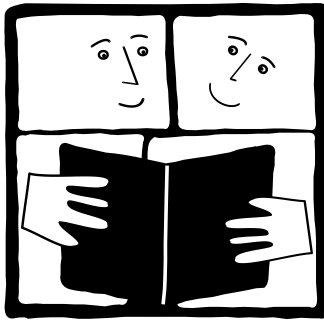


# **My Journey**

***Stories By Adult Learners***

**PARTNERS IN READING**



San José Public Library

Adult Literacy Program  
2016

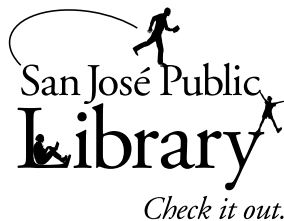
## ***My Journey* Production Team**

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**Editors:** *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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## Acknowledgments

Thank you from the Partners in Reading (PAR) staff to everyone who has worked hard to make *My Journey* possible for our learners and tutors:

- Every year we ask PAR learners to write a story on an interesting topic. This year 49 learners answered the call to write a story about their journeys. We salute them for their courage. Some journeys are not easy. Sharing about journeys may not be easy either, and we thank all those who were willing to include us on their journeys this year.
- PAR learners are assisted in the writing process by volunteers who participate in pre-writing discussions, drafting those first difficult lines, expanding on those ideas with details to give the stories color, and the all-important steps of editing and revising the learner's story.
- The writing process would probably not get off the ground for many potential authors without our expert and published author, MaryLee McNeal. MaryLee breaks down each task, from discussion and brainstorming to writing that critical first sentence, into very small steps. Even authors who doubted themselves come away from this initial workshop with a significant portion of their story completed. And for those who weren't able to attend the workshop, she provides handouts that tutors and learners can use together to create engaging stories.

- It is not easy to carefully balance making sure stories are easy to read without changing too many things. Volunteer editor Victoria Scott does just that by making sure that the authors' words and intentions shine through in the final version of their stories.
- For 27 years PAR has enjoyed the support of the San José Public Library and the City of San José in providing adult and family literacy and ESL services to residents of San José. Without their ongoing support, PAR would be unable to provide these crucial services to our customers. We are very grateful.
- PAR also enjoys financial support from the San José Public Library Foundation so that a wider segment of the San José community, including adults seeking a high school diploma, knows about the work we do.
- Now in its 32nd year, the California State Library, through the California Library Literacy Services, has enabled more than 100 libraries throughout California to offer adult and family literacy services. More than 20,000 adults each year have the opportunity to build their literacy skills through these programs.
- By reading this book, you are learning more about the needs of adult literacy learners. We thank you for sharing what you now know about adult literacy with others so they can participate or support the work we do.

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

## **2015-2016 Funders**

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

## **Donors**

- Brian Badenoch and Sarah-Ann Bishop
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- San Jose Jazz
- San Jose Museum of Art
- Sharks Ice
- Sprouts Farmers Market
- The Fish Market
- The Old Spaghetti Factory
- The Studio Climbing
- Tomato Thyme
- Trader Joe's
- Vung Tau Restaurant
- Willow Street Pizza
- Winchester Mystery House

## Introduction

This book of essays is dedicated to the hard-working adults who step up and ask for help with basic reading, writing, and technology skills. It takes courage to join an adult literacy program to get needed help. Those who do, though, can usually see big differences in their daily lives, including in their confidence level and their ability to accomplish tasks independently. Some take a further difficult step, to open their lives for all to witness by writing a story. To become a published author involves patience, practice, and the willingness to take a risk. Partners in Reading (PAR) and the San José Public Library are grateful to those who took that risk to think about the topic, organize their ideas, and then write a piece that is meaningful to them and to their readers.

PAR selected this year's book topic, My Journey, to inspire potential authors to write about any journey—to a place, about an idea, something real or something imagined. These journeys will take you all over the world to different places and different times: you will travel backward into the past, forward into the future, or simply explore an idea. We can guarantee that these trips will be interesting and unusual. As you read the stories you will be moved, you will learn, you will laugh, you might cry, and you will admire the people who chose to share a part of their lives. Each story is inspirational, and we applaud all those who took a chance and were rewarded by sharing in this book.

We hope this book will also motivate other learners to take the leap and write even more challenging pieces for future books and purposes. Maybe other adults who have not yet joined the program will hear these stories and take the journey of becoming a learner with PAR. It might even motivate potential tutors to volunteer to help an adult in San José read and write better .

*“The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.”*

— Lao Tzu

## Partners in Reading (PAR) Program Highlights for 2016

Through the support of the San José Public Library (SJPL) and California Library Literacy Services (CLLS), PAR volunteers and learners journey together to make real change happen every day at the library. Adult learners can reflect on how their lives are different after working in the computer lab and spending time and tremendous effort to learn and practice new skills and techniques during tutoring so that they can navigate the world more comfortably. Here are some examples of what PAR learners, tutors, and staff have accomplished together:

- In November 2015, PAR welcomed new manager Pam Cornelison to the program. She brings warmth, a sense of humor, and great energy to a very busy program.
- One of Pam's first projects was to administer one of our newest pilot projects, Career Online High School, where adults can qualify for a scholarship to take online classes to earn a high school diploma and a career certificate in 5 to 18 months. This project is funded through SJPL, the California State Library, and the San José Public Library Foundation.



*shutterstock 261321629*

*Do you have original of this?  
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- PAR continues to offer ESL classes for adults who do not have the conversational skills to qualify for a literacy tutor. The classes meet twice a week and focus on building listening and speaking skills, as well as confidence, in the hope that those who attend will soon begin tutoring sessions to build their reading and writing skills as well.

- PAR's successful family literacy program, Together We Read, is for adult learners who have children under 14. Tutors introduce parenting information, such as how to build a strong learning environment at home so kids can succeed in school, and distribute children's books for families to build home libraries that will make reading a priority.



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- At a special event in April, PAR honored all of its volunteers who week after week give their time to assist adults in improving basic literacy skills. They enjoyed an evening of inspirational stories about the value of bringing tutors and learners together to study the elements of reading, writing, spelling, and grammar while developing confidence and independence.
- Two volunteers in particular were honored for their dedication and hard work. Toni Thunen was selected to receive the Ben Sherrod Award, which honors a PAR participant who has shown exceptional commitment and gone above and beyond to support learners and PAR. Toni has volunteered with PAR for 2½ years and works with a dedicated small group of adults who have overcome many obstacles during the time they have been meeting together. She has supported them throughout this time.

- Mike Yuen is the PAR Volunteer of the Year. He has tutored six learners during his 7½ years with PAR. Mike teaches in a creative, entertaining way so that his learners can more easily grasp difficult concepts of English grammar and vocabulary. He also supports new tutors in the program by giving advice and answering questions during tutor training sessions.

- PAR staff and volunteers also offer a number of ways for adults to become more tech savvy while living in Silicon Valley. Many learners have a desire to enhance their skills so that they can find higher quality jobs. PAR computer lab instructors work to make sure that



learners feel comfortable using the internet to search for jobs and interact via social media, and can also offer them tips for becoming more proficient in using their cell phones. A new addition this year is a phonics program called CORE 5, which is self-paced and helps learners build an awareness of sounds and how to put them together to make words. Learners who use this program develop more confidence in spelling and in reading new words.

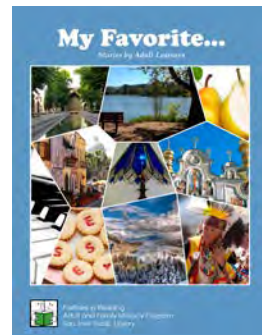
- PAR was privileged to work with Read Santa Clara through a grant from the California State Library in 2014 to create 77 high-quality videos as a resource for tutors. PAR has incorporated them into its tutor training sessions,



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which further enhances the experience for new tutors by showing them what it's like in actual tutoring sessions. These videos were incorporated into a training program between CLLS and the Florida Literacy Coalition, and are also used throughout California in other library literacy programs. They are available on the PAR YouTube channel at [www.tinyurl.com/partutoringvideos](http://www.tinyurl.com/partutoringvideos). Check them out!

- In September 2015, PAR released its book of learner writings for International Literacy Day with 53 authors. The topic was *My Favorite...*, and the stories ranged from descriptions of the authors' home countries to favorite local places and people who influenced the writers. We are grateful to have a product each year to showcase some of the hard work that our learners and volunteers tackle together.



- With funding from CLLS through the California State Library and SJPL, PAR has been able to significantly enhance its materials collection. We have small collections of adult easy reading material at King Library and five other branches: Pearl Avenue, Santa Teresa, Edenvale, Educational Park, and Evergreen. We also now have a wider variety of workbooks for PAR tutors and learners to meet many needs. New to the collection are audio books with matching print books so learners can read more challenging materials by listening and following along at the same time.

- PAR has strengthened its partnerships in the last year to expand the work we do. Gale Cengage Learning provides the Career Online High School program and the technical support for our high school scholars. Our internal partners include SJPL Works, a unit of the San José Public Library assisting job seekers, small businesses, and entrepreneurs. PAR is also working more closely with the Family Learning Centers at seven SJPL branches to promote lifelong learning and to reach a wider group of customers.

These are a few examples of the journeys that PAR learners and volunteers take together each year. Thank you for traveling with us and for being a part of the journey.





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## My New Life

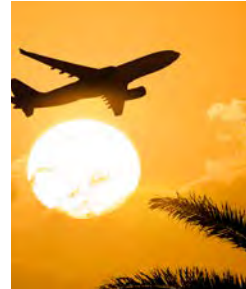
By Lina Abreha

I came to San José in 2012 from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. It was my first time flying. I was afraid because I felt alone.

When my plane landed in San José and I saw my sister and her husband, I was very happy. I had not seen them in 3 years. My sister taught me how to live in the U.S.

