

# *If I Had the Power...*

Stories by Adult Learners

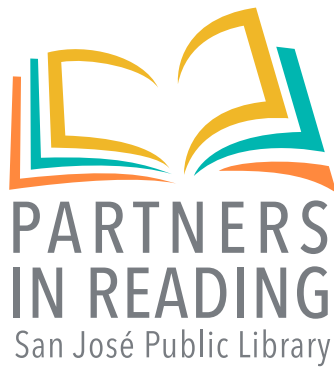


Partners in Reading  
Adult Literacy and ESL  
San José Public Library



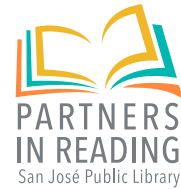
# ***If I Had the Power...***

**Stories by Adult Learners**



Adult Literacy and ESL  
2023

# ***If I Had the Power...*** **Production Team**



Production Coordinator: Ellen Loebel

Editors: Ellen Loebel and Kristen Vehling

Writing Workshop: MaryLee McNeal

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.



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# Acknowledgments

Partners in Reading (PAR) would like to thank the many people who helped put this book together. We want to begin with the learners. You are the reason PAR exists and produces a book. We appreciate all those who wrote a story for the 2023 book *If I Had the Power...*. Thanks to all of the readers. Many learners and tutors used previous learner books as examples and for reference when writing their stories for this year's book. It takes people to write stories and it takes readers to enjoy them. We hope many people will enjoy *If I Had the Power...*

Tutors are a valuable resource for learners who are becoming authors. Without their guidance, writing stories to put in the book would be a chore. However, tutors patiently assist learners so that their ideas shine through, even if they are not yet comfortable presenting those ideas in writing. Tutors assist learners in putting their ideas on paper and then expanding on those ideas with details and descriptions. Then, together, they polish the stories until you are looking at the finished product. We hope you agree that the writing process is not easy, but the payoff is great with some outstanding points of view.

Each year PAR gives the workshop presenter, MaryLee McNeal the topic. MaryLee then creates handouts that she shares during the workshop and later on for tutors and learners who cannot attend the workshop for use during tutoring sessions. The handouts are flexible and break the writing process down into very small steps that make the process less difficult. Thank you, MaryLee, for your creativity. Your examples show authors what a finished story could look like.



We also thank the many organizations that enable PAR to provide services to the San José community. The California State Library has provided a leadership role in adult literacy since 1985. PAR is proud to have been working in this rewarding field with California Library Literacy Services for most of that time, since 1989.

The city of San José, the San José Public Library, and the San José Public Library Foundation each have prioritized adult literacy and English language services because there is such a great need in the community. Additionally, IBM has made literacy services one of its most important community causes, and we appreciate their support. Without each of these funders, PAR would not be able to provide the breadth of services to San José.

# **Partners in Reading Appreciates Your Continued Support**

## **2022–2023 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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- San José Jazz Fest
- San José Playhouse
- Sharks Ice
- Sprouts
- Symphony San José
- Trader Joe's
- Winchester Mystery House

## **Introduction to *If I Had the Power...***

For the 2023 book of stories by Partners in Reading (PAR) adults, we asked everyone to think about what they would change. We encouraged people to look inside to see if they wanted to change something about themselves or if they wanted to change something in their community or in the world. We are moved by the compassion that the authors showed and the innovative ways they found to solve difficult and complex problems. This exercise was as if the authors were imagining that they had super powers and nothing would get in the way of arriving at a solution.

While the 2022 book was about Community, and many authors looked deeply at the many issues we all faced as we locked down during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the authors identified so many areas that would benefit from change. This year's book continued that examination of problems in the world, and how to fix them. We applaud everyone who tackled the challenge of writing about things that we all can do better so that everyone can be happy and safe.

In this book, many authors wrote stories around the themes of housing, nature and the environment, family, immigration, health, and other areas that affect our society. In many cases, the themes overlap. The stories about housing interconnect with stories about health and about protecting the environment. We thank each author for working hard to express your message of hope along with solutions that can benefit everyone.

We hope you enjoy these stories and appreciate the work it took to create them. If you are in the PAR program, we hope you will read many of these stories, and that you will write a story next year celebrating nature

because of an innovative grant from the California State Parks and the California State Library. You would become a published author.

## **Program Highlights**

Partners in Reading (PAR) is the adult literacy program of the San José Public Library (SJPL). In addition to offering basic literacy tutoring and technology help, PAR began offering small group ESL tutoring in September through a generous grant from the California State Library. These small groups complement the ESL classes in collaboration with Catholic Charities that PAR has offered for several years.

PAR has started to see more tutoring pairs and small groups meet at library branches again as we emerge from the pandemic. Volunteers and learners feel safer coming to branches for their sessions. In most cases, tutoring is more effective when participants can see each other, can more easily demonstrate pronunciation, and can share a notebook, a laptop, or a white board from the same location. We encourage others to give it a try in the future. While tutoring remotely can be convenient because it eliminates travel time, most people agree that face-to-face meetings are more effective. Come on back to your closest branch and give in-person tutoring a try again.

As many people realized with the onset of the pandemic, using technology has become even more important. We learned how to meet with our medical team from our phones, to participate in Zoom classes for safety, to establish a connection, and many of us learned how much we don't know about technology. PAR volunteer computer instructors

are waiting to see you in the computer lab in our office. Bring your laptop, your phone, or use our computers in the lab to continue learning about Facebook, email, how to apply for a job, work on your spelling, or read the news. Give us a call so you can learn with our dedicated computer instructors. We have hotspots for internet access and Chromebooks to check out if you want to use technology at home.

We are pleased that many learners are taking advantage of the PAR online small classes taught by volunteer tutors. Participants can practice technology skills such as how to use Zoom, while enjoying a conversation club, a theatre class, reading the news, or interesting topics in the Have You Ever Wondered? class. More classes will start again in September. The learners who participate in these classes have developed a strong bond, even though they do not meet in person.

PAR staff and our amazing AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer, Katie Bauman, have participated in extensive outreach efforts with giveaway books and toys for children so that staff can speak to the adults in their lives. These conversations increase awareness of the services we offer in the hopes of attracting new learners and volunteers.

The PAR family literacy program Together We Read continues in its mission to provide parents with parenting information and age-appropriate books for children to keep and establish a home library. Tutors and learners review these materials during their meetings to help parents share them with their children. Beginning in July, PAR raised the age of children who qualify to 17 and under. Over the last several years, PAR has increased the types of children's books it gives away with a focus on diversity. We want children and their parents to see themselves in the books they read together.

