


In Our Words

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



VOLUME ELEVEN



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In Our Words Volume Eleven

For 40 years, PSC learners of all walks of life have been meeting their writing goals with the help of a cadre of generous volunteer tutors. This year is no different. PSC is pleased to present the creative and diverse writings of PSC's author-learners, which reflect our current times.



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the learner-authors in this volume:

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I Love Libraries in the United States

by Yingying M.

Libraries are my favorite places to visit in the United States, without a doubt. There are so many libraries in the United States. Libraries of various kinds cover the whole country: national libraries, state libraries, university libraries, and public libraries in every city. They have large collections, abundant resources, and are extremely convenient to everyone!

Each library is a distinctive building, a blend of modern and traditional art that makes a lasting impression on me. Each library is meticulously designed, and boasts well-organized spaces, beautiful color schemes, and user-centric facilities. They provide readers with a quiet, comfortable and enjoyable reading environment.

Each library offers personalized and diversified services to the community, not just lending services for readers. Different reading areas are designed for different age groups: children's areas, teen areas, and adult areas, each area with its own unique design to meet the needs of different reader groups. I think it is certain that the lovely and warm children's areas make them fall in love with reading from an early age.

The program of afterschool homework assistance for children and teens helps the families whose children have difficulties completing their learning tasks. Especially the program of the Adult English Language Learners (ELL). I found this program at the library and became one of the participants in it. I am very grateful for this program and my tutor.

Another important function of libraries is to regularly hold a variety of events. There are puppet shows and LEGO building for children, and various interesting activities for exchanging and enhancing gardening, cooking, and handicrafts skills. Through these activities, neighbors can not only improve their hobby skills, but also fully communicate with them and make new friends, which is very fantastic. In addition, libraries also offer various activities according to different holidays and commemorative days in the year. March is Women's History Month, and many library activities are designed around the theme of "women's rights." I like it very much.

In summary, libraries in the United States are not just places to borrow books, but more importantly, they are the center of social activities in the community. They play an important role in public education, cultural exchange and social integration, and promote the popularization of education and the transmission of culture in the United States. This is why I love American libraries.

Looking for the Way!!

by Annie A.

I am an empowered woman. My name is Annie and I am a single mom of two children.

Coming from South America, Peru, my original language is Spanish but I have been speaking English for 17 years. Even so, I still learn something new every day.

Originally, my hope was to find better opportunities for my children.

Sometimes I felt that something was missing in my life because I was feeling sad and empty. I thought my marriage was okay and my financial situation was okay too but it wasn't, something was missing.

One day, I decided to go to a different church. That day I realized how important it is to build a relationship with God. It is wonderful to congregate with other church members, to pray together and to read the Bible. This is the only way I feel complete and not alone.

Now I have all the tools that I need. I hope that you have the chance to find your way too.


I Can Reach My Goals

by Velia R.


When I was young I dreamed of being a teacher, but I didn't achieve my dream. I am continuing to study in the project second chance.

In August my granddaughter starts kindergarten. I'm going to volunteer at her school. When my son told me, I immediately told him, yes, I could volunteer three day a week. I feel very happy to help children and teacher.

I don't know how I'm going to feel, happy or nervous, but I'm going try to do my best.



**I feel very happy to
help children and
teacher.**



Different, Yet the Same

by Flávio D.

My name is Flávio, also known as Palhaço Frangolino, and I worked for a long time in a “normal” job, on “normal” weekdays, with “normal” people, until these things in my life made me change my job.

In 2001 I began my career transition from IT to professional circus artist.

Today, after 22 years, I thought I would make an analogy between corporate companies and circuses. So let's do this.

I see the office as a circus, where there are all the artists and employees of a circus who go there every day to earn their daily bread.

The clothes that people wear are costumes pre-determined by job, such as security, doorman, cook and all positions in the company.

The building is a circus tent, where the public (customers) and artists (employees) are there, constantly trying to tame the lions of everyday life.


Employees are juggling bills to be able to pay them at the end of the month.

The boss is the ringmaster explaining the rules of the game, and when someone goes against the boss, he becomes a fire-breather.


The magician only appears on Friday, announcing the two magical days off.

And the clown can only smile in the photo printed on the badge, because if he smiles in person he won't be taken seriously, but joy is the main part of life.

Live life in the best way possible, because in 100 to 120 years everyone here on earth will no longer be here. And what did you do with your life?



I see the office as a circus, where there are all the artists and employees of a circus...



Thentuk (Tibetan noodle soup)

by Dhondup W.

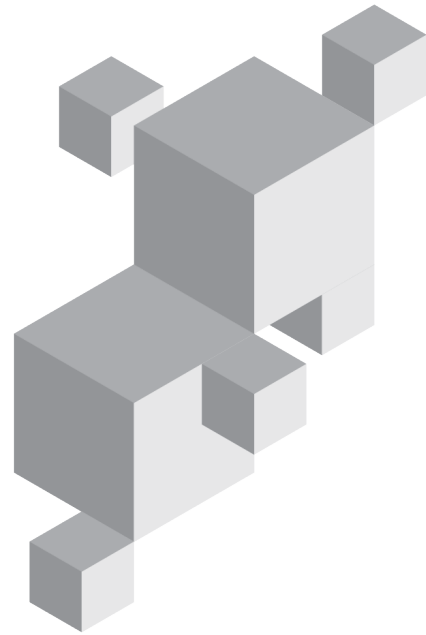
- One onion
 - Two tomatoes
 - Three cups water
 - Half cup cilantro
 - 1-2 tablespoon oil
 - Salt to taste
 - Spice to your like
 - For noodles:
 - 4 cup all-purpose flour
 - 1/2 cup water
1. Mix flour and water. Knead the dough until the dough is medium soft. Cover it and let it sit for 15 minutes.
 2. Cut up onion, tomato, and cilantro.
 3. Make noodles. Take a one-inch ball of dough and rub the dough between your hands to make a thick noodle. Repeat.
 4. Heat oil in pan.
 5. Add onion, tomato
 6. Mix spice and salt
 7. Add water and let it boil
 8. Pinch off small pieces of dough and add to water. Use all dough very quickly. When water boils, let it sit for 2-4 minutes.
 9. Then it's ready to eat.

The Year of the Dragon 2024

by Lucie S.

This is the year of the dragon in the Chinese Zodiac. Dragons are strong leaders and are determined to succeed. This inspires us to choose our dreams.

In my imagination, there was a dragon named Simon. He loved to let people ride on him. He told everyone it is a free ride. Simon brings people good luck when they take a ride. They are happy and lucky things happen for them.



My Mom's Soup

by Boubacar D.

My mother is a light skinned woman. She has long and black hair, tender cheeks, smiling, and she is incredibly beautiful. My mom is also generous, kind, and talented. One of my mom's talents is cooking. For me, mom is the best chef ever. I remember when I was little, mom used to cook her favorite soup for us. There is something special in her way of cooking. At home, unlike in the US, soup is often made for breakfast. They commonly say, the body needs something warm to wake up, which means a soup is the best wake-up call for the body.

