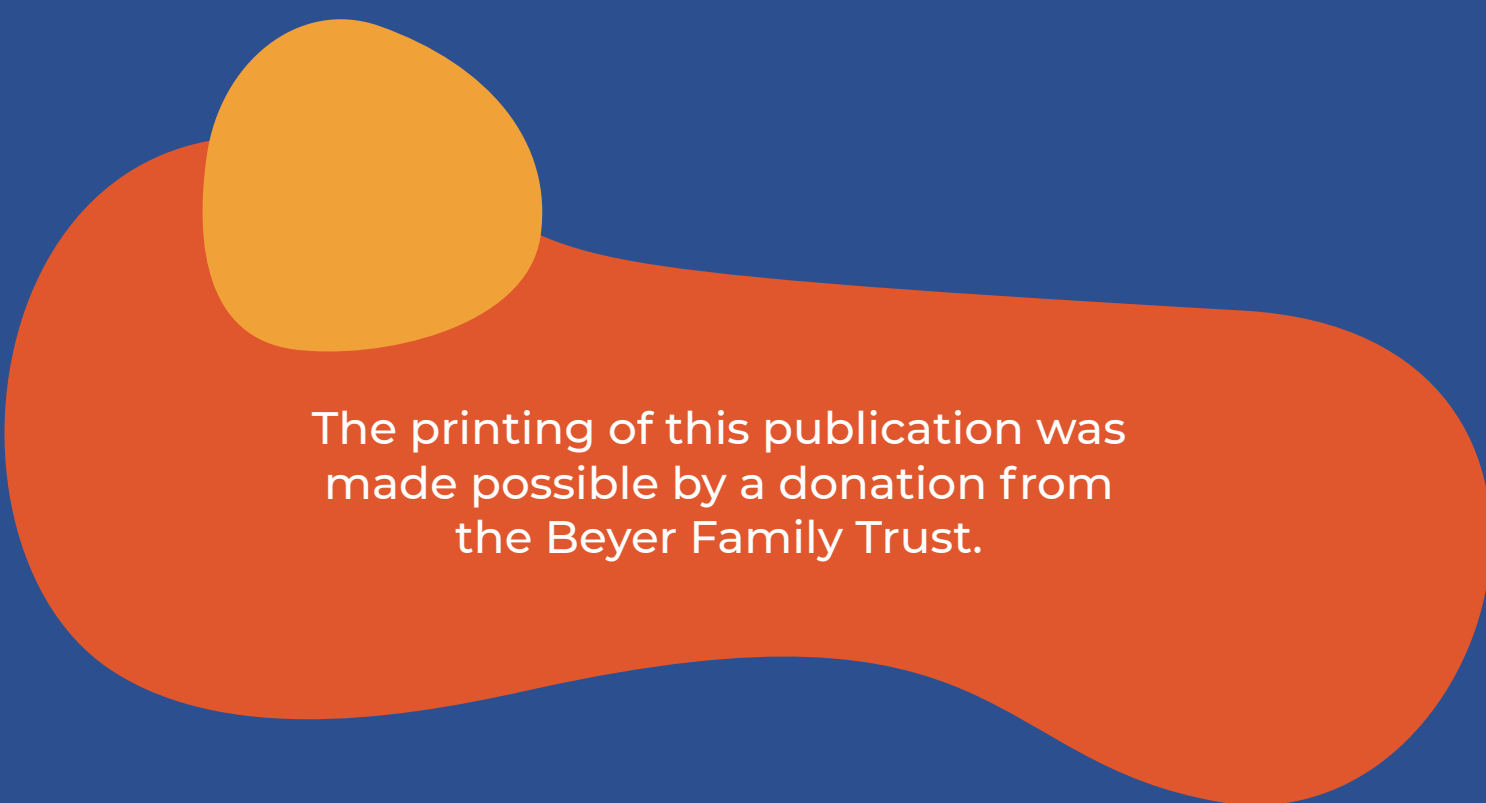


In Our Words

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

VOLUME TEN

An abstract graphic design featuring a solid blue background. In the upper left, there is a large, irregular orange shape. Overlapping the top-left corner of this orange shape is a smaller, smooth, yellow circle. Centered within the orange shape is a block of white text.

The printing of this publication was
made possible by a donation from
the Beyer Family Trust.

In Our Words Volume Ten

This issue of In Our Words is dedicated to the memory of Ike E., poet. Helen Beyer tutored Ike for over 30 years. Their work together formed the foundation of this publication. He will be greatly missed by PSC staff.



I've lost a good, kind friend. We've all lost a good, kind friend. I worked with Ike for many years—publishing his poetry, working on spelling and writing. He eventually gained the confidence to open and discover the help and wonders of a dictionary.

I thought of Ike as the “Teddy Bear Man.” He would give little teddy bears to anybody. He loved to give them to little children, of course asking parents’ permission first. But he also cherished giving them to the elderly. One time was particularly special when he gave a teddy bear to an elderly lady in a wheelchair who looked rather sad. He said she just beamed with a smile and a tear.

Ike showed me the courage it takes to step up and ask for help with a very delicate and personal problem. I guess sometimes the tutor is the learner.

Ike was unique and will be missed by many. He is with Wanda now.

—Helen Beyer

Please enjoy some of Ike’s poems chosen by Helen on page six.

Along with Helen, Project Second Chance thanks all the other tutors who’ve worked days, months, or years helping their learners gain the skills and confidence to write the wonderful stories you’ll find in this issue.

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Special thanks to the wonderful tutors below who supported and coached
their learners on writing the stories in this issue.

Amy Abele
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Bev Farrell
Bonnie Yee
Britney Davis
Carmen Ochoa
Carole Taunton
Connie Forrest
Cynthia Ding

Elaine Kociolek
Helen Beyer
Jane Copps
Julie Haselden
Leslie Satin
Lisa Cline
Marc Hanson
Marie Delahaye

Marilyn Lloyd
Max Shoka
Mikko Rogers
Sandy Burnett
Sindy Munson
Susie Thompson
Trina Hodges
Vicki Magstadt
Wendi Li

The Lady and the Teddy Bear

by Ike E.

I was in the store getting Teddy Bears
You see, I give away Teddy Bears to
Kids and older ladies
I saw an older lady in an electric wheelchair
She looked kind of sad
When I got to the checkout
I had bought 20 Teddy Bears
The lady and her son were right behind me
She was behind her son
I got a Teddy Bear, walked over to her
And gave her a Teddy Bear
She said, no, you have someone to give it to
I said, no, I have 19 of them to give away
She pulled the Teddy Bear to her heart
And said with a smile
I haven't had a Teddy Bear in a long time

What is a Tutor

by Ike E.

A tutor is a person who has a good mind,
The patience of a saint,
A passion for learning,
A passion for teaching,
A gift for giving,
A sense of humor.
A tutor has big heart.

Red "F's"

by Ike E.

In my younger days in school I was illiterate
I had a hard time learning
And so I got a lot of Red F's
They haunted me all the way through school
The Red F's made me feel like I was falling
Down a black hole of illiteracy
Every time I turned around there was a Red F
In my later life I found a tutor and then I
found literacy
One day when we met my tutor pulled out a
red pen
To highlight some of my work
I almost had a heart attack
And threw my arms up in the air and yelled
NO RED F!!!!!!
He explained there is no grade but he put
down the
Red pen and never picked it up again
I finally got rid of the **Red F's !!!!!**



Strength of an Eagle

By Martha S.

PSC: it's been quite some time since I last spoke with you due to surgery. During that time I never gave up hope to improve in my reading. I'm not where I want to be but I am not where I use to be.

I would like to thank the staff, directors, and special thanks to the teachers who volunteer their precious time to help a person like me to reach their dreams. Every teacher I've had always spoke encouraging words and inspiring me and giving me hope. You teachers are really doing a great service for people such as myself. I wish I would have known about this program years ago. I probably would've been tutoring or something in that capacity.

