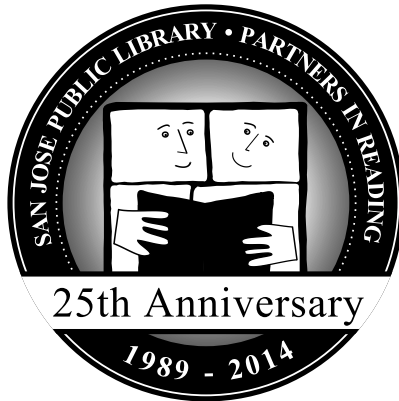


The Magic of Learning

Stories By Adult Learners



Adult Literacy Program
2014

The Magic of Learning Production Team

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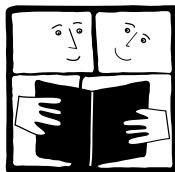
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The opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the San José Public Library, the City of San José, or any other funders of the Partners in Reading program. No official endorsement by these agencies should be inferred.

PARTNERS IN READING



San José Public Library



Tribute of Thanks to Judy Klikun



Judy Klikun worked with Partners in Reading for almost six years before moving on to help adults and families in South San Francisco. Her enthusiasm, vision, and hard work have transformed PAR into an organization that serves many more in the community, so that they can enjoy what San José has to offer. For example, under Judy's leadership, PAR began offering ESL classes, which are extremely popular and serve more than 100 learners per year. The classes fill to capacity each time they are offered, and the learners enthusiastically recommend classes to their friends.

Judy also brought small-group ESL tutoring to PAR, with a special training session and recruitment of learners who otherwise would not have had enough English-language skills to participate in PAR's primarily reading-and-writing-focused tutoring program. Most learners need to be conversant in English to participate in the regular tutoring program, but the learners who participated in the ESL tutoring focused mostly on oral skills during their sessions, with some instruction in reading and writing.

Prior to the ESL success, Judy led a successful workforce literacy program to help teacher's aides in childcare and preschool settings, and for janitorial staff members in a hospital and at San José State University.

She worked tirelessly to create lasting partnerships in which the sponsoring organizations benefited by having workers with improved skills, and PAR was able to reach more learners with intensive instruction.

Since family literacy is so important, Judy changed the way PAR delivers family literacy services to reach more people. She expanded the definition of who is served in this program and changed the delivery model, too. Instead of holding monthly events, many more families now receive parenting information and children's books for their home libraries. They get this material from their tutors, who review it with them so they are comfortable taking it home and using it with their families. Families who read and learn together will explore their surroundings more and do better in school and elsewhere.

Judy always managed to lead staff and volunteers through challenging projects with good humor. Her creativity and her passion for literacy are evident in all the work she takes on and in her approach. Her many late nights and weekends at meetings, events, and plowing through the piles of assignments are a testament to how much Judy values the work of adult and family literacy.

We thank her very much and miss her as she leads a new organization. She welcomed all who came to PAR and created lasting partnerships that help PAR serve more people better. South San Francisco is lucky to have enticed her to go north, but we here at PAR think of her every day.

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Thank you from Partners in Reading (PAR) to everyone who made this book possible:

- **The PAR authors**, whose stories each year never fail to move and teach anyone who reads this book.
- **PAR volunteers**, who patiently assist emerging authors with writing and editing so the stories are interesting and easy to understand.
- **MaryLee McNeal**, who each year demonstrates the writing process in very small steps for those who attend her workshop or who use her handouts later on in the writing process.
- **Victoria Scott**, who skillfully edits learner stories so that their ideas can be easily understood, but their unique voices remain.
- **Joaquin Rodriguez**, who expertly illustrated many of the stories for the book. In addition to being a very skilled artist, he is also a PAR tutor.

- **The San José Public Library and the City of San José**, which for 25 years have valued PAR's work in the community to build literacy skills and help adults lead richer lives. They are San José's champions of adult, family, computer, and workplace literacy and English language acquisition.
- **The San José Public Library Foundation**, which supports ways to ensure community awareness and support for PAR's services.
- **California Library Literacy Services through the California State Library**, which for 30 years has committed to funding PAR and other library literacy programs throughout California.

Partners in Reading Appreciates Your Continued Support

2014 Funders

- City of San José, San José Public Library
- California State Library, California Library Literacy Services
- San José Public Library Foundation

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Introduction

“A good teacher can inspire hope, ignite the imagination, and instill a love of learning.”

— Brad Henry

The magic of learning with Partners in Reading (PAR) starts with a partnership between a tutor and a learner. Tutors and learners work together to determine what they will study and how they will approach learning. Those conversations are often a challenge because the adults in PAR have so much they want to learn and be able to do. Sometimes prioritizing what to learn first is very difficult. Other times, adult learners are somewhat reluctant to state their preferences about what is most important in their lives. But when they are able to have that conversation, the adults and their volunteer tutors work together to make that learning magical. The list of tasks that they are now able to accomplish grows longer and more varied. Lives change.

Some PAR learners not only choose to meet with their tutors to learn valuable skills but also take another giant leap: they write a story to be published in a book. This is the book that you are reading right now, *The Magic of Learning*. Learners and tutors attended a workshop in February 2014 led by MaryLee McNeal. The authors discussed each step with a tutor, and by the end of the evening they had a large portion of the first draft of their story written. Some learners worked with their regular tutor later, during weekly tutoring sessions, to write their first drafts. Putting their

initial ideas down on paper was the most difficult part. Then came the many steps of adding colorful details, clarifying sentences, editing words or expressions that might be a little confusing, and reading their work over to make sure it was just the way they wanted it to be. Many PAR authors learned that it takes many rewrites to create a well-written piece.

To the 47 authors who contributed their thoughts to this book, we say thank you. We know that everyone who reads this book will enjoy discovering why they carve time from their very busy lives to come to the library and meet with a volunteer. Learning is indeed magical, and we know that you will be inspired and learn a great deal by reading their stories. Congratulations to all the PAR authors who contributed to this volume, and to the volunteers who helped them so that we can all read their stories about the power and the magic of learning.

Read this book—read the stories for enjoyment, and also to learn about the authors. Use the stories in tutoring sessions, to build vocabulary and comprehension, to study grammar, and to practice writing. Most importantly, consider writing a story for next year’s book.

In addition to our annual release of the PAR book, we are celebrating two milestones:

- Thirty years ago, in 1984, the California State Library realized that they were missing out on a large segment of potential customers who weren’t coming to libraries because they couldn’t read well. To help change this trend, they started a modest adult literacy program in 27 libraries throughout the state. Today, California

Library Literacy Services (CLLS) is thriving, with 97 programs that help more than 22,000 adults at over 500 locations throughout California. They provide training, technical assistance, and financial support for adult and family literacy programs. For the last 30 years, library literacy programs all over California have been able to help countless adults, who in turn have touched their families, their co-workers, and their neighbors through improved literacy skills. CLLS has become a model throughout the country both for how to advocate for and how to fund literacy services on a state level.

- Twenty-five years ago, the City of San José and the San José Public Library opted to start a small adult literacy program. PAR persists today with the help of over 160 volunteers who have served more than 400 learners in the past year. Learners report positive changes at home, at work, and in the community. When one person improves literacy skills, all the people they touch and interact with are also affected, so tutoring one adult causes a ripple effect all over San José at a great value.

Through the contributions of many volunteers and the financial support of key funders and individuals, PAR continues to fulfill its mission and expand its reach. There are many more adults who need our services, however. You can help by contributing to PAR. Please use the remittance envelope in this book, or go online to **www.sjpl.org/par** and click on the “Donate” Button. Thank you.

Highlights of PAR's Twenty-Fifth Year

PAR is excited to celebrate its 25th year of providing high-quality adult and family literacy programs in San José. With our large group of committed volunteer tutors and instructors, we have been able to enhance current programs, respond to the changing needs of our learners, offer services beyond library walls, and provide even better leadership skills for some of our learners.

- In response to learners' increasing need to build computer literacy skills, PAR trained computer instructors on a wide variety of new computer programs that help learners with typing, basic computer hardware skills, Internet navigation, and instruction on how to use mobile devices.
- Some tutors and learners are using Skype for long-distance tutoring sessions when they can't meet together in person.
- More small groups and classes have been added to provide additional reading and writing practice for our learners. This has been an excellent way to strengthen learning as well as provide a way for learners and tutors to get to know each other better.
- Lower-level ESL classes have continued because of our ongoing partnership with Dahl Elementary School and Catholic Charities. A new class with Somos Mayfair was offered at Cesar Chavez Elementary School to help mothers of students with beginning English-speaking skills.

- ESL classes at Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library have expanded to include beginning, intermediate, and advanced programs.
- The Together We Read (TWR) program gives PAR learners the opportunity to enjoy reading with their children. Primary caregivers receive books, parenting tips, and other valuable information so they can work with their tutors on how to best engage with their children. In the last year, PAR served 81 adults and 145 children and distributed 849 books for home libraries.
- Three learners went to Sacramento to participate in the California State Library’s Adult Learner Leadership Institute. They built leadership skills in the area of adult literacy advocacy, including how to get funding and communicate with state and local government representatives.
- This year, PAR tutors gave 27,610 hours of instruction valued at \$727,250. Learners recorded 23,974 instructional hours and met 2,682 goals.
- PAR received a California State Library LSTA grant to produce a series of videos that demonstrate best practices for tutoring adults in the four components of reading: Alphabetic, Fluency, Vocabulary and Comprehension. It will be a great resource for new and experienced tutors to enhance their skills.



