

A Collection of Adult Learner Writings



Let Me Begin Again

Celebrating the 30th Anniversary of
Sonoma County Library's
Adult Literacy Program
1986 – 2016

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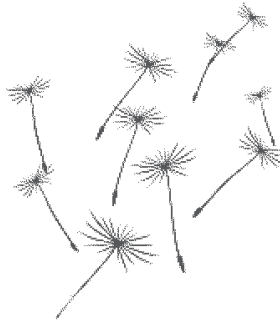
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Note

These stories have been reproduced exactly as written by the adult literacy learners, and as such, are not “perfect” by design.



Dedication

To those who boldly begin where they are,
and inspire us all to begin again...and again.

Foreword

The LET ME BEGIN AGAIN Anthology is the culmination of 30 years of free services by the Sonoma County Library Adult Literacy Program, an organization that supports the life-long learning goals of adults across our county. Since 1986, our one-on-one tutoring program has adhered to a learner-focused perspective that honors the learner's experience and knowledge, and focuses on meeting concrete goals that are relevant to the learner's immediate needs. Over the past 30 years, the program has empowered hundreds of adults to achieve success by setting and meeting goals like passing the GED, getting a new job, building computer skills, helping a child in school, voting for the very first time, or checking out a library book. Our mission is realized by the support of volunteer tutors who generously share over 6,000 hours of their time each year to guide learners toward mastering new skills. The Adult Literacy Program is a free program of the Sonoma County Library, supported by Friends of the Library groups, and funded by the California State Library.

As it did at the beginning, our program has grown and adapted to meet the needs of the adult learners, including new services like English Conversation classes and laptop computer workshops. Of course, thirty years ago, who would have anticipated how our society would change through the growth of computers, internet, and mobile services? Now as we look ahead to the next thirty years, we are committed to "begin again," to continue to offer learning opportunities that are relevant and focused as we help our learners meet their personal literacy and education goals.

My heartfelt appreciations goes to everyone who has participated in this project: the learners and tutors who have contributed their writings; the staff who coordinated and organized this material, and you, the readers, who will enter into these remarkable stories and interpret them in ways that enrich your own lives.

— **Kathy DeWeese**

*Adult Literacy Supervisor
and Youth Services Manager*

Introduction

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this collection of stories. We all have stories to share. Most of us are able to verbally share our life stories and experiences with family and friends. Some of us capture these stories by writing them down in journals or letters. We read and write emails, and Facebook postings, and letters to stay connected with others. When we are unable to communicate with those around us, we become isolated and some opportunities seem beyond our grasp. This collection shines a light on people who have seized the opportunity to improve their reading and writing skills in order to expand their worlds.

I'm proud of the work the staff and volunteers of Sonoma County Library do to connect community members with information and learning opportunities. Our dynamic literacy program includes one-on-one tutoring, English conversation classes, civics classes, and English classes and literacy tutoring for inmates in our county jail. People enter our literacy program from a variety of backgrounds and for a variety of reasons. The stories in this collection attest to this. Some of our adult learners were born and raised in Santa Rosa and realized later in life that they wanted to improve their reading and writing skills. Others are college graduates from other countries who moved to the United States and dedicated themselves to learning to read and write in English.

The stories within this collection cover a range of topics and observations. Some beautifully capture a moment: A woman looks out of her bedroom window and sees a raccoon scooping at fish in her garden pond. Other writers chose to share food recipes or compose poems. But the majority of the stories are about family and the love parents feel for their children. As I read these personal stories, I imagined the parent giving a copy to her child, and the child reading and rereading it over time, each time re-experiencing the love and language that connects parent to child.

Thanks to all the adult learners, library staff, and literacy volunteers who made this collection possible.

— **Brett Lear**
Library Director

Literacy Changes Lives

Paul Heavenridge

*Sonoma County Library Commissioner
and Literacy Advocate*

We communicate in writing on a daily basis. Writing allows us to gather and use information. Writing helps us to manage resources such as grocery lists and phone messages. We use writing to email questions and find answers. We use writing to successfully fill out job applications and communicate personal stories.

Reading and writing go hand-in-hand. Can you imagine not being able to write that note or list or fill out a job application? Or read to your child a bedtime story? Or read medication directions? It is not easy to be an adult with limited literacy in a society that expects and demands a high level of literacy.

These stories are written by some of our library literacy learners. Our learners are Sonoma County adults who seek to change their lives and the lives of those around them. They are doing this through their commitment to improve their basic literacy skills.

I hope you enjoy these wonderful stories. I also hope after reading them you feel inspired to become involved in supporting our Sonoma County Library Adult Literacy Program. Perhaps you could volunteer at your local library branch as a tutor. Go to **<https://sonomalibrary.org>** for more information about the Adult Literacy Program.

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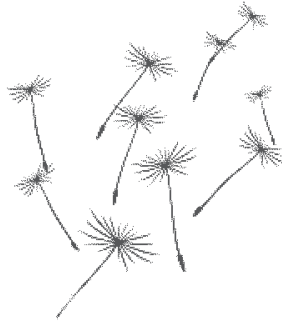
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Section 1

Let Me Begin with My Dreams...

Don't Stop Dreaming

By Adriana Q. P.

My name is Adriana. I'm 29 years old. I left my little hometown, Zicuiran, to go to college in Morelia, Michoacán. Morelia is the capital of the state, a very big city and very busy all year. I remember my first week there. I didn't miss Zicuiran. I was fascinated with all the new things in the city. There is a beautiful and enormous Cathedral that makes the downtown look colonial and amazing. One day was enough to fall in love with that city. It was there that all my dreams and plans for the future started. I went there with the ambition to get my Bachelor's degree in Accounting and start my career in one of the most known accounting offices in the city. I felt so positive and motivated. I was surrounded by people my own age with dreams and plans for their future too. I accomplished one of my goals, which was finishing college. I was so proud of myself and I realized it doesn't stop there. I got a job and no more worries about studying for a test, but my worries now were bigger. I still had time for parties but not as much because I was stuck in the office. After a year I had to make a decision: continue with what I had or move to the United States and meet with my family.

When I came here I wasn't convinced at all. I came here because it was the opportunity for me and my family to live all together for the first time. It took me so long to get used to it. The first struggle I faced was driving. I never needed to learn how to drive because public transportation is so convenient in Mexico. I finally learned and got my driver's license.

I was homesick for a while. After a few months I went to school and started working. That made me feel more useful, but I always still wondered what I would have been doing in Mexico. At the same time I wasn't brave enough to go back. I had a lot of mixing emotions.

Little by little, I was settling down, and I convinced myself that it was a new experience and that I can set up new goals in my life because it's the human nature. We are capable of adapting wherever we go. If we are clear about what we want and follow through our ideas, we can get what we decide.

My positivism came back, and I started pushing myself about

having a career at work. I have been promoted twice already. It took me time, but I am still moving forward.

I still have my career ambitions and also I want something else. I just moved in with my boyfriend, and we are ready to start our own family. Life is beautiful. There's darkness sometimes, but it's our attitude that will make it different. I'm very happy now and will keep working on it.

Tutor Teresa C.

Dreams

By Magdalena R.

When I came to the U.S., I only dreamed to work hard and make a lot of money. When I arrived in the U.S., I didn't find work because it was winter. Finally I found a job in the fields tying the vines to the wires. That winter was bad for working because it rained too much. This was not the only problem. It wasn't easy to find transportation to and from work, and the work for women was only temporary. I worked for 3 months only. I needed to pay rent, transportation, food, and buy clothes from the thrift store, and that took most of the money I earned.

I again started looking for another job and attended Altimira (school) ESL class for adults, to try and learn English. Finally I found another job, but it was far away and I had to take the bus. I remember the first day. I didn't know how to pay the bus driver. He tried to tell me, but I couldn't understand him because I didn't speak English. Finally he gave me the schedule that showed the cost of the ride and he showed me how to put the money in the box. Some days my friend gave me a ride in the morning. One afternoon I waited for the bus until someone told me it wasn't coming because it was a holiday. I had to walk around 5 miles to get home.

I kept working toward my dream. But then I met the man who is now my husband, and we got married and had two daughters. Now I work hard so that my daughters' dreams can come true. I've never stopped working and dreaming, but now my dreams are for my daughters and not for me.