If I know of anyone struggling with reading I would definitely refer them to PSC. It's very embarrassing not knowing how to read. The crows like to make fun and make you feel less than. I got rid of those darn crows once I found PSC. And come to find out they weren't fluent readers anyway. I told one crow that I was going back to school and they said at your age!!! And I replied, "You should come with me."

In closing, for those who are starting or may want to start PSC, Do it for yourself and don't throw this opportunity away. At first it maybe rough, but these days will PASS and it will become easier. "THE EAGLE" is still soaring through the sky. And I met a lot of other eagles from PSC. These eagles thank PSC for our joy.

Please find and read the poem, *Never Let Go of Hope* by Jancarl Campi.

Project Second Chance Contra Costa County Library

by Velia R.

How Project Second Chance help me. First, I would like say thank you to Project Second Chance for finding me a very good tutor, Carmen. She has patience to explain to me words I don't understand. The project is the best program they have, and I enjoy my classes, too much. This program is beautiful. I don't know how to explain how much it helped me. I can read much better, and I understand my reading. I am also learning to write sentences. The place for me is the library and reaching my life range goals.

Mother

by Hamid T.

Mother is the most beautiful word in the English language. Mother is an image that represents a home of comfort with a warm and kind heart to take care of the family. Recently the British Council surveyed more than 40,000 people in over 100 countries in the world. They voted the most beautiful word was mother.

My mother was so young when she married. She raised ten healthy and happy kids. I was in the middle. She never discriminated between us. She treated us exactly equally. She didn't punish us physically, only she made us scared of God and said that God doesn't like you if you do something wrong. She was moderately religious.



Here's a story about my mother's kindness: One day long ago, my mother and I were walking to see our nearby neighbor. On our way I saw a young and neat stray dog. I asked my mom to let me pet the dog. We were in a hurry, my mother let me pet the dog. After a minute or two I said goodbye to Dogi (I named it Dogi) and we resumed walking. After a short while, I checked behind me, I saw that Dogi was behind me and was wagging its tail. I asked my mother to let me keep Dogi. I said it has no place to live. My mother thought about my request and then she said, where do you want to keep it? I said, in the yard. My mother thought again and she said, on one condition. I said, just let me keep it. I will accept any condition. She said, promise me to take good care of it. I promised her that. We didn't go to see the neighbor. I thanked her many many times. We went to the pet store and bought some dog food and returned home. Dogi lived with us until his death. This kindness was one of the many my mother had done for us.

We lost our mother 15 years ago. I will never forget her as long as I live.

Thanking My Tutor

by Benjamin G.

I have been tutoring with Sindy for three months. I'm happy to have found Sindy to help me improve my English and writing. I thank Laura from PSC for working with me in finding a tutor. I have committed myself to learning English, reading, writing, and improving my computer skills. I am El Salvadorian and I have lived in the United States for twenty-eight years. I enjoy cooking and I have written two recipes, one on how to cook fish and the second recipe was on how to cook El Salvadorian beef soup. This was the first time I wrote a recipe. Below I have included my recipe for my homemade El Salvadorian beef soup. I hope you try my recipe for beef soup. Enjoy my recipe.

Ingredients:

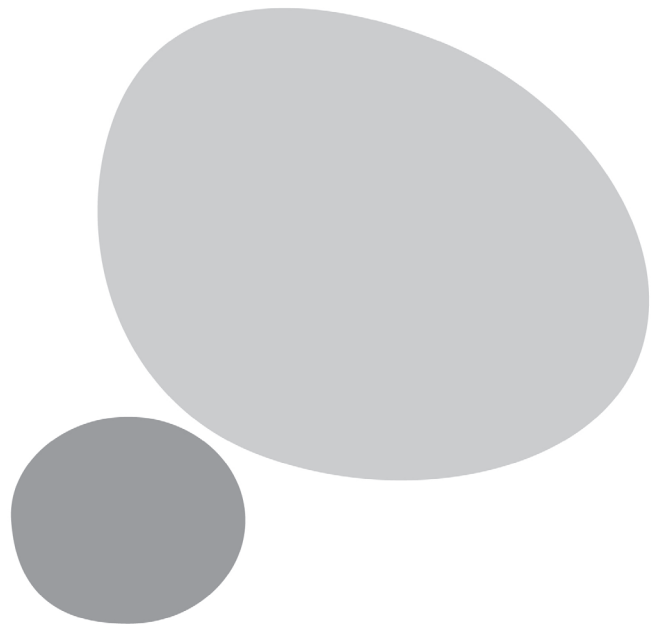
2 pounds of beef
1 gallon of water
2 chayote
2 diced tomatoes
3 diced carrots
1 chopped onion
½ pound green bean
3 chopped celery stalks
1 chopped chili pepper (use any chili pepper of your choice)
2 teaspoons of salt
½ pound chopped cabbage
¼ pound chopped lettuce
2 ears of corn cut in three pieces

Optional for topping:

1 lemon
1 cup of cilantro

Steps:

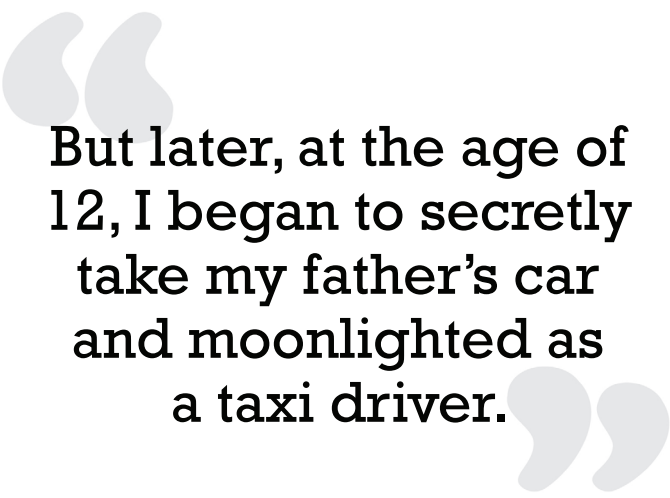
Add all ingredients into a large pot and bring to a boil. Turn down the stove and let it simmer for one hour. Serve in a bowl and squeeze half a lemon and sprinkle with cilantro and serve while hot.



First Driving Experience

by Vadym K.

My first driving experience (in Ukraine) was at the age of 11. My father taught me on a deserted road in his own car. The first feelings were not so good. I was afraid of the speed and the responsibility for the car because everything depended only on me. But later, at the age of 12, I began to secretly take my father's car and moonlighted as a taxi driver. Once the neighbors noticed that I was taking my father's car and called him about it. It was late autumn and sometimes it snowed. I managed to put the car in the garage before the snow began to fall and before my father returned. My father was very surprised that there were no tracks in the snow in front of the garage, but the engine was still hot. Later I confessed everything to him, and we laughed for a long time about how I outsmarted him that evening.



But later, at the age of 12, I began to secretly take my father's car and moonlighted as a taxi driver.

Storytime at the Contra Costa County Library

by Velia R.

My granddaughter, and I enjoy story time on Thursday from 11am to 12pm. When I tell her it is time to go to school she gets happy. She has long hair, and I tell her I need to comb your hair and she brings me all the stuff. She likes to participate in her class, when the teacher asks, "who wants to roll the dice," Mia raises her hand, "me me!" My granddaughter, Mia, is 3 1/2 years old. Her favorite song is "wheels on the bus." She likes to play with other children. Sometimes, she doesn't like to share toys, but she is learning little by little. My husband and I take care of Mia from Monday to Friday. Our grandchildren make our lives happy.

Grandma and Me

by Lucie S.

Everyday after school, I went straight home to be with my Grandma. Mother felt it was not safe for Grandma to be left alone while she went off to work. Grandma and I kept each other company. I kept a watchful eye on her.