Mom often started cooking her soup in the evening. Once she got home from work, after she had taken her bath and dinner, she goes straight to the kitchen. To start, she peels the onions, cuts the meat, assembles everything in a large pot, fills the pot with water, then she throws a handful of salt in the pot. Once she had finished mixing everything, she places the pot on the fire where she let it cook until morning.

In the morning, when we wake up, we can smell the soup from everywhere in the house. After taking our bath, brushing our teeth, we gathered in the living room. Mom was going to pour the soup for us in a large bowl and give each of us a piece of bread and we were going to start drinking. Those moments of gathering, eating in the same bowl, sharing laughter and joy, are memories that I will never forget. Because this was not just a common soup but rather represents numerous memories.



**...soup is the best
wake-up call for the
body.**



To You, My Dear Mother

by Cecilia A.

To you my dear mother, to you my beloved mother
today I come to tell you that you are forever loved.

Forgive me without reproach, for every one of those nights
that you spent in agony over me.

Your slow pace, witness to what I am saying today

You kneeled down, day by day you prayed.

Your white hair is a reflection of years of advice,

Advice listened with contempt

I heard you.

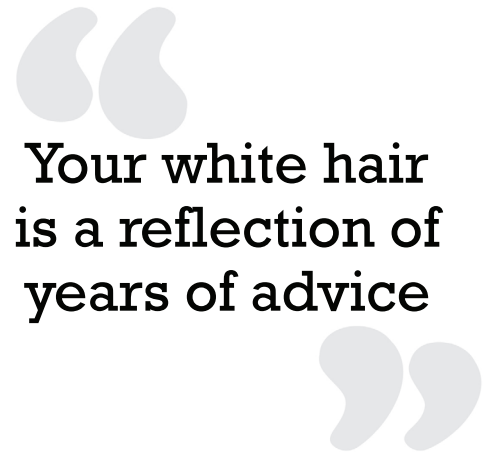
Your words I still remember, they sound in my ear
and are now the advice, which I leave to mine today.

Forgive me mother forgive me

I did not understand those years, all the harm that I cause.

If now being an adult I disrespect you,
be the King of Kings who judge me this day.

Adolescence can dwindle hugs and caresses,
from the one who will forever be blessed before God.



**Your white hair
is a reflection of
years of advice**

2 Bikes

by Jacobo E.

My favorite thing to do is to ride bikes. I have 2 bikes. I have a Mountain bike and a BMX bike. I like the BMX bike more because It's faster and it has more speed. I like to ride my BMX bike at the Heather Farms in Walnut Creek because I enjoy the park there and It's more fun. I don't ride my mountain bike that much because it is slower. Speed is my favorite thing.

Letter to My Children

by Lilian O.

Dear Children,

Let me first say this: I love you more than anything in this world.

I can't give you perfection, but I can give you all of me.

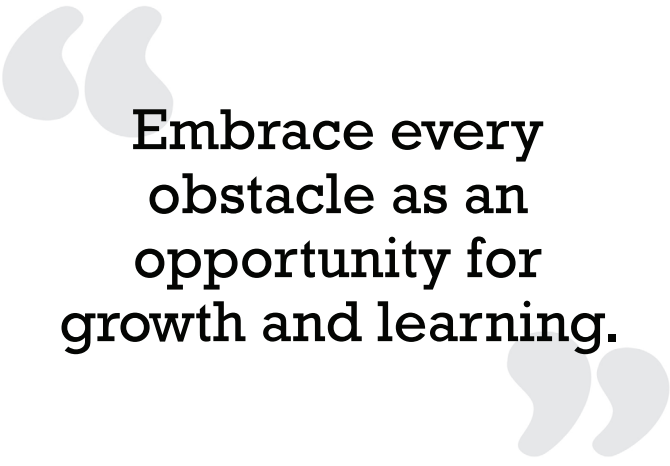
I can give you my whole heart. Since you were born, being a mother has taught me many things, but one of the most profound is that love has no conditions. It does not depend on your achievements, successes, or failures. You are loved simply for being you—my children—Jorge, Eduardo, and Emily. I just want you to know that you're the best thing that ever happened to me. No matter where you go in life, Mom is always there, no matter what.

I am so blessed to be your mother and that you chose me, to have the privilege of you as my children. I have so much gratitude for the precious soul that God gives me the blessing to have as a young person in my life.

You may be a young one to everyone else, but you are still a little one to me.

I'm so proud of you to see how you define your path and create a future that aligns with your aspirations. Your dreams are unique and deserve to be pursued with passion and determination. Remember, my children, that the road to success may not always be easy. There will be challenges, setbacks, and moments of self-doubt. But never lose sight of your dreams. Embrace every obstacle as an opportunity for growth and learning. Stay committed, stay focused, and never give up.

With all my love,
Mother



**Embrace every
obstacle as an
opportunity for
growth and learning.**

Reflection of an Adolescent to His Parents

by Cecilia A.

They say that they love me a lot, that for them I am very special.

They say that they remember with tenderness when they were able to hold me.

They say that they love me a lot and that for them I am very special.

They say that I am the center of their lives and bring joy to the family.

They say that they love me a lot and that for them I am very special.

They say that I have all that I want and they still have more to provide.

But while being alone, I ask myself: why do they hurt me so much?

Arguing with each other doesn't help me feel safe.

At the age that I am, nothing brings me happiness.

If for you yelling means love, please stop loving me now.

I implore you, I beg you to teach me unity, because this world belongs to the children, in the Bible it is written.

My Experience with God

by Kinkin Y.

Before graduate from University, I must practice teaching at a village in Yogyakarta. Go up the mountain using a motorbike.

That day, the road was quiet and I was tailgating a motorbike in front of me. Suddenly that motorbike in front of me was stuck. It stopped. I can't brake, because if I brake, I can't imagine what happened to me because I was so fast. I froze....I close my eyes while shouting, "Lord Jesus." I closed my eyes—I was afraid. I froze. I thought I would get in a collision, and I surrendered. When I closed my eyes, I felt my hand (the back of the palm) get hold and move.... I feel my motorbike shaking heavily....When I opened my eyes, I looked back. I was far away from that motorbike.

Someone held my hand so I didn't die. GOD is good, He saves me when I call His name. He is alive.



Sooner or Later in Life

by Cecilia A.

