself over the edge. I tossed and turned in my sleeping bag the night before as dreams of sharp rocks and chopped ropes churned in my mind. In putting on my most courageous face and erasing any signs of fear, I was letting my participants down. I was broadcasting the message that there are certain types of people who do extreme outdoor activities, and certain people who cannot. But folks, let me tell you, there is nothing further from the truth.

I don’t solely attribute my failure to articulate my fear to my participants as forgetfulness due to an adrenaline rush or my ego sitting at the helm. Part of my decision to portray myself as tough, hardy, and fearless came from attempting to uphold the long-standing stereotype of a Recreation Leader. I saw Rec Leaders as adventurous, rugged, free spirits who were well-equipped with the technical skills and grit to get them through any and every challenge the great outdoors could throw their way. Rec Leaders were mighty, dirty, and probably pretty goofy, but there were also some things they were not. Rec Leaders, in my eyes, were not weak or easily intimidated. And they were sure as hell not afraid of heights or cliffs or mosquitoes. So in order to assume that persona of the ideal Rec Leader, I trimmed and sculpted myself to fit the mold and discarded anything that didn’t fit. I stuffed down my cautious nature, pretended to be sure-footed in boulder fields while wearing a 60-pound backpack, and smiled up at my participants after rappelling (an experience that made me feel like I was going to pee my pants) and told them they had nothing to be afraid of.
I was mistaken. I thought that vulnerability meant weakness. To expose one’s belly was to appear fragile and invite onlookers to judge, distrust, and attack. I felt shame for feeling afraid and I worried that my participants wouldn’t respect me, trust me, or like me if I was vulnerable.

I know now just how wrong I was. To be vulnerable is to be human. Vulnerability opens us up to others, to experiences, to life in its juiciest and most delicious form. Vulnerability invites others to dive deep, to trust, and to show parts of themselves they thought were unacceptable or unlovable so that they may be accepted and loved wholly.

As a Rec Leader it is my job to show up as my authentic self so that others have permission to be their authentic selves. It is my job to facilitate connection. It is my job to lead by example. I didn’t realize it at the time, but the only thing I did in pretending to be a Recreation poster child who had no fear did seem inauthentic and unrelatable. It also created a divide between me and the people looking to me for support and guidance and sent the message that there wasn’t room for people to express the messier parts of themselves.
The outdoors is, and should be, a space where folks can come exactly as they are and belong. It is a place where authenticity is abundant, all emotions are welcome, diverse skills and talents are valued, and as a result, connections and community abound. Fear is a very real part of going outside and engaging with the unpredictable. But so is joy, victory, and celebration.

If I could go back to that magical day in the Sierras and tell my participants anything, it would be this: You do not have to be bearded, rugged, or enjoy having dirt under your fingernails to belong outside. You do not have to own gaiters or Grigris or Patagonia clothing to belong outside. You do not have to be fearless, hardened or guarded. You simply belong. In response to the question: Was I afraid up there, with my feet dangling hundreds of feet above the earth? You bet I was! But I also experienced awe, gratitude, and elation as I looked out across the miles of unobstructed beauty.

I now know that my fear has a place in the world of outdoor recreation and that I can bring my whole, undiluted self to my job as a Rec Leader. And it is my hope that in leading from a place of authenticity and vulnerability that I can invite others to do the same.
Walking into the Rio Theatre on Thursday, February 20th, for the opening night of the Banff Film Festival, the familiar sensation of excitement and anticipation of the films we were about to see came back in an instant. Thirty minutes before showtime, the seats are already filling up, as the folks who have been coming year after year know to get there early to get favorite spots and prepare to be moved and inspired. 2020 marks the 29th year that UC Santa Cruz Recreation has been hosted the Banff Centre Mountain Film Festival World Tour. The tour is a curated selection of the best films from the annual Banff Centre For Arts and Creativity Book and Film Festival held every November in Banff, Canada. Here in Santa Cruz, it has become a local institution, popular with both the UCSC and local communities, and is a perennial fan favorite for great films and also for raising funds to support UCSC student participation in experiential outdoor education.

This event raises funds for the Wilderness Orientation Willie Williams Scholarship Fund and UCSC Recreation student scholarships. With four sold-out nights, February 20-23, and a total attendance of 2,400, we raised just over $32,000 this year!

THANK YOU to all the sponsors, volunteers, folks who purchased tickets, and everyone who made it happen. It is these collaborative efforts that expand access for students with financial need to adventure, participate in outdoor, recreational and hands-on learning experiences. One of the benefits of this engagement is to strengthen mental health through social belonging, building self-confidence through challenge and accomplishment, and cultivating one’s personal sense of discovery and adventure.
The tour has expanded over the years and now travels to over 550 communities across the globe to create the shared experience of viewing a wide variety of films that celebrate the outdoors, natural beauty, mountain culture, and adventure sports. And as the technology of filmmaking changes and evolves, so does its higher purpose. Festival Director, Joanna Croston, poses the question in her introduction in the Banff World Tour Program, - “Is it enough for films to entertain these days or do we want something deeper? Our planet urgently needs our help and as lovers of the outdoors, we need to ask ourselves, what is within our grasp that can bring us together and amplify our message? We think our shared love of adventure film just might be it.” With our world now reeling from the realities of the novel coronavirus, Joanna’s question is even more striking. The world is quite a different place now. In retrospect, I think the Banff Film Festival at the Rio was the last large event that I attended. Isolated and sheltering in place, it feels like a distant memory.

