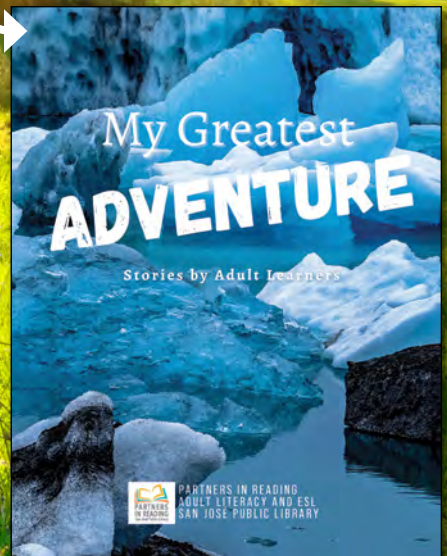


The Bright Side

Stories by Adult Learners

Also includes stories
from our online book



Partners in Reading
Adult Literacy & ESL
San José Public Library

The Bright Side

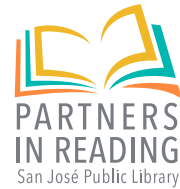
Stories by Adult Learners



PARTNERS
IN READING
San José Public Library

Adult Literacy & ESL
2021

The Bright Side and My Greatest Adventure **Production Teams**



Production Coordinators: *Yui Jenkins, Cassandra Landicho, Ellen Loebel, and Adrian McBride*

Editors: *Sue Rizzi, Victoria Scott, Pam Cornelison, and Ellen Loebel*

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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Tribute of Thanks to Deborah Estreicher



Deborah Estreicher has worked at the San José Public Library for 30 years. She is retiring in 2021 to spend more time with her family, and so we dedicate this book to her. She has enjoyed a successful career in the Children's Department, as an adult reference librarian, and, most importantly, as the Family Literacy Specialist in Partners in Reading (PAR) for many years. With all these assignments, Deborah has distinguished herself by always welcoming customers to the Library as if it were her home.

Deborah is known for her kindness, love of libraries, and dedication to public service. From enthusiastically running monthly family literacy programs and ensuring that each child receives interesting books for their home library to conducting enjoyable and educational story times and field trips, Deborah has always shown everyone how much she enjoys her many roles at the Library. Staff can always count on her to find answers to tricky questions or solutions to unusual problems. If Deborah doesn't know the answer (which is rare), she will dig in and search for the answer until she finds it.

Thank you, Deborah for spending your career with the San José Public Library and your devotion to our customers.

Acknowledgments

Partners in Reading (PAR) is grateful for the help it gets each year from so many sources to offer the wide variety of instruction, primarily through volunteers, that makes PAR a valuable community resource.

For 32 years, the City of San José has provided funding and space so that PAR can offer a wide variety of tutoring materials, comfortable places to meet, and training and support for volunteers and learners.

Beginning in 1985, the California State Library created a network that has grown to more than 105 library literacy programs throughout the state. Since 1989, the State Library has generously funded PAR and has overseen an expansion of services for adults with families, newcomers to the U.S., and others who want to build their basic reading skills. With this expansion, PAR has been able to reach more people and meet as many needs as possible by offering a wide variety of services.

The San José Public Library has worked to integrate PAR into one of its essential services and looks to PAR to suggest innovative ways to reach more community members and to promote lifelong learning for everyone. This investment makes San José a stronger community.

The San José Public Library Foundation supports PAR in serving adults who seek to increase their basic literacy and technology skills. These adults demonstrate that being a lifelong learner can help them expand their world and also benefit the generations that come after them. Education leads to open doors. The Foundation also provides support for adults who need a high school diploma. Free scholarships valued at \$1,500 enable adults to

earn a diploma and a career certificate through Career Online High School. Graduates then have access to additional opportunities, such as better jobs and more training or education, which often require a diploma.

MaryLee McNeal offers workshops and easy-to-follow materials that outline each step of the writing process. MaryLee breaks down the process of composing a story so that it is manageable and not intimidating. Before learners know it, they have drafted a story that is interesting, clear, and meaningful. They can work with their tutors to make it even better, and they soon understand from their own experience that professional writers go through a similar process. Writing doesn't come out perfectly the first time and requires lots of small steps to make it good. After MaryLee, come our intrepid editors, who make as few changes as possible, suggesting corrections only when needed for accurate communication. Thanks to Sue Rizzi, Pam Cornelison, and Victoria Scott.

Each year, PAR volunteers provide thousands of hours of instruction and other services. With this talented cadre of dedicated volunteers, PAR is able to leverage its funding to offer individualized support to so many across San José.

Without PAR adult learners, we would not have a program. We offer our respect and thanks to the amazing adults who prioritize learning so that they can advance and become more self-sufficient and confident. You are an amazing group of people, and we salute you.

Thanks to all of you who wrote stories for *My Greatest Adventure* in 2020, under some very difficult circumstances, and again this year for *The Bright Side*. In both cases, most of the writing process took place online, and through email or sharing documents while speaking on the phone. Writing is never an easy task for most people, and we especially admire you for working so hard to produce these very personal, fascinating stories.

Partners in Reading Appreciates Your Continued Support

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

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Introduction to *The Bright Side* and *My Greatest Adventure*

Since early 2020, many people, including Partners in Reading learners, have had a difficult time because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some people lost their jobs or worked less. Others got sick or lost family members. Parents had to stay home to help their children with school and stay away from other people to be healthy. Other people struggled because they were at home all the time and could not leave to do the things that keep them healthy and happy. Some people lost their homes or didn't have enough food to eat. Other people had many of those things happen, not just one thing. The San José Public Library closed, and people who would have gone to the Library to learn, read, or just find a quiet place to be for a while couldn't even do that.

When the libraries closed in 2020, PAR had just started the process of working with tutors and learners to write their stories for *My Greatest Adventure*. We managed to collect 23 stories, which was too few for publishing a printed book. Instead, PAR created an online book, which we published last year.

Since this time has been so difficult, this year we tried again, with a topic that asked writers to think about the good things that can provide a ray of light and hope during dark times.

We proudly present both collections to you here—the 2021 collection *The Bright Side*, and the 2020 collection *My Greatest Adventure*. As always, our learners go to great lengths to write stories by attending a workshop or by using the using the handouts with their tutors. We hope you enjoy their stories, and that they will help you pay attention to the good things in your life, too.

Program Highlights

Partners in Reading (PAR), the adult literacy program of the San José Public Library for 32 years and counting, assists adults who want to build basic literacy and technology skills. PAR now provides a continuum of education ranging from developing confidence in English-speaking skills all the way through college.

PAR has been funded since its inception by the California State Library and the City of San José to offer basic literacy skills to adults. Over time, basic literacy began to include technology, especially since technology is such an important part of living in Silicon Valley. English as a Second Language came next because San José is home to people from every corner of the world. Sometimes adults are not yet ready to work with a tutor on basic reading and writing until they build their listening and speaking skills, as well as their confidence. All tutoring is in English, so everyone needs to be able to converse in English to study with a tutor.

Literacy tutoring has expanded to include small classes, and most recently, PAR has overseen two exciting diploma programs, a high school diploma and a bachelor's degree program. To date, 121 students have graduated from the Library's Career Online High School (COHS) program, where students earn a diploma and a career certificate. Those graduates are then eligible for a pilot program called Working Scholars, which enables them to earn a bachelor's degree online. Today, 4 COHS graduates are enrolled in Working Scholars.

As we all know, 2020 brought unusual changes that necessitated that staff, volunteers, and learners become familiar with Zoom so that instruction

could continue during the pandemic. While learning how to present and teach online, PAR staff members and volunteers began to offer online weekly classes for building vocabulary with TedEd videos, studying grammar, reading stories from News for You to build comprehension and learn about current events, participating in a book club, and even learning the flags of various countries.

PAR also offers free books and family learning activities to adults who have children under 14 years old and are meeting with tutors. Every other month, PAR sends books home for each child in the family, along with suggestions for how to make learning fun and success in school a priority. PAR also offers outreach to high-need areas of San José, complete with book and activity giveaways to encourage more people to join PAR and become regular library users. Some of these events also include parenting workshops in English and Spanish.

