

In Our Words

A Collection of Student Writing from Project Second Chance,
Contra Costa County Library's Adult Literacy Program



VOLUME EIGHT

“ I’ve had many meanings for home. ”

— Young N. (PSC learner)

In Our Words Volume Eight



Welcome to Project Second Chance (PSC) learners' wonderful stories of dreams, challenges, memories, and pleasures. This year, some learners wrote about some aspect of "home," such as home country, family traditions, relations, or beliefs. The stories are richly diverse, connected by the learners' shared experience of finding a learning home in PSC. We thank the following tutors who supported this year's *In Our Words* authors:

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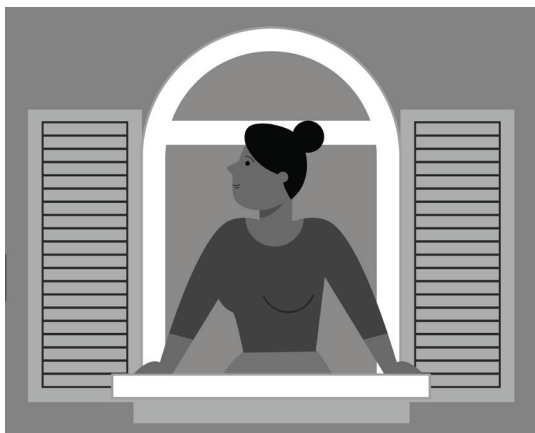
My Favorite Tutor

by Ali S.

First of all, I really appreciate the group of people at Project Second Chance. They found a very nice tutor for me, Miss Vicki. She is very helpful and has a strong personality. She is trustworthy and has a passion to teach me ESL in an advance level.

My name is Ali. I am really excited to deal with the group at Project Second Chance to improve and build upon my English skills. And also, instead of ESL classes, I am starting to write my biography about when I came to U.S.A. I am trying to a famous writer in this country.

Finally, I have to appreciate my best tutor, Miss. Vicki, and the group of Project Second Chance for helping me to reach my goals.



Keep Moving

by Veronica G.

I like to keep moving in many ways. My goal is to do exercise at least three times a week and I like to run and enjoy nature. Sometimes when I exercise more, I feel much better. My energy is all the way up and I am not feeling tired. As a mom, wife, student, and employee, it really helps me to run my days more easily with more energy. I really like to exercise and teach my seven- and twelve-year-old kids how important it is to “keep moving.” Also, it helps me with stress. I think exercise is a good way to help you feel better. With just a few minutes of walking, I am feeling better.

Another way to keep myself moving is that I learned that it is never too late to learn new things and nobody else can do that for me. I learned that I have the power to learn and do what I need to make my own goals. To be part of Project Second Chance is to keep learning new English and be able to accomplish those goals. Learning is never done. For me, every day is a new opportunity or challenge to learn something new.

The Night When My Life Changed

by Alex A.

On July 22nd 2016, my life changed forever. When we are little, our parents tell us to not touch a candle and we still want to touch it. We think it's not going to happen to us. When far away from the candle, you feel like you can handle the fire but once you get closer, you will get burned and you are still provoking it to happen.

That night, when I started driving my motorcycle, I released the clutch too fast, and I did not expect a wheelie, and I tried to control the motorcycle. It was very fast and my whole body was dragging on the asphalt, and I kept holding the handlebars until the impact, and that's when I disconnected myself, and just five houses before getting to my house. My roommates found me under a construction truck. I should have listened to my parents.

Waking up at John Muir Walnut Creek ER, the Dr. told me that I will never be able to walk any more, that my life is about to change. He said that I will be a paraplegic and I didn't know what he meant. On Monday, he was going to intervene with an emergency surgery of life or death. I felt like my own funeral. Friends began to disappear, to not show up at the hospital anymore, and the same happens at a

funeral. You find yourself in a casket and half the world comes to tell you how much they love you and never again come back to visit you to show you their support, and that's where you realize who the ones who are your best and true friends; sometimes the ones you least expect are the ones who are there for you.

After five years since my accident, I'm learning so many new things and the most important one is appreciate the small things life give me. We don't appreciate what we have until we lose it and when we don't have it any more is when we miss it the most. Nothing is the same or will be. But there is something that I'm grateful to this accident; it helped me to value my loved ones, be humble, to ask for forgiveness, to forgive someone who hurts me, to see how beautiful life can be, to the small details, and to value the special moments.

Adaptation to a New World

by Flavio D.

This last year made me think differently about where, how, and what clowns could do today and in the future.

Together with six clown friends (two in Portugal and four in Brazil), we created a group with the purpose of thinking about the future. Every Tuesday (3 p.m. USA, 7 p.m. Brazil, and 11 p.m. in Portugal) we meet via Zoom.

We talk about new possibilities for continuing work to be successful as a clown, figure out a lot of things and the result was we developed a first online symposium of the humanitarian clown. These clowns work in situations of conflict zone like war, vulnerability like hospitals and homeless. The goal of these clowns is to bring joy and create positive feelings for people so they spread it to family and friends.

My friend Silvio Messias developed a platform where set up everything and each of us developed a theme and contents for a class with videos, photos, and reference books. My class is about how to work as a street performer. I speak about my experience in the streets and parks of California, China, and Brazil.

It is a success and much pleasure because every clown talks about experiences in different situations of their life as a clown.

There are 14 live classes for a total of 28 hours. In July, these classes will be available to sell to other people that have interest in learning more about art of the clown.

The good side about changes is finding a capacity to reinvent yourself. I am happy that I found, together with my friends, different ways to help other people.



To Be Happier!

by Eunjoo K.

If you know the other side of a situation, it might help you to be happier than before. "A sound mind in a healthy body." I like this saying. It is important for you to have a healthy mind to be happier. Focus on positive thoughts and let go negative thoughts. But it is not easy to get rid of them in your mind. It is helpful to have positive thoughts.

You can make a regular life routine like getting up early, having healthy food, and having a good night of sleep. Especially, you should exercise as a routine. You could use your body properly such as walking, running, and yoga or stretching. Having good habits is good for you. Then you can feel better and have a healthy body.

Love is the most important part to find happiness. Loving yourself is No.1 priority. Do not judge harshly and be kind to yourself. If you love yourself, you can love others also. I recommend to give some gifts or try something new for you. In my case, I love going to a very nice coffee shop. Think about what you love and try it.

You can meet with friends to make you happy and you can do some activities that you love. You can serve and volunteer for others as you can. Learning something new is a very good way to be happier. Find somethings that you're interested in and try them. You can be happier than before. Don't forget, love yourself, to be happier.

The Mask Is Still Off

by Elaine W.

