

# In Our Words

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

**VOLUME NINE**



# In Our Words Volume Nine



Welcome to Volume Nine of Project Second Chance learners' book of writings, composed and collected over the past year. In these pages, you'll find stories on topics that are important in PSC learners' lives: family, friends, memorable travel experiences, special recipes, favorite pastimes, and communities, new and old. It's never planned, but every year a few stories are submitted about learners' appreciation for the PSC community, and most particularly their tutors. It's true that PSC tutors make all the difference to our learners. We'd like to thank the following tutors who supported this year's *In Our Words* authors:

Andrew Silva  
Angeline Hong  
Ann Marie Foley  
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Bev Farrell  
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# Choosing Project Second Chance

by Alfonso E.

I belong to a trade union. In September 2018, I was selected to be a delegate to region 10 conference meeting. The president of the Northern California chapter was unable to attend, so he asked me to report on his behalf. This included a PowerPoint presentation. I told him I was very uncomfortable in presenting the PowerPoint along with the report in front of crowds. But we talked it over and he convinced me that everything would be alright.

So I practiced the presentation. I had three weeks to prepare. I was very nervous. When it was time for me to make my report, the first thing that happened, the computer for the PowerPoint got frozen. So I had printed out the PowerPoint on paper to pass out to read as I was presenting. As I was passing them out the computer started working. I read the first paragraph with no problem, then after that everything went downhill. My mind could not pronounce some of the words, and I began to stumble from one word to another. Thank God, the recording person helped me with most of the words.

I felt at that point of my life the lowest I could even feel. A dummy illiterate person in front of the large crowd. I know that

the crowd was thinking, why did Northern California send me to report when they could have send someone else. At least someone who would be able to read and understand the report.

After the meeting I went back to my room feeling bad. At that point I had to make a big change in my life to make myself feel good again. That's when I heard about Project Second Chance. Thank God for Laura, she directed me to three excellent tutors.

The program has helped me to read and write better. And the best thing of all, it helps me to sound out words. In addition, I can think about what I write down. Tutors have been real patient with me and worked with my busy work schedule

Thank you Project Second Chance.



**At that point I had  
to make a big  
change in my life  
to make myself  
feel good again.**





# Appreciation Letter

by Tsering D.

Dear Reader,

First, I would like to say thank you very much to Laura for helping me join Project Second Chance and finding me a great teacher, Andrew S. He is the best teacher I ever met before. He taught me how to read, write and speak. As well as lots of wonderful key vocabulary and useful things, from the book and out of the book. I also learned how to read some cooking instructions. Before I couldn't read and write nicely, but after I took this class around 13 months ago, I can read and write much better. I could even read the received enrollment form from my daughter's preschool. I was very happy, proud, and excited. I got tears in my eyes. Then I tried to read a book all by myself and I completed it. That was my first book in my life. I was very happy, and I screamed and hugged my husband, and I told him, that I could read the book and I completely read this book. The name of the book is Box Car Kids. Then Laura helped me to find a book in my reading level. It's call 3 Cups of Tea. That book was a great book. It was very similar to my village. Some areas in Pakistan and Afghanistan don't have any transportation like car, bus, and train and no school. Not even any pen and paper for kids to write. They used dirt as a paper and stick as a pen for writing.

As well as no running water in the house and no electricity and no bathroom like here in the US. Now I realized how lucky I am. I am very fortunate that I am here in the United States. There are lots of great opportunity to learn how to write, read, and speak English. The girls can go to school, even adult woman and men's can go to school or college. As well as Woman can work just like men. I learned lots of great key Vocabulary. I never heard those words, before, but after we had learn from book 4 and 5. Recently I can hear lots of key vocabulary words from news and everywhere, which makes me very proud and excited.

Thanks for Listening,  
Tsering D.

# Thank You, My Tutor!

by Connie C.

Dear Tutor,


Time flies! It has been nine months since we met on Zoom. It is my great honor to be your student. Because of you, my English is getting better and better. Learning English from you is a wonderful experience.

You are a very knowledgeable lady. Whenever I ask you about something, I always get a satisfied answer. I have learned a lot from you beyond English. You have a passion for tutoring. Since you have been spending so much of valuable time preparing for tutoring, it makes me feel guilty and pushes me to learn harder. You are the most patient person I have met. It is difficult for a senior like me to learn new things. Every time I am about to throw in the towel, your encouragement helps me overcome the obstacles and makes me keep learning. Moreover, in order to enhance my learning interest, you played many games with me such as Wordscapes and Crossword Puzzle. We have a lot of fun with them. Your kindness makes me feel warm and your open mind makes me willing to tell you my opinions. All of these put me in a comfortable setting to learn more English.


This July, I chose *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens as my first reading book in English. I know I set my goal too high. Nevertheless, "No pain, no gain." I am confident that I will finish my work well; I will not only know the story, but also get the deep meaning of this book because you are there.

All in all, you are extraordinarily good teachers. I am so lucky to have you on my English-learning journey. You are special to me. I appreciate everything you have done for me. Thank you.

Best,  
Connie



**Every time I am about to throw in the towel, your encouragement helps me overcome the obstacles and makes me keep learning.**





# Thinking Differently Brings Good Things

by Flavio D.

Thinking differently became part of my life, when after 10 years working in IT, I started to study Performing Arts. At this point my life changed for the better. I figured out that simple things can make a difference when you act. For this reason, I started to study human behavior to obtain knowledge to improve the quality of my work instead of focusing on money.

I work in performance arts and I had many different opportunities in Brazil. When I arrived in the United States in 2017 I needed to work in different jobs (as any other immigrant) that I didn't love and more for the money to survive, because people didn't know about me.


My mindset changed when after I made a show; American people gave feedback that I please adults as well kids. This made my marketing different. I began to sell myself as a circus performer to all ages which improved my income.

When I worked with rideshare, I talked to many different people about my skills as a clown. This was a way to promote my clown work to others and to improve my network. And at this point, PSC made a total difference, because it helped me with English.


Years later in 2019, I started teaching at Kinetics Art Center, circus school, and I teach many different skills to the children. And this year I have the opportunity to coordinate the juggling act at the show TENACITY.

Lastly, I am currently teaching in a variety of schools and I am more dedicated to my company Gira Circo and this makes me happy. And also I have more time available to my family.