PAR could not offer this wide variety of activities and instructional opportunities without its wonderful volunteers, who donate thousands of hours of service each year. Each one of those hours of time and talent is valued at \$33.61 in California, according to the Independent Sector evaluation for 2020.

PAR is fortunate to have small collections of high-interest, low-reading-level materials available at several branch libraries. These Quick Reads books benefit anyone who wants to build reading confidence and learn about a variety of topics. You can find them at these locations: King Library, Pearl Avenue, Santa Teresa, Evergreen, Edenvale, and Educational Park. We hope you will take advantage of these books and CDs and check them out with your library card.

PAR is looking forward to welcoming volunteers and learners back to the Library and restarting its in-person programs, in addition to re-inventing the way we offer programming. The lessons learned in the last 18 months will certainly help PAR provide instruction in ways that take advantage of both in-person instruction and the flexibility of teaching online. We can't do it without you!

The Bright Side
Stories by Adult Learners 2021

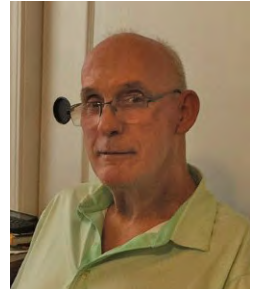
Looking Ahead

By Robert Byers

My bright side is being able to participate in my Bible Study class. So, that was one of my goals when I started to work with my tutor, Linda, five years ago. At that time I could only read a few small words. I could only listen to the discussion in Bible Study because I could not read. To improve my reading, I tried to read every day and practiced learning new words. After I was able to read and understand enough words to read a book, my pastor gave me an easier Bible to read. Also, I met with a couple from Bible Study at their home. They read with me and explained the Bible verses. On March 31, 2021, I was able to read a Bible verse out loud to my Bible Study and to participate in the discussion. It felt really good and I was so proud of myself. I used to be very shy and I have trouble with speech because it is hard for me to say long words. Now, I just slow down. Church is important to me because it is the source of my friends, social life, motivation and inspiration. Reading made possible other new firsts for me:

- I can read my own mail and write my own letters.
- I can read the newspaper.
- I can write better poems because I can express myself with more words.

I am learning to use email and to use a computer. I am looking forward to a future of learning new skills.



Robert is retired. His story is about why reading is important to him.

Living With Music

By Rigo C.



Rigo wrote this story to share his journey and inspire everyone who wants to learn to play an instrument.

When I felt like my life was at a standstill, I went to the store and bought myself a trumpet. The person that helped me was kind and took his time to explain the difference between each trumpet's unique design. I chose a bright red trumpet that was in my price range. I went home content knowing I had made the right purchase. As soon as I got home, I spoke to my friend Johnny over the phone. He asked me several questions about my musical background. I picked up the trumpet and I blew air out attempting to make a sound. The next day I was able to make a sound come out of my instrument. I was struggling to make it sound how I perceived it in my head.

Johnny taught me how to read melodies and how to play them. I was improving my sound like a snail crossing the road on a very hot summer day. As I made progress, he started to teach me how to control my air stream using different techniques. My sound went from just blowing an air stream through my mouthpiece to playing actual musical notes. No One but me was able to stand the noise I was making. As I progressively got better my family stopped complaining. Fast forward to 2021. I have made an immense refinement in my ability to play the trumpet.

I Am a Woman With Wings, Not Cages

By Carmen Cervantes

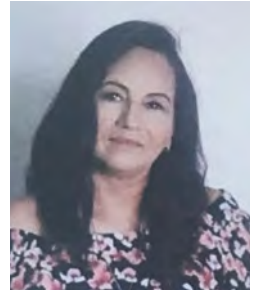
I was born in Mexico. I'm from Michoacan State. I was 20 years old when I came to the United States. I crossed the border illegally with my cousin and my sister. The coyotes kept us isolated for three days in San Ysidro, California, waiting for the chance to move north. On the third day, early morning, the coyote came to the room, opened the door and ordered us to leave. He said the car was there waiting for us. So the three of us jumped into the trunk. Thank God everything came out well.

We landed in Los Angeles. We decided to come to San José. I found a job in a home taking care of a boy with Down Syndrome. I lived in the home for one year with the family. They gave me food and my own room. I felt safe. After a year, I got a better job and better pay as well.

I had noticed the way to live here was completely different from Mexico because it was less complicated there. We had no phones or electricity. I remember when I was little the life was easier in Mexico.

The people didn't know how to write. School wasn't the priority. The people seemed happy even though they lacked many things like clothes, shoes, and

(continued)



Carmen wrote this story to motivate herself and to show others what we can do.

food. The women worked hard in the house, making tortillas by hand and cooking. They did the same thing every day and the men worked hard in the fields. When the sun went down, I saw the men walking toward their houses with their hoes on their backs. They looked very weary.

These things made me leave my roots and my parents to have a better life and help my parents with money. I bought a used car, and in 1987 I became a citizen. I learned a second language. Then I asked my mom to come to the United States. But unfortunately, she wasn't able to come for health issues. After three months she passed away.

Three years later I met my husband and thank God I now have two daughters. Finally, I have my heart full of love with my two grandkids and another child on the way.



© Marisa Peñaloza/NPR

Nowruz

By Mitra

Winter can be depressing for many people. Winter can be cold and dark, but winter doesn't last forever.

Iranian people, like many others, look forward to spring. Iranians celebrate spring each year. This celebration is called Nowruz. Nowruz is the start of spring, usually March 21. All Iranians celebrate this event.

I want to explain the ancient, traditional custom. For all Iranians, the traditional Nowruz decoration is the haft sin table. Haft means "seven." Sin is the letter S. What you put on the table are things that start with S. There are seven things that you put on the table and what they represent:

Sumac (sumac) – the color of sunrise

Serke (vinegar) – age and patience

Senjed (lotus nut) – love

Samanoo (wheat pudding) – wealth

Sabzeh (wheat grass) – rebirth

Sib (apple) – health and beauty

Sir (garlic) – medicine

Some people also put other things on the table. Fish, coins, candles, the Quran, and flowers are common.

Iranians prepare special foods for Nowruz. One example is sabzi polo mahi. This is rice and vegetables and fish. Another dish is kuku sabzi. This is egg and vegetables. Nowruz is important for Iranians because it is the beginning of a new year.



Mitra has been in the United States for 5 years. She is very happy to be learning English.

Visiting Exciting New Places in My New Car

By Herman Haro



Herman wrote this story because it shows the difference between owning a new car and an old car. His old car prevented him from going to new, different places. Now he can enjoy stress-free journeys.

My older car is a 1992 Lincoln Continental, and I was afraid of driving it very far away. It always needed a lot of repairs that cost a lot of money. I could not drive it far away. In 2017 I purchased a new car. It gave me more freedom to travel very far distances, without worrying about anything. I visited many places like San Francisco, Coit Tower, the Golden Gate Bridge, Lombard Street, Pier 39, Carmel By the Sea, and Santa Cruz. I purchased a 2017 Toyota Corolla, a compact car, for fuel economy. My car is a shiny slate-blue four-door sedan and just the right size for the city. I really enjoy the new places I visited and journeys along the way there.



Coit Tower, San Francisco,
© Smithsonian; Structural Engineers Association of
Northern California

Good News

By Dolores H.

My son had a tragedy in his condo. For no reason, the sprinkler popped up at midnight. He called 911 for help. He took his family to the Marriott Hotel to save them from the water pressure. My daughter-in-law and my son grabbed the boys, who were sleeping at that time. The water destroyed the carpet, wooden floor, and most of their furniture. To repair the condo was going to take more than a month. Then I suggested they stay in my house. He talked to his wife, and they surprised me with, "Yes, we will stay in your house."

They moved all their belongings to storage but brought a lot of toys and clothing to my house for their two boys, Jeremiah, 4, and Myles, 2 years old. Since they moved into my house, my life has changed a lot. Hearing little voices laughing and feet running around the house is something I never imagined. I can live again having children around my house.