I learned to use my calming voice talking with Grandma. She could be very stubborn. It would take patience to persuade Grandma to go along with what was the best and safest for her. I always walked with Grandma. She could wander off.

My Grandma collected books. She went to the library book sale and brought home bags of books. She loved to read her books and the daily newspaper. She snatched the paper to read the comics before my Dad came to the breakfast table. He teased her about pulling the paper apart. She was happy for the attention. For a treat, we went to McDonalds. When I got up to go to the ladies room, I came back to the booth to find my French fries were gone. I asked Grandma if she ate them. She denied it but I knew she had. She could be so sneaky and play tricks in her funny way.



I learned many life skills from my years with Grandma that I use in my job. I work with special needs babies and toddlers. It is necessary to have a watchful eye, patience, sense of humor, respect and playful laughter. I miss my Grandma.

The Story of My Life

by Vicky D.

Life is very interesting to understand how it changes day by day and year by year.

I remember very well when I left my family behind in Guatemala. It was on April 7, 1961, when I came to the USA by myself to work and live with a wonderful and kind family. I didn't speak English, but I understood a little bit. We used sign language to communicate. In the beginning, it was hard for me to adjust to a new life with my new family. I had to learn a new culture, to learn English, to use all kinds of electric appliances, and also I had to learn to drive. I saved money to buy a used car to go to school on my days off.

Seven years later, I met my husband Robert in a Mexican restaurant in San Francisco, CA. Two years later, we got married in Redwood City, CA in a Catholic church, Mountain Carmel. That was the beginning of my new life! God blessed us with three children: Alfred, Robert, and Lorena. My husband worked hard to support his family.

In 1970, we moved to Martinez, CA where we raised our family. I was very happy to be a housewife.

We enjoyed watching our two sons playing baseball in a little league and taking Lorena to her music practice. We always did family things together, until my husband got very sick. I lost him when two of our children were teenagers.

It was very hard for me to be a single mom, and it was hard for the children to not to have the support of their father. Thank God I kept my family together!

I worked two jobs. My children continued with their education, while each one also had a part time job. Now they have their own family.

So this is the third part of my life. When I retired, I went to adult school to improve my English. Then I found Project Second Chance. That is the best gift God has given me. All the staff at PSC are very friendly and helpful, and my tutor is a great teacher!

My Journey into the Unknown

by Laura A.

I was born in Guerrero, Mexico. It is small and quiet. The food is very fresh because the people make everything. My Grandma's house had an apple, orange, papaya, guava and pomegranate trees. She also raised chickens, pigs and cows. When I was eight years old we moved to Mexico City. It was a big change because the city was noisy and had many fast cars. We moved so my parents could work and buy us clothes, shoes and toys. It was difficult in school because the language was different from Guerrero. I was happy to move in with my parents. And finally, I love Mexico City.

When I married I moved again from Mexico City to the United States. It was a very big change again because I had to learn another language. It was a little sad because I miss my family—my parents and my sisters. Otherwise, I'm happy because I had my son here and they have better opportunities. I'm also happy because I learn more English and I love Project Second Chance because they help people. I like this country because it is more safe, too. And I can help my family in Mexico. I wish I can go back to visit my family in Mexico City and Guerrero. Right now I love to travel everywhere and I know the places around here.

My Journey

by Lisa G.

I started with Project Second Chance five year ago. I have learned a lot! On my journey of reading and writing, I feel real good about myself. The program has helped me with reading at work about sales prices. I learned the alphabet and now I can work in the pharmacy. So the patients' last names. Now I can file the prescription for the patients and help the pharmacy. I work at the Drugstore. The name is Rite Aid. I'm the cashier in the Front of the store. I have been with Rite Aid for thirty one years, that is a long time!



Clown and Immigrant

by Flavio D.

My immigrant life started 6 years ago, when I arrived in America with the dream to show my clown skills to different cultures and people that live in California and other states. A lot of people said to me that in America people don't like clowns, so for me to make a living just working as a clown would be impossible.

The figure of the Clown in America is used in horror movies or pranks, so people when they see a clown, remember it as negative. In Brazil people when they see a clown, the feeling is pleasant and clowns are very welcome in many places like parties, hospitals, and companies. I know clowns are funny, generous, friendly and good listeners.

The first years I had a lot of difficulty with clients understanding my job, but I didn't give up, I persevered. I knew that it would be hard but it is my mission in America to show that clowns are good people.

Today my main income comes from my clown job.

I am telling this story to show everybody that if you want something and you work hard for your goals, you can do it. Everything is possible.

"Impossible seems impossible until it is done." —Nelson Mandela

"Impossible is just a matter of opinion."
—Chorão (Brazilian singer)

I keep doing it with my clown shows.



American Experience, Part 1

by Hyun Jin K.

I finally arrived at Walnut Creek. We went to a restaurant nearby before we unpacked our luggage. It was our first time going to a restaurant in the USA, "Black Bear." We thought "America is definitely hamburger!" We ordered two hamburgers, salad, and a pancake. When we were served food, we shouted "Oh, my god!!" We just thought hamburgers like the Mcdonald. But the hamburger size was so big, other food sizes were so big too. Even the pancake was like a pizza.

America is so huge country. And cars, houses, even food are all huge to me. I am trying to write about my feelings in America.

I think Americans are so kind. Their faces are full of smiles. The store clerks are never embarrassed by my poor English and show kind reactions. When I see each other while passing by, they always smile and give way to pass first, and hold the door with consideration behind passenger. Their kindness makes me more comfortable in unfamiliar America.

On the day of Martin Luther King, my family watched a movie about him. We talked about the history of America and history of discrimination, and about the problems of discrimination left in modern society. I asked my kids "Have you ever seen it at school?" My kids replied, "When are the times they are racist? That's ridiculous." I know that there is still a problem of racism in modern society. But in Walnut Creek where I live, I feel infinite gratitude and pleasure that we didn't experience racial discrimination.

When I arrived here first, I took the taxi to Walnut Creek from the airport. I said to the taxi driver it was okay to go slow. It seemed so fast. I thought I met a rough taxi driver unfortunately. But I noticed all cars in the freeway was running so fast. It was like a car race. They drove without hesitation and changed their road lane. But I became aware that there was no car racing driver in Walnut Creek while staying here. They keep stop signs incredibly well, drivers always wait passenger with consideration. It is very impressive to me. Because in Korea, when crossing the street without a signal, there is a lot of timing game. American driver even has a nice hand gesture and smile. But their race begins again, only on the freeway.

American Experience, Part 2

by Hyun Jin K.

Tip culture in America is really difficult to me. I always have to make a calculation how much is 15% or 18% of my food price. I sometimes think if service is bad, it is really okay I don't need to tip? It gives me a headache to think about it. How their service accurate? It might be because of that, the server is always kind. They give water in my cup while I am eating. Even though my cup is still full of water. They always ask me how is taste when my eating is finished. If that food is bad, "it is okay" I reply honestly to their smiling faces. I always feel pressure I always give an answer "good" and tip.

After my kids went to public school, I was sent an email about donations. Why did a public school ask for money? Isn't a public school run by all taxes? It passed because I didn't know about that. Again donation mail! Again pass! Again donation email! And then, I went to the Ice Cream Social day at the school for the first time. There were many volunteer parents, donation booths. I thought it was more like a local festival than a school event. After participating in several school events, I thought that donation is not an unfair pressure, but an educational culture that is created together. I sometimes see donation advertisements all around the city. Donation was just for poor people to

me, now, I think it is a mature culture to invest my time and money in something that I value to make it more valuable and share it with others. This class that I am learning English also receives volunteers, so I am very grateful.