So this is a follow up story on my life. A couple of years ago, I wrote a story, "The Mask Is Off," about not being able to read. This is my personal journey. I was excited to learn how to read. Guess what? I completed my first book. I was so excited to complete it. It wasn't an easy task but it was well worth it because I did it. Yes, the mask is still off and I am still learning about myself. I have big goals and dreams. One day, I want to be able to go to college. I can do this with the help of my tutor who has been there every step of the way. She continues to support me and tells me to never give up so stay tune for part two.

The Pandemic

by Vicky D.

The coronavirus brought a lot of changes and sadness to our lives. We are in a pandemic and everyone must shelter in place.

Many businesses closed, and people lost their jobs. Schools closed and children have to learn from home online. People must wear face masks, social distance, wash hands with soap and water for at least twenty seconds, and disinfect frequently touched surfaces. Lots of people got sick and had to go to the hospital. Families lost their loved ones because of the coronavirus.

When grocery shopping, there is no time to check around for good prices. We just get what we need, then leave the store quickly. People don't go to church, movies, or restaurants anymore. Parks and museums are closed. We don't get to visit our family or friends. I miss not going to my exercise classes.

When some of my neighbors bring something for me, they call to let me know they left something on my porch!

Sheltering in place has given me the time to garden and look for new recipes to cook for the international college students who stay at my home. Additionally, thanks to

my tutor, I learned how to log onto Zoom. Now we can see and talk to each other when we meet.

Also, I go for walks in the neighborhood and enjoy seeing people's gardens, especially this time of the year. The flowers are blooming everywhere and the fruit trees, too. Almonds, peaches, lemons, nectarines, and apricots surround the houses. Seeing the beauty of nature makes me feel peaceful and happy.

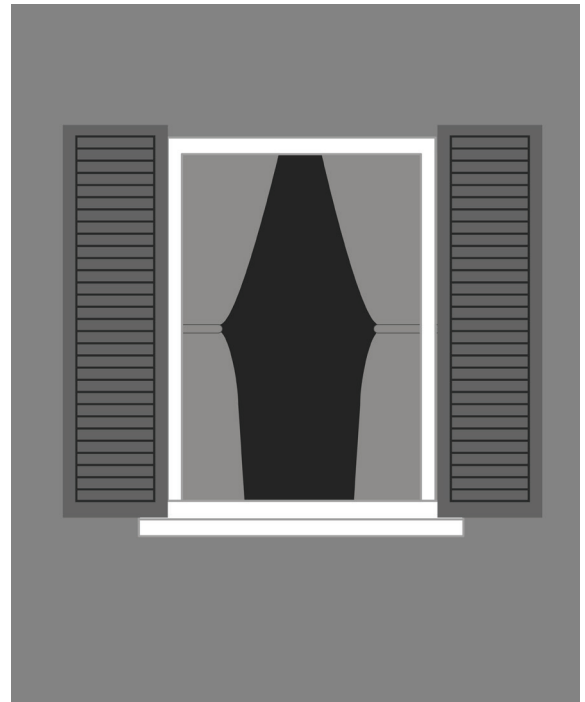
Now there is hope for a normal life to return. Many people have been vaccinated and more are getting vaccinated everyday. Schools and businesses are reopening and more people are going back to work. Hopefully, people can begin to recover from the negative effects of the pandemic and life will become more normal even though it will be slightly different in many ways than before the pandemic. Better days are coming.

The Unusual COVID Year—2020

by Judy H.

- The extremely disturbing year 2020 has gone, finally.
- The year 2020 unexpectedly made a huge change in people's lives.
- In the year 2020, tens of thousands of families grievously lost their loved ones.
- In the year 2020, many retail stores and family-owned restaurants sadly closed.
- In the year 2020, the freeways were incredibly, unbelievably empty.
- In the year 2020, my family cancelled all of the trips we had booked and we self-quarantined until April, 2021.
- In the year 2020, people started to recognize Zoom as an alternative to our traditional way of communicating—in person.
- In the year 2020, family members couldn't hug each other or say "Bye Bye" to grandparents who were dying.
- In the year 2020, doctors and nurses worldwide were risking their lives to rescue patients.
- In the year 2020, I proudly participated in the Chinese-American Association (CAA), which collected donations to support our local Bay Area hospitals, and I also donated a good amount of cash.
- All of the above are more than enough to describe our experience with COVID-19. Boiled down to one sentence: The whole world has been badly hurt. Who made this happen?

- Where did the virus come from? The communist regime and CCP chairman Xi Jinping should be held responsible for spreading this disease to the whole world.
- Unfortunately, some people blame Chinese-Americans for Covid-19 because they can't distinguish between Chinese-Americans and the CCP government.
 - The truth may be late, but it will eventually come out.



Letter to Ike

by Ying Q.

Hello Ike,

I am Ying and I have been a student of PSC and a reader of *In Our Words* for years. Today, I am writing this letter to you as I just wanted to thank you.

I really enjoy reading your poems. I like that your words are dynamic in *When I Was Young*: “The oceans were deep blue, the mountains were majestic, the river ran fast....” You recall the things that happened in the past with a warm and tender heart, such as in *The Oly* and *My First Kiss Missed*, showing me how valuable truth and love are in life.

Your sense of humor and the way you free up yourself in your poems *I am a Renaissance Man* and *My New Car* are rich and wonderful. The verse, “I have to stop the car to change the temperature” made me feel relatable to my own experience with a computer. I laughed for a while with tears in my eyes and later found those tears to have healed my dry eyes that had irritated me for a month (I put this story into *In Our Words 4*).

Your poem of *The Gates* inspired me to live with passion. There are many gates in life’s journey, such as stress, anxiety, and sickness, that hinder us go farther.

But facing the difficulty with an attitude of courage and sense of humor might help us lighten the burden. As you said, “Then I thought/ I can read/ I got up/ And disappeared/ Down the road/ Smiling.”

Thank you very much for sharing great poems each year! They are so deep and meaningful and reflective of our lives. I wish you the best happiness and health!!

God bless you!

Ying Q.



The '77 F-250

by Ike E.

In the '80s, I bought an F-250.
It became my family car.
It had a six-foot bed, a cooler, a stove,
and lights.
The bed had 3 pieces of plywood to make a
six-foot bed with a foam pad.
We took it to Canada.
My wife would lay on the bed and
read a book.
I had put a light in the back.
She would read while I drove for
1,000 miles.
I had the F-250 for years until my son
wrecked it.
It sat in my driveway for years.
I finally got it running.
I had it a number of years.
Then Wanda, my wife, wrecked it again.
It sat in my driveway for two years.
My son got it and took it to Washington.
He said he would fix it up.
A year later, we went to see my two sons
in Washington.
The first thing I saw was the F-250
rusting away,
So we virtually shot it.

Fall

by Hamid T.

