


In Our Words

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

VOLUME TWELVE

A large, dark, irregular ink splatter is centered on a light blue background. The splatter has a dense, dark core with many fine, radiating lines and droplets extending outwards, creating a dynamic and expressive visual effect.

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

In Our Words Volume Twelve

Table of Contents

In Our Words – Volume Twelve

Aseyeh A.

A Story about a Traditional Eid
and Other Celebrations.....11

Boubacar D.

A Saturday Like No Other.....13

Byron D.

Irregular Words.....14

Cecilia A.

Good Morning Sun.....32

Letter to Wes Moore,
author of *Discovering Wes Moore*.....23

The Greedy Yellow Squirrel.....33

Dhondup W.

A Journey from Tibet to the U.S.A.....16

Dolma C.

Learning English.....9

Tenzin's Birthday.....24

Ehte A.

Nowruz—Iranian Name for New Year.....12

Eunjoo K.

Three Things I Learned from Malcolm X....25

Feyza K.

A Translated Turkish Children's Story.....34

Hsiao W.

Meeting People.....7

Javi C.

Adventures on the Ranch.....9

Joy J.

Make Good Choices.....24

Judy H.

My Antarctic Trip 1.....18

My Antarctic Trip 2.....19

My Antarctic Trip 3.....20

Juliana M.

A Gift for Immigrants.....8

Larisa V.

My American City That I Love.....22

Lhamo T.

Language.....10

Lilian O.

The Beauty of a Second Language.....6

Lucie S.

Camp Krem Adventures.....29

Manizha H.

A Dog's Apology.....31

Maria R.Pilgrims are Important
for My Family Roots.....17**Mary G.**

Happy Day!.....24

Niloofer S.

The Path Less Traveled Led to Her.....15

Oksana D.Becoming a Parent:
Nature vs Nurture Part I.....26
Becoming a Parent:
Nature vs Nurture Part 2.....27**Parvin M.**

My First Trip to the U.S.....21

YuJeong Y.My Clubhouse.....28
Thanksgiving Weekend.....28**Zary**

A Dream.....30

Many thanks to the following PSC tutors who worked with
the learner-authors in this volume:

Ann Marie Foley

Bev Farrell

Collin Baker

Connie Forrest

Connie Miller

Cynthia Kay

Diane Kopchik

Edith Henchey

Gitte Sommer

Glen Teshima

Jane Copps

Jaqueline Brooks Hanel

Judy Brennan

Karen Helfter

Kathy Youngson

Lior Jacober

Lynn Eve Komaromi

Marilyn Lloyd

Melanie Falo

Ron Elsdon

Sandy Burnett

Sara McCune

Shauna Cramer

Sheldon Jones

Susan Klingman

The Beauty of a Second Language

by Lilian O.

“Your mindset is the only thing standing between you and success”—Carol Dweck

When I started learning English, it was out of necessity. I needed to learn how to communicate with others in my day to day. I felt restricted not knowing how to communicate with others. I had the feeling of being naïve and not being able to defend myself when I knew that I have not done anything wrong. One day at work someone made a mess and my boss thought that I made the mess. When I tried to defend myself, I couldn't. From that day I promised myself that I would learn English so no one would take advantage of me. Since then, I have been taking English classes and learning something new every day. That taught me that there is beauty in learning a new language.

“With every rose there are always thorns”

In the beginning of me learning English it was hard for me to always be translating from English to Spanish. As my teacher was teaching me the language, she noticed that I was struggling. It was difficult for me because I was thinking in Spanish when I was speaking English. She explained to me that it is easier to learn when you are speaking and thinking

in English. She opened a lot of doors for my education, and she supported me through my learning journey. One of the opportunities that her class showed me was a program called Project Second Chance. This program would partner people with a tutor that would teach them English. When I learned about the program, I was excited because it would be more focused, and it would help me on a more personal level. After I called to ask about the program, they paired me with a tutor named Ann Marie.

When we first started together, we clicked on the first day. We got to know each other, and we learned that we had a lot in common. We both like to cook, and we like the outdoors. When she started tutoring, she would ask what kind of learning I wanted to do that day which could be reading, writing, speaking, and listening. She is never mad, she always has a positive attitude, and I am very happy to have her in my life and as my tutor. In my journey with learning English, I am proud to have Ann Marie for the past 3 years and I hope to be learning, laughing and speaking with her for many more.

Meeting People

by Hsiao W.


At first, when I came to America, I felt like I couldn't say what I wanted to say. I couldn't understand what people were saying to me when I was walking around. Sometimes I could understand a little, but I couldn't understand all, and I didn't know what to say. Then I felt so bad.

When I moved to Tennessee, I met people who could speak English and Chinese. It was very nice and very good. I met friends from China who lived in the same community. We went shopping and to restaurants. We could talk about everything.


In 2022, there was an opportunity for my husband to choose to work in California. This was a big choice because we had been in Tennessee for three and a half years and our friends and our children's classmates were all in Tennessee. This was also a chance to see a different city and an opportunity to meet new friends. When we first arrived in California, of course, we all needed some time to adapt to the environment and school. In the blink of an eye, we have been in California for more than two years, and we have adapted to California, but we still miss our friends.

In Taiwan, when my children were young, I often took them to the library to read and borrow books, so when we got to the U.S. we went to the local library. Because my kids love reading, I stumbled across the library website and saw the Second Chance Program for Adults. Actually, I hesitated for a long time, and then I thought, "if you never try you will never know," so I mustered up the courage to sign up for the library's Adult Second Chance Program.

I still remember being very nervous during my first class, because of my experiences meeting people before. When I met my tutor, she was very friendly and nice. Now when I study English, I am completely stress-free and relaxed. I am so grateful to Project Second Chance and to my tutor for spending her precious time helping me.