It is just my experience for 6 months in America and most is just in Walnut Creek. But it makes me think of how America changes. To me, I just think America is a huge country and the strongest in the world. But Walnut Creek gave me America on Halloween when they put chocolates in front of their house gate for kids, some houses are decorated with funny decorations on Thanksgiving, the house has a cozy fireplace and carpet, and a clean sky and warm sunshine. This place is cozy, sweet and warm. It makes me happier, kind. I'm looking forward to the rest of my America life.



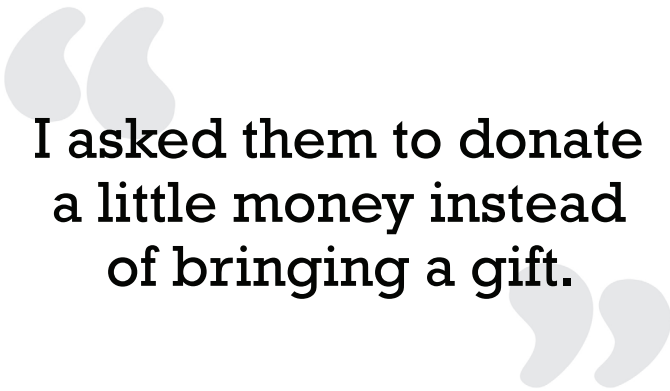
A Story of Generosity

by Ehte A.

I would like to tell you a short story about my home country, Iran. I love my country, but there are problems, and some laws are very different from the laws in the U.S.

One of the laws is about money. If a person owes money to a bank or an individual, but they cannot afford to pay back the money, he or she must go to prison until the debt is paid. I think that law doesn't make sense. How can they pay off their debts if they are in prison? I was really worried about the poor people in prison and their families, so I decided to do something to help.

If you are invited to a friend's home for dinner, it's an Iranian custom to bring a small gift to the hosts, such as candy or flowers. I bought a piggybank, and when my guests came to my home I asked them to donate a little money instead of bringing a gift. After a while I saved up more than \$7,000.



I asked them to donate a little money instead of bringing a gift.

When I went to Iran in the summer of 2022 to visit family, I brought the money in my piggybank. I went to the prison in my hometown and met with the prison supervisor and asked for the list of prisoners who owed the least amount of money. This way I could free more people with the amount of money that I had. I reviewed the list that the supervisor gave me and selected the people who were heads of their households. With the money that was saved I was able to pay the debts of seven prisoners, plus pay for the surgery of the child of one of those prisoners.

Before I left for home, the prison supervisor asked my brother and me to come to his office. There were several prison staff members there, and they gave us a certificate of appreciation. They also gave us handmade items from some of the prisoners that were released.

I am very thankful for the donations from my friends and family, without which this would not have been possible. Because of their generosity, seven prisoners are free from prison and are back with their families, and that makes me very happy.

Chocolate and Jack Rabbits

by Roy D.

There was a candy factory that made chocolate on Ohio Street in Richmond.

I was 8-years old and was walking in a field behind the factory so that my two dogs could chase the jack rabbits there. Those rabbits had long bodies and tall ears. They were bigger than any regular rabbit. They reminded me of a cross between a rabbit and a kangaroo.

While the dogs were chasing rabbits, I discovered a tray behind the building. It was full of chocolate from them draining the lines.

I got the idea to cut some of the blocks of chocolate with my pocketknife. It was like a giant candy bar except that it was harder, but it melted a little in my hand. It was messy but good.

On my way home, I was alone because my dogs were still chasing the rabbits. A group of boys saw me, and I could see by the look in their eyes that they were up to no good. As they got closer to me, they started saying, "Hey! What are you doing?" They crossed the street toward me, and my dogs showed up. My dogs got between us and there were no longer any problems. The boys crossed the street, and I went home with Bullet and Champ.

While the dogs were chasing rabbits, I discovered a tray behind the building. It was full of chocolate from them draining the lines.



Boxing

by Roy D.

I was 25 the summer of 1980. After a day shift, I got home early and watched boxing on TV. I thought, "I can do better than that." I looked in the Yellow Pages for "Boxing Gym". I appeared to be confident and courageous but didn't feel it. Hindsight tells me that I needed to overcome the negativity and insults from my father and school. I thought boxing would help me gain confidence and courage.

The nearest boxing gym was in Oakland. I took BART and walked 1 ½ blocks to the 2-story building and went up the stairs to the second floor. I remember the stink in the hallway! I walked into the gym and heard speed bags and jumping ropes. The gym had all colors and ages from teens to 30s.

A trainer asked me, "You here to box?" I said, "Yeah." He suited me up for my first time in a ring. The bell rang for a 3-minute interval. My sparring partner was a big guy. Not one minute later, I was on my butt. The club owner said, "Son, what are you doing in there?" The trainer said it was ok. Turned out the big guy in the ring with me had ranked #10 in the Light Heavy Weight division.

The owner, Archie Moore, called Tiger Floyd, called his son, Carl, a middle-weight trainer and former champ. Carl taught me how to stand, punch, balance and shift weight. How to bow and weave. He taught me defensive and offensive punching.

Carl was a really good trainer. He would show me movements in slow motion and tried to hit me, showing me how to duck and block. Later the movements got faster. My training started with four three-minute reps of jumping rope and worked up to sets of 12-minutes. Ten months later, I jumped rope non-stop for 60 minutes. My weight went from 189 to 153 in 8 weeks. My wife thought I was crazy. But I was motivated because I'd never felt so good and so strong.

I got to the point where I was an exceptional boxer and could have qualified as a professional. But I didn't want to hurt anybody and knew I could. I felt that I'd accomplished what I wanted. I overcame my fears and felt confident in my abilities in and out of the ring.

A Motorcycle Accident Changed My Life

by Roy D..

In 1989, before helmet laws, I had a 1978 Harley Davidson. I was preparing to drive my motorcycle to a family picnic. My 14-year-old daughter wanted to ride with me to the picnic. Her mom said, "Absolutely not!"

I went alone on my bike. As I approached 7th and Pennsylvania in Richmond, a fire engine with sirens on crossed in front of me. As it left, I was clear to continue. Just as I took off, a Camaro made a left turn in front of me. My bike T-boned the car. I flew onto the car's roof and rolled off. The car kept going. It was hit-and-run.

In those days, I had a lot of energy and was always in a hurry. But that accident was unavoidable.

I was rushed to John Muir Trauma Center with injuries and a concussion. While I was in the hospital, I was grateful. I got sentimental, cried out to the Lord, and thanked Him that I was still around. The fourth day after the accident, I came home from the hospital with my jaw wired shut. My jaw was broken in 3 places, and I sucked food through a straw for 4 months. I lost 40 pounds.

I still had anger for whoever hit me. One sunny day I stepped outside to enjoy the sun. I looked to my left and saw the Camaro that was described as the one that had hit me. It had a dent just as if it had hit a motorcycle. I called my wife, "Rose! Get my keys!" I wanted to drive over and get the license plate number. I was still recovering from the accident. My heel, my ribs, my hands and face all hurt. By the time I got there, the Camaro was gone. I was too late.

I went home and got emotional, thinking, "I survived! I have life!" I felt a change of heart. I was no longer angry and was thankful that I could move. I was loving life and felt I had a second chance.

I was so grateful that I went to the Hilltop Community Church and when they had an altar call, I answered.



The Taste of Karate Sport

by Hamid T.

I was 25 when I accidentally saw one of my old classmates on the street. We were good friends in the last 2 years in high school. After finishing high school we didn't get a chance to see each other until that day. We were kind of excited. It has been seven years since we last saw each other. We both asked, what did you do after high school? He said, "I went to military service for two years and I work in a good company and get a good pay now." I told him I went to college for two years then I started my own business. After we chatted for a while I asked him, "how do you spend your spare time?" He told me that he had been going to karate club for two years. Then he asked me the same question. I said, "I do a little bit of everything which means nothing particularly." He asked me if I would like to come to the karate club? I said, "how many times a week do you go?" Three days a week and two hours for each session he said. I thought for a few seconds and said, "I like to go." We made an arrangement to go to karate club. I bought a karate suit with a white belt. This event kept me busy for two good years, meanwhile, I got a brown belt. If I had stayed a year longer I would have gotten a black belt.