Fall is full of life
Leaves' colors make me relax
They're like a painting

Dear God

by Lisa J.

You are my best friend. Her is my father
in this life. Her gave me a job care of kids.
I joy be with the kids, I joy be with the
family. I joy going lunch with the girls and
shopping.

I took care of my friend best. Have a great
rest of the day. God bless.

Love God today. Lord, thank you for the
power of the Holy Spirit to help me.

Love others today. Do you know someone
who is anger, sad, or bitter? How can you
show love to that person?

Love yourself today. Move yourself to the
top of your list of people you take care of,
then you'll be better able to care for others.

Love God today. Lord, I will acknowledge
and praise you every chance I get today.

Little House on the Prairie

by Stella K.

After reading *Little House on the Prairie*, I changed my mind to a more positive way.

“Believing in the importance of knowing where you began in order to appreciate how far you’ve come.” Writer Laura Ingalls Wilder wrote about her childhood on the prairie. It was life on the open land. It was difficult, dangerous, but the family overcame it with love and trust.

While I was reading this story, one man came to my mind. The man who is the strongest in my world but weak at cancer. He was my father. I had been more afraid of starting a new life in America than having a hope and a dream, which Pa has in the book, which my father taught me.

When I finished this book, I realized that they were never hopeless and gave up. What do I have to do? I must think about their pioneering spirit when I forgot where I was.

Continuing Tom and Mary’s Idiomatic Story

by Judy H.

Mary and Tom finally got married and a year later, a beautiful little angel arrived and became a family member.

Mary still worked *doggedly*. Every now and then, she had to travel on the weekends from place to place for meetings, without seeing her little angel. It made her sad and guilty. She kept silent for a while. However, everyone could see the disappointment *written all over her face*.

One day, *at the drop of a hat*, Mary *put her work off* and decided to go home early. She said to herself, “This is *once in a blue moon*. That’s okay. I really miss my daughter and I’m going home now.”

Tom got an unexpected call from Mary, telling him that she was on the way home. He felt so happy; there was *a lump in his throat*. At 6:00 p.m., Tom came home. He saw that the baby was playing happily and that Mary was cooking in the kitchen. Mary welcomed him home and said, “My cooking today *falls short* of your cooking. I’m sorry, and I’ll do a better job next time.”

Tom joyfully said, “Mary, *I’m so touched* by your *spending quality time* with our angel. You are working so hard to support our family, I don’t care about how you cook. I’d just like to enjoy this family moment.”

A Letter from Roger to Mrs. Jones: Blue Suede Shoes

by Eunjoo K.

June 19, 1950

Harlem, New York

Dear Mrs. Jones,

Do you still remember me? It's me, Roger. Thank you for your advice. I realized something. I felt as if I was loved by someone. I've never been loved before like that night. You did not ask my background. Actually, my mother passed away two years ago. So I live with my father and an older brother. But they don't take care of me and are not interested in what I do.

After that night, I have another life. My lifestyle has changed a lot. I wash my face twice a day, in the morning and at night. And I do let the water run until it gets warm, as you said. I go to school every day. I do my homework and try to do my best. I do not snatch anything from other people and I do not go around at night.

I just wonder why you did not call the police that night. You are very kind and generous. You saved my life. Thank you for your kindness. I cannot forget your words, "Behave yourself."

Sincerely,
Roger

P.S. I bought my blue suede shoes. I love them. I appreciate you.

Story Summaries

by Eunjoo K.

Summary of "The San Francisco Earthquake"

The San Francisco Earthquake in 1906 was an incredible incident in the history of the United States. About three thousands buildings collapsed in the earthquake and several thousand people lost their lives. After the earth shook, the street cracked and the gas leaked which cause fires to burn for days. People had no place to live but they helped each other and they rebuilt the city again.

Summary of "Beatrix Potter"

Beatrix Potter was a very shy girl who underestimated her painting even though she was very good. She made friends with a lot of small animals such as squirrels, rabbits, not other children. She wrote a letter to a five-year-old boy to make him happy because he was sick. He shared his letter and it was popular, so Beatrix rewrote it as a book. It is called *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*. She was persuaded to write many books by a publisher. She could illustrate well, thanks to her family trips to Scotland.

Dear Hero

by Tseten D.

That morning, you literally became a burning fire and lighted up the whole world from darkness. You willingly let that fire engulf and turn your body to ashes. No mercy, and it burned your bones to ashes.

You marched into the street with your body in flames. You neither screamed nor called for help. You fell and you got up again. You chanted your slogan without fear.

No one knew why a living person was burning like a torch and marching in the street with his right fist in the air. Jaws dropped in shock and everyone stared at that small video clip someone had captured by cellphone. Every news channel blasted that hot news.

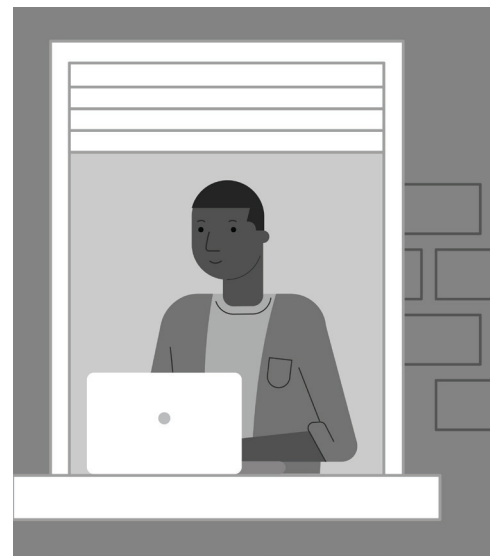
That morning, my heart was shattered into tears and pain when I heard your slogan, "Free Tibet, Free Tibet...long live his Holiness the Dalai Lama." You self-immolated to protest the brutal communist regime. You sacrificed your life for sake of freedom, equality, and liberty.

You showed that burning flames on your body are better than no freedom. You showed the world that there are people longing for basic human rights. You gave everything for the sake of six million Tibetans people who are suffering under the brutal the Chinese government.

Your sacrifice gave me strength and courage to fight for those who have no voice, to help those who are in need, to be grateful for what I have in this free country, and to never give up. You are my hero and you will live in my heart all my life.

Xoxo

Sincerely,
Tseten D.



The Coffee Incident

by Parvin M.

A few months ago, my son and I were coming back to Walnut Creek from a luncheon in Berkeley. On the way back home, he drove to a drive-up coffee shop window to get a cup of coffee.

A car was at the window in front of us. When we arrived at the window to pay and pick up the coffee, the cashier said that the driver in front of us had paid for his coffee and my son's coffee, too.

The action of that guy made me think how some people can be so nice and thoughtful to try to make others happy. The price of a coffee is not so much, but the action is priceless.