Learning Responsibility

by Haregu Abraha

I learned a very important lesson from my kids. They taught me about responsibility.

My first lesson in responsibility was when I was pregnant with my first child. I saw the ultrasound and I thought, 'Wow!' I looked at the baby and he changed my life. Now I have three kids. My sons are 11 and 7 years old, and my daughter is 2 years old.

Responsibility means being careful, thinking about safety, and putting their needs before my needs. Responsibility is an important lesson to learn because it makes your heart good and changes your mind. You love the kids and the kids love you. You need to look after the kids and take care of them and listen to them. When you have kids you always think about them. When something happens to the kids, if they fall down or get sick, it's scary and I feel it in my body.

My kids are lovely and I want them to have a good life. I love my family and that's why I like to be a responsible mom.

Haregu is from Eritrea and lived in Italy for ten years before moving to the United States in 1994. She misses her family in her home country, but her husband and children make her very happy. She loves spending time with them. This is a story about one of the many ways her children have changed her life.



I'm Learning to Read

by Faalaa Achica



Faalaa came from Samoa long ago. He likes California very much.

Learning is magic. Reading makes me happy.

I learned from my tutor, but she passed away.

I learned the letters: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, U, V, W, X, Y, Z.

I am learning to use a computer from Julie at the Computer Lab. I am learning how to type. I go to the Computer Lab every Wednesday after work.

Sometimes I count money. I need to know more about counting money. DeAnna helps me to count my money.

I want to read books.

My stories are in 4 books. This is book 5. The new book comes out in September. I will show my family. They will be happy.

“Learning never exhausts the mind.”

— Leonardo da Vinci

Don't Give Up

by *Megnaga Aimru*

I learned how to read in 2009. I was 24 and going to City College. I took a test and failed it. They told me to go to Partners in Reading at the library. That's where I met my tutor.

I learned how to divide words so I can pronounce them. I learned not to guess the words because if you guess, the word is wrong.

I am proud of myself that I can read. I don't give up when I have to read something hard. It's important to know how to read when you live on your own because you have a lot of things to read, like bills or notices from the manager. Now I can read street signs and know what they mean.

When I have my own kids, I want them to learn to read. I don't want them to give up when they have to read something hard. I want them to try their best. I want them to go to high school and college. I will tell my kids, "No matter what other kids say to you in school, don't listen to them. Just try, even if it is hard."



Megnaga works at Safeway. She is a bagger. She likes to go to Golfland.

Partners in Learning

by S. Baltodano



S. wrote this story because she is learning many things in PAR.

I have been learning many things in PAR. Now, I can speak, read, and write in English better. Also, I'm learning about American culture.

On Christmas, my tutor and his family visited my house. His family sang a chorus of Christmas songs. They brought homemade cookies to my family and me. They were delicious. My granddaughter and I were happy. I can feel love from American people through them. They are extraordinary and represent the beautiful folk of the United States.

My tutor is Mr. Brian Badenoch. He is my friend and adviser. I have the confidence to ask him any question, and I know that he will have a good explanation. If he doesn't know the answer, he will research the question and bring me a page or more of definitions. After that we will discuss it.

We have talked about Rosicrucians, Masons, kings, and the Bible. I have read good books, but the most interesting were about Nelson Mandela and Gandhi. Now my communication in English is better. I need to know more, and I am trying to learn day by day.

We work on English pronunciation. He tells me where to put my tongue in my mouth. It is difficult and funny. He gives me a hard time, but I need it.

I have learned to use the computer. I love Facebook. If I don't know the meaning of a word, I go to Wikipedia.

I have learned to help the community because my tutor and PAR staff have shown me how to do it. Many thanks!

Thank you, Brian, for your discipline, dedication, patience, and the time you have been spending with me. You and your wife are a gift in my life.



How My Tutor Helps Me at the Library

by Abraham B.



Since Abraham started studying with Partners in Reading, he has been happy that he has learned more English and how to use the computer.

I have learned many things with my tutor at the library. For example I learned about grammar, including verbs and nouns. Also my tutor taught me about punctuation. I learned that you use capitals for places such as countries, names of people, and streets. Some examples are Eritrea, Mary, and Santa Teresa Avenue. I use an exclamation point when someone is excited, like in the sentence “Happy Father’s Day, Abraham!!”

I also learned how to type. I typed a story about my trip to Israel and a summary about Nelson Mandela and “A Long Walk for Freedom.” Some of the spelling rules that I learned are: the y rule, the drop the e rule, and changing the f to v, like in the words “knife” and “knives.” I also read stories on the Internet, including one about Hurricane Sandy. I am learning how to understand math word problems. Some of the math problems have mean, median, mode, and range.

I am so happy because I learned about grammar, including verbs and nouns, but still I need to learn more grammar and math.



My Grandmom

by Shirley A. Brooks

In 1953, my family and I went to live with my Grandmother Lula. This is a story about my grandmother. Her name was Lula Mae Booker. Her family was black mixed with Blackfoot Indian, and she loved her family very much. One day, my Grandmother Lula registered me for kindergarten. On that day, my grandmother was wearing her favorite white flower covered dress, and brown shoes.

One day, in the late summer, my Grandmother Lula woke me up early and she said, “Today we are going to register you for kindergarten.” My grandmother helped me to wash up and to get dressed in my favorite dress and patent leather shoes. After I was dressed, my Grandmother Lula made breakfast for the whole family. Breakfast was scrambled eggs, homemade biscuits with homemade strawberry jam. After breakfast, I washed my face and hands and then brushed my teeth. Then my grandmother called me and said it was time to walk to school.

Grandmother Lula helped me put on my jacket, and then she put on her coat and hat with



Shirley wrote this story because she remembers when her grandmother enrolled her in kindergarten.



a flower on it. We held hands as we walked to my school, which was seven blocks away from where we lived. As we walked we saw the neighbors waving hello to us. The air was fresh and filled with the scent of flowers and freshly mowed grass. The birds were singing and there was a beautiful blue sky filled with puffy cotton clouds. The walk to the school was so pleasant that we did not notice that the school was seven blocks away from our home.

When we arrived at the school, there was a long line of parents holding their children's hands, waiting to register for kindergarten. We finally made it to the front of the registration desk, after waiting in line for a long time. The person behind the registration desk at first requested my Grandmother Lula to fill out some paperwork for the school. After the paperwork was handed back to the registration clerk, who was a woman, the clerk stated that I had to be put into a "Special Ed." class. My Grandmother Lula became upset with the registration

“When you learn, teach, when you get, give.”

— Maya Angelou

clerk and Grandmother Lula said, “I want my granddaughter to attend regular kindergarten.” My Grandmother Lula was so upset about what the registration clerk said that she fainted. The ambulance was called for my Grandmother Lula, and she was brought to the hospital.

My grandmother Lula stayed in the hospital for a few days. Later, when Grandmother Lula finally came home, we found out that the school had decided to let me attend regular kindergarten instead of “Special Ed.” I am so proud that my grandmother stood up for me, because I feel that Grandmother Lula helped me to become the person I am today.



The Best Lessons

By Adriana Camacho



Adriana wrote her story because she wants people to know about her. She would like people to enjoy more of life because it is so short. Her tutor says she works hard at her job and in her studies of English.

During my lifetime I have learned important lessons.

These are five of the most important lessons of my life. Where I have learned a lot, each has left a stunning impression on my life. I have been grateful that these lessons have taught me to be a better person, better mother, better wife, and better daughter.

1. *When I was young, I learned to obey when my parents said “no.”*

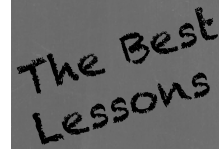
When I wanted to get in at 1:00 a.m., they said “no” because it was dangerous.

2. *When my children were born, I learned to take care of others.*

I only cared about me, and when they were born I had two little people who needed me and depended on me.

3. *In the time I have been married to my husband, I learned to share, understand, and to have patience.*

I had to share my time and space with another person and share everything. I learned to understand that we are different and have different views, and we need to agree on important decisions together.



The Best
Lessons

4. *When my mother died, I learned to enjoy every minute, good and bad.*

It is not worth wasting time on nonsense, but appreciate what you have today and enjoy the most as if there is no tomorrow.

5. *I love my family I have right now because the time with my family is special.*

As parents we can look back and see our boys using what we have taught them. I feel very proud of them and of my marriage because so far God has given us intelligence and wisdom to solve our problems. As a result, we are a solid and happy family.

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

— Nelson Mandela

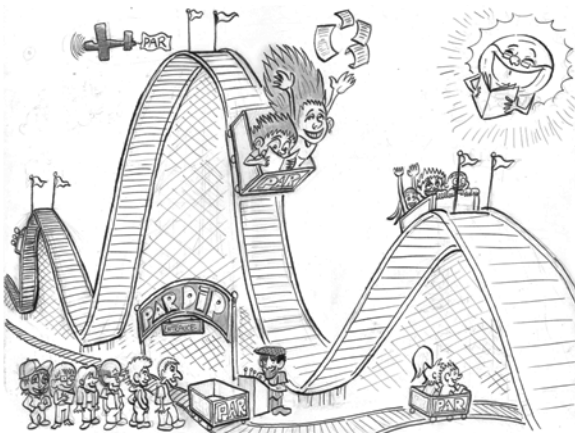
My Learning Adventure

By Vaneza Candia

Vaneza wrote this story so she could tell you about her learning experience at PAR.