If you think differently, you can do good things also.



**And at this point,  
PSC made a  
total difference,  
because it helped  
me with English.**



# Blessed: Part 1

by Roy D.

My father-in-law, Luis, worked at Chevron as a boilermaker/welder. He knew how to put things together! When I was 18, Luis asked me if I would like to work there. I said, "Yes!"

I had been working at Eng Brothers Wood and Metal Products. I was glad to have the job, but it had low pay, no benefits, and a cold environment. I was eager to get a better job.

The first time I went to Chevron, Luis took me to three office trailers on Chevron property and I walked into an office with him. Luis introduced me to the Chevron man who offered his hand and introduced himself. He asked what skills I had. I told him that I could do anything available. He took down my name. He was a subcontractor who did the hiring. He asked, "When can you start?" I said, "Tomorrow would be fine."

On my first day as a sub-contractor at Chevron, my eyes were open, and I was ready to learn. The senior warehouseman, Vic, met me and gave me gloves, an apron and safety glasses. Vic described my tasks as another worker performed the job. I watched the whole process, paying attention to details. Safety was a concern and steel-toed shoes were required. He

gave me steel covers for my shoes to use until I bought my steel-toed boots.

My first job was handling drums to be cleaned. I learned the techniques quickly and was soon promoted because of my good work. Some people who had done this job for a while did not get promoted.

One day, while working with the caustic drum cleaning process, an observer watched me work. He said to me, "You're doing a fine job. Do you work for the company?" Since I was working as a subcontractor, I said, "No."

Then he asked me, "Would you like to?" I said, "Yes!"

He asked me, "Do you mind if I write a recommendation?" I said, "No, not at all."

There were no job application forms to fill out at Chevron. They only wanted my personal information. My reading skills at 18 were very low. I didn't read. I'd had problems at home and couldn't focus at school. Since I was disconnected at school and at home, I tried extra hard to do well at things I chose to do outside of school and away from home.

## Blessed: Part 2

by Roy D.

When I was promoted to Head Warehouseman at Chevron, I was confident in my work, but I was anxious at meetings, dreading being asked to read anything out loud. I managed to get forms filled and documents handed in by taking them home to use a thesaurus and get help from my wife, Rose.

After getting hired by Chevron, I wanted to improve my reading skills. I wondered what it would take to help me read with confidence. I went to the Richmond Library and admitted for the first time that I needed help reading. The librarian handed me something to read, and I managed to read it. The librarian said I could read just fine. I knew that I wasn't stupid but was frustrated because others could read so easily while I struggled. I left the library frustrated.

I retired at age 53, after 34 years of service at Chevron. Eight years after I retired, I was talking to a friend in the steam room after working out. He told me that he was a tutor for Project Second Chance. For the second time, I admitted that I needed help reading.

I went to San Pablo Library and met Laura of Project Second Chance. She interviewed me and two weeks later, called to tell me that she'd found a tutor who would be a good match for me.

Three years ago, I met Julie at the San Pablo Library. We set up a schedule to meet twice a week. We got along great! Shortly after we began working together, Julie asked me if I had ever done a crossword puzzle. My answer was, "No. Never." We started a tradition to end each session by working on a crossword puzzle from News For You. Now, halfway through the Wilson Reading System, I enjoy doing crosswords at home! The puzzles have increased my vocabulary and comfort reading.

Laura suspected that I was dyslexic, and my brain worked differently than most. She invited me to a viewing of a video about dyslexia. I brought my granddaughters to see it with me. It made sense to me.

When we finish all 12 steps of the Wilson Reading System, I plan to study with Julie and earn a GED.

I feel blessed for my years at Chevron and to have the chance to work with Project Second Chance and move forward

# Being a Mother

by Hyunju O.

I want to think of my life as a mother. I wonder if I'm doing a good job or not. When my sons make mistakes or they have some problem, is my action right or not? This is the first time I'm a mother and take care of kids so I make mistakes and make problems too. But I love so much my kids, most of all in my life, and it never changes.

I never understood my mother before I gave birth. I complained many times to her because she made me angry and talked so much to me. But now I totally understand my mother, who always loved me and hoped I would have a good life and be a better person. She still hopes for me to be happy.

I really want to become a good mother to my sons and I try to raise them to be good people and have a good life like my mother hoped for me. I do my best for my sons but I think it is not enough and sometimes I regret my behavior. Most parents are like me at every moment.

When I raise my kids, I often remember my mother. She had a hard time even though I never was a bad teenager and didn't fight her. Mother's generation had a hard life and there was not enough money to raise children. My mother had a business and took care of 3 kids. Thinking about

my mother's life, my heart is broken. She sacrificed for her children and she lived as a mother and as a wife without her own life. I hope my mother will be happy and enjoy her own time now.

I regret that I didn't understand her as a mother and as a woman. I love my mother so much and I support her life.

Raising two kids is hard and many times I sacrifice my own life, but as a mother, I'm growing up too and I learn good things by raising my children.

## The Night Angel

by Ike E.

I'm in the hospital for  
Physical Rehab  
I have a lot of aides that come in  
And help me that are angels  
And then there's HILDA  
The night angel  
She comes in and goes  
Out of her way to help me  
She'll rub my shoulders  
Massage and exercise my legs  
She has beautiful dark brown eyes  
And a smile you can't see  
Only in her eyes can you see  
Her smile

# Comforting My Daughter Elizabeth


by Veronica G.

When I found that Elizabeth had a hearing problem, it was overwhelming. First, I let Elizabeth know that I was there for her. It wasn't easy to understand and process all the new information about my daughter's hearing problem. As a family, my husband and I discussed what had to be done to help and supported our daughter. We followed a pediatrician's appt, then he referred her to Children's Hospital. My husband and I took Elizabeth to her hearing evaluation at Children's Hospital.


I remember how nervous and anxious my husband and I were, that was the longest waited appointment we had ever been to and thought how we can help and support our daughter Elizabeth hearing problems. We left the hospital with many questions, and a lot of them without answers. I have been learning all new kinds of information on how I can help and support Elizabeth's hearing problems. Working as a team, I felt so much relief of stress and be supported is important. Elizabeth's audiology's name is Sarah, from Children's Hospital and Joyce is from Mount Diablo School District. They are making easier the process to work as a team. We look for Elizabeth's best ways to support her with ideas and methods that can help her with her education and have a normally life

just like other kids. I thank all teacher and professional people who work in different ways and helps Elizabeth in her daily life studies. It's crucially important for me to let her know that she is not alone, and to be prepare in all kinds of situations especially, to let her know that she can do whatever she deserves in her life.