In Taiwan, when my children were young, I often took them to the library to read and borrow books, so when we got to the U.S. we went to the local library.



A Gift for Immigrants

by Juliana M.

To become an immigrant is to leave everything you know or have and restart your life.

Sometimes everything you did or you spend your whole life for to build is left behind: family, friends, job, career.

That's why, sometimes, it's about being lost in your own life.

A new language, new culture are now part of you and you need to start from scratch. Only those who live the experience know how hard it could be, for several reasons.

That's why, the second chance program is a gift. An immeasurable gift for each one of us, immigrants.

I am so grateful for the opportunity to take class with a tutor, improving my English, knowing more about real American life and giving to me a chance to build myself again.

I can't explain how amazing this experience is being and how grateful I am for wonderful tutor I have. I am so lucky to have Ms. Shauna Cramer [my tutor]. She is always positive and kind.

Day after day she encourages me to try and makes me more confident in my ability to communicate in English.

I am recommending the program for everyone I know, because I hope it can help more and more people like it is helping me. Thank you PSC!

I am so grateful for the opportunity to take class with a tutor, improving my English, knowing more about real American life and giving to me a chance to build myself again.

Learning English

by Dolma C.

When I first arrived in California in 2019, I couldn't understand or speak English very well. I listened to short stories in English on YouTube. Now I study with Lior, my tutor through Project Second Chance.

In 2021, I took an online ESL class for two months. It was very helpful. Now, I am not so nervous to converse with Americans.

When I used to go to a restaurant, I was too scared to order something. My friend and my daughter spoke with the server for me. Now, I am comfortable ordering for myself. About two months ago, I made three different medical appointments by myself! I even went to my appointments alone! They said that they understood my English. For example, my new eyeglasses were giving me a headache. I went into the eyeglass shop with Lior, but the optician understood what I was saying, and he fixed them.

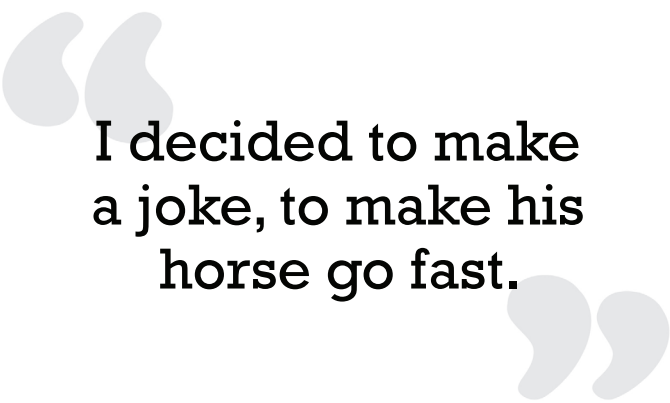
Adventures on the Ranch

by Javi C.

One time I went to visit some friends at their ranch. Then he asked me to go with him to get the two horses and help take them back to the stable. We rode them back.

I decided to make a joke, to make his horse go fast. So I used a little branch to tap his horse. So instead, my horse felt the tap and he started running very fast. I dropped the rope and grabbed my horse's hair when I panicked!

The rope got tangled in my horse's legs. Then he fell and I flew off the horse, but we were okay after we fell. We were very lucky!!




**I decided to make
a joke, to make his
horse go fast.**

Language


by Lhamo T.

Our language is very important to our life. Most people can not stay more than 100 years but our language must stay forever and also our culture is so important for all of us too. But if we lose our own language and culture then no one knows who we are.

If we keep our own language and culture then our next generations will know who they are. If we don't teach them our own language and culture then we are very negligent. I really want to teach my own language and culture to our Tibetan children.



**If we keep our
own language and
culture then our next
generations will know
who they are.**



From last year we started Tibetan Storytime at the library. Most children are Tibetan so we read Tibetan books and sing songs in Tibetan and also speak in Tibetan. So many families are so happy we are doing this and also children are happy too.

Last year, I opened family daycare at my home and my day care children are all Tibetan. I teach them Tibetan language and culture. I am reading Tibetan books and singing songs and many different things all in Tibetan. I think this is very good idea because some students first speak to me only in English but now speak in Tibetan. Their culture is getting much better too. For example, one girl only spoke to me in English at first but now she speaks to me mostly in Tibetan. For example at first she said, "no no" and now she says, "མེད་མེད་". Also, the children pray before eating. That means their Tibetan and culture are improving so I hope our language will be stronger and I will do my best to help.

A Story about a Traditional Eid and Other Celebrations

by Aseyeh A.

This year coincidentally, the beginning and end of Ramadan coincided with the beginning and end of March. During this month, hunger and thirst did not bother me much because the weather was spring like and perfect. A few days before the end of Ramadan, my daughters and I, who are now teenagers, were thinking about Eid and choosing an Afghan vendor on Cliton Road.

We happily went to the store. Fortunately, we were able to choose three beautiful Afghan dresses and buy them at a reasonable price. The first day of Eid was very enjoyable. We spent the day in beautiful weather, wearing beautiful dresses, and visiting friends and neighbors until late. We went to our neighbor's daughter's wedding on the 4th April, just in time for Eid. My daughters and I had great time. The variety of Afghan food, happy music and traditional dances were all interesting and exciting. One of my husband's old friends recently came to America with his family.

First we invited them, and after a few days they invited us because they had been in Turkey for a few years before America and knew how to cook Turkish food, and they had worked hard at that party and they had cooked several types of food, such as dolma, which is made with mulberry leaves and a mixture of rice, lemon, meat, and burek which is made from a bread of pastry dough and also minced beef, spinach, mushrooms, egg, and cheese and it was very delicious.

And also, the next day, we went to the shopping by car and bought some household items for ourselves.