I spend most of the day with my grandkids, playing basketball and soccer in the backyard, doing puzzles, dancing, and singing. Every night we enjoy dinner, and my daughter-in-law cooks for all of us. After dinner, we watch television for ½ an hour, then Mama takes them for a bath, and I read a book to them before they go to the bed.



Dolores wants to dedicate her story to her tutor Jim, who encouraged her not to give up learning English.

Gardening

By K. Lao



K. learned to grow succulents during the COVID-19 pandemic so she wouldn't be lonely. She communicated with people online who have the same interest and got to know an elderly woman who taught her a lot about growing succulents. This woman reminds K. of her mother.

This COVID pandemic had gotten me more lonely, due to the shelter in place and the order to stay away from people who I was not quarantined with. I'm not a computer savvy person, but I am good enough to operate online services and other applications. However, from this pandemic, I got more involved in using the computer. Eventually, I found a fun hobby, which was gardening and networking online with people who have the same interests.

I had downloaded NextDoor and FaceBook applications, then selected groups that I was interested in. These groups are listed under gardening and succulents. From both websites, I have been receiving multiple notifications. I'd been reading, responding, and making comments to the posts on the groups' pages. People may ask to trade plants, identify a specific plant, share photos of their garden, etc. By joining the groups, I have learned to care for and love succulents.

While I was browsing for plants, I met Thelma on FaceBook, who sold me my first succulent. Thelma is an elderly retired woman from the Philippines who enjoys her time gardening, specifically succulents.

She loves to share her knowledge on how to grow many types of succulents. She knows all the names of her succulents in her garden. I felt that the time I spent with Thelma reminded me so much of my dear mother, who also enjoyed gardening. From the experience and knowledge I gained from Thelma, I see myself enjoying and growing succulents in my own garden as a hobby. This is the bright side of my story.

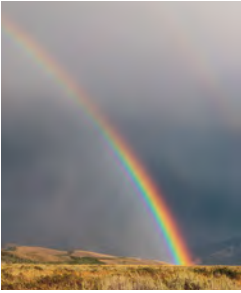


“We may think we are nurturing our garden, but of course it’s our garden that is really nurturing us.”

– Jenny Uglow

Optimism Makes Me Happy

By Joyce



Joyce likes to share ideas and learn more English.

My bright side is to stay optimistic. COVID-19 has been attacking humans for over a year now. Life has changed. Children can't go to school, people can't meet with their families, and many have died.

My kids asked me, "Mom, why can't we go to school? Why do we always stay home? What's happening outside?" I explained what happened. I know that COVID-19 makes them feel cooped up like chickens in a henhouse. This made me sad, like a kid that lost her parents. My friend Lucia told me, "After a storm you're sure to see a rainbow. You must learn to enjoy your life."

We became very optimistic about the COVID-19 situation because we were encouraged by my husband and my friend. My husband is always smiling as warm as a summer day and amusing as a hilarious clown. That makes us happy.

Another way our family cheered up was when, one day, we watched the news and my daughter asked, "Can I teach younger kids English online?" My husband and I cheerfully replied, "Yes!" and we clapped. Then I wrote an advertisement, planned a

lesson about learning English with an online program called Learning English with K and D, and sent it to my friends. They got the advertisement and allowed their kids to join this event. At first, it was difficult to run the program, but we solved the problem, which also makes us happy.

Finally, we understand that staying optimistic is worth cherishing in our family.



<https://preply.com/en/blog/online-spanish-classes-for-kids>

“Optimism is a happiness magnet. If you stay positive, good things and good people will be drawn to you.”

– Mary Lou Retton

From the Ranch to the City

By Maria Lepe

After 21 years, Maria is still working at Zanotto's. Her family loves living in San José.

I grew up on a ranch in Jalisco, Mexico. It was a lot of hard work every day of the week. We had cattle and small animals, and we also grew vegetables and fruit. But as the family of nine children grew into adults, the ranch could not support us all.

Some of my brothers and sisters went to San José, California. They talked about how nice it was and about how there were plenty of jobs. In 1995, I decided to go there. I traveled with my husband, Hector, and my young daughter, Maria, and son, Daniel.

We arrived in San José and knew we would like to live here. We stayed with my sister Monica while we looked for jobs and saved money. I found my first job in only two days!

My first job was at a bakery. A few years later, I got a higher paying job as a waitress. Then one of the waiters mentioned a job opening at a grocery store. That sounded really good!

I applied and got a part-time job working at Zanotto's Market. I was working the two jobs and it took all of my energy. When another employee in the grocery store didn't show up, I got lucky. They relied on me to do the job. Zanotto's hired me full time and I quit the waitress job.

The Zanotto's owners were very nice to me and even provided English lessons. It's a family-run business that treats me like family. During the time I have worked there—since 1999—many of the Zanotto children have grown up to become managers. I am now one of their longest serving employees and I still enjoy working there. I expect to work there until I reach retirement age. I love San José and Zanotto's and my life in California, though I will always love Mexico, too.



The Benefits of Wearing Masks

By Dina Li



Most people have negative views about this pandemic. Dina wants to share some positives about this pandemic.

Sneezing will give you unwanted attention. That's no longer a concern for me this spring, because my allergies are no longer a problem.

Usually, every year during the spring, I'd have terrible allergies. My nose would drip, my throat would be itchy, and I'd have the unwanted and constant sneezing. I'd have to take medicine to cure my allergies. This would cause drowsiness and fatigue. I had trouble sleeping because of the medicine's side effects, like dry throat. The next day, I'd still be tired and wouldn't want to go walking outside.

In the late spring of 2020, we were required to put on a mask by the local authority when we were in public because of the coronavirus. At the beginning of the pandemic, there was a shortage of surgical masks. Some people were price-gouging masks. I had to get creative. At first, I searched how to sew a mask on the internet. Then I learned how to use a sewing machine to make my own masks by watching YouTube videos. I also made extra masks for friends and family members as gifts.

Because masks were on my face all the time when I was outdoors, my allergy symptoms were no longer a problem. I think wearing a mask on my face protected my nose from the pollen. I was able to keep walking outside, even during the spring season. I no longer feel embarrassed sneezing in public due to allergies.



“Can’t we sleep ten minutes more? I was having a lovely dream about sneezing without covering my mouth, and giving everybody germs.”

– Daniel Handler

Looking for the Good

By Porfiria Lopez



Porfiria wrote this story because this year has been difficult. It helps her look for the good moments.

One bright side of the pandemic is that we are able to have quality time with our family. Before the pandemic, our lives were so busy that we didn't have time to really communicate with each other. Our two boys went to school, and my husband and I went to work. We could just say, "Good morning," "Bye," and "Good night." And I used to do all the chores at home.

However, because of the stay-at-home order, I have had the opportunity to talk with and teach the boys how to do chores, decide what to eat, and how to cook it. We divided up the chores, and the boys even learned to do the laundry in our apartment building's laundry room.

Another bright side is that we have found we can handle the changes that have resulted from living with the coronavirus. Now we have new ways to learn. I used to go to the library to learn English, and the boys went to school. Now we all do our classes on Zoom. Getting more experience using the computer makes me so happy.

Other bright sides are that my husband and I have kept our jobs throughout this pandemic year. By following the recommendations of the CDC, our family has remained healthy. We are so thankful to have survived this year, and we continue to see many bright sides as we meet the challenges brought on by the pandemic.

A Bright Future

By Patricia

I lost my job cleaning houses. At first I was very mad because I had only worked 3 months with my friend, and then, nothing. She said there was no work because of the pandemic. I was very disappointed. But then I realized there might be new opportunities for me. I began to look for new houses and I found different people that needed their houses cleaned. I am happy because I like to clean houses. I get to know different people from different cultures who teach me many different things. The ladies I work for are very nice to me. I love my new job. My son-in-law is a graphic designer and is designing a logo for me. The name of my company is Crazy Clean and the logo will have a broom dancing around and the hair flying. My daughters think I really am crazy!

Now I realize that losing my job wasn't all bad. I really like to clean houses. I have started my own business. My future looks bright!



Patricia is from Mexico. She is married and has two children.

“There’s something wrong with a mother who washes out a measuring cup with soap and water after she’s only measured water in it.”