Tutor Mary L. N.

Dreams of Outer Space

By Billy de S.

I'm so happy to know that kids of all backgrounds have a new role model: astronaut Jose Hernandez, who has joined other astronauts for a mission to outer space. This mission into outer space will make him the first Mexican American astronaut.

Astronaut Jose Hernandez has received many special honors and awards. He is a recipient of the "Medalla de Oro" for professional and community contributions.

His work ethic came from his parents, who helped him follow his dreams. I was surprised to know that he only learned to speak English at the age of twelve. What an impressive accomplishment. I hope the kids can follow his example and stay in school and get a career. Kids should know that awards for hard work in education are endless.

I want to see astronaut Jose Hernandez visit schools and jails for the youth. I want him to make it his goal to reach and inspire as many kids as possible to stay in school. Maybe he would inspire one or two to follow in his footsteps.

Astronaut Jose Hernandez and Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor are great examples of how hard work and education can help your dreams become a reality. I hope that all Latinos can appreciate and learn from our new role models. All other Latino role models before were movie actors or singers like Pedro Infante, Carlos Santana and Cristina Aguilera.

I would like all young Latinos to have more choices when it comes to a Mexican American role model, such as a scientist, or a person who does research to find cures for deadly bacteria.

This writing originally submitted to the Easy English Times in 2010 and reprinted with permission.

Dreams Can Come Through

By Li S.

I am from Estonia. It is a small country in Northern Europe. Estonia has been a free, independent country since 1991, but before it was part of the Soviet Union.

It was a hard time. People had little money, but money had little value. Much more important was that you had a good relationship with the sellers at the store because the shops were empty of goods. When the goods arrived at the store, there was a long line of people who wanted to buy them. Many goods were produced in Estonia, but most of it went to Russia. Our town had its own bread factory, dairy plant, meat-processing plant, cannery and so on; but the store's counters were empty.

Sometimes we took trips to these factories and we saw what was produced there, but we never saw these products on store shelves. We were not hungry because many people grew vegetables, and some people around the town were animal keepers, if you knew one. For some food products you would need coupons. Estonians prepared meals at home with what they had. There was a shortage not just of food, but other products too. We had very few cars in Estonia, and we could not travel outside Russian territory. Therefore, we had many dreams.

My biggest dream at that time was to get a new, modern washing machine. In Estonia in the 80s, there were no modern washing machines available. I had two children and a lot of laundry. When I washed clothes, I had to bring water from outside, then had to boil it on a stove.

This was not easy. It was a wood stove, and I had to build a fire first. Then I put the hot water into the machine. The machine would agitate the clothes, then I would drain the water by hand through a hose. It was hard work and took me all day to do laundry. After Estonia became independent, more goods became available, and I was finally able to buy a modern washing machine in 1995. I was very happy.

One of my dreams, which I really did not believe could happen, was to travel outside of Russia, which was almost

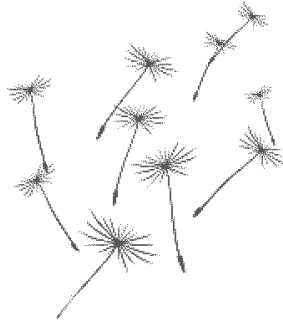
impossible. We learned about other countries, but I was sure that I would not see them.

Once, I had to do a term paper about Norway. Some pictures I found of Norway were so beautiful, and I dreamed I'd like to be there. There were many other countries I wanted to see also, but especially Egypt, Thailand and the USA.

After 1991 it was finally possible to travel, and now I have visited those countries, and I live in the U.S. It has been very interesting to see these countries and sights.

Now I say: "Daydream and our dreams can come true."

Tutor LaRee M.



Section 2

Let Me Begin with My Favorites...

Guayabate: A Sweet Memory

By Violeta M.

Guayabate is a paste of fruit called guava that is mixed with a lot of sugar. I like it a lot as a dessert, and other people like it too. When I was a child my mom made guayabate for the family and to sell. It was a lot of work.

First she needed to buy and look for all the ingredients: guava, tejocote (a Mexican fruit), and sugar. When she had everything at the house, we helped to wash guavas and take the middle part out and cut them. She cooked the tejocotes and then we took the seeds out. She took this to the place where they ground it in a big grinder.

When she came back home, she mixed all the paste with a lot of sugar. In a big metal pot on a wood fire, she cooked and stirred all day with our help. When it was ready we all put the paste in a wooden mold on a table, with waxed paper.

The next day when it was firm, she took it out of the mold and wrapped it with plastic. She sent my sister and I to sell it to our neighbors and customers that she had. It was heavy for me and my sister to carry, but we sold it for a good price.

When the guayabate was all gone, we felt happy because we made a lot of money and she gave some to us.

Tutor Susan D.

My First Real Trip in California

By Anabel P.

On New Years Day 2014, I drove my daughters, my mother, my nephew and myself to Los Angeles. I would like to tell you about our trip. We rented a hotel that was really nice for the kids because they liked going to the hotel pool.

Later, after our arrival, we left for Disneyland. We were able to see the fireworks and parade. We had a great time. The next day at noon, we went to a barbecue restaurant. We ordered a large plate of food for the family to share. The meal was barbecue ribs and chicken with side dishes of corn, hot macaroni, mashed potatoes and fries. It was a delicious meal.

After the meal we went to Los Callejones. Los Callejones is a flea market called “The Alles.” There is a lot to buy, especially foods and fruits. I purchased a white baby bunny for my daughter Kasandra. My nephew also purchased a grey baby bunny and two baby turtles. Next we went to Santa Monica State Beach, then to “La Placita Olvera,” which is another flea market. It was a much nicer flea market with handmade crafts from Mexico. After shopping we went back to the hotel for more swimming.

When we drove back home, we went through Santa Clarita on Interstate 5, to Los Banos Pass. We crossed over to San Jose, Highway 580 North and then Highway 101 to Sonoma County. We stopped in Tracy to take a rest and a meal.

This was the best trip my family and I have taken so far. We hope to travel again this summer.

Tutor J. J.

This writing originally submitted to the Easy English Times in 2014 and reprinted with permission.

Mother Teresa

By D. F.

I have always loved and respected Mother Teresa. I'd read something about her once and never got over it. She was a nun with the Catholic Church. She was with Missionaries of Charity. She was born in Yugoslavia.

In 1979 Mother Teresa died at the age of 87. She left a well-trained organization in Calcutta.

Somehow Mother Teresa came to San Francisco to deal with homelessness in the City. She and her order of nuns stayed at a small church in the Noe Valley right by the Mission.

At the time, I had just lost my partner Carol. I decided to travel to Lesbos – one of the islands in Greece. Life was too much to face alone as I was grieving. So I took care of business, sold all my furniture and stored sentimental things in a small storage unit. I was gone for three and a half months with my backpack and traveled around to all the Greek Islands and saw some of Athens. But, of course, I loved Lesbos the most. It's a northern island closest to Turkey.

Back to Mother Teresa. She was in San Francisco for a few months. I think she came to San Francisco to relax, but how embarrassing — from Calcutta streets to San Francisco streets — she found herself involved finding places for the homeless there! Friends and I got to go to a mass with a handful of laymen because we knew a layman priest where Mother Teresa stayed, from my friends Jeanie and Mary.

So Jeanie, Mary and I got to attend a very small chapel with Mother Teresa and her nuns. I must admit, I felt so lucky. My heart was full of love and respect for all. She was a tiny little soul and full of grace and light.

After mass I noticed all her nuns right behind her. The few laypeople at the mass stood by respectfully and made room for them to pass. As she was leaving, she stopped to acknowledge the handful of laymen and stopped and interacted with us individually.

When she approached me, she stopped and looked into my eyes

and soul. I could tell she felt my sorrow but also saw the goodness and kindness in me, which I had forgotten to look at. She then cupped my hands with her little hands around mine and put a medal in my palm. When she looked into my eyes and took time to connect with me, it was a moment in my life that I will never forget and knew she was a Saint.

Tutor Al V.

Fondest Memories

By Elvia R.

I am from Jalisco, Mexico. I came when I was 18 years old and I am now 29 years old. I married my husband in Mexico and we came because we wanted to have a better life.