I think most people are nice, but sometimes we hear or see of special things people do for others, such as stopping for a person who has a car problem on the road or helping disabled or senior people across the street if they need a little guidance, and most of all people who voluntarily use their time and energy to help others.

The coffee incident inspired me to go out and do something nice for someone. I wonder if the person who paid for my son's coffee knew what a great example he gave.

Abortion Is a Sin

by Cristina P.

Do not murder is the fifth commandment of God's law. God's law is there to keep us safe and close to Him because He loves us. God created humans in His image. God's plan is to give life to whomever He wants, and He knows us and has plans for us before we were even conceived. Each and everybody's life is valuable to Him and thus should be valuable to us. For that reason, abortion should be illegal. Every human being has the right to live and pursue joy in their life.

If a person is guilty of a crime, he/she has to prove their innocence before a judge to be free of penalty. Are these innocent babies guilty of a crime to deserve death? Do equal rights really apply to everybody? Every human being has the right to live and pursue a life of joy, peace, hope, and love.

If you believe in God's law, of not murdering, you should also NOT be in favor of legalizing abortion. We must do our part in fighting for the right to life for every human being, including unborn babies. We are not to rely only on the world's law, but in God's will. The law of the world is not conformed to God's laws. The spirit of the world is against the spirit of God. Do not be led astray. The blind are leading blind people in most cases.

Racial Discrimination

by Joo C.

Many Asians have experienced racial discrimination from Western countries. Some people thought Walnut Creek is a safe community and people are nice. I met a lot of nice people and I appreciate all of the good people around me but racists are everywhere.

For example, I went to the DMV to get a written test. I printed some prediction questions for tests on the internet. At the DMV desk, I tried to enroll in the written test. But a white woman who worked there got angry and yelled at me about the papers. I explained that I printed out the predicted questions from the internet and I didn't get any test paper yet. But she didn't hear me. She took the papers in my hand, went through my bag, and took all my printed papers. She looked like a cop. She took the paper to her supervisor for confirmation and she knew she was wrong. I told her to apologize to me but she didn't apologize to me in the end.

The second episode is about a spam call. I tried to hang up quickly so I told her I was so busy. However, the person mocked me with a high emphasis on shouting, "Go back to your country!"

Third, I often go to the supermarket. Most times, there were white people in front of me and white people behind me. Many cashiers kindly greeted and joked with the white people around me but not with me. When it was my turn, they didn't say anything to me, didn't look at my eyes at all, and suddenly worked hard to get away from me quickly.

Many people are uncomfortable talking about this topic. Even Asians don't want to talk about being racist. Because it's about getting their private ideas out and hurting. Asian are called the model minority in the U.S. because they live a successful life more than other minorities. And everyone thinks they should not complain.

When the Coronavirus started in China and moved to the United States, racial discrimination increased by 152% in San Jose, by 833% in New York. Most violence occurs to elderly Asians or Asian women. There was only one thing I could do. When I meet racists, I speak up clearly in front of them. Being aware of problems is the beginning of the solution.

Welcome to the Amazon

by Maria A.

How much do you know about the Amazon? You might be thinking about the online shop, but I am talking about a marvelous place in South America. It's very important to South Americans and to the entire world. It's called the lungs of Mother Earth. Just like human beings have two lungs, our Earth has two lungs too, the Amazon rainforest and the Congo rainforest in Africa. The trees and vegetation provide oxygen for all of humanity and balance the ecosystem.

The Amazon has one of the largest rivers in the world and is one of the principal reserves of sweet water. It has many resources like wood, gold, and oil. The river is very wide and is called the ocean river. It goes from two miles to sixty miles wide. This river keeps eight countries united as siblings—Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Surinam, and Venezuela—and makes possible the life of all kinds of living creatures in the area.

The Amazon shelters many tribes who want to maintain their culture far away from modern civilization. But those native Amazon people and the different species are affected by huge deforestation caused by climate change (fires) and tree felling (human deforestation), mining, and oil extraction. It is important to know that this

deforestation has increased since 2008–2020. Research shows companies cut 13,000 trees per hour. The principal reason for cutting down trees is to create pasture for livestock.

Different species are affected: on the ground jaguar, giant armadillo, sloths, monkeys, poison dart frogs, reptiles like anaconda, turtle, varieties of birds like macaw, insects; in the river piranhas, the pink dolphin, and varieties of fishes are at risk of extinction.

Human beings need to take more responsibility to protect our ecosystem and all lives in the Amazon because according to scientists planting trees in other areas is not replacing the rainforest.

Butterfly

by Mirae P.

Butterfly

Vivid, dreamy

Clapping, swimming, whispering

Wings, sky, flower, sunshine

Glittering, shining, drawing

Sweet, alive

Star

A True Shot to New Beginnings, Part One

by Maria C.

Fitness is a very big part of my life. That wasn't always the case. Two years ago, before I started my journey, I slipped into bad habits eating unhealthy foods. I started to gain a lot of weight. I didn't realize it until I took a trip to Hawaii and had several pictures taken. When I looked at the pictures I thought, WOW! I needed to make some changes. Not only did I look overweight, I also felt sluggish, I was tired, and I lacked confidence. I hated shopping and the way things would fit on me. That's when I realized this wasn't me. It was time for a change.

I decided to join the gym and I made a commitment to myself of living a healthier lifestyle. I joined a weight loss challenge that the gym had and I got a trainer. I figured, let me give this a true shot! I started working out five days a week, doing cardio and weights and I also started doing a few different classes they had. I got into boxing and CrossFit. I made a lot of friends at the gym that shared the same interests as me, which was getting stronger and also healthier. We would do group activities outside of the gym, like going on hikes and we would get together and share great ideas about healthy foods. We motivated and inspired each other.

I started to get several compliments which made me feel good and better about myself. Instead of me feeling forced to go to the gym, at that point I was excited every evening and couldn't wait to get there. The results I was getting made me even more excited.



A True Shot to New Beginnings, Part Two

by Maria C.

After being committed for almost two years, the pandemic hit. The gym closed. In 2020, we all struggled through a difficult time with the pandemic. My routine got thrown upside down. I had a choice to keep moving forward or give up. And my choice was to not give up on myself and everything that I worked so hard for.

I started going for daily runs and working out in my garage. I purchased some weights and eventually even got a treadmill. I also came up with my own workouts. All I knew was that I had to keep the promise to myself and continue to eat healthy and also workout. It was a very big challenge. I was so used to being at the gym and being around people. I'm a very outgoing person so the gym and being surrounded with people helped and also pushed me even more, but I didn't let that stop me. I still continued to push myself every day.

