

Arrivals and Departures

A Collection of Writings by Members of the
Sonoma County Immigrant Communities & Learners in
Sonoma County Library Adult Literacy Programs

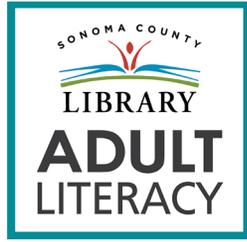
A Joint Project by
Sonoma County Library Adult Literacy &
the 2022 California Humanities
Library Innovation Lab Grant



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Sonoma County Library Adult Literacy provides FREE services to adults who want to work one-to-one with a community volunteer tutor at their local library to improve basic reading, writing and English language skills. We provide resources and instruction so adults can focus on their personal learning goals as learners, family members, workers, and community participants. The Adult Literacy Program has been an integral part of the mission of the Sonoma County Library since 1987, striving to bring information, ideas and people together to build a stronger community.

The views and opinions expressed in these writings are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position or policies of the California Humanities, the National Endowment for the Humanities, or Sonoma County Library or any other funders of the Adult Literacy Program.

For the most part, these writings have been reproduced as written by the adult literacy learners and members of the Sonoma County immigrant communities. As such, they are not “perfect” by design.

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“One foot remained rooted in our native soil while with
our other foot we dug into American soil to anchor
ourselves and weather the storm.”

© Reyna Grande, *A Dream Called Home*

Foreword

As I read the collection of stories in this anthology, Arrivals and Departures, I was reminded of what the American author, Madeleine L'Engle, wrote: "If you don't recount your family history, it will be lost. Honor your own stories and tell them too. The tales may not seem very important, but they are what binds families and makes each of us who we are."

Like Madeleine L'Engle, I believe that we come to know whom we are through telling our own stories. Our individual identity as well as the identity of our nation is shaped, to some extent, through these stories. Furthermore, when we tell our stories – as the authors in this anthology have done – and when we listen to the voices of the different groups that make up our diverse society, we make connections. And when we make connections, we break down walls that separate us from one another; we see ourselves in the other and take comfort and rejoice in our shared humanity.

This is why it is so important and illuminating to have this anthology of personal stories of immigrants from various countries who reside in Sonoma County and who are socially and economically diverse and varied in age. Their intimate and moving testimonials are about why they immigrated to the United States and what their life experiences have been since they arrived. They immigrated for a variety of reasons: to seek employment or educational opportunities, to escape poverty or a violent conflict, or to reunite with family. They share a range of emotion-filled experiences characterized by joy and sadness, disappointment and success, hope, perseverance, and dreams for their families and themselves and, in some cases, nostalgia for their home land. They face challenges with faith and courage. Some express gratitude for their lives in the United States and for the help they have received from the Sonoma County Library Adult Literacy Programs.

Reading these remarkable stories also brought back memories of my own childhood growing up in a family of migrant farmworkers.

When I was four years old, my family emigrated from Mexico to California to escape our poverty and to seek a new and better life. My family moved from place to place, following seasonal harvests. During the nine years that we followed the crops – picking strawberries, grapes, cotton and carrots – we lived in migrant camps, often in tents and old garages. It was in writing about these experiences that I discovered the power and importance of story-telling. It refined my own sense of identity and helped me feel more at home in our diverse society.

My hope is that readers of this anthology are encouraged to tell their own stories and that they will deepen their empathy, respect and appreciation for all immigrants whose invaluable contributions have shaped who we are as a nation.

Francisco Jiménez

Award-winning author of *The Circuit*, *Breaking Through*, *Reaching Out* and *Taking Hold*.

Introduction

These collected stories are written by immigrants who have, for better or worse, made their way to the United States. As you read through the collection, I hope your eyes are opened to the different struggles and experiences people have when they immigrate.

This anthology was born from a place of curiosity and love. As a child of an immigrant, I have always been curious about what it is like to leave your home country in search of something “better” in another. And once you arrive there, have you found what you are truly looking for or is it like chasing a mirage – the thing you are looking for is always just out of reach?

For many of the writers in this collection, they have found what they were looking for in the U.S., and much more. For others, they are still searching for what they thought they wanted. And for others still, they have not found what they are looking for, but are working to make their dreams a reality.

These stories are collected from participants in Sonoma County Library’s Adult Literacy Programs, the Petaluma Adult School, Cesar Chavez Language Academy, and members of the public who heard the call for stories and answered.

I am humbled that these participants have chosen to share their stories with us. So many of the writings in this collection are deeply personal and reading them feels as though I’m being shown a secret part of the author’s heart.

I have, for as long as I can remember, loved other people’s stories, often taking out my phone to record loved one’s stories of triumphs, failures, and adventures. I have always been drawn to stories about experiences that other people have had that I will not or could not ever experience myself.

My hope for you is that through reading these stories you find yourself transported into the shoes of another whose experience you may or may not have had. My hope for you is that through reading these stories you see the people who wrote them a little clearer. I know that reading these stories has done these things for me.

Enjoy the journey.

Jo Ayala, Adult Literacy Associate
Sonoma County Library

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Section 1
Departures

My Story

By Axel Daniel Maradiaga, grade 7

This story was originally submitted in Spanish. The original text follows the English translation.

I left my country with my brother because it is very dangerous there in Honduras. The **maras** and gangs look for young boys like us and that is why we decided to get out of there. Also, because my mom is here and we had been apart for a long time. The road to get here is very difficult. There is much suffering, but thank God, we arrived safely. Now that we are here, we will make the most of the good things that are here.

God bless the United States.

- **mara (or marabunta):** a form of gang with transnational roots, known for brutal criminal activities.

My Historia

Escrita por Axel Daniel Maradiaga, grado 7

Mi salida de mi país con mi hermano es porque allá en Honduras está muy peligroso. Las **maras** y pandillas buscan a los jóvenes como nosotros y por eso decidimos salir de allá. También porque aquí está mi mamá y teníamos mucho tiempo de no estar con ella. El camino hacia llegar hasta aquí es muy difícil. Se sufre demasiado, pero gracias a Dios llegamos con bien. Ahora que estamos aquí, pues vamos a aprovechar al máximo lo bueno que hay aquí.

Dios bendiga a Estados Unidos.

My Life

By J. Ling

My name is Jiang. I'm from China. I have lived in China for most of my life. My homeland has left me a lot of good memories. I grew up in a small town. I was a child when I and all my classmates lived in school. Our lives were regular and happy. I studied together with my classmates in the morning and the afternoon. We exercised in the evening, swimming is my favorite. On the weekend, I went back home. My mother always cooked delicious food for me. Then I was really happy!

I started my first job as a farm worker in 1969. That was a black period, because it was the third year of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. This movement continued for 10 years and ended in 1976. Afterwards I had the opportunity to return to school to study and change my job.

I got married 48 years ago. Raising my children was my happiest time. Children are like little birds, they always want to fly higher. I watched them grow up day by day. They went to school, went to college, went to a job, etc. I watched them fly higher and fly farther, that was my happiest time!

I came to the U.S.A. when I was 55 years old. I came here to take care of my grandchildren. So, my life is here, but I met a big problem: I can't speak English. To change this situation, I went to the Petaluma Adult School to study English. I started learning the alphabet. Teachers and classmates are very patient and very nice helping me.

After some time, I found a job. Now I am a student and caregiver. I study English in the morning and work in the afternoon, my life is full. I am thankful that the United States gave me the best opportunities to study, work, and live. I'm very lucky and happy here.

I hope I will continue to be healthy and study and work for a long time, slowly getting old.

A Turning Point in My Life

By Leslie Yang

Tutor: Linda P. Frank

August 6, 2017 was a significant, meaningful and unforgettable date to my family. We left our warm, familiar place: Shanghai, China for a new place: Santa Rosa, U.S. Was I sad? Did I miss friends or relatives? Was I happy, excited and relieved? These complex feelings had been looming for a long while. Living in Shanghai was joyful to me and my husband. He worked hard and diligently to create safe and prosperous conditions for me and my son.

But one day, when my son came back after his elementary school, he told me in tears that his Chinese teacher criticized him in front of all his classmates about his weekend homework having a tiny mistake, and he would get the worst score this semester. He couldn't understand the reason for such a tiny error being a big thing to his teacher, and he was very scared about what his teacher said casually back then. As was often the case, my son experienced this several times in the following days.

4 In addition, at the same time the air quality in Shanghai was really poor, his school often canceled all PE classes and ordered all students to stay in the classroom to study and study. My son gradually lost his smile on his innocent face. My husband and I realized these problems were not easy to change or control even for a short time. We were depressed, feeling low and anxious to think about our future life. At last, we made a decision to leave since we couldn't change our current situation. I respected our decision and I felt so brave. I didn't know a lot about America even though I was in my forties. We left our dear relatives, friends and familiar culture for a new country to start our new life.

Arriving in Santa Rosa – this was the first city we reached in America. I was astonished by the differences between Shanghai and Santa Rosa, as if I had reached another planet. Tall buildings became short buildings, crowded streets turned empty, Chinese converted to English, and buying groceries nearby our house on foot transformed into buying them by car. These different things made us excited, curious, and prompted us to know this city well. There were no problems in my son's school here, his smile appeared again on his face, so my husband and I also felt relieved. I have gotten new hobbies as well. Hiking on the trails in the national park or in our community is a really fantastic activity. I enjoy sunshine and fresh air to strengthen my body and put my worries behind me. Reading books in English can activate my brain and widen my vision, and I know different kinds of information and stories through them.

Looking back we made an extremely correct decision. Even though this place is not 100 percent perfect, we are still satisfied, content and feel lucky.



Section 2

Everywhere in Between

Patricia's Story

By Patricia Leon

My name is Patricia Leon, and I am from Guatemala. When I lived in Guatemala, life was difficult, fun and beautiful all at the same time. I lived with my parents, sisters and my only brother. I lived in a small town, which only included a school and a small health center. The teachers came on Mondays at 9:00 a.m. because they didn't have transportation for each day. They looked for a place to stay for four days, and returned to the city. The nurse lived inside the small health center. My parents owned a ranch and farm. For many years, my mother made fresh cheese, cream, and cottage cheese, and sold them in the town. My house had solar panels, but the rest of the town didn't have electricity. We also had a well inside of our house. My mother had a little market, and I helped her. The food in my house was extremely good. We ate black beans, eggs, corn tortillas, chicken soup, etc.

In my town, there was only an elementary school, so when I was ten years old, my sisters and I moved to Chiquimula, a bigger city. We lived with my aunt and continued our education. I completed high school and got a certificate in accounting after two and a half years at the university. I worked as a secretary while I was studying at the university. While I was studying, my father passed away.

After I graduated, I went back to my hometown because my mom was sick and needed help. I worked in my town at the school as a teacher for two years. I met my husband and got married while I was working as a teacher. My husband lived in the United States, so he would travel back and forth to visit me for one year. I missed my husband and wanted to be with him, so I tried to apply for a visa three times, but they denied me each time. I was very sad and frustrated, so I decided to go to the United States illegally.

My trip to the United States was in November 2004. By the time I began my trip, I was 22 years old. At the beginning, it was fun. I was nervous and scared about what was going to happen. You hear a lot of pretty bad stories about this trip.

We took a bus from Guatemala City to Mexico City. The trip took me one week. From there, we walked one day and rested one day. This continued for two weeks. I slept inside a garbage bag on the ground (no bed, no pillow), I ate cold food, and I carried a backpack and one gallon of water. The immigration agent caught me when I was trying to cross the border and sent me back to Mexico. I tried to sneak in again, and I made it. It took me about one month to get to the United States. It was a very difficult process and I lost 25 pounds.

