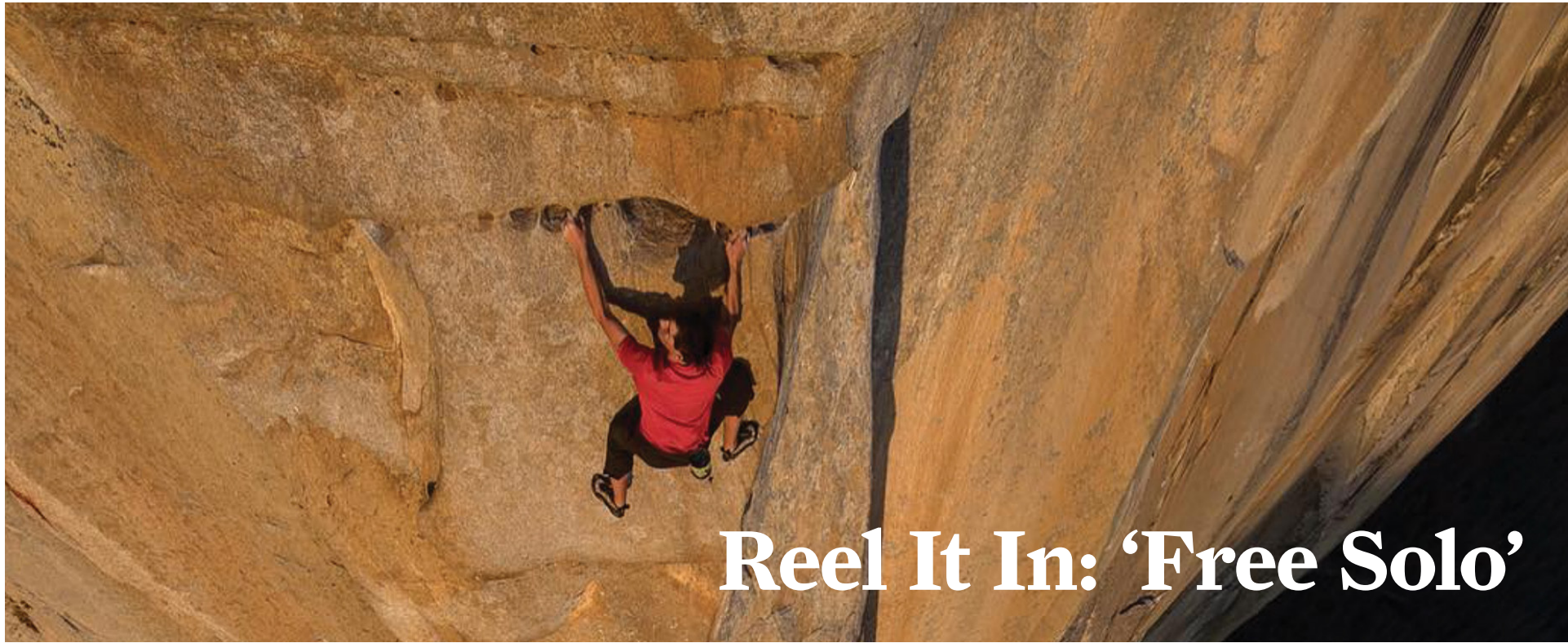




Alex Honnold's ascent of El Capitan. "Free Solo" is an Oscar-winning documentary on Honnold's journey. PHOTO COURTESY OF @FREESOLOFILM ON INSTAGRAM.



Alex Honnold sitting on a rock surrounded by the mountains of Nevada. "Free Solo" documented Honnold's journey climbing El Capitan. PHOTO COURTESY OF @ALEXHONNOLD ON INSTAGRAM

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Welcome to Reel It In, a bi-weekly film column where I'll keep it real, literally, by discussing an often-underappreciated side of cinema: documentaries. For that, there's no better place to start than the Oscar-winning "Free Solo," one of the most popular documentaries of the past decade. The film, directed by Jimmy Chin and Elizabeth Chai Vasarhelyi, follows rock climber Alex Honnold as he trains to climb El Capitan, a 3,000-foot rock formation in Yosemite National Park. But this isn't just a normal climb; the movie gets its name from Honnold attempting the first-ever free solo climb of the summit. That means that Honnold can't have any ropes, any protective gear or anything to save him if something goes wrong. But the truth is, that's not really what "Free Solo" is about. The training is just the backdrop to the movie, the narrative that gives it its structure and the shots that give it its thrills. In actuality, the film uses its documentary style to create a character study about a man who is so passionate about climbing that he's crazy enough to risk his life for it, and the toll that it takes on him and the people that surround him. The movie doesn't just center itself around Honnold's training, but around Honnold himself. We get to learn about who he is through the lens of the camera. He spends most of his time alone, either climbing or liv-