I am very happy that in the last few months I have been able to drive easily and go to the shopping without fear and I owe this progress to Gitte efforts. It really helped me a lot because in the beginning I was a little shy about speaking English in public and in the shopping, and I always thought that maybe no one would understand what I meant. And I need to speak fluently to have complete command of English, but these two-person conversations between Gitte and I made me realize that even with basic English, I can get my point across.

For some time now, I have been able to handle my daily tasks outside the home with high self-confidence and with my basic English.

Nowruz — Iranian Name for New Year

by Ehte A.

Nowruz means new day in Persian, and it is the Iranian new year, which is celebrated starting on the first day of spring. Each year before Nowruz we do some activities to get ready for the new year celebration. We want everything to be fresh, new and clean, just like spring is a fresh and new time of the year.

First, we deep clean our homes. This is a lot of work but it helps to make everything fresh. We also like to buy new clothes for the new year because new clothes make us feel good.

We love to visit and share our time with our families and our friends. One of our traditions is to go to the bank and request brand, new dollar bills. We then put those bills inside a religious book or a book of beautiful poems. This is the way we present money to our loved ones when they visit our home.

We believe that God gives us wonderful gifts in our lives, and we want to make a collection of things that symbolize those gifts. We do this by setting up a table with different items, such as wheat, grass, garlic and apples, which symbolize new growth.

Iranians love Nowruz because it's a celebration for all people, no matter what religion they may be or what country they came from. The celebration lasts thirteen days. For the first twelve days we spend time with family and friends. Schools and many businesses are closed then, so students and employees can take some of that time as vacation. On the thirteenth day, the last day, we go to a park. Sometimes there are musical concerts in the park, and everyone likes to play, dance, and have picnics with delicious food.

Nowruz is a very happy time for Iranians. It lifts our spirits and brings joy to our hearts.

We believe that God gives us wonderful gifts in our lives, and we want to make a collection of things that symbolize those gifts.

A Saturday Like No Other

by Boubacar D.

On Saturdays, I usually start my day slowly, enjoying the calm after the busy weekdays. I often sleep in a bit longer, enjoying the freedom of not having a fixed schedule. But one Saturday, on November 5, 2023, everything changed unexpectedly.


That morning, I woke up and made myself a comforting cup of coffee. I sat down at the dining table, a routine I cherish, often chatting with my mom on the phone. Little did I know, this ordinary Saturday would become unforgettable.

As I talked with my mom, suddenly I heard gunshots nearby. They seemed to be coming from all directions, getting louder and more intense. Instinctively, I hurried from the dining room to the bathroom for safety. The gunfire stopped suddenly, leaving a strange silence behind.


Soon after, the neighborhood was filled with police. They blocked off the street, and I could hear neighbors talking anxiously with the officers. I cautiously stepped outside my apartment and was shocked to see two bullets had pierced through our walls. One passed near where I had been sitting moments earlier, and had gone through the kitchen into the bedroom wall.

The police questioned me about what I had witnessed. Despite hearing the gunfire, I hadn't seen anything because all our doors were closed. They took my information, promising to give me a report number later, but I never received it. Another officer came by later, asking the same questions but didn't request my ID.

In the following days, with no police report in sight, we repaired the damage to our apartment ourselves, covering the costs. The incident left me shaken, thinking about how unpredictable life can be and how quickly things can change.



I cautiously stepped outside my apartment and was shocked to see two bullets had pierced through our walls.



Irregular Words

by Byron D.

Mr. Irregular **had a** lot of words to say to **his** friends **and** family. **He like** to talk **about** food. One thing he like to do **is** cook breakfast; **egg** was his specialty. **They** all got together and bought him a new skillet **on** his birthday. He was so happy when they **gave** it to him. **I** always **wanted** a new skillet, he **said**. Is **this from** all of you guys? They all answered, yes! and asked him a question. **Will** you cook us breakfast? He pause **for** a second, yes he answered. I've **been** waiting for this **day**. He went right into the kitchen to start cooking eggs bacon toast and pancakes. Mr. Irregular was so happy this **day**. His daughter was over and grandkids all enjoying eating breakfast together. **She has** a lot of friends. They all came over that day too. **Her** friends saw Mr. Irregular in the kitchen crying. **Are** you okay they asked him? **The** day couldn't have been any better, he answered. **Did** you all enjoy my cooking? Yes! they all reply. Well it's time to go, **see** you all later, love you all.

The Path Less Traveled Led to Her

by Niloofar S.

While walking my dog, we often take a cozy narrow path which few people seldom walk through. One day we saw a cat hiding behind a tree and some large garbage and recycling bins.

I thought she might be lost or just prowling outside her home. I tried to pet the cat and check the collar, but she didn't let me get close. I decided to inform the apartment offices about the cat, hoping they could help find her owner. I emailed the snapshot to them, but they said no one had reported a lost cat.

Three days later, I returned to that path to see if the cat was still around. Surprisingly, she was there again! I needed to leave for a meeting, but on my way back, I stopped to buy some cat food. While she was eating, I gently tried to pet her so I could check her collar for a name and pick her up. She was scared, meowed loudly for help, so I kept her calm.

I took her to the vet to check for a microchip and make sure she was healthy. They found a microchip and gave me the serial number and a link to report her information. I took the cat home, fed her, and gave her water, then I tried to call the phone number on her tag, but it was disconnected, so my son drove to the address on her tag to find the owner. He found the owners and brought them to our home. They lived about a mile away and told us that they had missed the cat for a month. They had searched for her a lot, but as she is 14 years old, they thought she might have passed away. We were surprised how the cat had gone so far from home and how she survived without food and water for so long!

We returned the cat to them. They were emotional and cried because of happiness. The cat recognized them and calmed down in their arms. At the end of the day, I felt joy and energetic because I had helped save the cat's life and now she has her own warm home and kind humans.