– Erma Bombeck

My Voting Experience

By Maria Nieto



Maria says, "Thank you, PAR, for being there for me to support my learning and expand my knowledge. Your enthusiasm for my successes has really encouraged me."

I feel very excited to have been able to participate in this historic election for the first time voting as an American citizen.

This adventure started with studying hard next to my tutor to get my citizenship. In October I was scheduled for my interview. There were butterflies in my stomach from nervousness and excitement. I was fortunate that there was an opening the following week to take the Oath. After I was sworn in I registered to be eligible to vote in this memorable election, November 3, 2020.

The process was not as complicated as I thought it would be. I have to say thanks for the very helpful materials I was provided with from the PAR program, and a Zoom meeting to learn about what to expect as a first-time voter. The voter guide was a useful resource. I also had help from my husband reading the ballots at home and discussing the content.



The Cycle of Volunteering

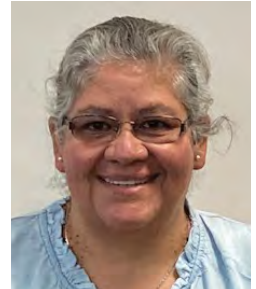
By Veronica Suarez Orozco

My volunteer job helped me when I needed it the most. I live in downtown San José, where I volunteer at La Mesa Verde and the Methodist Church. I stopped volunteering because of the pandemic.

My husband and I don't qualify for monetary aid because we are undocumented immigrants. We worried because I am a housewife, and if my husband doesn't work, we don't earn money. We looked for places providing free food, especially Mexican tortillas, which were very difficult to find. We had to use our savings to get by.

We have a little vegetable garden. During our time volunteering with La Mesa Verde, we taught other families to grow their own vegetables. I missed helping at the Methodist Church, making food bags for the neighborhood families.

Volunteering helped us a lot because we connected with others, some with more monetary need than us in that moment. When the opportunity to receive financial help came, we were very happy. The resources arrived from La Mesa Verde and the Methodist Church at the same time. That's



Veronica is a volunteer and wants to share her gratitude for receiving help when she and her family needed it the most.

(continued)

how we realized that being volunteers gave us back something more than what we gave to the community.

I never felt more proud of the work that I did to help others. We never expected to get anything for volunteering because we just like to help. We were so surprised to receive money when we needed it the most. It is always gratifying, but this time my volunteering was brighter than I expected.

Volunteers at
La Mesa Verde



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“Wherever you turn, you can find someone who needs you. Even if it is a little thing, do something for which there is no pay but the privilege of doing it. Remember, you don’t live in a world all of your own.”

– Albert Schweitzer

How I Got Surprised

By J. Robbins

My boyfriend of 15 years passed away from heart problems in May, 2020. I felt very hurt by his passing away. I was very sad and lonely for almost a year. On Valentine's Day, my niece and her daughter came by to visit me. They brightened my day by giving me a surprise Valentine's gift. I got chocolate heart candy and a stuffed dog that looked like my pet dog, Shiloh. They also gave me a beautiful card that said, "I love you, Tia." It was a big surprise for me.

When my boyfriend passed away, I thought that I would never meet anyone again. To my surprise, when my friend came from Texas, her cousin came with her to help her move. He was only going to stay for two days and then turn around and go back to Texas. But I could see we had a physical attraction. I'd never met anyone who could make me laugh so much. Four months later, he's still here with me. He was someone I never expected to meet. His name is Dandruck. If you were to see him, he'd make you laugh, too!



J. has been a PAR learner for a long time and enjoys writing stories on topics that interest her. She enjoys meeting with her long-time tutor to build her reading, writing, and math skills.

“Laughter is an instant vacation.”

– Milton Berle

The Bright Side of Retirement

By Ashraf Sadr



Ashraf decided to write about retiring from her job as a math teacher.

Almost 55 years ago, I got a job as a teacher in Iran. I was very happy because I loved my job, teaching, and students. At the time, one of my coworkers retired and we had a celebration for her. Iran requires teachers to retire after 30 years, but I didn't want to retire ever. After 27 years I was close to retirement. I thought about it all the time. I decided to build a private school. It was a great idea, but it needed a lot of planning and a lot of money. I couldn't do it alone. I found 3 partners who were interested in my idea. We searched to buy a house or a piece of land. We requested a loan from some banks but didn't get a positive answer. Unfortunately, we didn't have enough money. We made 3 offers to buy a house. After 24 hours the owner told us, neighbors don't want you to establish a school, because of traffic and noise.

We didn't give up hope. Suddenly, a miracle occurred. A bank gave us a big loan and we found a big house. We started working hard, demolished the building, and rebuilt a new one. After 11 months, our school was ready for students. We established a 4-story school with 200 students. The school's name is Hope of Tomorrow. Our school is working well and gains more students every year. I would like to teach until the last day of my life. I want to go back to teaching and help students in the U.S.

My Walmart

By Manju Shahi

The bright side of my life is working in Walmart. Walmart is a bright and friendly place where I am encouraged to have a great day as well as a bright future. This is true even though I was a professional teacher and owned a private high school as my business in Kathmandu, Nepal.

I joined Walmart, which is located in Mountain View, California, in 2017. Walmart is a place of opportunity. A local businessman by the name of Sam Walton was the founder of Walmart. He founded it in 1962, in Rogers, Arkansas. The headquarters of Walmart is in Bentonville, Arkansas. Walmart Inc. is a multinational retail corporation that operates a chain of hypermarkets, discount department stores, warehouses and grocery stores around the world. The motto of Walmart is "Save Money. Live Better." I have learned a very important business culture here.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic caused the coronavirus to spread all over the world. In addition to causing financial havoc, it caused sickness and death everywhere. There were many human fatalities. More than 600,000 people in the United States alone have died. Most of the heads of nations are still struggling to eradicate the coronavirus. I self-

(continued)



Manju wanted to share her feelings with those who love education and hard work.

quarantined for 14 days without a paycheck. I used that time to type and print out my composition writings. Also, I practiced driving on the freeway. Many people have lost their jobs, but I am still working at my Walmart. I will work here, hopefully, as far as my hard work and talent will take me. These are the bright sides of my life.

Top photo:
1970's Walmart,
courtesy of The
Walmart Museum

Bottom photo:
2020's Walmart,
Mountain View



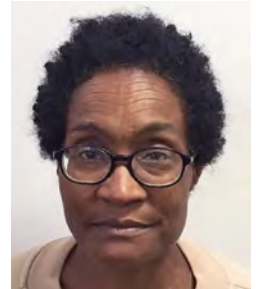
Neighborhoods

By Jackie Smith

Community organizations in neighborhoods are helping their surroundings. Some of these are Ujima and the Roots Community Clinic, African-American Community Service Agency, CityTeam Ministries, and the Low-Income Self-Help Center.

Viewing the bright side, the pandemic has made the U.S. stronger for parents, who are like teachers who are home-schooling. Minority families are strengthened by family relationships and better ways of communication. Also, students are not on the street as much, so they are safer. I learned to do more things, like Zooming, and virtual learning through PAR, and I look forward to using it with my grandchildren. People are using tablets as well as smart phones. We are able to have more conversations with groups of people, and also “talk to text”.

We are in the techie age of the future, and that’s the bright side!



Jackie perseveres even when things are difficult. The small steps on the way to success bring her a lot of joy.

“We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future.”

– Franklin Delano Roosevelt

Finding PAR

By Maria Torrico



Maria came to the U.S. more than 20 years ago. She is married with three children. She has enjoyed studying with PAR.

The bright side in my life was when I learned how to understand what I read.

In Bolivia, when I started middle school, it was difficult for me to read and do my homework. My cousin Delia encouraged me to read sentence by sentence and read books that are not too difficult to understand. After I followed what she said, little by little I improved my reading.

When I came to America I got frustrated because I could not read English. I would get very angry and upset. One day I went to the library to get books for my kids.

Afterwards I saw a sign about the PAR program. I thought, "This is going to be my savior for all my English reading problems." Meanwhile I had the urge to sign up for this program to improve my reading and writing. I called the office to take the test, and I passed.

The next day I was accepted into PAR. They found the right tutor to come with me through this whole adventure. Finally, I found someone who has patience and good qualities to help me in this journey that is still continuing.