ing in his van, and often seems uncomfortable with being on camera and talking about himself. Yet, Honnold talks about his family and his difficulties in balancing a love life and climbing. He believes that one day he will die while climbing, yet he does it anyway because he feels that it's what he was meant to do. The documentary style distinguishes itself by showing us the psyche of the real Alex Honnold. If "Free Solo" weren't a documentary, there would be a barrier between the viewer and Honnold, separated by the director and actor's interpretation of who he is. But the documentary has no barrier; it confronts the viewer with a man whose behavior seems completely foreign but tries to show why he is willing to put himself in a position where he's 2,000 feet in the air with nothing but chalk and climbing shoes. But "Free Solo" isn't just about Honnold. It also focuses on other people in his life, and how his attempts to free solo El Capitan affects them. Throughout the film, Sanni McCandless, Honnold's girlfriend, serves as the emotional core. She struggles to balance her desire to let her partner do what he loves and her desire for him to not put himself in near-death scenarios. McCandless is one of the few non-climbers present in the film, and her presence brings a grounding perspective. She can't stop Honnold from climbing El Capitan, so all she can do is hope that everything will turn out alright, as we carry that hope with her. On top of being the people behind the camera, the docu-

mentary crew adds its own emotional layer by playing a role in the film itself. They crew members worry about the dangers of what Honnold is doing, and what they're doing. What if they record Honnold's death instead of his triumph, or if a cameraperson does something that causes Honnold to fall? Their worry rubs off on the viewer, as the stress of the dangers surmount as Honnold gets closer to free soloing El Capitan. "Free Solo" builds a narrative around all the factors that Honnold has to consider, and the conflicts feel completely authentic because they are completely authentic. The documentary is as much about the climb as it is about the decision to climb or not to climb. But that decision isn't made by any ordinary person; it's made by a person who loves climbing more than anything else. And whether he's in a relationship or there's a camera crew recording what could be his death, he's going to do what he loves. Now, I can't tell you whether or not that's an admirable quality. But that's not what "Free Solo" is about. It's about real people, ordinary and extraordinary, who are filled with passion and love and worry and fear. The documentary strips away the artifice and makes you feel the real forces that drive these people. And, though you'll get much more out of it than this, I can't deny that it'll bring you to the edge of your seat as you watch one of the most bizarre guys climb 3,000 feet higher than anyone should ever need to climb.

It's Getting Warm Out, Folks: 5 ways we can enjoy spring weather



The UConn Dairy Bar, located at the University of Connecticut in Storrs, Conn. They are credited with serving some of the freshest ice cream in the area. PHOTO BY SAMANTHA BRODY/LIFE EDITOR

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It's officially springtime, and as we get closer to the end of the academic year, temperatures are beginning to rise. On April 1, the temperature was 73 degrees, a sign that a nice warm season is coming. Within the next week, the temperatures are going to range between the 40s and the 60s. While they're not going to reach the 70s, it's guaranteed that temperatures will continue to rise throughout April. As that happens, we should begin to embrace the outdoors a little more.

#1: Play football or frisbee outside the Student Union

Whenever I walk by the Student Union on a warm day, I almost always see a

group of students play football or frisbee on the expansive lawn in front of it. They're always smiling and laughing, a sign of enjoyment and bliss. If you like to play sports, you should spend some time getting together with your friends and throwing a football or frisbee around with one another. You don't even have to play on the lawn in front of the Student Union. There are many other great places, including the Great Lawn near East Campus and the park in front of South Campus.

#2: Get out of the library and do your work outside

Are you sick of studying at the library? If so, you might want to pick a different place. As the temperatures become warmer, you should consider working outdoors. Not only will you have a change of scenery, but

you'll have the opportunity to sunbathe while reading your physics textbook or working on your lab report. Plus, you'll breathe in fresh air, spend a little bit of time with nature and maybe say hi to people who walk by you.

#3: Stop by the Dairy Bar and get a taste of the freshest ice cream in the world

Don't you just love eating ice cream that's so sweet you desperately want more? If so, you should stop by the Dairy Bar. Consistently voted a favorite in local polls, the Dairy Bar is known for having some of the freshest ice cream in the area. Its menu contains a variety of flavors and toppings that customers can choose from. It also features ice cream cakes, waffle cones and monthly sundaes such as Chocolate Love Bomb and the Apple Har-

vest Sundae, all of which will make your taste buds ecstatic.

#4: Spend a little bit of time going on a walk, run or bike ride

If you have no homework or extracurriculars to take care of, then I recommend going on an outdoor run. Not only will you be able to relish the outdoors, but you'll get some physical activity. And if you're not a fan of running, then you can always walk or ride a bike if you own one. The University of Connecticut has many different routes you can take. Whether you walk, run or ride a bike, you can go just about anywhere on campus. You can go from North Dining Hall to South Dining Hall, Towers to Garrigus, Buckley to the Gampel Pavilion — anywhere your heart desires! UConn is so huge you won't have to worry about becoming bored as you travel.

And if you get lost, you can always access the campus map.

#5: Go for a hike on Horsebarn Hill

If you've never been to Horsebarn Hill, you should explore it while the temperatures are warming up. Horsebarn Hill has many different routes you can take, and while it might possibly smell like cow manure, it'll still be a change of scenery from the many buildings you can see on campus. If you're ever looking for a quiet and peaceful place to walk and hike on, Horsebarn Hill is a great option. There are many more activities we can do, but these are the top five I recommend. We have one month left in the semester, and warmer weather awaits us. So, let's enjoy this last month by going outside and having fun!