Since 2016, PAR has administrated San José Public Library's Career Online High School program, an accredited online high school diploma program with a career certificate. Students choose from one of ten career fields and complete this self-paced independent study program. We congratulate the 165 students who have earned a diploma while finding better opportunities for jobs with higher pay and more stability.

PAR is excited to begin a series of programs aimed to get people outdoors and into parks with a grant from the California State Library and California State Parks. We will be organizing field trips to two state parks as well as some local parks in San José. PAR learners will be able to check out free State Parks passes with a library card. We will have backpacks available for checkout with supplies that will make your encounters with nature more enjoyable. We will be purchasing nature-themed materials so that tutors and learners can prepare for park visits by reading and learning about how to enjoy parks safely.

The last year has been busy and exciting, and we look forward to finding out what the next year holds. Join us on this journey!





***If I Had the Power...***  
**Stories by Adult Learners**

*“Knowledge is power.”*

– Francis Bacon

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# My Vision of a Harmonious Society

*By Hilda Aguilar Morales*

I had a vision walking to the store. I saw drivers go by, following the traffic rules. I saw people going to the store, holding their children's hands. I saw the respect that people showed towards each other. I saw police acting as moderators in the community's social life.

In my vision the police are also role models for their honesty, integrity, and great sense of justice. It is of vital importance that they display emotional intelligence, enabling them to be level-headed in high-risk situations and to manage and resolve conflicts. Their training includes courses with high-stress scenarios in addition to handling of weapons.

The police receive funding and support from the government to maintain the strength of the police force, including ongoing training. The government's role is to provide civic education and teach rights and responsibilities to the citizens through academic development, which is strengthened through all forms of media. Civilians are not allowed to carry guns, because they don't need them, which reassures

*(continued)*



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When Hilda watches news on TV, she sees problems in the community, between the police and criminals. She wants the city to become better.

officers' safety and makes it easier to identify criminals. It is precisely for the purpose of walking the streets risk-free and with peace of mind that every person is prepared to be courteous and uphold civic and ethical values, behaviors that are imperative for a harmonious life as a society.

If I had the power, I would make my vision of a harmonious society a reality with cooperation between community, police, and government.

San José Police Chief Mata visited the San José Animal Care Center @ adoptapetsj to help promote adoptions as the shelter continues to struggle with overcrowding.



Source: San José Police Department (@san\_jose\_police) · Instagram photos <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cu3Fwy-JFPQ/>

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# My Best Version

*By Yessica Arteaga*

If I had the power to change something in my life, it would be to take more risks, conform less, and be less fearful – perhaps to face new challenges and opportunities to get out of the comfort zone that gives me emotional stability. I always had the necessary attitudes and abilities to succeed and provide my family with a better quality of life. However, I continue to work at my best version so that at the end of my life I can say that I was everything I wanted to be. Apostles Lutheran Church cares about its community and supports it in several ways. For Easter and Christmas, our church has special activities, like a sunrise service and a toy drive for children. The church also has collections to help veterans. Our pastor visits people who are disabled or elderly and cannot come to church services. I have learned to become a better person. That’s why I became a Christian. We study and live by God’s word.

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Yessica has joined Partners in Reading to improve her English speaking and listening skills.

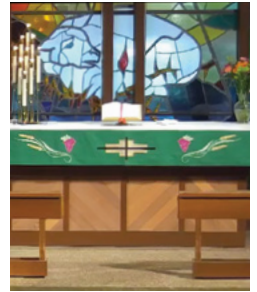


Photo Credit: Apostles Lutheran Church in San José

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## Prosperity and Peace

*By Vaneska Avilés*



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Vaneska wrote this story because she thinks that honest people in government can solve some of the problems faced by her country and by other countries with poverty.

If I had the power to change something in this world for the better, the first thing I would do is to eliminate the poverty suffered by many countries. I would start by removing corruption, which I believe is the root cause of poverty. Many politicians are corrupted by the desire for power and money, forgetting about the needs of their people.

My country, El Salvador, was one of those countries where poverty, crime, and gangs were growing for many years. Corrupt politicians allowed this to happen. The corrupt people were getting richer every day, making the honest people get poorer. These bad people also stole the money assigned to projects for the benefit of the country.

Thank God, the last four years the situation has been improving in El Salvador. We have a president who is not corrupt, Nayib Bukele. He is doing many projects for the benefit of the whole country. He is putting the gang members and corrupt politicians in jail. There are more jobs, security, better health, and an education system. For the first time, Salvadorans have hope that things can be better.

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A country cannot get out of poverty if there is no employment, if the government does not fight crime and provide all the resources to live successfully. When there is no corruption, a country can prosper. I would like to have the power to put more presidents like him in other countries. Bukele's campaign slogan was, "There is enough money when nobody steals".



<https://elsalvadorinfo.net/poverty-in-el-salvador/>

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Photo from  
the article  
"Poverty in El  
Salvador, an Issue  
that Leads to Crime  
and Migration"  
- Eddie Galdamez

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# How to Change the World

*By Brandon Bejerano*



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Brandon wrote this story because he feels the world needs more love and human connection.

I am clear on how to change the world, at least from my eyes.

You grow up thinking that buying expensive things, or having nice cars and houses of great value will make you happy. But, this is not true.

Life is a journey of experiences, feelings, and learning. Caring for our loved ones unites us as a family; Believing in what we cannot see connects us with the invisible and produces harmony and faith in our souls. Having empathy for people we see around us every day connects us to each other by helping us see what is missing in their lives. It also completes us by filling what is missing in our own lives. It gives voice to the internal and emotional yearning inside of us. We all want to be seen, heard, and connected to others. But the bad decisions we make every day, being unfriendly, and avoiding our responsibilities to society prevent us from changing the world around us.



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I want to say thank you for letting me write in this book. I also want to give glory to my Father in heaven who said, "Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven." (Matthew 18:19)

That's where my point of view changes and is glorified, because we cannot change the world with material things, nice clothes, or an expensive car; we change the world with love and mercy.



Brandon standing next to a classic Dodge Viper he has been detailing

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# Empowering People to be Self-Sufficient

*By Rodolfo Bernal*

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As a person who received help when he needed it, Rodolfo would like to help people find available resources in the community so they can be successful.

I would like to help people empower themselves, so that they can be self-sufficient.

I once knew a person who had problems. She needed to work, but she had a family she had to take care of, and she also had to pay to live in an apartment. I knew there are government agencies that help people with those kinds of needs. I guided her to get the resources available. Today, she has a job, and she and her family have a better life.

There are many stories like this one that we can find in life. I could help somehow but I know I don't have the knowledge to solve all the problems, so I would create a help network and involve institutions and people with different professions.