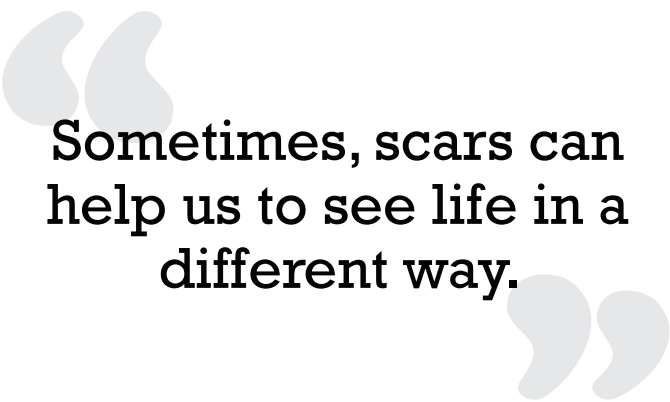
As we grow up in life, we fill our brain with dreams. For example, when our kids are little, we see them with a career, having a great job, getting married, and then having their own kids. We also can see ourselves in a marriage that goes in a full swing, or having the job of our dreams. Others can dream to have their own house or a nice car. But sometimes, we forget that we live in an imperfect world; a world with people with strengths and weaknesses. We forget that real life is made from ups and downs; from sunny and cloudy days.

When something pleasant comes to our life, our faces reflect happiness; we smile more often. We want to go out and share the good news with everybody. We want to tell to our friends, neighbors or relatives. Now, with social media at our fingertips, we can spread the good news quickly.

Sooner or later in life each of us, will experience not only good moments, but agony days too. In fact, none of us are prepared to face difficult moments. Problems don't see religion, age, sex, race or economic position. We overcome difficulties in different ways, because we are all different.

But what do we do when everything turned out the opposite of what we expected? What do we do when

challenging periods come to us? How do we react to those unexpected news? Do we keep the situation to ourselves and pretend that everything is running smoothly? Do we try to avoid the subject in a conversation?



Sometimes, scars can help us to see life in a different way.

Some situations will leave scars in our life. Some scars will take longer than other to heal, but we are the ones who will decide if those scars are going to give us strength, take advantages of it, use them as an opportunity to keep moving, or let them keep us down. Sometimes, scars can help us to see life in a different way. Through them, we can find new reasons to start over. If we accept that we can't change our entire community or our entire family but other than that, making little changes in ourselves and the way we face problems, this will be a big step not only for us, but for others too. Our good attitude towards problems can also help others to manage difficult situations.

by Kinkin Y.

One motorcycle followed me. Two bald men. And they speak to each other with a low voice. They use a motorcycle and I walk. Supposedly they can pass me easily. But they didn't. After half the road, they are still in my back. I felt very scared. More and more scared when I saw the cemetery door open. I just hold my Bible tight. I prayed, "Jesus help me."

God I'm safe. God helped me with His way when I called His name. God is so good. He is always good. He is alive. He hears when I ask for help. I cried every time I remember how good He is.

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Jasper the Beagle

by Ehte A.

This is the story of Jasper the beagle. Jasper is my grandson's dog. My grandson is named Rayan, and Jasper was adopted two years ago for Rayan's 14th birthday. Rayan knew he wanted a beagle, and he and his mom got Jasper from a breeder in Missouri when he was nine weeks old.

Jasper went to puppy school and learned how to behave and do tricks. Rayan and his mother even hired a professional trainer for him. He loves people and he's a very good boy.

I didn't grow up with pets so I wasn't sure I would like having a dog in the family. But I guess Jasper wanted me to like him because whenever he comes to my home he follows me around and wants a lot of my attention. Maybe that's because I give him treats and play with him. Sometimes I babysit Jasper when Rayan and his mom are out of town or busy, and when they come to get him he hides under the table because he wants to stay with me.

Jasper is very smart, and he's also very sensitive. One time I fell down and cut my leg. Jasper seemed to know I was hurt and came over to me and tried to make me feel better.

I never thought I would fall in love with a dog but Jasper makes it easy to love him. He loves his family and we are very lucky to have him.

Think Positive

by Joy J.

A few years back I got in a car accident. I can remember the Dr. telling me I would never walk again and I believed it. At that time I was on drugs, and I thought I would never stop.

I began to think positive and felt like God lifted the poison from my body and gave me the strength to get back on my feet. Because I started thinking positive and because of the Project Second Chance Program, I am able to read and write again. Many days I wake up and pinch myself to make sure I am not dreaming.

One day I went to the DMV office to get a new I.D. I looked up and there I was on the T.V. screen. They were talking about all the services in the area. I wanted to say "Hey that's me I am a star, would you like my autograph?"

I would like to thank all the people who took the time out of their lives to help me. Thank you. Think positive.

**Many days I wake up
and pinch myself to
make sure I am not
dreaming.**

My Unforgettable Day in America

by Eunjoo K.

I'll never forget the day when I felt desperately alone in a foreign country. In 2014, I got off the Cal-train to get back to the hotel in Santa Clara from San Francisco. I remember seeing the sunset which was like a warning that I should be in the hotel. I had a 7-year-old boy by my hand and I carried a 4-year-old girl in the other arm because she had fallen asleep. My husband was still at his office because this was his first business trip. I had wanted to go to the Exploratorium, a kind of science museum in San Francisco with my kids but I had to use public transportation because I didn't have a driver's license.

Earlier, on a previous day, I had asked the hotel front desk if there was a limousine service from the train station to the hotel. They said that I could use that service so I requested it. However, after finishing my trip from San Francisco to Santa Clara, I waited for the hotel limousine in front of the train station. But, nobody came for us. Fifteen minutes later, I was worried so I called the hotel. A man said that it was rush hour so he couldn't send the limousine to me. Oh my god! I was frustrated, disappointed, and resentful because the front desk man's attitude was rude to me. Additionally, my husband

didn't answer my phone call to him. In the end, I decided to walk with my kids from the train station to the hotel by using Google Maps guidance on my cell phone. I remembered that it took half an hour on foot.

On the way to the hotel, a man suggested for us to ride in his car to our destination, but I refused it. I had a strong emotional feeling because I felt extremely afraid of being alone in the dark in a foreign country. It was the longest day ever. The next morning, I complained to the front desk about the no show limousine service. The manager apologized to me and sent a snack basket to my room.

As soon as I returned back to my country, I got a driver's license right away. I used to use public transportation in my country, like the people in New York City. The system is very convenient, economical, and efficient. Even though I'd had a bad experience in Santa Clara, I learned a great lesson in my life. Thanks to this episode, I'm the best driver for my kids now!

Letter to the Author

by Marisol M.

Dear Mr. Albom,

My name is Marisol and I am a student for Project Second Chance in the city of Concord. Thank you for your book, *Tuesdays with Morrie*. It took me forever to read the book because I learned many new words, but I really enjoyed reading the book! And I learned many new pronunciations—complicated pronunciations! And, for me, every Monday was the time to read the book, and it was a good time to learn and enjoy the life of Morrie.

When I read the book, I imagined it how Morrie can have all the conversations with the people around him. Now I understand why people are visiting him every day. The book taught me a lot of human things in many ways—because no matter what was happening in his life and all the challenges he passed, he never said negative things. I never heard negative things in his own words. What I learn from him is to be a better person in my personal life. Morrie was a professor and he helped support his students and tried to give them motivation in good way, but now it's hard to find people like him who can help others. With the internet now, I don't know if it's worse than in the past. There's a lot of crime everywhere—and I don't know how we can change that—people's mentality.