I tried to call the phone number on her tag, but it was disconnected, so my son drove to the address on her tag to find the owner.

A Journey from Tibet to the U.S.A.

by Dhondup W.

I was born on October 17, 1974, in Kutse, a small and isolated village in East Amdo, Tibet. The roads were bad, and we had no electricity. Our main livelihood was farming with a small herd of animals. At the time, I didn't realize how poor my village was because I had never left. I only knew that Tibet was under China's control.

In February 1992 I traveled to Lhasa for the first time. The journey was nearly 2250 km and took a long time. Lhasa was a holy place for us Tibetans. When I saw the potala palace, I felt very proud. At Norbulingka, I saw many people still grieving, as it was the summer palace of His Holiness and the place from where he escaped Tibet. After a few months, I traveled to India. The journey took over a month. In India, I saw posters and videos about Tibet things that China had hidden from us. I finally learned the truth about my country and the suffering of my people. It broke my heart.

I returned to Tibet in 1992 determined to help young Tibetans go to India to see the truth and get better opportunities.

I returned to Tibet in 1992 determined to help young Tibetans go to India to see the truth and get better opportunities. For many years, I made it my mission to bring as many people as I could, including students, families, and even political prisoners.

I met my wife Lhamo in Lhasa through mutual friends. Life in Lhasa was difficult because it was under strict Chinese control. With many rules and curfews. We lived there for 14 years and had all our children there. In 2000, we sent our sons to India. Then my oldest daughter in 2002, and finally, in 2006 my wife and youngest daughter. In 2007, I sent my parents to India and started working on my documentary.

In March 2008, during the protests against the Beijing Olympics, I was arrested. I was sentenced to six years in prison. When I was released in 2014, I was still under strict surveillance. The police often came to my house and questioned my friends. Life was very difficult.

After many hardships, I finally decided to escape Tibet in 2017. I had not seen my family for 11 years. On December 25, 2017, I arrived in the USA. Reunited with my loved ones.

Pilgrims are Important for My Family Roots

by Maria R.

I admire the statue of Christ pilgrims brought to our school long ago. Each year on Candelaria, February second, about 8,000 pilgrims pass through my town on the way to visit the Cathedral of San Juan De Los Lagos. From all over, two million people visit the Lady de San Juan De Los Lagos. It's the second most popular place to visit after the Lady of Guadalupe.

This all started in 1840, when the pilgrims left a box having a Christ with the school teacher in my town, Santa Maria Transpontina, Jal.

I have a personal experience with this Christ image. As a child I was really curious and I wanted to go to school to learn English and math, but I could not. Now I have had angels to help me and find a much better life in California.

Pilgrims showed me there's faith through love and helping each other. As a child, I loved the old songs, sung when the pilgrims passed. In my interior I was very happy and felt peaceful. I love hearing the history about my town and family ancestors. Between 1926 and 1929, during the Mexican conflicts called Guerra Cristera many people were killed because of their faith. During this time, gold was hidden because the owners of haciendas didn't have time and feared being killed. The US government helped the sides negotiate and finish the war. These are my family roots.

Today, cartels kill and torture those who compete with them for drug territory. I hope for peace for our families, and those who suffer in other towns, cities and countries across the world. Everybody can make a difference. I continue to change myself to be better.

Thank you Project Second Chance for this program.



**As a child, I loved the old songs,
sung when the pilgrims passed.**

My Antarctic Trip 1

by Judy H.

The first day of the new year 2025, my husband and I started our journey to Antarctica. Actually It was my dream come true, and we were super excited about what we were about to see—the wonderful sight of Antarctica. As we all know, California's winter is the summer in South America, so we brought summer clothes for South America. But the weather in Antarctica is very cold. So we brought thick clothes that we would need there, and we also packed my husband's accordion and my keyboard for our daily practice.

...we were told by the Captain that Drake Passage is one of the most dangerous passages with heavy winds and waves. So everyone should stay on a lower floor to avoid falling.

We flew from San Francisco to Argentina and spent two days in the Capital city—Buenas Aires, then boarded the Sapphire Princess for a 17-day cruise. During those days, the ship reached these shores: Chile, Uruguay, and Deception Island, which belongs to the UK. Besides that, our ship passed Drake Passage, Admiralty Bay, and Elephant Island. We also saw Antarctic research stations from five countries.

First, let's talk little bit about Drake Passage. When the ship was getting closer to Drake Passage, we were told by the Captain that Drake Passage is one of the most dangerous passages with heavy winds and waves. So everyone should stay on a lower floor to avoid falling. Older passengers shouldn't do any exercises, and should sit down to keep their own balance. Actually, when I recall it now, I felt only some bumps at that time, but there was no discomfort. My husband and I even danced at that time. I saw everyone talking and laughing that showed they were very relaxed.

My Antarctic Trip 2

by Judy H.

Second, I want to talk about the thing that we didn't expect and it was unforgettable. When our ship approached the British Antarctic Station, the Captain announced that he would send two small boats to the station and pick up seven staff members and bring them to our ship. The Captain will let them take a shower and then have a buffet breakfast, then, they will give the passengers a presentation. "If you have any questions, feel free to ask them," the Captain said and ended up the announcement. In an instant, there was applause. I wanted to see the process of picking them up with my own eyes, so I intentionally went early to the 14 floor breakfast restaurant and found a table next to glass window. A half hour later, I witnessed the two orange boats from our ship headed to UK Station one after another. Later, more and more passengers came behind me, and saw the two boats were returning to the ship. BTW, I still have a question even now: during the process our ship never completely stopped, how did people on the boat board the big ship?