We would help everyone who requires it. But it would be targeted to low-income families, or families who don't know how to face these challenges. We would focus in these areas:

## **Housing**

We would direct families to the housing agencies of the government. And if required, we would accompany them to the first consultation.

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## Business entrepreneurship

We would guide people who are interested in running a business with permits, insurance, legal procedures, business accounting, etc.

## Education

We would guide families to find better schools for their kids.

## Work

We would teach people how to create a competitive resume, how to do a good job interview, help them find job fairs, etc.

I will commit to using what is given to me to make a difference.



Courtesy of Civic Makers: <https://civickmakers.com/kicking-off-the-workforce-transformation-corps/>

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# The Power of Exercise

*By Abraham B.*



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Abraham joined 24 Hour Fitness and really likes to go there. He wants others to experience this feeling too.

If I had the power, I would get everyone to exercise daily. I used to see people doing exercise every day on my way to work in the early morning. I did not understand why they were doing this instead of sleeping.

Now I understand the power of exercise after I made time every day to exercise. I started slowly by joining the local gym and swimming every night after work. You can start as simply as taking a walk outside every day. If it's cold or rainy outside, you can visit the local mall to walk.

These simple changes to your daily routine will make very big changes to your life. The first thing that I noticed was I had more energy even after finishing many laps in the swimming pool and working all day. I was amazed by this, as before I felt very tired after only working all day.

The second thing I noticed was my overall mood improved. I felt so much happier even though I was tired. I want everyone to see these benefits themselves. It will strengthen not only your muscles but also your mind and allow you to be more peaceful so you will sleep better.

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## To Be Safe

*By Robert Byers*

If I had the power, I would want everybody to be safe. Every time I turn on the television, I hear about someone getting shot. It is wrong that innocent people get hurt or killed, especially children. This makes me feel angry and sad.

People should be educated about safer gun control, such as making 21 the minimum age to buy a gun and requiring background checks and training on how to safely handle and store a gun before giving them a permit and selling them a gun. Most of all, stop selling assault weapons.

People need to demand that the government make changes to the laws. We can write letters to our politicians, we can hand out literature about the need for gun control, and we can even join protest marches.

People can no longer be silent if they want to feel free and safe to leave home without fear of being shot.



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Robert wrote this story because he is upset about seeing so many shootings in the news.

*“I don’t ever want you to be satisfied with incremental progress, but I want you to demand it.”*

– Senator Chris Murphy

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## Improving the Lives of Seniors

By Mery Coa



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Mery works as a Home Health Aide for seniors who need care. She sees great problems when families cannot care for their elders.

I see a great need for help for older people with disabilities who need a lot of assistance. When I go to work I see people daily. They live alone. They talk about being lonely, depressed and are not eating healthy food. Many people have dementia and do not remember to take their medication. When their families can't care for them, the elders often do not receive the care they need.

If I had the power, I would start more centers in San José to help older people when their families can't. The center would be senior daycare. We need to have a bus and people to help pick them up at their houses and transport them to the senior center. They would receive hot meals, help with medication and do many different activities.

If I had the power, I would like the city, county and state to work together to build the centers and support them by taking community members to meet with the government agencies. People could be paid or be volunteers to staff the centers.

---

I think my solution for this big problem would help seniors have better lives when their families can't care for them. If I had the power to make this happen, it would make me feel happy.



Courtesy of the National Council on Aging.  
<https://ncoa.org/>

*“Caring for seniors is perhaps the greatest responsibility we have. Those who have walked before us have given so much and made possible the life we all enjoy.”*

– Senator John Hoeven

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# Technology

*By Sandra Cortes*



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Sandra wrote this story because she has noticed how much technology has changed relationships.

If I could change some bad practices in society, I would change the way in which society currently uses technology.

Since its arrival in human society, technology went from being an investigation to being our axis of communication, becoming almost a vital necessity.

It is impossible to go out into the streets and not find a person without their phone in their hands, simply enjoying nature and what surrounds us; on the contrary, everyone is attentive and anxious to what happens daily on their social networks, who “likes” their posts, who commented and who shared.

Something as vital as face-to-face and reciprocal communication between humans was the process that helped the same evolution. However, from my point of view, the use we have given to technology has often represented an improvement in the quality of life and our knowledge process. It would undoubtedly change the fragility of manipulation that came to humanity, and its current practices that affected our contact and communication in the



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same way, blinding us from the many benefits that interacting with people brings.

Although my solution is not to eradicate technology, if it is in everyone's hands to change our practices with it, let's live in the moment with the people around us and enjoy them. Smiling will strengthen us and give us happiness.



Grace Art and Wellness Program (GAW) members cheer during the San José Giants game as special guests to celebrate We Care Wednesday.

<https://www.sanjoseca.gov/your-government/departments-offices/parks-recreation-neighborhood-services>

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## Perfect Children?

*By Veronica Delgado*



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Veronica is grateful she works with kids, and it's fun to think about having perfect kids at home. She loves her kids a lot, even though they're not perfect.

Imagine how peaceful it would be for us mothers to have perfectly-behaved children. Think about having the power to motivate them to do daily chores without needing to remind them. I wouldn't have to nag them or hear complaints like, "I know, Mom. I know what to do!"

If I had the power to control their emotions and reactions to each other, I wouldn't have to listen to their sibling fights. They would have empathy and concern for each other. Instead, they ignore, bully, and make promises they don't keep.

Can we also imagine eating dinner peacefully without hearing any complaining? I would no longer hear, "I don't like this food," "Do you have something else?" or "I'm not hungry." Instead, they would eat their dinner using good table manners and no longer eat junk food snacks later.

What if our home didn't have any technology? I feel that my children are addicted to their tablets, phones, video games, and TV. If I had the power to change their constant use of this technology, they

---

would instead spend their time painting, reading, playing outside, and having fun with each other. I would feel more relaxed and less stressed, and my children would have more open minds to do things that would help them in their development.

Would I really want perfect children? Since I don't have this power, I'll just love them the way they are.



Photo credit: Getty Images

*“Cleaning your house while your kids are still growing up is like shoveling the sidewalk before it stops snowing.”*

– Phyllis Diller

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## How “No” Can Be a Good Thing

By Consuelo G.



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Consuelo writes because she has ideas in her head. She appreciates the opportunity to write for *If I Had the Power* . . .