Spring Training for the Oakland A's

By Thomas Valdivia

The bright side of my life is watching the Oakland A's spring training. Spring training is for baseball players so they can train for their regular season. All teams do spring training right now, before the regular season starts. Opening Day is April 1st. It is too late for us to go to spring training this year, but we will go next year.

When I'm at spring training I see the baseball players; they are big and tall. They play in a stadium in Mesa, Arizona. The weather is very hot! There are lots of green seats. Me and my friends call it the green hole. There is brown dirt and green grass. I smell victory. I smell ice cream. I like the chocolate malts. The A's have about twelve games. We usually see four or five of them. I like to see the home runs, people fighting for foul balls and good base stealing. You should go to spring training if you can!



Thomas wrote about spring training because it's fun.



Hohokam Stadium,
Mesa Arizona

They Still Watch Over Me

By Cynthia



Cynthia wrote this story in memory of her dad and his friend, who look after her even after they passed.

My dad and his friend Sonny passed away, but they still watch over me. I met Sonny when I was babysitting for his kids. Dad and Sonny met because of me.

Sonny and Dad were always together. Dad was retired and usually sat on the front porch waiting for his buddy Sonny to come home from work. Dad would jump into Sonny's car, and they would drive to Popeye's Chicken to eat. Sonny would take Dad to his doctor appointments, and sometimes they went joy riding to see the sights. Sonny and Dad were good friends, like two peas in a pod.

When Dad got very sick, and was even hospitalized, Sonny was right there with us. Dad asked Sonny if he would take full responsibility for me when Dad no longer could. Sonny told Dad he would.

After Dad passed, Sonny and I became very close. Sonny was my rock. He took me shopping to get clothes and to buy food. He took me on joy rides. He never judged me. Sonny passed away last February. I am lost and confused without him and don't know what to do.

People pass, though, and you have to push yourself to keep moving and find the bright side. I know Dad and Sonny are still watching over me because I see signs sometimes, like birds and squirrels who give me a message that Dad and Sonny are telling me everything will be okay, and, “You will be fine, kid!” This is my bright side.



Guadalupe River
Park and Gardens

“Never. We never lose our loved ones. They accompany us; they don’t disappear from our lives. We are merely in different rooms.”

– Paulo Coelho



My Greatest Adventure
Stories by Adult Learners 2020



My Greatest ADVENTURE

Stories by Adult Learners



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My Vacation in Nicaragua

By Sonia Baltodano

Sonia wrote "My Vacation in Nicaragua" because it was amazing. She went with her friend from high school, and they enjoyed it together.



We arrived around 11 a.m. We ate a delicious lunch in the main lodge. We went outside. We saw beautiful trees. We walked over a small bridge. They have horses. We saw a "dormilon" (animal sleepy head).

On the first day we took a long hike. We walked on gravel roads. We wore boots and carried walking sticks. We forded rivers, walked around a beautiful mountain, crossed bridges, and we walked down slippery roads. I felt nervous, but it was amazing, fabulous, a lot of adrenaline. Finally we found a beautiful waterfall called El Eden. We are seniors, but we did it. It wasn't easy.

When we got back to the main lodge, we drank coffee and ate Nicaraguan cookies. Then we had dinner, and we saw a movie. Our rooms were high on the mountain, far from the main lodge. I was so tired, but I saw a wonderful view. The weather was cold. I slept with a mosquito net, but I didn't see one.

The next day, I got up at 6 a.m. I took a warm shower. After it we had a good breakfast, a plate with beans, cream, eggs, fried bananas, fruits, cheesecake, pitaya juice, and coffee. They gave us a cacao bean. They said it gives a lot of energy.



We saw the cacao process and how the silkworms make silk. The silkworms ate baby morera leaves, lettuce, or quelite cake. The silkworm cocoons look like cotton.

They have a place for preservation of butterflies. It was a room with fishing nets. I saw some zebra butterflies. Also we saw arboricola frogs. They are small, green, and have red eyes. I held one on my hand. It jumped to my friend's shoulder, and she was screaming, and we were laughing.

We walked around coffee trees. I took a red coffee seed. During our walk we saw a collection of old Jeeps. I love Jeeps, and my friend took a picture of me with them.

We had a good time. It was an amazing place, and we gained new knowledge.

*“May your adventures bring you closer together,
even as they take you far away from home.”*

– Trenton Lee Stewart



My Surprise Adventure

By Robert Byers

Robert is retired. His story is about something that happened to him.



My adventure was not planned. On January 15, 2020 at 4 p.m., I was sitting in my bedroom studying. Suddenly, there was a loud crash and my mobile home shook hard. I heard things fall off the shelves and break. My housemate, Elias, and I ran to the living room to see what happened, but we could not open the front door. It was jammed because the walls were crooked. We had to wait for firemen to help us get out through the back door.

When we were outside, we found a fire truck, a police car, and an ambulance. A car had run into my mobile home and knocked it off the foundation. I thought it was an earthquake, but it was an accident. After the firemen inspected the mobile home, they had to “red tag” it. This meant it was no longer safe to live in. This was a helpless feeling. We could have been homeless, but Elias called his niece, Bonnie. She and her husband, José, said we could stay with them. They had extra bedrooms, so Elias and his wife and I each had our own bedroom and bathroom. Thank God, we had a place to stay. Bonnie and José did not charge us any rent, so we helped with household chores, bought food, and paid for utilities until we could move back into our own place.

Meanwhile, there was a lot to do. We had to move the useable furniture, clothes, and other things out of the mobile home and into a storage unit. Then I had to find a new place to live. But first, I had to talk to my insurance agent to find out what I could afford. The driver had



insurance too, so together with mine, I could buy a new mobile home. The new one had to be built first. It took longer because the shelter-in-place order stopped construction. Moving home was delayed until the summer.

There were a lot of people to talk to and a lot of papers to sign. This kept me busy for many weeks. I had to have the damaged mobile home removed because I wanted to stay in the same space at the same mobile home park. There was new furniture to buy and dishes and glassware to replace.

I am excited about my new home because it is larger and everything is new. We moved into our new home at the end of June. This adventure was not a fun one, but it had a happy ending.

“We have stories to tell, stories that provide wisdom about the journey of life. What more have we to give one another than our ‘truth’ about our human adventure as honestly and as openly as we know how?”

– Rabbi Saul Rubin



Traveling to a New Adventure

By Maria Cuevas

Maria wrote this story because she would like to travel, and it would be great to visit North Dakota, a state she has never been to before.



I will feel great joy in me when with my family, especially my oldest granddaughter, who is very curious about traveling to know the state where the Native Sioux are living.

We are very interested to know the history of Native Americans and to see how they are living and listen to them about their ancestors.

We would like to see the rituals, the masks, the clothes for every occasion. Also, if it will be possible to taste their food.

I would like to visit them at longhouses and see inside, and ask them where is the bedroom?, where is the kitchen? and where is the bathroom? But first we'd like to know the history of when Joseph Brant became a Christian, and when he worked on translating the Christian Bible into Mohawk.

We will fly from San José, California, to North Dakota, and during the flight I will explain to my granddaughter the common things between Native Sioux and Native Aztecas in both countries, the U.S. and Mexico, like the way the tribal chief always wore special clothes.

The Sioux has a shaman and Aztecas have a shaman, too.

When finally we arrive there and we can see all the things we want, then I can say this was my GREATEST ADVENTURE.

When I came to this country I started to hear interesting histories about Iroquois who call themselves Haudenosaunee, meaning "People Building a Longhouse," and I've felt the wish to go to that state.



My Cyber Adventure

By Marisela Cuevas

Marisela has been married for 24 years. She is a mom of three children. Marisela considers herself a relentless woman.



When the pandemic started, I never realized that my whole life would be a crazy adventure, especially in my work area. I am a community worker, and I love doing my job as an in-person instructor. I never imagined doing my work any other way. My first thought was, “How can I do that?” I was afraid, but at the same time I was excited about learning how to teach in a new style through online applications. That was when my cyber adventure began.