I am from a big family. I have five sisters and two brothers. I am in the middle of the children. My mom stayed home and my dad worked at a big company.

My fondest memory is Christmastime in Mexico from December 6th through December 24th. Every day our family went to another family's house. The families plan all the food for the guests. We all go to the church on the 6th, 24th, and 25th. On Christmas Eve we have a family reunion and open the presents. We each exchange a gift with one person only. We have our best meal on the 24th. On Christmas day the family eats leftovers, talks together, plays games, and visits. On December 26th, all the relatives and friends go back to their homes.

My other fond memory is playing with my sisters, brothers, and cousins. We usually played Tag or Hide-and-Seek. I loved running around and tagging the person. Everyone was so happy. The older kids were very fair to the little ones during the game. We played Hide-and-Seek under the table, in the closets, and in the trees outside. The older children were usually "it."

My memories of Christmas and playing games in Mexico are my best ones. We are teaching our sons how to play Tag and Hide-and-Seek. We try to make the same food we had in Jalisco at Christmas. I haven't seen my family in eleven years. We are trying to give our children the same customs we had in Mexico, but this is a different country. So we have different traditions from two countries! This is difficult but we are doing it!

Tutor Kathleen M.

The Flag Day In Mexico

By Irma F.

All the schools prepare a big parade on February 24. In my mind I have good memories of this day because the teachers taught us how lovely the flag is and how to treat it with respect and with honor. Flag Day in Mexico is a national holiday. It is celebrated every year on February 24 since it was established in 1937 by President of Mexico General Lazaro Cardenas.

The flag of Mexico, as it is today, was adopted in 1968, but the history really goes back to 600 years earlier than that. The shield in the center of the flag comes from an Aztec legend that goes like this: Their gods told them to build a city where they would find an eagle on a nopal (a prickly pear cactus) eating a serpent. The city is now Mexico City. The color green means hope for a better country, where people join together to have peace with each other. The color white represents the purity of the Catholic faith. The color red stands for blood, to remember the Mexican people who died during the terrible War of Independence.

The most important thing that I like about Flag Day is when all students wear uniforms and some students recite poetry. The Flag Day is a special and beautiful day for all Mexican people.

Tutor Sandy D.

Corral Grande

By Rudy G. L.

Corral Grande is a nice place to go have a picnic. Corral Grande is a park where you can have so much fun. The size of the property is about a hundred fifty acres or more. There are around a hundred pools of all different sizes and designs.

In between the pools are grass, palms, some trees and plants. Around the property, there are covered patios with tables and grills to barbeque. And every two or three hundred feet there are consoles to play music. Or you can rent your own band. The sizes of the covered patio areas are around one thousand and five hundred square feet.

The times that I went there, I was with my brothers' and sisters' families. I remember the last time that I went there we rented a Mariachi (band). And when the girls and boys were swimming, all the adults had a drink and were preparing the barbeque. Me and a friend of mine served the drinks — making Margaritas, beer, juices, waters and others. My best drink is Rancho de Oro tequila in a glass, mixed with ice, Squirt and a little bit of Coca Cola.

Tutor Alisa A.

Halloween

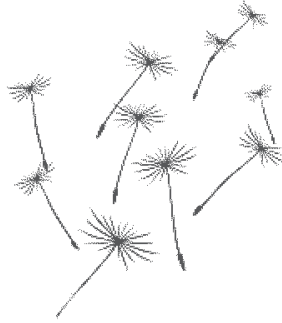
By Lorena R.

I remember when I was living in Mexico. Halloween was a big day. All the families remember their family dead. Two days before Halloween, we put some fruit, candles, bread, water and food on the table with pictures of the people who have died.

My family and all the people in Mexico say that on that day all the dead people came to visit the houses where they lived.

The first day is for adults, and on the next day, for kids. Then we all go to the cemetery and leave yellow flowers for them.

This writing originally submitted to the Easy English Times in 2008 and reprinted with permission



Section 3

Let Me Begin with My Life...

My Life

By Jose M.

This is a story about my life. My name is Jose M. I live in Santa Rosa, California. I was born in Santa Rosa. My wife's name is Serena. We stay in Windsor with her brother. This is a little story about myself.

I have recently been going to a literacy program to learn how to read and write better. My teacher's name is Alex and he's been teaching me for over three years. I would like to thank the literacy program for the support that they're giving me. I would like to thank my mother, my wife, and my teacher for the support that they have given me.

Tutor Alex

This writing originally published in the Oct 2012 Easy English Times and reprinted with permission

My Childhood Ambition

By Hyung T. O.

When I was in middle school I wanted to be a teacher because I was interested in history of the Joseon Dynasty era. I studied under an excellent history teacher who made history an interesting subject. This teacher made me want to be a history teacher as well. Being a teacher also would provide a stable and respectable job.

The most interesting part of Korean history was the creation of the Korean alphabet by King Sejong. The Korean alphabet is called Hunmin Jongum, which is a document describing an entirely new native script for the Korean language. The script was initially named after the publication but later came to be known as “Hangul.” Its formal publication date was October 9th 1446. Hangul Day is designated as a national holiday in South Korea. This document is now kept at the UNESCO World Heritage sites.

When I was in university, my major was history. I had completed all the courses for my major. I interned for six months teaching history to high school students. It was challenging to prepare for the weekly lessons. I received a teacher’s license.

Unfortunately, the only job opportunity was far away from the city where my family lived. I put myself on the waiting list for a job in the city but, soon after, I met my husband-to-be. Once I got married and had children, I never returned to teaching. However, my Teacher’s Credential allowed me to help my own children with their studies.

Tutor Patricia S.

Teen to Adult

By Monica T.

I was born in Mexico in 1990 and now I am 26 years old. I lived my first 14 years in Mexico. They were the best years ever, because when I was little it was so fun in the morning going to school; and in the evening when I got out of school and got home, my Mom made the food for (everyone) at home and we ate together.

Afternoons, many of the children went outside to the street and played different types of games; for example: Hidden (escondida), Scab (la rona), Pitcher (el cantarito), etc.

One day my Father asked if I wanted to come to the United States and, of course, I said, “yes.” And when I got here, everything was different. My life changed – everything – because I had to cook, and I had to do everything like a married woman because my mom was in Mexico and my dad and brother were here. So I needed to do everything for them because they worked.

Also, I went to school, but I was more focused at home than at school. That’s the reason I did not learn English well.

When I was 18, I got married and I got pregnant. After my beautiful son Rafael was born, years passed and then Kevin came. So now I have two beautiful children – 7 years old and 4 years old. My children are the reason and motivation to keep me going because I’m a single mom. I left the dad of the children when I was 3 months pregnant.

Now I’m working hard, working in a gas station (as a) cashier for 3 years. At the moment I’m happy with what I have and what God has given me.

Tutor Jan F.

Monica was an adult student in the Sonoma County Library’s EL (English Learner) Civics evening classes held at the Brook Hill Elementary School in 2015-16

Proudest Moment

By Catherine C.

I was born in Hong Kong and grew up in Hong Kong. Although it is a very crowded and noisy place, it is still a beautiful city (among the top 25 travel destinations in the world). People like to eat very good Hong Kong food and buy expensive brand name products. Victoria Harbour attracts a lot of visitors to see the city lights at night. People can also take the Peak Tram to the top of Victoria Peak and enjoy a bird's-eye view of the amazing nightscape of Hong Kong.

When I finished my education I went to work. In the autumn of 2009, I immigrated to America to get married. I went to live in Petaluma, California in America. It is a small town. Because there were few Chinese people to speak Cantonese with, I had to speak English with other people. Therefore, I started to study English at the Adult School.

Before my husband went to work, he dropped me off at the school at 8:00 am. Because I was very early, I walked around until the classroom opened at 8:45 am. At first it was very irritating and I could feel myself getting angry because in the winter it is very cold and wet outside. For that reason, I decided to get a driver's license. The first time I tried to take the test, I failed changing lanes. I also needed to learn to parallel park. I needed to practice driving more and more behind the wheel. On my second try I passed the road test. After that, I could drive to school alone. I was very proud of myself.

