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**12**

Nature Area  
Leonardo Rojas





 **NATURE**  
**EST. 1966**



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When the Aim Higher campus closed due to the pandemic, the Nature Area was abandoned. When it reopened, late participant Chris Francil was excited to bring life back to the space with his fellow classmates. Since his passing, his classmates continue to put their efforts towards the restoration of the land.

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Billy, Nicki, Douglas, Tyler, and Joseph are participants of the Health & Wellness program at Aim Higher. I was personally introduced to them by their instructor, Desiree Luna.



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2021  
Sacramento

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Introduction

1



The boys known as Douglas, Nick, Billy, Tyler, and Joseph have been going out almost daily to the nature area since the reopening of their campus. They had recently lost a dear friend of theirs at the end of September, who was named Chris Francil. He died suddenly with no warning, he was alive and healthy one day and gone the next. This has proven to be tough on the boys, especially due to the fact that Chris was a key element in their day to day activities. They continue to work out in the nature area for the time being on a regular basis. I was lucky enough to join them for a few outings to not only document the process of working in the Nature Area but also to evaluate the question, "What does the Nature Area mean to you?"

I was able to gain a greater response and understanding to what not only the Nature Area meant to them individually but what they all meant to each other, and how the Nature Area acted as a catalyst to form those deeper connections.







Chris

2

Chris was a loved member of Aim Higher Orange Grove. Francil had attended Aim Higher since the beginning of its opening and was on the Orange Grove campus for years prior. He attended Orange Grove Adult School with many of his Aim Higher friends. Through the years Chris became well versed in gardening and working in the Nature Area. Before the pandemic, he worked alongside staff members to grow produce and beautiful flowers. Amongst the produce, they grew various chilis, pomegranates, and tomatoes to name a few. Chris brought that knowledge with him, and it became a hobby he really enjoyed participating in. He even began growing a garden in his own home as well. Chris motivated his friends and staff to continue to bring life into the space that they enjoyed, and he still continues to bring life to that area after his death.





Chris was a leader. He always knew what to do, especially when it came to the nature area. He was always eager to help out, and be a teacher or supporter to his fellow classmates. He was sharp, very diligent, but he loved to laugh and joke around with all his friends. Together they would talk about sports, and memories that they have and will always have of one another. Those memories are still with them, and they still share those memories with each other.





AND1

Billy

3







Billy Roberts is an OG Orange Grove student, similar to Chris Francil. Billy and Chris have been friends for years. Billy is a soft-spoken, cool guy. He is very patient and always goes with the flow. Billy is a hard worker, and he is always lending a helping hand with no complaints. It is always a pleasure to talk with him.



Chris and Billy were best friends, and there will always be that connotation of Chris' presence in the foundation of the Nature Area, Billy enjoys restoring the land because he feels the piece of it that is connected to Chris, and that's what makes it especially significant to him. Apart from that, Billy lets me know that he also enjoys raking the leaves, and taking the leaves to the compost, a task Chris used to do.

While these tasks do remind everyone of Chris, including Billy, they also were a form of community building. I can see how these participants were able to work together and bond more effortlessly through this progress that they were creating as a team.



Douglas

4



Douglas Lakey is yet another OG Orange Grove student. Douglas is the sunshine. He is a ball of light and energy, in fact when it's gloomy out, Douglas will plead for the sun to come back. He loves working in the Nature Area because he loves being outside. Douglas enjoys any form of outdoors, as long as the sun is out.

When he's not in school he's riding his bike with his family, rain or shine, or so he says. That is what frustrates him about the gloominess, the rain always gets in the way of the fun activities he wants to participate in. A song he introduced me to is "Sunshine On My Shoulders" by John Denver, this is his version of a lullaby, to make the gloom feel brighter.