Still, I miss my family and work in Ethiopia. I wish I could go to my mother's Ethiopian coffee celebration.

I hope to go back soon to visit. For now, on special days I make Ethiopian coffee and it reminds me of back home.



---

Lina has a new life because of her sister (Shemal). She loves her very much. She wants to say "thank you" and "God bless you" to her little sister.



---

## Riding on the Bus

By Faalaa Achica



---

Faalaa is a happy man. He likes learning to read, write, and use the computer.

My favorite journey is to go home from the library on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. I walk from MLK Library to Santa Clara Street. I like to walk fast. It is fun. Sometimes I go to Walgreens to look around.

I wait for the 522 bus. Sometimes I wait for a half hour. A lot of 22 buses come by. I listen to music on my iPod.

I get on the 522 bus. I sit at the back near the door. It is better to sit there. It is easy to get off.

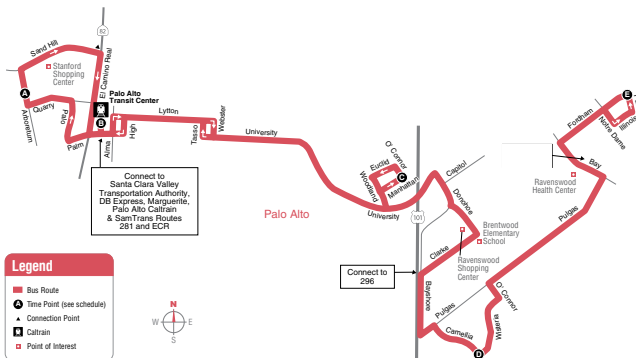
I sit down and relax. Sometimes I listen to all kinds of music on my iPod. I look out the window. I see a lot of old Volkswagen buses. I really like to see Volkswagen buses.

I get off the 522 at the Palo Alto Train Station. I wait for the 280 or the 281. The 281 bus is a long walk home. The 280 bus is easy. Sometimes there is a lot of traffic. It is a long wait.

The people talk with me. They ask me where I came from. I tell them I came from the library.

The bus is late. I get on the bus. I sit down. It takes 10 minutes to get to my stop.

I get off the bus. I walk to DeAnna's house. She makes lunch for me every day. I put my lunch in my ice box. I walk home fast. I am happy to get home at the end of the day.



---

# English Was Hard!

By *Megnaga Aimru*



---

Megnaga is an enthusiastic learner who works hard.

Learning English was a confusing journey. I don't know how I learned it. I came to America when I was ten. When I was 11 or 12 I had my first day of school. I didn't go to school in Ethiopia because we didn't have enough money. In Ethiopia I learned to speak Amharic, but not to read or write it.

When I started school in San José, I didn't have any friends. I didn't understand the homework so they put me in a class with little kids. I still didn't understand, so they put me in a special ed class when I was 13. I still didn't understand English!

When I was 16, I went to Gunderson High School. There was a CD that you listened to while you followed in a book. That's how I learned my ABC's and how to write my name. When I went home I watched English TV. My little sister was 5 so I watched cartoons with her.

---

When I was 16 or 17 my dad took me to the library for the first time. My family was speaking more English, and my friends spoke English, so English was now easy to learn. By the time I was 18, I had my first job. I had to speak English at the interview, and learn how to speak nicely on the job. Now I speak good English, but I'm still learning how to speak Amharic.



*“Transformation is a process, and as life happens there are tons of ups and downs. It’s a journey of discovery - there are moments on mountaintops and moments in deep valleys of despair.”*

— Rick Warren



---

# Learning English as a Second Language

*By Silvia*

---

Silvia wrote this story to practice writing in English and to show how difficult it is to live in another country.

My journey is about when I came to America 15 years ago. I didn't know any English words. For a month, I lived here with my brother-in-law. I started to feel the need to learn English so I could read papers and communicate with other people.

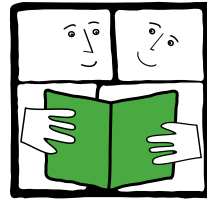
I went to adult school for six months. At the time I had two jobs, and sometimes I fell asleep during the class. So I felt embarrassed, and I quit the school. One way I tried to learn English was to listen and ask the meaning of the words of my coworkers. I read kindergarten books to my daughter. I also used a dictionary and a translator machine.



---

One day my neighbor told me about this program, “PAR,” and she gave me a flyer with the information. I did all the steps to get into the program, and finally I got my tutor. Her name is Janice, a wonderful person. She gives me her time, explaining, and thinking of new ways of teaching me the most useful words. For all of this I want to thank Janice. I really appreciate all she does for me.

**PARTNERS IN READING**



San José Public Library

This shows all the work I put into this journey.

*“Every single journey that I’ve embarked on, I’ve learned something new.”*

— Shailene Woodley

---

## My Trip to Canada

*By Abraham B.*



---

Abraham wrote this story because he likes to read books from different people.

Last November, two of my daughters and I traveled to Toronto, Ontario in Canada for a family wedding. We were very excited to go on this trip, but also made sure to pack well for the cold weather since we knew Toronto would be very cold around that time. We would be staying with our family there, so we were looking forward to seeing everyone and catching up. There are so many great things to do in Canada, so we tried to plan out a list of places that we wanted to go and see while we were there.

When we finally made it into Toronto, we went to pick up our rental car and headed to meet our family. It was very cold when we arrived in Toronto, but we were prepared with our sweaters and jackets. One of the first things we did when we arrived was go eat. We found an excellent Eritrean restaurant and the food and service was very good. That evening, we spent all night talking and laughing with our family and their three children. It was great!



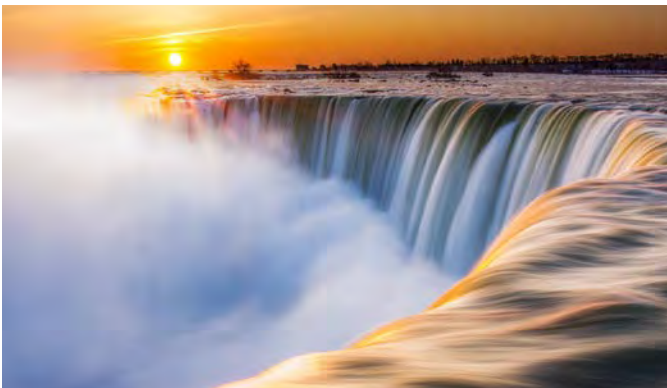
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The next day, we decided to go and explore downtown Toronto until the rest of the family came into town for the wedding. There were a lot of people walking around, even in the cold. There was no rain or snow yet, just cold. We went to the mall downtown, which has a graduate university inside of it as well so it was very busy! We bought a few things at the mall and moved on to go visit the Art Gallery of Ontario. The art museum was amazing and full of many different exhibits for us to see. Also, later that evening, we returned to the downtown area to go to a basketball game. My daughter is a big Chicago Bulls fan and her team was playing that night so we went to the basketball game and had a great time. It was even better because the Bulls won the game!



© John Vetterli - originally posted to Flickr as Skyline

The following day we made the two hour drive to Niagara Falls to see the amazing waterfalls there. When we arrived, it was snowing a little.



Niagara Falls

---

We walked down to the water falls and took lots of pictures with my daughters. The water falls are even more amazing in person, something that everyone should visit one day! We also visited the gift shop and stopped at a nearby restaurant for lunch before heading back to Toronto.



Port activity - cargo ships, lifts and cranes with link to old steam train rail in Eritrea, Port of Massawa, Red Sea.

My cousin, who lives in London, in the UK, was also attending the wedding that weekend. It had been almost 35 years since we last saw each other, back when we both still lived in Eritrea. He used to work on the ships in Eritrea, and eventually we both made it out of Eritrea when the war erupted between Eritrea and Ethiopia. My cousin and I spent most of the night catching up, since it had been 35 years. When we all arrived at the wedding on Saturday, we were so excited to see everyone. The bride and groom looked very happy and we were all very happy for the young couple. It was a beautiful wedding and the food and music were excellent! We had a great time, and ate and danced all night!

We wished we could have stayed in Toronto even longer, because we were having such a great time! Everyone in Toronto was so nice and very helpful. I have some pictures of our time in Toronto and all of the fun that we had.

---

# My Journey to the Flea Market

By Rogelio Bugarin

Friday I didn't go to work. I went to the flea market to buy all kinds of fruit and vegetables. I looked around and saw many people selling things they don't need and junk too.

I sat for a while and watched people and rested with my wife. My wife and I looked around. We walked around. Kids were playing and running around.

Some people argued with the person selling things. They raised their voices and hands. People wanted to make deals. I like making deals. I'm not very good at it, but my wife is.

After we shopped we went to eat. We went to eat at Burger King to use my coupons.

We like to do things together. My wife works and this is our time to spend together.



---

Rogelio wrote this story so he could tell readers about his visit to the flea market.

*“Life is a journey. When we stop, things don't go right.”*  
— Pope Francis

---

## English Is the Journey

By Grace Chen



---

Grace wants to share her story with people. She hopes her story encourages others to learn how to read and write better in English and to enjoy the American lifestyle.

In 1988, I traveled to the United States and Canada for the first time; I visited over a one month period. The tour guide showed us many places of interest. However, I did not understand any English at all. So I was very thirsty to understand what the tour guide said.

In 1992, I immigrated to Vancouver, Canada. I told myself, “I want to learn English.” At this point, I could only say “yes” or “no” and I could point at things.

When my son immigrated to Vancouver, I couldn’t help him learn how to do homework, talk to his teachers, get around on buses, or many simple things. Now, I told myself, “I will spend one year to focus on learning English.” After one year, my English was only a little better. If you used “body language” to explain to me, I could still not answer your question.

In 2000, I took an ESL class in San José, for the first time. The teacher said the first 10 sentences, and I understood two of them.