The only reason I left the club was because of my job. I really love this sport. I think participating in any kind of sports, especially sports, that give you self-confidence and self-defense are the best hobbies for free time.

My Name is Cecilia

by Cecilia A.

On April 22, 2022, I went to the Ygnacio Valley Library in Walnut Creek and I saw a sign about Project Second Chance (PSC). I took a picture of the sign and I gave them a call to find out how the program worked. I was very excited the day I met with Megan. She explained to me everything about the program and after a test she told me she would find an English tutor for me. She found someone to help me to get the confidence that I needed with my English. How lucky I was to have met my tutor Britney D. She is very enthusiastic and positive. I would like to thank Project Second Chance and each volunteer for the amazing job they are doing. Now that I know about PSC, I will be giving their information to my friends.

My Surprise Gift Named Charley

by April W.

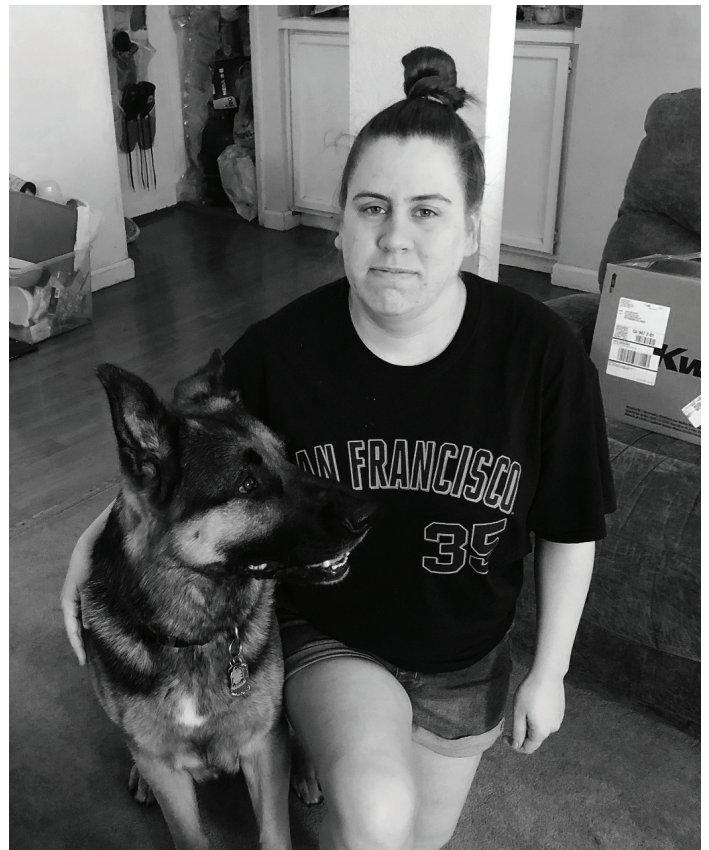
My dog Charley is a male German Shepherd my husband found on Craig's List. Charley was a surprise gift from my husband. I was not expecting to see a dog when I went with my husband to pick Charley up. Charley was a little puppy when I got him and he has been living with me for four years.

Charley has black fur and has one ear that stands up and the other flops down like Charley in the movie All Dogs Go to Heaven. That is why I name my dog Charley. He likes to play hide and seek; I hide and he runs to look for me. Charley eats like a horse and I feed him four times a day. I walk him every day, even when it rains.

I trained Charley to sit, lay down, stay, and search. When Charley obeyed my commands, I rewarded him with treats. Charley is a service dog, but sometimes behaves like a police K-9 dog. If he doesn't know you, he will show his teeth, his hair stands up, and he growls. Charley is a good protector.

Charley is like my kid and I love him very much.

Charley is a service dog, but sometimes behaves like a police K-9 dog.



The Crabbing Trip

by Alfonso E.

In December 2022, the PSEA Credit Union sponsored a crabbing trip at the Berkley Marina. I was very excited. Me and two of my co-workers decided that we would attend. One of my co-workers had been on the crabbing trip already, and he explained to me what to expect.


We had to board the boat at five o'clock in the morning. I made sure I had plenty of warm clothes on, along with lunch for all of us. The boat was filled up with more than 20 people along with the boat crew. The boat pulled away from the dock around 5:30am. The bay was calm and the weather was perfect, but cold. We headed west out to the Pacific Ocean. We sailed under the Golden Gate Bridge which was a pretty sight to see.

We rode about two hours west and the boat began to slow down and stop. It was time to drop the crab traps. The crew, along with the guests helped. They dropped the traps one by one until they made a big circle. When we got back to the first trap they began to pull it in. I was amazed on how many crabs were in that trap. They placed the crabs into a big bucket. The smaller crabs were tossed back into the ocean and the others were poured into the boat's fishwell. After we got the last crab trap back into the boat, it was time to head back to Berkeley.


Before we got back to the Berkely pier, we had to get some gas from pier 39. Once we got to Berkeley, it was time to divide up the crabs. Each guest got 10 crabs.

One of my co-workers offered to clean and cook my crabs for me. The Berkeley Marina had a cleaning and cooking service there, by my friend said they charged too much. He would do it for free. So, the three of us went to his house and I helped clean and cook about thirty crabs. He had everything. A big pot of boiling water along with a big garbage can. When I got home, the only thing I had to do was eat them!

I am planning on going next year.



I was amazed on how many crabs were in that trap. They placed the crabs into a big bucket.



A Matter of Inches

by Ramon L.

It was nice weather in Monterey bay. I scuba dived with my speargun, and caught several big fish. I was happy about it. But when I got out of the water with my diving buddy, the Coast Guard was there waiting for us. They measured the fish which I had measured right after I caught it. They told me that they had to seize my fish and give me a ticket because one of my fish was smaller than 22 inch size limit requirement.

I didn't agree; the fish was stiff and curved, and even with that I could see it hit the limit from a certain angle. I spent 30 minutes trying to convince them on site, but it was in vain.

Meanwhile, I was taking photos and video as evidence, in case I needed to fight this ticket later. And I'm glad I did, because this thing ended up in court.

So 4 months later, with my photo, video, my on-line research on dead fish shrinkage, and full of confidence, I went to court. What surprised me was the Coast Guard brought 3 people to make their case. After both sides' statements, the judge only reduced my ticket from \$500 to \$300, but still believed the Coast Guard's measurement.

I almost couldn't believe what happened, and I felt I had to appeal this decision, no matter if the ticket price dropped by 300 or 3 dollars. Then I learned that an appeal is another long process, plus I would have to go to Monterey again. So I decided to end my crusade that day.

I was super upset over that day. I had taken a day off and had driven 2 hours each way to Monterey. I had followed the rules and had done nothing wrong, I should have had justice. But it turns out there are some gray areas between how I understood the rule and how they made the rule. Even though my first time in court was an education, I hope it will be my last.



Fig Counting

by Wenman L.

Two years ago, I brought a fig tree. The second year, it produced fruits. That was a surprise and made me happy.

When I first saw the fig sprouts, I was excited. I looked at those small pretty buds with beams. For my curiosity, I started counting the buds: 13. After two weeks, I went to check, the number was near 20, and after month, it grew up to about 30 buds. In the meantime, the leaves got bigger, they provided more good areas for the buds to hide. So searching for the buds needed more time and attention. However, finding buds was a fun part of my enjoyment.

Not long after, I decided to change the way of counting to satisfy my interest. I only counted figs when I picked them off. Each time, I picked the fruits off the twigs, I marked the number down on a piece of paper, until the last collection. I collected total of 75 figs the first year. The size of figs wasn't big, more like an egg yolk. I think when the tree is fully grown up, the fruit would be bigger. Anyway, it was a harvest for a tiny tree.