Today I can say that I got through the pandemic and I'm still feeling the same exact way I felt when I decided to make a change and dedicate myself. I still have lots of energy. I'm still healthy and happy with my success. I look at it like this, if you want something bad enough you have to push yourself. Discipline and consistency are the number one key. I refuse to go backwards.

My story is about me and the way I continue to move forward with living a healthier life. Yes, we may face different challenges that may try to throw a wall up but it's up to each of us to go to obstacles and continue to get through them. I'm happy with the choices that I decided to make and how I did not give up on myself. It didn't just help me look better, it helped me mentally and also physically.

Rain

by Hamid T.

The rain comes softly
Its sound is like good music
It makes life for all

My Favorite Hero

by Hyun Kyoung K.

If I ask my friends, “Who’s your favorite hero?”, they may think this question is too childish. Most people may think that heroes exist in their childhood only to show better direction and to make their dreams come true.

When I was a kid, my favorite hero was Jackie Chan who is a Martial Arts movie star in Hong Kong. I loved him, because he became a world star despite having a poor family environment and many difficulties as an Asian. He overcame those barriers and exposed the world to Asian cultures through his movies. I admired his passion for dreams. He wanted to be a pioneer in Hollywood as an Asian actor and a role model. In his movies, he always fought for justice, showed respect to all people, and presented a strong and positive image. My hero gave me a lot of good influence to achieve my goals like learning Mandarin, making films, and being a positive person.

However, after I grew up, I started to lose my direction and passion for life. I found out what real life looks like and I needed to face that. This made me a more passive person and allowed me to maintain what I have so far. I felt it was risky to face new challenges and didn’t want to waste my energy moving forward again.

Recently, I read the biography of John Adams who was the 6th President of the United States and it made me think about my new hero in middle age. He was defeated in his 2nd election by his best friend, Andrew Jackson. At that time, he was very disappointed with himself but he didn’t give up his dream of working for the American people. Therefore, he became a congressman when he was 63 years old and he worked against slavery. His efforts were made to end slavery and won praise from many Americans. Before I read his biography, I felt miserable about my life and I didn’t know what I needed to do for the rest of my life. John Adams taught me that life is a long learning journey and I still have enough time to contribute to my community and to the world.

Currently, I am the principal of Walnut Creek Korean School and the organizer for the International Fair at Walnut Acres Elementary School. Those jobs are mostly volunteer positions, and I enjoy devoting myself to the students and building our community. My hero motivated me to be a better person with more purpose in life.

The YouBike

by Julia H.

The YouBike is a form of public transportation. It is a fun and inexpensive way to travel in Taiwan.

I like to ride a YouBike for my exercise in the morning. The YouBike will accompany me when I am happy or unhappy. The YouBike will take me during daytime or nighttime.

There are multiple kiosks located around many cities in Taiwan where you can get a YouBike. You can go to any Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) station or convenience store such as 7-Eleven or Family Market to buy an EasyCard to use to rent the YouBike. It is free of charge for the first thirty minutes.

Cable Car

by Stella K.

While going up,
Like the lyrics of a song,
I want to wear some flowers on my head.
My mind is full of expectations to meet
kind people.
Some people wave their hands and smile.
What a beautiful place it is.

While going down,
I could see the sea.
The wind blows and welcomes me.
What a beautiful place it is.

Sports Changed Me

by Selina G.

A good friend invited me to attend a community running event years ago. I did not like doing exercise, especially running. Somehow or other I went to run at the end.

I remember that it was about 5 kilometers running on a beautiful day from Tung Chung to the airport. It was a very long distance for me. I tried my best to catch up with my friend but I failed. She disappeared in front of my sight at the very beginning. Many times I wanted to quit running because I thought I could not make it. When I found out some elderly people joined the running together and looked like they were enjoying it. I made up my mind that I needed to keep going.

It took me more than one hour to reach the destination. I was excited and even felt exhausted. After a few days my muscle aches.

Right now, I like doing exercise and even running. I think that event changed me. I enjoy the soreness after exercise. I feel relaxed after sweating. Sports makes me strong and powerful. I like it.

Healthy Habits

by Alicia F.

Hi friends,

A long time ago, I had some health issues and I have been trying to do something to prevent chronic illness. Many of my family members have been dealing with chronic illness and they really struggle with it. Decided to educate myself on how to have healthy habits. I read medical magazines, books, watched videos, and I contacted a nutritionist. I found that eating healthy can make a big difference in your life, but it's hard to change an eating habit when you grow up thinking the way you eat is healthy. But it is never too late to start again and create healthy habits like:

1. Eating Healthy
2. Sleeping well
3. Planning exercise and doing it
4. Lowering your stress level

But for the best information and help on this process, it's better to contact a professional nutritionist.

Best wishes,
Alicia



Kimchi

by Stella K.

I made kimchi today. Since I moved to America, I have made kimchi a lot in my life. Usually, I bought kimchi from the store. There are not many choices in America. I started to make it by myself. A lonesome foreign life made me miss home food.

It takes a lot of work. Preparing ingredients, cutting, salt it, rinse, seasoning, and waiting. I feel that making kimchi is a kind of magic. Temperature and ingredients affect the taste. Every time I try something different, I feel like a wizard. After three days, I will open my kimchi jar. I am looking forward to how it will taste this time.

Pumpkin Sesame Balls

by Helen G.

Today, I want to make a dessert that my kids like. It is very delicious and simple.

Ingredient:

- (1) Pumpkin (200g)
- (2) Sugar (60g)
- (3) Rice Powder (280g)
- (4) Sesame
- (5) Vegetable oil

Method:

1. Peel the pumpkin, slice into thin pieces, put them in the pot and steam for about 10-15 mins.
2. Add 60g sugar to the pumpkin, mash it into paste.
3. Add 280g rice powder, stir until it is mix well, and knead it into a smooth dough.
4. Roll it into logs, and cut into pieces. Roll it into balls. Dip each ball in clean water, coat with sesame.
5. Heat the oil until it comes up to 500-600 degrees, put it in the ball. When it floats, becomes bigger, until golden brown, then take them out.

This recipe is good even for someone who is new to cooking.

Christmas

by Velia R.

My favorite holiday is Christmas. We celebrate in December 24th. We decorated the Christmas tree after Thanksgiving. I like put a lot of flashing lights ornaments.

I every year bought gifts for all my family. My grandchildren's gifts I wrap in different colors. My grandchildren asked my how many gifts they have. I explain to them each one has a different color of Christmas paper. They asked me what is my color. I explained to them. They felt very happy and everyone counted and they said we have the same.

They wanted to open the gifts earlier, but I say no. Supposed to open at 12 of the night. I explain to the children they have to wait until after God is born. I put all their gifts under the Christmas tree.