Bob joked about it, "The smart Captain made a really good deal. He generously provide a shower and breakfast which they needed badly, then got in exchange a presentation for passengers." They were able to learn about their daily lifestyle and work. It is the win/win situation and would be an unforgettable experience for all.


Third, since we had left from hot Argentina, after a few days, the weather gradually turned colder, so passengers' clothes changed from summer to fall, and to winter. When our ship entered the Antarctic, I really experienced the weather changing over there. In an hour, the weather from beautifully sunny changed to pouring rain, it made people run inside. A minute later the foggiest air floated over, it blocked the view of the beautiful mountain peak and blue sky and white clouds. We couldn't see each other clearly even when we were face to face.

**...the weather gradually
turned colder, so
passengers' clothes
changed from summer
to fall, and to winter.**


My Antarctic Trip 3

by Judy H.

Last thing was the cute penguins. To see the penguins was most people's top priority of this trip. Everyone was looking forward to seeing the lovely penguins. I wonder who doesn't like their adorable swaying style of walking. I know that the penguins often jumped into the sea to eat fish from time to time. Our ship sailed in Antarctica for four days, and every day everyone was looking forward to seeing the penguins. Once I saw a hillside densely covered with pure white clean snow with orange dots on it. We passengers were standing on the deck, all guessing what those little bits were. And later, I learned from the UK station wild animal expert's presentation, that was penguins droppings. When they eat a specific fish, its droppings turn orange color. During the 4 days in Antarctica, we were only able to watch the penguins from the ship deck which was pretty far distant. Finally when the ship arrived at the Falkland Islands, seems like all of the passengers were headed to the place where the penguins were. Hundreds of penguins were over there, some of them lounging around, some of them playing with each other, some of them looking at passengers, and they must be wondering: who are you? or why are you guys here? Of course, I videoed the fighting between two penguins.



Everyone was looking forward to seeing the lovely penguins. I wonder who doesn't like their adorable swaying style of walking.



Now, it's about the end my story, but the one thing I like to say is about Argentinians. I talked with many Argentinians during this trip. They were friendly, cheerful, and love music and dancing, especially tango dance. They also told me that they support the President Milei's policies and love the changes in Argentina under his leadership.

My First Trip to the U.S.

by Parvin M.

My first trip to the U.S. was in 1988. My husband and I came from Iran to see our children who were in their first and third years of college in California. Before this trip I had traveled to several European countries and now I was eager to see America.

We spent a summer in San Jose, CA where my children had rented a summer apartment. We had a great time. The weather was moderate so my husband and I would go for walks in the mornings. The first thing that caught my attention was people's behavior. They would smile and say good morning to us, which would make our day happier.

Another thing that was different from other countries, including Iran, was that American stores were computerized. When you made a purchase, the cashier would scan bar codes printed on the products into a computer. However, when you made a purchase at a store in Iran, or other countries, the cashier manually totaled the prices with a calculator. In America the computer totaled the prices.

My children took us to some interesting places like Yosemite, Disneyland, and Las Vegas. Yosemite was the most impressive for me. It took us an hour to reach the top of Yosemite Falls, where I realized how grand and magnificent it was.

Disneyland was a new, fun and unique place for me. I had a lot of fun there and enjoyed watching the entertaining shows. Disneyland is certainly not just for children. Adults love it, too.

Las Vegas is famous for its casinos. I had no experience going to a casino because in my country, Iran, gambling houses were only for men, and only before the Iranian revolution in 1979. I found it amazing that both men and women were playing the gambling machines. As someone would hit the jackpot, the clinking sounds of the coins hitting the trays attracted everyone's attention.

That was a memorable trip for me.

I had no experience going to a casino because in my country, Iran, gambling houses were only for men

My American City That I Love

by Larisa V.

My city where I live is Walnut Creek. It is located in the valley of Contra Costa County, not far from the famous city of San Francisco, California. My city is located in the valley between the mountains. It is always warm and cozy here. A beautiful, spacious city with diverse architecture of buildings, fountains, wide roads, city and country parks, where you can always walk among huge and rare trees and enjoy the singing of birds.

We have a very comfortable and spacious downtown. I think it is the most beautiful in the vicinity of small towns like ours. In the center of the city we have a large beautiful library building, where there are always many residents of different ages. It is spacious, cozy and full of life. You can see different activities of mothers with children, schoolchildren, adults at computers, residents reading in comfortable chairs or discussing new events in separate halls. Next to the library is a small but well-decorated Civic Park. Many different holidays are always held in this park and many personal events are celebrated. Photo sessions are often held in the beloved gazebo, the playground is always filled with parents and children. I liked the celebration of Independence Day, when many residents gathered, the orchestra played the American anthem and popular melodies. Everyone was happy and congratulated each other. The most wonderful thing is our theater, where concerts and performances are held not only in the building, but also on the streets of the city. We can always watch and take part in performances, where our children can also participate.

There are many restaurants in our city where you can choose any type of cuisine. They are beautifully decorated. And on weekends, a market opens on Locust Street. Yes, this is not surprising when you talk about a market that is in almost every city. But this is not just a sale of farm products, this is an amazing place where you can see, listen, taste and just talk a lot. One of the popular recreation areas is Heather Farm Park. This is a wonderful place for family recreation and holding various city and school events. There is enough space for everyone, and the Rose Garden will leave you with pleasant memories of the beauty of flowers and a unique aroma.

Visit our town and you will enjoy with us its friendly welcome and attention to guests, the atmosphere of calm, enjoyment and joy from contemplating what you see and hear.

Letter to Wes Moore, author of *Discovering Wes Moore*

by Cecilia A.

February 16, 2025

Dear Wes,

I hope you are doing well in all aspects of your life.