After having lived in America for a few years, citizenship became important to me. I wanted to know if an Asian could become an American citizen. It was difficult for me because English is not my mother language. To learn more I joined Citizenship classes and tutoring at the library. For me it was difficult to learn about American History, the Federal Government, the President's Cabinet, and general information about the United States Government. I studied for more than one year. I practiced a lot for the Citizenship and I passed my exam the first time. This was and is my proudest moment.

continued

I always think English is not easy, but I have a long term goal to practice English at Adult School, at home by myself, and through tutoring at the library. I hope I can speak fluent English in 3 to 5 years. It is my wildest dream and I hope it will become real.

Tutor Cathi C.

My Plan

By Mercedes G.

My name is Mercedes. I am from Michoacán (Mexico). I came to the U.S. in the year 2000. When I arrived here, my dream was to buy my house in Michoacán and save money. My plan: stay here just for three years and return to Michoacán, but my destination was other. I decided to go to English classes and learn to speak and write.

I stayed for eleven years, and I can't finish with my house because it is too expensive. Now I don't know when I will come back to Michoacán (Mexico) because I like this country and it has more opportunities. I continue with my English classes.

Thanks to the Sonoma County Library Adult Literacy Program and thank you, Harla, for helping me. Thanks to Altimira Adult School for English classes and thank you, teacher Tomiko.

Tutor Harla S.

This writing originally submitted to Easy English Times in 2012 and reprinted with permission.

My Biggest Challenge

By Elva A.

My father sold the ranch when I was 15 years old. We moved to the city. I liked the ranch because I felt free. They did not explain why we moved. The city was hard because we had to buy everything, even water. At the ranch we planted vegetables and grew animals. We had all kinds of fruit. (In the city) we had to work hard to buy food. I was confused and angry. I spent one year in the city.

I started calling my brother in California, asking to go with him. He bought a ticket for me to come. My uncle took me to McDonald's; I did not like the food. My sister-in-law took me to the mall to buy clothes; I did not like the escalator. I babysat for their children. I was bored, and I wanted to make money to send (to) my parents. I babysat for another child for money. They did not think to send me to school.

One year later I started working at a skilled nursing home. It was hard because I did not speak English. One cook helped me. She pointed to things they asked for in English, next time I remembered. I was a Dietary Aide. I helped prepare the food and serve it. One year later, I was the cook. I sent money to my dad and my mom in Mexico. I worked there for three years.

Tutor Margaret F.

Life

By Jonathan S.

Well it's funny how life turns out. I never thought I would end up doing a prison sentence. But, hey, I kinda did. As a kid I kinda knew I would be a screw up; just how my luck has always been. I didn't graduate high school, can't hold a job, my relationships are a joke. I'm 31 and can't even be with a girl more than one and a half years. Well, that's life.

I sit here in my cell every day and night looking back on my life, at all the good times I had and the bad times. But I'm grateful that I'm not doing life like some people in the facility. I'm grateful that in four months this will be a dream. And life carries on. One day soon I'm gonna walk through those doors a free man and to always make better choices but always remember too the time I spent here. I'm gonna learn from this because I was never a troubled child growing up as in getting arrested. I was a pretty good kid.

Tutor Julie D.

This writing originally published in the Aug/Sept. 2015 English Times and reprinted with permission

My Name is Maria

By Maria L.

My name is Maria and I'm from Michoacán, Mexico.

I had a very difficult time in childhood. Well, it all started when I was 8-and-a-half years old and my bigger brother died. That was on May 3, 1990. Then my grandfather died in November of the same year.

After that, my mother was sick in December for a few days before Christmas. She was pregnant and had preeclampsia. That year in our house we did not celebrate Christmas and New Year.

Then the next year, my grandmother fell and broke her two hands and my sister went to the house of my cousins. There my aunt had a soup pot on a spit and it knocked over. My sister's both feet (were) burned. And because of all those things (reasons), I did not go to school.

I had to stay home to take care of my little brother and (act as) the housekeeper (while) my mom was recovering from his birth and preeclampsia.

So that was my childhood. And then I grew up and I decided to come to America. I married and have two children. We live happily.

My childhood was tough, but it made me strong and (I) learn(ed) to stand (difficult) things and be strong. And, therefore, today – after almost 25 years – I came back to school!

Tutor Jan F.

Maria was an adult student in the Sonoma County Library's EL (English Learner) Civics evening classes held at the Brook Hill Elementary School in 2015-16

Two Destinies, One Way

By Elizabeth M.

My name is Elizabeth. I am 45 years old. The name of my husband is Oscar; we have been 7 years married. We have two daughters. Their names are Miranda, she is 6 years old; and Mariana is 4 years old. We were living in New York for 3 years and came to Santa Rosa 4 years ago.

I was living in Mexico, studied (at) college in Mexico, and I was working there for 16 years. When I visited my sister in New York seven years ago, I met Oscar and decided to get married. I quit my job in Mexico and stayed to live in New York.

I am very happy, but now I have to decide whether to return to Mexico or stay here in Santa Rosa, California. The pharmaceutical company I used to work for offered me a very good job in Mexico, and now I do not know what to do!

Tutor Jan F.

Elizabeth was an adult student in the Sonoma County Library's EL (English Learner) Civics evening classes held at the Brook Hill Elementary School in 2015-16

California Library Literacy Services

Writer to Writer, 2009

Advanced Writer Finalist Letter

*By Anonymous Adult Learner,
Sonoma County Library Adult Literacy Program*

I read your book, *The Greatest Miracle in the World*, twice. Each time I read it, it gave me a different impression and helped me in many ways.

These past few years, I have been facing many personal difficulties. I was diagnosed with cancer. During my treatment for this, my father passed away, and my mother's long-term health problem continued to worsen, in addition to other trials I will spare you. These experiences taught me that no matter what happens, as long as we are alive, we are blessed, and we can always choose how we react to our situation. But, as time passed, the vagueness of my thoughts began to erode this lesson.

When I read your book for the first time, what really struck me was your ability to teach us our internal value with a wide range of quotations. *The God Memorandum*, in particular, describes things completely but simply. I was very impressed and delighted to have found all the thoughts and feelings I gained through my experiences in there, neatly and perfectly transformed into words. Reading your book refreshed my memories and strongly encouraged me.

I read your book for the second time about six months later. Until then, I believed that I will understand how blessed we all are, and I considered myself as the last person who would be living death. The six months, however, had given me time to realize my life situation better; and it changed my impression about your story.

It has been three years since I came to America to live. Even though I was happy with my husband and was grateful for the life given, there were still times I longed for the things I left in my country: my family and friends, my career and many other things I have cherished. I must confess that I felt empty sometimes and felt lost in my life direction. Furthermore, my lack of self-confidence increased my feelings of helplessness. I felt scared and stuck in a

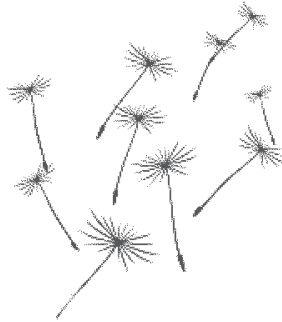
tiny imaginary box that I created. With this situation, the book said to me this time that I was in danger of becoming “a living death.” This was a sudden realization I had never expected.

Mr. Og, I haven’t met any “ragpickers” yet. But, fortunately I’ve met your book, which gave me a clear idea about myself and also helped me come back to the principle: Each one of us is a great miracle and we have enough power within to live however we want. I thank you for writing this wonderful story.

Even though it was written more than a decade ago, the demand for books like yours is growing year after year. Especially nowadays, because of the economy, more and more people are losing faith in themselves. I really hope your story (and Simon, whom I want to believe truly exists somewhere in this world) will continue “ragpicking” others as it did to me.

Truly Yours,
Anonymous

Originally published in 2009 *Writer to Writer: Letters of the Award Winners & Finalists* and reprinted with permission of California Library Literacy Services



Section 4

Let Me Begin with My Family...

My Best Friend

By Araceli S.

Josefina is my best friend in the world. I have known her my whole life. She knows me very well. She is the most important person to me for many reasons.

First, she takes care of me by giving me advice, and she motivates me to continue with my busy life. She supports me in the good times and bad times.

Also, she is very positive. She always says that it's never too late to do anything you want to do. And she says that you never know what you can accomplish until you try.