The magical part of my learning is to never give up on my dreams and keep going because learning is an adventure. From the book, *The Alchemist*, I have improved my understanding of the Personal Legend, which is the goal one wants to achieve in life. Learning gives me knowledge and is valuable because no one can take that away from me.

My tutor taught me how to write essays, read and comprehend books. She taught me how to put sophisticated words in the essays to be interesting. A priority of mine is to write competently in my career and teach my siblings. When I write my essays I am expressing my point of view and thoughts.



Since I was overwhelmed about the quality of my essays, I quit the PAR program, but I returned so I could improve my learning abilities. All in all, learning has been a journey and an unforgettable roller coaster.

The Importance of Honesty

By Erlinda Catabona

I learned one of life's most important lessons when I was six years old. I have 7 brothers and sisters, and one day, I happened to be in my big sister's room when I saw a big box in which she kept all her clothes. Inside the box, I saw something that I liked a lot. Since I was so young at that time, I closed all the windows because I thought that God would not see me doing bad deeds and wrongfully take my sister's things.

Later on, my sister found out about her missing possession. She made all my siblings and me gather together, and asked which one of us had taken her stuff. No one admitted to stealing her stuff. Then, she advised us not to steal and not to tell a lie because that's against God's commandments. A long time has passed since this incident took place. I'm in my mid-sixties now, but what I learned from my big sister has lasted through my whole life, and I have even taught my children the lesson that "Honesty is the best policy."



Erlinda wrote this story to inform the readers about the importance of honesty in life.



Dora Speaks English

By Dora Ceballos



When I came to San José in 1998, I didn't need to learn to speak English to survive. I lived and worked where everybody spoke only Spanish.

I now realize how knowing English can help me in my everyday life. I need to spend more time studying English and I need to make more time for my classes.

People talk too fast sometimes and I can't understand them. I can understand better when they speak slowly. I need to practice my pronunciation. Interviews make me really nervous.



One of the most important lessons of this year was learning about problems in my house and who to call to repair them and to be able to make myself understood.

Thank you for understanding.

Learning for 40 Years

By Rosa Chavarria

When I started middle school, I had to go to a different city because my parents thought that a more educated school would be better for my future. It was a private school, twenty miles away from my city, and I would take the bus early in the morning. After three years I got my high school diploma and technical secretary diploma.

After I graduated from high school, I started going to a university in the capital of Nicaragua. I used to attend school during the night and had a full-time job during the day. Then I decided to come to the United States. I was willing to learn English, so I attended an orientation of English classes with a counselor at San José City College. I used to pay five dollars per unit in 1992. After three months,

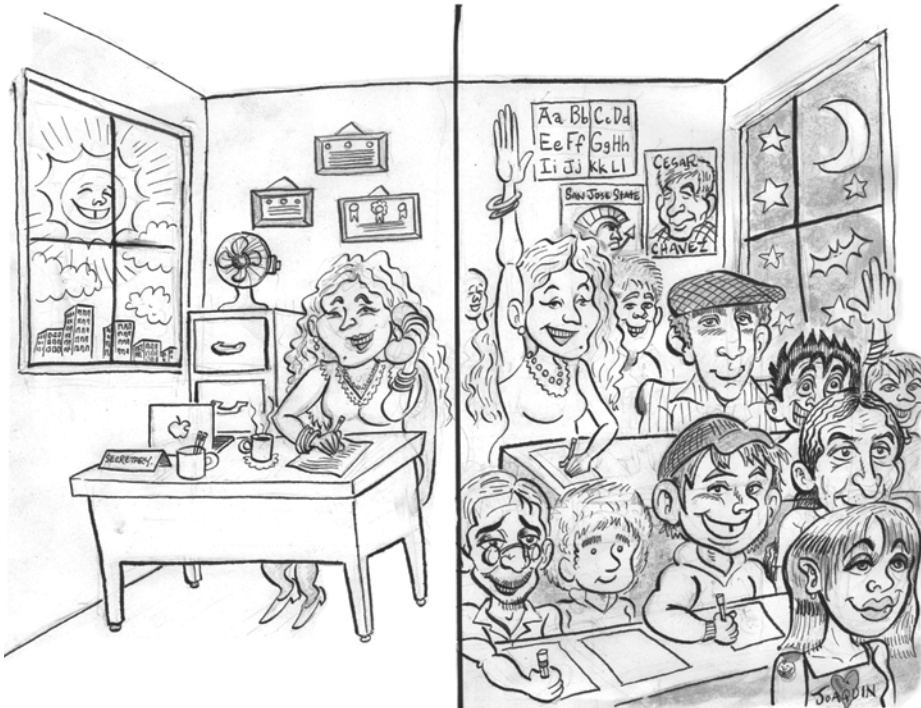
Rosa is planning to get a job in a Silicon Valley company so she can use what she has learned over 40 years.

“Words to me were magic. You could say a word and it could conjure up all kinds of images or feelings or a chilly sensation or whatever. It was amazing to me that words had this power.”

— Amy Tan

I could fill out applications for jobs and I got my first job at an electronics company. I was able to understand the directions from the supervisor. Hopefully when my daughter graduates from high school I plan to get a job in a Silicon Valley company, so that I can use all my experiences I have learned in 40 years.

Now I'm gladly learning a lot from the PAR program. I'm very happy to have a wonderful tutor because she makes it easier for me to learn. Meeting twice a week is very fundamental for my learning. My tutor is the best, hands down!



Thanks to My Parents

By Gyung Choi

My parents are very special in my life. They taught me so much, especially learning how to be independent. They always live with sincerity and enthusiasm. They showed me their teachings with positivity and optimism. They were the first teachers of my life.

Independence is valuable because many people rely on their parents too much. As I am getting older, I realize my parents' intentions. They have always been there for me. They let me know about independence silently and gave me many chances to do things by myself. They said that I could do anything without their help. They always believed in me and supported me whenever I tried something new.

They never said "no." When I went to college, I had to leave my hometown. That was my first big move without my parents. They encouraged me to challenge my new life. Even today, they made my current foundation of life.

Here in America is my second big move. I live with my husband and children successfully, too.

Gyung wrote this story to thank her parents for letting her live in America without any sisters, brothers, and family.



When I lived in Korea, my mother-in-law cared for my two children, Alex and Sally, while I worked full time. Now we are here in the USA, I have to look for the answers and decide things by myself.

When I need some help, I find I can solve the problem by myself. I enjoy the challenge. If I have questions, I can find the answers. Now I also teach my children independence, just like my parents taught me.

I owe everything to my parents.



Du Lịch Hàn Quốc Tháng, Korea 9/2013

A Man From the Caribbean Sees a New World

By Robert Daniel

I feel lucky to be in the Partners in Reading Program. It teaches me to read and write and it does a lot for me by helping me learn things I did not know, like spelling, writing words, and sounding out new words better than before PAR.

I have learned typing, texting, and have a better understanding of reading. My understanding of words is better, and that makes it easier to ask questions and open up. It helps me express myself and explain things better. I am more comfortable about taking my test to become a United States citizen.

Having a great tutor has done a lot for me. She is patient and easy-going.

It is important to keep up with the new technology. Every year things are changing—am I right or am I right? This all means a lot to me. By knowing all these words, it allows me to move in a new world.



Robert is from Dominica, a small island in the Caribbean. He is married to his marvelous wife Patty and has lived and worked in the United States for 10 years.



Books Are Hidden Treasures

By E. R. D.

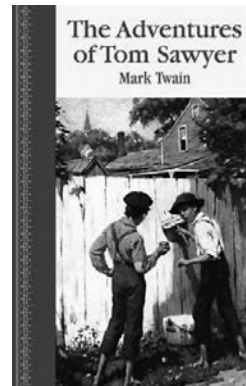


Not being able to go to school past third grade inspired E. R. D. to join PAR. It has increased her self-esteem and shown her that it is never too late to accomplish your dream.

When I was a child, I learned to appreciate books because my mom often told us that books were like hidden treasures. At the beginning of the school year, as soon as we got our textbooks, she would get paper and help us make book covers to protect them from daily use. Books and learning were important to her. My father, however, had a different opinion about women's education. I had the opportunity to join an accelerated program to obtain a nursing diploma; my mom supported me but my father didn't. He said, "Whatever you need to know, your mother can teach you." He meant how to be a good, responsible wife and mother. I resented my father for a while, but later I understood that he just wanted to protect his daughter from the risks of being alone in the big city.

When I married my husband and walked into his house for the first time, I was in awe because a whole wall of the living room was a bookcase full of books. And of course he said, "If you would like to read a book, you can. There are some written in Spanish." So I

did. I remember the first book I read was *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, then Anne Frank's diary and *Los Hijos de Sanchez*, to name a few. With each story I confirmed what my mother had often said: that books are hidden but exposed treasures from which anybody can experience the magic of learning about our own and other people's lives and cultures. The books helped me realize that even though the first ten years of my life were very difficult because of extreme poverty, it was not even close to the difficulties that the characters of these stories went through. Through the years I have read a number of books, mostly true stories, which have helped me not to stereotype others and have shown me that my life is not much different from others.



“Look at everything always as though you were seeing it either for the first or last time: Thus is your time on earth filled with glory.”

— **Betty Smith, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn***

The Story of My Learning

By Araceli Figueroa

Araceli wrote this story because she wanted to say thank you to PAR and to her tutor.