Most of his students doing good in life, but now I only hear really bad news. Because all the time when we read the news is negative things in life that happen. Especially now with two wars, in Russia and Palestine. Even in the schools around our neighborhood and there's a lot of crime in the schools. The students they no get motivation. They leave the school. And they no respect the teachers. We need to be more like human being and how we can change this world in better ways. If there were more professors like him or people same like him in the schools or everywhere, they can help and motivate the students. They can change the mentality for new generations and that's what we need. These people around him start to think about life and how they can live and enjoy every single day. This book changed my mentality. I think we need to be more like him.

I hope this letter will find you well.

Marisol

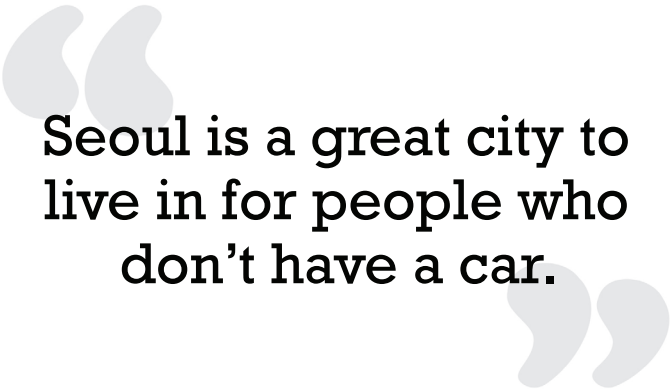
Born in Seoul, Korea

by Joo C.

Seoul is the best place to live in the world. Seoul is my hometown. I feel attached to this place because it is where I was born and spent my childhood. I lived there before living in the Bay Area. The area of San Francisco is 121.6 km*, which is only about 1/5 of the size of Seoul. In addition, Seoul is large, but Gyeonggi-do also has a large bed town surrounding Seoul. After immigrating to the United States, my longing for Korea also includes my homesickness for big cities. Many people think Seoul has the stigma of being a crowded and overly densely populated area. But I miss Seoul just as Americans love and miss New York. Seoul is a great city to live in for people who don't have a car. I hate to drive so this city was convenient for me. I could go everywhere by bus or subway, and there are many taxis. Public transportation is safe and very clean in Seoul. Seoul also shares its culture with many people. I especially enjoyed going to art museums and movie theaters. Seoul has many cultural spaces like these. For people who love art like me, this is a great place to experience the best cultural life. In addition, I often went to the hospital to treat minor illnesses, and Seoul has many good quality hospitals. So, even if I was only a little sick, I often went to the hospital. In Seoul, Gangnam is the most popular area for Koreans. It has quality

education, parks, workplaces and quality high-rise housing. If you live in Seoul, you can have a better life if you live in this area. I still miss Seoul because I enjoyed its safety, convenience, and many benefits.

*121.6 km: MapFight - San Francisco (US) vs Seoul (South Korea) size comparison. (n.d.). https://mapfight.xyz/compare/san-francisco-vs-seoul/#google_vignette



Seoul is a great city to live in for people who don't have a car.

Let's Talk About the Primary School Education in the United States

by Junqiang H.


There are so many differences between the United States and China, such as political systems, culture customs, eating habits, etc. Today, I would like to talk about six differences in education between China and the United States.

Enrollment: both the United States and China encourage the principle of proximity enrollment. Students go to schools nearest their homes. In the United States, whether you own or rent a house, you can go to the school near where you live. But, in China, only if you own your house, can you go to the school near it.


Class size: there are usually about 20 students in a classroom in American, but in China, primary school class size is generally around 40 to 50 students. I think the main reason is that there is a big difference in educational resources between China and the United States.

Time at school: students usually attend school from 8:30 am to 2:30 pm in the US, and on minimum days, students finish school at 1:15 pm. Taking into account parents' working hours, almost every US school has an after-school program, and children can stay in the school until 6 pm. In China, students usually are at school from 8:30 am to 4:00 pm, and parents must pick up and drop off their children on time.

Teaching content: I have not seen any first-grade textbooks. Our 1st grader son Max always brings a bottle of water to school and never brings any books home. Every week, I receive an email from the teacher, which talks about a topic of study this week, such as how to express kindness to others, how to help others, how to express a problem, etc.



The United States emphasizes emotions, warmth, freedom, and sharing, which differ from China's emphasis on strictness, rigidity, discipline, and self-centeredness.

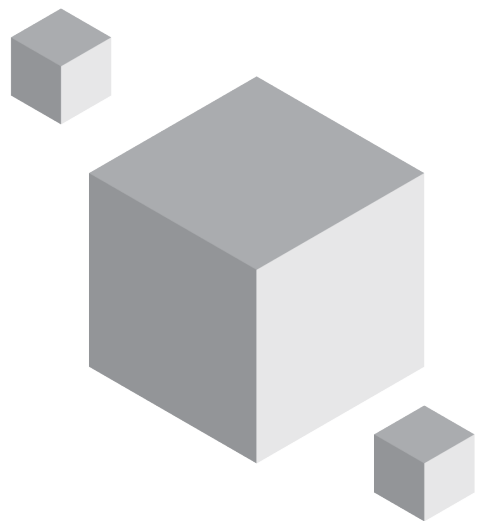


In China, each grade has many textbooks about Chinese, English, math, etc., and the learning content is mainly taught according to the textbook.

Homework: US first-grade primary school students do not have homework. The teacher may give a little homework every week, but this is done voluntarily. It doesn't matter if you don't want to do it. In China, homework is basically given from the first grade onwards. Although the Chinese government has ordered that the burden be reduced for primary school students, most schools still assign homework to students every day.

Heart and mind: American elementary school classes place great emphasis on sharing and encouragement. In Max's class, the teacher celebrates every student's birthday in the class, and birthday students will also give a small gift to their classmates. On some festivals, classmates will share gifts with each other. In China, teachers often focus more on teaching subject knowledge in the class, and love and sharing are often overlooked.

In conclusion, I believe there are significant differences in primary school education between the United States and China. The United States emphasizes emotions, warmth, freedom, and sharing, which differ from China's emphasis on strictness, rigidity, discipline, and self-centeredness. I believe this is what China should learn from the US. Finally, I wish I could talk about all the differences between China and the US, but I've run out of space.



My Experiences: Comparing American and Korean Schools, Part One

by Eunjoo K.

Our family has lived in America for 4 years. I have experienced the differences between my own country and America while raising a middle schooler and a high schooler. I want to briefly compare 4 features of American and Korean school systems.

1. Extracurricular Activities: The most noticeable difference between American and Korean schools is students' focus. It depends on whether the focus is on studying or on studying along with other activities. American high schools offer dozens of activities after school, such as sports, arts, dances, bands, and other clubs. The students also study hard while being involved in these activities. If students manage their time well during school hours, they can balance their extracurricular activities and studies.