She is always there when I need a shoulder to cry on. She has the sweetest voice. Every time I hear it, it makes me feel complete.

I thank God for putting this amazing woman in my life. Josefina is my mother.

Tutor Phoebe C.

Unforgettable Moments

By Francisco S.

I call the moments so sweet with my three children. Their names are: Jennifer Carol – 9 years old, Nicole – 7 years old, and Sebastian – the youngest – is 2 years old. He is the most happy and he illuminates our home with his beautiful smile.

Also, the three together, they give me joy, wonderful times, and they motivate me to continue to keep working hard and progress in life. I love to see their happy faces and hear them laugh every day. And when we are all together – either to eat or go out and play in the park – I am happy and grateful to God for such beautiful and precious moments.

Tutor Jan F.

Francisco was an adult student in the Sonoma County Library's EL (English Learner) Civics evening classes held at the Brook Hill Elementary School in 2015-16

Viviana's Quinceanera

By Lupe V.

A Quinceanera is a special party that is held when a Hispanic girl becomes fifteen. We had this celebration for my daughter Viviana on December 25, 2014, while we visited our family and friends in Mexico.

Our whole family got dressed up and Viviana wore a beautiful mint-green dress. In the morning we all went to the Catholic Church for a special ceremony. After church we walked back to spend about an hour at a family member's home. From there we continued walking to a local school for the special celebration honoring Viviana. It was held under a huge canvas tent to allow enough room for all our family members and friends. We ate delicious food like carnitas, rice, beans, salad and cake for dessert.

Our four family members danced together first, to special music we prepared ahead of time. This included my husband David, our daughter Viviana; our son David and me. Next, Viviana danced along with her brother David. After that, six boy cousins wearing dark suits with mint-green vests, joined in to dance with Viviana. Then while the band played music, other guests soon began dancing together. Some people enjoyed relaxing at the tables, drinking water, soda or beer and eating cake.

Two hours later, Viviana changed into a skater-skirt with four other girls and surprised everybody by performing a rhythmic dance routine together. Toward the end of this long celebration, I greatly enjoyed having a special, slow dance with my 88-year-old father-in-law Genaro.

Viviana was very happy at the Quinceanera, celebrating with her whole family and many, many friends. Her transition from being a girl to (becoming) a woman will never be forgotten.

Tutor Denile K.

This writing originally published in the Aug/Sept. 2015 Easy English Times and reprinted with permission.

The Dream of Rosario

By Rosario J.

Hi! My name is Rosario. I was born in Michoacán, Mexico. I came to the United States at the age of fifteen. I worked in many places and my last job, it was at El Pollo Loco. I worked at El Pollo Loco almost 12 years as a drive-thru cashier. I left the job two years ago. Now I'm a Housewife. I'm so happy that I have an opportunity to learn English at this point in my life.

I'm a lady of 38 years old. I have been so busy playing the role of Mother of four kids: Simon, 20 years old; Jacob, 17; Alexa, 7; Julianne, 4; and my stepdaughter Sharai. She is 7 years old. I love her like my daughter too. I'm so proud of all of them. We have a very open relationship.

Juan is my husband; I love him. He's a very hard working man. He loves his family. He's a very responsible husband. We're a happy family, so it's time for me to start my classes.

I need to learn how to write English because life is hard with no English. Thanks to classes, I'm going to (make) my dreams come true. Thanks to the teachers for being here every night. They're good people.

Thanksgiving Day is a special day for everybody. I cooked turkey and ham and ponche. Ponche is a Mexican beverage that you make with fruit. I also cooked monkeybread and cornbread, but all that food did not fill my empty heart (sad face) because my son Simon was not with me that day. I had many guests and I could hide my feelings, but that feeling to cry – it was always there.

When my children were little, I did not have that concern because they always stood by my side; but time goes by and now, they're men. With all the pain of my heart, I have to let them go (sad face). The good thing is that I have my girls and my husband. They love me and I love them, and we could spend a happy Christmas and a happy New Year together thanks to my little family!

Tutor Jan F.

Rosario was an adult student in the Sonoma County Library's EL (English Learner) Civics evening classes held at the Brook Hill Elementary School in 2015-16.

Proudest Moment

By Pola R.

My proudest moment is when I found out that I was pregnant with Erik. We tried for two years to get pregnant. When he was born, he looked wonderful. Erik had a lot of very black hair. He was a very good baby.

Tutor Sharon G.

My Three Lovely Children

By Felipa A.

I have three children. Their names are Candy, Miguel and Jessica. They represent to me all my life.

Candy is my oldest and she is named after my father. The day she was born, she was the most beautiful girl in the world. The first thing she did was look at her dad and he took her in his arms and became very emotional. She was a very active girl, liking bikes, roller skates, and swimming. As an adolescent she was very rebellious, but with love and patience she became more responsible and mature. Now she wants to be a doctor. I'm very proud of her.

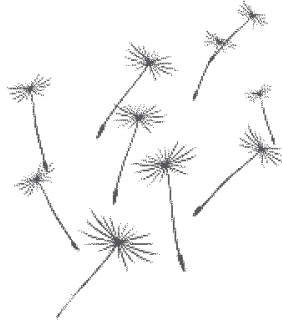
My middle child Miguel was a lovely baby. We were all very happy when he was born. He was happy and always laughing. As he grew he became very active, playing basketball and soccer. I always ask God to help me so I know how I can help him in his life. I hope he makes good decisions and grows up to be the man I know he can be.

On the day my youngest daughter Jessica was born, she completed our happy family. She was a beautiful and quiet baby. My other children always helped me with her. As she grew she liked dolls, dolls, dolls. She grew very fast. Now she's an adolescent and she likes music and talking with her friends, but she's still involved in the church. My hopes for her are that she grows up to be a happy, healthy, good person. I know she will.

To be a mother is not easy but my children are God's gift and with love and patience, we can make a difference in their lives. If I had a choice to live life again, I would choose the same life, husband and children. They are my reason for living. I love them so much!

Tutor Nancy S.

This writing originally published in the Jan 2012 Easy English Times and reprinted with permission.



Section 5

Let Me Begin to Explore
Writing Scenes, Recipes and Poems...

Bicycle Thief

By Adolpho M.

I went inside the store to buy a pack of cookies. While I was paying, I saw a man tossing my bike over a “no parking” sign. I asked him, “Need any help?” He said, “Sure!” I helped him lift the bike up. He tried to get on. I pulled the bike away from him and he fell. I said, “This is my bike!” He said, “No, this is my bike!” I said, “You want to do something about it?” He lifted his hands, and I clocked him. He ran away.

Tutor Clint L.

A Surprise!

By Shuying

As usual, I woke up by the alarm at 6:15 a.m., though I was still sleepy, but I had to get up. I needed to prepare breakfast and lunch for my husband and my kid. Sleepily, I dragged myself to the bathroom and opened the window. I looked down out of the window at the trees, plants and flowers. Gazing into the distance, a sight filled me with awe. I was struck dumb for a minute – the valley is draped in a veil of mist. The veil of mist made the houses and trees part hidden and part visible, but like a beautiful, shy bride!

Suddenly, I heard a small noise from my garden. I looked down from the window. It was a fat raccoon walking along the little brook, which is part of my fish pond circulation system. When the raccoon saw my fish, he stopped in his tracks. Then he went closer and reached his foreleg into the pond to catch the fish, but when he touched the net cover he took his paw off quickly. After a short pause, he found another spot and tried again. This time he stretched his paw down into the pond swiftly. Then he made a horrible scream and limped away. I realized the net wire cover had the barbs up. They must have hurt the raccoon. I felt so sorry!

During the time that the raccoon was performing, a timid squirrel was nibbling a nut and his eyes were roving. He saw the show and must have been struck dumb by this. Poor timid squirrel, don't think poorly of me because I made this net. I am always nice to the raccoon, but I also wanted to protect the fish from being eaten.

Tutor Laura O.

This writing originally published in the Aug/Sept 2014 Easy English Times and reprinted with permission.

Meat Kabab – Kabab Koobideh

By Faranek K.