My life in the United States has had many ups and downs. I had my first baby in 2006 and my second baby in 2009. During this time, my husband applied to get a green card for me. It took ten years to complete the process. In 2015, I went back to Guatemala to complete the process to be a legal resident in the United States. When I got back from Guatemala, I gave birth to my third baby. It has been eighteen years, and I still miss my family, friends, and everything.

My life now in the United States is better. My mother and my sister came to visit me. My daughters are growing up now. They study well and like to play sports in the school and the community. Sometimes I help in my daughters' schools. I volunteer on school field trips, I help with activities inside the school, etc. I would like to improve my English so I can understand my daughters' teachers and help people who do not speak English when they need something.

I have many goals for the future. This year, I need to submit the application for my citizenship. After I am a citizen, I will try to apply for my mother, who lives with me in the United States. Another goal, I want my daughters to continue studying and later go to a university so they can get a good job and own a house. Also, I want to continue my education. I would like to continue to study English and also to earn my high school equivalency so I can get a good job. Finally, I would like to own my own house, and for my husband not to have to work so hard. I hope that someday we will have a better life and can take vacations once a year and visit new places.

Susana's Story

By Susana

My name is Susana. I am from Mexico. I have been here for 20 years. I came here when I got married, because my husband lived here and he had a job too. We came here for the opportunity to have the best life.

My life in Mexico was different from here. We did not have so many scheduled activities and I spent a lot of time with my family. It is another way of life.

When I came here, I felt different. Everything was new for me, new people, new language. Through time, I began to get used to my new life. I started to go to school to learn English, I met people, I made new friends, I started to be involved in the church, and so my new life began.

This country has given me a lot of good things. My husband has a good job, we have stability and we live in a safe city. My kids will have a lot of opportunities like jobs and good schools.

∞ My goal is to have a happy life, maybe here, maybe in Mexico. My dream is to go back to Mexico because my parents and most of my family are there, and I would like my kids to spend time with them, and learn about my culture, my roots. But reality is different sometimes, because if my kids decide to live here, I'm going to stay here. Nobody knows what will happen in the future. For that reason, I choose to be happy anywhere.

Benjamin's Adventure

By Angel Ixchel

I was born in a small village about an hour's walk outside of **Teloloapan**. In **Nahuatl**, Teloloapan means river of stones. Legend has it a river runs underneath my tiny town; I don't know if it's true or not but it's fun to think about from time to time. We also have the best tasting water, that I know for sure.

My first time crossing the border was in the early '90s, I was 18 and all my friends were making the journey to the north and were coming back with nice cars like black Camaros that looked like the one from the show Night Rider. I remember thinking: that is pretty cool, I want that too. My aunt and uncle asked me to take my 14-year-old cousin safely across the border and in exchange they would pay me. I was very excited and I knew this was going to be an adventure that I was looking for; I was young and not scared. We said most of our goodbyes to our family the night before, and we left before sunrise the next day.

We took a bus from my small village to Mexico City, and then I took my first plane trip to Tijuana. In Tijuana there were two hotels that are famous for helping people find **Coyotes**. One was called the Phoenix, the other was called the Cortez, I can't remember which one we stayed in. As soon as we got there it was not difficult to make a deal and find a Coyote, we got one as soon as we checked in. We stayed one night in the overcrowded hotel and then the next morning we made the journey with our group.

The Coyote was grumpy and would treat us like merchandise, yelling at us to shut up and to not ask questions. We were instructed to all hold hands with each other, so that no one was left behind. I came to understand as I looked around our group that some people were walking with us but were not the same as us: they had blond hair and looked confident, they could talk with the Coyote and not get reprimanded. I think they were decoys or something, but I will never know for sure.

As the noon sun was coming in we came to a nasty, slimy lake. We stopped to take a break. The Coyote handed everyone two plastic grocery bags and told us to put the bags on our feet. He demonstrated on his own feet, and we all did what he demanded, except one guy who wanted to show off that he was tough and didn't need to listen. We all held hands again as we started to walk in the still and murky, slimy waters. We trod on for a while, maybe an hour or so, till we heard horse hooves trotting along the shore and a man yelling from the bushes. First in English and then in Spanish: "Come on out and let me help you!" My heart was racing, the Coyote turned

and loudly whispered, “It’s immigration! Shut up and don’t listen to him!” The Coyote told us, “He’s trying to trick you, he does not want to help you.”

He further explained that the horse doesn’t want to touch the nasty water that we were currently in. I know it’s kind of disgusting, but he was right! We were never caught, that gross water saved us that day from immigration. As for the guy who never put the grocery bags on his feet, he got a bad case of athlete’s foot.

After the scare, we walked for a half hour longer weaving through county parks. We came out of one park and instead of walking into another one we entered a parking lot where a cherry red pickup was waiting for us. We all scrambled into the bed of the pickup to hide. The Coyote gave his last “Shut up” as he covered our heads with scrap pieces of cardboard. I thought to myself, we made it!

We drove to a safe house and then I was finally able to talk freely with my fellow comrades. I found that all of our experiences were different, for some it was a trauma, for others an adventure. I was lucky that I looked at it as an adventure. The only thing that bothered me was not knowing how long the journey would take. When my father crossed in the '70s it took up to two weeks traveling, this trip only took a few days. Thinking of what I lost crossing the border, I knew in my heart, I was going to lose anyway.

My friends, family, the people I was closest to, were all leaving for a better life. I’m grateful for all my work in the fields and in the kitchen, I finally have financial freedom. I went back to Mexico for a time and my small town still had no industry, the people were stuck, I had made the best decision for myself. I’m truly blessed, because even though I’m not in Mexico anymore I can always be brought back just by the taste and smells of fresh food cooking on the **comal**, and I’m transported to my small village outside of Telotoapan.

- **Teloloapan:** a city in south-western Mexico.
- **Nahuatl:** language/group of languages of the Uto-Aztecan language family.
- **Coyote:** as used in this story, a person who smuggles immigrants across the Mexican-United States border.
- **comal:** flat, pan-like clay or metal griddle.

My Dream Cut Short by War in My Homeland

By Fretta Gebreslassie

Tutor: Jeddie Scardino

The war between Ethiopia and Eritrea started in 1998 when I was fifteen years old. I am Eritrean but I was living in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. We suffered mass deportation. Thousands of people lost their lives. My father walked three days back to his hometown in Eritrea. After eight months, my mom with my five siblings joined my dad. I escaped to a refugee camp in Kenya. I was so lonely and missed my family. I lived in a dormitory with other girls. After two years in the camp, I got a settlement proposed by the American government. I was so happy and ready to begin a new life.

I came to America hardly speaking English. I walked everywhere because I didn’t know about public transportation. I didn’t have a car. I struggled to adapt to the culture. The hardest part was getting an apartment even with a job, because I had no credit history. I was a refugee, so of course I had no credit history. I started to go to an ESL class to learn English. I got a job working with individuals with Significant Cognitive Delay Disability. I helped the clients navigate from major behavior to minor. This helped them to learn life skills. Working with this population was challenging because it was difficult for them to express their needs. It took a lot of energy and patience for me. In the meantime, it was good for me because I was learning English. I was able to grasp the routine and I was elated to keep doing it. I knew it would be difficult, but not impossible, especially in America.

When I was growing up, my happiest memories were that my parents thought that education starts at home. Family should always come first. No matter how far the distance, family should always support each other and never forget to keep in touch. I lived in the most poverty-stricken part of the world.

Eventually, I asked my friend’s family to sponsor my parents so I could bring them here. My friend was kind enough to open her house so I could stay with her to save money. Things got better when I brought my parents to America. I knew as long as I dreamed and worked hard, things would get better. God saved me when I was in the refugee camp. Life is good now and I count my blessings.

Moving to Macau

By Julie Lin

Tutor: Kyla Wall-Polin

I was a worker in Macau in 1998. At that time, I really needed money because my husband had no job. I had to make more money to pay for my mom to take care of my son. My son was three years old. I left my son at the small village with my mom. I went to be a worker in Macau. The first time I was in Macau, I wasn't scared at all because they were speaking Cantonese.

I was a sewing worker in the factory, sewing samples there. The company had bonuses. If you got M\$ 900 (about US \$113) in fifteen days, then you got a M\$ 100 reward. You had to work overtime to get to M\$ 900 and most people only earned about M\$ 750. Also there was a percentage reward. For example, if you got M\$ 1200, the reward was M\$ 150. I was lucky and almost always got both of them. It was pretty good at that time. I was happy to work there.

There were several things I never forgot in my whole life. First, when I arrived in Macau, everybody walked to the dormitory and passed many kinds of stores where people stood and watched us. As immigrants many of us said, "They looked at us like we were monkeys." The Macau people saw us like that.

Second, one day when I was shopping at the market, I heard the owner say, "She cannot speak Cantonese." That was discrimination against mainlanders, because we were foreigners. It made me very upset. They didn't think more people should come to Macau because that meant more people would consume their limited resources. They thought our mainland workers took their money.

Third, everybody was a worker in Macau. Everybody wanted to save some money to bring back home. We couldn't use the telephone to call back home. Macau blocked the signal. We used black-market cell phones to call back to China. We paid a lot of money for one minute. It was not a regular business. They did that mostly on the building's top floor. When we got a phone call in there, they closed the door.

Jerome's Story

By Kiat Liong Jerome Kua

Tutor: Kathie Barclay

In 2013, my family took our first Southern European cruise through the Adriatic, Aegean, and Mediterranean Seas. I saw the optimism, open-mindedness, and attitude of enjoying life from European and American Westerners who accounted for the vast majority of the tourists on board. It reminded me of the youthful, happy, and joyful beauty of traveling to the United States for a month in the summer of 1991 while I was taking advantage of a job change.

After returning to Taiwan from the cruise trip, I fell back into the busy, stressful and challenging work track as expected. Gradually the idea of wanting to liberate myself to a more open, free, and unrestrained environment slowly sprouted and grew in my heart. Taiwan was then being vigorously pushed by the running party at that time into the arms of China, which is under a totalitarian, single-party Communist dictatorship.

Because my family and I were not optimistic about the future of Taiwan's democratic and free life, we wanted to apply for immigration to the States. We wanted to go to a beautiful, unrestrained, free, open, and dream-like country to try a different life while we were still not too old to walk.

At this time, my hair was already a little gray, and my hairline had receded unknowingly. I was middle-age. As Confucius said: People who are over 50 should know what is decided by fate and is not within his/her reach. Still I wanted to make such a big change in life and I didn't hesitate. I began to attend meetings held by immigration companies everywhere. After taking into consideration our own occupations, ages, financial resources, and other conditions, we chose to move to the the States by EB-5 visa program. We made a stride forward on the road to immigration.

We submitted our application for immigration in 2014. On the eve of our immigration, I attended a university alumni reunion in Taiwan. A classmate, who had been in the United States for more than 20 years, was invited and returned to Taiwan to give a speech. The first thing he said and predicted when he heard that I was immigrating to the United States was that I would definitely encounter many cultural shocks.

After a long wait and a few twists, turns, and perilous situations, we finally came to the bustling and uniquely handsome port city San Francisco – on the West Coast of the United States on July 12, 2018.

Not having any relatives and knowing little about this place, our mental states were really mixed and could hardly be described in words. We were excited and scared at the same time. What was worse was the language barrier.

Although I had tried my best to improve English reading, writing, and listening comprehension as much as possible for four years before immigrating, I was still very limited in English. There were many miscomprehensions, misunderstandings, or unclear expressions. More importantly, we were completely unfamiliar with American society and American behaviors, customs and cultures, so we ran into obstacles everywhere and had setbacks constantly.