“But the future doesn’t have to repeat the past.” What a wonderful expression! Being a student at Project Second Chance, gave me the opportunity to read one of your books. *Discovering Wes Moore* is a great book, and the quotation that I wrote at the beginning resonated with me. As I read further I couldn’t help but I think about how hard your life must have been. At your youngest age you didn’t know that all those loose steps in your life were only preparing you to be the person that you are now.

Your book has helped me see a good opportunity in every situation, to move on, and not focus on small things. I hope others can see the light in the darkest of their lives and find a way out of their bad situation. This mindset may help not only themselves, but to others too.


There are many families around the world going through the same situation that you did and it is very important as parents, tutors or mentors, to never give up and always point out the good things in others rather than point out the negative. We are all different: not only by race, religion or economic position, but also in the way and time that it will take us to overcome obstacles in our lives. If we always keep in our mind that the future does not have to repeat the past that will make a big difference for everyone.

I wish you the best in your life and in your work in helping others.

Sincerely,
Cecilia A.



**If we always keep
in our mind that the
future does not have
to repeat the past
that will make a big
different for everyone.**



Make Good Choices

by Joy J.

Time goes by so slow but yet so fast. The bad choices I have made me a stronger person because it help me not only believe I could walk again after two years. Can you imagine it is so surreal, to this day I pinch myself as I learn to walk again. I believe I could read and write again and because of the Second Chance program I am able to read and write again. As I go to different groups and share my story, there are so many people that always take time out of their lives to help others, I really believe that's one of the best choices, I believe.

There are so many people in the world that need help and all they need to do is reach out and believe and always make good choices, choices will always affect you in future one way or the other.

Always there are positive and more good choices, you will always be better off.

As time changes in life don't have time to say I wish I wood of, I wish I should of, I wish I could make good choices all the time.

Tenzin's Birthday

by Dolma C.

A couple of months ago, we celebrated my nephew Tenzin's 10th birthday at my cousin's home in Richmond, CA. They have been living in the area for about 20 years. All of us in the family cooked lots of Tibetan and Indian food. We made chicken curry, chicken biryani, broccoli and carrots, deep fried chicken, dumplings, noodles and more. We had lots of snacks and sweets, and tea to drink—butter tea and sweet tea.

At the party were Tenzin's grandparents, parents, siblings, cousins, friends and other guests. It was a full house, inside and outside. We had a great time! I didn't get home until 9 pm.

Happy Day!

by Mary G.

It is beautiful today.

I like the weather.

I love it!

because I don't like winter.

I am from Egypt.

Three Things I Learned from Malcolm X

by Eunjoo K.

I started "The Autobiography of Malcolm X" because my boy's summer homework was to read this book. At the beginning, I was suffering because young Malcolm was surrounded by poverty and racism, and his father was murdered. His mother was in the mental hospital, and he was raised in foster homes. When he was 16 years old, he became a hustler in Harlem, and he broke the law by dealing drugs and committing robberies. Finally, he was in prison, and he learned the many religions including Islam, Eastern and Western philosophy, and history by borrowing and reading many books from the prison library. After release from prison, he became a member of the Nation of Islam and began to preach the beliefs of Elijah Muhammad. He encouraged black people to be free of the domination of white people. Malcolm showed how he was an influential leader because many people were persuaded by his beliefs and speeches.

I am impressed by Malcom's ability to stand up, educate himself from many books, and take action he thought was right.

First, his ability to stand up. His speaking was fascinating because his voice was so strong, and his thoughts were also clear. His main opinion was that black people should segregate and establish a community for only the blacks because there was hopelessness with the whites who were like devils.

Second, he educated himself from the books in the prison. Eighth grade was his final year in public education. However, he met many philosophers and historians in the books and was strongly interested in African history. After educating himself, he prepared to join the debate team in prison. He found he was talented in persuasive speaking.

Third, he was determined to take actions he thoughts were right. Although he had undoubtedly believed in the Nation of Islam, he realized Elijah Muhammad was a fraud. He renounced Elijah and separated himself from those beliefs. After this trauma, when he went on the pilgrimage to Mecca, he experienced hospitality, the brotherhood of Islamic people from all around the world, including black and white, and the true religion of Islam. After he realized what real Islam is, he no longer believed that the black and the white need to be separated.

This book highlights that no matter skin color or origin, humans are equal and deserving of respect. This embracing attitude is crucial to a better world.

Becoming a Parent: Nature vs Nurture Part I

by Oksana D.

Hundreds of years ago, before the advent of science, many people had religious beliefs and believed that God controlled people's traits and tendencies. Today, we are still researching which has a greater influence on children—heredity or environment. In my opinion, nature and nurture must work together for optimal child development.

Before we start comparing heredity and environment, I would like to explain the meaning of both concepts. Heredity is the set of characteristics of a child, such as the color of eyes, skin, hair, height, as well as the shape of the nose, genetic problems, a beautiful voice, etc., which are passed on from parents. So the characteristics of a child are determined by genes—small cells that contain the DNA code and turn into the basic features of the child after birth.

Unlike heredity, the environment can be controlled by parents in most cases. That is parents choose what food a child can eat, or the quality of the home where the child lives, as well as the school where the child studies, or the playground where the child can play with other children. The environment is an aspect of the decision of the parents or children. Unfortunately, not all life circumstances are controlled by humans and we are not protected from natural disasters. But we will not touch on that in these essays. Many debates are about what is stronger—nature or nurture. That sets me on a path of reflection about my own circumstances.

Not all the characteristics came from us the parents, but some from previous generations. Once when I was a child, I found an old chest in the attic and it contained old family portraits. From one of the photos one woman looked at me with a silent attachment. Her position and mannerism magnetically drew all of my attention. She was me in thirty years—she was my great-grandmother—she was my root. I took her genes and I will pass them on to my next generation. It made me think about our invaluable role and how important it will be for our great-grandchild's safety and enriched environment.

