
Memories of Home



**Partners in Reading
Adult Literacy Program
San José Public Library
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Introduction

This collection of stories shares the memories of home of the learners in Partners in Reading, the adult literacy program at the San José Public Library. These dedicated adults are working to improve their reading and writing skills by meeting with a volunteer tutor each week. For many learners, this is the first attempt to express their ideas for publication. Others are more experienced authors, having written for one or more previous PAR publications. They all worked very hard to draft, revise, and polish their stories. Learners are beginning to find confidence in themselves as they explore written communication with their tutors' assistance.

This year's theme is *Memories of Home*. The book gives learners the opportunity to think about a home that was very special to them. This can be their childhood home, a home in their native country or their first home as a homeowner. The learners went beyond writing about the place and wrote about the people that made that home so memorable for them.

Lyudmila shares her fond memories of spending time with her family in Russia during World War II and how she felt "warm and safe there despite the outside life." Hong reminisces about her mother in Vietnam and vividly describes the delicious food and colorful decorations of Lunar New Year. Jesse thinks back 17 years ago to the house he shared with his family and how his youth affected his relationships with his mother and brother. Sonia writes about her grandparents' amazing house in Nicaragua that fit all of her extended family and had a room built around a mango tree.

As you read this book, you will find beautiful descriptions of homes in countries all over the world and touching stories of the importance of family. We thank the learners for sharing their stories with us.

Tiffany Hayes
Literacy Program Assistant

My First Home

by Jahannaz Afshar

Blue is a color that always reminds me of my childhood home. The front door of that home was blue. Most of the sweet memories of my childhood happened in that home, which was located in a hilly area of Tehran, Iran.

After the hallway, there were rooms on the right and left. After the first room on the right, there was a kitchen with a large living room opposite. By going down two steps, we were in the garden. I loved the open window from the kitchen to the garden. Delicious smells and my mother's voice were unforgettable.

Except for the wintertime, the garden weather was breezy and cool in the mornings and lovely and hot at noon. However, my favorite time of day was afternoon, when I was playing in the garden and able to hear my mother's voice through the kitchen window while she sang, hummed, and cooked. I had plenty of time to play because preschool started at age five and I was four at

that time.

The garden was small but full of happiness and joy. A berry tree always had gifts for us in the summer. By “us” I mean my brothers, sisters, and myself. A beautiful, fragrant honeysuckle covered one of the garden’s walls and cascaded down. I used to take one of the branches and pretend that it was my microphone. I used to wear my mother’s fuzzy-collared pink nightdress, tied up with a tape measure around my waist. I felt like a princess with a wonderful dress, and of course I wore my mother’s red lipstick! I started to sing. The audience was very small, consisting only of my younger brother Shadi and my grandfather, who was so kind and patient and my biggest fan.

Those memories always bring a smile to my face, and I still think of my first home whenever I feel sad.

Jahannaz has lived in the United States with her husband Reza for almost four years and has been with Rosemary, her Partner in Reading, for ten months. Jahannaz came here from Iran, where four of her five siblings still live. She has a sister in Canada. She trained to be a medical assistant in San Jose and now works in the area of refugee health assessment. In her spare time, Jahannaz loves to paint and to read.

The Kerosene Lamp

by Lyudmila Babchinitser

I'd like to tell you about my childhood home in faraway Russia. My memory begins from 1943. World War II was still on Russian territory, but the Soviet Army had driven fascist aggressors far away from Moscow. Mama, with my sister Tanya (8) and me (6), returned to Moscow from our two years of evacuation. Moscow met us with war "camouflages": the military patrolled the city, barrage balloons covered the sky, streets were empty and dark from early evening, and nobody could be on the streets without a special authorization for it. However, we were glad to be in our Moscow home together with our dear father, who hadn't left the city and worked for the defense department. The real life in Moscow wasn't easy; we could buy only a very limited quantity of bread, butter, meat, flour, clothes, shoes, and even soap with special cards, and we always stood in long lines for the most necessary things. At that time, our most delicious meal was canned meat (we called it in Russian "tooshirnka"), which the USA sent to the USSR under the

Lend-Lease Act. By the way, here in the USA, I have tasted a lot of different brands of canned meat, but I haven't found the yummy one from my childhood. Possibly my taste has changed, and maybe meat and recipes have changed, too.