Rating: 5-4 votes

ground lamb or beef or a combination of the two	2 lb
ground onions	1 medium
salt	1 teaspoon
pepper	0.5 teaspoon
Turmeric powder	0.5 teaspoon

Mix the meat and onion and spices with your fingers for a few minutes so that (it) will stick together and will not fall apart when you pick it up in your hand.

Make a ball – about 1 inch. Then start spreading/wrapping the meat on the middle section of the skewer by opening and closing your fingers until it sticks to the skewer. The thickness of the meat mixture should be about 1 inch all around the skewer.

Grill the meat, turning the skewers and continue.

Kabab Koobideh is served with hot Persian rice mixed with butter and Persian yogurt drink.

Tutor Manisha K.

The Caterpillar to Butterfly

By Marcela C.

Where am I? Why is everything so dark and cold?
Am I alive or did I die while I was asleep?
I can't move; I am trapped in a sphere
My personal space is getting smaller
I can't see anything, I just hear the sound of the silence
Somebody please, tell me what's going on!

I know something is happening, I can feel it
my body hurts, everything is moving around me

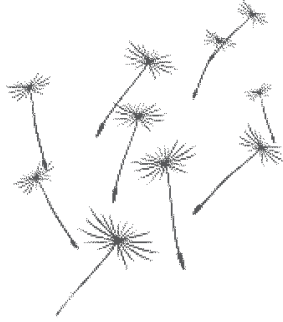
The funny thing is, I feel peace.
I am not afraid, my body is changing
I am getting strong, I don't want to resist the change,
Something within tells me I will be ok.
I need to let go and I follow the unknown

My heart is racing because I have been wrapped
In a cocoon for so long, that I almost forgot
How to breathe and love life again.

Finally a beautiful star is shining in my life,
my wings are spreading, and feeling the air.

I am no longer a caterpillar, I am a butterfly
Now I am flying high and feeling the warmth of the sun
I must hurry to live and enjoy life, I have two weeks
To discover the world and then I will say goodbye.

Tutor Mary H.



Section 6

Let Me Begin with My Tutor...

My Tutor

By Juanmin L.

It was a nice day in February this year. I always remember that I was so excited after my tutor called me. When my cell phone was ringing, I answered, “Hello.” Then I heard, “Hello, this is Pearl, a tutor from Sonoma County Library...” I was so excited because I had a tutor who could help me to learn English. I held my dog and said to him, “I have a tutor at last.”

I met my tutor at the downtown library in Santa Rosa for the first time. She wore jeans and a jacket. She is medium height. She has a nice face with brown eyes and a nice smile. She has short curly hair. She is retired. She looked intelligent and independent. She used to be a Probation Officer. Her job was very dangerous, but she was very brave, I thought.

I have learned a lot from her. Her methods are very useful. She is patient to teach me how to pronounce. For instance, I couldn't pronounce “globe” well. Then she tutored me on the street. She asked me to talk with strangers. I was shy to talk with strangers in English at first. She always encouraged me. I am not shy to talk with strangers now.

I went back to China to visit my parents and my friends in May this year. Before the day I left for China, she gave me a book with a CD. She told me that the book had a few different communication styles that might be a fun way to see how interesting English could be. She also told me to enjoy myself and be sure to show all my family and friends where we were on the GLOBE. I told all my friends about the interesting tutor. The book is really difficult for me to read now, but I can read it one day, I think.

My tutor has the ability to keep me on my toes during her teaching. She loves to laugh and makes me laugh too. I am relaxed when I am with her. I enjoy learning with her. I like talking with her and like hearing her laughing. I am lucky to have the best tutor.

Happy Organic Garden

By *Elvira B*

Jennifer and I met four years ago through the Adult Literacy Program that is run by the Library of Sonoma County. I came to this program looking for a tutor and I found more than a tutor: I found a great friend who loves helping others and who is a fabulous tutor. In our conversations we talked about the importance of eating organic food. However, organic food is expensive and most families can't pay for organic fruits and vegetables every day. Three years ago we decided to build our organic garden.

Jennifer asked my children and me if we wanted to grow our own organic vegetables on a vacant lot that her neighbor had available. Jennifer made a design to decide where to put the vegetable beds. On the first day of work in the garden, Jennifer, a friend, my sons Angel and Brian, and I built the beds. This day was exciting. It was the first of many happy days that we would spend in our garden. The following weekend we had the organic soil to put in the beds. This time our friend Ron and my husband Eduardo helped us.

The next step was to start planting the seeds in little pots. Jennifer and I took some gardening classes to learn how to care for our vegetables. A couple of weeks later, after planting the seeds, we had baby vegetable plants and some weeks after that, it was time to transplant them into the beds. We did it very carefully. We watered them every single day. They were growing up very happy. The sunflowers were very pretty. The tomatoes were blooming and the lettuce was ready to eat. It was really fun to work together.

We ate our first salad with lettuce from our own organic garden. A few weeks after that the tomatoes were ready. We made a delicious salad with different kinds of lettuce, tomatoes and some cucumbers. We made salsa and some "pico de gallo" with cilantro, jalapenos or serrano peppers. All the ingredients came from the organic garden. The basil smelled so good and fresh for making pesto. The pumpkins were ready for Halloween and pumpkin pie for Thanksgiving. These were the last vegetables of the garden for that year. To celebrate our harvest, Jennifer, Ron, my husband, my children Angel

continued

and Brian, and I had a picnic. It was another family and friends day in our garden.

Now our garden is big. We have apple, peach and lemon trees, some blueberries, wild blackberries and strawberries. We have six beds where we grow different kinds of vegetables year round. We grow tomatoes, lettuce, spinach, corn, cilantro, tomatillos, basil, radishes, arugula, garlic, green beans, yellow beans, watermelon, zucchinis, pumpkins, cucumbers, chard, serrano and jalapeno peppers. My weekends are very special. I get to see how beautiful our garden looks and I meet with my friend Jennifer and her adorable dogs Lulu and Cloey. They are with us all the time. In this project, we have not only been growing organic fruits and vegetables but also a great friendship. I love our happy organic garden.

Tutor Jennifer

This writing originally published in the June 2013 Easy English Times and reprinted with permission.

Dear Laura

By Shuying

My respected teacher and my honest friend. I want to let you know how happy I am and how confident I am. Because of you, my life has changed! You opened a great door and led me to a wonderful world!

You taught me how to read, how to speak and how to write in English. You pointed to the text and said, “Shu, please read this to me loudly.” When I pronounced a word wrong, you called out, “wait.” Then you showed me the correct pronunciation. When necessary, you said to me, “Please spell out this word. Here is your homework: use these new vocabulary words to make a sentence or a short story, and read them to me without looking at the paper when we meet next time.”

Week after week, month after month, you trained me in a variety of ways, such as reading comprehension, activity practice, writing phrases, conversation and e-mail. Your conscientiousness, your loving heart, your skillful teaching, keeps me hungry and going on the learning path. Your hard work made me able to read, speak and write in English.

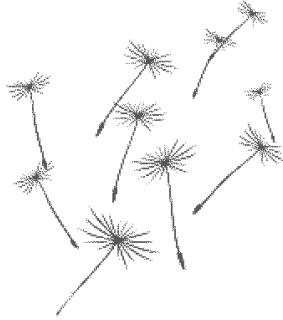
Because of your tutoring, I can freely communicate with people around me, like school teachers, my son’s activity coaches, shopping mall clerks, contractors, doctors. Based on my communication skills, I have independently solved many problems myself. Here are some examples: I handled my kid’s schedule very well, I talked to his teacher and followed up with his school education. Once, my son felt very unhappy because one student kept teasing him. I talked to his teacher about this but requested that the student not be punished. The school understood my meaning and settled the problem very well. Once I had a problem on a highway. Somebody hit my car and ran away. I didn’t know who he was and I couldn’t get him. So I called the police and explained the details to them. The police believed the situation I described and helped me get the car fixed for free from the insurance company. A year ago, I couldn’t have done any of these things by myself. I could only call my husband and squeeze his time to work them out.

Dear Laura, you mean more to me than only a tutor. You mean a lot to me! You are my hero, you are my friend and you are my mentor! I do and always will appreciate everything you have done for me! Thank you very much and the best wishes to you!

Love, Shuying

Tutor Laura O.

This writing originally published in the May 2014 Easy English Times and reprinted with permission.