In the United States, at least in California, everyone seems to be very independent. All have their own personalities and styles. Although people are friendly, everyone seems to have their own clique and it is almost impossible for outsiders to join. What was worse was that I often traveled between Taiwan and the United States, because my business in Taiwan had not been fully handed over to the successors yet. So in the first two or three years after immigrating, I always felt like I still lived in Taiwan. My English did not improve much and I did not know much about the United States.

Now, because of geographical and human factors, I very much enjoy the brilliant sunshine, mild climate and vast geographical landscape of the famous wine country in Northern California. The climate is moderate and comfortable, the air fresh and clean, so that I can bathe in the warm sunshine all year round, walk in the huge redwood forest and breathe deeply in the fresh air. I can immerse myself in the rural life of beautiful poetic seclusion. In recent years, I have been fortunate to visit the magnificent Yosemite National Park, Sequoia National Park, Death Valley, Lake Tahoe, Grand Canyon and other world-class landscapes.

It has been four years since I immigrated to the United States, but I have not experienced much. I still want to continue to enjoy this beautiful new world, this handsome and romantic variety of life.

Life is a journey. It's not about the destination. It is the scenery along the way and the feeling of seeing the scenery. After all, traveling with hope is better than reaching the destination.

Arrivals and Departures

By Nishitha Laxman

Tutor: Terry Martin

My name is Nishitha Laxman. I'm from India. I grew up in a joint family of eight members. I have three younger sisters and we grew up all together. We used to share things, dresses, hang out, etc. We were close and never used to fight. I completed my studies and my family found an Indian guy who lived in the USA. I married and came here leaving my wonderful family to start my new beginning.

I felt awful to leave my family but I was very excited and nervous to move to another country. It was my first time to move away from my family. But on the other hand I knew I would gain so much knowledge by being by myself. I knew I would get a chance to communicate with people only in English so my language would improve. I could build confidence in my language because in India I never communicated in English.

Initially, I was so excited to come to a new country and start everything new and learn how to live independently. When I found out that I would be moving to a new country, it was my chance to improve my communication skills. I'm trying to convince my family to move here and stay here forever because I started loving the new country.

It was a big challenge to make friends, interact with others and learn a different culture. I was so fortunate that my neighbors were very friendly and welcoming. I made a few friends and I started to communicate with everyone and am getting to know the people and culture.

I noticed that the young people in this country become independent sooner than they do in India.

I do miss my family and friends in India but I have gained new friends here and discovered a whole new way of life.

Esmeralda's Story

By Esmeralda Alcaraz

I went to elementary school in Mexico. Sometimes the teachers couldn't be there because they had to take the bus and it couldn't come. I lived on a ranch with my parents and seven brothers and sisters. One of my brothers is completely blind. I have three brothers and four sisters.

Living on the ranch was very difficult. We had to walk one to two hours to get the bus. My parents planted beans, corn, tomatoes, and avocados. That was what we had to eat. If there was extra money, they would buy a chicken. The whole family would share the meat.

Only a few people had a car. If someone got sick or was having a baby, we would knock on their door and ask for a ride. When I lived in Mexico we only had one pair of shoes per person. We stayed on the ranch and didn't meet many people.

In 2003, my husband decided to bring me to the U.S. To get to Sonoma, I had to fly from the Morelia, Michoacan airport to Tijuana. From the Tijuana airport I took a bus close to the forest to walk all night to the U.S. border. I was scared because it was very dark, because of snakes, and robbers. Sometimes I ran and I didn't have water or food because it was too heavy to carry. I was hungry and thirsty. Then when I crossed, I took a ride from Los Angeles Airport to Oakland. From there my husband went to get me to go to Sonoma.

I didn't learn English right away because I was shy and didn't have many opportunities. I didn't know anyone in Sonoma.

I miss Mexico. I still have brothers and sisters who live there. Sometimes I call them on the phone.

This is my story of how I got to Sonoma.

My Immigration History

By Maricela Ledesma

Tutor: Mandy Bankson

Sixteen years ago my husband arranged his permanent residence with the help of his father who was already living in the U.S. At that time he decided to marry me and we started a family. We had our first daughter Stephanie. A year passed and I got pregnant with my second daughter Diana. After a year we had our third daughter Camila.

Many times I asked him to make the application for a petition for me to be a resident and come to the United States, but he didn't want to. He told me no because when husbands bring their families they leave them and he didn't want that to happen. We had a lot of arguments for that reason. In Mexico there is a lot of machismo. After several months I decided to leave him. He spent more time outside of Mexico than with his family. So I called him and told him that I was going to separate from him.

He decided to apply so I could get a green card. In less than two years, the Immigration Services asked for all documentation and we received the appointment to see if we were candidates for permanent residency. They gave it to us for 10 years. I was very happy but that day I had to return to Mexico because we didn't have enough money. A few months passed and when I talked to my husband I asked him when we were going to come to the USA and he just told me there was no money.

I didn't know what to do and an idea occurred to me. I had a pig that just had 12 babies and they were ready to be sold. But it only gave me a little money. So I held a yard sale with all my furniture and I got money to be able to take a plane and come. I called my husband and told him that I already had the day and time of our flight. My husband was a little angry because I didn't tell him that I was going to come.

We settled in the living room where my husband, my daughters and I lived with my brother-in-law for one year. I couldn't sleep for one year because my husband's family had parties every week until 2 or 3 a.m. and they were in the living room. I had to go to work at 6:00 a.m. When I got here my husband didn't want me to work but I needed to buy my own things and I didn't like asking him for money.

One day I went to apply to an agency. They sent me to a wine bottler. For three days I have never regretted something so much. I had a fever and my whole body ached from the day I started working to when I got my first

paycheck. I bought a cell phone. I changed jobs and started working at Taco Bell. I worked there for one year.

I asked my husband to teach me to drive many times and he always said no. Then one day we had a holiday party and we stayed up very late. He decided he didn't want to get up so early. He usually got up to take me to work at 6 in the morning and that day he decided to teach me to drive. I got excited but I also got scared because I had never driven before. That day was the worst day of my life. That day he made me drive a standard car and I didn't even know how to do that. I went on the freeway. We only turned off the car twice. When I got to work I was shaking from being afraid. That happened for three days and then he told me, "For today you are going alone." He lent me his father's car and I had to drive with great fear. After a week it was easy for me to learn and since that day I have not stopped.

Then I started working in a care home for the elderly and I liked it. I bought my car and now I am trying to learn English with the help of my tutor Mandy Bankson. That for me is very difficult but I try. I'm studying to become a Certificated Nursing Assistant. Sometimes I don't know how I do all that but I want to improve myself.

It was very difficult to be in a country that is not yours but with the passage of time I realized that I will never have the study and work opportunities in my country Mexico that I have here. My daughters love sports. Stephanie the oldest plays soccer, Diana basketball, and Emily loves music and plays the violin. I try to keep them busy with an activity. I'm afraid they're going to get into trouble.

My husband is very different now. Now I can wear what I want. I can make my own decisions. My husband gives me more space to be with my friends, study English and live my own life. He's not trying to control me. Before, my husband spent a lot of time with his family and friends. Now he spends more time with our children and me. My first friend remembers when I first came to this country. I was very quiet and only wore jeans and a big sweatshirt even when it was hot. I only went out alone to my daughter's medical appointments on the bus. Now I am independent and I have a very different life.

My husband is working in a winery and I will try this year to continue studying to be a CNA. I hope to be ready the following year to do citizenship.



Section 3

What We Left Behind

Soledad's Story

By Soledad Fernandez

Tutor: Sandy Drew

In 1990 I left Mexico and came to the U.S. I came to follow my husband to Santa Rosa. In 1999 he became my ex-husband. When I crossed the border I was very happy. I loved California because the most important for me is to open my eyes in the morning and close my eyes at night and see my sons and daughter with me. When I lived in Mexico, I could visit my sons only every six months for a few days. After I moved to the U.S. I see my sons and my daughter every day and I am happy.

I was sad to leave my mom, my dad and my brothers and sisters. I missed my friends. I missed my town. It is a lot smaller than Santa Rosa. The size is like Guerneville. There was no bank in my town. Now my hometown has more businesses. I missed the big celebrations in December with piñatas and lots of food. The family is together to celebrate for Christmas and the New Year. Even when I am sad about leaving Mexico, I am happy to be with my sons and daughter. I don't want to change anything that I have now.

I moved to Healdsburg and worked hard. I still work hard seven days a week. And I still see my sons not every day but we talk every day. I see my daughter every weekend. I feel happy because all of my children are around here.

In September 2022 I will be in the U.S. for 32 years, longer than I lived in Mexico. I am very happy here because my family is close to me. For me the family is the most important. Even more important than Mexico. Also, it is important to me to have a job. I have my family and my work. I am more independent than in Mexico.

When I came to the U.S. I only spoke a little English. I tried to learn when I came here in different programs. But it was very difficult to go to class because I worked every day. I missed class and couldn't follow the study. And now I found a good program. I read better, I write a little and I speak more English than before. Thank you for the program. It is very interesting and important. My opinion is the program helps people. In this program I found the correct teacher. Her name is Sandy!

Anna's Story

By Anna Szendi

I was born in a small Mediterranean town in Spain 63 years ago, but I didn't grow up in Spain. I am the third of seven siblings. My parents lived in France when I was five months old and I spent my childhood and youth there. I remember my years in France fondly. I can still smell the herbs of Provence from **La Garriga** in spring. We lived in the field and I remember my first years of life being very fun with many picnics and many outings. I remember the long winters and snowy Christmases. We moved again and went to live in a beautiful Roman city called Nimes. I continued my studies there until I was 18 years old.

In the summer of 1977, my parents decided to return to Spain. I remember that time very fondly. We had a house very close to the beach and it was a lot of fun when we all went, because in those years there were already nine of us in our family and we didn't go unnoticed anywhere.

I met the father of my children in Spain and we went to live in the Canary Islands. I spent almost all my life in the Islands from then on. I had four children, but unfortunately we lost two a month after they were born due to heart problems. They were difficult years. I studied Hispanic Philology at the National Distance Education University for two years and when I got pregnant I had to stop. When my baby was older, I became interested in the world of cosmetology and dietetics and I studied for two more years to finally start working on my own. In those days, I had about nine dietetic and cosmetic stores. Ten years later, my husband and I divorced and sold the company. Later, I worked for several companies and finally dedicated myself for 11 years to the world of dentistry. I was an entrepreneur for many years. In the pandemic, we had to stop the activity and we sold the dental clinic.

On a personal level, I met my current husband in Spain, but he was American, so we decided to get married and now I live in Petaluma. I arrived when I was 62 years old and I've only been here for six months. My children are adults and have their careers and partners. I'm not a grandmother yet but I hope to be one day.

The most important goal for me at the moment is to be very happy, adapt to American society and speak the language fluently. My most immediate goal would be to get my driver's license since mine will no longer serve me in a few months. I am also studying to get my license as a real estate agent.

From my position, age, and experience, I encourage all youth to fight for their dreams and put all their strength into achieving them. Those of us who are not so young anymore tell you that it is never too late to start a new life even if it is thousands of kilometers from where you were born. My children will come to visit me next year and I'm sure they will fall in love with this great country that welcomes foreigners with such affection.

On the other hand, the hardest part of coming here was separating from my family and paying tribute to the country where I was born. I will say that I really miss the exquisite Mediterranean food that we have there.

- **La Garriga:** a municipality in province of Barcelona, Spain.

A Gift of Joy

By Janice M. Bowens

Tutor: Janet Felker

This writing was inspired by the author's encounter with an immigrant family from Nigeria.

Just a couple of days ago, I met a little girl as I gave some joy to her little world. Not just for her, but for her mother and brother too. Just a small gift that meant the world. Just a small gift of kindness, thinking "there, too, go I."