We lived in a communal apartment building, with a nice big yard where I played with my neighbor children. I remember that German prisoners of war worked nearby and the children ran to watch them. A beautiful old park was also nearby; in summertime Papa boated us around the lakes there, or we walked along nice shadowy alleys, or watched a performance in the park's theater; in winter we loved to skate, ski, or sled there.

We occupied one room of a unit; a professor in literature, the family of a professor in engineering, and a single man who was always drunk occupied the three other rooms. Our room was always warm and cozy because Mama was there. She brought out a special spirit (in the literal and metaphorical sense) in everyone by her charm, kindness, and cooking talent. Mama cooked very tasty dishes, even on a primus or oil stove. Her borscht, cutlets, piroshkies (rolls stuffed with meat, cabbage, or apple), blinchiki (very thin

pancakes with cottage cheese or meat inside), cabbage or peppers stuffed with rice, vegetables, and meat, and her honey cakes and fragrant jams were delicious and unforgettable. We always had dinner at home, and relatives and friends loved our feasts despite the smallness of our home.

Every one of us had everything necessary for work, rest, and education in our home. There were two bookcases fully packed with books, a desk, a sofa, a piano, and a big round wooden dinner table, above which hung a nice silk lampshade; three beds were separated by a light wood partition from this dining-living room. This room united us; everyone was close to each other. Papa worked at the desk; Mama prepared a dinner nearby or sat at the dinner table with her Singer, sewing something; Tanya played piano; and I did my homework at the table across from Mama, helped her, or read a book sitting cross-legged on the sofa. I remember beautiful music filling the room from the gramophone. If the electricity was off, Mama put a kerosene lamp on the dinner table and we all sat around it, drinking tea and eating Mama's cookies or catching up on everyone's work. I always loved to look at the magical thin shadows that danced around us under the swings of bright flame of the

kerosene lamp.

It was my happy home. I felt warm and safe there despite the outside life.

Much later, I moved to a comfortable apartment and my life became easier, but I still see in my dreams a picture of the dark room lit by the twinkling kerosene lamp. Through the years, I have come to understand that separate rooms for everyone, a big TV, stereo music, delicious food in restaurants, and many other things of modern technology are very nice to have. Now I am happy for my son who lives with his family in a very comfortable home. When I am visiting them, I see that everyone is in their own room, and a picture of my small childhood home comes up before my eyes again.



Lyudmila's granddaughter Emma

Lyudmila likes music, theater, and fine art. She loves to read and she used to read a lot in Russian. She has studied English almost since she came to the USA from Russia. Really, she is beginning to write in English with the great help of PAR tutors, especial her tutor Jean Knofler. Lyudmila's dream is to read novels in English and to write about her life in Russia for her granddaughter Emma, who is now only four and a half.

The Mango Tree in the Middle of a Room

by **Sonia Baltodano**

The tree was in my grandparents' house. I lived seventeen years in that big house with my extended family.

There were two living rooms, and one dining room divided by three high and elegant columns that reached the roof. In the dining room there was a big table. In the middle of the table there was a crystal bowl with fruit. The house had eight rooms, three rooms on the left side and five on the right. In the back of the house were a large bathroom and two washbasins. The kitchen was next to the dining room. Outside the dining room was a large patio. There were banana and lemon trees. There were swings under trees and a little pingpong table.

In my cousin's room there was a mango tree in the middle of the room. The room was built around the tree. The canopy of the tree was outside, over the roof. When I wanted

mangos, I used a ladder to go to the roof. I would shake the branches and the mangos would fall on the roof—big, sweet red-and-green mangos. I would pick up the mangos and put them in a basket. From the rooftop I could see the city. I could also see some birds feeding their babies.

My friends would wait in our neighbor's patio to get mangos from me. This was a time to play a geography game, guessing the names of capitals of world countries. When a friend guessed correctly, he or she would get a mango. I can still smell the sweet mangos. I thought they were the best mangos in the world.

In December 1972, a big earthquake destroyed Managua, Nicaragua, my city. My family lost everything on Christmas Day. Our Christmas tree was on the floor, the house was badly damaged, the beautiful mango tree was cut by the government because it was dangerous to live in the house. It was the end of happy times for me.