I will never forget the day when I walked in to the library with my two little kids, about seven years ago. As soon as I got in, I noticed the PAR table. I spoke just a little English but it didn't stop me, and I asked what was that? One gentle lady explained to me what PAR was all about and that I would have to have an evaluation. Soon after that I met my tutor, Jim Myers. I was very nervous at first, but when I got to know him I discovered the great person that he is. I also met his lovely wife Gail. They have been a blessing to me and my kids and very important in our lives. I am also very thankful for all the people that make this program possible. It means very much to people like me, who have to work and don't have enough time or money to go to school.

“Magic is believing in yourself, if you can do that, you can make anything happen.”

— Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

For me, I can say that being part of PAR is one of the best things that has happened to me. Thanks to that I can meet my kids' teachers without the help of a translator. It feels so good when I say "I don't need one"! Also my work is a lot easier and it has run better since then.

I know that I have a long way to go, but I am very proud of what I have done. My tutor, his wife Gail, my kids and I formed a team. While I study, Gail helps my kids with their homework. It's like buy one and get one free!!



My Experience in Special Ed. Classes

By Alvin Fore



Alvin wrote his story to describe his Special Ed. classes.

I will be talking about when I was in Special Ed. classes. First I learned that I was treated differently by other students. They called us names like “Retarded,” “Stupid,” “Dumb,” and “One-Eye.” We felt like we were being bullied by other students. Kids in regular classes only saw weaknesses in us, like this girl named Lori in my classes. She had a mind like a little girl, but she was smart, too. She was smart in math and could beat some of the other students in regular classes and Special Ed. classes.

A few teachers treated us differently. When we had substitute teachers, they would teach us differently than what we were used to. They did not keep with our teachers’ assignments. The substitutes had their own lessons because they did not think that we should have special treatment. The head coach did not choose anyone from Special Ed. classes to join sports. He thought we couldn’t learn to read

“A good teacher must be able to put himself in the place of those who find learning hard.”

— Eliphas Levi

the playbook. Also, the students in Special Ed. classes had to take a different bus to and from school. The bus was called “the Retarded Bus.” It made me feel uncomfortable and sad because they treated me differently.

Out of all the Special Ed. teachers I had, Mr. Jeff Pelsner and Miss Barbara Nemur were the best teachers. They would take us aside if one of us had a problem and talk and listen to us one-on-one. They would give us advice. We would go camping sometimes with both of them.

Mr. Pelsner was funny. He had a good sense of humor. One day some people in our class who wanted to went with him to his home to meet his wife. She baked a spinach pie and it was delicious. I had never had spinach pie before and I enjoyed it a lot. While we ate we sat around and talked about what we wanted to do after graduating from Jefferson High School. It was a nice visit, and Mr. and Mrs. Pelsner treated us with kindness.

I liked Miss Nemur because she was a good Special Ed. teacher. She treated us with respect. If we didn’t do our homework, she expected us to get it done. She didn’t baby us.



Even students in Special Ed. treated other Special Ed. students with disrespect. Sometimes I felt that I just wanted to be a normal kid. And the way to fit in was to make fun of some kids in my class. I felt bad about that because I made somebody feel sad or made them cry.

Being in Special Ed. classes made me see how people sometimes treated other people who seemed different. All we wanted was to learn and be normal teenagers, and to move on and have a regular life. We just needed teachers who could teach us what we needed to know.

“The trouble with learning from experience is that you never graduate.”

— Doug Larson

I Learned to Never Give Up

By Eusebio Garcia

I am Eusebio and I am from Mexico, but I have lived in San José, California, since 2002. I learned that when I came to the United States working very hard was not enough to be successful; I needed to learn the language to communicate with people so I could get a better job position.

When I arrived in this country as an immigrant, I did not speak English. It was very hard to find a job. I had no choice but to work in the fields. Florida is very humid and I had to handle temperatures between 80 and 90 degrees every day.

Later on, I made the decision to change what I was doing and where I lived, so I moved to San José, California. I learned to believe in myself and that I am not different from other people. There was something in me that told me that I have the capacity to learn and focus on my goal. So I began to take English classes and a few years later I started speaking English.

Now I am the store manager of a popular restaurant in San José. I am excited because I reached my goal. I also help my kids with their homework. In addition, I am a curious person. I always want to learn something new and meet new people.



Eusebio wrote this story to show his family and his friends what he has learned.



Grateful for a Second Chance

Anonymous

This learner wrote this story because she is thankful for the PAR program. She is also thankful for her tutor.



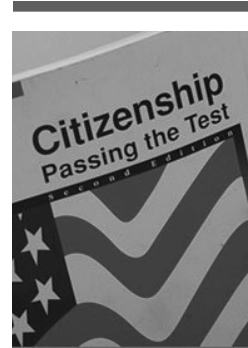
I'm a 44-year-old woman. My family immigrated to the U.S. when I was five years old. At the time, my parents couldn't help me learn English because they also didn't know the language. When I finished middle school, I still didn't know how to read or write well. I quit school after eighth grade and began working. As a teenager I looked for reading and writing classes, but I always got put into ESL classes instead.

About 4 years ago, my sister told me about PAR. When we went to the orientation, Catherine McBain was so cheerful that she made us feel comfortable seeking help. Catherine went out of her way to tutor us for a period of time. Then I got a new tutor who is dedicated to teaching me reading and the things that I missed in elementary education.

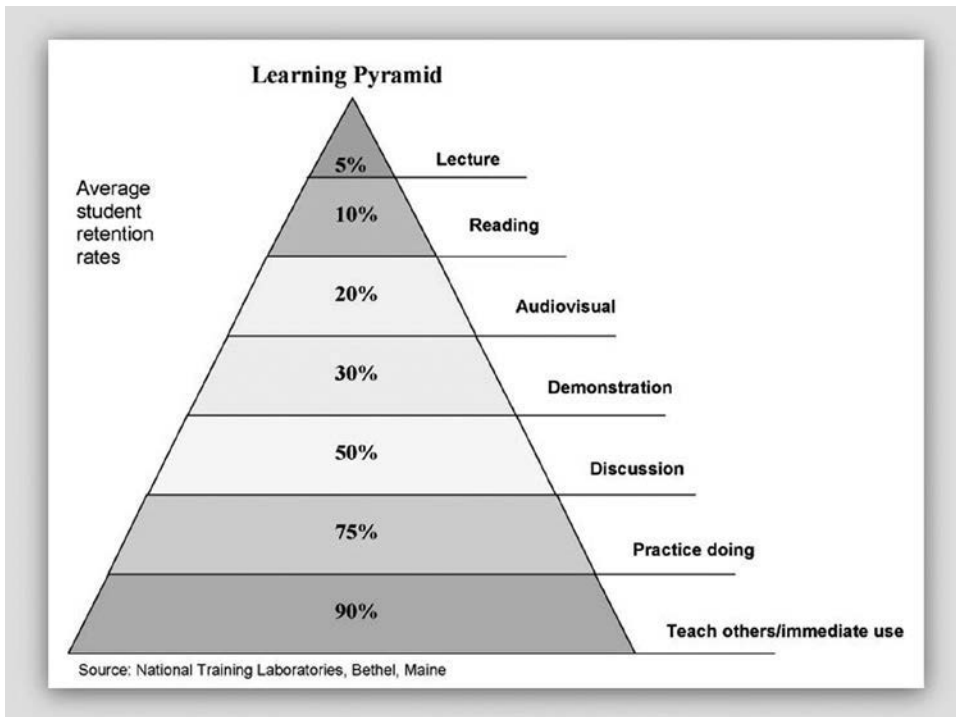
“It's what you learn after you know it all that counts.”

— John Wooden

In these last 2½ years, I've enjoyed meeting with my tutor and now know what it feels like to take time for myself and participate in learning. I have increased my reading ability, learned about proper English, math, history, maps, spelling, vocabulary, writing, self confidence, and I am studying to get my citizenship.



Learning has opened a whole new world to me! It's magical when I see a word and I'm able to know what it means. I even enjoy listening to the news now. The most important thing I have learned is that it is never too late to learn.



What I Have Learned in PAR

By F. T. G.

F. T. G.'s tutor, Grada, taught her the power of storytelling and writing. She thanks Grada for her guidance and for bringing the language of joy to share her vision. She also thanks Grada's husband for allowing Grada the time to meet with her.

PAR inspired me to write. I knew the basic skills when I started. However, my spelling and writing were not my strong points. It helped me in many ways.

For example, understanding instructions, filling out forms, and communicating with family and friends on Facebook is now very comfortable. I feel very confident about using the new technology. I never believed I could have that confidence in writing. When I look back at my writing skills throughout the years I have been with PAR, I learned from my weaknesses and it gave me the strength to improve in writing, comprehend the reading, and be part of small group conversations.

I remember the days I was afraid to have an opinion or give advice to co-workers. Now I have the courage of speaking out, giving advice and speaking in small groups discussing any topics anyway and anywhere.

I like to continue in PAR and would strongly recommend this program to others. I found out how helpful my tutor is, and how she keeps learning exciting and meaningful for me. She chooses interesting material to read, for example, the history of the USA, newspaper articles, Readers' Digest, and Guidepost. She gives tests on books we read together.

This is a dream come true. One day I would like to give back what PAR has given to me.



“We do not need magic to transform our world. We carry all of the power we need inside ourselves already.”