Looking into that child's face would bring joy to the souls of so many. Just a little doll brought joy and laughter into her small world. The world turned that moment, in the girl's eyes – all her sadness vanished for a brief second when she was given that new baby doll. Such a doll she may have lost when she and her family were running for their lives. A toy she may have loved but may have been left behind to save their lives.

How can a child ponder her loneliness, so disturbing since she once had someone who loved and cared for them all? Today, a small child's dreams were filled with hope and joy. That one little toy brightened up her day. Will she be able to rise above that dark sadness to get to the other side? Today I hope I've made her day just a little bit more bright and joyful, because today she got a new gift, that new baby doll.

My Mom the Smuggler

By Rich A. Colorado Sr.

In August of 1946, I was nine years old when my parents sold their large home and got rid of all belongings in El Salvador. They donated many things to charities. We gave away our beautiful green parrot to one of our servants. I didn't know what happened to our little dog, "Perlita," with all the excitement, all of us forgot about her.

My mom, my younger brother Carlos, and I flew to the USA together that day, on a Pan American Airlines plane. My dad and older brother Luis chose to stay in El Salvador. They would come to the USA at a later time.

Since I had been in the U.S. before, I was the only one who could speak English, the rest of the family spoke Spanish.

Our plane landed in El Paso, Texas. Each of us had a cloth carry-on bag full of things we were bringing. The luggage was on a cart to be inspected before we could enter the U.S.

"Come on. Let's get in line, we don't want to be last," my mom said.

The line for customs was long. Finally, it was our turn to be inspected. Mom picked up the suitcases one by one and placed them on a counter. Each was opened and when it passed inspection, it was closed, placed on the other side of the counter, then the carry-on cloth bags were inspected. Each of us had different things we wanted to bring with us: small books, toys, odds and ends.

My mom placed her carry-on bag on the counter, but not her large purse. The inspector started pulling things out of it.

"Do you have anything to declare? What is in this wrapped item?" he asked, holding it up for mom to see.

"Digale, que es dulce."

"She said it's candy," I said to the inspector.

"Tell her I have to open each one to make sure," the inspector said.

I told him and he started to open them, looked and wrapped each up again. Then he started pulling out fruit, like mangos, nances, and guavas.

"Señora, you can't bring the fruit into the U.S., I have to confiscate it."

"Oh, no! Why not? It's only fruit for us to eat," she pleaded, as the inspector was placing the fruit on the counter.

"It's a regulation, Señora. Uncooked fruit, I have to throw away."

"Wait a minute please, give me all that fruit. I can't let you throw it away. We were going to eat it so we will eat it right now. You can help the next person while we do that."

She reached over and scooped the fruit into a bag and moved to the side to let others go ahead. She gave me several guavas, a mango and told me to start eating. She gave some to Carlos and she started eating also. All the fruit was ripe and juicy, so it was very easy to eat.

Some of the customs officers and most of the nearby passengers going through customs, stared at us in disbelief.

It took about ten minutes, and we did a good job of eating the fruit. We moved back to the counter to finish our customs inspection. Some of the fruit was left and mom placed it on the counter.

"We can't eat it all. You can throw the rest away. Why don't you eat it?" Mom said to the agent.

"I'm sorry about the fruit. There's nothing I can do about that. Just go through that door and welcome to the U.S."

We pushed the cart and walked through the door. Mom quickly moved us toward a cab and told the driver where to take us. She plopped down into the seat, she seemed exhausted. She leaned back into the seat trying to relax. It was a short ride to a hotel where we were going to spend the night.

My brother and I were excited to be in the U.S. in a fine hotel. As soon as we got there, mom placed her large cloth purse on the bed, laid down next to it.

"Mom, can we all go outside and look around?"

"No, not yet. I have something to do and show you."

We watched as she got off the bed and reached for the handbag. We thought she was going to give us some money. She looked into the handbag and she reached in with both hands and very slowly and carefully pulled out a limp little dog.

“It’s Perlita, it’s Perlita!” We chanted and smiled, we gathered around her.

“Is she ok? What happened to her? Why was she in your purse?” I asked.

“Here is what happened: I tried to get permission to bring her to the U.S., but I couldn’t get it. So I got a sedative from our doctor and I gave it to her before we boarded the plane. I had placed her in my large purse. During the flight, I would go to the bathroom and check on her. She is so tiny that she didn’t need any more sedative.”

“How long will it be before she is ok again?” I asked.

“She will be fine in a while. I have to give her some more tomorrow before the plane flight to San Francisco. Now all of you have to keep this secret. Or they will take the dog away. Do you promise?”

“Yes, yes we do,” we all said.

“I brought all that fruit to use as a diversion at the customs check-in. I really was afraid we would get caught with Perlita. Thank God it worked.”

During the fruit-eating incident, the customs agent forgot to check the rest of her large cloth handbag.

That night our night prayers included “Perlita.”

Mom sedated her one more time for the flight to San Francisco and Perlita lived eight more years.

Catherine’s Story

By Catherine Chung

My name is Catherine Chung. I was born and raised in Hong Kong, The Pearl of the Orient. Hong Kong has four seasons, spring, summer, fall and winter. In winter we never see snow. In summer it is very hot and humid, also there are several typhoons. Hong Kong has three regions: Hong Kong Island, Kowloon, and the New Territories. On July 1, 1997 the British returned Hong Kong to China.

When I was a child, I helped my grandmother and parents at a grocery store in a big city, Kowloon. We had Chinese medicine, canned food, Chinese chestnuts, dried mushrooms, rice, and wine, etcetera. My father started the grocery store.

I have one elder sister, one elder brother and two younger sisters and I am in the middle. We always played Chinese checkers and hide and seek, jumped rope and we didn’t spend money. My parents seldom bought any toys for us. I remember one year, my brother requested my father to buy him a new bicycle, and my father said, “You must study hard to get good grades, then I will buy you one.”

I spent my childhood with two younger sisters going to school in the morning and helping my grandma four afternoons a week in the store. Life was happy then and I enjoyed playing with the kids next door.

My mom cooked delicious Chinese food. She made poached brown chicken, sweet and sour pork and curry chicken, and dumplings were the best!

When I grew up in Hong Kong, there were both Chinese and English schools. My parents sent me to Chinese school where English was taught as a second language. So my English is not very good. After I finished high school, I found a job at Modern Educational Research Society Ltd. in Hong Kong. I was a bookkeeper. It was my first experience away from school. I worked hard. The month end was busy, but I enjoyed auditing accounts.

At the office, I met many nice colleagues. We worked as a team. We worked diligently. Timmy worked with me, and she had beautiful short hair and was always smiling. She was my supervisor. She is also my best friend.

My sisters and all my friends wanted to learn English, but it was very hard because the majority of people in Hong Kong speak Cantonese all the time.

I worked for 23 years at the same place. It was okay there, but gradually I realized that I needed to make a change in my life. When I was 46 years

old, I had the opportunity to immigrate to America to marry my husband. I opened my eyes to see the new big country and a new life. I was amazed to see so many new things. The first two years were very hard. I spent time to learn English in the mornings, and went to a local community center to learn conversation with Americans in the afternoons. I spent my time watching English TV programs in the evening at home.

I am taking more classes to learn English. I hope one day, I can speak fluent English and have good health.



Section 4 Dreams Come True

Crossing the Border

By Alicia Caldera

Tutor: Bob Alwitt

I came from Mexico in 1993. I crossed the border on Christmas Eve. We were a large group: My husband and me and our one year-old son, and five other people. We paid one hundred dollars for each of us to the “coyote” who led us across the river into the U.S. I left my three oldest children with my mom. Three months later my husband went back to Mexico to get my twin girls, and then six months later finally my oldest son got here.

I came to the U.S. because I got tired of being alone with my three children in this little town of Pilas de Soto. For nine years Marcelo was working in Sonoma, California; he was going back to Mexico for three months each year. I was living with his parents during that time. I decided to come to the U.S. because I wanted my children to be with their father.

When I was young I wanted to go to “el Norte.” My brothers were living in California and I wanted to visit them. But I got married and stayed in Mexico. Now I am living in the U.S., not just for a visit, and I am a U.S. citizen. When I was young I didn’t dream of such a thing.

- **“el Norte”:** “The North” or as used in this story, Mexican slang for the United States.

Jazmín’s Story

By Jazmín Oropeza Bueno

My name is Jazmin Oropeza. I’m from Mexico. I grew up in a big city. The streets are very quiet and peaceful. Gastronomy in Mexico is very delicious, we have a variety of traditional foods like albondigas, lentejas, enchiladas, chilaquiles, cochinita pibil, sopes, etc. But the most wonderful are tacos. When I was a child I played with my friends a lot of games like stop, airplane, hide and seek, caught, etc. In Mexico life is wonderful, our neighbors are so friendly and everyone knows each other.

I was raised by my grandmother and father. My parents separated when I was one year-old. I was the youngest of my siblings and also the dreamer. I remember when I thought about how my life would be when I grew up, I imagined that I would be the owner of a fashion agency and it is still my dream.

When I was in Mexico, I worked for seven years in the telecommunication business. I was the owner of a subsidiary. That job was so nice and I learned so much about teamwork, business administration, group coordination and creation of work strategies. I really enjoyed that stage. Unfortunately I had to close the subsidiary due to non-payment by the company.

After that, I started to sell many things, like skin care treatments, clothes, and also I learned to do nails. I continued working in Mexico, but my husband moved to the USA when the business closed to help me pay back money we had borrowed to cover our workers’ payments.

That period was very difficult, because my husband and I lived apart for two years. I came to the USA at the age of 34. The beginning was very difficult for me. My life changed completely, I missed my family and friends a lot. When I thought about them I cried, although I was very happy to see my husband again. It was hard for me to adapt to living in the USA. I was working in three different places before I felt comfortable with my current job.

I met a friend in my neighborhood, and he told me about English class in the Petaluma Adult School. I couldn’t believe it. I was very excited to start the English class and I really loved my first day. Meeting people from many countries was one of my dreams, and that day was fulfilling in the classroom. ❤️ The teacher’s class was very fun and interactive. I really loved my teacher too.

Life in the USA is very different from Mexican life. There is a very different culture but I am starting to feel good here. I have learned English better and also many skills at work that I did not know before.

I am still working to have my fashion agency in Mexico. Thanks to my job in the USA, I have money to create a business in my country. I now have a beauty school in Mexico and I am creating my dream to be a fashion designer. I will do my best to reach my new goal.

The New Opportunity

By Martha Espinoza

Tutor: Cynthia Denenholz

I am from Mexico and I am married and a mom of two boys: Beni, 16 years old and Juan, 11 years old. For me, it is difficult to live in a different country with a different language, a different culture, and we have a hard situation with education. As a mom of a preteen and a teen, I need to know how the education system works. I need support with everything and I need to find programs and help in both boys' schools.

In 2002, I was living in Guadalajara with my younger brother. My father, other brother, and sister lived in my hometown Yahulica, about 90 minutes away. I had a hair salon and I was working hard to help support my brother, who was in architecture school. When I was 30 years old, I went to my hometown to the Fiestas Patrias, the independence celebrations in Mexico. Benito, who lived in Rohnert Park, came on vacation to Yahulica and we met then. He invited me to the USA!

I had a beautiful and independent life in Mexico, but I always thought of starting a family. I used to visit the United States and I knew that I would be better off in many aspects. I felt my life would be changing and would take a turn for the better. I thought that it was a perfect time for my own family. My dad asked me, "What is the reason to live in the U.S.?" I told him because I met Benito and he asked me to move to this country.

Benito and I married one year later and I moved to the USA with him. I left behind my life, family and friends, my work, and my single status, which in Mexico is very different from married life. For me that was a big change: married life and living in a different country.