Elizabeth you can complete any goals you want professionally in your future. Elizabeth, mommy loves you.



**I have been  
learning all new  
kinds of information  
on how I can  
help and support  
Elizabeth's hearing  
problems.**



## Oh No, It's 30!

by Ramon L.

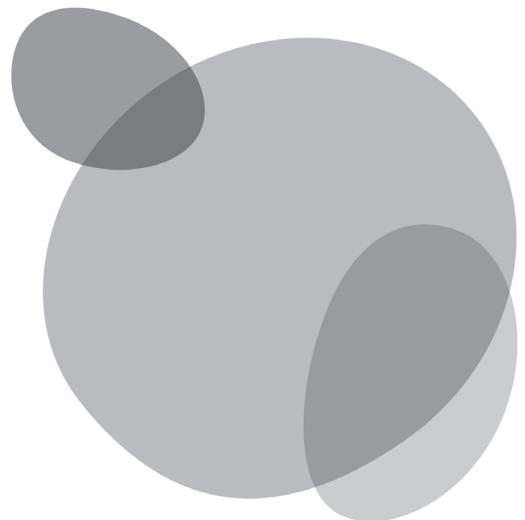
I haven't seen my cousin for 3 years, when I saw my fatty cousin walking toward me. It was a big shock to me, because he used to be thin and strong. I feel age is too cruel. We chatted with each other casually and comfortably, and I felt this guy had a lot of helpless feelings and powerlessness created by working and social pressure in this past few years. Which is what I worry about, and I anticipate that will happen to him.

"I'm not great as what I thought," he was saying to me. I felt bad for him. I knew based on Taiwan's economic situation that this few years were hard for him, he just passed 30 years old. For most young people living in Asia, 30 is a big number, people are hungry to be successful and rich. It's hard to go through it. But this is what our world is. I felt tortured by that pressure. Now it's his turn.

I brought him a book which affected me a lot. I don't know if this book will be able to change any concepts he has, but I just want to bring some useful information to him. There are some good stories in that book, written by Scott Galloway. In that book, there are entrepreneurs who started from zero. After a few unsuccessful businesses, they started businesses in the recycle industry or focused on the

insurance industry. Those industries sound boring and routine, but they became foundations of their little empires.

The message that I try to deliver is not how to be successful or rich. I want to say that most people might not have felt success when they were young, and they put their value on other people's thinking or how famous they are. That will put you in dangerous thinking, and you may make wrong choices because of this. In Taiwanese society, people admire people who have success when they are young. Under Confucianism culture, you are supposed to settle down at around age 30 in work, the family, financially. People have so much pressure at that age. I was there. I totally understand it. In my perspective, those concepts are just like chronic poison, like boiled frogs in warm water. The pressure makes some people feel they aren't good enough, and some people have to go to a psychologist because of this.





# Family Traditions

by Fidel C.

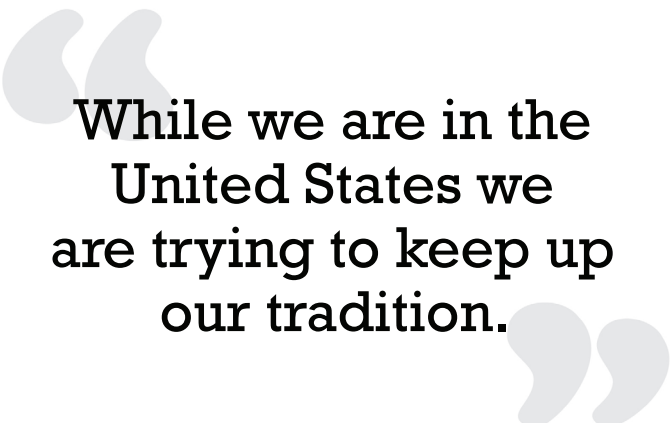
I have a huge Mexican traditional family. Our traditions were taken from a Catholic church from my hometown. We are from Tarimoro, Guanajuato, Mexico. There in Mexico all the cities or small towns have their saint or founding town anniversary to celebrate every year. And the way for us to celebrate is having a big party that involves food, music and alcohol. Also, some religious ceremonies are the most important celebrations for the people who practice the religion. In my town we have many religious celebrations during the entire year but the most important is the 29th of September.

On that day, we celebrate San Miguel Arcángel. We start on the 20th of September and finish on the 30th of September. Every single day we have music in the morning for mañanitas. At night we have a carnival all around the city for the nine days. The 29th of September is the main day. It is where people from many different villages or cities gather together in my town. There's music all day long, food all over the plaza, or downtown. At night there are fireworks to close the celebration. We also have a rodeo we call Mexican jaripeos. We have fun watching how the cowboys ride the brave bulls.

While we are in the United States we are trying to keep up our tradition. By gathering together twice a month with the small family we are trying to build in this country. We organized small celebrations but always close to our tradition. My aunt is the best cook in the world. She cooks delicious traditional food like fried gorditas, tacos, and enchiladas. Sometimes we cook birria. That's steamed goat, my favorite food for that occasion.

As a traditional family we are trying to pass on to the new generations. And keep our tradition a life for the longest we can. I see that many of my younger family members are interested in keeping all of our traditions alive, so we are doing a good job.

In conclusion, I think keeping up any tradition is good for the new generation, so they can see where the ancestors are coming from.



**While we are in the  
United States we  
are trying to keep up  
our tradition.**

## Losing My Mom

by Ehte A.

I'm glad my mom got to live to be over 100 years old.

Almost seven years ago my mother fell down and broke her leg. She could no longer walk or stand up. We didn't have a choice to take care of her in our home because she needed professional help. We decided to move her to a rehabilitation facility.

The first time I was nervous about it. I didn't know what to expect. I was happy that the rehab center was close to my house and I could visit her a few times a day. Everybody there was very nice and patient.