In contrast, public Korean high schools usually prioritize studying. After the regular high school program each day, the majority of high school students also attend Hagwons which are private academies aimed at improving their GPA. Parents have to pay the tuition of Hagwon classes without government help.

There are special-purpose high schools in Korea that focus on certain subjects such as, science and math, foreign language, physical education, arts, and elite private schools. These schools also have regular subjects included in daily curriculum: Korean, math, English, science, PE, society and history, and art. In fact, special-purpose high schoolers major in their chosen subjects while also studying the required high school curriculum.

2. Required Curriculum and Choices of Subjects: American high school students must take 4-5 required subjects, but they can choose 1-2 other subjects. Students can choose regular, honor, or advanced placement classes. High school students have to take specific years for each subject, such as 3.5 years for history, 4 years for English, 2 years for math, 1 year for world language, 1 year for fine art, 2.5 years for PE and health, to qualify for high school graduation. In comparison, Korean students go to high school for 3 years studying the same subjects as American students take.

Elementary, middle, and high schoolers have art and music as required subjects. While there are exceptions in some American high schools and specific education districts, arts and music classes are not always part of the curriculum. Many American middle and high schoolers can participate in arts such as choir, drama, or instrumental band as elective subjects or school activities that students choose.

My Experiences: Comparing American and Korean Schools, Part Two

by Eunjoo K.

American regular middle and high schools provide students more participation and motivation by having annual concerts and sometimes traveling for student concerts. In contrast, Korean regular middle and high schools provide a standard musical theory and limited opportunities for performance.

Additionally, Korean schools offer moral education classes from elementary school to high school, where students learn how to behave starting from the first grade. They learn how to greet, to respect teachers, elderly people, and parents. The moral class covers from Eastern philosophy to Western philosophy during middle school and high school.

3. Same Classroom or Movement?: American middle and high school students typically move to different classrooms every period depending on their subjects. All teachers have their own classrooms, so the students who registered for the semester have to move to their subject's classrooms.

In contrast, Korean middle and high schoolers stay in the same classroom, and then every teacher moves to the different classrooms depending on the subject and their timetables. One similarity for Korean and American elementary students is both have their own classrooms. They don't need to move at all. Sometimes, they may change location for special subjects such as P.E. and science laboratory classes.

4. School Lunch: Both American and Korean schools have nutritionists, and school lunches are offered free for all students. However, the main difference between the school systems is the distribution and materials for food containers. American schools use disposable plastic boxes and utensils, which are heated to keep the food warm. In contrast, Korean school lunches are served on a stainless-steel plate with categorized side dishes, stainless utensils, and cups. The utensils and plates are washed and sterilized after each use. Therefore, Korean schools employ more staff in the school cafeteria.

There are some pros and cons for both school systems. American schools have more freedom to choose and responsibilities, while Korean schools focus on solid education and entrance to good universities. In conclusion, my thought is that it doesn't matter which school system students attend, but all children need a good education which considers their unique characteristics to have a happy life.

Tragic Conditions in Tibet

by Lhamo T.

I grew up in a small village in Tibet. Before the Han army from China invaded my country, everyone was happy and the environment was very good. Many flowers with different color on the mountains. People loved and helped each other. It was a very peaceful country but after the Chinese occupied my country thousands of people were killed. They took all the important sacred items from our temple and some of them included century old scroll painting of Buddha, and natural resources like copper, to China.

Daily each person was given only one spoon of Tsampa (traditional food of Tibet). One spoon of Tsampa is not enough for anyone to have a full meal, and it came out watery. A lot of Tibetans suffered and died from hunger, not getting enough nutrition from food. At that time we didn't have shoes on our feet, not enough clothes and no blankets to keep us warm. In my family, two children died because there's no hospital and medicine.

The Chinese man who's a head of our village made all of us work very hard, day and night. A lot of time the leader would wake everyone up and order us to hunt down birds and other animals. The situation was very difficult at that time because we Tibetans don't believe in killing living things, and if we refuse the leader would cut down our food and give us extra work to do.

The situation is even worse now. There's no human right, no language right, and no religious right in Tibet. It is mandatory to send young children to boarding school in Tibet where they have to learn Chinese and all the older ones are sent to study in China without any choice. They are making new rules like that to get rid of our culture and language in Tibet. It is very heartbreaking to see our young generation forget the language and culture slowly. I'm in the US right now but I'll always remember the situation in Tibet and I'll never forget about it.

“we Tibetans don't believe in killing living things...”

I'm praying daily for a better future in Tibet like before, peaceful and a safe country. I'm praying that His Holiness the Dalai Lama will be able to return to Tibet very soon.

Why War?

by Parvin M.

This is always a question in my mind: why war? Why do countries go to war and people kill each other? We are all human.

I had an experience of war between my country, Iran, and our neighbor to the south, Iraq, when Iraq invaded and occupied southern Iran. The war continued for years, 1980–1988. Many people died, were maimed, or displaced.

I was living in my hometown, Shiraz, almost near the cities involved in the war. Although we were not in the war zone, we had the experience of having our city bombed. I remember during the days or nights when we were having lunch or dinner, the sirens would sound to warn us the warplanes were approaching our city and we had to go to a shelter. The shelter was across the street from my house. If it was night, all the electricity of the town would be shut off, and cars had to stop and turn off their lights until they heard the next siren, which would allow them to go. One year the backyard of the hospital in our city was bombed, and the sound of the bombing was so loud that it cracked some of the windows in our house.

Even though these days were sad and stressful, we would show ourselves to be strong to make our children calm and to not worry. We would bake special sweets for the new year, which is Iran's most special holiday, and perform our traditional customs. I remember sometimes my next-door neighbor, my sister-in-law and I would bake sweets together in my kitchen for the new year. The sirens would go off, even more than once a day, and when we heard them we would leave everything we were baking in the kitchen and run across the street to the shelter.

I wish for there to be no war anywhere in the world. May people live in peace, may children be happy, may no one become displaced, and may people's homes everywhere be a safe place for them to live.

**...the sirens would
sound to warn us
the warplanes were
approaching
our city...**

Ukraine Today, Taiwan Tomorrow?

by Ramon L.

Do you think Ukraine made the right decision to fight a war? I'm not sure. But I'm pretty sure most of Ukraine's people will still be grieving even ten or twenty years later. And by that time most of the city and facilities that were destroyed by the war will probably be rebuilt. But those people who lost family or were injured will find it hard to recover. Some of them will never recover.

So if one day China decides to invade Taiwan, I think we should surrender right away. I'm a true believer in the concept of "where there's life, there's hope." As long as people stay alive, they always will have opportunities in the future. People's lives and family are more important than anything. I wouldn't put them at risk of death because of war.

Even if Ukraine wins, the majority of Ukrainians will still lose, not only property, but family life. And in the long term, history may even say Russia was justified in its invasion! So don't even start a war should be the best option. People will definitely have better lives in the next 10 years or 20 years.

The American Dream

by Phyu Phyu W.