---

During the classes, I spoke English only . So I cherished that moment for a long time. After 6 months, the teacher said 10 more sentences. I understood 8 and I asked questions to learn more.

My English is still improving. It's not good enough yet for a good paying job. I want to learn better English so I can share my experiences and learn about other people's experiences. Communication is important to me!



---

ESL program  
Pronunciation class.  
[avspeechtherapy.com](http://avspeechtherapy.com)

*“Life is a journey and it’s about growing and changing and coming to terms with who and what you are and loving who and what you are.”*

— Kelly McGillis

---

## Traveling to South Africa

*By Norman Derkovits, Jr.*



---

Norman wrote this story because he likes to travel.

I went to South Africa in February 2014. My sister Debbie took me there for vacation. We flew on Delta Airlines and Virgin Atlantic Airlines. It took 2 days. We arrived in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Gokey, Debbie's friend, met us at the airport. Me, Debbie and Gokey stayed at the Vetho Apartment Hotel. Our room had a kitchen.

The cars drive on the left side of the road. The steering wheel is on the right side of the car.

In Johannesburg I saw a statue of Nelson Mandela. It was okay to see the statue. Me and Gokey went inside the Makro Store. It is like a Sam's Club. We walked around. I enjoyed it.

We drove to Durban. We went to the beach. I walked on the sand. I did not go in the water. Our hotel room had a bathtub. I was happy. I love taking baths.

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We went to an animal park. I saw lions, giraffes, tigers, hippos, birds, zebras, and monkeys. I had fun.

Me and Debbie spent 15 days in South Africa. It was my first time outside the U.S. I am glad that my sister took me on her vacation.



Entabeni game reserve, South Africa



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# My Passion for Painting

*By Ayako Eguchi*

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Ayako wrote this story because she likes to try new things related to studying English.

This year I started my journey to pursue my passion to paint. It's like a small boat to begin rowing in the ocean. It has been two years since I started the journey. Two years ago my sons and I came to the U.S. with my husband's business from Japan. My husband was the only one in our family that could speak English.

My sons took ESL classes at school and I got information about PAR in the library. My teacher, Paul, is a perfect teacher.

I have learned not only English but also about U.S. holidays, historical people, traditional customs, etc. from him.

I always consult with him about the concerns that I have. He is the only American who I can talk to without hesitation. When I was a student at the University, I chose Japanese literature as my major. I enjoy reading and drawing.



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I didn't take art classes in Japan. I didn't want my parents to have the expense of sending me to an expensive art school. I gave up art, one of my favorite things. Last December, I decided to take a drawing class at De Anza College. First I thought it was impossible because of my difficulty with English. Paul encouraged me to enroll. My husband and my sons supported me to go to college. Now I'm taking an oil painting class. I have desired to learn that for long time. My journey of painting started and I'm on the way.



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Artwork by  
David Litman



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Water Fall Japanese  
Garden, John  
Lautermilch

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## My Trip to Arizona

By Veronica Estrada



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One day Veronica wants to look back on all her achievements and all she has accomplished. She wants her children and grandchildren to read her story so they can be proud of her.

I've never flown before. I've never even left the state of California. Over the years I heard of many reports of airplane crashes and that's why I had a fear of flying. If it wasn't for my son who moved to Arizona and asked me to visit him, I would've never gotten on that airplane.

Before I went on my trip, I asked my doctor for some medication for my anxiety. I took one pill and regretted it because it made me feel nauseated. I realized I would've felt better without it because I was enjoying the view. So my return trip was more pleasant because I realized I didn't need a pill to conquer my fear.

It had been a while since my son and I have seen each other. He's been through a lot over the years and we missed a lot of time together. I finally saw him all grown and the direction he's taken in his life with his job, home, and a family.

I'm so proud of him and feel blessed to have become a grandmother for the very first time!

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During this visit, I was able to go with my son and his girlfriend to their OB GYN doctor visit where I saw my new granddaughter in 4D Ultrasound. Wow! That was amazing to see. We visited a mall called “Arizona Mills” because my other granddaughter was excited to show me the Sea Life Aquarium. We had so much fun! We also visited her school when I picked her up the next day. She was excited to show me her school and introduce me to her friends. Not only was this trip important to me to overcome my fear of flying, but to see my son and his girlfriend who is 8 and a half months pregnant with my grandbaby. I am excited to go back to Arizona this spring. And this time I will be meeting my new granddaughter for the very first time and I won’t need medication. Now I get to enjoy my trip with my son Ramon, who will be flying with me.



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Sea Life Aquarium,  
Arizona Mills

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## Working Toward My Dreams

*By Araceli Figueroa*

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Araceli lives in San José with her husband and two children. She has been with PAR for over eight years and has met with her tutor for over 350 hours. She loves to read and learn. Her goal is to get a GED and attend college.

My journey started in a small town in Mexico. I'm the youngest of a family of 9 siblings. Being the youngest has its benefits. I grew up with love and care from my parents and older sisters (so I am a little spoiled). We had a happy childhood. My parents worked very hard to support all of us. Everybody helped at my parents' farm. Eventually my sisters and brother started to leave home. Some to the U.S., some to the closest big city. At one point I was the only child left. I enjoyed this time so much. I had all the attention just for me. When I was 19 years old I met my husband. We dated for about three years, we got married, and I got pregnant. It was then when everything changed. We realized that we wanted a better life for our kids, our dream. Mexico is a beautiful country but unfortunately we didn't have opportunities there. So we made the decision to leave. It was very painful for me because I was leaving my parents behind.

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We arrived in San José, CA on Feb. 1, 2000. Our life was hard. We didn't know the city. Even worse, we didn't speak the language. We had relatives and friends here and that helped a lot. My son was born healthy and in a country where he can have a better chance of success in life. And he will for sure. Years later I had my second child, a beautiful and smart girl. She is very determined to be someone important in her life. When I see them growing happy and talking about their future I think that all of the sacrifice, pain and hard work my husband and I endured was so worth it and without a doubt we would do it over and over again. My dreams are coming true.



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Rocio wrote this story to preserve her memories. She remembers the difficult time of when she moved here.

*“I am no longer afraid of becoming lost, because the journey back always reveals something new, and that is ultimately good for the artist.”*

— Billy Joel

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# Las Vegas

*By Alvin Fore*

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Alvin had a good visit with his sisters in Las Vegas.



I, my sister Denise, my niece Thea, and her daughter Fore went on a road trip to Las Vegas in August 2014. This was my first trip there. I was excited because I hadn't seen my sister Debbie and my half-sister Regina in three years. Both of them live there.

It was a long trip! It took seven hours, but it was worth it because I enjoyed seeing the Mojave Desert instead of just seeing it on TV or in pictures. I saw government buildings and old houses. Things that you wouldn't think would be there. I was amazed that I saw a kind of cactus I had never seen before.

Right outside of Vegas I saw small hotels, casinos, and restaurants. They were nothing compared to downtown Las Vegas. After we went to the wedding of our family friend, my sister Debbie and her husband Corey took us on a tour of Las Vegas Boulevard where all the casinos are. I liked it because of the atmosphere and the buildings. The one I really liked was Caesars Palace, which has a lot of statues of Roman emperors.

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I liked other casinos. Luxor is shaped like a pyramid and New York has a roller coaster that goes around the outside of it. It was amazing that anywhere you went there were slot machines everywhere. We also saw a lot of unusual people. People dressed as Elvis, Spider-Man, Wonder Woman, and Michael Jackson. A couple of men were only wearing thongs!

I enjoyed going to Vegas to visit my sisters. Maybe one day I will return to stay at Caesars Palace



Caesars Palace,  
Las Vegas

*“Life to me is a journey - you never know what may be your next destination.”*

— David Russell

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## Wedding Day

*By Consuelo Garcia*



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Consuelo is from Zacatecas, Mexico and moved to the U.S. to be close to her parents.

On April 9th, I took a celebratory journey with my niece and family. My niece's wedding was held in a Catholic Church in Morgan Hill next to the mountains. Inside the church, there were beautiful bouquets of red, white and pink roses lining the aisle where the bride walked down.

My niece wore a beautiful long dress with antique white lace and a full skirt with a train. The dress had many buttons going down the back. She wore a short white veil made out of lace that covered her face. Everybody was excited to listen to the mass. After the ceremony, we gave them a hug and said congratulations on their new life together.

My niece's wedding reception was in a big covered stable. It had a sand floor because they held rodeos there. There were decorations everywhere. Red, blue, yellow, white, and green rectangles with different colored stripes hung from the ceiling. On the tables were beautiful small baskets with cornhusk dolls made by my niece and her family.



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Everybody enjoyed seeing and riding the horses that were available that day . They also had a mechanical bull. Ever yone was having fun seeing others ride it and riding it themselves.



My niece’s wedding was a special family journey because we enjoyed together the food, drinks, music and dancing. She was happy because the people she loved wer e there with her.



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# My Journey With My Tutor

*By Anonymous*

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This learner wrote this story because she is grateful for this journey of learning with her tutor.

When I met my new tutor I was excited and anxious at the same time because I was continuing PAR on my own without my talkative sister. I felt comfortable with my tutor after a few meetings. We have been meeting for over four years. I have enjoyed meeting with my tutor in this journey of learning.

My tutor is very professional and loves to teach. I can see the passion she has for reading and knowledge. She teaches me the importance of basic education. She helps me study history, reading, geography, math, and spelling. My tutor has encouraged me to read many books.

*“We’re put here on Earth to learn our own lessons. No one can tell you what your lessons are; it is part of your personal journey to discover them. On these journeys we may be given a lot, or just a little bit, of the things we must grapple with, but never more than we can handle.”*

— Elisabeth Kubler-Ross

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# Hawaii

By FTG

This year for my spring break I had a remarkable experience. This trip was on my wish list, but not so soon! I travel occasionally. Last summer my friends and I took a five-day road trip to Oregon. It was beautiful and I thought it would be my last trip for a while. I was totally surprised when my friend persuaded me to go to Hawaii.