My mom was very nice to everyone. She always had a smile for people and she liked my tutor, Jane. I have to say thanks to Tampico Terrace, the rehab center, and also thanks to John Muir Hospital. Whenever she had a problem they helped her. And I appreciate that Megan, our current Project Second Chance program manager, sent a very nice card to us after she passed.

I miss my mom, but I always try to think about the good things and good times I had with her.

## June Fun

by Kunsang L.

Saturday all my family went to Lake Berryessa. We had so much fun. We got there around 2:00 pm. We brought three camp tents. My son put them up. We also brought a gas grill.

My daughters did some cooking and cleaning. My husband just looked at the trees and flowers. My son cooked dinner: chicken and tofu, asparagus, and tomatoes. Nice.

We slept one night. Next morning we got up at 7 am and made breakfast: eggs, tomatoes, bread, and coffee. We went swimming and we rented a motor boat on our second day.

Gas was expensive, but it was worth it. This was our first family trip since the Pandemic started. California needs water because all the grass is yellow. I got back home thinking about saving water.



# A Person I Admire

by Tamam J.


My name is Tamam. I am from Syria, and I have been here since 2014. I went to Berkeley Adult School to learn English, but I stopped going because it was too difficult to get there on public transportation. By chance, I found Project Second Chance. I'm so lucky to be a student with this project. At first I thought of this project for English speakers who never had a chance to learn how to write or read, but this project is a good opportunity for any adult who needs to learn English. I have been in this project since January. I love it, and I have learned a lot. They even encourage me to write and read stories. That's why I wanted to share my writing with you.

I would like to tell you about a person who I'm proud of and admire. She is my niece. Her name is Marah. She used to live with her mother in the capital city of Syria (Damascus). She lost her mother as soon as she started her studies at university, during the civil war. She faced money problems and difficulties, but she didn't give up and she insisted on completing her studies.


I really admire her, especially when she refused her father's family decision to go back to her countryside to live with her stepmother because in our country, girls can't live by themselves. Girls are supposed

to be with their parents until they get married. Immediately after her graduation she got a contract for five years teaching in high schools, and she was so happy and lucky. But after one year of teaching, she decided to change her career because her income was very low and didn't support her living. Right now she is studying at a law school while she teaches. She wants to be a lawyer or judge. I told her maybe it will be hard with a full time job. She said: "I'm a diligent student and hard working. I will get another bachelor's degree and become a lawyer, too."

Most of all, I hope for Marah to achieve her goals and be happy.



**She faced money problems and difficulties, but she didn't give up and she insisted on completing her studies.**



## My Daughter's Vacation

by Tahereh H.

My daughter, Fariba, who is living with family in New York, came to visit us on October 15th. This made my husband and me very happy.

The first day she arrived her father told her brothers that while Fariba is here you are invited to our home. Then my oldest son invited us for two dinners and my younger son for one night. The rest of the time we enjoyed being together.

Her father told Fariba to promise one or two times a year to come to California to visit us. Fortunately, it was a very good vacation and satisfying for her and our family. It was the most fun for us. Thanks to God we had a wonderful time!



## The City of San Pablo

by Fidel C.

When I moved to San Pablo, California, a long time ago, it was a small city and unsafe. There was a lot of crime in the city. Like looter, burglary, and car jacking. In addition the police department reputation was unacceptable and there were many crimes unsolved. By then the city has a few green parks where people can do outside activities. Like run, walk, play soccer and ride a bike. In addition the public services buildings were too old especially the city hall and the library. The streets pavement was very badly. It has had a lot of bumper holes where the cars used to get damaged.

Now times the city of San Pablo has worked hard to update the entire city. They have modified the mains streets. They look better, the pavement is nice and level. They have replaced the public service buildings for a newer and sophisticated one to serve better to the community. They also have developed a new program's to better train the police department. Now relationship with the community is acceptable. The parks are better and clean. People are happy to do outside activities. The parks are full of young boys playing soccer, the most popular sport in the city nowadays. San Pablo is a small city but is growing. Many people has been moved to live and others are coming for a visit. After all everyone are welcome.

# A Trip with Gio

by Vicky D.

In late January, 2020, my daughter and I and her dog, Gio, a little white Bichon Frise, decided to go to Virginia City, NV for the weekend. It took us 6 hours to get there from Martinez, CA.

It was a cold night, snowing, but the sky was clear with lots of stars, and that made the snow look whiter and clearer and more beautiful. Gio enjoyed walking and exploring in the snow.

We found a restaurant where pets are welcome. That was good for Gio because we didn't want to leave him by himself in the room. After dinner, we went to the casino to play a little bit!


The next day we went to church at St. Marys in the Mountains. That is the name of the church. This historic church is a famous point of interest in Virginia City. Also, we bought some Christmas ornaments that were on sale.

We went to have dinner in Reno, but we couldn't get into the restaurant where I wanted to eat because dogs were not allowed. We decided to go back to Virginia City to a place where we could bring Gio.


The next day we headed back home. On the way, we saw some Mustang horses. All the cars were stopping so that the people could watch them. Gio wanted to get out of the car to say hello. He was very curious about them.

Coming back home we drove through Lake Tahoe. It was beautiful scenery. It took us 12 hours!

I'm glad we made this trip because Gio is not with us anymore. He died in August, 2021 before we could return to Virginia City. We miss him very much.



**Gio enjoyed walking  
and exploring  
in the snow.**



# Visiting Taiwan


by Ramon L.

After 10 days quarantine, the first thing I would like to do is take a ride on my brother's electric scooter. I will go around this beautiful and small town right after I can legally leave my home, enjoy the freedom and warm wind blow on my face. This town must have a lot of change, not because there is new infrastructure, but a lot of restaurants I know all permanently shut down during pandemic outbreak in this world in these 2 years. And I would like to have fresh and nice food at a vendor or restaurant that I am familiar with. Then I can start to work on the things I want to do on my list.


I will move in my brother's house, and go visit my grandmothers, uncles and sisters, and spend as much time as I can with them. Just stay with family, even if we are doing nothing. It still gives me energy and peaceful feeling. And I will bring some flowers, coffee and dessert to my family tomb. My parents and grandfather are there. In Chinese culture, we believe people who passed away still be able to spiritually eat, so I will bring something they like. I can't wait to share a lot of my things and talk with them. I miss them so much.