— J. K. Rowling

A Big Heart

By Rosa Gonzalez



Rosa wrote about her grandmother because her grandmother is her role model.

My grandmother taught me the best lesson of my life. She is the most loving and kind person I know.

My grandmother didn't have much money. She lived in a humble cardboard house, but she always liked to give. Every morning she talked to her plants while she watered them. She fed her hens, dog, and ducks. One morning, when I was seven years old, I was throwing the garbage out when I saw her giving a plate of food with a glass of milk and banana to a man. The man looked very dirty, and wore no shoes. When he left I asked her who he was, and she said, "I don't know who he is, but maybe he's God."

My grandmother cares more about other people than she does about herself. When I was very young she made me understand that there are people in this world who need compassion. Today when I see people in the street, I think of my grandmother and the lesson she taught me, about being kind to everyone and not judging people.

Magic of America

By Fouzia

When my family lived in Afghanistan, my father only worked. My sisters, brothers, and I went to school. We were a happy family. Then the Russians came in our country and the scary war began. Money and food were hard to find. Bombs dropped almost every day. One evening a bomb fell in a room in our house. Two of my brothers left to go to America and work and go to school. Russian soldiers came into our house and searched for my brothers. We were very afraid.

So, our family decided to go to Pakistan. It was hard to get there. For the next two years we all lived in a one-room house. My sisters and I sewed clothes to earn some money. My father was too old to find work. My brothers sent us money for our food and rent. When we had saved enough, we left Pakistan and went to America, the home of the free.

Now happiness is everywhere. I have a nice peaceful house. I can dream of opportunities for my children. I do not have to worry about bombs, soldiers, and not having food. I dream of being fluent in English. Living in America is MAGIC!



Fouzia wanted to tell why her family left Afghanistan.

Never Give Up!

By Debbie Hodge



Learning to read well can take a long time. It's easy to get discouraged, but keep trying—it's worth it!

Everyone learns in different ways. Some people learn by seeing, some by hearing or by feeling or speaking. You have to find out how you learn best so learning is easier and won't take so long.

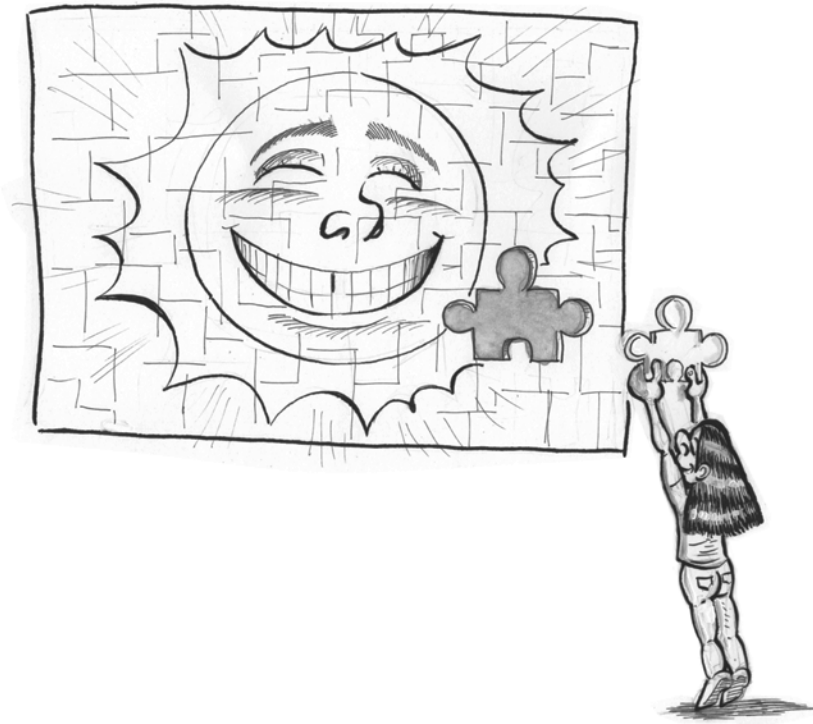
By trying different ways to learn, I figured out that not everyone learns the same way. My tutors helped me find out that the way I learn best is by feeling. By using a board with magnetic letters, I could feel the letters and learn how they sound.

My tutors helped me in other ways. My tutor never gives up on me and helps me not to be discouraged. Even when my sisters ask me, "Why do you keep going to school? You should have learned enough by now!" I keep trying and don't give up.

I have to keep trying. Reading has changed my life. Reading gives me important information, like instruction on how to take my medication. That can actually save my life.

Learning to read is like putting together a puzzle, so don't give up. You learn one piece at a time, but the more you learn, the more of the picture you can see. Keep learning, keep trying until you can see the whole picture. Keep putting the little things together.

The most important thing is to NEVER GIVE UP!



A Precious Learning

Kyunghee Kang

Kyunghee wrote this story because she was inspired to help other people.

I learned my life's precious lesson when I joined a library reading program. When I finished ESL at community college, I considered getting tutoring for English. I thought I could get more personalized learning through tutoring.

By chance, I knew there was a reading tutoring program in the public library that was free of charge. I registered and got an interview with the library staff.

Before long, I was matched with a wonderful tutor. I met some people during the process. They were so nice and sincere to help me. Frankly, when I found this program at first, I was half in doubt. "Tutoring for six months with no charge" was too good to be true. However, it was certainly real.



This program is run by many volunteer tutors. I was inspired about helping people from this program. As I get older, I think more about the meaning of life. My life is focused on only my family, especially my kids. Sometimes I worry

when my kids grow up and leave me, what am I going to do. When I was captured by this thinking, I was depressed and I felt I didn't know what to do when I was old. However, when I met people who wanted to help me, I could see how they enjoyed helping other people and looked happy. I got my answer.

I will find out how to devote my time and efforts to people and society. Even though my English is poor, I believe there are many ways to contribute. It will make me happier and my life more meaningful. This program has taught me not only English but also how valuable volunteering can be.



Reading Is My Favorite Way of Learning

By So-Ae Kilgore

So-Ae was born and raised in the east part of the Republic of Korea called Dong-Dae-Mun (also known as East Gate). She lived for a long time in North Carolina. She moved to California and enjoys the sunny climate.



Why do I like to read? I know there are many ways to learn.

Since we are wired differently and uniquely designed, we have different ways of gathering information, of learning, of understanding and practice. Looking back, like most people at an early age, school in Korea taught me that education was a path to discover all the questions kids can have, such as What is learning? Why is learning important? How can we learn?

I don't know what the motivation was, maybe living in the big city of Seoul with tall buildings, congested traffic, the sound of noise pollution, overpopulation, people bumping into each other, especially in underground transportation.

In the monsoon season it did not stop raining for two weeks, which was my favorite time for reading. Listening to the sound of raindrops relaxed me.

On such days, opening *The Book of Greek and Roman Mythology* took me to the forests of ancient Greece, where I could meet a warrior. Piles of books, endless days and nights, one book after another, becoming immersed in another world—I enjoyed it so much. It took me to the places, through words, I couldn't have imagined.



When I was in literature class I learned that no matter how cultures were different, there are some things that are the same in all cultures. For example, selfishness never has been admired in any culture, but we have different ideas as to whether we should have one wife or ten.

But we have always agreed that we must not simply have any woman or man we like. And when I was introduced to Albert Camus' different idea of "we merely only exist" and "this is all there is," I thought it was absurd!! Unheard of!! How can it be possible? It created a question mark in this brain of mine which I never knew existed.

It motivated me to look for more, to find a way to comprehend this idea. It led to another writer who has similar views he shares with Camus. I needed to find the way to understand this idea. This was new to me.

This very unknown idea challenged me. It gave me reason to look up more about him. To try to understand from his point of view. Whenever new ideas were presented to me, I struggled to understand what was beyond me. That is why, to this day, I know some people like to go fishing, some people like to go shopping, but if you asked me what it is I am interested in, it is people's ideas.

When I listen to them or when I am reading, I am no longer myself. I am an outsider, seeing the world through other eyes, not mine.

That is what learning is to me.



The Magic of Parenting

Natasha Kotko

I would like to tell you about magic. When our baby girl was born last year and I became a mother—this was truly magical for me. The amazing thing is that the love of two people can create a new life. We must appreciate this magic that our God presents us with.

The greatest happiness to parents is to help their child/children grow up and become good people. We help our young to learn about this world from their first day of birth. The first day after your child is born, the doctors help you with your baby; then you return home and realize your personal responsibility for new life. You understand that you are the universe for the baby. Every minute of the day you try to do many things for your baby, as you study the baby and the baby studies you. Every day you discover wonderful new things about your young one. You rejoice in her/his first smile, first recognition of you, first time sitting up, first new tooth, first step, etc.

My daughter is 8½ months old now. I am her teacher and she is mine, every day. As adults, recalling our childhood, we understand how much we owe to our



Natasha was born in Ukraine but now she lives in the USA. Now she is a wife and mother.

parents; it is our responsibility to provide the same love and guidance to our children.

I desire all people in our world to become parents and experience the magic of providing the birth and nurturing of a new life. A truly great learning experience!



Hole-In-One

By Joan Unsuk Kwak

I couldn't believe that I had a hole-in-one! Last year we went to Palm Springs with 16 of my golfing friends for a tournament. We played three different courses in Palm Springs. One of the three golf courses, Soboba Springs, was where I made the hole-in-one. I will never forget that. I know that I was lucky. It was the difficult 13th hole, par 3, 99 yards, very uphill, so I grabbed my 4-iron. When I played golf that day, I felt like a very good golfer. Because it was an uphill shot, I didn't know that I had a hole-in-one until we climbed the hill and looked for my ball. . . and there it was . . . in the cup!