“She was me in thirty years—she was my great-grandmother—she was my root.”

Becoming a Parent: Nature vs Nurture Part 2

by Oksana D.

Being a parent is a sweet time when you can play and share your love with your child. It is a time when you can discover new pleasant emotions. During this time you can develop limitless patience, kindness and care for your loved one. It is also a time when you assume the responsibility of raising a small child to adulthood, nurturing and supporting her/him along the way. Every time when I want to help my own child in his educational process, I consider his innate skills and abilities and encourage him to take his own path. Some parents expect their child will follow their family business or career. But what can we do if the child's skills do not match the parent's genetic factors?

This reminds me of the story of a famous man named Carl Friedrich Gauss. When he was three years old, he already knew how to read and write. His parents were poor, ordinary and uneducated people. Carl was lucky to have math teacher who recognized the boy's talent and helped him get a scholarship to college. Carl's children were unlike their father and had no talents. In the case of Carl Gauss we can say that it was a combination of heredity and environment. Genius talents are partly genetic, but are not passed on from parents to children. Throughout his life, Carl practiced and developed his skills, deeply explored numbers and theorems, and discovered new ones. All these opportunities were provided to him by teachers, literature and available materials. Would the world have known Gauss as a great mathematician without the support of his mentors and sponsors? Maybe not. Would the teacher have helped him get into college if he hadn't recognized the boy's talent? Perhaps not. It is evident that nature or the college environment strengthened Carl Gauss's good heredity and added considerable advantages to it.

To end the story, I would like to add that it is very important for parents to make a plan in advance, even before pregnancy. From the first step, from sperm and egg, consider a healthy lifestyle, sports, nutrition, medications or vitamins. All these factors are involved in the formation of healthy cells, and in the future can determine the optimal set of DNA in the heredity of children. This is how the environment and heredity are interconnected and work together.

My Clubhouse

by YuJeong Y.

My apartment's clubhouse is one of my favorite spots. It has many comfortable chairs, a large fireplace, a grand piano, a billiards table, a ping pong table and a big TV. My husband and I often have tea and read a book there. Sometimes I meet friendly neighbors. I like it very much. Recently, it was decorated with twinkling lights and a big Christmas tree. Last Tuesday night, there was a jazz band performing at the clubhouse. The band played jazz and sang a lot of carols with excitement. Some people danced to the music. Especially, it's nice to see an old couple dance. Their smile was very beautiful. We enjoyed the atmosphere. I will remember this interesting night in the US forever. Overall, I am very satisfied with our clubhouse. I enjoy our clubhouse very much. Thanks!

**Especially, it's nice
to see an old couple
dance. Their smile
was very beautiful.**

Thanksgiving Weekend

by YuJeong Y.

My husband and I had a great Thanksgiving weekend filled with a lot of food, conversation and games. We were fortunate to spend the holiday at my friend's house. My friend's name is Madeline. She is an American. She has a husband, a son, and a daughter. They are kind and friendly. I brought wine and pie. We ate mashed potatoes, a big turkey and grilled salmon. We enjoyed delicious wine. After dinner, we played card games. I know how to play a few card games. So, Madeline helped me. It was very fun. We are all Catholics. We prayed and thanked God. Overall, the weekend was a perfect time and happy holiday to remember. I thanked Madeline and her family. Thanks.

Camp Krem Adventures

by Lucie S.

Camp Krem is a nonprofit camping experience. It provides “a place for exceptional people to be themselves.”

I choose two camping trips a year from a list of a number of adventures. The overnight trips are a few days and some as long as ten days. We begin by meeting at Camp Krem Yosemite sleeping outside overnight. There are activities for us to do there. The activities include arts and crafts, music bingo and a bonfire for the campers.

**We all laughed and screamed.
It was so much fun.**

Last summer I went on the Lake Tahoe River Rafting trip. It was a ten-day trip. We set-up tents at the campsite. The counselors helped us and were very nice. We went swimming in Lake Tahoe. There were fireworks to watch on July 4th. There was a live band. We went together on walks and hikes. We went rafting down the river. We wore life jackets and a helmet. We sat on the side of the raft holding on with both hands. I was scared at first. We all laughed and screamed. It was so much fun. Some of us exchanged numbers at the end of this camp trip and we text each other.

In January I went to Bear Valley for four days. We shared a cabin and ate together. We took a shopping trip in to downtown. I liked being in the snow country and meeting new campers.

This summer I will be going to Santa Barbara for ten days. We will take a boat ride along the coast, go to parks, and make trips to town. I have never been to Santa Barbara. I am really looking forward to this adventure.

A Dream

by Zary

A dream came true years ago when I was a teenager. I had a dream. I was walking casually in a busy street that ended up to a white tall tower with a round clock on top. As I got closer and closer to the tower but before I could touch it, I woke up. I had no idea where the place was.


About, fifteen years later, when my husband in my first few days in the U.S. was showing me the town [Berkeley] that he had lived for many years, and I saw the tower from my dream again. It was the same tower I dreamed.

As we walked on Telegraph Avenue, I was looking curiously all around and I was so excited to see this town that I heard a lot about because of its university: UC Berkeley.


The tower was there, but not in my dream this time, it was real life. I was standing in front of the UC's gate.

How could I dream of a place clearly before I saw it? Are our souls able to travel through time? Are we able to see new places in our dreams? Do our souls travel the "time tunnel" as Albert Einstein said? If so, which one is more real; our dreams or the world where we touch, see and hear. Even now, after many years every time I drive on Telegraph Avenue and see the tower, I remember that dream. And every time I just smile. That time reminds me of all those memories, including the flight over, leaving home, arriving in a new land, and studying was like watching a short movie.