The second week after my quarantine, I will also start my medical tour. I have to go to the dentist, Ophthalmologist, Orthopedist, and have my sister or uncle start my acupuncture treatment for my pelvis muscle problem. Sounds crazy right? I will spend much less time and money with high quality for me if i can do these treatments in Taiwan.

And there are so many things I want to do in the rest of my free time. I would like to play golf with my uncle, go to the local stream to do some swimming and diving, hike, and hang out with my tennis company.



**Just stay with family,  
even if we are  
doing nothing.  
It still gives me  
energy and  
peaceful feeling.**





# A Dream Trip

by Ferozan M.

I have always wished to go on a family trip to Turkey. My first choice has always been Afghanistan because that is my homeland, however, it's not a safe country due to the Taliban taking over. The reason why I chose to go to Turkey is because it's a safe Muslim country, there are lots of mosques, they have halal food, and their culture is similar to the culture in Afghanistan. Turkey is also known as a touristy country with a lot of good scenery.

I was lucky enough to go with my husband and all my four kids. After a 13 hour flight, we finally arrived at the Istanbul airport. My son had arranged a private shuttle to take us straight to our Airbnb.

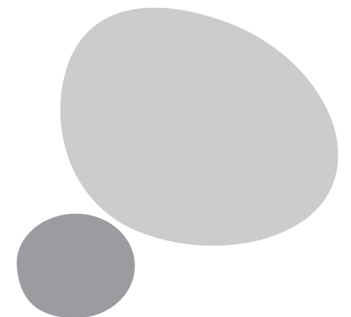
Then we went to a fancy restaurant which had delicious food. It was located on one of the tourist streets. We loved walking around there and compared their restaurants with ours back home.

We stayed in Istanbul for a week. We visited some of their palaces, mosques, museums and more. The mosques, especially, were amazing because of the extremely high ceilings, and their domes, and very beautiful writings of verses from the Quran around the dome. They were huge with thousands of people praying together. I also really liked how there were many mosques in each neighborhood.

This means that Turkish people don't have to drive 15 or more minutes to reach a mosque like we do in America. Mosques are walking distance. I was most surprised to see that there were mosques in shopping malls and even in their airport.

After a week in Istanbul we traveled to a different city called Antalya. We stayed at a hotel which was right by the ocean and all the boats. My favorite part of the hotel was that they had a private beach with a beautiful view and a free breakfast. We did a lot of activities like ATV, parasailing, and went on a tour to see a beautiful waterfall called the Duden Waterfall. We all had a great time in Antalya and the weather was perfect.

After spending two weeks in Turkey, I realized that our culture is more similar than I thought. The Turkish hospitality was similar to Afghans. The people were always helpful and friendly. Even though we all had a great time, we missed our home back in America.



# The Place Where I Live

by Parvin M.

I am living in a cozy one bedroom apartment in Walnut Creek, California with the view of beautiful Mount Diablo that I enjoy looking at. I love my apartment and its neighborhood.

Walnut Creek is a lovely, quiet city with several parks, a variety of restaurants and coffee shops. Downtown Walnut Creek is very pretty and charming. I see people enjoying their walks, talking together and shopping on weekends.

In my apartment building the people who live here come from different countries, and it's a chance for me to talk to them and learn about their cultures.

Moving from my country to the U.S. was a big decision for me. My husband had just passed away and my children were living here. They encouraged me to move here, but I didn't want to because I loved my hometown in Iran, my siblings, and my friends. Now I am experiencing a different life and living situation. I am happy to live near my children and I've also made new friends.

I love beautiful Walnut Creek and the nice American people. I appreciate that Project Second Chance has given me an opportunity to have a wonderful tutor, Jane, to help me learn about American history and American cultures, and also to improve my English. I am so thankful.

## Diamante Poem

by Lilian O.

Family

Beautiful Charming

Amazing Smiling Inspiring

Dependable Diligent Together Happy

Loving Caring Protecting

Humble Funny

Lilian

## The First Time to America

by Hyunju O.

I remember when I first came to America 13 years ago. That time was hard but everything was interesting. For example, when I went to the market I didn't understand when they offered plastic or paper bag. WHY? I never imagined I would live here. I couldn't speak English. In Korea, I had a job and family lived near my house and my life was stable for me.

The first city in America was Seattle. The first time I arrived is still vivid in my memory. The sky was gray and it was really cold. I wore a short sleeve tee and thin pants because it was early June. It was warm in my country. When I came to Seattle, my friends and family worried a lot for me because I was 8 months pregnant. My husband and I were really brave.


My life in Seattle was not bad. I had many new experiences every day and learned about a new culture. One interesting thing I found was when we took walks. Most of the people would say hello or hi even though we had never met. People don't do that in my country if we don't know each other. Americans are more friendly than I thought.

If I didn't come here I never would get these new experiences and meet some good people. I realized that we have different languages and different looks, but we can be friends.


## Environment

by Velia R.

How to actively participate in environmental protection. The first it is to preserve clean and healthy conditions in the environment. The earth is the planet on which we live. We have to teach our community how to keep our city clean. My husband and I volunteer to clean streets. We feel proud when the people stop their cars and tell us thank you very much for help. Humans don't think we need cleaner air for the next generation. We need to teach children not to throw garbage in the streets. All the animals in the ocean are dying because of so much garbage. The ocean animals suffer a lot. They eat garbage. Why don't we work together and clean up our streets. Ocean animals will disappear and they eat garbage. We need a cleaner environment for everybody to be healthy.



**We feel proud when  
the people stop  
their cars and tell  
us thank you very  
much for help.**



# Never Give Up

by Lucie S.

When I was ten-years old my Mom's friend, Maureen, asked if I would like to join Special Needs Little League. I wanted to but I was nervous because I didn't know what it was all about. After a few practices, I became more comfortable and I had fun.

Special Needs Little League Coach Doug asked me to try out for Special Olympics in summer sports. I tried out for track and swimming because I had lots of energy. I really liked the practices. Coach Doug asked us to pick a name for our team. We became the Richmond Buffaloes then as the team grew we changed our name to East Bay Buffaloes. We are now one of the largest teams in Special Olympics Northern California.

Three years ago Coach Katherine asked if I would be a team leader. There are thirty athletes on our team. I lead them in exercises for all the sports. I give them instruction and encouragement.