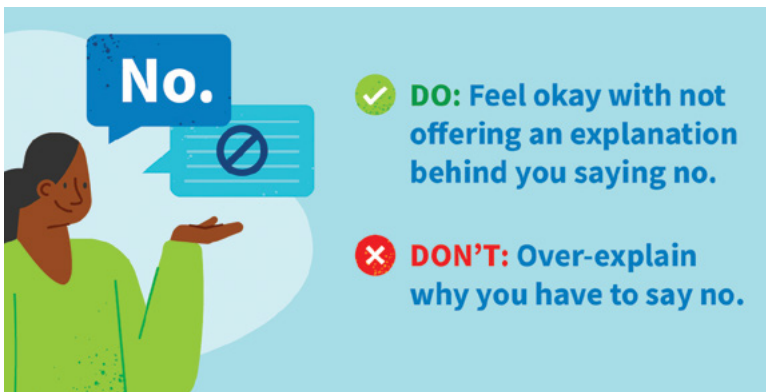
If I had the power, I would say “no” more often. I have lived with my parents, my sisters, and my brothers in San José for 20 years. I have been helping them since I was younger. I thought that helping is a nice quality, but sometimes it makes the person irresponsible.

My sister asks me to borrow money very often. I say “yes” every time. When I try to say “no” she doesn’t stop asking. My other sister bought a car. I helped co-sign the car loan. She never paid her loan on time or paid the car registration for three years. Many times I made payments for her.

My parents are going to be 80 years old. They need help with everything: driving them places, shopping for them, doctors’ appointments, and making sure they take their medicine. If I sometimes say “no” to my parents, other family members can help them with these things.

---

Now I am getting older and I want my future to be secure. It is stressful to always worry about the family all the time. I wish they would take care of their own problems. I hope to retire from working. I want to focus on healthy living, eating, and exercise. If I say “no” more often, maybe my family will take responsibility for themselves, and I may reach my goals.



<https://www.creditrepair.com/blog/credit-score/how-to-say-no-to-family/>

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How to say “no” to family asking for money: A guide to setting boundaries for your finances + life

*“I encourage people to remember that “no” is a complete sentence.”*

– Gavin de Becker

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# How I Would Change California

*By Rosemary Gonzales*



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Rosemary has been studying with Partners in Reading for a long time. She has learned a lot about how to use computers. She has written many stories for other Partners in Reading books.

I don't like California. If I could, I would move out of California to another state.

I don't know what state I would like to live in yet. I have to look into it. Maybe it would be Ohio.

The reason I am still here is because I have family here in California. If I moved out of state, I wouldn't know anybody. I would be alone.

Another reason I hate California is that the taxes are too high. Riots have taken place throughout California. Breaking windows, burning company buildings, and disrespecting authority are big problems here. When God put laws for us to obey in the Old Testament, before America became a country, God used great leaders who were strong in faith in God and had a plan for America.

That is what makes America great. In the past, we never had a problem with homelessness in America. But the homeless and mentally ill are making a lot of messes throughout the city of San José and throughout California. I heard President Reagan released the mentally ill in many states. I voted for him, and I still like him, but I don't think he should

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have done this. I think this caused lots of problems in our state. If I had the power to change things, I would:

1. Lower taxes.
2. The people who rioted would be held accountable for the damage that was done. We already have companies shutting down; we don't need any more. I believe in protesting, but people should do it in a peaceful way without destroying property and without disrespecting authority.
3. I would allow empty buildings to be used for housing to help those who are homeless.
4. The mentally ill would receive counseling, food, and shelter. They would have suitable housing if they wanted it.



Photo by Jana Kadah. <https://sanjosespotlight.com/empty-san-jose-offices-could-convert-to-housing/>

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The Office to Housing Conversion Act, or AB 1532, would allow certain office buildings to be converted to housing across the state.

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## From Our Vulnerabilities Come Our Strengths

*By Gabriel Guerrero*



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Gabriel wrote this story because it seemed interesting. He notes that a person's economic status can influence the opportunities available to them.

If I had the opportunity or the power to change something in my life, I believe that it would be negative actions that I have done in the past.

And also power to change things to help more people like equality regardless of economic status or nationality.

It finishes with world hunger: to offer more employment for the impoverished, fair salaries, and also labor exploitation in minor children that is a consequence of extreme poverty. Poverty can be changed if more opportunities are given to poor people without education.

*“Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.”*

**– Arthur Ashe**



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# Let's Make the World Cleaner

*By Herman Haro*

I would like to improve the environment and climate. If we don't do that, Earth will look like Mars. It will be hot and dry; there will be no water or plants. I want to reduce water pollution, limit cars on the road, reduce wildfires, and make cities clean. The outside air will be nice and clean, and people will be healthy. Animals will not be going into neighborhoods, because they will have their own environment. The water will be nice and clear, and creeks will have green trees and grass around them. The beaches will be clean, too. The world will function better with clean water and clean air.

Climate change is important because it affects everyone. It changes the food chain in the ocean and land. The price of food will go up if the environment changes. People's health is also at risk. If it does not rain, the plants and trees will die and dry up, causing fires and a lot of smoke. If it does not rain, we have no water for fruits and vegetables.

*(continued)*

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Herman wrote this story because there is air and water pollution every day. It needs to be controlled.

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If I had the power, I would change governments' points of view and unite them to make the world cleaner. This will be hard for some people to accept. There are solutions for every problem and all countries should be willing to help. Rich countries would pay taxes to help the poor countries. Countries would work on new technology at power plants to reduce pollution, build new water treatment plants so there would be cleaner water and high pressure, stop deforestation, and improve access to public transportation. Governments should require people to use the trains every day for commuting. We can educate people about water pollution. These are things I would do if I had the power.

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"UN warns of 'rapidly closing' window to avert global warming."  
By Rachel Frazin  
03/20/23  
<https://thehill.com/>



AP Photo/Rick Bowmer  
Steam is emitted from smokestacks at a coal-fired power plant on Nov. 17, 2021, in Craig, Colo.

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# A Professional Home Caregiver

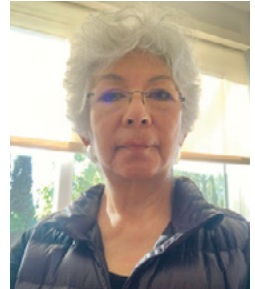
*By Dolores Hernandez*

A professional home caregiver should be well trained in: feeding, changing sheets, changing diapers and clothes, and bathing in caring for their patients. If the patients are unable to move, the caregiver must know how to safely transfer them from place to place. The caregiver needs to clean the bathroom for proper hygiene, cook meals and clean up after, and even take them to doctor's appointments. Patients come in all conditions and sizes. The issue is today caregivers have little training and experience in addressing the needs of their patients being cared for at home. A good caregiver needs to speak the language of their patient. Why? Because good communication is very essential for both parties. The patient will feel better asking for a particular service and the caregiver will feel better in properly serving the patient.