Section 7

Let Me Begin Sharing
What I've Learned...

Heath's Story

By Heath B.

Hello, my name is Heath. I am a 38 year old man. I am from Virginia but moved out here about 10 years ago. I did not finish school. I liked school but not the work. I moved around a lot when I was younger.

I got involved with the Adult Literacy about three and a half years ago. I was feeling something in me saying: You need to get help with your reading and writing. As an adult it was hard to ask for help and I think that was the hardest thing to do. I have always been a private person so to tell people I had a problem with reading and writing was huge for me, but I am so glad I did it.

On my way I have met some great people, like Bill. He is my tutor. I cannot say enough good things about Bill. I will say he is supportive. It has not been easy, but – What is?

My reading and writing are so much better, and I have a lot more confidence in my reading and writing. For the first time in my life, I am reading books. It is still crazy to me that I can.

Any person who is thinking about getting help should do it. I would say, everybody needs help sometimes. And it might get hard at times, but stick with it. It will work for you. Just DON'T GIVE UP.

Tutor William C.

My History

By Jessica A.

My name is Jessica. I am the oldest of four children. I was born in 1983 in Sonoma, California. My parents immigrated to Sonoma in 1981. My father worked on a farm and my mother worked in a store. After I was born, my parents decided to return to Jalisco, Mexico in 1984. My first sister was born in Jalisco. The relationship I had with my sister was to be fighting all the time.

The relationship I had with my second sister was better. With her, it was playing, lending clothes and shoes, and sharing secrets. My brother was born in Jalisco also. The relationship I had with him was loving and close. During the 20 years I lived in Mexico, I have more bad memories than good. I went to preschool, elementary school and finished my high school there.

My mother always told me that if I wanted something, I had to work for it. For example, if I wanted a candy, I needed to help my father in carpentry, or if I wanted to buy a pair of pants, I had to get up at 4 in the morning with my mother to go to the mill where corn was ground and then make tortillas.

Sometimes this requirement prevented me from going to play or watch a favorite TV program. In a way it helped me to never give up if I wanted something. The downside to this is that my parents had no patience in teaching me to have good habits of reading and mathematics. A negative reaction (that) caused me fear (was) when I went to school and tried to read books.

When I was a teenager, almost an adult, I decided to come to California in 2003. It was hard in the beginning because I didn't know how to speak English and had no money. I started to live with my uncle. My uncle helped me get a job.

I started working at McDonald's for two weeks. After that, I started to work at a hotel, but it was also difficult because I didn't understand English. I worked there for three years cleaning rooms.

When I was 21 years old, my first child was born in 2005. One day I decided to go to school in Napa, but I only went for a few months because we needed the money. Still, because I had faced challenges in

continued

my life, I had already shown that I was mature and resilient.

When I worked in the local hospital, I learned many things including how to speak better English and basic hospital skills, but I made a mistake. I worked in the Surgery Department and one of my co-workers was the patient. I broke the rules by taking a photo of him.

The consequence was very bad because I lost the position and my pay was reduced. However, the most difficult part was I felt extreme stress. I tried to change my feelings because a new baby was coming. Also I wanted to change how I could eat better and have good information during pregnancy. I decided to do volunteer work at a local Latino organization so that I could help people and take classes on nutrition.

After my second son was born, my history changed dramatically in a good way. My doctor suggested working with a therapist to prevent postpartum depression. I accepted. Near the end of the 12 sessions, she gave me a surprising compliment. She saw in me several good qualities. One of the qualities was helping others and another was curiosity about learning child development. She then suggested that her agency might have an open position. I was surprised because I was not sure that I had the qualities they needed in this position. However, she insisted that I had the qualities. I accepted the position and a few months later I started to work.

I learned how to jump over the obstacles in different ways. The experiences gave me the maturity and confidence to set any goal in my life.

No matter what happens, I am ready for the challenge.

Tutor Richard D.

Until That Day

By Edith R.

My name is Edith, and I just wanted to share my experience with an insurance company on February 13, 2014.

I rented a townhouse in Sonoma County. My mom lived with me. On February 13, I went to work and my mom decided to organize my kitchen and patio. When she was done organizing the kitchen she accidentally turned on the oven. She forgot she had put plastic containers in the oven, so the kitchen was filled with smoke.

I received a phone call from the fire department to tell me what happened. Then after four months, I received a letter from the building owner's insurance company. They told me I must pay \$33,000.00 for all the damage in the townhouse.

The insurance company asked me for my renter's insurance. Until that day I didn't know about renter's insurance. I had never heard before about that!

Just this month (January 2016) we finished with all the issues. I was close to bankruptcy, but finally everything worked out satisfactorily. Now I know how important it is to have renter's insurance, and the great thing is: it's not expensive!

Tutor Mary J.

My New Driver's License

By Dulce G.

It is a great opportunity that the DMV gave the immigrant community permission to get a driver's license. For all the community it is a step forward in California, and that gives us more security. We have more knowledge and less risk for causing accidents.

My driver's license is important because I need it in every moment. My experience was great: the first time, I passed my written test, and I was happy. I studied hard in my literacy classes and at home. The second driving test, I got nervous. It is difficult to drive with another person in the car. All is good – I passed this test too!

I motivated other people to obtain their driver's licenses too. My husband Saul obtained his driver's license in November 2015. One week later, there was an accident with my husband and I, when Saul was driving his truck. We got hit in the back. The other person did not have a driver's license or insurance. The police report said that the fault is the other person's. It was very bad for us; the truck is junk (now). We need to start a civil action. We are going to court on February 25, 2016. I hope the result is in our favor so Saul can buy a new truck.

It is very important that everybody obtain a driver's license and insurance!

Tutor Cynthia D.

Discrimination

By Miguel N.

To be or not to be? Pretending to be what others want, to guard against.

Discrimination is a very difficult theme right now, because in spite of the technological advances, it seems that our intellectual skills every day go in reverse. Discrimination is the act of separating or forming groups of people from a set of several predetermined criteria. It is a way of sorting and classifying. It refers to the act of making a distinction through segregation, then violates equality of opportunity. It is often used to violate equal rights for individuals based on social, racial, religious or sexual orientation on the basis of gender, ethnic origin, nationality and politics. At present, and in spite of living in a country in which freedom is presumed, we face the terrible virus of discrimination. Far from uniting and forming a stronger nation, it separates us in a way from the common good.

Let us leave aside the focus on one country and look at the world in general. How would you feel to ask for a job with brown skin — not possessing the stereotype defined as correct beauty — being of small stature or different weight, and be excluded from work, friends and other social circles? This is what, every day, many people suffer. Social discrimination, in my opinion, is one of the most severe problems. A minority of people form the upper class while most people are in the lower and middle classes. And sadly, our opportunities are not the same. Every day hatred and racism towards ethnic and cultural groups grows, and it is more difficult to excel in a world of vanities.

Religion as another type of discrimination is not something new. Since ancient times and religious wars, the word of god, far from being used to unite men, has been misused to grow hate. And men forget that which god truly said and only seek power and oppression. They don't think about the hurt they cause and offend others with ridicule and contempt. Such is the case with homophobia towards people with different sexual orientation. Hateful words resonate against millions of people around the world who seek their own

continued

happiness and (seek) to gain well-deserved respect. They have been victims of torture and death. But whether you're male or female, you cannot run away from this virus of discrimination. There has been discrimination against women because some people think women are worthless and have no rights to education, work and politics.

Even though we encourage values to eradicate discrimination, I believe that we need to get started early in our homes: respecting each other, instilling values in our children since they are the future of the world. This way we can uproot discrimination and future problems such as drug use, criminal offenders and World Wars. As the illustrious Mexican Benito Juarez said, "Respect of other persons is peace."

Tutor Cathrine W.

Moving to a New Country

By Ying

I used to live in Hong Kong where people spoke Cantonese. I lived there from 1952 to 1999. In 1999, I emigrated to the U.S. I could not speak English when I arrived. Essentially, I had to learn the new language immediately. However, English is not easy to learn. So I used my own strategies to help me.

At first I used a card to write down the vocabulary and the meaning on the other side of the card. I put it in my purse in order to practice it at any time. When I started a new lesson, I had to read it over and over until I understood it. I brought a little pocket dictionary with me so I could find the different meanings.