Today I am thirty-four years old and still competing in Special Olympics. I have won medals running in track meets and throwing the javelin. Our coach tells us to have fun and never give up, win or lose.

On the Special Olympic medal is printed the words: Skill—Courage—Sharing—Joy. The Special Olympic oath, "Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt." I love Special Olympics. It makes me happy and feel good about myself. I have made many friends in the twenty plus years I have been an athlete.

## The Eagle

by Ike E.

It was a hot summer day  
On a country road  
Driving wild and fast  
To get rid of my anger  
And frustration  
Going around a curve  
In the road  
Looking up I see an eagle  
I stopped the car  
It is quiet  
The eagle was sitting on a  
Quiet breeze drifting across the valley  
The warm sun wrapped  
her rays around me  
Filling me with warmth  
With a smile on my face  
I drove away slowly


# Never Too Late to Learn

by Connie C.


It was a beautiful afternoon. The sun was shining, the breeze was blowing, and the white clouds were floating in the blue sky. We were waiting in the classroom for our teacher, Mr. Green. He would give each of us a Medical class Terminology Certificate. We all felt elated. Five minutes later, Mr. Green came in and congratulated us. To celebrate, we had a big party and took many pictures together. All of us were proud of ourselves.

As I approached my twilight years, I was eager to learn something about health and decided to take the Medical Terminology. I heard medical terms are difficult to spell and pronounce. If you don't have good English and a medical background; it will be a big challenge. My English was not good enough; I didn't have medical background either. The big obstacle was my learning ability declining. However, I'll give it a try. If I fail, I'll not lose anything.

"The early bird catches the worm." In order to pursue my goal, I spent the whole summer reading the textbook. From it, I learned how prefix, word root, suffix, and combining form to form medical terms, and the terms are used in most medical jobs which are related to the human body, structure, function, diseases, and treatments. When the class started, I was well-prepared and able to understand the teacher's speech very well. After class, I spent a lot of time reviewing what we learned from the class. I also dedicated weekends to the homework. Mr. Green was a renowned teacher at the school and was very strict. He made an audio to teach us pronunciation. Every Monday, we had a quiz, and every other week we had to answer 100 questions on paper. Mr. Green said I was the best student in this class. I fully understand he just wanted to encourage me. My endeavors made me pass the final test with flying colors.



**I found it is possible  
to learn new  
things even  
if you are old.**



I know what I learned from that class is only a drop in the ocean of the medical field, but I found it is possible to learn new things even if you are old. All we have to do is follow your heart and make efforts.

# Shining Shoes and Playing Pool

by Roy D.

I was 12 years old when I started shining shoes on 6th and MacDonald in Richmond. It was my first job. A guy had a shoeshine stand over a juke joint. He thought it was important for me to learn shoeshine skills. The number one skill was don't ruin shoes! He taught me to "pop the rag," buff the shoes and brush the sides. I had to be careful with white laces and the two-toned shoes called Stacy Adams. I learned to finish the sides of the soles and heels with matching colors. If there was white stitching on the soles, I learned to add white pencil on the stitching. I looked forward to tips for a job well done.

The shoeshine stand was across the street from Bill's Pool Hall, which is where I learned how to play pool and snooker. It wasn't a real job, but I made money shooting pool and snooker by gambling two dollars a game. I was pretty good and still enjoy playing a good game, but I don't gamble anymore.

I enquired about the vacant two-seat, three-drawer shoeshine stand in Bill's Pool Hall. I asked Bill how much for the shoeshine stand. He told me it would cost \$25. I thought, "Wow!" because it was something I could own.

First, I asked my godfather if I could set up my new shoeshine stand in his bar, which was called Santa Fe. He agreed. Next, I had to figure out how to move the stand from Bill's Pool Hall to Santa Fe. I used my homemade scooter to move the stand from 6th Street to 4th Street.

I started my shoeshine business the next Friday night. I made \$35 on my first night and then won \$25 playing pool.

Now I play pool at the San Pablo Senior Center where there are men who remember me as a kid, shining their shoes and playing pool.

## English Class

by Nusaiba A.

English class is good  
Learning, diverse, enjoying  
Marie is special



# How Have Our Lives Changed During the Pandemic?

by Judy H.

Nowadays, probably it's too early to answer that question. However, I might as well imagine it using my speculation and imagination.

First of all, we have to face and deal with the fact of tens of tons of medical waste. This is not made of domestic garbage, but of protective clothing, medical needles, masks, test kits, and medical gloves. It is really hard to imagine how long it will take the environmental pollution caused by this medical garbage to decompose. Maybe 50 years? Or 100 years? It could take even longer.

Second of all, the social channels have been increased. During the pandemic, digital communication has been widely and frequently used for many things, including working from home, business conferences, exercise classes, dancing classes, family reunions, birthday parties, funerals, and doctor's visits. Gradually, people have realized that it's possible to do these things without infecting others, not to mention saving gas and time. Perhaps people will continue to use the digital tools afterwards.

Third, more people need psychological help and emotional help. Many families have lost their loved ones, and need emotional help. A huge number of people in the world were infected with COVID-19. And although a high percentage of people have recovered, many have been impacted in their emotional health or physical health, often requiring a long period of time for healing before they can return to normal life.

What have we learned from this unexpected experience? We have learned that people's health is not as strong as we thought. Humans can be hit and damaged by an invisible virus; it might even take people's lives.

The pandemic is gradually subsiding, so each of us should go out and move, make close contact with nature; it's the best gift from God.

Human beings receive nutrients from nature as a blessing. We must respect nature, obey nature, protect nature, and love nature, carefully using the resources that we rely upon.

## God Hear Me

by Lisa J.

I thank you every day and night.  
I am thankful I can get up morning.  
I feel happy when I go to the craft store.

I call my family for the Holiday.

I am go to take care of kids  
when they call me.

I could care of the house when  
she was sick. Went.

I like to going shopping. I have fun.

On Friday we go to play.

I went to Las Vegas for a trip to see  
my son and girlfriend.

I take care of my friend when  
she was sick and I cooked for her.

I could do it with God's help and  
his strong every day.

God gives me strong to do the job well.

I know you're going to make it. It may  
take time and hard work. You may become  
frustrated and at time you'll feel like giving  
up sometimes. You may even wonder if it's  
really worth it. But I have confidence in you  
and I know you'll make it if you try.