## **If I Had The Power:**

The first change I would make would be to hire people who have at least a minimum of one year's training in order to provide the required help for their patients. Second, the caregiver should also be trained so as not

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Dolores wrote this story because there is a great need for home caretakers as the population ages.

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to injure themselves or the patient. The caregiver needs to evaluate the patient and see how much attention and care they may require. The caregiver should know their own limitations and be up to date in their knowledge. Lastly the caregiver should be required to be up to date in providing proper care through various training seminars.

With more people aging, there will be a greater need for additional caregivers. These caregivers will be required to be well trained to provide the best possible care for patients in their homes.



Photo credit: Getty Images/ iStock

*“They may forget what you said, but they will never forget how you made them feel.”*

– Carl W. Buechner

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# A Better World for Everybody

*By Juliana Hernandez*

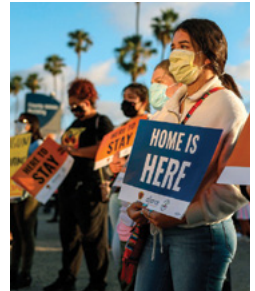
I wish I had the power to stop the harsh laws regarding immigration in the world. I would gather all the most powerful leaders in the world for a change. A system would be created to increase opportunities for immigrants in work, housing, and education. Any country that refuses to respect their human rights would be sanctioned. I would explain to our leaders how our humanity will have a better quality of life and how all our economies will grow stronger.

Some people really have a hard time in their countries and want a better life. There is a stigma toward immigrants that they come to destroy instead of build. When immigrants come, they work hard to make life better for themselves. The result is life is better for everyone.

After serious laws and bills get passed to help people who need help, I would be able to take a deep breath knowing people will enjoy any corner of our world without feeling fear or being pressured. I want nothing more than to stop this nonsense that has existed for ages and has impacted negatively everyone's quality of life.

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Juliana wrote this story because she has experienced what it is like to be an immigrant.



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People hold signs during a rally in support of the Supreme Court's ruling in favor of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, in San Diego, June 2020.

© Getty/Sandy Huffaker/  
AFP - <https://www.americanprogress.org/team/immigration/>

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## Live Better With Less!

*By Bonnie H.*

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Bonnie relocated to California three years ago. She joined Partners in Reading to improve her skills in conversation, reading, and writing English. She is glad that she has met her tutor because they have learned about a lot of things related to America that make her feel passionate about learning English.

I used to be a fast fashion person who bought many new tops, pants and shoes every month. Now, I try to reduce, reuse and recycle clothes, so I ask, can I convince everyone to do likewise?

One day I helped my sister sort out her closet. We pulled out many items. Some had been worn a couple of times or not at all. We decided to do something about it. I prepared several boxes and sorted the clothes that my sister had not worn for over a year. I washed and folded them properly. Then I took those boxes to an orphanage for donation. Finally, when I looked into my own closet, I realized that I actually didn't need all those clothes either.

Nowadays, we see many advertisements on TV, YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook that pressure us to always look new, different and better. Those habits lead to our desire. We use too much petroleum to produce clothes, overuse the resources, and end up with so much more than we need. We have created too much garbage in landfills, clutter in our closets and anxiety in our minds.

If I had the power, I would make everyone aware that what we have is enough so we can see what is most important in our life. Really, what is inside each person is more important than fast fashion, and a cleaner ocean is better than the next cute top.



The idea to reduce, reuse, and recycle clothes has changed me. My friends still love me and I have a sense of purpose. Hopefully, we all can reduce, reuse and recycle together. I believe our planet will be better and if I can do it, then you definitely can do it too!



Photo credit: <https://www.priia.com/reduce-reuse-recycle.html>

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# I Would Live in the Forest

*By Zeinab Ibrahim*



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Zeinab is a wife, mother, grandmother, and student. She has lived in San José, near her daughter, for 10 years.

My daughter and son-in-law have a cabin in the forest. We vacation at this cabin many times during the year. The cabin is on a large lake in California and is surrounded by tall trees. The fresh air is very pure and healthy.

If I had the power, I would move to the cabin and live there for the rest of my life. I would make sure that all my family would be there with me. We would catch fish every day and shop at the local farmer's markets for all our meals.

When I was a child, my brother taught me to swim in the sea. Sadly, one day the waves caught me and tossed me into the underwater currents. I have since been afraid of deep water. This is the reason I do not fish from the boat, but I do fish from the boat dock or shoreline.

Some of my other family members have cabins that are close to my family's cabin. We often gather for celebrations. My power would include all of the extended family as well.

We all wish for the power to change our lives for the better. This move to the cabin would be the best of everything for my family and me.



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# Children of Refugees Break My Heart

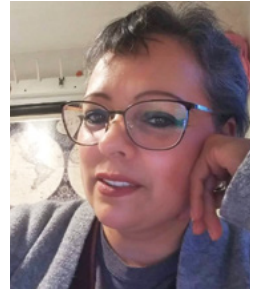
*By Maria de Los Angeles Lepe*

If I had the power, I would change many things for refugees coming from Central America. The children and their families have to flee their own homes in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Children cannot attend school or play in their own cities because they are afraid.

Refugees walk hundreds of miles on dusty roads all day under the hot sun, some of them dying from hunger and thirst on the way. They leave their grandparents, friends, and property because they don't feel safe, and they don't have jobs. When they arrive here, they hope for something better. But many families are separated, and they continue to suffer the uncertainty of not knowing what is going to happen next. What is happening is so sad, especially for the children, the poor little ones. They cry and feel lonely and horrible at a time when they should be playing and laughing.

If I had the power to make changes now, I would make good governments with good leaders. If I had the power, I'd make sure everyone had food to eat. If I had the power, I'd make sure children had good

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Children of refugees break Maria's heart. If she had the power, she would change many things for refugees coming from Central America.

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schools. If I had the power, I would tell young people to start their own businesses to make jobs. If I had the power, I would have good police forces so people can live safely and grow and be in harmony together in the cultures they love, rather than having to run away and start with nothing.

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Migrants, many from Venezuela, are gathering along the border fence in El Paso before the expected expiration this week of a rule limiting border crossings. Credit Todd Heisler/The New York Times



Published May 10, 2023, NY Times, Eileen Sullivan  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/10/us/politics/title-42-border-history-immigration.html>

*“No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark.”*

– Warsan Shire

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## No Place to Call Home

*By Dina Li*

Home sweet home. I'd rush home after a full day of working from the office. Home gives me comfort and a warm, safe place to rest. I think these things are what humans need. But unfortunately, some people around us don't have these basic needs for themselves. They have been struggling under the freeways, at the corners of streets, and at abandoned lot areas battling windy, wet, and cold weather.