One of the films this year called “Eli” seems particularly profound at this moment. It is a short five-5 minute piece from Patagonia films about a young man who lives in the Navajo Nation, and after a bout with depression, finds running as his source of inner peace and self-discovery. I encourage you to check it out and consider ways in which you can find restoration and peace through movement and overcoming challenges.

Eli is also a part of our spring online programs adventure film series, in which the UCSC community is invited to participate in a discussion after watching films. Check out the full menu of online programming here.
Last fall quarter, I went on my first backpacking trip with UC Santa Cruz Recreation to Big Basin State Park with NO prior experience. I have grown up as a girl scout and enjoyed camping with my friends, but I have never experienced such a life-changing trip. I was nervous but excited the night before the big day, thinking about what my experience would be like, what I should expect, and most importantly, what I should bring! Though I had never backpacked before, I was up for the challenge! I met at Athletics & Rec bright and early, ready to start my first backpacking experience with pretty much a group of strangers.

I came out of that trip with a new group of lifelong friends, a new perspective on life, and a sense of pride and accomplishment in myself. I pushed my limits and proved to myself that I am mentally and physically strong and am able to accomplish any task that I set my mind to. After miles of backpacking, there were times I wanted to stop, times I wanted to scream, and other times where I thought backpackers were crazy people. But looking back on it all today, I am so proud of myself for stepping out of my comfort zone and trying something new.

Yes, my legs were in pain and my feet had blisters, but I would do it all over again in a heartbeat. Reaching the top of the mountain made me thankful for things I never really thought about... I was thankful for my strong beautiful body that got me up the mountain. I was thankful for my mind that allowed me to persevere. And I was thankful for the support from my new friends. Recreation and this Adventure Outing has provided such a life-changing experience that allowed me to grow and learn so much about myself.

Allison Hu is a fourth-year cognitive science and environmental studies double major.
The most visceral point in any weekend adventure is returning home, where the adrenaline and emotion dissipate as real life sets in. I often find myself lying on the floor, silently reflecting on a sweaty and beautiful weekend in the mountains. This moment of quiet is a necessary contrast to the everyday noise of college life. It is comparable to sitting back into the harness after completing a challenging rock climb, eating a burrito as the sun sets post-surf, and taking off soaked hiking boots after a week in the wilderness. These moments can only exist because of the time and thought put in before them. I have had the honor and privilege of experiencing some of these moments with the UCSC Rec community, and they have been unforgettable.

I didn’t expect to be reflecting on my college experience from my parents’ house, unable to do the things I love with the people that make me happy. But, if the Rec has taught me anything, I will make the most of unexpected circumstances and bask in the beauty of the last four years. UCSC feels like a home because of the Rec community. The first time I was introduced to CP I realized this, and every time I run into Dustin and Brock at Cowell’s Beach I’m reminded of this. Rec people have a certain fire in their personalities, and it’s contagious. I smile every time I remember butt-sliding down the snowy slopes of Basin Peak with a dozen people I’d just met, or careening headfirst off of my surfboard during my first surf lesson with Lucas. In all these memories I was supported, appreciated and uplifted.

Reflection is vital, but doesn’t last too long, and two weeks into quarantine I’m planning future exploits with new lifelong friends. Classes are virtual and people are stuck inside for the time being. But adventure will always be real, and nothing can ever change that.
Graduating is such a muddled mix of emotions and circumstances. And this spring, that muddled mix is even more complicated. Each of our graduating seniors has shared their love and hard work with our programs over the last several years. Anticipating their graduation and departure from campus without the in-person formalities and celebrations only adds to the melancholy moment we’re experiencing. Nonetheless, the words from the folk singer John Gorka ring loud and true:

“People love you when they know you’re leaving soon.”

And we love these people! From a distance, we share our appreciation, admiration, well wishes, respect and love for all that they’ve contributed to our programs and for the positive impact they will continue to have on other communities and our earth. Thank you Graduating Seniors! Onward!

Enzo Wright
Sami Braun
Mariah Gehring
Dean Lyons
MC Moazed
Sarah Herzer
Babak Farahmand
Loren Schneider
Katie Alibrio (Slugs in the Kitchen)
MEET THE REGISTER TEAM

CORI HOUSTON
Guest Contributor
Cori is a UCSC alum, retiree, and former Rec Supervisor. She is grateful to have the opportunity to volunteer and give back to the Rec Dept. and maintain a connection with the community.

DUSTIN SMUCKER
Editorial Board Facilitator
Dustin serves as the Associate Director of Recreation and believes that challenge and resilience are positively correlated.

AUGIE DONOVAN
Chief Foreign Correspondent
Augie is a third year Econ/Math major at UCSC and has been involved with Recreation as a Wilderness Orientation participant (2017), Wilderness Orientation Volunteer (2018), and is currently serving as a Recreational Leader (2018).

SAGE BRADFORD
Lieutenant Graphic Designer
Sage is a second year Environmental Studies student. She is a past Wilderness Orientation participant, current Recreation Leader and general lover of the outdoors.

SAMMY THE SLUG
Administrative Assistant
Sammy is an eighth year Entomology major. He enjoys hiking, biking and kayaking. You can usually find him hanging around the Rec.

DEAN LYONS
Official Bicycle Magician
Dean is a fourth year Film and Digital Media major who has attended a variety of Rec trips and classes, and has worked at Bike Maintenance for the past three years.