I was sad because I missed my country and my family, but I had a lot of hopes and dreams to start my own family. We can complete our dreams easier in the U.S. I really liked the equality between women and men in this country. I think about this all of the time.

I was open to the new life and I was open to know new people. I was scared too because I needed to start working again, but with no license it was difficult to work in a hair salon. For me the first thing to do was to get the license, but we had money problems. I had a few more struggles. I was pregnant with my older son Beni and for me that was a big change because that was a surprise. In 2010, the dream came true to buy a house in Rohnert Park. Five years later, I had my second baby boy, Juan. It was

inconvenient to go to school with a small child and a baby, but with a lot of struggles I went to school and I finally got my cosmetology license. I gave up Mexican citizenship to be a U.S. citizen because you can't have both. I also left behind **Día de los Muertos**, **Día del Grito de la Independencia**, and **Mes Patrio**. I remember the traditional food: chocolate abuelita, carnitas, tacos de asada, and churros. The flavors are really different in Mexico, with chile in everything! I can't grind corn to make dough in this country, but I don't want to forget how to make tortillas and cheese. My memories of trips to swim in the river and cut prickly pear (nopales) with my family are wonderful. In my ears, I have the sounds of the lotería, the gas seller and the corn seller in the streets, the mariachi and loud music in the house. Every single year, I remember the season of the dahlias and gladiolas because my grandmother had those flowers in her garden. I don't want to forget that people in Mexico were more humanitarian and more generous when I lived there.

However, now I am blessed because I live in a beautiful place. Thank you, God, for giving me my new life in 2005. With time after I arrived in this country, I won my own family, my children, U.S. citizenship, my house, a job in my profession, and English class. Now we have a better economy, safety in the streets, many safe, low-cost recreational activities for our children, and really good friends.

Thanks 🙏

- **Día de los Muertos:** Day of the Dead holiday celebration.
- **Día del Grito de la Independencia:** September 16 celebrations for Mexican independence from Spanish rule.
- **Mes Patrio:** "The month of our country" month-long patriotic celebrations in Mexico.

No Longer a Chameleon

By Eloina Ortiz

Tutor: Nancy Mickens

I immigrated to the United States three months after I married. I knew that a new member of our family was already on the way. At that time, I only thought about how happy we would be in this new stage of my life. We came as farm workers to the state called the Evergreen State, specifically The Cascades of Washington State. I had to pick cherry and nectarine trees. More than picking the fruit, I wanted to satisfy my belly and share with my baby that sweet, juicy cherry which was so delicious and appetizing. It was the first time that I had ever eaten cherries. The harvest only lasted a short period of time. Later I was able to work in cherry packing to sort out the fruit. It was not legal, but at that time you could get residency with a few dollars. That was my case temporarily. After five years we moved to California. We were looking for new opportunities for work that were not in the orchards. Once again, we had to undertake another immigration. My son and I came with signs of abuse. My ability to communicate was limited because I didn't speak English at that time and I didn't have friends. I didn't know about any resources for abused women.

I did get my residency and started working in a factory. After many attempts I decided to go to Southern California with my three children. It was a bit difficult because I didn't have a job. My sister's husband supported me financially for a few months. His sister was a manager at Costco so I was able to go to work for a few months. At that time my son Daniel was a teenager and my fear was that he would become involved with gangs. For that reason, I decided not to stay in Southern California. I went back to where we had lived. I was left alone with my children. It was very difficult. There were days of loneliness and a lot of sadness but I could not let myself be defeated. There were my three children who depended on me. Even though it was a difficult time, to see that my children were happy and emotionally stable compensated all my effort. I didn't have time to get depressed. I could not.

I was always a responsible mother and completely forgot about myself. I didn't want anyone to come into my life again. My children and my parents were my engine to keep me going every day.

When everything was established and going well in my life, my mother died in 2010. I felt very lonely without her. Once again I went through a very difficult period. God has been a very important pillar in my life. I don't believe in coincidences either. I always think that things happen for a

reason. All that suffering I had experienced for so many years prepared me to receive a good reward in my life.

I always longed to return to the country where I was born and the place I had lived with my parents. All the memories of my childhood, both good and bad, stayed there. I left my country with dreams and illusions but my country never left my heart. My roots remain anchored there forever.

In 2013 I met my new husband (my honey, as I call him). A year later we got engaged and moved in together. After that I started to make a lot of changes in myself because he let me be myself. I had identified myself as a chameleon because I hid my emotions and preferred to remain silent in order not to be seen. Now I feel like I was reborn and I like the person I am now. I have the family I always wanted to have. Our children are now all living on their own. We are now adjusting to an empty nest and I am beginning a new chapter in my life.



Section 5
Dreams As Yet Unfulfilled

Rosa's Story

By Rosa

My name is Rosa. I was born and raised in a small town in Jalisco, Mexico. I have three sisters and four brothers. When we were children, we worked on farms and we couldn't make enough money to buy things we needed. Some of my brothers never got to study because they had to work at an early age. It was sad for us.

We decided to move to the United States in search of work and better opportunities for us. I immigrated here 18 years ago. I found a job where I worked for 11 years, but I had to quit my job because I needed to take care of my family.

Now I'm a homemaker, bookkeeper, and am taking ESL classes. I want to improve myself and help my husband with our small business. My goal is to grow our business and one day send our daughter to college.

Gabby's Story

By Gabby R.

My name is Gabriela R. I'm from Jalisco, Mexico. I've been here for six years. I grew up in a small county called Jalostotitlan, Jalisco. As a child, I was sad because I grew up without my father because he came to the U.S. But I have beautiful memories with my brothers and my mom. She was our support and she always helped us to reach our goals. She always told us that we should never give up, and that we can do anything we want if we do it with our heart. She passed away when she was 39 years old in a tragic accident. I was so sad and all my dreams left with her, but I remembered her advice and decided that I would never give up because I can do it!

When I was 15 years old, I had a dream to come to the U.S. and see my dad again. I got married when I was 17, and some years later I finally got my visa. I realized that dreams do come true because when I was 27 years old, I finally came to the U.S. and saw my dad after 19 years. But that's not the reason that I decided to stay in the U.S. I loved my country and I missed it so much, but I had to leave because the crime there got more powerful and there was nothing to do about it. I didn't feel safe. For example, there was a powerful man who wanted to date me, but I didn't want to. He always threatened me and made me live in fear. Then he tried to kill my husband. We had to move to the United States because our family was not safe.

We came to the U.S. with no money, just our most important assets. I was scared to come here because I did not know the language and I was worried about how my children would feel about living in a new city with all the changes. But I had to be strong for them. We arrived at the house of my brother-in-law's friend who rented a room to us. We were looking for a job for one month, but nothing worked. We were spending all of the little money that we had. Then finally after a month, my husband found a construction company and they gave him a job. I was still so sad because I missed my family and I didn't have any friends. Then I met a person who told me where my children could go to school and where I could go to learn English. After a few months, we found a house to rent and I was happy because my kids had a big space to live instead of just a room.

One year later, we came to Petaluma. My sister lives here and we came to live here in my sister's house while we looked for a job and a new place to live. Finally, my husband found a job at a ranch and they provided housing, so it was perfect for us. I felt more confident because I had my sister near me and together we found a school to learn English, Petaluma Adult School. It was the best day because I was excited to learn a new language and I knew it was going to be a good decision. Now we live here and my goal is to continue with my classes so I can speak, write, and understand well. Someday I hope to have my own business, a beauty salon. Although we have had ups and downs, I feel safe and happy I have my family here.

My Personal History

By Anahí Soledad Orgaz

My name is Anahí Orgaz. I am from Argentina, a beautiful country in South America. I was born in the year 1984 and I grew up in a small and quiet valley in the north of Argentina, a city called Jujuy.

When I was a child, I loved taking care of homeless animals; drawing and painting, and skating in the afternoons. I loved school, music, classical dance and art in general.

I was raised in an all-female home: my mother, my grandmother and my sister. My parents are divorced for a long time. My father used to visit us, not very often, he was a workaholic.

I had a normal childhood, but I was a very quiet, obedient, and lonely girl, so I liked to draw comics and create great characters and stories.

When I finished high school, I started at University, and there I graduated as a Professor of Arts. I worked in schools in my city, but I also had other jobs, such as Statue Restoration and a wine seller to clubs and restaurants.

When I was 34 years old, I met my current husband, Oscar, through social media. Yep...Facebook. We spent hours on video calls, until one day he went to my country to meet me. He is American from a Mexican family. He was born in Chicago, Illinois.

I came here to the U.S. in 2019 because I got married to my fiancé; but for family reasons I had to live in Mexico (Guadalajara) for two long years. My son Ioannis was born there.

When I first came to America in 2019, I was blessed to be baptized in the Orthodox Church. Since then, my life has resumed its true course.

My life in Mexico was full of hardships. The heat was very intense and bad for my health, so I decided to return to the U.S. in 2021.

The second time I came to this country, it was very different. It was no longer difficult for me to adapt like the first time, but it was so hard to start from scratch. My life here is a little bit of a sacrifice but pleasant and motivating.

I love this country for many reasons: the discipline, the cleanliness, safety, the economy, which still allows us to live and not just survive.

Although sometimes I don't have time for anything. I love to go for a walk outdoors with my family; the U.S. is a country with beautiful landscapes. Here I decided to enter the English School for adults, since I had never studied this language (only French).

I started to work in a restaurant, but as an immigrant, jobs are not well-paid. But I live here with enthusiasm and, for the first time, I feel alive.

I miss many things of Argentina; but I love more my life here. I love to work and be a proactive person.

My routine is very dynamic, and that's what I like about my new life.

Presently, my family and I are living with my in-laws.

But two weeks ago we bought a motorhome with enough living space. Our plan is to live there for a while, because it's cheap and it will allow us to save more money; since one of my goals is to buy – in the future – a small house.

Actually I have many goals; one of them is also to create my own business and become a citizen, since I am also very interested in taking an English degree at the college.

My life here is “new” in many ways, but I still feel at home, and that's good, but my country will always be in my heart.

Olguine's Story

By Olguine Dorvilus Laguerre

My name is Olguine, I'm from Haiti. I was 32 when I left my country.

I'm married, I have one child. In my country I was a nurse. I graduated and I lived in the city. In my country, many people have talent for something but they don't have any help or assistance to continue with their dream.

I left my family to come to the USA, it was hard and it is still my goal to be a nurse. My challenge is a new culture and the laws, but I can survive because I don't like trouble. I'm shy, I like to observe people and do the right thing. I cry for people when they tell me a sad story of their life. I would like to be rich or have more money to help people on the street, especially children, because they are the future of life.

I trust God, I'm Christian.

I like the USA and the people living here. They are kind and respectful.

Sometimes when people talk to me I give a short answer because I don't speak English. Maybe they think I don't want to talk to them or I'm not nice. In reality, I don't have a lot of vocabulary to speak to them. I'd like to say "sorry" when I can't explain.

My dreams are big but the first is to be a nurse and for me and my family to be together.

My Story

By Andre Luna Perez, grade 8

This story was originally submitted in Spanish. The original text follows the English translation.

I felt nervous because I did not know anyone. Many people move to the United States and they help each other or some help immigrants. When I came, they helped me learn English. I know a little English, but I am advancing in English like other classmates or immigrants. Many parents do not know English, even though they have been here for years because they never practice it, but some do. When I learn English, I will help people who do not know English. When I learn English, I will try to see if I can learn other languages. There are teachers who help me make progress in English and they help other kids too. Many people in the United States are bilingual and they went through the same things as other immigrants.