The movie finishes when I get to Shattuck Avenue, so I have to turn left and head toward Berkeley Bowl for some grocery shopping. My thoughts are replaced with what I need to get to cook before my kids come home from school.



Even now, after many years every time I drive on Telegraph Avenue and see the tower, I remember that dream.




A Dog's Apology


by Manizha H.

I grew up in Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan and we used to live in an apartment, and we don't keep pets. I remember my childhood well. We usually visited my grandmother's once a month. She had a clever but dangerous dog like a wolf. No one had the courage to enter the yard because if someone knocked on the door, he would start barking. That is why everyone was afraid of him.

One night in winter we went to my grandma's house. Next morning when I woke up I saw that the dog unusually and he was so quiet. He put his head under his arms. I asked my grandmother, "Is your dog sick?" She answered, "I don't know, maybe he is hungry."



**Mistake is a mistake
but the important
thing is to accept it,**



As we were getting ready to leave to go back home, I couldn't find my shoes. Everyone started looking around but no one found them. Finally my grandma realized that her dog had torn it into small pieces with his teeth.

When she asked the dog about the shoes, he shamefully brought back the broken pieces that he had chewed up when he did something wrong he pretended he was sick.

Mistake is a mistake but the important thing is to accept it, although he was an animal, he was upset because he did the wrong thing.

Good Morning Sun

by Cecilia A.

One beautiful summer morning, the Sun rises as usual with his shiny sun rays. When he appeared over the horizon, his rays shone even brighter when he saw the Moon swinging very happy under the immense blue sky.

“Good morning, Moon!” said the Sun.

“Good morning, Sun!” she exclaimed very happy.

“Why are you still up?” asked the Sun.

“I never see the kids playing” she told him, “I see their houses, their back yards and their parks” she added, “but they are always inside their houses when I come out” said the Moon in a sad way.

“The truth is, I enjoy seeing them” said the Sun.

“You must be tired” commented the Sun.

“Yes”, she nodded with her head, “but today, I will stay up a little longer” added the Moon. “I want to see their faces, I want to see them playing in the park and also see them walking to the school” she told him.

“Look! I see some kids playing on the slides!” said the Moon very excited.

“Wow, do you see those running with their buckets full of toys?” asked the Moon full of happiness.

“Moon! Turn around and look at those walking to the school!” shouted the Sun.

“This is so great” said the Moon with a soft voice.

“Moon, I think is time for you go to sleep, the kids are impatient when the night comes to hear stories that their parents read about you” said the Sun.

“You are right” she said, “I am leaving very happily because I know what they look like. They are so beautiful.”

“Goodnight, Moon” whispered the Sun.

“Good morning, Sun” answered the Moon.

The Greedy Yellow Squirrel

by Cecilia A.

The Yellow Squirrel crossed the road one day, to celebrate her fifth birthday. She didn't invite even a bunny and for her that was very funny.

When she thought no one was looking at her, she climbed and claimed one of the biggest trees, before anyone could see.

How cunning the Yellow Squirrel was!

She went up, up and up, and very quickly she ate ONE huge, huge nut.

The sweet Yellow Squirrel ate the nut number TWO, and her cheeks immediately turned blue.

Oh no, you can't believe what your eyes will see, she already ate THREE, and she almost fell out of the tree.

Even though her hands were twisted, she ate the nut number FOUR that almost goes to the floor.

The Yellow Squirrel, tired this time, said to herself, "it's nap time." And after she dozed, the greedy Yellow Squirrel very quickly rose, and without thinking she ate the number FIVE, which she had hidden under her leg and looks like a golden egg!
For her, her birthday was a blast, how silly she was!

Now is your turn

- 1-How many nuts did the Yellow Squirrel eat in all?
- 2-What did she do after she ate the fourth nut?
- 3-Where did she hide the fifth nut?
- 4-Did she invite any friends?

A Translated Turkish Children's Story

by Feyza K.

There is a Turkish child book written by Feridun Oral. Its original name is Kırmızı Kanatlı Baykuş, and I tried to translate it into English. (This note is also for my dear tutor, Sara: I'm so lucky to have met her. Also, thanks to all PSC Staff.)

Red Winged Owl

There were red-winged owls in the huge forest. They were flying to find food for their babies. On a windy day, the little owl left his nest. The wind was so strong and he almost fell. Because his wings weren't strong or big. He wanted to fly very much but he shouldn't have rushed.

When he was waiting in a sad mood, he heard a noise. That was a little mouse.

He said: "Sorry, if I scared you! Why are you sad?"

Owl answered: "I have no friends and I can't fly."

Little mouse replied: "We will be friends if you want."

Little owl was so happy to find a new friend. Mouse decided to teach him how to fly. He went and collected some red flowers. And he put red leaves all over the owl's wings.

And he said: 'Now you are a red-winged owl.' But after a few minutes, all the leaves blew away because of the wind.

Little mouse said: "No worries, I have a new idea."

He went and took some apples. He used the peels and made a ribbon.

Little owl fluttered his wings but all the peels fell. And the mouse said again: "No worries, I have a new idea."

This time he found a red yarn. It was the cat's yarn. He took it and wrapped it around the owl's wings.

Suddenly the little owl sneezed and was hanging on the tree. He tried to escape from the rope. He fluttered his wings more and more.

As a result, his wings got very strong. But he couldn't escape from the rope. Little mouse helped him with gnawing the rope. And finally, he got a red-winged owl.

He was very happy and thanked his friend. They are best friends ever.

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

2151 Salvio St., Suite 299
Concord, CA 94520

psc@library.cccounty.us

ccclib.org | (925) 691-3960

 Follow us @PSCContraCosta

 PSCContraCosta



PROJECT SECOND CHANCE
Adult Literacy Program

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY LIBRARY

ccclib.org/psc