My name is Phyu Phyu. I'm 60 years old. I came from Myanmar (Burma) to US. My family arrived to US in July 2022. I have two younger brothers. They lived in US 28 years ago. They applied immigrant visa for our family.

I have two daughters. My mother stays with my family. She is 88 years old. We live in Antioch, CA. My husband works in Walmart. My elder daughter is studying in DVC. My younger daughter is studying in LMC. They also work part time jobs. They are very happy to study and working in US. They can speak English very well.

I am good at cooking and crocheting. On Saturday or Sunday my brothers and their families come to my home. I cook Myanmar foods and we eat together. They like my cooking. My mother is very happy. Sometime we go to my brother home. We visited to San Francisco with my brother.

I can make hat, bag, handphone bag and cushion cover with crochet. I don't know where can I sell it. I want to sell my handmade. I need to take care my mother, and I can't go out to work.

Step by Step

by Martin G.

In 2017, my wife and I decided that we would move to the United States for better job opportunities. I applied to plenty of jobs, getting a “NO” as an answer. In 2019, I received an opportunity for the state of California for the city of Napa in a winery. I completed all the legal procedures to enter the United States through a work visa. Full of joy and excitement to start a new path. Also, after a long wait, we became pregnant with twins. We moved to California October 2019.

When my wife and I arrived from Mexico City to Concord, California, she was already 4 months pregnant. I started a job that was great. But between the fifth and sixth month the pregnancy began to complicate, so she had an emergency surgery in the seventh month. On March 13, 2020, my twins were born, and I lost my job due to the start of the pandemic. My boys were born healthy and small, and my wife recovered slowly. Due to the job loss, we lost our apartment. It was complicated and very challenging.

The only thing I could rent was a living-room in an apartment and the only thing we had was a mattress and a few clothes that we bought for the children. When my children were 3 months old, I got a job. For 4 months we lived in that place, and then, I was finally able to rent an apartment for my family. I felt grateful and at peace, but also with an opportunity to move forward to continue growing and giving a better life for me and my family.

Thirty Year Dream

by Rita S.

I had one big dream for 30 years. I wanted it more than anything else. I am blessed my dream came to true. I came to my dream country, with my two daughters. They have good education, and we are happy. I am looking forward to continue my life. I believe, you have to chase your dream always.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my wonderful tutor Dan from Second Chance. Dan has encouraged me to improve my English.

Ukraine: Part One

by Volodymyr F.

It wasn't an ordinary day in October 2023. It was the time when I left Ukraine. A few days before, I bought train tickets for my new friend and me. On that night, on the same train, but in different cars, the two of us were going to the last train station near the western border. Each one of us had his own reason to leave our homeland and try to find a new place to live without a war. As for me, I left Ukraine forever. I proceeded towards the USA, where I dared to want to live a few years before.

Life in Ukraine has never been easy, and the war made things worse. Can you imagine that? The war has just made life worse because life before the war was already too hard.

It was the last train station. I left the train car and scanned the crowd. I was looking for my friend, my fleeing companion, to meet him in person, not through a video call. We did it, finally. We saw each other and waved through the crowd. I made a gesture about my intention to meet him by the exit from the train station. I started crossing the rails because it was a shorter way. Our first meeting was delayed by the interference of the border police. Three officers were between us, and they started to interview us politely directly in front of the train station. It was unexpected and seemed like something bad. Communications with authorities in Ukraine are always a bad sign.

Ukraine: Part Two

by Volodymyr F.

Ukrainian border police are not good people, especially now when the war has begun. They don't want to fight, and they overstep the rights of civilians. They try to catch civilian men with signs of intentions to cross the Ukrainian border out of the special crossing points and send them to fight by force. Civilian men flee from Ukraine because they don't have a chance to be prepared to fight a war. If a man joins the army, he goes to the battlefield with insufficient training. Now, it is the usual practice in Ukraine to prepare troops just for two or three weeks. It can be compared with a new athlete who wants to win a gold medal with just three weeks of training. The battlefield is not a game, and lives are at stake.

Let's get back to the border police. The contents of our backpacks were looked over. They even read our messages and looked over our browser histories on our phones. It was disgusting! Even now, I'm surprised that I allowed it without resisting. The border police are skilled in the manipulation of people's minds. They have a lot of practice every day.

They were asking questions to uncover our desire to cross the border in the mountains. Of course, we weren't confessing. Our interview took about twenty minutes. After all these humiliations, we were free to get started on our plan to flee Ukraine.

We left the train station, and the taxi driver was waiting for us. He even called us when we were with the border police. He was getting a little worried about us, and he was tired of waiting. He was glad to see us, we were glad to see him. We needed him to make our hiking trip shorter by giving us a lift to the bottom of the ridge.

Ukraine: Part Three

by Volodymyr F.

He drove us in his old Mercedes along the picturesque valley of the White Tisza River. Our driver was an elderly man, and he had been living all his life there in the Carpathian Mountains. He clearly remembered how things had changed with the Soviets in power. In the nearby village, they unsuccessfully tried to force people to join a collective farm until the 1970s. Life in the mountains was hard, but you could maintain your freedom. The Soviets built a few industrial plants nearby. All of them were closed after Ukraine became an independent country because of cheaper and better imported goods. We were curious about the history of this place, and he was glad to tell us what he knew. We had a ride and guide for the same money.

After forty minutes of driving and talking, we arrived at the park entrance. In the past, just park workers were at the park entrance. At that time, there was a border police officer, and he was walking toward us. It was an unpleasant surprise. Oh, no, not again! It took the officer a short time to figure out who we were. The taxi driver helped us with this situation. He explained that we had already met the border police at the railway station. The officer called his colleagues, and the situation was resolved. We had permission to go. It was the happiest moment of that morning.

We were happily talking and driving for the next 20 minutes in the car. The time flew by, we didn't notice when we came to the river's confluence, and it was our destination. We paid our driver and guide, thanked him, and said goodbye. We were hungry and had a fast breakfast at the picturesque camping place among the mountains. The last part of our hiking journey to our new free life was about to start.

We left the country due to the authorities suppressing the potential for development for every citizen. The authorities are keeping people in poverty and in unsafe conditions. They are taking away the future of our people, and now even taking our lives.

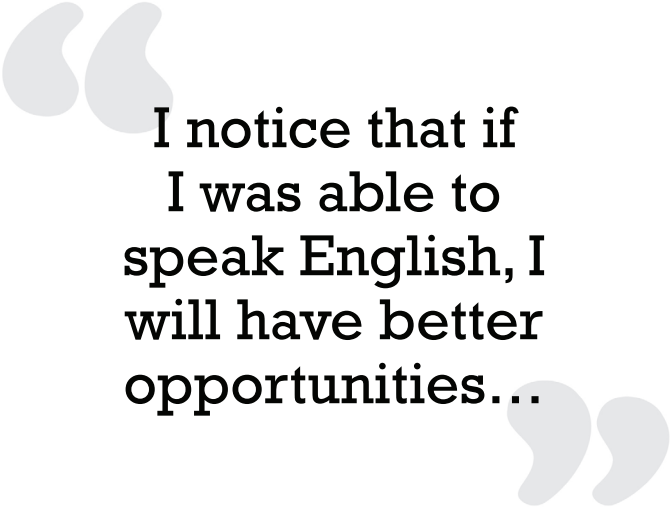
A Big Step for a Better Life

by Laura Y.