The traditional food is pozole and tamales. I started to cook in the morning. I wanted to finish cooking before my children came to the house. My daughters-in-law bring gifts for the family and also they bring desserts and drinks and potato chips.

We have this tradition for many years. We have celebrated Christmas for many years together.

The Wonderful Years

by Sandra P.

I have great memories from my childhood. If I could go back in time, I would turn in back when I was about seven years old. That age was wonderful to me. I remember that when my parents had the opportunity, we made vacation in the ocean, where my aunt and my cousins lived.

That time was special because I had a chance to see my cousins the same age as me. When my cousins and I were together, we were happy because we could play all day long different kind of games like table games, girls stuff, and invent new things.

Because they lived close to the ocean, some days our parents took us to the beach. We played in the water and ran in the sand until we got tired.

Nighttime was the best. During the day, we bought any kind of candies like lollipops, ice cream, chocolates, and chips. We eat all of them without telling our parents. While we were eating all these candies, we talked and talked all night long until we fell asleep. These days are like lights in my life.

When I had the opportunity to see my cousins, we agreed that were wonderful years.

We call each other prima/hermana (means cousin/sister). I like that world because it makes me feel good that I didn't have my own sister. We like very much as if we were sisters.

The 1938 Pontiac

by Ike E.

In 1948, my dad bought a 1938 Pontiac. My dad said we are going to the lake.

It was night when we were getting ready to go.

Mom made a bed on the back floor of the car for me.

My dad was asleep on the back seat when we got started.

Dad has strapped tires to the top of the car.

It was about 12:00 a.m.

I was awakened.

I heard Mom and Pete, the driver, talking about another car trying to force us off the highway.

And it did.

And we rolled over and over and landed on its wheels.

But for the tires on the top of the car, We would be hurt.

A week after the accident, The car was stolen.

First Little Story

by Eva A.

My name is Eva. This is a little story about me. I grew up in my grandmother's house: my grandmother, my parents, my brother, and me.

An ordinary twelve-year-old at the time of this story, I was graduating from elementary school. I was raised mostly by my grandmother; a person who thought that school wasn't necessary for girls.

As the new school year was starting, my next door neighbor, Emelia, a doctor who had a consulting room in her house, came to visit us. She talked to my grandmother and me about the importance of school and offered me help to continue attending middle school. Because the year had officially started, it was hard to find a space for me. Her son was a good friend of a private school's principal, which helped a lot.

It was a private school and my parents would have to pay for everything: books, uniforms, and tuition to the school every month. Emelia offered me a job cleaning her house; that way I could make money to spend on my schooling. She also offered to pay half of the tuition.

It was a huge school with all school levels from kindergarten up to university. My classes were from 2:30 to 7:45 p.m. I used to clean her house during the day and attend school in the afternoon and evening.

Taking the bus every day back and forth to the school, I was the happiest girl studying and working at the same time. She is still our neighbor and I am and will always be grateful to Emelia and her son.



Second Little Story About Me

by Eva A.

This is a story that lives in my mind. I was around ten years old. I used to play with my neighbors every evening.

One day, my neighbors' cousin named Veronica came to visit them with a game called "Guess Who?" I was delighted with the game.

Over and over again, I asked Veronica for a turn but her answer was "no" every time. She was so mean and I was feeling so sad. At the end of the day, she left and didn't let me use it at all.

We were a poor family and my parents couldn't afford a game for me. I spent the next day thinking about how to make my own game. I settled in the backyard, my favorite spot, the place that inspired me to do anything I wanted. Sometimes I became a famous singer, other times the best dancer in the world, and this time I became the best draftsman. I started to draw pictures, trying to make them as similar as possible to those in "Guess Who?"

I asked my grandmother and neighbors for egg cartons. After a few days of waiting for them to be done with their egg cartons and after the pictures were done, I started to cut some cardboard to make sturdy pictures. I got some toothpicks and glued them to the little pictures. I put one in between each hump of the egg carton, making sure that the pictures could be pulled up and down. It took me a lot of effort, but at the end I was so happy and proud of myself.

Again my backyard was the place that inspired me to make my idea a reality, this time in that game that I loved when I saw it completely. That beautiful picture will always live in my mind.

I used to play it with my best friend all the time and I repaired many times until it fell apart. Since then up until the present, my best friend and I have talked about that story and it has brought us a lot of happy memories.

Rayam's Pets

by Ehte A.

I have a grandson. His name is Rayan and he is thirteen years old. He loves animals and likes to have pets.

His first pet was a parrot. He was a beautiful parrot that his father bought from a friend in Southern California. His dad was told that the parrot could talk. However, when he arrived at Rayan's house the parrot was always very angry and would yell at people. When Rayan tried to play with him the parrot bit his finger. They soon figured out that the parrot could only speak Spanish and nobody understood him. Rayan gave the parrot to a friend who could speak Spanish.

Then his mom bought two fish for Rayan. The problem was that they would fight and could not be in the same fish tank with each other. The fish tank was on top of the air conditioner and, after a few months, one of them died and we think the other fish jumped out of the fish tank and fell in the air conditioner.

Next, Rayan's mom bought hermit crabs. They were very beautiful but when Rayan got older he gave them away to a friend.

His next pets were hamsters. They liked to play together but at night they were very noisy. Unfortunately, one of them died and

a few weeks later the other hamster died. I met a lady who had a kid and I cleaned the cage and gave the cage to her.

Rayan's last pet was a turtle. His mom paid a lot of money for it because it was a special turtle. Rayan kept the turtle for a few years before he gave the turtle to a friend.

Rayan is very good with animals, and one day he would like to have a dog.

My Little Sweetie

by Candy K.

Today, I am going to write about my grandson. His name is Holden James!! He is my first grandchild. He is a four-month old boy. Everyday he gives me a different joy. One day he starts baby talk, the other day he flips his body. All the time he makes everybody laugh. Also, he makes me very busy but I enjoy everything I do with him. He is my little cute angel. I will love my grandson forever.

Playing the Violin, Part One

by Ying Q.

There is one thing for which I feel very lucky and grateful when I look back at my life experiences, and that is learning to play the violin. I had learned to play the violin when I was in elementary school, which was when the Cultural Revolution of the 1970's happened in China. Society was very political and everything was related to socialist propaganda and Chairman Mao.

My parents was working full-time and always came home in the evening. In order to resolve the concern they had about what I would do during the second half of the day after school was out, my mom thought I could learn a musical instrument. "You'd probably be able to promote Chairman Mao's thought through music in the future," she said.

I joined the school band called Propaganda Team and learned to play the Chinese mandolin, liu qin. I enjoyed the musical activities very much and was exposed to many other kinds of instruments. The violins, with their beautiful, curved outlines, f-holes, and reddish brown colors, caught my attention very much. I enviously watched some of the senior students play the violin—they looked cool and elegant—and I wanted to be like them. I kept begging my mom to let me learn to play the violin.