Sonia Baltodano came to San Jose from Managua, Nicaragua in 1985. Her first encounter with American society was in Los Angeles. The first three years there, she stayed home to care for her young children. She found work in clothing factories, but she also took English and training classes to become a CNA (Certified Nurse's Assistant) after her work. She considered the constant danger of living in a big city and convinced her husband to move to San Jose, where she had relatives. Once in San Jose, she soon found a job in a convalescent home. She worked long and difficult hours. A friend told her about a custodial position at San Jose State University; she applied and got the job. She has been working at SJSU since 2001. Sonia lives with her family and her 73-year-old mother, who does not speak English. Sonia considers PAR a great opportunity to improve her English. She feels that she learns vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, verbs, and culture. She particularly enjoys learning idiomatic expressions. Aside from reading, Sonia enjoys hiking and nature walks.

A House in the Country

by Earlene Chapman

Our house in Waldo, Florida was the perfect place for a child to grow up.

My father built this house in the country. Living there was like living in an oasis, or living in a place Mother Nature designed for us. We were surrounded by tall pine trees, oak trees, beautiful wild flowers and streams. I would pick wild flowers to give to my mother.

My brother and I played in the stream where we caught small fish and frogs. We liked to play in the stream when it was raining.

The roof of the house was made of tin. When the rain came down the sound was loud. After the roof was wet the rain sounded very soft, peaceful, and restful.

We had farm animals including one cow, ducks, chickens with chicks we could play with, hogs and pigs. One pig, whose name was Pearly, was my pet. She was cute,

white with a pink nose. She was a playmate until she became a hog.

Our house was very warm and my mother enjoyed cooking. There was a great aroma of bread baking, soup cooking on the stove, or fresh baked cake that you would smell as you entered the front door.

Mother used vegetables from our garden. We grew tomatoes, corn, string beans, peas, watermelon and cantaloupes, too.

Memories of my house give me the feeling of joy and love.

Earlene has enjoyed participating in Partners in Reading and working with her tutor since February of 2008. She thinks her life with her grandchildren has been enriched by her ability to read to them.

Our New House

by **Catalina Chavez**

I live with my mom, my sisters and my dogs in San Jose. When we moved to our new house my mom was really happy. It has three bedrooms and two bathrooms. When I am at home, I can hear my dogs barking at people. I can also smell Chinese food and Mexican food because they are my favorites.

Catalina likes to go out to the movies and hang out with her brother. She has been in Partners in Reading for 8 months. She works at Zanatto's and is a student at San Jose City College.

Green Onions and Cilantro

by **Santa Dandan**

I have good memories of the house I lived in at 1328 Wash Street in Alviso, California.

I still remember waking up the aroma of chorizo, eggs, and homemade tortillas.

My mom prepared burritos for us before we went to school. After school, my sister and I played jacks, with a small red ball and ten metal stars. My brothers would play marbles outside.

I also remember I had a cat named Blackie. While I was sleeping he would play with my feet and wake me up.

Ever since I can remember, we have had a tradition. In the month of Lent, Mom makes a special dinner. She makes nopales with shrimp patties, green onions, and cilantro. We also make potato patties and fried fish, and the whole house is filled with the aroma of green onions and cilantro. It smells so good. For dessert she makes capirotada, which

is a bread pudding that has piloncillo, cinnamon sticks, raisins, bread, cheese, and peanuts. It is delicious. We still get together and enjoy Mom's good cooking.

Santa Lujan Dandan was born in Ciudad Acuna Coahuila. Her husband's name is Joseph and they have three daughters, Angel, Santa and Lynda. They also have seven grandchildren. Her hobbies are Jazzercise and cooking. She has been with PAR for about ten years.

Memories of My Home

by Araceli Figueroa

The smell in the morning and the wind on a rainy day take me back to my childhood. In fact, I think one part of me still lives there.

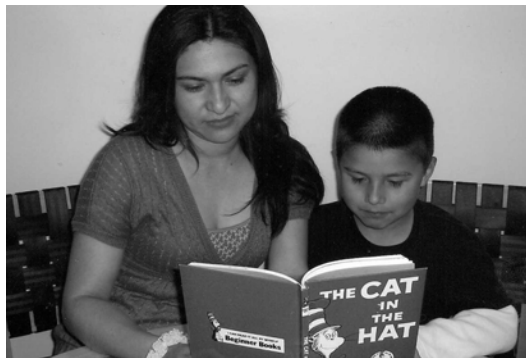
I was born in a little town in Jalisco, Mexico, near the volcano of Colima. I remember when it was active and we could see the fire in the night. That was so scary for me and the only thing that made me feel safe was my mother's hug. In winter time, the volcano was full of snow and that was a beautiful view.