Never give up your dreams for  
they were meant to come true.

I have a church family.  
They are good to me.

## My Garden

by Lisa G.

Why did I start growing a garden, every  
year? To help save money on veggies. This  
is something my grandparents showed  
me and my mom how to grow a garden. I  
enjoy growing veggies and seeing things  
grow. I like sharing with family and friends.  
I always feel relax working in my garden.  
Thank you.

## I Am Poem

by Nusaiba A.

I am simple and optimistic  
I wonder if I go on vacation next year  
I hear old music  
I see myself as a good mom  
I want to visit my country

I am simple and optimistic  
I pretend that I am young  
I feel good  
I touch the sky  
I worry about my dad  
I cry when I watch movies

I am simple and optimistic  
I understand another culture  
I say God is inside me always  
I dream to be more than an RDA  
I try to speak English fluently  
I hope I can  
I am simple and optimistic

## If I Found a \$10,000 Bill?

by Eunjoo K.

Dear Aunt Kate,

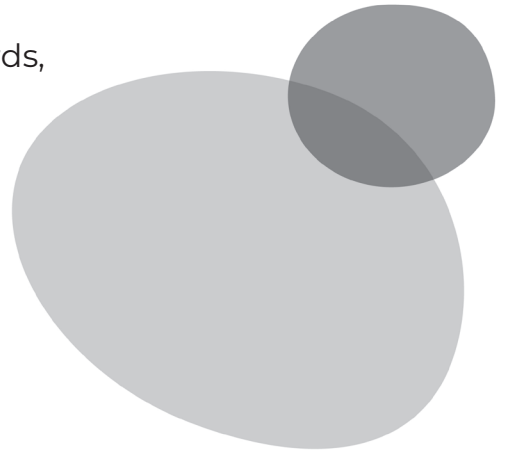
As you know, I found a \$10,000 bill in an old sock when I was cleaning out my closet a week ago. You advised me to spend the money on fun! So I have a plan. Please listen to my plan. First of all, I'll get an airplane ticket for England. You know how I love the country England. I'll stay in England to study how the English people live. I'm extremely curious about the secret of the industrial revolution in England, and where the ideas for the inventions came from.

I'm also wondering how England produced so many remarkable famous writers and how people in England enjoy reading, not using a cell phone, even while riding on the underground. So I'll drop by the cafe in Scotland where JK Rowling used to write, visit a museum dedicated about Jane Austin, and the birthplace house of William Shakespeare in England.

And I'd like to live and eat like a local person so I'll go around to talk with local people and find real English food. I'll stay and live there as long as I can. I want to stay for a certain period in a specific city then I'll move to another city to observe and feel an English lifestyle. The first city will be London and the next city will be chosen after staying in London.

My favorite fun thing is to travel to a new place so I'll spend all the money to get my new experience. I'm so happy imagining that I live in England already. Thank you for suggesting spending the money on fun. I'll tell you more after coming back from the trip. Thank you!

Best Regards,  
Eunjoo



## Volunteer for the Food Bank

by Lisa G.

I have been volunteer for five years at the Food Bank. I enjoy helping peoples that need help in the community. Because when my mom and me and my sister move to Rodeo, we needed help with food. So I look back and see how the Food Bank helped my family out. So I feel good that I can help give back to the community. Now I can help my cousins and my neighbors with foods.

# The Scarecrow

by Ike E.

It was a dark Halloween night. I heard a screech; I looked up at the moon to see a woman with a pointed hat riding a broom. Her silhouette is coal black against the pale orange moon. She yelled, “hah-hah-hah,” and pointed her finger at the ground. A bolt of lightning jumped from her finger. She disappeared from sight. The lightning bolt hit a scarecrow in a cornfield. The pumpkin head exploded. It came alive. The scarecrow gathered the pieces of his head up, he put them on his shoulders. There was fire in his eyes.

The scarecrow ran towards town. He could see the lights of the town a long way off. He traveled down the road a ways, when he heard a little meow. It was so faint he barely heard it. He looked down and saw a small kitten lying in the ditch. It was hurt. He picked it up and ran toward town, looking for help for the kitten.

He saw a farmhouse off in the distance. He started toward the house with the kitten cradled in his hand. When he got to the house he yelled, “Help the kitten.” A young boy came to the door. When he opened it and saw the scarecrow with fire in its eyes, the boy screamed, “It’s a scarecrow.” He ran back into the house and got his little brother and sister. They all ran out the back door into the cellar and locked the door. The scarecrow said in a soft voice, “help the kitten.” Then he looked in the window and saw his reflection. It scared him. He turned around and ran down the road to town.

He came upon a group of kids in Halloween costumes. The scarecrow called to them, “Don’t be afraid, I will not hurt you.” They all ran away. A tear came out of the fire in the scarecrow’s eye. He sat down on the corner. The kitten moaned. He caressed it. The kitten snuggled down in his hand. He heard a small voice. Looking around he saw a tiny girl in a Little Bo Peep costume. Coming up to him with a smile she said, “I can help. My daddy is a doctor.” The scarecrow handed the girl the kitten, putting his hand on her cheek tenderly. With a smile on his face, he then turned and disappeared into the cornfield.



# Music in My Life


by Eunjoo K.

Music can touch a person's mind and so music has a power. When a person is about to argue something, they can be peaceful if they're listening to warm and happy music.


Music has many positive sides and a few negative sides. Music makes people feel good and reduces stress and pain like a medicine. There are even music therapies to help people support their serious emotional problem. But we should be careful about hearing loss. If we listen to music for a long time by wearing earphones, we should be aware of our hearing.

My son was very stressful doing his science project last week. I could feel that he couldn't focus on his work and I couldn't tell him to calm down because he is a teenager. I just watched him what to do. Suddenly, he went to the downstairs straight his piano. He was into the piano playing with his favorite songs aggressively. It took 10 minutes to be back to his normal temper. I realized that music is like a calm medicine.

I love Cannon Variation for piano, violin, and cello. When I feel depressed in my journey, Cannon Variation makes me feel better and gives me positive motivation and energy. When I've been to an orchestra performance at a concert hall, I can unify my body and mind with live orchestra music. I can enhance my soul, have an open mind, and release stress. Also, I can focus better on my life than before. Therefore, listening to music is a necessary thing and enriches my life.



