

~~Impossible~~, IMpossible

By Kevin Kim, Class of 2028, Civil Engineering Major

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Into the Unknown: My First Wilderness Expedition

This past spring, I embarked on a 5 day, 5 night backpacking trip through the Sierra Nevada mountains. This trip was far beyond anything I had ever attempted or expected.

I had always been fascinated by catch and cook camping videos and survival challenges online, but this was my first time doing anything remotely similar. I saw this trip as a chance to explore a new potential interest, disconnect from comfort, and see what I was capable of when put to the test.

One of my goals was also to get to know the other Caldwell Fellows better and to build relationships rooted in authenticity, vulnerability, and joy. After losing my dad, I've made it a mission to cherish the people around me and to spread the warmth and laughter he was known for. His ever present smile lives on in me, and being able to make others smile and laugh, even just for a moment, is one way I continue his legacy. It fulfills me to know others get to experience his spirit through my energy and joy.

A Journey of Struggle, Laughter, and Growth

The expedition was filled with unforgettable moments: some beautiful, some brutal, all transformative and a lot of type 2 fun. Every day brought a new challenge: hiking for miles with a heavy pack, setting up and breaking down camp, cooking in the cold, and facing conditions I wasn't remotely used to.

One of my favorite parts of the experience was the dinners. We were all freezing, huddled together, swapping stories from our lives as we shoveled warm food into our mouths. I enjoyed hiking in the front, middle, and back of the line, constantly rotating and talking to different people. These moments of bonding were some of the most meaningful parts of the trip.

The hardest challenge came on the first night. My toes and hands were so cold that I genuinely thought I might have hypothermia. I considered waking up the trip leaders to help me. In desperation, I pulled off my socks and rubbed my hands together with my foot between them for

about 10 to 15 minutes. Slowly, the feeling returned. I hadn't expected this level of physical strain, and at that moment, I just wanted to go home.

But something changed. As the days went on, I developed a new mindset, to survive. I established a Mission Minivan. I focused on moving efficiently and pushing through one step at a time with one thought in my head: get back to the minivans. That goal kept me moving, but the people around me kept me going. Talking with others about how they were feeling, realizing I wasn't alone in my struggles, and encouraging each other helped transform the experience. I wasn't just enduring the trip, I was living it.

I also found joy in lifting others up. Making people laugh or smile, especially when spirits were low, meant everything to me. It was in those small moments: a shared joke, a goofy grin, that we bonded.

At the start, I thought, "This is impossible." But through meals, shared laughter, frozen fingers, aching muscles, and jaw dropping views, I realized: I'm possible.

Embracing the Unexpected

By the time we reached our second mountain pass, we had to turn around due to uncertain conditions ahead. Strangely, I felt conflicted. Just days earlier, I had been counting the minutes until it was over. Now, I wanted more. I had started to enjoy the challenge.

This trip taught me that what we fear can become what we treasure. I thought I hated backpacking on day one. By day five, I couldn't wait to do it again.

A Changed Mindset

This expedition pushed me in a way nothing else ever has. It reminded me that growth rarely comes from comfort. It comes from struggle, reflection, and shared experience.

It also deepened my appreciation for simplicity. Out there, all I could think about was the next meal, the next campsite, the next pass, the views, and the people beside me. It stripped life down to its basics and helped me reconnect with what matters: perseverance, connection, and purpose.

Advice to Future Explorers

If you're considering a similar opportunity, just do it. You don't need prior experience. You just need to be open to the idea that something unknown could change your life. I had never done anything like this before. The closest was a 30 minute walk with stairs and an elevator. But I said yes, and it made all the difference.

Give yourself the chance to be uncomfortable and to grow. Discover the unknown.

Because sometimes, when you think something is impossible, you find out you're possible... or you find a minivan.

P.S. PoopsALot total = 27 IYKYK