We arrived at the Big Island. Compared to other airports, it was small and not overly crowded. We picked up our car and drove to Honokaa, a small town in the Waipio Valley, where the cliffs face each other immersed by the beautiful landscape of soaring mountains. I must admit, I was overwhelmed seeing this beautiful landscape. We had rented a house through Airbnb. Not being familiar with the procedure, we were pleasantly surprised when our host welcomed us into her lovely home. We woke up by the sound of birds and chickens calling us to get up and enjoy a new day. The host served us breakfast and her special banana bread every day.

I had a good time exploring Volcanoes National Park, walking five miles through lava flowing

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FTG would like to thank her tutor, Grada Blom, for imparting skills that have taught her valuable lessons. She has drawn essential experience from her tutor.





thousands of years into the ocean, seeing the steam from the lava. Feeling the heat and to be that close was exhilarating. Watching the volcano erupt while the sun went down and taking in those vivid colors was breathtaking. We stopped at downtown Hilo's well-known farmers market with all the fresh fruits and vegetables. The last evening our host served us a delicious friendship dinner. What is amazing is that people barter their homegrown fruits and vegetables.

I begin to see my journey as part of my adventure. My wish is to go back to Hawaii with the warm ocean water of the Pacific Ocean on my feet, the palm trees swaying back and forth. The mountains and people have warmed my heart.

It truly has been the best journey I ever took.



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## My Family Trip

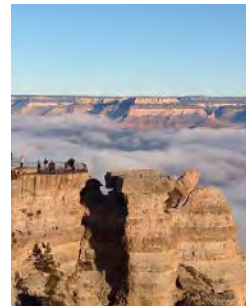
*By Elsa Gomez*

My name is Elsa. I am married with Ricardo Gomez. We have one daughter. Her name is Delia. In July last year, we took a vacation to Arizona to see the Grand Canyon. It was such a beautiful experience of nature in the morning! We thought there was too much fog to see the valley. But after a while the fog disappeared. We went walking, took pictures, visited the shops and bought souvenirs and gifts for my family. Then we went back on a bus to where we left the car. Also we visited the casinos and restaurants. Then we went to Mexico to visit my cousins, uncles, sisters and brother. We were sad because two cousins passed away. We gave their family condolences. We went to visit the Dam of the Virgin. We walked and we went on a boat crossing the dam. We had specialty food at the dam which was fish soup, fries and shrimp. That was delicious. In my town, my family woke up early every day. We went walking with my sisters and their husbands. And later we went to Rancho Pandeño to go swimming in the pools. In my town, there are hot springs. There also exists a lot of fish in the hot springs. The hot water supports the fish, up to 47° Celsius. It is registered in the Guinness Book of World Records.



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The most important thing for Elsa is enjoying time with her family.



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# The Last Journey to Amazon

*By Rosemary Gonzales*

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Rosemary wrote this story to help her with her writing skills. This program has helped her a lot. The people who work there have encouraged her to read more. She hated to read in the past because she was not a good reader, but now she feels she has improved some.

Seven months ago I took a journey to Amazon. Not THE Amazon. Amazon the company . I got a job there. At first I had difficulty with a scanner. It became easier as I kept working with it. But it was hard standing on my feet for three to five hours. There were times my feet would hurt and my body would ache as if I was working out at an exercise facility . But I got to meet some nice people on the job and on the Fremont BART who were working at the same place at Amazon. It was fun working there. We would have a different thing going on the calendar , like one day would be pizza day, cookies day , ice cream day, etc. But the journey back home after work was long and scary every night. I traveled from Newark to San José at night. I got home around 11-11:30 pm every day. I had to take two buses and a light rail and walk by myself late at night. To my place it took 15-20 minutes walking. I used to spend the night at my friend's house after work and go home in the morning. I don't want to do that anymore. It's not like being in your place,

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relaxing and taking your time before going to work the next day. I asked for a day shift but there weren't any at this time. So tomorrow I will make my last journey to Amazon and turn in a resignation. I'm going to work towards getting a car or a day shift soon. But I really like the night shift because it gives me the whole day to myself to do whatever I want to do throughout the day.



Amazon warehouse,  
Fremont CA

*“Success is a journey, not a destination”*

— Ben Sweetland

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# I Left a Boy and Returned a Man

By Mauricio Gonzalez



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Mauricio wrote this story because he likes to remember when he was a boy and he wanted to share it with other readers.

A journey that changed my life forever happened when I was 15 years old. When I was 15 years old, I left Mexico and came to the United States. I lived in Atlanta, Georgia. I remember when I got here, the first days were very difficult and sad for me. The work was very hard and I missed my family, friends, and everything I left in my country. Little by little, I got used to it. I never gave up because I needed to help my parents. I remember it was sad and scary for me because I did not understand English. I lived in Georgia for two years. I was not very happy there. When I returned to Mexico, I felt happy because I returned to my family. This gave me the strength and motivation to go back to the U.S.

*“Focus on the journey, not the destination. Joy is found not in finishing an activity but in doing it”*

— Greg Anderson



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# My First Trip to the United States

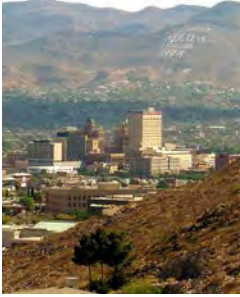
*By Rocio Hernandez*

Some years ago, I took a journey that changed my life and my son Angel's life. It was when we traveled to the United States. We got some suitcases in the truck with our memories of all my family. I can't forget the sadness in those moments, when we came around the curves in the road and looked at the scenery behind us. My parents are elderly. They were sad, because Angel grew up in their house. I was married but I still lived at my parents' home. When we left, my mother had a strong depression. My parents' house had a particular smell from the food my mother made. I miss my parents so much. Also when we went to the river, its fantastic sensation, to feel the water on your feet. We sat next to the river and watched the small fish.

The first stop was in Juárez City, Mexico. Angel and I had an appointment with immigration because my husband Victor was an American citizen. After a long day of exams and interviews, we were approved for American residency. We left Mexico and we continued our journey to Modesto, California where we

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Rocio wrote this story to preserve her memories. She remembers the difficult time of when she moved here.



El Paso Skyline

had a new home. I had a sense of fear and joy at the same time. We started a new life in a city far from my parents, with different habits and customs that we had to adopt gradually. My husband worked in San José and for this reason he traveled daily. The first months were very difficult. Then we decided to move here to San José, California to spend more time together as a family.

Now we go to Mexico every year with my family to visit my parents and spend some great days. But the first journey to the United States I think I will not forget.

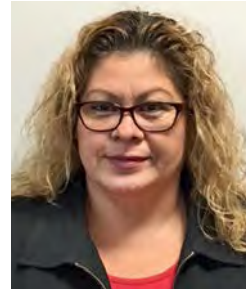


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## An Awesome Dream

By Irma H.

My dream took me on a journey to the beautiful country of France. I saw myself walking to the top of the Eiffel Tower early in the morning, enjoying the panoramic views of the City of Lights. When I reached the top of the tower, I felt the air stroking my face bringing the rose flower aroma from the gardens. After visiting the magnificent Eiffel Tower, I went to the Louvre Museum to see all the famous artworks of the past and present. In the afternoon, I went to a fashion show in the luxurious area of Paris. Later, I tasted some delicious French food like potato gratin, beef and cheese fondue, and apple pie. Towards the end of the day, I rode on a gondola with a good friend of mine. We rowed the boat up and down the Seine River. This rowing experience made me feel like flying to the moon and dancing with the stars because we enjoyed ourselves and had fun seeing all the beautiful scenery around Paris. When I woke up from my dream, I felt like I went through this journey feeling happiness in my heart. It was an awesome experience to visit all the beautiful places in my dream.



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Irma wrote this story because she saw it as a great opportunity for learners to share their dreams and creative stories with everyone.

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# My Day Out

*By Shaina Huston*

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Shaina is 25 years old and she has been with PAR for a year. She wrote this story about her vacation and how much fun it was. She wants to share this story.

My Independent Living Skills (ILS) group went on a charter bus to Great America last summer and it was fun. I enjoyed the fresh air because it was nice. I ate junk food like soda, candy, fries and hamburgers. It was hot and I drank a lot of water. My favorite ride was Gold Striker. It was fast and I got a rush. I went on it ten times. Then I went on a different one, a water ride. I was soaked and it was nice and cool. It was nice to hang out with friends for a change.



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# Moving to California

*By Maria Garcia Jimenez*

I remember the day I came to California like it was yesterday. I left Mexicali B.C. on November 6, 1996. I took a bus to Tijuana B.C. to meet my dad and to get my visa to immigrate to Los Angeles.

Once I was in LA I joined my mother and little sister, who I hadn't seen in a long time. I was very excited about my new life in a new country. Life in LA wasn't easy, I didn't speak any English and finding a job was very challenging.

I remember the first time I saw LA. I was impressed with all the clean and long roads the city has that I had never seen before. My cousin in LA made my new life easier. He took me to a lot of new places. We visited the zoo, the malls, and restaurants. He always made me laugh a lot.

I started English in LA and after a few years I moved to San José, CA. Now I feel more comfortable speaking English, and I have a job where I can practice and improve my English skills every day. At the same time I help people who only speak Spanish.

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Maria has learned a lot in the last year and is happy to be part of the 2016 PAR book.



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Downtown  
Los Angeles

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Moving to California was a very important journey because it changed my life completely . This journey was full of new things. I learned a new language, I made friends from all over the world, and I found a job that I enjoy .