The San José Spotlight article from April 2023 indicated San José had 6,650 homeless people in 2022. The top reasons for homelessness are not enough housing, housing that is too expensive, the lack of needed services for those with mental illness, and the lack of needed services for substance abuse. I believe if we can solve those issues, we can end the problem of people living on the streets.

One day, if I have the power, I would build enough houses on the edge of southern San José. I would build many small houses or apartments in that area because there is a lot of empty space there. This

*(continued)*



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Dina wrote this story because she has concerns about people who are homeless. She wishes she could build more houses and provide healthcare services to them.

would let all the unhoused people in San José have a safe place for them to call home. And I would be sure that those people also have professionals to provide the services and care they need.

If we could end homelessness, the quality of life would be improved for both individuals and society as a whole, and everyone in San José would have a place to call home.

675 E. Santa Clara Street Affordable Housing (559 units) was approved in April 2023



Photo credit: <https://www.sanjoseca.gov/Home/Components/News/News/5093/4765>

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## Gathering the Family

*By Porfiria López*

I'm trying to bring my parents here for a visit because we haven't seen each other for a long time. If it happens, it will make us the happiest family in the world. It could happen this year if we fulfill all the requirements of the United States and Mexico. For myself, I had to prove how long I have been in the United States and also to provide my birth certificate. For my parents, I needed to help them gather their documents such as, wedding and birth certificates, ID, passport, and proof of address.

They had to bring these documents to the Immigration Office in Oaxaca and fill out the application for the Cultural Conservation Program. This program reunites Mexican families with relatives in the United States they haven't seen for a long time. The last thing that needs to happen is that they must be interviewed at the Mexican Embassy in Mexico City, where it will be determined if they qualify for a visa to visit the United States for 10 days. Right now, we're waiting for the call from the Embassy to tell us the date of the interview.

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Porfiria wrote this story because her whole family wanted this to happen and tried to accomplish it. Finally, they got some help, and it's incredible that it may happen soon.

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My sister and I tried for years, with little progress, to bring our parents here. We felt like “a lion in a cage”—frustrated by our lack of power. But this year we got help from my sister-in-law’s niece, who works for Mexican Foreign Affairs. She has helped us tremendously to make headway. With her help and renewed hope, we are using our power to change things and bring our parents here.

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Mexican Families Reunite Using B1 and B2 Visitor Visa



Photo credit: <https://documentedny.com/2023/07/19/visitor-visa-interview-b1-b2-parents/>

*“Family is the most important thing in the world.”*

– Princess Diana

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# The Opportunity to Start a New Life

*By Anonymous*

Imagine a world without homeless people. What would it look like? The streets would be cleaner and quieter, it would be safer to walk in the streets, there would be fewer break-ins into cars and houses, there would be no drugs on the streets, and there would be no shoplifting. The police would have more time to deal with more important things, and families would be happier.

If I had the ability and the means, there would be a shelter in every city. They could sleep, take a shower, and find food any time there. In addition, there would be social worker teams and psychologists who would be available to people who want to make a change, get professional help, and start on a new path. I believe that homeless people are good people who made wrong choices in life. If I had the power, I would give them the opportunity to start a new life.

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The author sees homeless people everywhere, and it makes her think about how their lives could be better.

*“It is never too late to be what you might have been.”*

– George Eliot

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# I Like People to be Happy

*By Arefa Omar Hamed*

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Arefa likes people to be happy. If she could teach someone how she brings people together, then they could try it with someone they know.

If I had the power, I would like to be able to bring all people together to help stop fighting. Sometimes in my family we have problems where people are not speaking to each other. I am usually able to bring my family together by making some delicious food and inviting them both over. Before the meal, we start talking about the problem and I listen to both. I have them explain their sides while I think of how I can make each person feel good about their side. I then help explain how and why we should solve this problem. Everyone is happy, and then we enjoy our lunch as a happy family.



Photo credit: iStockphoto

Sometimes the problem can be between neighbors. To help my neighbors start talking again, I will go to one of the neighbors and listen to their side of the problem. Then I will go to the other neighbor and listen to their side of the problem. Then I like to invite them to lunch. Then we start to talk about the problem, and I listen carefully again. I then try to find a solution to bring them together. Bringing them together requires that they both trust me in knowing that I am here to help them. The real power I want is that everyone trusts me, and I can help bring them together. Just imagine if I had the power to do this also with world leaders. We could make peace everywhere!



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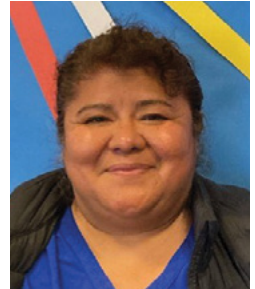
## It's Never Too Late to Start Your Dream

*By Maribel*

If I had the power, I would like to be able to get a better job to support my mother in Mexico and my family in San José. When I landed in the U.S. I was unable to speak or write English. I always took care of my children and never worked out of the home and I wanted to start helping my husband to pay some bills. That is why I started taking classes at the library to learn English. Now I am able to speak, write and read English. I also learned how to communicate by email and take Zoom classes. Now I am studying to get my high school diploma and my career certificate in childcare.

The library helps me a lot. Each of the people at the library is very kind and helpful. During the COVID pandemic, I never felt alone because they called or emailed to help me. They are part of my life's success because they send emails to encourage me, especially my tutors.

For my high school diploma, I am taking many kinds of classes like Math, Social Studies, Science, and English. For my career certificate. I am taking different classes like how we can learn, play and communicate with children. All the things that I am doing now will help me to reach my goal to get a better job and help my family.



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If she had the power, Maribel would like to improve her skills. That is why she decided to study. She will earn her high school diploma and her Career Certificate to get a better job to help her family improve their lives.

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## Wishing My Dreams Come True

*By Ashrafossadat Sadr Hosseini*



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Ashrafossadat spent almost 40 years as a teacher trying to improve the educational system in Iran. She hopes her dreams and hopes for a better world full of peace and love come true.

Some countries face problems with each other or with their own people. Why are countries facing problems with one another? Maybe one reason is they fight for money, land, religion, culture or security issues. Who is responsible for these problems? Politicians or ordinary people? What should we do? People can change even a little if they think more about education, humanity, and finally accept that all people have human rights in the world.

All humans including men, women, disabled, abled, children, and the elderly have the same rights. Children need to have good schooling to be healthy. We must try to work for medical research on diseases. We must also consider their needs instead of producing, buying, and selling chemical weapons and guns.