After we finished golfing, 16 of my golfing friends' congratulations meant a lot to me. I was happy, and I couldn't believe my hole-in-one! We had a big party! Also my 16 golfing friends made a trophy for me. I couldn't forget that beautiful day.



Joan is proud of her hole-in-one and wanted to write about it.



My husband wants us to play golf together when we get old. I have practiced at a golf range and golf course and my home. I started to learn to play golf in 2006. My husband and I have the same hobby, and we have good times exercising and walking the course and seeing green. We have traveled many different places golfing. Also, we have many golfing friends. One of my life's most important lessons for me was learning to play golf.



My West Coast Exploration

By Hyunjung

My family traveled to Seattle last weekend. I wanted to go to Seattle because I saw the movie *Sleepless in Seattle!* In the movie, Seattle is a very beautiful and charming city. So, when I came here, I decided to travel to Seattle later.



First I went to the first Starbucks coffee shop. There were many people in the shop. I took a picture and I bought a mug that is sold only there. My family had dinner at The Crab Pot Restaurant. There was a lot of seafood, including shrimp, crab, clams, and so on. The food was very delicious. The next day we went to the Space Needle by monorail. We looked out at the wonderful city from its top. I was very happy, even though I would have liked to see the night view of Seattle.

Hyunjung came from South Korea one year and three months ago. She has been in this program for four months. It makes her happy to write this story to put in the book.

“Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young. The greatest thing in life is to keep your mind young.”

— Henry Ford

We visited Portland in the state of Oregon when we were coming back. There were many beautiful and big landscapes. We saw the Columbia River and Multnomah Falls. I thought that this trip was very memorable. I'm looking forward to my second trip to Seattle in the future.

By taking this trip I learned that Seattle is in the state of Washington. Washington is the northernmost part of the West Coast of the United States of America. It rains a lot, and because of the rain there is a lot of greenery. I learned that in Portland, Oregon, many people ride bikes because they are very eco-friendly. I learned that the West Coast of the U.S.A. consists of Washington, Oregon, and California. I had fun learning all those things.

Multnomah Falls
Columbia River
Gorge, Oregon



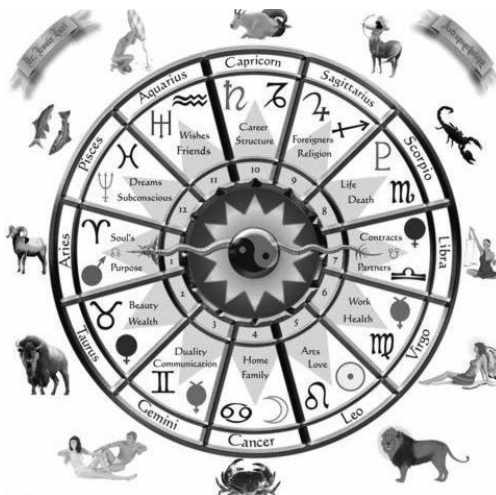
Learning About Astrology

By Anna Laver

Fifteen years ago, while living in Israel, I grew increasingly interested in learning more about my life and the events that affect it. A group of friends and I started learning about astrology from a teacher who had studied the subject in India. We attended class twice a week.

Anna was born in Ukraine. She later lived in Israel for 20 years. She has lived in San José for the last 5 years. She lives with her daughter, son-in-law, and two grandchildren.

Astrology is related to our solar system. It can teach us about the planets and how they affect us (human beings). I have studied many astrological maps to better understand my life and other individuals' personalities. Astrology provides knowledge that can help people make decisions in their lives, predict their futures, and aid in avoiding major mistakes in life.





While living in Israel, I once referenced my personal astrological map to determine whether I should apply for a job that a friend of mine told me was available. Based upon my interpretation of certain astrological signs, I did not pursue the new job—fortunately for me, as the company folded soon after the new job began. On another occasion I referenced my astrological map to determine the best time to buy a new flat.

About five years ago I left Israel and moved to the United States (San José, CA) to live with my daughter and her family. I continued to study astrology for three years but then stopped because I became too busy. In the future I plan to seriously study astrology again. It has helped me advance my life in positive directions, as illustrated by the two examples cited above.

“We should regret our mistakes and learn from them, but never carry them forward into the future with us.”

— Lucy Maud Montgomery

The Lost Ticket Story

By Chiu-Ping Lee

I learned how to love from my mother and my brother and my grandmother when I was 9 years old. I still remember that day in September 1966 in Taiwan. I lost my ticket and I didn't know how to go home.

It was 50 miles from home to the school. I was scared and worried that I didn't know how to solve this problem. I looked around but didn't see my ticket anywhere. But fortunately, suddenly, I remembered that my brother was on his way to kindergarten class in the afternoon, so I could wait for him at the bus station.

After not too long I saw him walk out from the bus. I told him I had lost my ticket and he said nothing. He just took out 50 cents from his pocket for me, then walked to the school. At that time he was only 6 years old.

And my first reaction was right away to run and buy another ticket. But when I turned my pocket inside out my mind turned to empty in a second, because when I ran, in that moment, that 50 cents had jumped out from my uniform and disappeared!

Chiu-Ping wishes she could go back again to let her family know she loves them. With this story she tries to tell the reader how important it is to treat people well because time is very short.



As I walked on the side of the road, I noticed a lot of flowers. Even though I didn't know the names, they were still so pretty, dancing in the wind. After 47 years it is still fresh in my mind. I almost forgot my troubles until I heard my mother's voice. All of a sudden I saw my mother in front of my face.

She asked: Why did you walk home? I answered: I lost my ticket. She answered: Are you hungry? I nodded my head. Then she brought me to the nearest ticket office to buy a snack for me. That moment I was very happy because my mother was not angry. I felt she was the #1 mother in the world.

When we got home my grandmother, who lived next door, walked out and asked me: What happened? I answered again: I lost my ticket.

Grandma said: All the people were worried about you! I never knew I was so important. In that moment I told myself, I will do anything and the best for my family because I love them so much!!



My First Class in the U.S.

By K. L.

One of life's most important lessons that I learned was when I immigrated to the U.S. in 2001. When I first arrived in the U.S., it was very difficult to get a job because I didn't have any English skills. Luckily, my older brother's friend, Wei Khan, registered my brother, two sisters, and me for Economic Social Opportunity School (E.S.O.) computer classes. (It was a six-month full program.) At that time, all of us had poor English skills. After the six-month program, I got a job! In three months I got a promotion because I had computer skills and certification from the E.S.O. program. In conclusion, the E.S.O. program gave me the most basic, important English and computer skills that I needed to start working and communicating in the U.S.

K. L. wrote this story about a life experience here in the U.S.



“I am always doing that which I cannot do, in order that I may learn how to do it.”

— Pablo Picasso

Work Hard and Achieve

By Fitzroy Leslie



Fitzroy wrote this story because he feels proud of himself and sees what he has accomplished.

The magic of reading helped me to achieve lots of goals. I remember when I couldn't even pick up a book to read. I felt like I was in the dark searching for a little light.

Learning to use the computer changed my life because I had to go online to search for jobs. Sometimes I even had to do a short quiz. A short quiz can be really tricky. Sometimes one word can mean different things, so you have to be very careful reading the quiz. If you go too fast and don't pay attention, you might as well not take the quiz because you will get all of it wrong.

Learning to read really helped me go far, such as reading books to my son, reading cook books, and using the computer for a lot of day to day life.

I have learned to go to the market and get the best deals on things I need for the house.

Now I can go to the airport and use the check-in machine to board my flight. If I'm going to a different country, like Jamaica, where I have to fill out a customs form, I have to read the form really well because they write their date the English way—1 Feb. 2014 instead of Feb. 1, 2014.

Now I look back where I have come from and I realize that I have achieved a lot, but not enough for me to stop, because in life you never stop learning. You learn something every day.



Learn How to Plant

By Porfiria Lopez



Porfiria is happy with Partners in Reading because she has learned a lot of English.

When I was seven years old, my parents started to teach me how to grow plants in Oaxaca, Mexico. I learned how to grow apple trees, corn, garbanzo beans, and different kinds of seeds. The first step is to prepare the soil with manure. Then I learned how to plant the seeds and water them. When it is time to harvest, we save some seeds for the next planting and we eat the rest of the fruits and vegetables. Now I don't have space to grow vegetables, but I plant flowers in a small place. They make me happy, and I enjoy them and never forget how to garden.



When I Was a Girl, I Learned a Big Lesson

By Josefina Martinez

When I was a girl and I went to elementary school, I learned something very important. I thought it wasn't necessary to study more at home to be prepared to take any tests. I only used to do my homework every night. I checked my backpack to be sure that I had all my materials inside, including my uniform and my shoes. Then I took a shower before I went to sleep. I had to get up very early. I thought I was doing all my school duties, but I never thought to study or review my books, my notes, or read some more at home. My concern for the next day was to be clean and to be on time for school. All the time my grades were good every year. I never was in trouble with my homework, projects, or tests. I thought school was easy!



Josefina likes to write about what she has learned because it has been an important lesson in her life.