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Evening over  
downtown San  
Jose, California



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## A Journey of the Mind

*By So-Ae Kilgore*

Do circumstances make us who we are?  
Or do they merely reveal who we really are?

We all have our own journeys to make.

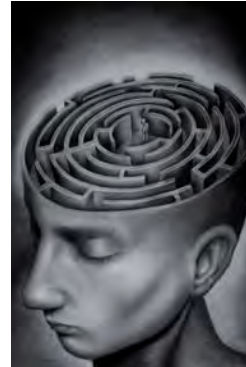
It reflects where we come from; how we got  
where we are now.

When I think about my childhood, the most  
important person to my development was  
my father.

He didn't graduate from college or succeed  
in his business but he had wisdom to know  
how I was different from my sibling and the  
tenderness so few possess.

My parents embedded the values I cherish  
every day, the difference between right and  
wrong, what is appropriate to say or not, the  
importance of how to face unknown fear and  
walk through it.

No matter how hopeless it seems, we always  
have choice.



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So-Ae has noticed  
that people's minds  
improve and get  
more developed  
as they get older .

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We act pretty foolish sometimes, we feel like running from it, we try to hide, we face without finching.

We all react according to our own nature. We take action for our beliefs and stand up to a challenge. It teaches us how to take responsibility for our own journey. What we sometimes fail to realize is that choices we made dictated the life we lead.

This creates one simple question.

Since our personal values, beliefs and responsibilities are different from each other, since we observe other cultures through our values rather than through their beliefs, how can we say whose choice is good or bad? How can we measure the values of one's personal choice? Should some people's choice be given greater value than others'?

I think not. It's just choice. We are all in our own journeys. That's what makes it interesting.

*“There's no destination. The journey is all that there is, and it can be very, very joyful.”*

— Srikumar Rao



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# The Deep Blue Waves of Lake Tahoe

*By Seung Lee*

One day, in the middle of the summer, my family was riding in a car over four hours. We felt a little bit tired. My family was heading for Lake Tahoe for summer vacation. My son and I fell asleep for a long time. But when I opened my eyes, I was surprised because suddenly beautiful Lake Tahoe appeared in front of my eyes. I couldn't forget that moment. It seemed that the Great Mother Nature was trying to talk to me.

My life was totally changed when our family moved here. I felt uncomfortable because of different culture, language, people, etc. and I had to adapt to a new environment in the U.S. I was very nervous all the time. So I got lots of stress. I needed physical as well as mental relaxation for myself. When I saw Lake Tahoe for the first time, all of a sudden my mind became comfortable. I felt like I was on another planet. The deep blue waves of the lake had a mystique and were very beautiful. There were



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Seung wrote this story because she wants to share about this beautiful place with many friends. She thinks Lake Tahoe is a wonderful place.

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many trees in the mountains. I could feel the great force of nature. I heard the voice of Lake Tahoe. “Life is full of adventure. Cheer up!” Maybe I got some encouragement from Lake Tahoe. After that, my family has visited Lake Tahoe every year, especially when we need some healing. Whenever I visit there I could see different faces of Lake Tahoe. That’s why I love Lake Tahoe.



*“Life is a journey; let’s enjoy it, seeing some exciting things, and having fun along the way.”*

— Ellen J. Barrier

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## Our Family Trip to San Francisco

*By Fitzroy Leslie*

Katie and I went to San Francisco with Kieran and Kellan.

It was so amazing for my son, Kieran. His dream came true. I could see what was going through his head. “I get to go on the train to go see planes fly in the sky .”

When we got to the train he said, “Don’t hold my hand. I can do it by myself. I’m big.”

I said to him, “No, you are not that big. I have to lift you up.”

He said, “Why?”

I said, “Because if anything happened to you police officers will come and get me.”

“Okay.”

When we got on the train it was a scene. His eyes were lit up like when stadium lights turn on. When we got to San Francisco we took the trolley to the Blue Angels.



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Fitzroy wrote this story to share about his family’s trip to San Francisco.



Blue Angels -  
Fleet Week,  
San Francisco

“Dad, look! Look, dad! Look, that’s so cool!  
Right, dad?”

On our way back after finishing watching the Blue Angels, it was really hard with two kids, because there were too many people leaving at the same time.

Every trolley we could have gotten on was too crowded.

Sadly we had to walk to the next trolley station and ride it to the Cal Train. The kids were hot and fussy, and hungry because all of our snacks were gone. When we finally go to the Cal Train we grabbed snacks for everyone to eat. Now everyone was happy.

So we boarded the next train home.



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## A Hard Decision in my Life

*By Porfiria Lopez*

It was time to get my life in my hands. I was afraid because I didn't want to go the wrong way.

I was thinking and thinking and praying to God. I begged for guidance because my boyfriend had asked me to go to the U.S. with him.

I felt over whelmed at the idea, yet I knew I had to make this difficult decision and be responsible for it.

I had three possible choices in my life: to stay with my family, live alone, or start a new family. After thinking about it, I told my boyfriend, "You can go. I'll wait for you."

And he said, "What if I find another woman?" I told him, "I'll understand."

He said, "No, come with me."

"Okay, we can go together," I told him. "We'll talk with my parents."



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Deciding whether to go to the United States was the most difficult decision Porfiria has ever made.

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He said, “No.”

I told him, “Yes, because they’ll become scared and angry if I just run away to the U.S. We need to take our life in our hands.”

He finally said, “Okay, we will talk with your parents.” And that is what we did, and that is how we got to San José.

Now we are happy with two sons. Sometimes we have some problems in our life, but I pray to God for the intelligence to solve the problems. The most difficult decision in my life has helped me to grow and become more responsible, and this makes me happy.



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## A Long Process to Mexico

*By Josefina Martinez*

I haven't been in my home country, Mexico, for more than twelve years. It was my biggest wish during all those years. I came here to the United States in 2003, but I didn't have documents to return to Mexico to see my family.

In 2013 President Obama announced an ordinance to help husbands and wives of U.S. citizens to legalize their status. In that moment my husband, who always lived here lawfully, was only a permanent resident, so the good news was awesome, but not for us. My husband started to go to school to learn about U.S. History and U.S. Government. The first days were difficult for him because he never studied those topics in Mexico. Sometimes he would come home from the school very disappointed, but he never missed his class during the six months. He and I studied every night because we wanted him to become a U.S. citizen and finally fix my status in this country.

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Josefina wrote this story because she wants to encourage people to take advantage of opportunities.





He started his process with immigration filling out applications, making payments and getting proof of his records. Finally when he went to have the interview with immigration he was successful. I felt very happy because I had the opportunity to try to fix my status here and to have the possibility to go to Mexico to see my parents. Then we opened my case to start the process with immigration.

I was very excited, but it wasn't easy. It was difficult and sometimes painful because my husband had to demonstrate why I had to stay here, and how he would be affected living without me. He had to show them a lot of documents. All of this took about two years. Little by little we were climbing step by step up a big mountain and finally I got an appointment to go to Ciudad Juárez, Mexico and have an interview with an immigration officer. I was happy because it was the last step to get my green card. But I worried about my daughters. I didn't want to take them with me to Mexico because I thought that place is too dangerous. So, we decided to leave them here in San José with their aunt. I didn't feel happy, but I wasn't worried. I didn't know how many days we would have to stay in Ciudad Juárez.



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We took an airplane to El Paso, TX and then my husband and I rode in a taxi to a bridge called El Chamizal. The taxi stopped before crossing the bridge and we crossed it walking. I felt a sensation that I can't describe. How easy it is to get out of the United States and after twelve years come back to Mexico, I felt like a foreigner. Ciudad Juarez is in Mexico, but I had never been there. I had three appointments including my interview in the American Consulate in Ciudad Juarez. Luckily I could complete all the requirements to get my green card and finally go to my town in Jalisco, Mexico to see my parents after twelve long years!



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## I'll Always Have Paris... and London... and New York

*By Frederick Mills*



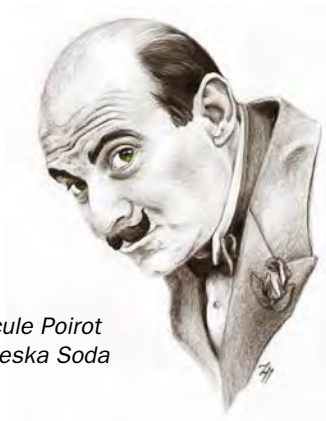
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Frederick wrote this story to tell you about his travels.

People talk about Paris in the spring time and about how lovely it is. But I went there in the winter when it was cold and raining.

It wasn't just Paris. I also had a chance to go to London. While I was in London, I met this world famous detective and helped him solve a murder. His name was Hercule Poirot.

Meanwhile, back in the deep South where I made and sold moonshine, I was chased by the cops through the backwoods where the trees grew together. It was so dense that at noon it was as dark as midnight. There were a lot of guns, a lot of bullets, and a lot of blood. It didn't end well. I got killed.



*Hercule Poirot  
by Ceska Soda*

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Then I met a woman with eight arms and legs and eight eyes. And she was very hairy. She carried her offspring on her back and was an extremely dangerous woman. She killed me too.

One of my most recent trips was to New York. People were looking for me: my sister, brother-in-law and manager. I'm a beautiful 22-year-old blonde model with blue eyes. My manager tried to kill me, but instead killed my best friend.

I'm sure you're wondering how one person could achieve all of these experiences. Well, I did it through books. Some of the best trips a person can take are through the pages of a book.



*“Books are the plane, and the train, and the road. They are the destination, and the journey. They are home.”*

— **Anna Quindlen**, *How Reading Changed My Life*

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# 5,000 Miles Faraway From Home

*By Toshiko Miraflor*

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Toshiko came to the United States 35 years ago from Japan. Her recent challenge has been to read an English novel.