My town was a peaceful place. I remember how we felt free to walk around. My parent's house was in the middle of the town. The best place, because we could see the Church and the Kiosco from my bedroom's window. Every night the Church bell played calling the people to pray. After that we liked to play hide-and-seek with friends while the adults talked to each other.

My father had a little farm next to the town. Every morning

he woke up early and went to the farm to milk the cows. My sisters and I used to go there to feed the pigs and cows and water the plants. Then we liked to go into the forest and get some wild fruit and flowers.

Now, years later and far away, I still miss my childhood. Now, I'm a mother and it is my turn to make my children's childhood, happy and memorable.



Araceli and her son Alexis

Araceli lives in her own home in San Jose with her husband Alex, son Alexis (7) and daughter, Areli (4). On weekends they enjoy doing things as a family like visiting parks, the zoo, and the Monterey Aquarium. She loves bringing her son Alexis with her to the tutoring sessions at the library. Together, they choose books to take home to share with Areli. In addition to being a full time wife and mom, Araceli works as a housekeeper. When she has free time she loves to read, write and go shopping

A Baseball Team in the Backyard



by **Maria T. Gafford**

Of all the homes I have lived at in my life, the one at Segunda Privada de la 10 Oriente No. 3, San Pedro Cholula City, Puebla, Mexico, is the most memorable.

This home had a combination kitchen, dining room, and living room with beautiful windows looking out onto the street. It also had a bathroom, three bedrooms, and a big big yard. This might seem like a big house, but you should know that I had nine brothers and sisters, counting me; my dad always said that we could make up a baseball team in Mexico. We played many baseball games in our backyard, using bricks for bases, a fence for a backstop, a big stick for bat, and our bare hands for baseball gloves. The ball was made out of hard rubber and bounced very high when it hit the ground. It wasn't so much who won the games, it was just the joy of playing together as a family that made it so special.

The second thing that I loved was eating together as a family. Our main meal of the day was at 3:00 p.m., and I can still savor the aroma of hot tortillas cooking on our stove, along with the spicy smell of beans boiling in a large clay pot. But mostly I remember the laughter and the fun that we shared at the dinner table.

Today, as I think back, I still love baseball and I still love tortillas and beans, but most of all I love my family and the memories they gave me.

Maria is from Puebla, Mexico. She has lived in the U.S. for almost five years. She lives in downtown San Jose with my husband Bill. She is a housewife and a student in the Partners in Reading Program. She enjoys both things and many other things as well. She loves when her husband arrives at their home and comments on the delicious smells of the meal she is preparing. She loves to have their home clean for him, too. She loves him so much. Her favorite hobbies are to read, to cook, to walk and the most important, to see all of the people smiling. She is so very grateful to everyone that makes Partners in Reading possible. She and her husband appreciate it so much.

My Home

by **Debbie Hodge**

I was raised in Gallup, New Mexico. I have eight sisters and I had three brothers. What I like about our house was there was always something to do and someone to play with. My father died when I was nine years old, and my mother raised all eight girls and the three boys by herself.

Since I come from a big family, I learned how to share everything. We had a three-bedroom house. My brothers shared one room and all eight sisters shared one room. We slept in one room and on one bed.

We had a piano that all of us tried to play, but only my older sister could really play.

We had a dog named Shep. He followed my sister Betty home from school one day and he never left.

Debbie has three children, but raised four. She likes sewing and making clothes. She has been in Partners in Reading for thirteen years. She recently graduated from the Adult Learner Leadership Institute. She has had some great tutors. She thinks that Partners in Reading is one of the greatest things that has ever happened to her.

One County—Korea

by **Ki Sun Kim**

My partner in reading has told me that when she was in elementary school, before World War II, she learned that the name of my native country was “Chosen.” Since World War II, the country has been called “Korea.”

I would like to tell you a little bit about Korean history, what my life was like there, and what my American life is like now. My county is not a big land, but our history is not short. It is about 5,000 years old. The land is between China and Japan. The country was one, but after the Korean War it became two: North Korea and South Korea. It was called “Chosen” for 500 years. Before that it was called “Koryo.” The country changed names and leadership. The people were the same—one nation.