Since my mom had bought me a liu qin which cost her half a month's salary, she thought it wouldn't be necessary for me to have the second instrument. My mom thought I was just impulsive about violins, that my interests wouldn't last long and that wouldn't insist on practicing violin patiently. I swore to my mom, "I will practice violin hard because I liked it very much!" I said that again and again.

There was one scene I have never forgotten. One day, my mom came home from work in the evening. She showed me a book, *How to Play Violins*, and then said that when she went to the bookstore to look for music books, the clerk told my mom that her husband was a violin teacher, teaching at their house. "What a coincidence! Isn't it?" My mom was excited. I was glad and jumped, too! We were happy for this surprise. This scene in my childhood is ingrained in me forever.

Playing the Violin, Part Two

by Ying Q.

As there weren't any Western published books during the Cultural Revolution, for years I had used hand-copied *Hohmann Practical Violin Method*, books 1 through 4. I borrowed them from my friend and copied the music myself for two days straight every month. During the Cultural Revolution, money was not allowed to be used for any transactions, so to thank and pay my violin teacher for my private lessons, my parents considered giving them canned meat and fish, as those were the most expensive foodstuff instead of cash. The implemented quota system at the time in my hometown dictated that each person only gets 1000g of meat per month, so meat was a scarce goods.

I remember that every time my father bought some meat cans home, he would say, "This is for Mr. Yin" and then put them somewhere inconspicuous. My brother and I never tried to open them secretly during those years even though we were really greedy for the delicious canned meat. Is it unbelievable? Also, there were not many entertainment options at that time, so I was very focused on the violin, practicing one to two hours daily and three hours during summer break, going to my teacher's house with my mom and then by myself each week. I had never felt that it was tough. Now I think it was a great early music experience in my life.

Time flies. After I experienced all kinds of things, I realized that music has become a big part of my life. I listen to music while I exercise; I can do two to three hours of housework and never feel tired if music accompanies me. I share my feelings through music and then it seems to respond to me. Music brings me relief and peace, and with its vastness and beauty, music fills my heart and comforts my soul. It is just like an angel bringing God's messages to me. I think music is like the humming of God, singing out his Love.



Day at the Races

by Ricky R.

I am going to pick up my cousin, and two of my friends will meet us at the track. We are going to Sacramento Raceway to watch different types of drag racing. There will be different types of category cars. That means some cars are faster than others. They decide by ET, which means time that the car leaves the starting line and crosses the finish line, and speed.

We plan to arrive at 10 a.m. and leave when the races are over. Everything is wide open so we can go talk with the drivers before, during, and after their race. We will sit in the stands during the race. We can smell the rubber from the tires and the fuel from the cars. We bought hamburgers for lunch and ate down in the pits together. After we ate, the races continued, and we started watching the different categories of racing.

We saw one accident. It was a small tire category. The car left the starting line, went sideways, and hit the concrete barrier. The driver was unhurt.

My favorite car categories are the Pro Mods. The body of the car is fiberglass and the chassis is made of steel. The driver is enclosed behind a roll cage. The driver has to wear fire clothing when driving to protect him from flames. It is not required for drivers to wear this fire clothing in every car category. But because of the type of

fuel they run in the Pro Mod cars, there is more of a chance of fire.

At the end of the day, we loaded up our chairs and canopy into my friend's truck, and drove home. We had a wonderful day at the races!

The Trumpet

by Ike E.

When I was ten, I wanted a trumpet.
You see, I am crippled on my right side.
My right fingers do not work well.
I wanted to be in a school band.
The teacher said I do not have space for a
trumpet
but I have space for a clarinet,
So my mom went out and got me a
clarinet,
which I could not play.
I never played music again.
I often think of that time and wonder,
What would happen if I had gotten the
trumpet?

I'm Proud of...

by Yulia K.

I wanted to share a story about my little handmade hobby which changed my life.

I've always liked to make something with my hands. When my first baby came, I was interested in drawing, cross stitching, scrapbooking, and so on. One day, I saw a beautiful crochet toy on the internet. I fell in love with it. I was inspired to do a search for how this toy was created. I had never crocheted or knitted before, so I started to learn how to make basic crochet stitches and creating easy stuffed toys using YouTube channels. I really enjoyed making these cute creatures and I couldn't stop doing it. I presented my toys to my friends and my friends' friends. I always got amazing feedback. Then other people asked me to create one for them. People loved my toys and shared my works in their social media so more and more people began to know about my hobby.

In 2018, I started creating my own ideas and wrote my first "Do It Yourself" tutorial. More and more people were interested in making toys using my patterns. One year ago, I opened my own Etsy store where people could buy my crochet instructions. At this moment, I've had about 25 patterns and 9 Crochet Kits there.

Recently, I've got an offer to add one of my patterns to a German magazine. This magazine is sold in three countries: Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. I will be mentioned there as the designer and author. I'm really happy to get this opportunity to see my work in the magazine.

Every day, I get positive feedback and it makes me happy and I'm proud of my little hobby.



Six-Word Stories on Home

Safe, relaxing, busy, messy,
loud, overwhelming
—Onesha E.

It is time to play outside.
—Diana S.

Old house, small rooms, big kitchen
—Vicky D.

Home sweet home, safety to me
—Vicky D.

Beautiful home with many
beautiful memories
—Vicky D.

Home is the nest of families.
—Vicky D.

Home is comfortable place to be.
—Vicky D.

Home is a good night's sleep.
—Vicky D.

Family always waiting for your return.
—Julia H.

My Hometown

by Hamid T.

Hi Dear Vahid,

Before you come to visit me, let me write some words about the city which I live in. Its name is Concord in California. It's one of the big and old suburb cities of San Francisco. Concord downtown is very unique. There is a big square in the center of downtown. It has a playground for kids and a stage with concrete seats for an audience of any show and entertainment. There is a fresh market twice a week. You can find almost everything such as cheap and delicious foods, stuff for living, etc. On one side of the downtown square, there are many beautiful hotels and restaurants in a Mexican style architecture. I promise you wouldn't be disappointed when visiting Concord.

A Snowy Memory

by Mirae P.

I came back home after elementary school. There were lots of my mom's friends and my aunt in our front yard. They seemed all busy with washing cabbages. I said hi to them and went inside of the house. My mom's friend's kids were hanging out and I got excited with them. We grabbed some snacks on the table and ate all together. Then, we went outside to watch what our moms were doing. We didn't pay attention but we watched when we got bored from playing. Lots of talk, laughs, and delicious food filled our front yard.

A few days later, it was a cold and snowy day. I woke up in the morning and ran up to the front window in our living room. I really liked watching how it snowed. Everything was covered with white snow. It looked totally a different place from where I used to be.