My long journey started in May 1981, when I came to this country from my 5,000 miles faraway hometown to Stockton, California. The weather was so hot and dry. The temperature was over 100 degrees at that time. The winter was so cold and foggy. I was frustrated to live in these conditions for the rest of my life. However, I lived there over 30 years with my family.

I had another problem when I was confronted with the language barrier. I decided to take an ESL class at Delta College in Stockton. After I finished the class, I got a part-time job, but my English skill was not improved.

One day I visited the Culture Center in downtown Stockton, where I met Dan Mintiens, who was an artist. He asked me to join his art class. He said, "I'll teach you to paint watercolor instead of English." I was excited and I joined his class. I met many students at Dan's class and we became good friends. I spent most of my time in painting. If I had not met Dan, my life would have changed in a different way.

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Many years passed by . I moved to San José 5 years ago by myself. I lost my husband from serious illness. I like the weather in San José. I especially like my neighborhood because it feels like my hometown. Then I joined the PAR program and I am taking an English class since last spring.

Learning English is the most important for my dream. It seems to be a long journey to me.

Thank you to my teacher , Michael Winterstein, for your patience, discipline, broad-minded attitude and inspiring me to study English.



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## Dream Trip to Boston, Massachusetts

*By Gordon C. Nelson*



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The City of Boston's tourism office is conducting a contest and Gordon hopes to win a trip so he can visit.

The City of Boston's Tourism Office is conducting a contest, and I have decided to let them know that I have a dream of visiting Boston. You ask me why? I'll let you know. I have wanted to visit many places I heard about in Boston, Mass.

I would like to visit the Nelson family plot. My Mom and Dad are buried there, and I want to visit their graves and see my plot. I would also like to visit the Boston Museum of Fine Arts because they have Egyptian relics from the time period of Jesus. I'd also like to see the USS Constitution (ship) because I want to see the big cannons and see how the crew lived. Next, I would enjoy seeing where Paul Revere's horse ride warning the colonists of the British troops' arrival took place.

I would also include seeing the Boston Symphony too, because I want to hear the music (all kinds of sounds). The Old World Church would be included because I would like to see how the church looked at that time,

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because I'm a Christian. I understand that across the street from the church, there is a cemetery with grave stones dating back to the 1600's.

I am a senior citizen, and Boston's history, especially my parents' birthplace, is of great interest to me.



Museum of Fine Art,  
Boston (top)



Paul Revere  
Monument (left)

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## My Friendship Cruise

*By Kathleen Nicolas*



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Kathleen wrote this story because she loves her new friends.

In 2012 I went on a Silver Sea cruise. I had the most fun time ever. I went with my mom and dad. We visited Venice, Greece, Italy, Istanbul, and Santorini. I met the cruise director and made new friends.

On the fourth of July I went to a show on the cruise ship. After the show there was a Fourth of July party. I met the entertainers Elizabeth, Rebecca, Jodie, Kyle, and Jared. Kyle taught me a line dance. I taught the entertainers the Kathleen dance. We had fun and became friends. They sent videos to me as they traveled.

Elizabeth is my cruise sister and we have friendship bracelets. In 2014 I went to Los Angeles to see Elizabeth in her new show. Elizabeth and I send texts to each other and we are both on Facebook. Elizabeth is the greatest cruise sister ever. I miss Elizabeth and I love seeing her. The cruise was really fun. I love my new friends.



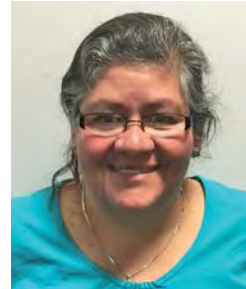
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## Two Families, One Wall

*By Veronica Orosco*

My journey is about how we became a family of five to a family of eight almost overnight. My husband Rodrigo and I have three kids, Rene, Angeles, and Saray. We are a harmonious family. They are my reason to live. We own a duplex. My brother-in-law Demetrio lived next door with his family. He was married to Karla, and they also have three kids, Miguel, Emmanuel, and Julianna. The houses are separated by only one wall. That means that we practically lived together.

I would always try to make sure everything ran smoothly in my own home. While I worked on my own family's wellness I would always hear the domestic violence through the wall. The mother would yell profanities at her own kids, and the kids would always cry. My own kids would question me asking, "Why isn't life always fair?" I felt sad, angry and powerless. I couldn't do too much for those kids. They had their own parents. To my surprise the mom one day left the house.



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Veronica wrote this story to heal her sadness. She has a strong character and hates injustice, especially for kids.



The kids and my br other-in-law (who is deaf) came to me looking for help. I felt ver y disappointed and confused. I decided to help them with ever ything. One day my br other-in-law left the house to fnd distraction. Later he returned for a while with dr ugs, pr ostitutes and all around bad company . His kids came to my door asking for a place to live. They no longer wanted to be with their father . My nephews and niece cried alongside my husband and my own kids. I felt sad and angr y at the same time. In the coming weeks my br other-in-law left the house.

I decided to help the kids. I am tir ed of seeing kids suf fer so much during their childhood. My life was rapidly changing right in fr ont of me. We made a hole in the wall, which became a door way between the two houses. I felt emotionally drained. I went crazy! But my str ong faith in my own morals helped me to over come. Every day I pray for str ength with the ser enity prayer, which goes like this, "God grant me the ser enity to accept the things that I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the dif ference."

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My nephews and niece are affected, but they are learning and adapting fast. I received some lessons about all this in my journey. God will never give you anything more than you can handle. Life is always getting you ready for any challenge that comes your way. From being a family of five, we are now a family of eight. I end all my days exhausted, yet content knowing that we are all now safe and sound.



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# My Journey Through Music

By Paco Reyes



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Francisco Reyes was born in a beautiful country where music is a part of people's lives. This is Francisco's personal story explaining why he is always happy when he listens to music. He wrote this story to recognize all the different kinds of music in the world. Thanks.

When I was younger my family liked music and listened to it all the time. This was a beautiful time, especially because my father had a music group. Sometimes when the music group practiced I paid attention to how all the instruments were played, but I looked at the drum because it was interesting. This was a favorite instrument for me, because I wanted to be a drummer. So I started practicing with the drum and my father told me, "If you like the drum, do it."

I played the drum five months but I saw it was hard and I quit because I saw it was not for me. But I continued to listen to music and to listen to different kinds of music. The ranchera and mariachi was music of my father's music group and I changed to younger persons' music like pop and rock and the most favorite, cumbia.

Cumbia is now my favorite music. It's a style from Mexico. This style is enjoyable because when the music is turned on people dance with each other. Also, the music is fast and when you dance you exercise.

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People like this kind of music, because it's like going to a party. For example, when you go to a party there is always a DJ or music group. These guys have the honor to open the dance, so they say, "Let's go dance." Everybody chooses a partner and starts to dance cumbia with the rhythmic music. You can make a friend when you dance to this music, because you're able to talk with the person you choose to dance with, and you can then exchange information.



Cumbia is not music for sleep. You want to move when you listen to the music. You can lose weight with this music, because you want to move all of your body and you are exercising when you dance. Cumbia is awesome and fun. This is why I saw my opportunity in 1997, and I've been a DJ since that time.



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## A Trip I Will Never Forget

*By Janeen Robbins*



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Janeen lived in Rochester for five years and loved it.



A trip I took a long time ago will always stay in my mind. In the 90's, a friend and I drove from Salinas to Rochester, New York because we wanted to see new places. My friend drove her car, and we ate food from home. We drove a long way each day, and slept in the car at night. One night, I saw fireflies for the first time. The trip took three days to get there.

We drove through eleven states. Nevada had rust-colored mountains that looked like clay. In Utah, I saw the Great Salt Lake. It looked like the ocean! As we were driving through Wyoming, I asked my friend, "Where are the mountains?" She said, "There are no mountains here." We drove through Nebraska and Iowa. Both states had lots of farms and miles of corn. We stayed in Chicago, Illinois, where we saw lots of skyscrapers and a huge stadium. I don't remember much about Indiana, Ohio, or Pennsylvania, because I was exhausted by then. I was so happy to finally hear that we were in Rochester!

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To me, Rochester was a big culture shock. There were people from many different countries, and I ran into a lot of friendly people. The summer weather was humid. It rained a lot, with lightning. I saw lots of people sitting on their front porches, and I thought that was different. In winter, it was very cold, with lots of snow. Once, in winter, I was walking home with a friend to her house. We had been drinking tequila and listening to music. We had a good time, but when we were walking, I was so drunk that I fell right on my butt. My friend started laughing at me, and I said, "Don't laugh at me, help me up!"

I will always remember my trip to Rochester, and my five best years there.



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# My Journey to Mexico

*By Angelica Serrato*



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Angelica was born in Durango, Mexico. She has been living here for 20 years.

My husband and I drove to Mexico to visit our families with my three daughters. I enjoyed the trip my family took to Mexico. We stopped in different places along the way .

One of the places we stopped was at the windmills in Arizona. We thought they were interesting because there were a lot of them. They were spinning all together . We stayed overnight in a motel in Arizona.

The next day we drove through El Paso, Texas, Juarez, Chihuahua, Torreon and ended in Durango. We only stopped a few times to eat, walk around and to get exercise. We stayed in Durango for ten days visiting family .

We went to the river to let the girls play and swim. We also went to the park and zoo. The zoo is as big as the one in San Francisco. We visited the new places in Durango that were not there when I lived there. One of the new things



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was a gondola that took us to the zoo by going over the city. Another was a tour of the mine tunnels where they mined for gold. The tunnel tour was very interesting.

On the way home we stopped in the same places just to rest and eat. The whole trip was fourteen days. We had a great time.



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Durango, Mexico  
/ Photo by Ivan  
Rumata

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## Adventure to Marseilles

By JiaLuo Shen



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JiaLuo had a dream of visiting Europe. She was pleased to live her dream. Her limited time and bad weather gave her more challenges besides the language obstacle.