Learning English is so important to me. I am always going to have problems getting a job and communicating with shopkeepers, neighbors, and so on until I can make myself understood in English. No business will want to employ me. If I don't learn English, I am restricting myself. I am unable to learn the culture of the United States or of any other country. This means I live in a very narrow situation. I am unable to mix not only with Americans but also with people from many other countries who have migrated here. So it is necessary for me to improve my English education. Taking advantage of the government's free classes, I am able to get a better job and mix with more and more people.

The immigrants who set out to learn English as quickly as possible soon become confident and are able to find a job. Learning English is the key to life in this country.

This writing originally submitted to the Easy English Times in 2009 and reprinted here with permission.

Addiction

By Jonathan S.

Here I am in jail again. I'm working on myself and addictions. I have a tutor who has been coming to see me every Monday. This time I'm not going to fool myself or lie about my drug use and addictions. I'm trying to be self-aware of my triggers. I have made up my mind to never use or get locked up again. I have to take it one day at a time. I have to follow the advice in the "self-help" books. My addictions have caused my family and loved ones hardships. I have lost girlfriends, friendships, cars, jobs and almost my life. One day I want to look back and say to my inner self that I have overcome this thing called addictions.

I want to live life to the fullest. "Tomorrow is a mystery, yesterday is history, today is a present; that's why they call it a gift." God bless you all. Have a safe journey and destination!

Tutor Julie D.

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Not Even for Free

By Ernesto I.

Four years ago when I decided to buy my desktop computer, I had to spend more money than I first expected. However, I was very excited with my brand new computer. When I got home I realized that I was going to need a desk but after I bought the computer, the printer, ink and a package of paper for the printer and, of course, insurance for both the computer and printer, I didn't have that much money left. The next day was a Saturday, so I decided to hit the streets looking for the traditional good deals on yard sales, hoping that I was going to find a decent desk for my new computer. I couldn't find anything that Saturday.

On Sunday, when I was on my way home after church, I saw a garage sale and I decided to take a look. There was a desk on sale, but when I took a closer look I found out that it was falling apart. Anyway, I asked, "How much?"

"Five dollars," the guy answered. I was thinking that maybe it wasn't too bad. I could reinforce it in the back to make it work, at least, for a little while. The guy told me, "You can have it for two."

I said, "What?"

Then he told me the story. About two months before, he had put the desk in his yard with a "free" sign on it. After a week, nobody took it. So he decided to save it until the garage sale day. "You can have it for free now, if you want," he said. I told him that two dollars was already a good enough deal, and I paid him.

Yesterday I was talking with a lady that lives across the street from my workplace, and she told me a pretty similar story. She said, "Do you want to hear something funny? I put a wheelchair on the sidewalk with a "free" sign on it on Sunday. Five days passed, and nobody took it. So yesterday I decided to put it in the trash can. As soon as I put it there, somebody stole it! Isn't that funny?"

"Yes, it is," I admitted. I told her the story of my desk. We both agreed that sometimes it is even easier to sell something than to give it away for free.

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Adult Literacy Program

By Abraham R.

This time I'm going to write about the program I've been taking for about 3 months. It is the Adult Literacy Program at the library, and I think it is helpful.

In my personal opinion, it is the best class I could take for one simple reason: You are the only one in this class. There are no other students around you, so you have two whole hours every week to talk with your tutor. If you have any questions, you don't have to wait to ask your tutor. You can ask any questions: grammar, reading or pronunciation. He or she will help you better understand the English language.

I think it is very important to practice the language because practicing and practicing is the way to start speaking English. I was unable to have a conversation in English, and now I am able to do so. I can speak English fluently. I'm trying very hard to improve my grammar, my reading; and I also want to learn more phrases, words and idioms of the English language.

I remember when I first came to this country. I wasn't sure about what I wanted from the United States. Seriously, I did not have a dream. Now it is very clear. I want to be bilingual. I told my tutor once, "I am going to leave the door open for the possibility of learning a third language!" So this is it. You have to believe that speaking two, three or even four languages is not just for fun or to use them to make others feel bad. I think you have in your hands: "communication."

I think that there are lots of people looking for classes of ESL (English as a Second Language), and they don't know about this program. Probably the program is not good for everyone but can be helpful for some of them. It is good to know about it.

Before I go, let me introduce myself. My name is Abraham. I am 25 years old. I am from Mexico. I want to make my dreams come true. Finally, I want to say thank you very much for all your help. Thank you for the opportunity. Thank you for your time. Thank you to all in the Adult Literacy Program.

This writing submitted to the East English Times in 2010 and reprinted with permission.

Never Too Late to Learn

By Jeffrey G.

If you ever feel that you're too old to learn, that is not true. It all began when I could not help my kids in their school work because I couldn't read, write or spell. One day I was walking by the library and I saw a sign saying, "Do you need help to read? Come on in." So I did. From that day on, my life began to change for the better.

I met a wonderful woman named Laura. She has a beautiful southern sound when she talks. I am not lying. It's hard for an old dog to learn new tricks. But I did it with good vibes and positive energy.

I began to read with the help of my teacher Laura. I was able to read to my kids and help with school work. It feels good "inside"! For all the people that feel that they are too old to read, have faith in yourself!

I have set some goals for myself: to be able to read, write, spell and fill out an application for a job, get my Driver's License, get a GED and go to college.

By the way, last week I passed my written driver's test! Next week I will take my road test.

With all the support from my family, my teacher Laura and believing in myself, I was able to accomplish my goals. Am I proud of all the hard work? Yes! This is only the beginning of my new life that will help me do more for my family.

By the way, I have a job interview with the City of Santa Rosa in nine days. Wish me luck, peace and love!

Tutor Laura O.

This writing originally published in the May 2015 Easy English Times and reprinted with permission.

About the Services of the Sonoma County Library's Adult Literacy Office 2016

One-to-One Adult Literacy Learning

An Adult Literacy Learner is assessed and paired with a volunteer tutor who is trained and supported by our Tutor Coordinator and the Literacy office staff. The pair meet for tutoring sessions at their local library branch for a minimum of 2 hours per week for at least six months to achieve learner-centered literacy goals and improve reading, writing and conversation skills in English. Common learner goals in this program focus on financial, health and digital literacy as well as citizenship and parent-family literacy.

To support learner's digital literacy goals, this program offers quarterly laptop workshops for tutor/learner pairs and access to 16 laptops that can be checked out by the program pairs for approximately 3 months.

Families for Literacy (FFL): An enhancement program currently offered to all One-to-One adult learners who have children under age 5 residing/visiting their home on a regular basis.

The FFL program provides free new children's books written in English for the adult learner's household. The tutor teaches the adult learner how to read the book aloud so the learner feels confident sharing the story with their children. FFL is designed to build the adult's English reading skills as well as establish a library of quality accessible English children's books in the home.

English Conversation Classes

Non-native English speaking adults meet Wednesday and Saturdays for FREE classes led by a volunteer facilitator fluent in English. Classes are ongoing, free and designed to help new English speakers become more skilled and comfortable in communicating verbally in English. Goal: Expand this program to more library branches within the SCL system.

English Learner Civics Class

Classes for adult ESL learners focusing on developing English Skills as they relate to Civic Objectives such as: interacting with educational institutions, knowledge and awareness of how to use emergency services in the community, and gaining access to employment and job training.

Classes meet two evenings a week for two hours during the Fall and Spring school cycle. Classes are currently held at Luther Burbank and Brook Hill Elementary Schools. Free child care is provided at each location for children 2 years and older. Instruction is provided by credentialed instructors and bilingual classroom aides.

Inmate ESL Classes and Literacy Tutoring

Through a partnership with the Sonoma County Sheriff's Office, Sonoma County Library provides ongoing ESL classes taught by credentialed instructors as well as individual literacy tutoring by volunteers at the North County Detention Facility and the Main Adult Detention Facility. Inmates interested in these services contact their Inmate Services representative.

Graton Day Labor ESL Classes

ESL classes are ongoing and free at the Graton Day Labor Center located at: 2981 Bowen Street, in Graton, CA. Interested students must be active members of the Graton Day Labor Center to participate.



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