My Historia

Escrita por Andre Luna Perez, grado 8

Yo me sentí nervioso porque no conocía a nadie. Mucha gente se muda a Estados Unidos y se ayudan o algunos ayudan a los inmigrantes. Cuando yo vine me ayudaron para que aprenda inglés. Yo se poquito inglés, pero estoy avanzando en el inglés como otros compañeros o inmigrantes. Muchos padres no saben inglés, aunque lleven años aquí porque no lo practican nunca, pero algunos sí. Cuando aprenda por completo el inglés, voy a ayudar a la gente que no sepa inglés. Cuando aprenda el inglés, voy a tratar de ver si puedo aprender otros idiomas. Hay maestras que si me ayudan a progresar en el inglés y también ayudan a otros niños. Mucha gente en Estados Unidos es bilingüe y pasaron por lo mismo que todos los inmigrantes.



Section 6
Arrivals

Arrivals and Departures

By Yi Zhang

Tutor: Mary Wright

On a July dawn, a full golden sun rose high over the Pacific Ocean in the sky, lighting the land, and the airplane we took landed at San Francisco Airport. My son, three years old, held my husband and my hands and said, “Are we in the U.S.?” “Yes, my sweetheart, we are living here,” I responded.

Nine years ago, my son was born in Shanghai, China, and was strong and healthy. However, after one year, he had allergic rhinitis from air pollution and had to take allergy medicines to relieve his symptoms. He hardly had any opportunities to play outside like his peers and frequently got sick. We accepted the doctor’s advice to find better circumstances for him and decided to settle in the United States.

At the same time, I understood it could be a big challenge to leave our comfort zone surrounded by family members and friends, and to adapt to an unfamiliar environment with a different language and culture. However, we believed that the choice was better for him, and it was significant for us to start a new chapter of our life.

An intense feeling of homesickness became the first challenge I had to confront in the first year. Nevertheless, I adjusted my mindset to accept being away from my previous daily routine and started my new lifestyle. Generally, after getting off work on weekdays in my hometown, my husband and I used to have dinner with my parents. My father always prepared my favorite dishes and had them waiting for us, such as Braised Pork with Preserved Vegetables, Shanghai-style Smoked Fish, Shaoxing Wine Chicken, etc. My mother helped me take good care of my baby during the daytime. I appreciated how they contributed their spare time and love for my family. On the weekends, I sometimes played badminton with my close friends to stay healthy. On holidays, especially the Chinese Lunar New Year, which symbolizes a family union, we used to throw a party with our parents and relatives to celebrate this special day. Living in the U.S. seemed to be leaving my previous lifestyle, and it made me feel sad.

However, I realized that my small family had the chance to spend more time together than before – for instance, hiking in national parks, learning to play tennis in our community, riding bicycles to explore new spots, watching Disney films at the theater, and camping and fishing with our new friends. In addition, we are interested in the cultural difference in celebrating American holidays such as Halloween, Thanksgiving, etc., because of its historical backgrounds and novel experiences. Sometimes, when missing my parents and friends, I chat with them and send them

messages through WeChat. One of my family routines is that we often purchase various ingredients and food from Chinese supermarkets to cook my hometown dishes because the food always allows me to remember my father and my childhood memories.

My son enjoys outside activities and learns sports quickly, yet it took time for him to learn a new language and make friends at school. The weather in California is perfect because of the sunshine and good air quality. It allows him to spend sufficient time playing outdoors, have strong muscles, and stay healthy. He is fascinated by sports including tennis, ping-pong, football, basketball, etc., and tennis is his favorite and brings him confidence when competing with other peers in tournaments. Nowadays, his rhinitis is healed by the fresh air and by engaging in various sports programs. It also helps him to meet new peers with the same hobbies as him.

However, when recalling his school year of attending kindergarten, I felt a bit nervous and worried about him because of the new environment and the obstacle to speaking English. Thus, I volunteered in his classroom to bring him a feeling of safety and reassurance. His teacher also offered me some helpful suggestions in order to support him in learning English and adapting to school life. I appreciated the family-centered approach, which allowed me to be involved in my son’s learning process and build a partnership with his teacher. We worked together to understand our different cultural backgrounds and to enhance his development in this new circumstance. Our efforts paid off, and he became comfortable speaking English, was willing to communicate with his peers, and made new friends. The bilingual languages and social ability benefited him in communicating with others in both countries.

I understood how communication was vital for my child, and at the same time, I realized it also became my obstacle to living in the country. Even though I had learned English in China, and it allowed me to understand some basic vocabulary and daily dialogue, I still felt lost when talking with local people. To avoid exposing my weakness in speaking English, my husband became my interpreter when I needed him. The sensation of dependence made me lose my confidence, so I relearned English by taking some ESL courses at Santa Rosa Junior College and participated in the Adult Literacy Program at Sonoma County Library to enhance my English skills. I am thankful to my English tutor, Mary, who contributes her spare time to instruct me in speaking English, reading, writing, and patiently corrects my mispronunciation and grammatical errors. The most inspiring story she shared with me is that she restarted to pursue her educational goal after her sons grew up and earned her Master’s diploma in her 40s. Her courage and willpower motivate me to continue my English learning journey without giving up.

Nowadays, I am able to handle most of my daily life independently and pursue my educational goal of learning about Child Development. After having my child, I rediscovered my passion for working with children, who are innocent, dynamic, curious, and creative individuals, who crave to explore the world and absorb new information like sponges. As a parent, learning more about child development helps to create more understanding of the different stages children go through and how to help my son pursue his learning.

Time goes by, and when looking back on the past few years, there's something we might miss, yet something we have gained. When I see my son – having a sweet smile on his face, desiring to explore the world with his curiosity, enjoying learning new knowledge and making friends at school, and retaining a close relationship with us – I believe that it was the most beneficial decision we made.

My First Friend in the U.S., Maria

By Eunsil Lim

Tutor: Kathleen Larocque

Last Friday, I reunited with my friend Maria who came from Maui. Maria was my first friend in the U.S. She moved to Maui seven years ago from Richmond, California.

When I first came to America, everything was hard, especially English. When my husband came to pick me up at the airport, he turned on the radio. The sound from the radio wasn't what I knew. It was just noise to me. I couldn't pick out any words.

Since my husband and I were planning to go back to Korea, I thought English wasn't a big problem, but after we decided to live here, it was very stressful that I couldn't say what I wanted to say. But even more difficult was listening. So I was afraid to meet people because I didn't understand what people said.

In middle school, I learned to focus on grammar and vocabulary. I wasn't interested in English and not good at it. In Korea, I always got along easily with people and liked to talk, so being unable to converse in English here made me feel weak.

When I first met Maria at the playground, she tried to understand what I said. It was broken English and mixed body language. She was very fun and outgoing. We lived in the same town and she had a same-aged baby boy as my son. So we became friends fast.

I met other moms of children through Maria, and we raised the kids together. Our kids went to the beach, park, and same preschool, and ate together until Maria's family moved to Maui. Raising a baby can be very lonely and difficult, but thanks to Maria, we got through a hard time well.

After Maria moved to Maui and my son finished Kindergarten, we went back to Korea and then returned to Santa Rosa three years ago. Maria and I have kept in touch.

Last summer we booked air and hotel in Maui, but we canceled because of Covid 19. Last week Maria said she was coming to Richmond with her family for a family event. We finally reunited. Even though we were apart for seven years, we still felt close – kids, too. We hope to visit Maui someday to see Maria's family.

I have adapted well to America – thanks to Maria. And now I am very grateful to be able to learn English with my tutor Kathleen Larocque through the Adult Literacy Program in Santa Rosa.

Victoria's Story

Victoria Cabrales Larios was interviewed by Leti Soria

The following interview was originally done in Spanish, but has been translated to English here. The original Spanish transcription follows.

There is a story behind every decision to immigrate, what was your story?

Well, poverty. Lack of money. Lack of jobs in my small hometown; and, truthfully, the economic resources were the reasons I decided to come here to the United States.

Whom did you come with and whom did you leave behind?

I came here with my husband and my two girls – one two-year-old and one six-year-old.

Did you leave someone behind when you came here?

My whole family, my loved ones, my friends, my home – humble, but it was my home – my small little house made of dirt. I left behind my roots; remembering that now makes me a bit sad because I have been here for 24 years. I have not been able to return and I feel as though I have one foot here and one foot there.

What has been the biggest challenge about coming here?

The biggest challenge, starting with the crossing, being there two weeks – my daughters crossed first and then my husband and me. But, I believe that if I could turn back time, I would not have come here. I regret it.

May I ask why you regret it?

Because there is a very sad history that caused a lot of suffering to my children. I was in Tijuana for two weeks while they crossed and they had a rough time crossing. To the extent that, my son, who is transgender, still has bad moments because of what he went through. I believe he has yet to overcome that.

Have you received any assistance? Is there something or someone that has helped you settle here?

I have been here for 24 years and I have always felt alone. I have made a life for myself. I only have my daughter, my son, my husband. That is all.

Where do you find the strength to go on during difficult times?

I believe we have one life to live and we have to live it somehow – what better way than well. However, I have sought out psychological support. It has been a year, but I used to be involved with my church community. I have searched for companionship, support, but in the end, the loneliness does not go away.

What do you think was the biggest challenge you encountered up to this point in your life?

Well, now that my children are grown up, I think that the outcome of my bringing them here – I feel a sense of guilt. I have not overcome that but, truthfully, coming here was not so bad because we are doing well economically.

The hardest thing has always been the fear of not finding a job or seeking a job where I know they will deny me because I am illegal. In the past 24 years, I have not had the opportunity of others knowing that I exist, that I am here. This makes me feel bad in a legal sense. I believe that is the worst I can say – I am here but it is not acceptable for me to be here and truthfully, I would have liked to work or have had the opportunity to work in better places with benefits. I believe that has always weighed heavily on me.

Is it something you live with daily, a sense of uncertainty?

Yes.

What do you think about the future? Do you have plans or a goal you want to reach?

Truthfully, I feel stuck. I feel stuck because my children were my priority before. Now they are no longer with me. My daughter is married and my son lives on his own. That was the motor pushing me to carry on with my life, my family. It has been two years since my nest has been empty. After everything, I did not know what to do with my life and I feel very lonely. In those instances, I think enough is enough. Therefore, I am not sure, but if I return to the country where I was born, where I can visit the graves of my deceased family members, five or six of which I did not meet, know, or feel. I felt them here but I did not know them. I think in the future, perhaps in a year or two, I would love to return to my hometown.

To live?

Yes, to live and start again. I feel I have done what I needed to do here; I feel it has been enough and I do not want to feel alone anymore.

Is there anything else you want to say or want to include in your story?

Well, I could talk about something positive I achieved. I feel fortunate, after all, that although my English is not good, I attended the Santa Rosa Junior College for three years. I can read, write, speak, I am a server; I speak it with a heavy accent. It also gives me pride that my children are successful recipients of the DACA program.

My daughter went to the University of San Diego. She graduated with a degree in Archaeology and she is working at the North Bay Regional Center here in Santa Rosa. She is very successful; she is very intelligent. My son only finished high school. He plays three instruments and sometimes he plays in the primary band here in Sonoma and he has a job that makes

him happy. He works at the Petaluma Health Center as a facilities assistant, but he is happy, I see him happy. I see my daughter happy – she is married.

My husband is not a trained chef, but he is a very good cook. Through his job, we have health insurance and benefits but that was before they changed the regulations when they used to hire people without papers. Nonetheless, my husband has worked there for 24 years. The joy I get is from the three and only people I feel I have in this world. And I feel proud of myself in this moment for going to school and learning another language. My best friend is from Nepal.