When I was a young girl with only 18 years old, a big decision change the direction of my future. I finish my high school when was 17 years old. And then I was trying to get into college, but I couldn't get in because is super hard. Mexico hasn't enough colleges for all the teenagers. So after that I decided to emigrate to the United States. At first I talked with my mom. I tell her that there was no more chances for me so I was ready to find it on a different country. I was ready to emigrate to the USA to work for my future and for her too.

Then on May 2005 I got to the United States. It was so hard at the beginning. I wasn't able to speak English. So on the next week I found a job and I start working but I was working from 7:00am to 8:00pm. It was too much for me. After six months working like that, I decided to learn the language. I notice that if I was able to speak English, I will have better opportunities of jobs and I was right. I left my job of 12 hours to start working on restaurants.

I met a guy who now is my husband for almost 15 years. We get marry in 2009, then we start building our family we have two wonderful kids. I still continue studying English because is very extensive language. In this moment in my life, I own a small business and I continue helping my mom. I miss her so much, but I am so happy to live here in United States, speaking English and enjoying the weather of California.



**I notice that if
I was able to
speak English, I
will have better
opportunities...**

My Trip to My Home Country

by Tamam J.

I was very excited to go to my country and I hoped to spend a nice time with my family and friends. I was eagerly waiting for that time.

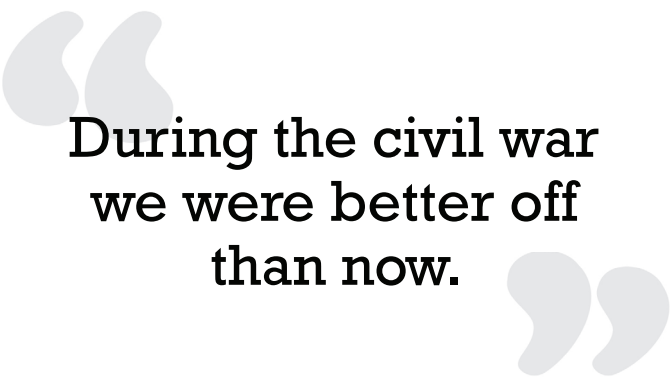
I left the United States on the tenth of July, heading to Lebanon. I had a good time there because I met my niece. She came to Beirut to see her boyfriend who came from Florida. They had been chatting online for five months and finally they decided to see each other and get married. And they did.

Their decision made my day because I will have a relative or someone whom I love in America when they live together in Florida. After ten days my niece and I left Lebanon heading to our country Syria by car. The best time of my trip was when our neighbors were waiting in front of their doors to welcome us heartily, and they were happy too to see us safe after a long trip. But all my gladness left me and a deep sadness settled down in my spirit because people are suffering from hunger and depression. Most kids don't go to school, they are working to support their families, there is no health care, and people must work hard to get their food. During the civil war we were better off than now.

The first day in my country I didn't do anything because I was very tired, but all the time I had left on my trip was great. My family and I went to a nice place not far from Damascus. We call it Yaafoor. Yaafoor is a small town with a lot of trees and a small river. We sat by the river and we had a barbecue for lunch and we listened to Arabic music. People invited me to their houses and out for food which showed their generosity.

The bad thing I faced in both Lebanon and Syria was the weather. It so hot and there was no electricity. People have been suffering from hunger since the war, the good thing is that now there is safety. Can go anywhere and anytime.

I love my home country but I love to be here too, and am proud and lucky to be an American citizen too. And I prefer to live here forever.



**During the civil war
we were better off
than now.**

My Thirst for Playing the National Anthem on the Piano

Chapter 1: The National Anthem

by Judy H.

If someone asked me “what is the greatest country on our planet?” I would react instantly and say, “the United States of America.”

Generally, the National Anthem is sung before the sports game starts, in Olympic games, when a US athlete wins, during Fourth of July parades and during the naturalization ceremony for new immigrants.

I have heard the National Anthem uncountable times. Whenever I hear it, the majestic and powerful melody makes me excited and my emotions surge. I often involuntarily go with the flow and hum the familiar melody with other people.

At my naturalization ceremony event, we, the new immigrants, raised our right hand and repeated the oath after the immigration official. Then, when the resounding National Anthem was played, I burst into tears.

To most people, it was just an ordinary day, but to me, it was an unforgettable, significant day. At that moment, I was proud to be a citizen of the United States of America. I thought to myself: it is my new country, I love the USA. As a citizen’s duty, I will faithfully do whatever I can to help. On that day, I promised to serve my country, and I am proud to say that I have kept that promise so far.

My husband Bob and I still remember vividly that when we were in China and we were young, we had a big dream—go to America, where an ordinary citizen has full freedom, and we knew that a capacity to speak good English would be necessary and helpful. At the beginning, it seemed like an unattainable dream. In order to fulfill that dream, Bob taught University students as a day job and learned English at the library and at home as a second job. Two years later, he passed the GRE and TOEFL tests, and received three university offers as a graduate school student. Then he chose the university that provided him a scholarship.

Now, decades later, we still deeply appreciate VA-Tech’s offer of the scholarship. He was taught by his professor Houska for six years. Unfortunately, Dr. Houska passed away at the age of 97. We participated in the online funeral ceremony. He will be missed and may he rest in peace.

My Thirst for Playing the National Anthem on the Piano

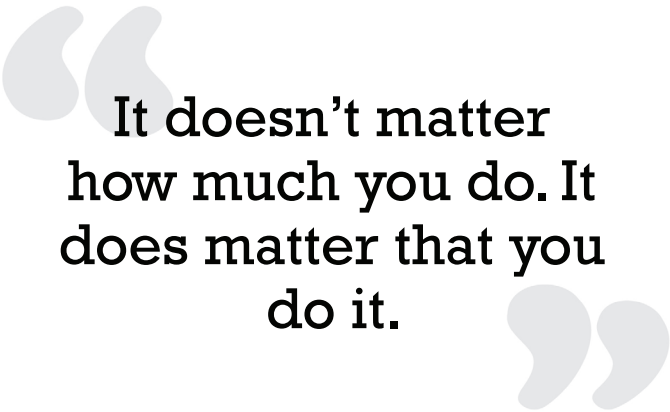
Chapter 2: My Naturalization Ceremony

by Judy H.

To me, the naturalization ceremony was the milestone of my life. Thanks to the U.S.A. for opening your arms and warmly welcoming new legal immigrants. It made me consider how I can make my contribution to our community and to our country.

These are some things I can do: first, the presidential election is particularly important to me and I will definitely not miss voting. It is my right and my voice represents my independent opinion.