I had a dream of visiting Europe when I was young.

Seven years ago, I had a chance to take a cruise around Europe. The cruise started at Barcelona. The package included an airline ticket from San Francisco to Barcelona. The ship sailed every night and anchored the next morning at the subsequent port of call. The ports were Marseilles, Nice, Florence, Naples, Pisa, and Rome.

It was the worst day of storms in European history. Most flights were canceled. So I missed the departure sailing from Barcelona. I took an airplane the next morning to catch the ship at the second port, Marseilles.

After various delays, I arrived at Marseilles pier at 12:30 p.m. All excursions had left. My only choice was to take public transportation to visit Marseilles. The last shuttle bus from downtown for embarkation was 3:30 p.m.

The limited time and the bad weather gave me more challenges besides the language obstacle.

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I started my journey hungry and fatigued. The first place I went was the Notre Dame de la Garde. I liked this tour. Not only did I enjoy the spectacular panoramic views of Marseilles from the top of the hill, but I had a very special adventure. The gale winds forced me forward and backward. I couldn't stand firm. At that moment, I was so proud of myself and deeply believed that I was the bravest old woman in the world. I cheered "holy" out loudly. I wanted to stay longer, but the return train was leaving soon.



1890s postcard of  
Henri-Jacques  
Espérandieu:  
Palais Longchamp,  
Marseille

It was two o'clock when I came back downtown. Checking the schedules, I estimated that I could catch the subway if I hurried. I could spend 15 minutes in the Longchamp Palace. "Don't give up," I said.

With a local French speaking resident's help, I got a round-trip ticket and successfully reached the palace. I felt satisfied although I just had a short visit in the palace. I returned to embarkation on time. Thereafter, I had a very happy cruise. I was pleased to live my dream, an adventure dream.

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## Coming to America

*By Vladimir Shirokov*

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Vladimir is 49 years old. He wrote his story because he wanted to introduce himself.

In 2013 my sister , who has lived in the USA for more than 20 years, advised us to try to take part in the annual international lottery to win a “Green Card.” We agreed and my wife won it the first time.

We decided to move to the U.S. It was a very hard decision because we were not very young and I had a good job. I was an aircraft mechanic, and also we owned our apartment in town and had a vacation home. But our son was very ill often, and the climate in Russia has been tough for him.

When we came to the U.S. the first time we lived in my sister’s family’s house and we were very happy. Later my sister helped us rent a one bedroom apartment. By that time we still had enough money but we didn’t have any jobs. Three months later I was close to despair because our English was horrible and everywhere we needed help. Meanwhile, our son spoke English very well and he was absolutely healthy . My wife and I tried to study English in ESL classes and also we went to

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“conversations clubs,” but it took a lot of our time and the classes did not help.

Half a year later I got my first job in America, I worked as an auto mechanic. I knew cars very well but my salary was not enough because I could not communicate with customers.

My friends advised me to go to the library and learn about a reading and writing program. My wife and I have become part of the program. Thanks to my tutor my English has improved and I was able to find a higher-paying job. Now I am working as a driver of SuperShuttle. It is not bad, but this is not my main goal. I hope when my English is much better, I can find a job in my specialty and I will be able to make more money and become a citizen of America.



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## My Summer Dream

*By Jacqueline Smith*



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Jacqueline wrote this page because dreams can become true or reality. She lived this dream and feels free to tell her story here.

The best dream I ever had was when I was half asleep and I felt a warm gentle breath against my head. I enjoyed the feeling so I did not wake up. The experience I had was so astonishing.

A few weeks later it happened again. I was snoozing and felt it again, on my cheek this time. It was the warmth of the spirit of the Lord. I finally realized that I was there in the presence of God Almighty. Another time, while taking a nap at a friend's house I felt the warmth on my feet gradually covering my whole body. Several weeks passed and it happened again. This time I heard a whispering in my ear that said "Wake up, daughter."

While lying in bed I was awake but could not get up. I only remember some of the most exciting parts.

I really want to go back to that place, which was unforgettable. I will never forget that place and dream once again to find the presence of God. It was wonderful to feel the expression of God's glory. It was spiritual and my mind

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was expanding during my dream. It felt like a journey. It was cozy and warm to feel His presence. At the time I was aware of the Lord's presence. He said, "Get ready. It's time." What a relief! And I have the peace of our Lord Christ.



This place I could not see with the natural eye but it was the place of all understanding and my help comes from the Lord. This is the best dream ever. I felt like I was in the clouds with the Holy Spirit's love on my pillow. I will continually give thanks to our maker, give thanks to the Lord, who shows His mighty promises and loving grace. The place was unforgettable. My dream was where there were warm thoughts shared with others. The angels talked with God for me on my behalf and answered and lifted all my burdens.



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# Coming to California From Oklahoma City

By Leo Smith



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Leo wrote this story to help improve his education. He is excited to learn to read the newspaper and the Bible.

I was living in Oklahoma City when I came to California in the early 1970s. Two of my brothers were already living here. They told me to come, and I stayed with them in LA for a month. I took a Greyhound bus for three days. I really enjoyed the trip because I did a lot of sightseeing of places that I had never seen. We stopped in El Paso and I went to the zoo. We saw a lot of animals that I had never seen before. I had dinner at the bus station in El Paso and had a chile dog that I will never forget. I haven't been able to find one since.

The Greyhound was a luxury bus with a TV, and it even had a bathroom. But when we were driving through the desert, the driver wouldn't let us open the windows. He kept the air conditioning on because it was so hot outside, but I almost froze inside that bus.



After staying with my brothers I came to San José. I got a job at the California Cannery. I worked on the assembly line processing apricots, plums, peaches, grapes, and pears. I worked there for three years.



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My next job was detailing expensive cars. I couldn't believe I was driving BMWs, Mercedes, and Porsches. Sometimes we would go to San Francisco, Hayward, and Oakland to pick up new cars at the dock. I liked that job because I worked by myself and nobody watched over me.

I'm glad I took that trip from Oklahoma City to San José.



*“One of the most important things that I have learned in my 57 years is that life is all about choices. On every journey you take, you face choices. At every fork in the road, you make a choice. And it is those decisions that shape our lives.”*

— Mike DeWine

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## A Trip Interrupted

*By Yanting Smith*



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Yanting came to the United States 20 years ago. She is grateful to have joined PAR. She is publishing her first story in the PAR book.

I have been an Airbnb host since 2012. The 2015 Airbnb host conference would be in Paris from November 11 to 14. What an exciting event, the city of Paris, my dream.

There were 6000 hosts from around the world, with many different meetings. The most successful hosts shared their experiences.

In Paris no one can miss the bakeries. The event provided breakfast but I skipped most breakfasts and went to the bakery to watch the fashionable people.

A host invited me to an art show in her living room. It was very interesting. The painter used raindrops to make pictures, which created a unique effect. When I left the party, I took the Metro back to my hotel. Everything was wonderful. I sent an email to my son and went to sleep.

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I was woken up by the phone buzzing, wondering who it was. Outside the window it was still dark. It was my son's message "Mom are you ok? Please call me! Paris had an attack."

I opened my iPad and looked at the news. There were attacks by gunmen and suicide bombers starting just about the time I got back to my hotel. They hit a concert hall, a stadium, restaurant and bars, almost simultaneously. A hundred and thirty people were dead and hundreds wounded.

Airbnb ended the conference and canceled our big party. I changed my airline ticket and went back home. My two week trip ended after five days.

My heart was touched so much by Paris. I prayed for the Parisians. I prayed for peace, I prayed for the most beautiful city of Paris.



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French light candles and place flowers outside le Carillon bar in Paris, on November 22, 2015, days after terrorists opened fire.



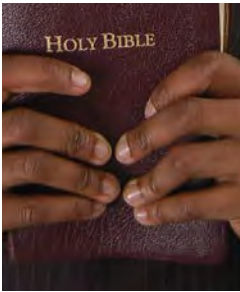
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# The Long Journey

*By Anonymous*

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This learner has been in the program for eight years.



My journey started about 8 years ago. It happened when I was called to the ministry. I had to get an associate degree in theology. I always knew that my reading and writing wasn't that great. At the time I didn't read a book or write a paper for over 15 years. So I came to PAR to work on my reading and writing. For two years I worked hard to get better. I would have to get my associate degree to become a minister. There was a lot of reading and writing in Bible College. I could say no to the call to the ministry, but I said yes. It was challenging but it was worth it. I am thinking of going back to get my bachelor's degree in theology. My journey is constantly learning and getting better in my reading and writing. I will not stop until I get to my goal.

*“Every day is a journey filled with twists and turns. Every day, if you smile, you will feel alive, my son.”*

— Santosh Kalwarn

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## Visiting My Sister

*By Hadas T.*

Two years ago, I went to visit my sister and her family in Mason, Ohio. I flew from San Francisco to Las Vegas because I had a connecting flight in Las Vegas. I stayed there for two hours then I flew to Mason. I arrived at Dayton International Airport at 8:00 p.m. Before I left home, I emailed my sister the flight schedule so she could pick me up at the exact time. She came on time and we went to her house.

I was excited to see my nephews and my brother-in-law since I hadn't seen my nephews for a long time. We couldn't recognize each other, but my brother-in-law and my sister introduced me to them. They are very nice kids and very polite, so I love them very much. For dinner my sister made lasagna, cotoletta and salad. We ate together. It was so delicious and I enjoyed it, especially that lasagna. The next day she took me to her restaurant, Café Bella, where we ate breakfast and I drank cappuccino. I stayed with my sister for one week. After one week, we traveled to Saint Louis, Missouri for my cousin's wedding. My sister drove. We got to Saint Louis at 9 p.m. It was very dark. We



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Hadas wrote her story because she needs to improve her English.