I am a member of the teacher community in Iran. We teachers all believe in the same idea of teaching new generations. I think we should teach children to be passionate about learning to avoid fighting or any further problems in the world. Therefore, they will have appropriate tools to solve problems down the road, when they grow up.

If I had the power to change the material in children's books, I would put in some materials about antiwar activities and peace and love around the world.

The poet Saadi wrote a poem which is in front of the United Nations' entrance.

*Human beings are members of a whole,  
In creation of one essence and soul.  
If one member is afflicted with pain,  
Other members uneasy will remain.  
If you've no sympathy for human pain,  
The name of human you cannot retain!*

بنی آدم اعضای یک پیکرند  
که در آفرینش ز یک گوهرند  
چو عضوی به درد آورد روزگار  
دگر عضوها را نماند قرار  
تو کز محنت دیگران بی غمی  
نشاید که نامت نهند آدمی



<https://surfiran.com/how-does-irans-education-system-look-like/>

Classroom in Iran,  
from the article  
"How does Iran's  
Education System  
Look Like?"  
- SURFIRAN

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# Helping the Homeless

By Margarita (Mango)

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Mango wrote this story because she wants people to know about the situation with the homeless. She doesn't want people to be rude to homeless people.

I feel bad when I see homeless people. When I see their eyes, I feel their pain. I'm frustrated about their situation. I know that they are homeless for different reasons. Some are homeless because they use drugs or alcohol or they are mentally ill. Others don't have those problems but lose their jobs, home, family. If I could help them, I would make an institution to provide help for them to support their losses whether they want help or not. This is possible in Mexico. If this is possible here then we take them into the institution and when they are ready to live a normal life, they could go.



## HOMELESS RESOURCES



Helps people connect to critical services. Every connection – whether providing hot meals, shelter beds, showers, clothing, or medical care – opens the door to lasting solutions.

[San José](#) | [San Francisco](#) | [Oakland](#) | [Portland](#) | [Chester](#)

Photo credit: City Team Connect. <https://cityteam.org/san-jose/>  
<https://cityteam.org/our-programs/#homeless-resources>

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# I Wish

*By Manju Shahi*

I wish a beautiful red fairy would appear to control the unlimited power and ambitions of humans on earth. We all are created equal and have the natural right to live, but each of us must be responsible to take care of nature.

Many people have superior knowledge that can be used to develop the most advanced technology, which in turn can be used to make advanced nuclear power plants, aircraft, and computers. Doctors can transplant hearts and kidneys. Engineers can design underground/underwater routes to transport gasoline, and so on.

Our lives have become more comfortable, even luxurious, in the 21st century. We are proud of being superhuman. We now have computers to print and delete the words stored in a software application. We, the people, would be so happy if there were an invisible but real superpower of a wave that could delete the negative thoughts of humans forever.

*(continued)*



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Manju is from Nepal and is improving her English reading and writing at PAR. She has been volunteering in the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library children's room since 2015. She hopes that her story will inspire each of us to save the environment and establish peace.

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We know that nobody is perfect by birth, that we learn everything gradually and get our opportunities as they come from time to time. Some people who have become powerful are misusing their power, creating chaos, killing innocent people, and destroying the environment just to fulfill their unlimited ambitions. For example, Russia destroyed residential buildings in Ukraine and killed innocent children too in the war.

We simple living creatures need eight trees for each of us to live healthy lives; yet we see and hear news of explosions, brutality, violence, exploitation and disrespect. And we consume unhealthy products every day.

I therefore wish a beautiful red fairy would appear to save the earth from all this negativity and establish equality, a healthy environment, and peace and happiness all over the world.

*“The sunshine is nature planting a kiss on the face of the earth.”*

*– Michael Basse Johnson,  
Night of a Thousand Thoughts*

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## Good Communication is the Key to Good Relationships

*By Veronica Suárez O.*

If I had the power, I would want to be confident and open in my communications with my kids. I don't want the consequences of our actions to follow us the rest of our lives.

When I was a child, my parents always bossed me around without a care about how I felt. When I was the adult, I sometimes felt that I knew everything. Now, I want to do things differently. I ask my kids about things, so that I can listen and learn from them.

It's hard to say sorry. Sometimes I get frustrated because I lack communication skills when it comes to my feelings. But eventually, I let it all out, cry, and finally say sorry. I end up feeling better and start to heal from the situation.

Living in a country where everything is completely different from where I grew up is difficult. We feel like our kids have more power as citizens than we do as immigrant parents. We learned to rise to the situation and leave behind our bad habits, frustrations, and insecurities. We learned to communicate better with our children.

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Veronica wrote this story because she is suffering the consequences of the bad communication with her husband's parents and with her parents when Veronica and her husband were little.

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When my husband and I became parents, nobody taught us how to do it. We just repeated what our parents did. I believe we can break the vicious cycle that our parents made with my husband and me when we have good communication with our kids.



Veronica Suárez O. and her family



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# Cleaning Up San José

*By Evelyn W.*

I salute the mayor of San José. From the first time he sat in his office, he has walked around with volunteers to clean the area of San José. In my opinion, it was really nice of him to be with a lot of volunteers, walking with them in the street, picking up trash, and giving the homeless places to stay. If I would change something, I would like to give an opportunity for those homeless living in the street to have a good facility to stay in. For example, we need to build a facility for drug abusers and homeless people. And I think that is what the mayor of San José is trying to do. It will be a lot of work, but then again with community help we can all make the changes. So I salute the mayor of San José for the good work he has done so far.

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Evelyn wrote this story because she would like to see San José be a clean and beautiful city and for everyone to have a safe and clean place to live.



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California Chief Service Officer Josh Fryday and San José Mayor Matt Manhan participate in trash cleaning up along a San José highway for Clean California Community Day.

Photo courtesy of [www.californiavolunteers.ca.gov](https://www.californiavolunteers.ca.gov).  
<https://www.californiavolunteers.ca.gov/san-jose-springs-into-action-at-clean-california-community-day/>



## **Introduction to Part 2 - *“Tutor Stories”***

The second part of this book is a little different because Partners in Reading (PAR) asked volunteer tutors to write stories, as well. We have a few examples of their ideas about how to use their powers to repair the world. We hope you enjoy their stories, and we hope this topic enables readers to start thinking about the influence they have to make life better! In many cases, small actions can have large effects.

We thank our volunteers not only for the time they give each week to the learners they meet with, but also for sharing their ideas on connecting with other people to make positive change happen in society. PAR volunteers do a fantastic job of deepening connections to make positive change. We salute all PAR volunteers.



# ***Tutor Stories***



Photo courtesy of San José Public Library: <https://www.sjpl.org/par-tutor>

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# Let's Conquer Cancer!