**Music makes  
people feel good  
and reduces stress  
and pain like a  
medicine.**



# Budae-jjigae

by Joo C.

Most Koreans have eaten Budae-jjigae. When I lived in Korea, I lived without cooking. However, in the United States, restaurants that sell Budae-jjigae were too far away and the ingredients were different, so it was not easy to get the same taste. I made Budae-jjigae for myself and my husband who is not a fan of kimchi, but he really liked Budae-jjigae. Some people call it Johnson-Jjigae because American President Johnson ate it when he visited Korea, or Korean Army Stew, but I think it should be called Budae-jjigae as a proper noun.

Budae-jjigae has a heartbreaking food history. After the Korean War, Korea was so poor that there was nothing to eat. My grandparents' generation did not lose hope even in difficult circumstances, and worked diligently to overcome this difficulty. People found food ingredients everywhere. Budae-jjigae is a food made by mixing canned foods from the US military camp with Korean seasonings and kimchi. Now, Korea has developed into an economically powerful country, but people still enjoy eating Budae-jjigae. This is because Budae-jjigae is a delicious food that strangely blends East and West.

I want to share how to make Budae-jjigae.

1. Rinse the rice 3 times (save the water from the 3rd rinsing (ssaltteumul)). Then cook the rice in the rice cooker.

2. Heat up the pot (about 5L)
3. Put kimchi and kimchi soup in a heated pot.
4. Add rice water(ssaltteumul) or water.
5. Cut the sausage, steak ham, and spam into bite-size pieces and add them.
6. Add the cut tofu.
7. Add the cut mushrooms.
8. Put 3 tablespoons of guk-ganjang (soy sauce), one tablespoon of sugar, and one full tablespoon of ssamjang.
9. Chop the green onions and add them.
10. Boil it until it tastes good.

Lastly, you enjoy eating Budae-jjigae with freshly cooked sticky rice.

Korean people have a little different recipes for their family. Some people put in ramen noodles, canned beans, or cheese. My grandparents' generation invented a new food to keep their children from starving, and my generation is not ashamed to introduce this food to the world. This food is the food of our grandparents' hard work and sacrifice, and it is a harmonious food that reflects their creativity. There are many traditional foods in Korea, but I recommend this dish to you with meaning. As Koreans, we live without forgetting the history of war.

Watch how to make Budae-jjigae:

<https://tinyurl.com/2p8nupz8>



# A Fig Tree

by Wenman L.

I bought a fig tree in July last year. The tree was small and I could easily count how many leaves were hanging on four tiny young branches. I didn't expect for any figs.

I was fond of to see the growing tree. I discovered that the surface texture of the leaves is rough. After two months, a small bud, the size was like a pea popped out in silence. And then, another week or two, a new bud in half size of a pea was next to the first one. I was ecstatic with the new discovery and I smiled like a pure innocent child. I couldn't find words to describe the great joy at that moment. They were not just buds; I could see the life, beauty, energy, and power in them.

Counting the buds was another pleasure. The tree produced about 10-15 figs in the first year. They were very fresh, sweet, and juicy. Near November, the leaves started turning to beautiful yellow color. Around Christmas, all the leaves were gone. The young trunk looked like a sugarcane. All winter, I didn't water the tree because I over watered in the beginning months. One of my friends told me that trees don't need to water every day, vegetables do.

February, it is springtime by Chinese lunar calendar. All things come back, so will my tree. I was eager to see if there are any new changes. It is the end of February, but nothing. The bare tree stayed there quietly and still enjoyed its tranquility. I was a little worried about my tree taking a long break. I went to see fig trees around neighborhood and I found out that their trees were in the same state. I felt much better.

I think my tree will begin to grow in March.

It was my first planting experience and I felt like that I was growing up with a tree. I went to see her almost every day and talk to her too. I am profoundly impressed by how a small new life begins, and it is one of my favorite memories.

**I was ecstatic with  
the new discovery  
and I smiled like a  
pure innocent child.**

## I Would Like To Be

by Cecilia A.

I would like to be sun and  
the earth warm up.

I would like to be the moon and  
the dark light up.

I would like to be a star and  
shine in the sky.

I would like to be a rainbow and  
the promise to show.

I would like to be a cloud and  
float in the air.

I would like to be a river and  
the sea to fill.

I would like to be a wave and  
dance on the sea.

I would like to be a seagull and  
cross the horizon.

I would like to be a breeze  
in the summer to cool down.

I would like to be a little bird and  
a melody to sing.

I would like to be food and  
hunger to satisfy.

I would like to be a laughter and  
make the sadness to go away.

I would like to be a thousand things  
but most of all, I would like to be  
a being without vanity.

## Having Fun in Our Gardens

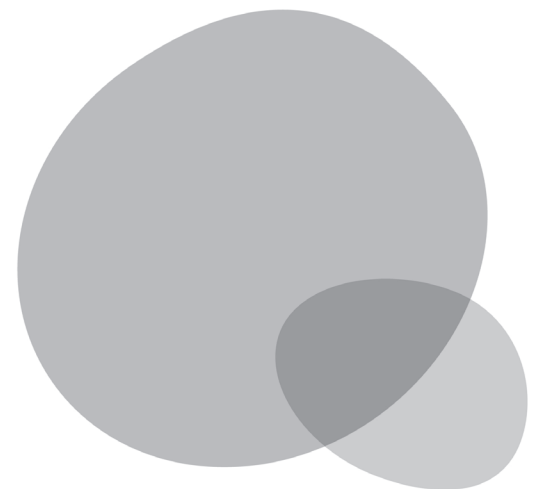
by Mary F.

I am going to teach you how to grow sweet potatoes. The best time to plant sweet potatoes is in the month of May or June.

Put a sweet potato in a sunny place in your house for three weeks until it grows sprouts. You cut the sprouts from the sweet potato and you plant the sprout in soil. You can use a pot or the ground. I grow my potatoes in a plastic bag because it is easy to take care of them. Water the plant every other day. If the soil is dry, then water the plant a little more.

It takes about three to four months for the potatoes to grow. Use a tool to poke in the dirt to see if the potatoes are there.

I taught my son how to grow sweet potatoes and he is growing them now. I hope you will try and have a good crop.





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