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couldn't find the wedding venue. We were lost, but found a Safeway where my sister asked a guy who was working there if he could help us. She gave him the wedding address and he told her the directions how to go there and we reached the wedding venue at 9:30 p.m.

The next day, which was the wedding day, we met most of our cousins, who came from different parts of the world. I hadn't seen them for more than 20 years so we had a great time together, chatting, dancing, eating and laughing. We enjoyed the wedding. After the wedding day, my aunt invited us to lunch at her son's restaurant, Bar Italia. We enjoyed the food and I have never been so happy like that in my life.



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# A Vacation I'll Always Remember

By Maria Torrico

In April 1984, during my mom's Easter vacation, we went to Lake Titicaca. It took 10 hours from our home in Cochabamba, Bolivia.

We left on Wednesday, a shiny day. We put our baggage for 1 week on the bus. I was so happy to go. It was my first time to see Lake Titicaca.

The bus drove northwest for 8 hours. I could see strong blue when we were near. I was so impressed with the color. I wanted to know where was the end. We came to the small city of Tiquina to cross the narrow part of the lake. We took a small boat to cross the water because there was no bridge. It smelled fresh. When I touched the water, it was cold.

We arrived at the Peninsula de Copacabana, a small city where we stayed. There were not many hotels. We stayed in a private home. The city was crowded. We went to visit the church. We walked the hills they called Calvario. We walked a rock path to the top of the hill. We took pictures. My mom bought souvenirs. It was a new experience with my brother.

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Maria was born in Bolivia and came to California in 1991. Visiting Lake Titicaca and coming to California were special trips.





The food was different kinds of fish: soup fish, fried fish and dried fish. The popcorn was bigger than I had seen in Cochabamba. I liked it. The place was beautiful; the water unforgettable.

I was there 32 years ago. Now they have more hotels, and more businesses, but they need a bridge for people to cross safely. I still remember that special trip with my family.

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Copacabana, on the south side of Lake Titicaca.  
© Matt Brown  
mattbrowntown.wordpress.com





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# My Journey of Horror, Music, Haunted Houses and Halloween All Put Together

*By Rich Truchetta*

I consider myself someone who loves Halloween more than just about anyone. For me, though, it isn't just a day, it's a lifestyle and part of who I am. Through the journey of movies, music, costumes, and scenery, I can become anyone, any character I desire to be. This story is just a little bit about how my fascination with all things horror, haunted, and Halloween began.

As a kid, I watched a lot of scary movies. I got hooked on a show called Creature Features, and the host was awesome. I remember this yellow rocking chair that he would sit in, smoking a cigar, and he would take this skull and light it up with the cigar, and then go into what movie would be showing that night. That show, along with interests like music, influenced me, and my imagination continued to grow. The bands at concerts I saw used incredible theatrical staging, makeup, and effects that drew me in.

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Rich wrote this story because he is very interested in horror and haunted houses. He wanted to share how he got started.



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Bob Wilkins  
(April 11, 1932 – January 7, 2009).  
Host of Creature Features on KTVU from 1971 to 1984



Gryo's 4D Fear  
Factory

Haunted houses have also become a tradition for me. There was an old Victorian house in my neighborhood growing up and at night for Halloween they made it into this “Night of the Living Dead” haunted house. It was so creepy that none of my friends wanted to go in, but I thought it was intriguing. I started constructing haunted houses on my own and ended up doing Gyro's for over 13 years.

There's no stopping me now. Every day and every experience just adds more to my journey.



<http://www.deadtimedreams.com>



*TransWorlds Halloween and Attractions Show 2015*

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## My Day in the Field

*By Gerardo Vazquez*

Thirty-one years ago I decided to go to work in the carrot field in Mexico. I wanted to make some money for my family. I was 12 years old. I went with my friends because the landlord employed children who earned low wages, allowing him to hire more children and get work done faster.

I arrived at the start time, 4:00 a.m., in the field. The carrots are fresher then and taste sweet and juicy. They gave me a row to pick, but it was hard to see, because it was still dark. So my boss helped me to finish my row.

My boss decided to take me to the river to wash the carrots. We made a circle of rocks in the river so the carrots wouldn't go away. The water was cold, but this was good for the carrots. The landlord gave me a warning: "Be careful because the bulls come to drink water at noon." I laughed, because I thought he was joking.



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Gerardo wrote his story because it was difficult for him to work in the field, and it is a funny story that he wants to share.



I started to shake the sacks to wash the carrots. Suddenly I heard many bulls running toward the river. I was scared and ran to the other side. So the bulls had water and carrots! When my boss came back, I told him what had happened. He almost fell down in angry surprise. At the end of the day, he took me home, but I was upset because he didn't pay me. I told my mom what happened. She gave thanks to God that the landlord didn't make her pay for the carrots. That was my first and last day in the carrot field.



*“Though the road's been rocky it sure feels good to me.”*

— Bob Marley

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## A Cute Birthday Journey

By Tapasvini Vyas

How can I forget the journey which I took on my daughter's birthday?

It was her first birthday after she got admitted to university. She insisted that our family should gather there on her birthday. Her dorm was very far from our place. There were no reservations available for a train or flight, so we had to drive by car. We were excited and started gathering stuff we needed and packed luggage. After we drove around 9 hours, we got lost. There was a hilly area with not much traffic. We smelled the fresh air and heard the roars of animals. Suddenly we realized that we only had 10 miles' worth of gas left. We got scared that we might get stuck in the middle of the road. Luckily we found a gas station. Tears came out of my eyes in gratitude.



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When PAR announced the topic *My Journey* Tapasvini felt her journey was worth sharing with readers.

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We were about to reach the dorm when an accident occurred on the road. Traffic was directed towards a different route, which was muddy and rough. There were fields on both sides of the road. The hot weather made us more tired. After a long drive, we reached the paved road again. Late in the evening, we finally arrived. When we met our daughter, she cried in joy and said “I am so sorry, you faced lots of troubles. I love you.” Our angel’s birthday was almost over. Still we had a good time together. Isn’t this the most unforgettable journey of my life?

*“Never make your home in a place. Make a home for yourself inside your own head. You’ll find what you need to furnish it - memory, friends you can trust, love of learning, and other such things. That way it will go with you wherever you journey.”*

— Tad Williams

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## A Trip to the Beach

*By Lilian Wolfe*

A few months ago my friends, my husband and I drove to the beach. We started at 9:00 in the morning; along the way we saw a lot of farms. A variety of vegetables were planted; we were excited and tried to tell what they were. We looked at those green vegetables bathed in sunshine and swaying in the wind; they seemed like they were dancing and singing. They were happy to grow. We were deeply attracted by the sight. It seemed we were dancing too. We enjoyed nature.

We went to the beach; we were fascinated by other scenery, the sunlight was twinkling off the ocean's waves, wonderful! We took off our shoes running to the beach, but soft sand made it difficult to run; we walked along the trail, we had to walk slowly. We took pictures after; my husband and my friends picked up stones, collected sea shells, and I was dancing with the ocean waves.



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Lilian came to the U.S. from Guangzhou, China in 2008. She has lived in North Carolina, Florida, and now lives in San José.

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We were tired, we sat on the beach drinking water and eating sandwiches. We enjoyed it very much.

The sun was going down, so it was time to go home. We were reluctant to part and say goodbye to the ocean. "See you soon!"

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© Jim Patterson  
San Gregorio State  
Beach, Sunset





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# My Journey of Learning English in the U. S.

By Rumiko Yamame

I came from Japan three years ago because my husband was transferred here. I had studied English for over six years, but I was afraid to speak it. I didn't know anyone here and I was very depressed.

Soon after we arrived in the U.S., I was playing catch with my son when the ball went over the fence and into the backyard next door. I went to my neighbor's house with a note of what to say. I nervously asked her if I could get my ball.

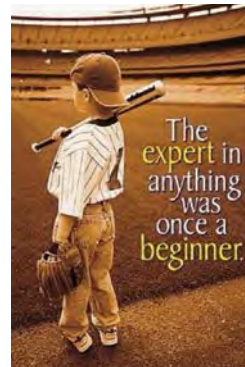
She said "Sure!", so I got back the ball.

My neighbor is very kind. She always speaks to me when we meet. I enjoy communicating with her using simple words and body language.

She advised me to take an ESL class. That's how I started to study English here. That class was very helpful. I could learn English in everyday life. After one year, I wanted to get better at speaking.

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It was a big change in Rumiko's life to come to the U.S. She was like a baby in English. She's on the long journey of learning English.



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My friend told me about PAR. I registered and started tutoring sessions one and a half years ago. In the lesson, I can talk a lot. My tutor teaches me vocabulary, pronunciation, American culture and everything. I began to speak English more and be less shy.

I also started taking medical terminology and interpreter classes. I used to work in the medical field. Taking those classes will be helpful when I start working again. I intend to continue studying English while having fun.

*“It is good to have an end to journey toward; but it is the journey that matters, in the end.”*

— **Ursula K. Le Guin**, *The Left Hand of Darkness*

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## Clock Hands

*By Haya Yang*

Sometimes a specific time and place shape our memory into more meaningful things. Ordinary events in our life can become a unique moment depending on the time and place. As having a meal is nothing special, but the dinner you have with your old friend whom you have not seen for a long time will be completely different.

Every day could be a small but valuable journey that makes your future different. When I was young, I didn't understand or notice this. My daily routine looked the same and going to work was boring from time to time. I wanted to journey from where I was by dreaming of another life.

I realize only now that life is like clock hands moving forward by seconds. It seems just to circulate in a circle without changes. Time, however, goes by, gradually changing everything and shaping our life progressively. Whether we appreciate our present or imagine other situations, it is part of our daily journey.

It is curious to think about what my future might be and how my journey will change my life.

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Haya wrote about the value of everyday life as a small but important journey because it shapes our future life.



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