I didn't plan counting figs, but it brought me so much joy. I had different feelings on each process; waiting for ripen figs, picking the figs off, and marking the numbers. The most satisfaction was tasting the figs. I've learned that the fig harvest is short only about 3 months, and I learned how to pick figs. Don't hold the fruit, it is better to pinch fig off from the stem. Figs love sun, they are bigger and ripe faster than in shade.

I was wondering how many figs the tree will have this year. I roughly calculated up to 200 figs. Let's see how close my number will be. I am planning to count fig. I call this is "Lighthearted Counting Activity."

I didn't plan counting figs, but it brought me so much joy.

My Backyard Bees

by Judy H.

Six years ago, we, my husband and I, accidentally met a friend who was a beekeeper. We were curious and asked him a ton of questions about bees. A week later, we became beekeepers, too.

During the first year, we experienced beginners' nervousness: having to wear the uncomfortable protective clothing for the periodic inspection of bees every two or three weeks and being stung by our own bees multiple times. Little by little we joyfully harvested the pure honey and learned to make bee wax candles.

The queen is the mother of the beehive. There is only one queen in a hive. A superior queen may lay up to 3,000 eggs in a day, during the spring and early summer, but the average is 1,200 to 1,800. If they realize that there is no queen in their hive, the bees will choose the best, strongest larva and feed it "royal jelly," produced by the bees' bodies. When the larva grows big enough, it is possible to become the future queen of the hive.

We were amazed to learn that the bees are smart enough to come back to their own hives after each pollinating trip. In addition, they are well-known for protecting their territory. They fight with opponents to stop them from stealing their honey.

Bees play an important role in producing honey and beeswax which are used for food, medicine, and other uses. Bees are indeed our friends and it's important that we do our part to protect their habitats, like planting flowers and other plants that provide food for bees and avoiding pesticides to harm the bees.

California is indeed known for its favorable climate for bees, with warm temperatures and a variety of flowers available for them to pollinate almost the whole year. Bees are used as pollinators for crops like almonds, avocados, and berries. It really helps farmers to have a better harvest. About one-third of food supplies depends on bee pollination. Without bees, many of these crops would fail, leading to a reduction in the variety and quantity of food available to us.

Beekeeping requires some knowledge (which we have learned by watching videos on YouTube), patience, passion, and a backyard big enough for two hives, but the rewards are great for us and for our environment.

Winter Storms

by Cendy C.

In January of this year we experienced a big storm in the Bay Area, with lots of wind and rain. This caused many trees to fall, resulting in much damage. As a supervisor for the arborists in the City of San Francisco, my husband, Rogelio, was responsible for attending to the removal of the downed trees that were blocking the streets and sidewalks. With 670,000 trees in San Francisco, there were quite a few that needed attention. The trees were dangerous even after the storm was over, because the soil was saturated, causing the roots to be loose. This created a dangerous situation for pedestrians and drivers.

Rogelio was working with others to remove some trees and branches that had fallen. Someone noticed what he thought was an animal moving in one of the trees, but it wasn't an animal; it was the tree starting to fall! Quickly, they all got out of the way and Rogelio moved the truck to get it away from the falling tree.

After several weeks, the crew was still working to clean up trees from the storm, when another difficult situation occurred. The soil was still very muddy when one of the work trucks became stuck in it. Rogelio tried to help the men move the truck, but then his truck also got stuck. After that, Rogelio called his boss to ask for help. The boss soon came to help, and his truck got stuck also. His boss then called for help with a tractor, which was successful in getting all three trucks out of the mud.

The rain stopped for a short time, but the Bay Area (and really most of California) experienced several more storms during the winter of 2023. According to the meteorologists, this has been a record-breaking year for rain, wind, snow and damage. These storms have caused much work for the arborists and other public works employees.

**Someone noticed
what he thought was
an animal moving in
one of the trees, but
it wasn't an animal;
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starting to fall!**

Backpacking Around the World (Part 1)

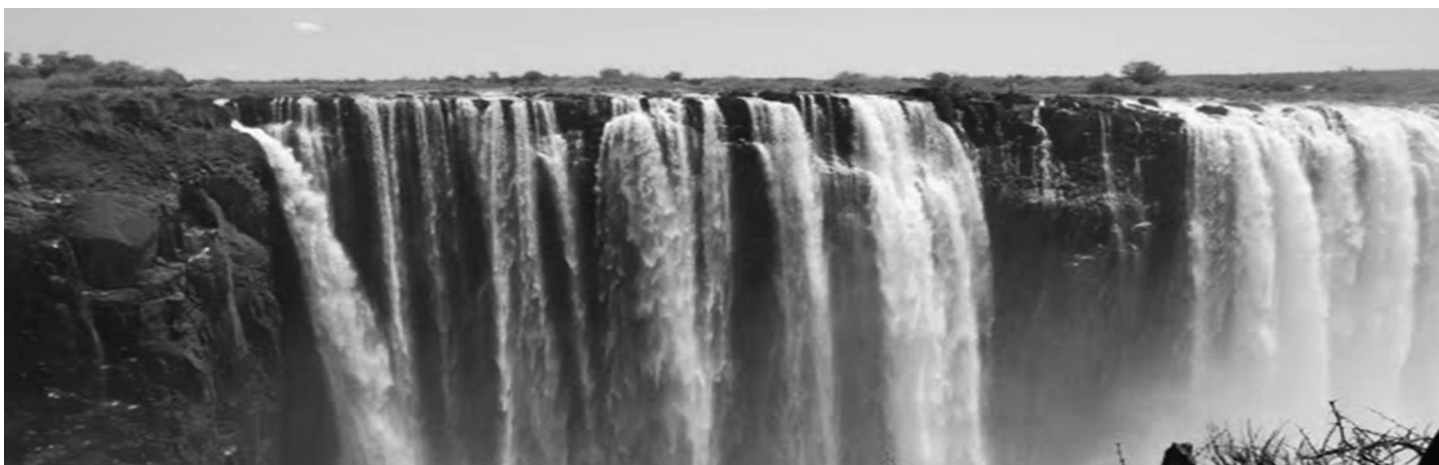
by MJ K.

In 2011, my husband and I traveled around the world for 1 year. We visited 36 countries and started from China, Russia, Europe, and Africa, then Latin America, and North America to Korea. Most of the countries were very nice and perfect, but I remembered some countries that were special to me.

First, the Uyuni Salt Flat in Bolivia was a very special experience. There is no sand. The whole flat is made of salt. In the rainy season the salt dissolved, so the ground became transparent and was the world's biggest mirror. We could see reflections like you wouldn't believe and a landscape. That was unworldly. I'll never forget.

Second, the Galapagos Islands. The Islands have many small and big lands. There were islands where lava was hard due to volcanic eruptions, but I felt like I was on another planet. We could see interesting animals not usually seen. All of the animals were not scared of people, so we could see very closely. We did a 7 days 6 nights boat tour. The tour was to travel around the islands. It was very exciting and well memorized.





Backpacking Around the World (Part 2)

by MJ K.

Third, the Africa truck tour. The tour had 20–25 people in a custom big truck in 2 weeks. The tour included 3 meals and sleeping in tents. We started from the Republic of South Africa, Namibia, and Botswana, then Zimbabwe, to Zambia. We saw many wild animals in the parks that were not zoos. Therefore, we could observe animals in their natural habitats. While we were touring, an elephant followed our truck. An elephant wanted to play with us! We stopped a moment, looked, and took a close-up picture. The truck tour offered Death Valley and deserts in Namibia, national parks, and Victoria Falls. Victoria Falls was one of the world's three major falls. However, Victoria Falls was more massive, natural, and impressive than the other two falls. I highly recommend this tour.