*By Katie Bauman*



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Katie works in the PAR office as an AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer. She enjoys meeting and supporting tutors and learners and hopes to have a positive impact in the community.

Losing a relative to cancer is heartbreaking. I have lost my grandma, my mother, and my sister (my only sibling) to different kinds of cancer. Although it has gotten smaller over the years, these losses have left a hole in my heart. If I had the power, I would cure all cancers!

I would push wealthy millionaires to donate lots of money toward research for cancer cures. I would create opportunities for scientists and doctors to work together to share their knowledge. We also need people who don't usually work on medical research, but who might have creative ideas for new cures, including engineers and young scientists (even teens).

Creating the cures for each cancer is a HUGE task, but it's not enough. More funding would be needed so that all treatments are available to anyone. Many more medical facilities would need to be built so that people would have access to nearby treatment centers. And I would make it so that all of these treatments were no cost to the patient – the government, private insurance companies, or wealthy donors would cover the costs.

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This would all take a lot of money, work, and commitment. It is worth it. No one should ever die of cancer and no one should have to watch a family member or friend die of cancer. We have made incredible medical advancements in the last few decades. I believe that we are close to finding cures for every different kind of cancer.



<https://standuptocancer.org/>



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World Cancer Day  
2023: A look at  
the top treatment  
breakthroughs  
in 2022

<https://www.cnbctv18.com/healthcare/is-cancer-cure-finally-here-top-treatment-breakthroughs-in-2022-15514181.htm>

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# My Necklace

*By Tracy Hemmeter*



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Tracy enjoys volunteering, being in nature, crafting, and spending time with family and friends.

I constantly wear a necklace with two pendants—a little disc showing the earth and a peace sign—representing my wish for world peace. To me, world peace means no more wars, needless deaths, and destruction of the environment. It also means a happier, healthier planet for all living beings. Everyone would have shelter, clean water, sanitation, food, education, and medical care. Everyone would respect and protect the earth so it can sustain itself and us.

There are ways individuals can help the world move toward peace. Acting with love and compassion reduces negative emotions, helps us see others as deserving of happiness and peace, and helps us be kinder to those around us. Reading about or traveling to other places helps us see and appreciate differences. Donating to or volunteering with organizations that provide necessities (food, shelter, clean water, etc.) relieves people of the need to fight or hurt the earth for them. Individual action is a bottom-up approach to world peace.



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Tracy's necklace



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There also needs to be a top-down approach to world peace. If I had the power, I would make every elected politician and government official around the world take classes on compassion cultivation, environmental protection, and social justice. I would make faith leaders convene annually to develop a joint message about the importance of love and kindness and communicate it to their followers. I would make world leaders safely dispose of or disarm all weapons of war.



I hope my wish for world peace comes true soon.



Photo via Rebuilding Together Silicon Valley

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Collaborate with other community members for a good cause.  
<https://sjtoday.6amcity.com/city-guide/play/volunteer-opportunities-san-jose-ca>

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# A Roof Over Every Head

*By Kendra*

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Kendra enjoys volunteering and making a difference in her community.

If I had the power, I would ensure everybody in California had a home. I would make local governments work together with non-profits and churches. I'd have programs funded by tech giants like Google and Facebook along with state government. I would put tiny home communities in each city district and unincorporated areas and strongly encourage property owners to build, preferably housing, on their properties.

Much of the homelessness is caused by drug addiction. Many addicts do well in a structured environment, such as rehab centers. We also know that at the first opportunity many will leave. Instead, give the person a choice to stay in a rehab center or a Sober Living Environment or they don't have to, but they need to do a urine test every day. They need to get a job and housing. If the person doesn't report, someone from a homeless support team will go looking for them and check on them. We want people to get better and have a home of their own. Many just need a lot more time than they are given now.



<https://calrecoverycenter.com/san-jose-rehab/>

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Another factor in homelessness is mental illness. We no longer have a place to house people with severe mental illness. Therefore, we shuffle them from the psychiatric ward back to the street. Some turn to alcohol or other substances to try and deal with their mental illness and others may get arrested. Jail is a holding place for the poor and those with mental illness.

The people with severe mental illness cannot care for themselves. Their families can't or won't take them in. It falls upon society to take care of the mentally ill, and we aren't doing a very good job. At one time, institutions for the mentally ill were places that for the most part, were horrible and abusive. That doesn't mean that if we tried institutions again that we would get it wrong again. We know much more now and have better techniques than before to deal with mental illness. Right now, what we are doing isn't working so we need to try something different.

If we address these two issues, drug addiction and/or mental illness, I truly believe we would have the power to make change. Every person in California deserves a roof over their heads.

*“None of us are home until all of us are home.”*

– Project HOME

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# Unequal Education

*By Jackie Snell*

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Jackie is a new tutor with Partners in Reading. She enjoys helping M. build her skills. They have fun and laugh a lot during their tutoring sessions.

Unequal education in California makes me angry. One of the problems is that public schools are funded primarily through property taxes. Thus, schools in poor neighborhoods are not funded as well as richer areas. I think it would be impossible to change this formula, so the government needs to supplement funding for poorer schools. Governor Newsom is currently trying to pass a bill that would do that. Some rich schools even require parents to pay an additional fee for each child in public school. Making this process illegal would be a step in the right direction and perhaps a step toward changing the funding formula. I hope Newsom's bill passes and that it works to improve learning for poor children. If I knew how to organize people, I would start a movement. Even businesses would benefit if our adults were better educated. Corporations should be behind this.

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

– Nelson Mandela

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# Rocking My Babies

*By Kristen Vehling*

If I had the power to go back in time, I would return to the time I was a young mother. I would hold my baby girls longer when they fell asleep in my arms. I wouldn't sneak them back into their cribs so I could clean up the kitchen from dinner. Instead, I would breathe in the smell of their freshly-washed hair, trace their soft cheeks with the side of my hands, and hum softly along with the lullaby playing.

During the day, I would worry less about checking things off of my to-do list and would instead lose myself playing Barbies with them. I would spend more time playing the role of Maleficent, chasing their Barbies with my plastic Maleficent doll, me cackling, them squealing. I would lose track of time, like they did.

Of course, I can never return to this time to change things. I remind myself that I did deeply enjoy this time, that I didn't miss it, and that these precious memories are with me forever. This nostalgic feeling reminds me that I need to pay attention to the humans around me right now, who are longing for connection and friendship. To-do lists can wait. Time marches on. I don't want to live with the regret of squandering my time on things that won't matter in 20 years. People are my priority.

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Kristen wrote this story because her daughters are now adults, and she wishes for one day she could go back and savor the moments of their childhood again.





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