But when I had to take my final elementary school test to change to middle school, I didn't study. That test was awful! I couldn't believe I got only 70% on my test. I felt disappointed in myself. I thought about my mom. Maybe she was mad at me. I felt ashamed. I didn't know what she was thinking about me. She didn't scold me, but I knew she was a little disappointed.

When I was a little girl, my mom was the most important person in my life. Now I am older and my mom still is very important to me. I'm married and I have two little girls. They are as important to me as my mom. I can't change the past, but I can teach my girls to be prepared and be responsible all the time. When I was a little girl, I learned a big lesson.

“The magic is only in what books say, how they stitched the patches of the universe together into one garment for us.”

— Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*

The Purpose of My Learning

By Elleni Mekuria

My learning with Partners in Reading covers many aspects of my life. My tutor, Beverly, helps me enthusiastically. We meet two times a week for one and a half hours at the library. She helps me read books and articles, learn a lot of vocabulary, read the sample ballot to decide how to vote, read recipes to cook healthier food, search important information for my personal life, and have many conversations.

Conversation is an important part for me while I am learning any of the topics above. We also have other conversations. Through the conversations, I get a lot of information not only about that topic but for my personal life, too. This part gives me more knowledge and understanding. Also this part improves my speaking and listening skills. When I explain my understanding, I speak a lot. Also when my tutor explains to me, I listen more.

Generally my learning changes my life. My reading and understanding of articles is better than before. It gives me more confidence to answer questions. Also I ask questions to others to get information. Because of the information I get, I make good decisions in my life. So my learning makes my life easier.



Elleni wrote this story because she wants to share with people how learning has helped make her personal life easier.

My Dad at Church

By Veronica Orozco

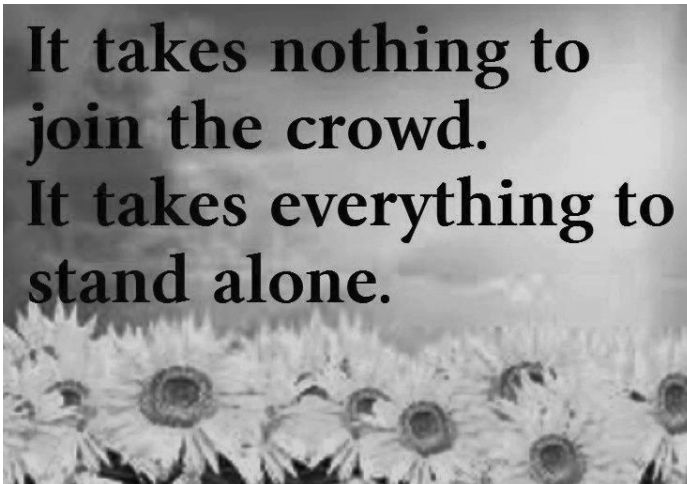


Veronica wants us to know how life gives us opportunities. She loves her dad.

When I was 10 years old, my dad showed me how to stand up and defend the truth with courage. One day my dad and I went to church. We went to listen to the 7:00 p.m. mass. We chose that mass because Father Navarro was my father's friend. I remember perfectly the message of the day. It said, "God wants you to live with the fire of the Holy Spirit. God doesn't want your spirit to be cold and without love. God doesn't like a warm spirit. He prefers that you are hot or cold but not warm."

The priest asked the congregation, "What kind of person are you?" My dad stood up! He answered the question very confidently and laughed. He said, "I am a hot-blooded person." The priest pointed to my father and said, "Leave the church!" My father refused and he said, "This is God's house and you can't ask me to leave." He looked at me and smiled. I felt very proud of my father.

That experience taught me not to give up. I will never forget my dad's words, "Be happy! God will always be with you. Stand up and defend the truth with justice and courage." That night we had a nice dinner. Thanks to my father's actions I became very strong and wise. I face many adversities. I make a lot of mistakes, but I always find the right solutions.



“Losers live in the past. Winners learn from the past and enjoy working in the present toward the future.”

— Hans F. Hansen

Take a Look at Me Now

By Darryl

Darryl's life
has changed
from learning
how to read.

Before I learned how to read, it seemed like I was in the middle of a black abyss, moving through this world not knowing what signs were telling me (where to go or what to do). Sometimes I felt like I was blind. What good is it to see the words when you can't read them?

Learning how to read is a miraculous eye-opener, a life changer. Now that I can read, I can move easily around by reading signs (Do Not Enter, Emergency Room, Danger, Caution, etc.).

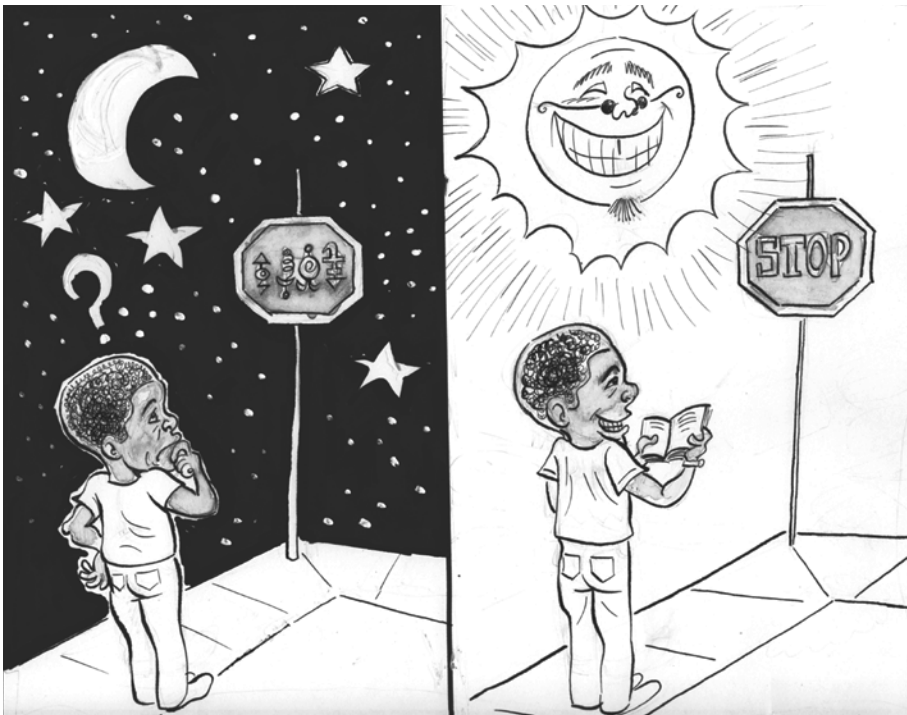
Sometimes when I read articles, books, or emails, it seems so amazing to me when I realize that I am reading them by myself. Only a learner could understand how good that feels.

“You cannot open a book without learning something.”

— Confucius

Somebody once told me, “A dream is a prelude to life, so dream big.” So I did. I challenged myself to dream for the sky. I knew it would be hard work, but take a close look at me now. Last year, in 2013, I won PAR’s Student of the Year award, this year I graduated with a Bachelor of Science Degree (BS) from Notre Dame De Namur University.

When I look back at where I was to where I am now, I realize that knowing how to read is the magic that makes dreams come true.



How English Has Helped Me and My Family

By Francisco

Francisco's story is dedicated to all people who have come to the USA. His story tells why it is important to learn different languages and how you can take all kinds of jobs when you know English as a Second Language.

Learning English has helped my family, because when different people are talking to me I now understand what people are talking about. I'm sometimes able to talk with other people, like when my family and I visit a restaurant and we need to talk with the waiter about the menu. That is important for better service.

I have also learned that I need to use my English when I talk with my children's teachers. Communication with the teachers is important. I want to make sure that the teachers and my children are working together, and that the teachers know my children's needs. These items are important for a good education for my children.

Learning English has helped my family, because now I get better work and more money. My work requires me to use English, and now I have had a promotion with better pay. Now I am the linesman. This is because I have better communication with my boss. Sometimes my boss tells me what needs to be done to help him. Then I will go to tell the workers what to do.

I have also been able to read and follow the instructions necessary to get better directions to do better work and to finish the job on time. Also as a linesman it is now my responsibility to fill out different kinds of forms, like timecards of workers, extra work orders, authorization-to-proceed orders, and project expense claims.

These three things—writing, reading, and learning English—have helped me, yes they have, and they get me more money for my family.

**Learn
ENGLISH!**



“Some books leave us free and some books make us free.”

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

Conquering My Fear of Reading and Writing in English

By Edel Riano



Edel wrote his story because it used to be hard for him to write.

When I first came to the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library three years ago, I saw a big beautiful building full of books, movies, and all sorts of programs to help people. The one I became most interested in was PAR. It is a program that helps people who have problems writing and reading English. I saw PAR as a magic word; I thought that this would be a good program for me because I was very poor in writing and reading English. I needed help in that area very badly.

I came to the office, and the people from PAR assigned me a tutor. Her name is Sandra Kemper. She is helping me with the process of learning to write better and to understand the words when I read. The first step was learning how to use commas, semi-colons, and periods. She also taught me how to use the dictionary to look up the correct spelling and parts of speech. Thanks to my tutor I was guided to start writing basic sentences and simple notes.

Like magic I started to write more, including introductory, supporting, and concluding paragraphs. Now I feel more secure in writing a note or a simple letter to friends or companies. I needed the help of my friends to write for me before PAR. I believe that everybody in PAR and my tutor helped put a little bit of magic in me to help me learn to read and write English.

Thank you.



Why I Joined PAR

By José Rodas

José wrote his story to help others. He can be a good example for others.