Some people asked me, “What is your favorite place around the world?” “I can’t choose a favorite place because many countries and places were very special to me. I got a different impression from each country, and they were all unique in their own way.”

I hope our daily lives will be happy and enjoyable like traveling around the world. It was very hard to decide going on this trip because it meant putting our lives, work, and careers on hold. However, we just did it without any thought and finally we got the valuable experience which we can’t get in the normal life. I know it’s not easy for you, but I suggest trying a small adventure, like a one-month trip to another country without any set plans. You can do it!

A Memorable Vacation

by Parvin M.

I love nature, especially oceans and mountains. They are majestic and remind me of God's power. Since I immigrated to America, some people would talk about Hawaii and its beauty, so I decided to put it on my bucket list.

I have traveled to beautiful islands in my country, Iran, and they are among my good memories. Last year I decided to fulfill one of my dreams and visit Hawaii. I talked to my daughter about it and she was excited to go, too. So she planned our trip and bought a package that contained round trip airline tickets to Oahu Island, hotel, and a shuttle from the airport to the hotel and return from the hotel to the airport.

As we arrived at the airport a young woman came toward us to welcome us and put Hawaiian leis made of real flowers around our necks, then guided us to the shuttle. The hotel was a few blocks away from Waikiki Beach. The next day we traveled by shuttle around the island. Oahu is a beautiful island with nice weather and white, sandy beaches. The people there were mostly tourists. I loved to walk on the soft, warm sand and in the clear water. I also enjoyed having local food. Watching the golden sunset on the ocean was another excitement.

Another place we went to was the Paradise Cove Luau. A tourist shuttle took us there. As we got off the shuttle a guide led us to a place where someone put beautiful leis around our necks and took pictures of us. They also gave us two coupons of \$20 each to purchase souvenirs. There were boat rides, shows, dancing, music, and they also served beverages and dinner.

On the last day of my trip a nice thing took place. In the main street next to Waikiki Beach there was an art and music festival. There were two orchestras that were a long distance apart; one of them was Hawaiian and the other was American. There were many people there enjoying themselves and listening to the music.

The trip was memorable. I hope I can go to Hawaii again.

On the plane trip home I caught covid, but I didn't get too sick since I was vaccinated. It couldn't destroy my nice memory.

I loved to walk on the soft, warm sand and in the clear water. I also enjoyed having local food.

The Retirement Party

by Greg R.

I went to the retirement party for an old boss and friend on Saturday without my wife since she is still sick with pneumonia. I went with my son-in-law, Ryan. He's 6'9" and I told him he could eat all he wanted. When I walked in everyone clapped. They said, "Hey it's 'Crazy Greg' in the house."

Ryan asked, "Why do they call you Crazy Greg?"

I told him that was a long time ago. He only knows me from 10 years ago.

They said, "You look the same as 35 years ago."

I had a shaved head then and now. They said, "You look so good. How do you do it?"

I said, "I keep myself busy."

They said that three people took over the job I used to do. It was a nice time. Everyone knew me at the truck and transfer station. They spoke Italian to me. Ryan could understand but I couldn't. They told him lots of stories. He went home and told his wife and she told her mother, my wife.

My wife said, "I can't believe I'm married to you."

Ryan said, "You could write a book."

I said, "I am," and he laughed.

My tutor is helping me write a book about the time in the garbage company.

My son-in-law was so happy to go. And said anytime you want to take me I'm in. He just wants to go because of all the food. He never had crab or prime rib or chicken all at one setting. He never had chicken like that in his life and he kept going back for seconds. It was Chicken Saltimbocca. It was great food and a fun time!



One Double Time Sunday Part 1

by Greg R.

One Sunday at Recology, the garbage company, I worked overtime. We had a supervisor and he was always on my back. I finished my work early. So he said, "Greg I need you to go on the freeway and pick up the papers."

It's highway 101 near Candlestick. I went out there and got the garbage can. There were some headphones on a garbage can. So I took them and put them on. It had a cassette AM FM radio and music on. I danced around and took off my shirt because it was hot out. I was dancing around on the side of the freeway picking up garbage when I heard this noise. There was a seven car crash pile up all because they were watching me dance and were staring at me.

The highway patrol comes and asked me, "Where are your cones?"

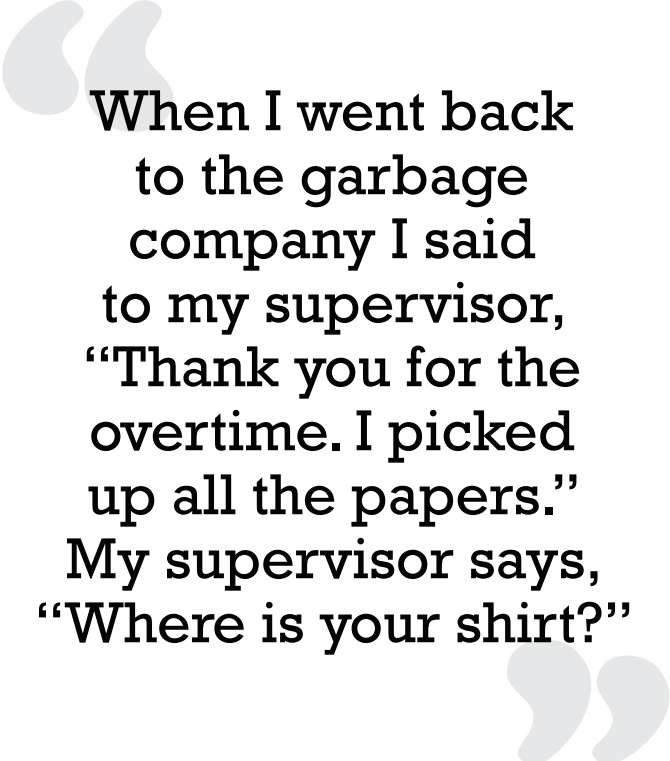
I said, "What cones? I don't work for Caltrans."

He said, "What the hell are you doing on the freeway?"

I said, "My supervisor told me to go." He said, "Oh yea, you think this is funny?" And he wrote me a ticket and said give it to your boss. So later I gave it to the main boss.

When I went back to the garbage company I said to my supervisor, "Thank you for the overtime. I picked up all the papers." My supervisor says, "Where is your shirt?"

I said, "I took it off because it was really hot out. It was in August." But I had the Recology fluorescent green vest on. You are supposed to wear a uniform shirt with the vest on top and it gets hot. He was so mad. He slammed the door and broke the window. He's so miserable, always like that since I started thirty years ago. Some people are miserable. He's one!



**When I went back
to the garbage
company I said
to my supervisor,
“Thank you for the
overtime. I picked
up all the papers.”
My supervisor says,
“Where is your shirt?”**

One Double Time Sunday

Part 2

by Greg R.

Monday morning the main boss goes to the transfer station where I am and says, "Greg get in the truck." So I did and we drove to his office. When we were in his office he asks me to write down what happened on Sunday.

Then he said, "Don't worry I'll write it." He kind of knew I couldn't write. I told him that I did all the work and it was done.

He said, "What were you doing on the freeway?"

I said, "My supervisor sent me there to pick up papers."

He said, "Ok what time did he send you?"

I said, "Around twelve."

And he said, "Oh that's around the time when the Giants game starts which is around one." And asks if I had something for him. Cause they had already called him. I gave him the ticket and he looked at it and his face turned pale.

He goes, "Greg can you please go home. I can't believe this happened."

I said, "It's not my fault."

He said, "I'll see you tomorrow morning."

Then I found out they had to pay \$50,000 fine and pay for everyone's car to get fixed. They told me, "Your supervisor will not be working on the weekends anymore. They don't need nobody anymore. You know how to do your job."