I had to take many steps. First, I started to explore some platforms such as Meet, Zoom, Webex, and Microsoft Teams, among others. Second, after researching the platforms and based on my work requirements, I decided to use Zoom. Then I had to learn all about Zoom’s features, such as how to schedule a meeting, how to use breakout rooms, how I could help the participants if they needed help, and any other issues related to the Zoom platform.

Nothing was easy when I started this adventure. The hardest part in the whole process was engaging the parents to participate in this new style of distance learning. I had to face many obstacles and barriers that gave me a headache, but at the same time helped me to see these as a growth opportunity. In the end, my accomplishments were My Greatest Adventure: 19 virtual presentations, many Zoom trainings, and more than 100 participants.





The City of Bessbrook

By O'Neal Durgin

O'Neal went to Ireland, and it's very interesting.



My name is O'Neal Durgin, and I have traveled to Ireland. Ireland is the most beautiful place to visit.

The city of Bessbrook was interesting. I enjoyed the country atmosphere. I went to the technology museum, which had a lot of old artifacts from Ireland. In particular, there were old military cannons. I had never seen those before.

In Bessbrook, there is a bridge called the 18 Arches. It is around a quarter of a mile long. It was constructed in 1849, and is the highest viaduct in Ireland.

I also went to the Giant Causeway, which is one of the natural wonders of the world. The Giant Causeway is made of lava and erosion, which form hexagon-shaped rocks.

While at the Giant Causeway area, I also went to the Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge. The bridge is 66 feet long and is 98 feet above the rocks below. I did not want to go across the bridge, but my family went across the bridge as I watched. It was high.

We finished the trip off by going to the Guinness brewery in Dublin. We got a free beer, and the Guinness was the best Guinness that I ever had.



My Unforgettable Moment

By Rosa

Rosa is so happy to be in the Partners in Reading program. She believes it is great to show people there is no limit to learning, especially when someone can get an education.



One of the greatest adventures of my life was the first time I traveled to San Diego to visit SeaWorld. I loved traveling along the road to San Diego, looking at the beautiful mountains and farms with horses and goats. Everything was new to me at SeaWorld. I had never seen a place like that before with all the whales and dolphins. People were friendly and welcoming.

My daughter, Denice, was four years old then, and she loved petting the dolphins, monkeys and seals. We also saw lions and tigers in cages, and we saw colorful parrots that whistled to us. When we petted the dolphins, their skin was so smooth. The dolphin pool smelled like the ocean. We enjoyed watching seals bounce balls off the tips of their noses. The seals also waved to us with their flippers. We made videos of Denice petting the animals, which we love to watch at home.

I liked the acts on stage at SeaWorld, where trainers had dogs perform tricks. SeaWorld was a very special place because it made me feel happy being there. Our family ended up going to SeaWorld four times because we loved it so much.

“Traveling in the company of those we love is home in motion.” – Leigh Hunt





Hello Kitty's Adventure

By *Monica Fernandez*

Monica wrote this story because she loves Hello Kitty.



Hello Kitty wanted to go on an adventure. She wanted to go across America to go and find her adventure there. She took a plane from New York City across America. She had a ticket to fly around the world. Hello Kitty had her suitcase packed and she was on her way across America. She had a very long flight to get there. She was a very happy kitten. She wore her best dress and her sparkling shoes.

She wanted to fly into the city of San José, CA. When the flight was over, she got off the plane, got her suitcase, and hopped on the VTA bus. In San José she saw many tall buildings and coffee shops. Her favorite coffee shop is Starbucks. She loves to drink cafe latte and eat at McDonald's. She met many people.

There was a person in San Jose. Hello Kitty said, "Do you know the way to San José?" Hello Kitty said, "Hello! My name is Hello Kitty. I came all the way from New York City. Where are you from?" The lady said, "I am from here. I live here in California." Hello Kitty brought her something from New York City. She opened the gift. The lady was so surprised to see it was a puppy, so she named the puppy Ruby. Her name was Maria, and Hello Kitty flew back with them to New York City.

Hello Kitty says, "The end. See ya."



Learning English Has Opened Up My Life

By Chelo Garcia

Chelo wrote this story because learning English has changed her life forever.



When I left Mexicali, Baja California, in 2004 to move to the U.S., I met my friend Julian. He invited me for a cup of coffee at Starbucks. He ordered a cup of mocha coffee for me and a cup of black coffee for himself. I drank my coffee but it didn't have any sugar in it. It was a black coffee. We both laughed because we got the same coffee. He apologized for not knowing how to say in English what kind of drink we wanted to order. I realized then that I needed to learn to speak English.

I started my adventure taking English classes. I was working at Los Altos Country Club as a housekeeper for one year. Then I got another position as an attendee in the lady's locker room. It was very difficult for me because the members only spoke English. My co-worker, Rita, laughed at me when I didn't pronounce correctly the members' last names or some new words.

After 5 years of being a resident in the U.S., my sister Imelda and I filled out the application to become citizens. I studied for the test, and even though I was very nervous for it, I passed!

Now I feel very happy because I can order my favorite coffee drink and I feel more comfortable speaking and listening in English. I now have better conversations with members, co-workers and my boss.

Thanks to my tutor, Edie Kuhlmann, for her patience and teaching me a lot. She is part of my greatest adventure.





The Best Adventure in My Life

By Tatiana Gutierrez

Tatiana wrote her story because she wants to share her experience about how her life has changed. She hopes her story can help people who are in the same situation that she was in a few years ago.



Two and one-half years ago, my life totally changed. My husband and I decided to move to San José. So, I left my country (El Salvador), my family, friends and job. The first year was very hard for me because I didn't have family or friends here. Also, I didn't know the language very well.

Sometimes I felt sad and depressed. Living here was so hard and different for me. However, I decided to follow a plan: I will learn English and then I will find a job in my field. I enrolled in ESL classes and also practiced my speaking skills with a volunteer from the Partners in Reading program. During that time, my husband and I decided to become parents. We thought that it was time to have our first baby.

After two years of living here, I feel more confident about the language, and my husband and I have built a new life here. I've also met friends who are very supportive. Now, I'm pregnant and these have been the most wonderful eight months in my life.

I totally changed my mind and plans for the future. My plans are now around my baby and his life, and my professional life is not my priority. I'm considering ESL classes and improving my English skills, but for the moment I have another purpose in my life, which is caring for my little baby. Now I'm living the best adventure in my life.

“There really are places in the heart you don't even know exist until you love a child.”

– Anne Lamott



New Horizons

By Mitra

Mitra was eager to practice her writing in a real story context.



Four years ago, there were three things that happened to me. I came to America. I got married. I began to learn a new language—English.

Learning English was a second try. It was long after what was taught in my high school. It was also very different from what was taught. It is also very different from my first language, Farsi. That makes it an exciting and challenging adventure.

The American culture is also very different from Iran. I am very happy to become acquainted with this culture. People are free.

“Travel isn’t always pretty. It isn’t always comfortable. Sometimes it hurts, it even breaks your heart. But that’s OK. The journey changes you; it should change you. It leaves marks on your memory, on your consciousness, on your heart, and on your body. You take something with you. Hopefully, you leave something good behind.”

– Anthony Bourdain



Panama Adventure

By Herman Haro

Herman wrote this story to show the exciting trip he took to a new country called Panama and to visit the Panama Canal.



When I got my first view of Panama City, out of the airplane window, I thought it looked amazing. On my drive from the airport, I saw different styles of huge buildings and houses. It was like being in San Francisco.

Later, I went on a tour of the whole city, and we visited Causeway Island. The next day we traveled to Gamboa, a harbor for a boat tour of the Panama Canal and Monkey Island. The water was very rough because the big ships were making big waves.

My first impression of the Panama Canal entrance was that it was very huge. It had long flights of stairs that led to doors. There was a large sign with individual letters that said "Miraflores." I entered the museum building and walked towards the back, where I saw a huge U-shaped balcony with a view towards the canal.

It was very crowded and windy. I was very excited to see the canal and learn how it works. The canal seemed narrow for the huge ships to pass by in the teal-colored water. Along the canal there was a train to guide the ships and help the captains pass through the canal. After my tour, I then proceeded to the museum, where I saw exhibits of how the canal was built and how it changed the ecosystem.