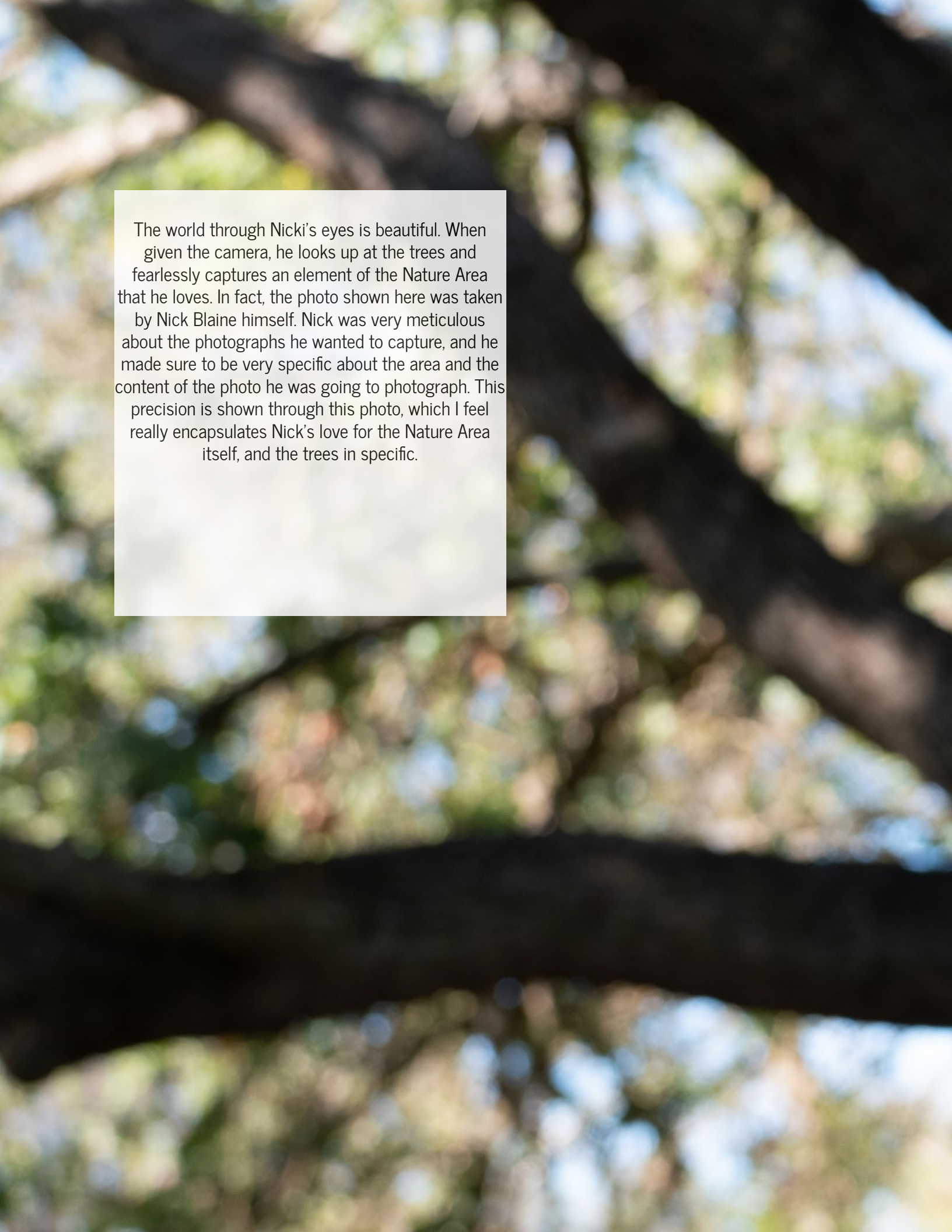


When I asked Douglas what he most enjoyed about the Nature Area, he responded with a plethora of answers. He talked about all the animals that resided in the nature area, being squirrels, turkeys, birds, even goats (occasionally). He talked about how he enjoys the noises of the animals and how cute they look to him. So from this response, I gather that he finds the Nature Area to be home to a lot of these animals, and Douglas wants to treat their space with the utmost respect. He also responded with tasks he enjoys participating in like sweeping, raking, and shoveling leaves, all of which contribute to the idea of respecting and caring for the home of the wildlife that resides in the area.



Nicki

5



The world through Nicki's eyes is beautiful. When given the camera, he looks up at the trees and fearlessly captures an element of the Nature Area that he loves. In fact, the photo shown here was taken by Nick Blaine himself. Nick was very meticulous about the photographs he wanted to capture, and he made sure to be very specific about the area and the content of the photo he was going to photograph. This precision is shown through this photo, which I feel really encapsulates Nick's love for the Nature Area itself, and the trees in specific.











Tyler

6



Tyler Williams appreciates the little things in life, not only that but he is a no-nonsense type of fellow which I can appreciate. You hardly have to worry about Tyler's stance on things because he is not afraid to let you know in the clearest way possible. When he first returned back to the program, he was not very keen on the idea of walking out in the mud or working in the Nature Area, and he was not very silent about his disdain for the tasks. However, after a few days, weeks of working consistently he began to really enjoy the time spent out in the Nature Area. He is a very hard worker.

In an interview with Tyler, I was able to capture his genuine love and curiosity for the nature area and the animals within it.



Q:What is your favorite part of the Nature Area?

A: The birds.

Q: What do you like about them?  
The way they look?

A: It's not about how they look,  
it's about how they sound.



Joseph

7



Joseph Garcia is less attached to the Nature Area itself, or the tasks, rather he is attached to the memories within the environment and the connections he creates through the environment. Joseph is a caring guy who genuinely cares for all of his fellow classmates, including Chris Francil, who he was able to create a sincere friendship with in the matter of months. Joseph has a vibrant personality, and it is no wonder that he has been able to create all these meaningful friendships so quickly with these guys. Joseph has a big heart, and is always looking out for everyone, making sure that they are feeling okay. This is especially true for Douglas, Joseph and Douglas are basically brothers from a different mother the way that they behave towards one another. They tease each other, argue, and yet they are the best of friends. This is true for all of the boys. Joseph sets the tone for the environment, he makes everyone feel welcomed and a part of the family that they have created within, and outside, of the nature area.

Within the Nature Area, the nostalgia is what is important to Joseph. He recalls moments with Chris, or moments that they have all shared together. He tells me that he really enjoyed the moments when there were goats coming every week to visit the nature area, and he was able to feed them apples. The goats were very friendly, and oftentimes would allow people to pet them as well. Joseph remembers laughing when they would hop the tables of the nature area, and make their funny noises. In the same thought, he remembers Chris, Chris enjoying the goats, and laughing alongside him. These moments are what make the Nature Area so special and important to everyone, and for Joseph it is so special to share the space with people he cares about deeply.











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In loving memory of Chris  
Francil



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Through the past months they have worked in the Nature Area, for fun, hobby, nostalgia, and remembrance. Through each moment they have built up a small community of respect, love, friendship and family. They supported each other no matter what, helped one another through the good, bad, and ugly. This is what the Nature Area has become, this is what they have become for one another.