What else can I say; I also make an effort to try other cuisines: Japanese, Chinese, Thai food. I can try different foods here and I cannot do that in my Mexico. That is a benefit of being here in the United States whereas in my Mexico I did not even have enough to eat. I have the economic means to decide to buy a top, a dress, a bag, speaking economically. But emotionally I believe I would be much happier in Mexico with my family, my roots, my hometown, my land, and I feel positive, at my 57 years of age, that I will go back. Now I am mature and, more or less, know how to start over in Mexico. I did not know before, with two little ones, what I could do but I tried. My husband refuses, but I have hope that in one or two years I will be able to convince him that maybe our future is in Mexico where we were born and where I would like to die. I would not like to die over here.

Do you want to return to your native country?

Yes, to my hometown, my customs, the people, the hustle and bustle!

Is it different?

Yes, parties, celebrations! Oh, how I long for all of that.

Thank you, Victoria. Many people go through a lot to get here and we are grateful you are sharing your story. I know it is difficult.

Thank you. I believe this will be the first time that I will feel like I belong to something. That I truly existed here in the United States. Victoria. No one knows that I live here because even to my own co-workers, I cannot say that I do not have papers. But I saw an opportunity here. My daughter knew that I needed to express that I am here in the United States. To be able to say, “Victoria was here, Victoria was here in the United States.” I believe it is the first time and I feel good. I feel excited, motivated to say that for the first time I will use my maiden name like the custom in Mexico because it felt strange not doing that here. My sister told me at first, you have to use your husband’s name here. And I never knew if that was good or bad, but I feel seen and now I would I love to use my two maiden names, my first name, my age, and everything.

La Historia de Victoria

Entrevista realizada por Leti Soria

Hay una historia detras de cada decisión de emigrar, ¿Cuál fue tu historia?

Bueno, la pobreza. Falta de dinero. Falta de empleos en mi pequeño pueblo y realmente los recursos económicos fue lo que más me hicieron que yo viniera aquí a Estados Unidos.

¿Con quién viniste y a quien dejaste atrás?

Tengo a mi esposo y me vine con dos niñas – una de dos añitos y una de seis.

¿Dejaste a alguien atrás cuando te viniste para acá?

Toda mi familia, mis seres queridos, mis amistades, mi hogar – humilde, pero fue mi hogar – mi pequeñita casita, chiquita de tierra. Deje mis raíces; que ahorita nada mas de recordarme me pongo un poco triste porque tengo 24 años aquí. No he podido regresar y eso me ha tenido a mi como un paso allá y un paso aquí.

¿Qué ha sido lo más difícil de venirte para acá?

Lo más difícil, empezando con el cruce, estar casi dos semanas – mis hijas cruzaron primero y después mi esposo y yo. Pero creo que, sí regresará mi tiempo atrás, no hubiera venido. Me arrepiento.

¿Te puedo preguntar por qué te arrepientes?

Porque hay una historia muy difícil de la cual mis hijos sufrieron mucho. Yo me quedé dos semanas en Tijuana y ellos se cruzaron y ellos la pasaron muy mal al cruzar. Al grado que, tengo mi hijo que es transgénero, todavía con malos momentos de cuando cruzo. Y creo que todavía no lo supera.

¿Has recibido alguna ayuda? ¿Algo que te ha ayudado en acomodarte aquí, alguna persona?

Tengo 24 años aquí y siempre me he sentido sola. He hecho mi vida yo sola. Solo mi hija, mi hijo, mi esposo. Nada más.

¿De dónde encuentras la fuerza para seguir adelante en los tiempos difíciles?

Yo pienso que la vida es una y tenemos que vivirla de alguna manera – que mejor que bien. Pero si yo he buscado ayuda psicológica. Antes, tengo como un ano que ya no, pero me reunía en la iglesia con mi comunidad. He buscado como compañía, como apoyo, pero después de todo la soledad que siento no se va.

¿Qué piensas que fue lo más duro de todo hasta este punto de tu vida?

Ah bueno, ahorita que mis hijos están grandes creo que el resultado del que yo los haya traído para acá – como que estoy con esa culpa. Todavía no la he superado, pero pues realmente cruzándome acá no fue tan mal porque económicamente estamos bien.

Lo más difícil es siempre estar con el temor de no encontrar trabajo o de ir a buscar un trabajo donde sé que me van a rechazar por ser ilegal. No he tenido la oportunidad en los 24 años de que sepan que existo, que estoy yo aquí. Que legalmente se siente uno mal. Creo que es lo más feo que puedo decir. Que estoy aquí pero no está aceptado que este aquí y realmente me hubiera gustado a mí personalmente haber trabajado o tener la oportunidad de trabajar en mejores lugares con beneficios. Creo que es lo que a mí siempre me ha tenido como mal.

¿Es algo que vives día a día, esa incertidumbre?

Si.

¿Qué piensas de tu futuro? ¿Tienes planes o alguna meta que quieras cumplir?

Realmente me siento estancada. Me siento estancada porque antes mi prioridad era mis hijos. Ahorita ya no están conmigo. La chica se casó y mi hijo vive aparte. Ese era mi motor que me tenía a mí el sobrellevar mi vida, mi familia. Ahorita tengo como dos años que mi nido está vacío. Después de todo ya no supe ni que hacer con mi vida y siento mucha soledad. De esas veces que digo creo que suficiente ya tengo. Entonces, no estoy segura, pero si me regreso a mi país donde yo nací, donde puedo ir a visitar las tumbas que de cinco o seis familiares muertos que yo nunca supe, ni vi, ni sentí. Los sentí acá pero no vi. Creo que, en el futuro, quizás en un año más, dos años, me encantaría a regresar a mi pueblo.

¿A vivir?

Si, a irme y volver a empezar. Siento que ya lo que tenía yo que hacer aquí; siento que ya fue suficiente y ya no quiero sentirme sola.

¿Alguna otra cosa que quieras decir o que quieras incluir en tu historia?

Bueno, puedo decir algo positivo que en su momento tengo. Yo me siento afortunada, después de todo, que mi inglés no es bueno, pero fui a la escuela al Santa Rosa Junior College por tres años. Puedo leerlo, escribirlo, lo hablo, soy mesera; lo hablo con mucho acento. Y lo que en su momento tengo como orgullo que mis hijos han salido adelante con el programa de DACA.

Mi hija fue a la Universidad de San Diego. Se graduó de Arqueóloga y está trabajando aquí en Santa Sosa en el North Bay Regional Center. Ella muy exitosa; muy inteligente. Mi hijo nada más terminó su high school. Toca tres instrumentos y a veces él toca en la banda principal de allí de Sonoma y pues tiene un trabajo que lo veo feliz. Trabaja en Petaluma Health Center de acomodador, pero está feliz, lo veo feliz. A mi hija la veo feliz – está casada.

Mi esposo no es chef con título, pero es muy buen cocinero. Por el tenemos seguro, por el tenemos beneficios, por donde él está, pero porque antes tomaban a las personas sin papeles y ya después cambiaron regulaciones. Sin embargo, mi esposo se mantiene allí, tiene 24 años trabajando allí. Eso es lo bonito que yo tengo de mis tres y únicas personas pienso que en el mundo tengo. Y me siento orgullosa de mi misma de estar en su momento aquí porque fui a la escuela entonces tengo otro idioma. Mi mejor amiga es de Nepal.

Qué más puedo decir; también siempre me he fijado y he decidido comer diferentes estilos de comida: japonesa, china, tailandesa. Aquí se puede eso, yo puedo comer lo que está y en mi México no. En mi México no tenía ni para comer entonces eso es lo positivo que yo aquí tengo en Estados Unidos. Que de cualquier modo económicamente puedo decidir irme a comprar una blusa, un vestido, una bolsa, hablando económicamente. Pero anímicamente creo que yo sería muy feliz en México, con mi familia, mis raíces, mi pueblo, mi tierra y me siento positiva que a mis 57 años lo voy a conseguir. Ahora ya estoy más madura y ya más o menos sé cómo volver a empezar en México. Antes no, yo no sabía con dos pequeñitas que podía hacer e intente vivir aquí. Creo que he invitado a mi esposo, él no quiere, pero ojalá en un año o dos yo consiga decirle que a lo mejor nuestro futuro va a estar en México donde nacimos y allí me gustaría morir. No me gustaría morir por acá.

¿Quieres regresar a tu país natal?

¡Si, a mi pueblo, a mis costumbres, a la gente, el bullicio!

¿Es diferente?

¡Si, fiestas, cumpleaños! Oh, añoro todo eso.

Gracias, Victoria. Mucha gente pasa por muchas cosas al venir aquí y agradecemos mucho que nos cuentes tu historia. Yo sé que es difícil.

Thank you. Creo que va a ser la primera vez que yo me voy a sentir dentro de algo. Que en verdad existí aquí en Estados Unidos. Victoria. Nadie se ha dado cuenta que vivo aquí porque hasta mis propios compañeros de trabajo no tengo que decirles que yo no tengo papeles. Pero con ustedes yo sentí esa oportunidad. Mi hija supo que yo necesito expresar que estoy aquí en Estados Unidos. Decirle a alguien, “aquí estuvo Victoria, aquí estuvo Victoria en Estados Unidos.” Creo que es la primera vez y me siento bien. Me siento excitada, motivada de decir por primera vez voy a firmar con mis apellidos de soltera como en México se firma porque aquí también hasta me he sentido extraña. Mi hermana me dijo una vez al principio, tienes que ponerte aquí el apellido de tu esposo. Y nunca supe si era bueno o era malo, pero no me siento identificada y esta vez me encantaría que pusieran mis dos apellidos, mi nombre y mi edad y todo.

Getting Used to an Unfamiliar Place

By Sicheng Huang

Tutor: Anne Sekara

Five years ago, my family and I moved to the United States. The first year I lived in the U.S., I didn't know how to fit into society. After many efforts, I found several ways to get used to an unfamiliar place.

First, at Santa Rosa Junior College, I took many ESL noncredit courses and ESL credit courses. Now I am still taking credit classes at SRJC. I have encountered a lot of setbacks in the school of my studies over the past few years. For example, the worst setback was in the class ESL 781. The score I got on my first essay was 50%. Therefore, I was very disappointed. I had struggled with reading and writing. For several weeks at the beginning, I wanted to drop the class. I told the instructor that I really wanted to drop the class. The instructor encouraged me not to give up. I passed the class in the end. So I learned from the setback how to face difficulties and learn from failure, and that I need to make an effort to do difficult things. Because I insisted on continuous learning, I have been integrated into the learning process of the school. In school, I met many classmates and teachers and became friends.

Second, my son joined the Boy Scouts in Sonoma County. There were some events every month. I often volunteered at the Boy Scouts events. For instance, I helped out with cooking and gardening. I have met many local Boy Scout parents in this organization. And I learned the local culture from them.

Next, my son and I became members of the Lion and Dragon Dance at the Redwood Empire Chinese Association. Before the pandemic, we participated in performances at schools, senior centers, churches, activities in public places, and so on. I met some friends who emigrated from China at the Redwood Empire Chinese Association. I got along with people in this group.

Finally, I went to the library at the beginning of 2018 because I wanted to find a tutor for my son to learn English. The library program did not provide for teenagers. It is an adult program. So I enrolled in the conversation classes two times per week. Then I got a tutor for learning English at the Sonoma County Library Adult Literacy Program. My oral English improved after I joined the conversation classes. And my tutor taught me a lot, such as pronunciation, grammar, writing and so on. I had those classes and tutoring in person before the pandemic. I also joined the

classes on Zoom during the pandemic. Now I have confidence in writing and learning and I will keep studying. "Never too old to learn."

Since I joined those organizations, study programs, and schools, I have gradually integrated into the place where I live which was very strange to me at the beginning. I am very grateful to the teachers, classmates and friends that I have met for their help.

Alternative Companionship

By Tweety Hsiao

Where does he go? With a hefty rhythm beating out from my heart, I trot along the roads near my neighborhood, searching and circling. Where could he go without a car and a cellphone? The air is damp, cold, and smells of another coming rain. I must find him. Right here and right now!