This was my first exciting trip to Panama. I would love to return to Panama in the future.



Traveling to a New Place

By Joyce

Joyce likes to travel because it helps her experience different lifestyles.



My greatest adventure is traveling to a new place. I wish to travel twice to Alaska with my husband. One trip would be to enjoy endless daylight in summer, and the other to enjoy an all-natural light show in winter.

I imagine that in the summertime the day is long, the night is short, and the weather is very pleasant. We would like to live in a log house by the forest with a perfect backdrop that includes clear streams, lush trees, all kinds of bright flowers and tall mountains. When the wind blows, there would be a light fragrance! We would like to visit Alaska Veterans Memorial, Denali National Park and drive ATV vehicles.

In winter, the day is short, the night is long, the weather is snowy and looks magnificent. I picture the local people as very enthusiastic and friendly. First, we would go dog sledding. Next, we would choose a delicious lunch of freshly caught seafood, a dish made from local birchwood barbecue, walk by the Chena River, and visit a museum. Then, we would go to see the northern lights, which are very gorgeous. They shine everywhere and bump into the air, giving off different colors. Our smart camera would record the very gorgeous northern lights and us. Finally, tired and happy, we would go back to the hotel in Fairbanks.

Traveling to Alaska, I would see different places, scenery, know different things, and feel different lifestyles. That's why I would like to travel to new places.



A Simple Thing Can Bring Happiness

By Mayfe Nieto

Mayfe wrote this story because she wanted to share with everyone her experience and to remind herself how much fun some circumstances in life can be.



An adventure can be many things. Every day can be an adventure for some of us, or a trip perfectly planned can turn into adventure.

I would like to begin my story by saying that my husband and I love to travel. We like to take any opportunity to disconnect from the daily routine. It could be something we decided at the last minute or something we planned ahead. We agree that any time is a good time to enjoy ourselves.

Last year, we chose New Orleans to go for our summer vacation! Why New Orleans? Well, because there is a lot of history, traditions and heritage to learn about, the weather is nice, it has many attractions and exciting things to do, and the food is absolutely delicious. We sailed along the Mississippi River on a steam boat, had an exquisite lunch with local food and music.

We had a marvelous time. It is impossible to decide what the most enjoyable part of the trip was; however, running in a heavy rain in the middle of the flooded streets, to catch our flight back home in time, was definitely an adventure that we will never forget. So, why not take life as an adventure, why not find enjoyment in the simple things? We never know how good or bad something will be until we try it! As I see it, we can live life creating memories to treasure.



Playing a Keyboard

By Vaneska Palma

Learning to play a musical instrument is fun and helps to improve memory power and creativity.



My greatest adventure was when I played the keyboard in the orchestra of my school. It happened in El Salvador in 1991-1992. I was in the seventh grade and I was thirteen years old.

Everything started when my father gave me a keyboard. I remember I wanted to know how to play the keyboard, so I decided to take some lessons at my school. My professor was a nun. Her name was Sister Margoth. She was a nice and enthusiastic person. At that time she was forming an orchestra. She invited all of her students to belong to it. We were a group of thirty girls between twelve and eighteen years old.

Learning to play the keyboard was a great achievement for me. I learned to be organized and disciplined with my time. In order to be in the orchestra, you had to get good grades.

The greatest part of this adventure was a contest. We participated with the orchestra in a local contest between schools. The contest was in another larger school. There were ten orchestras competing. The competition was difficult, but we won second place! This was exciting. We rehearsed a lot and I remember how much fun this was.

This adventure changed my life because I was part of something important and I made the decision to do this by myself.

I think the discipline that you need to play an instrument is the same that you need to achieve success in other areas of your life.





My Adventure as a Swimmer

By Ida Joy Robinson

Ida wrote this story because she likes to be physically fit and look good!



When I was younger, I experienced a serious knee injury from jogging. Years later, in the early 1980s when I was 33, I joined the YMCA. I had decided that since I could no longer run, I would transition to a discipline of swimming. I participated in a regimen of swimming for many years, using it as my daily workout.

My best adventure began when I moved to my current address 10 years ago. At that time I set a personal goal of becoming an avid swimmer. I was able to swim all year round, in all kinds of weather conditions. I enjoyed feeling the water on my skin, sometimes cool and sometimes warm. It was a delight to see familiar faces and hear the laughter of others. Watching some of the swimmers doing laps, I began to feel challenged to improve so that I could compete against them.

I pushed myself ridiculously hard, swimming as much as 35 to 45 minutes each day. During the winter months, it would be especially brutal and scary. The outdoor pool was not always heated, and at times I would be there alone. Soon, though, because of my hard work, I became such a vigorous and speedy swimmer that I achieved my goal and was able to pass the others when doing laps. Swimming was an exhilarating adventure, and I often experienced what joggers call a “runners’ high,” a transcendent, meditative state. I was proud that I had reached my goal.



My Teaching Adventure

By Ashraf Sadr

Ashraf decided to write about her job and share her adventure about becoming a teacher.



I was born in Iran. When I was 5 years old, too young to go to school, I liked to invite children from my family and the neighbors' children to play school, to tell them stories and sing songs to pretend that I was their teacher. We had a big house and a deep pool. One day while we were playing, one of the children fell into the pool. All the children were shocked, and they were scared. We saved her life, but my parents told me, "You must stop teaching."

I had to obey and became very sad, but I still wanted to be a teacher. I studied hard at school and college. After 15 years, I graduated from college and got a job as a math teacher. My greatest adventure was being a real teacher. I continued teaching for 40 years. I worked very hard and always loved my students.

In 1979, the Islamic revolution happened in my country. Before the revolution, we had a strong relationship with the U.S. Iranians liked Americans. After the revolution, everything changed. Many years passed. We decided to move to the U.S. because of our children's grad school. Now we are living in San José, California. I hope to improve my English-language skills and teach math at a U.S. school soon. I want to thank all the people who are helping me achieve my goals, especially Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Library's staff and tutors.





My Greatest Adventure Lies Ahead of Me: Writing Stories for Children

By Manju Shahi

Manju is a teacher by profession in her native Nepal. She wrote her story because she wants to write stories for children and help them with their education.



My greatest adventure is yet to come: writing stories for children. Being a mother and a professional teacher in Nepal, I realized that we must protect children from exposure to scenes of violence, which is difficult because between the ages of two and seven children imitate the characters they see or read about in storybooks, TV shows, and cartoons.

So, I would like to give children, especially children two to nine, the opportunity to read about positive things through stories, focusing on their moral education and environmental awareness. According to his/her age and capability, a child will learn vocabulary, numbers and colors, a general knowledge of living and nonliving things, a sense of humanity, the value of education and health, and the cultures and traditions of other people. The child will also gain an understanding of media content, TV, and cartoons.

I am going to go on my adventure with the help of PAR in the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Library. My volunteer teacher, David Muhlitner, will help me with my writing, and a young artist will draw the pictures in my storybook. PAR members will help me with printing and publishing. All my friends, including my best friend, Peggy Kilduff, family and supporters, and many children will enjoy reading the stories.

I can't wait to start my greatest adventure of life: writing stories for children.



Going to Israel

By Jacqueline Smith

Jacqueline wrote this story because she has always wanted to visit and see the customs of Jerusalem and walk where God walked.



I could hardly wait to visit there. I would need my very important passport for my 13-hour flight. My passport will ensure that I will return home. That's so important on my journey. I could hardly wait to see all the main attractions, plus the highlights, and taste the kosher foods, view the clothing for women, and meet with the passed-down traditions. Of course, the Wailing Wall. So much to do and see. My oh my! I could hardly believe it the day I purchased my tickets for me and my husband, Leo. We are very blessed to walk where God did.

We also visited Jerusalem, where I heard musicians playing familiar music in the synagogue where I joined the ladies in song and dance. The dancing ladies were warm and welcoming. I then went to Mount Zion, just outside the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem and went to the Upper Room, the location of the Last Supper, and Mount Sinai in Egypt. The next day I went to Jesus's tomb in Golgotha. I ended our trip by visiting the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.