I decided to join PAR because one of my friends from church told me about this program—that it's really nice and fun. She said that it's an expensive program but we can get lessons for free. It would help me with my English and I can learn more. I thought, I could also teach some people to speak Spanish, too.

I want to speak correct English and be able to write in English, too. I can do more things at work and for my personal goals. It would help me talk to our customers, my co-workers, and our neighbors, and have more confidence in social occasions.

My tutor is Mrs. Eva Colson, and she is trying to work around my work schedule because sometimes I am called to work even at night and I have to tell her that I cannot come to our class. I am trying to fix this problem by talking to my boss and explaining to her about my goals and that what I want in my life is to finish this course.

Right now, in two months, I know I have improved my English because some people said so, and even my boss made a comment about it. She said that I am not too shy anymore and I have more confidence. I was so happy when I went to a restaurant with my girlfriend and I could read the menu correctly—not all of the words, but like right now, I know how to say “Starbucks” correctly!

I’ll tell others about this program because this is really helpful for people who want to learn English.



Jocelyn, the Angel of My Life

By Porfiria Romero

Porfiria is from Guanajuato, Mexico. She is living in San José, California. She is married to Reynaldo Vallejo. She has two boys, Bryan and Jonathan.

Life has taught me something very significant. It taught me to be strong, and that changed my way of thinking forever.

In the year 1999, in Valley De Chalco Solidaridad, Mexico, I had my first baby, but unfortunately she was born dead. I was 22 years old.

Through this experience, I am now a strong person and a good mother. Now, I have two boys whom I love with all my heart.

My daughter taught me to be strong and have love in my heart, and until now I still remember her hands and her face. I will love her forever.



The Way I Started to Learn English

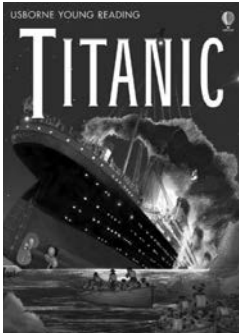
By Sandra Ruiz

I went to the library. I saw Catherine standing inside the front door. She asked everyone who was walking in if they wanted to learn English. I went there and asked her about it. She gave me all the information. I had to do a test. She called me after a few days to let me know that I was in the program.

It was August 2012 when I started. I remember when I was looking for my Partner. I thought she would be an old person. I was surprised when I saw her. Rachel wasn't old. My first class started. She gave me books to work with. We were talking and reading. I started to learn grammar, spelling, and pronunciation. Learning English is hard, mostly because the letters make different sounds.

I used to read books before the program, but it was difficult to understand some words that now are easy. I felt proud when I read and understood a story. There is a big difference from the beginning to now.

Sandra has two sons, one daughter, and two granddaughters. She has been in this country for 15 years.



The first book I read in PAR was *The Titanic*. After this most of them were stories about women. I like to read stories about how they have to fight to have what they want. There are many books about this. I love to read them. I don't remember the names of them but I identify with them because my life has had problems similar to the ones in the stories I read. I remember the story of a woman who by accident killed her husband. She had to hide with her little daughter without money. They were living in a tent they made themselves and taking food from where they found it. Reading books helped me to understand English better.

We were working on different activities. Learning to make sentences correctly was difficult, too. We were working with subjects, verbs, prepositions, nouns, and predicates. Learning what these mean helps me to understand and write in English.

My Partner had and has been working hard explaining to me how these work. She has been teaching me all this time. She is patient and nice. With her help it is easy to understand and learn English. I can't tell how many times she has explained English grammar. Prepositions are difficult to use. These and the verbs in the past tense have been the hardest parts of the English language to learn.

My English understanding is better and I keep working with it. I feel proud when I hear conversations and I understand them. I need practice on pronunciation and writing. I'm working on these.

This program helps me to learn English. I wish I had known about it before. Thanks to all the people who help me and others to learn.



My New Experience in America

By DongOk Seo

DongOk is Korean. She wants to share about how learning English with her tutor has made life in America a little more comfortable.

Camping in America was a new challenge for me. I had never been camping in my whole life. Last April my family wanted to try camping. We had a tent, stove, and sleeping bags, but we had to buy many more camping supplies. I had to visit new stores. Usually I felt scared about using English. I was afraid that I wouldn't understand when clerks would try to help me. Nervously, I went to Target for a tarp, Big 5 for archery kits for my children, and Costco for sleeping mats and a lantern.

At Whole Foods, I wanted to buy s'mores ingredients. I forgot the name "s'mores," so I asked the clerk to find marshmallows and then biscuits. But he didn't understand "biscuits." When I explained about the good camp snack, the clerk understood. He said, "You need graham crackers!"

At home I had to reserve a camping spot online. I was a little scared because I had never done that. I tried by myself and I was successful! Also, at the campground, I had to read an English map. We hiked and were excited to find the archery target.

My family had a great time on our first camping trip. I learned many things about myself. With each small step, I succeeded. Now I am braver when I speak English. I feel less afraid about understanding English when others speak to me. I am more comfortable and have more self-confidence about living in America.



When the Fog Is Lifted

By A. N. S.

A. N. S. has been in the PAR program for six years. He was encouraged to write a story for this book.

Just imagine yourself on a street on a foggy day. The fog is so thick you cannot see anything, but you hear the noises of a busy area. You wait a while as the fog thins out. As that happens, you start seeing outlines of cement buildings, people walking, but you cannot completely pick them out. Then when the fog is completely removed, you have a clear picture of everything that you did not see before.

That is the same way I picture learning about reading and writing. The fog is the inability to understand the fundamentals of reading and writing. The more I learn, the less foggy things are. With the help of my tutor I'm able to pick magic rhymes out of words. This is the magic of learning—to see things you did not see before.



My Father Was Right

By Patricia Topete

I have been learning important lessons, unfortunately, at the wrong time in my life. When I was young, I wasn't a good student. My father used to tell me, "If you study, time will pass. If you don't study, the same time will pass." I didn't take advantage of that opportunity and learn as much as I could. I now recognize how right my father was.

When I first came to the United States, I got married, had my children, got a job, and acquired more responsibilities, things that would distract me from going back to school. The most important thing in my life was my family. I was afraid that I would not do well in school if I went back.

Now my life is different. I'm taking advantage of the opportunity to learn. At my age it's hard, but never too late. I'm overcoming my fears and pushing my limits. I want to learn English so that I will be more confident and trust myself.



Patricia wants to be an example for other people who think it is too late to learn.



Thanks to the help of my tutor and other people who teach me English as well as other things, I am coming closer to reaching my goals. I am now expecting more of myself and looking forward with confidence. I want to thank the library, its resources, the staff and volunteers for letting me participate in the Partners in Reading program.

I have learned a valuable lesson: never waste your time, and always take advantage of the opportunity to learn.

“Books are a uniquely portable magic.”

— Stephen King

Learning Is the Key

By Maria Torrico

I have learned how important it is to read and write in English. The Partners in Reading program has helped me achieve my goal. I have a dream to get my GED. After that I want to go to college. I'm happy because my teacher is helping me with that.

Ever since I was in high school, I have wanted to be a nurse to help people. I have experience. I have been working with older people as an aide for many years. I enjoy doing that. They share their experiences, and I like to listen.

I want to go to vocational school to become an LVN, a Licensed Vocational Nurse. First I want to work with older people or in an emergency room to get more experience.

After that I want to go to college to become an R.N., a Registered Nurse. I would like to work in all areas of the hospital. When I finish all of this, I want to be an example for my children, to show that if they work hard they can accomplish what they want in life. I remember when I came to this country I couldn't speak English. Now I can understand and speak. I'm proud of myself. Everyone can do that.

Maria is married and has three children, two daughters and one son. She wants to be an example to her children.



My Wings Have Grown and Now I Can Fly

By Maria Villalpando

It is never too late to learn. Just try every day.

Learning and the pursuit of knowledge, for me, is the gateway to being able to communicate with people. This is important in my work operating a daycare. I have learned a lot from my family, teachers, programs, and even the children I take care of.

Learning has changed me as a person. Before, I did not understand the importance of play in learning, and now I do. I am now a more active person. I have more confidence in myself, and have a better understanding of English and Spanish. I may be a little more nervous now, but I no longer feel ignorant.

It is important that people know different teaching and learning methods, and that students maintain a positive attitude. Open communication between teachers, parents, and students is key to ensure the student understands the subject.

Learning is magical for me because I have a better understanding of language, which allows me to communicate more effectively

with people. I can comprehend the viewpoints of others, and I am more open to thinking in different ways. The more you learn, the better prepared you are to understand the people and situations around you.

I spent so long as a caterpillar, believing my education had reached an end. But one day I turned into a butterfly and realized that my ability to learn new things was as limitless as the sky. There is no expiration date on knowledge. Time and age are not important; your mind, heart, and determination are.



Great Example

By Manuela Zatarain



Manuela wrote this story because it is a great example.

My story is dedicated to two very special people. Over time I have met many people, but none like these two very special and wonderful individuals. They are a great example to follow. Their names are Manuel Lopez, and his wife, Cecilia Dominguez.

I had the opportunity to meet them in 2010. For me, it was a great pleasure and a nice experience to learn about their stories and how they progressed in this country.

As children of immigrant parents, they worked and formed their own company despite facing many obstacles. They have remained very humble people. Personally, they have taught me how to be grateful and humble. For me, they are a great example because having everything in this world doesn't mean one can't be humble.