All of a sudden, a figure wearing a dark blue jacket appears at the corner. I sprint to him with excitement, and while I am about to shout out his name, the guy turns his face obscured by two bushy eyebrows almost overtaking his mask. No, not him. His startled eyes, as strong as a magnet with repulsive forces, drive me to the corner of the street, where my feet are anchored under a streetlamp at the crossroads.

Is he reading newspapers in the courtyard of the senior center where cherry blossom trees provide the only landscape? Or is he loitering inside the grocery store that sells exotic food from the Mediterranean region down the block, a store that he craves to visit out of curiosity yet we refuse to take him to? As I ponder where else to search for him, an image swiftly strikes me. Yes. He must be there. I rub my stiff fingers for warmth and pull my hoodie tight, excited at the thought of finding him sitting comfortably at his favorite Chinese restaurant, a taste of hometown.

While I rush through the bustling streets downtown, where the aroma of food wafts through the air from all directions, the red neon light hung outside the restaurant is strongly lit, like an omen that beckons me to follow. As I am about to increase my pace, a voice comes from behind.

“Where do you live? Do you need me to call anyone for help?” a white man asks in English with a friendly slow-speed tone. Finally, I found him – right in front of a newspaper stand.

“Excuse me, I’m his neighbor. I’m here to take him home.” I explain and turn to check out this 80-year-old man who looks bewildered. I can’t bear to blame him, because any blame for a patient with mild Alzheimer’s seems meaningless.

“How did you get here by yourself?” I ask, pulling up his zipper on his jacket. “I wanna buy a bowl of beef noodles,” he says in a weak sound, holding a magazine in his left hand and pointing it toward the restaurant a few paces away. After getting the food he covets, I help him get in an Uber. On the way back, he sits quietly. Looking at his haggard face lined with a topographical map of creases around his eyes, I reminisce about the first year we met.

Three years ago, as a new immigrant of the Golden State, I made a pilgrimage to my local library, where an ESL conversation class was in progress.

“I’m Tony from Taiwan. I came here twenty years ago to help take care of my newly born granddaughter who is now a college graduate. Nice to meet you!” an old man said shyly in a serviceable English and turned his gaze to the old woman sitting next to him. “My name is Sue, Tony’s wife, I’m a retired middle school teacher. Last week, we flew to Baltimore where we spent Thanksgiving with our daughter, who is a professor at Johns Hopkins.”

“Professor? Johns Hopkins? How nice!” Praises rise here and there.

Sitting in the back of the raucous classroom, I lost myself in the only word that stood out to me – Thanksgiving!

How many years has it been since I helped my father paste red spring couplets on the front door on Chinese New Year’s Eve? How long since I tasted the aromatic home-made moon cakes with creamy, sweet red bean fillings for the Mid-Autumn Festival? How many family gatherings have I missed because of living in a different country?

I couldn’t remember. I could only let my regrets sink in and project my nostalgia onto people who share my culture, to defeat my homesickness, or perhaps, just for a companion.

After the class, I offered the old couple a ride, and that ride extended to numerous classes. Whenever people said, “How wonderful that you can join this event with your grandparents,” I always smiled back, immersed in the happiness of their companionship.

“Hajimenashite. Watashi Wa Ying Desu. Yoroshiku Onegai Shimasu (How do you do? I’m Ying. Nice to meet you.)” At the senior center where Tony and Sue and many other senior Americans were, I nervously introduced myself in Japanese with an awkward tone.

“Great pronunciation! You sound like a Japanese even though this is just your first Japanese class,” whispered Tony patting my shoulder for encouragement and then stood up to introduce himself, so fluently that I almost forgot he was also from Taiwan.

“My name is Tony. I was born in 1938 when Taiwan was still under Japanese rule. Strictly speaking, Japanese is my first language and Mandarin is my second language,” he chuckled, radiating confidence. Looking at the genuineness in his smile, I was reminded of my own grandpa who was about Tony’s age.

I couldn't recall the last time hearing grandpa speaking Japanese. Perhaps it was long before my grandma passed away 25 years ago. I'd always thought that grandpa had already forgotten the language, but perhaps he never did; he just couldn't find anyone to talk to, neither my father nor me. If I could have learned this language earlier, would I have been able to see his face glowing with gallant pride just like Tony's? Would we have more memories in common?

"Thank you for riding with Uber," says the driver, bringing me back to the present. I open the car door and glance at the entrance of the senior apartment where Sue is already waiting.

"Where have you been? This is the third time that you left the house without telling me," exclaims Sue while Tony continues to keep silent.

"Thank you for sending him back. My son is out of town and my daughter lives too far away. You are the only person I can call for help. Thank you! I'm extremely grateful."

"Not a problem. Just call me whenever you need to. Go get some rest," I urge, tucking the Japanese magazine Tony bought from the newspaper stand into the walker. Looking at their backs, I can't imagine how this incident would end if I were not here. Perhaps I'm destined to be here, right at this moment and right in this country.

On my way home, I take out my phone and send a message, "How is grandpa today?"

"He is doing well. We just came back from a walk. He is taking a nap now," replies grandpa's personal caregiver, the only person who can cope with his growing stubbornness.

Knowing grandpa is receiving the same kindness on the other side of the world, I feel a surge of gratitude. Increasing my gait with sheer delight, I can't help but hum the Japanese children's song that grandpa used to sing to me when I was a kid.

Suddenly, the scent of home stretches ahead of me – this summer I'll be flying home.

FREE Services Provided by Sonoma County Library Adult Literacy

One-to-One Tutoring & Family Literacy Services:

Available for enrolled adults at all branches.

Programs focus on improving basic reading and writing skills, and learning or improving English language skills.

An adult learner is matched with a volunteer tutor who is trained and supported by the Adult Literacy Coordinators team. The learning partners meet for tutoring sessions at their local library branch for a minimum of 2 - 3 hours per week for at least six months, to achieve learner-centered goals supported by the improvement of the adult's basic reading and writing skills, or the adult's English language abilities. In addition, participants have access to laptops and tablets if needed for program participation. Program assessment, instruction, training, and materials are FREE.

Pre-requisites/Learner Requirements: In addition to meeting 2 - 3 hrs a week at their local library with a tutor, adults must be able to independently seek services for themselves as well as schedule their own tutor appointments and related communications independently. All interested adult learners begin by contacting us. Interested in FREE one-to-one Adult Literacy learning or tutoring?

Contact: 707-544-2622
literacy@sonomalibrary.org

Visit Us: In-person service Mondays through Fridays:
10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
Sonoma County Library Adult Literacy Office
Physical Address: 2nd Floor of Central Library
211 E Street, Santa Rosa, CA

Family Literacy Services is offered to all one-to-one adult learners who have children 0 - 18 years of age residing in or visiting their home on a regular basis.

The Family Literacy program provides free new children's and young adult books for the adult learner's household as well as tips and effective practices to support early literacy skills and family reading encouragement. The tutor supports the adult learner in how to read the books aloud to their youngest children so the learner feels confident sharing the story as appropriate. The Family Literacy program is designed to improve the adult's reading skill, to provide literacy skill-building tips for parents and caregivers, and to create an encouraging literacy environment in the home of all adult learners in our program.

Let's Talk English Conversation Classes: Available Virtually

Non-native English speakers meet for FREE classes led by a facilitator fluent in English. Classes are ongoing, free, and designed to help adults practice and improve their conversational English skills in a welcoming and social environment. Interested in Let's Talk English Conversation Classes online?

To Register for virtual Let's Talk English Conversation Classes:

sonomalibrary.org/conversation

Sonoma County Library Adult Literacy Partnerships:

Community Outreach English Classes for Adults at Community Partnership Sites:

These classes are for adult, non-native English speakers, and focus on developing basic English and literacy skills.

Evening classes are scheduled during the 2022-23 school year with community partners Luther Burbank Elementary School and Santa Rosa High School.

Interested in Community Outreach English Classes for Adults?

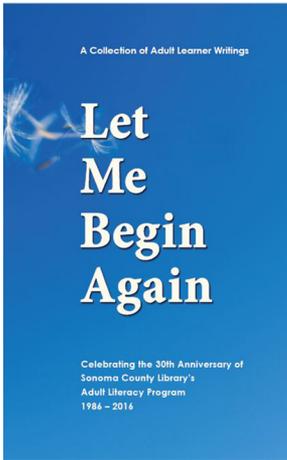
Contact: Ernesto Sanchez at Luther Burbank Elementary 707-235-2910 (Bilingual English/Spanish)
Alisa Adams, Supervising Adult Literacy Program Coordinator
707-544-2622

Inmate Literacy Instruction, Library Programming & Classes: Santa Rosa, CA

Through a contract partnership agreement with the Sonoma County Sheriff's Office, we provide Inmate Library Services at the Main Adult Detention Facility and the North County Detention Facility. Inmates interested in these services contact their Inmate Services representative to sign up. Classes are in-person or virtual (per current partnership agreements).

Sonoma County Library Adult Literacy

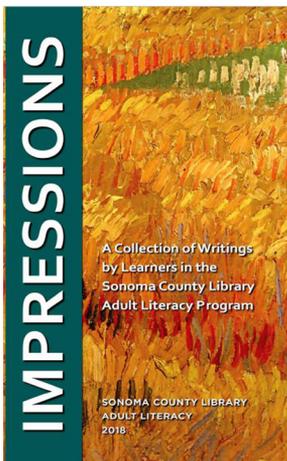
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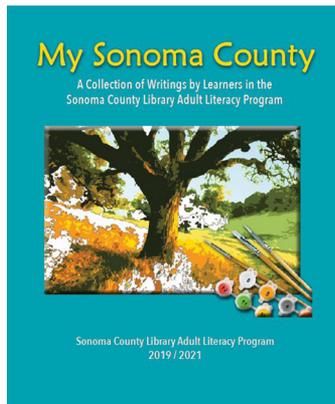
2016 Publication



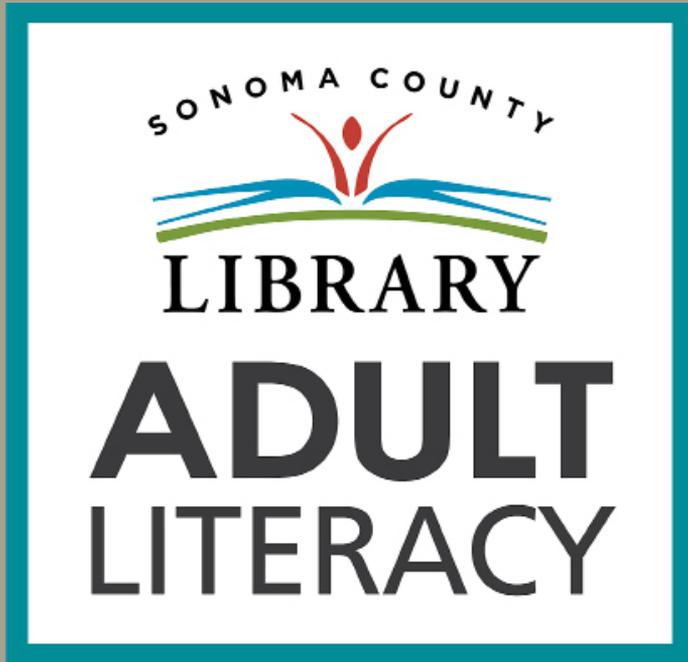
2017 Publication



2018 Publication



2019/2021 Publication



Find out how to get involved with our Adult Literacy Program as an adult learner, volunteer tutor, or donor.

Contact us at (707) 544-2622
email: literacy@sonomalibrary.org

Read and see more at:
<https://sonomalibrary.org/locations/adult-literacy-program>