My Hawaiian Adventure

By Maria Torrico

Maria has three children. She is married to Ed, and they live in San José.



On May 30, 1993, I had my best adventure ever. My husband and I had just gotten married. He gave me a surprise honeymoon trip to Honolulu, Hawaii. When we arrived at the airport, the vans picked us up and gave us leis (flowers). They said “Aloha,” which means “Welcome.” The van took us to our hotel. We visited a big mall, the beach, toured in a boat, and then we ate at a buffet. The next day we had a Continental breakfast and they took us to a big mall. There were many souvenirs, chocolate, and candies. I bought a Hawaiian shirt and maxi dress and souvenirs for my friends.

The boat tour was a beautiful experience. The buses took us to the dock where the boats were. One gentleman was telling us several times, “Your boat number is 15.” Later I forgot the number. In the boat we had a big brunch: seafood, salad, fruits, punch, dessert, and pina colodas. It was hot. We danced and we chatted with different people. When we got off the boat, most people were drunk and they forgot their number. They figured it out by the name of their hotel.

The beach was very beautiful. I loved to walk on the sand. I was impressed that the water was warm, not cold. They were serving cold drinks. It was very relaxing and many people were rowing in boats. Everybody was enjoying this place. This amazing adventure to Hawaii is something that I won't forget.



Taft

By Thomas Valdivia

Thomas wanted people to know about Taft College. It was an adventure being away from home for two years.



The best adventure of my life was going to Taft.

Taft is 30 minutes away from Bakersfield, California. It is a community college. Taft offers classes. They offered me classes for living independently. They also offered drama, math, and computer classes. My favorite class was computers.

At Taft I met my roommate, Collin. He was from San José too. He is still my friend. I also met my friend Kevin. Kevin was a freshman when I was a sophomore. I met a teacher and coach named Brook. She taught me how to run track and field. Collin ran track and field too. We both still run.

The special things about Taft are the friends I made and the jobs they gave us. Taft made me feel independent. After going there two years I brought that independence back home with me.





Alaska Voyage

By Silvia Wilder

Silvia has very good memories about her Alaska trip with all its majestic views. She met people from different countries. This was a dream come true for her.



Alaska is one of my favorite adventures that I've ever had. My husband took me for my birthday in September 2014, on a Princess cruise.

The first port we stopped at was Juneau. We went for a hike uphill for three hours and we came down in a gondola, enjoying amazing views, including a tiny ship from far away. I could not believe that 2,400 people fit in it!

On the second day we explored Glacier Bay National Park. The ship pivoted in the Bay, providing a panoramic view of the layers of the blue ice. The glacier continuously broke off large chunks of ice into the water, with a thunderous cracking sound and giant splashes.

The next day we stayed all day on the ship. They provided activities, entertainment, and food all day. Good thing we could go and burn some calories at the gym! We also walked around the ship. My husband and I pretended we were Rose and Jack from the movie Titanic, but instead of standing at the front of the ship we did this on the back, so nobody could see us.

On the fourth day we stopped in Ketchikan, where we took a seaplane ride. Before the ride at 9:00 a.m., they gave us an all-you-can-eat crab breakfast; we were worried about what could happen. Good thing nothing happened, and we enjoyed the ride.

Just remembering, I feel the adrenaline again. It was amazing, this once-in-a-lifetime adventure.



Discovering My Passion for Flowers

By Ling Yeung

Ling wrote this story so she can share her passion with others.



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My greatest adventure was taking a flower-arranging course nearly twenty years ago in Seattle. I had always dreamed of being a florist. When I see flowers, I always feel joyful and loved.

The course was three weeks long, and on the first day, we visited flower wholesalers. There were lots of varieties of fresh-cut flowers that I hadn't seen before. We learned that flowers need to be stored at different temperatures depending on their natures. Learning how to care for fresh-cut flowers to extend their lifetime was extremely useful.

The comprehensive course taught me how to design for all occasions (including weddings, funerals, and daily arrangements) and different customers (corporations, hotels, and events). My hands-on work improved every day with instructors' feedback. I learned how to calculate the material costs of arrangements and price them effectively to ensure good profit margins and stay within budget.

The graduation project was the most challenging, because our team had to create Christmas decorations with a limited budget and timeline. We satisfied the customer's needs, fulfilled all the requirements, and showed our creativity. It was an unforgettable experience for me.

Even though I can't be a professional florist, I fall in love with flowers every day, and am always eager to learn more and share my creations with others. I often send my pieces with my blessings to friends and family at their important moments. Flower arranging is now my lifelong hobby that I usually enjoy with my sons.



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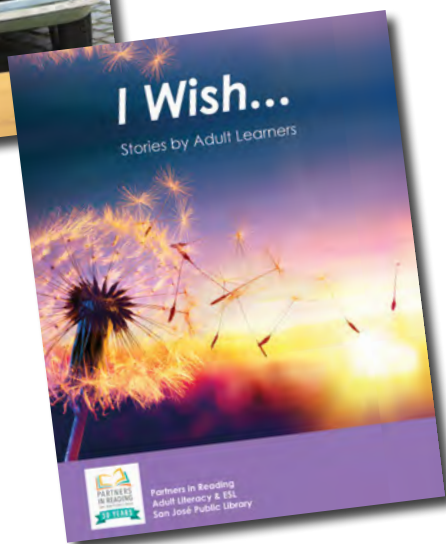
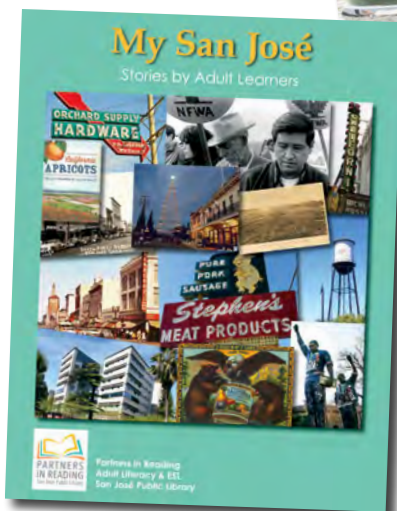
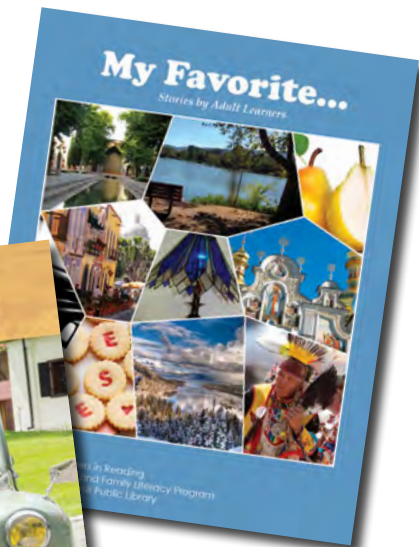
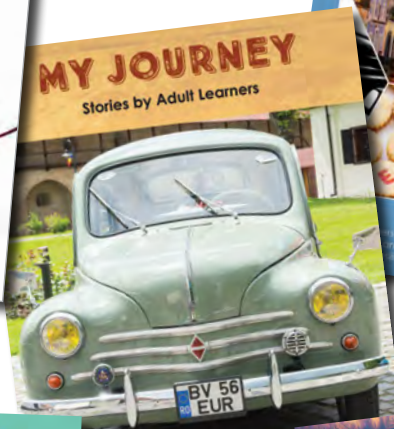
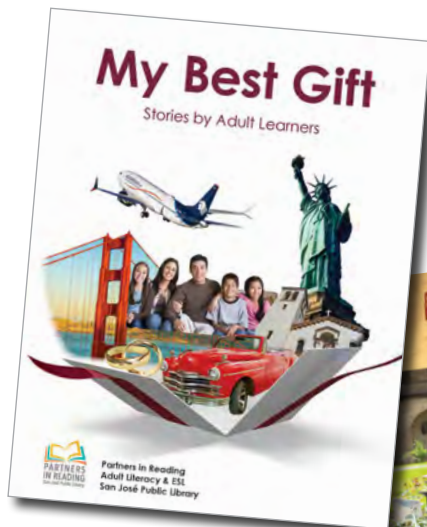
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