My supervisor was told to go to Sunset, another garbage company or retire. They didn't want him at Sunset and told him to retire. On top of that I got paid two extra hours on top of my double time and didn't get in trouble. My supervisor was management and had told me to go on the freeway and we're not supposed to go on the freeway. He ended up retiring!

The Safe


by Greg R.

In 1984 before I got in the union, they were trying me out. I wasn't in the union yet. They had a huge metal fancy safe in the Sunset office. It was an antique and they needed it moved.


They told Benny, "Where's the animal? Go get the animal!" That's what they called me then.

I went to the office and everyone was struggling to move the huge safe. I got two straps and put them around the safe and around my waist. Then I started moving the safe. I wore a leather belt back then. And I tied it to my weight belt and I started to move forward and the safe was sliding. I was really strong back then in my 20s. I moved it to the next office. They gave me 100 bucks and a credit card to fill up my El Camino with gas. They were good to me. The safe was really old. It was an antique, black and yellow and had a painted picture on it. It was five feet tall and five feet wide. It was made out of cast iron.

I was a body builder back then. I was working out every day and bench pressed 330 pounds. I even worked out with Mark McGwire and Arnold Schwarzenegger when he was nobody. He had an afro back then. We worked out at California Health Club. It's called California Premier now. The kid who worked there bought it. I went back there and rejoined that gym because it's all free weights.



**I was a body builder
back then. I was
working out every
day and bench
pressed
330 pounds.**



Working at Macy's

by Ferozan M.

When I worked at Macy's during the Christmas season, I was extremely happy to have a job. However, I was very nervous at the same time because I didn't know anything in retail.

I mastered many things at Macy's. I learned how to open the registers, ask for more cash, help customers, ring up purchases, return unwanted merchandise, accept payments on people's bills, and other duties. I also enjoyed meeting new people every day. I know it's normal for a lot of people to have a job, but I was excited because it was my first job in retail. Also, it was a great work schedule because it allowed me to pick up and drop off my kids at school. I wish I could've kept working there.

Working outside the house was nice for me. The first thing I did in the morning was to get ready for my work. I dressed up and did my makeup and hair. This was one of the reasons why I felt so professional having a job. I did not care about any other household responsibilities at that time.

Being at home and doing all the boring chores is very frustrating. I loved the two months that I worked at Macy's. I loved the experience I had working there and I wish I could work there again.

Volcanic Eruptions

by Nusaiba A.

A volcanic eruption is considered a natural hazard. Natural hazards in general are a natural phenomenon that may cause loss of life, health injuries, damage to property, social or economic disturbances or damage to the environment.

A volcanic eruption is the point at which a volcano becomes active and releases its power. Volcanic eruptions come in many forms. They range from small daily eruptions at places like Kilauea in Hawaii to super large eruptions (the volcano spews out at least 1000 cubic kilometers of material) like Lake Taupo in New Zealand.

Residents of areas exposed to volcanoes should always prepare to leave the area. They can know by always paying attention to the alert system for the extent of volcanic danger which depends on colors. For example, when the volcano is dormant it is green in color and is in natural state or activity has stopped. When it becomes orange, it's in high activity above the natural level and presence of some volcanic disturbances. In this case, government orders must be followed in evacuating designated areas.

Volcanic eruptions have a negative impact on humans and the environment.

How to Shop for a Computer at Costco

by Veronica G.

To shop for a computer at Costco, you must sign up for membership at customer services. I work for Costco as a cashier. If you ask me for help to find an item, I will ask first what you are looking for, so I can send you it in the right direction. The customer will look for a computer. I will send the customer to the sales department. So, the salesperson will explain the difference between computers, brands, or memory capacity. If the customer picked one computer, the salesperson will write a number to be taken to the register. After the customer pays, the cashier sends the customer with the receipt to go to merchandise pick up. A supervisor or manager can assist the customer with their purchase to be picked up. After you pick up your computer and go home, I have a conclusion about these specific purchases. If you need to print a document, you need to buy a printer and ink. You need to set up the computer at home. If you need help to set up your computer, call Costco customer services. They should be more than happy to assist you with any set-up questions you may have. After all, finally you will be ready to navigate with your computer and find anything you need to look for.

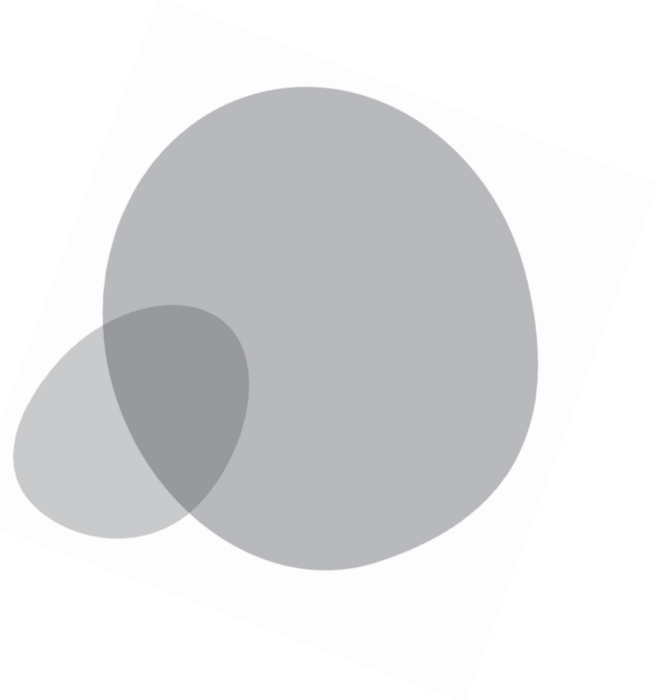
Project Second Chance (PSC) Acrostic

by Cecilia A.

Passionate for others, they are
Ready to help,
Offering their hands with
Joy and knowledge.
Excuses aren't their way,
Compassion in their heart,
Thinking of someone willing to learn.

Second chances should always exist
Education forever free,
Caring hearts in the tutors,
Offering help, they always find a solution.
Near or far, they gather with you,
Dedication and happiness they show.

Confident in their learners,
Hope they always see,
Access to a better future with PSC,
No shame when they speak,
Courage each day in reading and writing,
English is important, thank you PSC!



Let Nothing Be the Same Again (COVID-19)

by Cecilia A.

Let's ask God that nothing will be the same again because if it were,
what would have been the purpose of sheltering in place?
Let's hope that everything is different and that there is true love between people.
Let humility not be lacking and honesty reign forever.
May we long to be better and that together we create a world of love.
May we value every sigh and the opportunity to embrace a love one
since thousands in this hard battle have lost their relatives.
May we thank God for every day we have received and
when the sun goes down, let's raise a prayer to our creator.
Let's ask God that nothing will be the same again.
That the world ceases to be artificial.
That we have learned arrogance is no different from ignorance.
Let's get rid of resentment because it only causes more pain.
Let's learn that true wealth is not what is carried out, and that true value is what is inside.
That a friendship, if it is real, is not the one that is going to criticize.
That a force without love destroys everything around.
That better is not the one who is higher,
but rather, the one that fills the needs of the world with love.
May all this confinement have served to reflect on lost time.
Let's not long to go back but to become better.
Let's ask God for wisdom before starting a new day.
Let's ask God that all this is not in vain
and we kneel raising our hands to Him.

There is Always Hope

by Cecilia A.

What in life makes you feel you are behind?

Don't ask yourself too many questions

Just begin right where you are, because

there is always hope!

It doesn't matter where you live,

having life is all you need

Since every time you can breath

there is always hope!

Don't feel you are alone

Just enjoy singing to yourself, afterward

there is always hope!

Refuse to judge yourself too hard

If mistakes come into your life,

don't let them keep you down, as

there is always hope!

Don't let the color of your skin set you apart

Just show the love that is in your heart,

and inspire others to break the chains, because

there is always hope!

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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PROJECT SECOND CHANCE

Adult Literacy Program

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