Second, there is a variety of community activities I passionately participate in. For example, census working, joining the clean-up day, performing for seniors, walking with the Chinese American association 4th of July parade, and showing my respect to military personnel, police officers, firefighters, and EMT workers. It doesn't matter how much you do. It does matter that you do it.



**It doesn't matter
how much you do. It
does matter that you
do it.**

My Thirst for Playing the National Anthem on the Piano

Chapter 3: Learning and Playing the National Anthem

by Judy H.


During the pandemic, I decided that to learn the lyrics of National Anthem, to sing them, and to play the anthem on the piano would be my goal, but I didn't start immediately, and gradually I put it off...Until one day, a good friend of mine talked to me about the National Anthem. It touched my heart and made me immediately recall my goal. I regretted the delay and blamed myself. It's the thing I desired to do but postponed it, due to my lack of confidence. I thought to myself "there is no excuse for that, I will have to start is sooner or later."

My dear husband Bob helped me print out the National Anthem's lyrics. Then during my PSC lesson, my tutor Bev, taught me how the lyrics and the melody can be put together smoothly. I practiced reading the lyrics and singing the melody again and again under her patient guidance. Thank you Bev. Without you, I wouldn't be able to sing it correctly. The last step was to use my piano, to use my hands, with my passion, and a lot of effort to produce the National Anthem correctly and smoothly.


It was different from when I had learned other new songs before. This project went unexpectedly fast and smoothly. I really enjoyed the process of practicing again and again. I was able to play and sing at the same time. Of course, I know that there is no such miracle, just because I already knew the melody and I worked hard to reach my goal. Through this process, I realized that if you want to do something, as long as you have a desire and make efforts, you can definitely do it.

To me, it doesn't matter how well I can play and sing the National Anthem, as long as I have self-confidence to participate when the national anthem is needed. I can volunteer to play the piano and sing facing our beautiful flag that symbolizes our freedom and democracy.

Every nation's flag represents its own country. So respecting and protecting its flag is every citizen's duty. This is my interpretation, and it will be my action.



Through this process, I realized that if you want to do something, as long as you have a desire and make efforts, you can definitely do it.



My Journey with Abba

by Kinkin Y.

A lot people ask me how I get here. The story began in 2005.

I remember that day, I spoke to God with a broken heart, “nobody invited me to go around.” I felt very sad, because my aunt just invited my two sisters to go China and Singapore, never ever inviting me.

One week after that, got a call that I got scholarships in China 1 year to learn to be kindergarten principal.

When I was in China, did travel for like 1 month in Hong Kong, went to Xiamen with my friends. Sometimes China government gave free travel too.

After I graduated from China, some of my Abacus, Sakamoto students became champions in my country so I must accompany them to follow World Champion in China, Philippines, and get free tour in Singapore.

One day, when I was praying about my future husband to God, I suddenly heard a sound: “you will meet him soon.” We met 2 weeks later at Christian websites. He has been living in America 20 years. The shock for us after we went to deep conversation were he is my neighbor, his auntie is my auntie friend, and same with his father. And his cousin daughters are my students, and many things more.

After 1.5 years of relationship, in 2011 we married and I came to America. God gave me the opportunity to live in beautiful Alaska. Every week, my husband took me traveling around Alaska. He makes me so happy. We went fishing for salmon at rivers and sea, and glacier cruise is so beautiful. I saw my first snow. Omg...I’m so happy. We had lived there for 7 years.

God give me more travel. On my first honeymoon, I went to 10 cities in America (Atlantic City, Philadelphia, Washington DC, New York, Maryland, Grand Canyon, Las Vegas, Seattle, Denver, San Diego). My second honeymoon is Hawaii.

God gave me more exciting travel. Two weeks using a car from Alaska to California. We passing through Denali, Yukon, Port Nelson, Dawson Creek, Edmonton, Calgary, Banff National Park, Jasper, Lake Louise, Vancouver, Seattle, Portland, etc.) until in here San Ramon

I always pinch my hand (it is dream/real?). God is soooooo good. He is always good. He gives everything more than I dream for. He not only gave me a good husband but traveled with me until now. Thank God.

My Impressive Trip

by Lin F.

The impressive trip of mine is the traveling to Beijing. Beijing is the capital city of China. There are a lot of places of interest. When I were arriving, I felt it is a really big city. Approximately 10 subway lines crisscrossing and connecting in all directions. The first place I went to was the Great Wall. It is amazing. I couldn't imagine how they would build so grand in the ancient time. I was marveling at the scenes before my eyes. Next day, I went to The Imperial Palace. It was different from what I saw in TV shows. It is really magnificent. It was true in front of my eyes. It is not only historical but also beautiful. Last day, I ate a lot kinds of food in Beijing. It is very delicious. Until now. I still remember the taste of the food in Beijing. It is so good. I am really like the trip in Beijing because of the good food and excellent scenes.

**I was marveling at the
scenes before
my eyes.”**

TURQUOISE

by Erika T.

My favorite color is turquoise!
I like it in earrings and necklaces.
It is a brilliant color!
This color means life for me...
because it is enjoyable, happy.
It makes me feel connected to myself.
I have jewelry in this color.
My first necklace was gold with
turquoise stone.
It was a gift from my mom in Mexico.

My Adventure to Eagle Peak

by Xochil S.

It is a rainy Saturday morning after breakfast and I feel the need to go for a walk. My son and I give each other a hug and wish the best for our day. Some water, a snack, and I start on my way to Mount Diablo.

On my way through Clayton. I got a call from my sister and she asked me how was my day. When I told her about my plans she asks "are you crazy, the weather is bad and I don't think it is a good idea". And she made me have a second thought about my plans. But after realizing that I really needed that walk, I decided to take the risk of the apparently bad weather, and keep going with my plan.

When I got there, I was surprised when I see the parking lot full of cars. That was a good sign that I made the right choice. I was happy and motivated.

When I walked by the visitors parking, I realized that there was an event going on, that explained why the parking lot was full of cars. I started my walk and decided to walk towards Eagle Peak. I was really happy when on my way, I found a lot of people wishing me that I had a good walk.

My plan was to go on a loop that's not too long but on my way. I decided to go farther and reach Eagle Peak. And I made it!

When I reached the top of Eagle Peak the wind was blowing loudly, pushing the gray clouds, that sensation was great!! I felt so very satisfied to reach the top and grateful with God for not leaving me alone, and for sending those people to be there with me at the same time.

This is My Last Journey

by Lisa G.

My journey with Project Second Chance has helped me with reading and writing. I have learned a lot with the program. This is my last time writing about in our words. Megan Brown and Laura has been my cheerleaders on my journey of helping me get the right tutor to help me with reading and writing. My tutor that helped me a lot her name was Cathy. She helped me a lot. And we are good friends. This Project Second Chance has help me be a strong lady to help with direction on going to the court house, and talking with legal aid person. This is the best read program that helps peoples with dyslexia like me.

Thank you so much.

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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