I saw my mom walking to the jang-dok-dae (a very large claypot with a lid), where kimchi was stored in the front yard. It was all buried in the ground and only lids of three jang-dok-dae with snow covered were seen. She folded her cuffs and opened the lid of one of the jang-dok-dae. She knelt on her knees and put her right hand into jang-dok-dae and took out some kimchi. She put the kimchi into the bowl. She opened another jang-dok-dae and

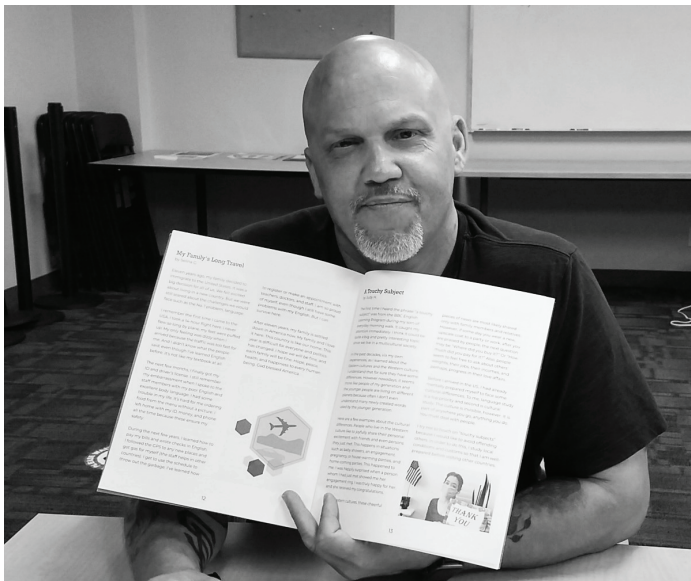
took out some radish kimchi, too. It looked like she was fixing breakfast with kimchi and hot soup. The kimchi tasted fresh, crunchy, and delicious. It was still cold and I even saw some ice on it.

After I had breakfast, I was again on the front window to watch snow and daydreamed.

Birds vs. Dogs

by Alan P.

I have the back door open. The birds are in their cages outside in their pen. Somehow the pen door became open. Tito came out the pen and was in my laundry room. I heard a scuffle. I came running outside to see the problem. I yelled for my bigger dog to come upstairs and he started coming up the steps with feathers in his mouth. Went to check on the bird. The bird seemed that he was okay. I was relief and I talked to my dogs like kids so they kind of knew something was wrong and I felt a little better knowing that the bird was fine.



Home Haiku

by Cendy C.

Home to me is love
Welcoming, relaxed, happy
Comfortable, safe

Day and Night

by Brenda I.

Day
Extraordinary, lively
Playing, working, swimming
Sky, sun, stars, weather
Eating, sleeping, dreaming
Peaceful, soothing
Night

A Sunny Memory

by Mirae P.

My husband came back home after picking my mom up from the airport. It was a beautiful sunny day. She always liked the weather in California whenever she visited. My son ran up to his grandmother and gave her a big hug. I cooked dinner while she was unpacking her luggage. Lots of talk, laughs, and delicious food filled our house that night.

A few days later, we put all the ingredients we bought from the Korean market for making kimchi in our front yard. It was about 35 to 40 cabbages and 15 large Korean radishes as main ingredients. And also, we prepared other ingredients like onions, scallions, and chili powder, etc.

It took a while to salt and wash all the cabbages. We had a great family time while we made kimchi. It took nearly two days to finish making kimchi. It was quite a generous amount for us. We could eat more than a year. As a final step, we put all the kimchi into the kimchi container and stored them in a kimchi refrigerator (a special refrigerator designed only for kimchi storage and it helps a fermentation process.). Kimchi tastes different everyday from its fermentation. One-month and six-months old kimchi taste totally different. And most Koreans enjoy the different flavors of kimchi as well as various types of recipes.

Finally we are all done with kimchi and we got excited after we loaded up our kimchi refrigerator full of kimchi. I was so grateful that my mom got to visit and help us have delicious, fresh kimchi.

About two weeks later, my mom and I went to the kimchi refrigerator which was in the garage, to check the kimchi, and...it was all FROZEN!!!! Everything was completely frozen up and was one whole block of kimchi. We could tell that it was ruined. We didn't realize that the refrigerator was broken before—TOO LATE—it was broken from age.

It is very sunny today. But I just want to bring back my snowy memory of the time when my mom was getting kimchi from jang-dok-dae (a large clay pot). I think convenient technology can't beat humans!



My Bumpy Road to Citizenship

by Cendy C.

I would like to tell you how I became a citizen of the United States during the pandemic. When I started the process of becoming a citizen, it was August of 2019, long before we knew of the pandemic. I was told the wait time to take my citizenship test might be eight months to a year. But because my mother and sister only had to wait seven months to take their tests, I felt optimistic and thought I might get my test earlier, maybe in the Spring of 2020.

In January of 2020, I started working with my tutor from Project Second Chance to learn about the history of the United States. These lessons helped me prepare to become a citizen. I was nervous, thinking I might not have much time to learn all I would need to know for the test. In March of 2020 we learned about the pandemic. We thought it might be over in a month. As the days, weeks, and months passed, I realized it might take a very long time. After a while, it became clear to me that my citizenship would be delayed. This made me nervous and anxious. Every day, I waited for the mail to come, hoping to get news of my test, but I heard nothing. It was very stressful for me.



After my sister has her citizenship ceremony in the fall of 2020, I really wondered if I was ever going to get to take my own citizenship test. Then, in December I received a letter saying I had an appointment for January 4th, 2021 to take my citizenship test. I was very excited.

On the day of my test, it was raining and cold. After I arrived and registered, I waited for my turn and wished I had studied more. There were no other people waiting with me. Soon a woman brought me into another room where she asked eight questions about the United States, which I answered successfully. I also did one reading assignment and one writing assignment. She then told me, "Congratulations, you passed!" She asked if I could come back at 11:15 for my ceremony and I said, "Yes." I felt very emotional, relieved, and happy. I went in alone, as I couldn't have any family or friends with me. The ceremony was very short and there weren't many people but I was so glad that I was now a U.S. citizen.

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Project Second Chance Mission Statement

Project Second Chance (PSC), Contra Costa County Library's adult literacy program, provides free, confidential instruction in reading, writing, and spelling to adults struggling with basic literacy skills. PSC recruits, trains, and supports volunteer tutors who work one-on-one with adult learners to help them achieve their individual literacy-related goals and empower them in their work and personal lives.

If you know an adult who speaks English and needs help with basic reading or writing, please tell them about Project Second Chance or suggest they ask for help at their local library.

Project Second Chance

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