I was born after the Korean War. During that time, the democratic and industrial development began. The population increased. Most people enjoyed peace and the natural resources of the country.

After 1970, the government changed the law of immigration. Many Korean wanted to emigrate to America or Canada. I came to America in 1983, right after I got married, because my husband was living in America. Many things in my life changed. First, I had to drive a car. Second, I had to work for a living. Third, I couldn't do things by myself because I didn't speak English. I was very blue. Anyway, I started my new life, which was a marriage and an American life. But both were not easy. What was worse, I didn't have a good friend here. I became a dependent person.

Finally, I got through the hardships, after about ten years. I have learned from my experiences. Now, I want to grow and make some effort to use my talents to give back to society. That is my reason for becoming a partner in reading. I have had a great time learning English and meeting the challenge. My tutor is a lever for raising me. She gives me practical knowledge.

Ki Sun Kim is originally from Korea. She came to the United States in 1983. Ki has is married and has three children. She works with her husband in a family-owned business. She has been meeting with her tutor, Lois, since October 2007.

My Young Mother's Voice

by Sook Yee Kim

I like to remember the house in Korea. When I was young, from 8 to 17, I lived in a wonderful house. There were about 12 to 14 similar houses on the street. Every wall was covered with flowers and tall trees. Many children played in the street between the houses. When sunset came, every mom called her child's name loudly. We heard our mothers and ran to our houses. I miss hearing my young mother's voice. Our yard had a beautiful garden. There were many flowers and fruit trees: roses, lilacs, sarubia, and some peach trees. When I opened the gate to the garden, I could smell the fragrance of plants. I still remember the smell. Sometimes I would taste the nectar of the flowers, and it tasted like honey or sugar water. Also, there was a big fig tree. One day, my siblings and I climbed the tree and picked the figs to eat. When we sat on the branch all together (four kids), it broke and we fell. We were very surprised. I still remember the details of the accident.

The garden did not just have trees, it also had lots of bugs. There were so many ants, spiders, bees, and butterflies. My brothers and sister caught them or killed them often. Those insects were very sticky and stinky.

We enjoyed lying on the wooden floor because it was cool in hot summer weather. My mother always made delicious foods. My family was very happy every mealtime.

When I miss my youth, I tell my daughters these stories about my house, and when I do, my daughters say, "Wow, Mom, you really have lots of great memories!" I hope my daughters will have many happy memories like me when they grow up.

Sook Yee Kim's name means "Pure and Clear Lady." She is forty-three years old. She has three daughters. The first one is Hyeyin. She is very beautiful and smart. The second one is Jeein. She is a charming girl who likes to make herself beautiful. Jeein doesn't eat breakfast because she spends one hour in the morning fixing her hair, putting on make up and getting her dresses. Yougin is the last one. She is very nice and innocent. Sook Yee's husband is Cheoul Soo, who is a doctor in Korea. He is generous and considerate. Sook Yee is a supervisor of a beauty supply shop in Oakland. Through the job, she got a work visa. Her hobbies are reading books, watching movies and playing golf. She tries to play two golf games a week. When she plays golf she feels very nice. The green grass makes her peaceful and happy.

Memories of Home

by Zhilin Liu



My childhood home has many memories for me. It no longer exists, but it was located in a small village in the middle of Henan province, China. My parents, older sister, twin older brothers, and I had a wonderful time there. I heard that my grandfather bought the land, and my parents built houses on it.

There were two houses in our big yard. The bigger, three-room house was used for living and sleeping. The other house had one room, which was our kitchen. Our yard was bigger and broader than our neighbors', so many children liked to go and play there. My sister, brothers, and I often played games, studied, and jogged in the yard.

Many trees were planted in our yard, and they would shade us from the torrid sun in the summer. Sometimes when it was very hot on summer evenings, we went out-

side, sat or lay on the matting on the ground in the yard, and listened to many interesting stories told by our parents.

One year, my parents planted tomatoes in the east side of the yard. The tomatoes were the sweetest I've ever tasted in my life. We also raised hens that produced many eggs for us to eat. Sometimes the eggs were too many to eat, so we sold some at the market. I often went to the market to sell some eggs by myself, and that was fun!

We had a dog who was our best friend when I was a child. The dog was so smart that we called him Fox. Every day, he sent me off to school in the morning and greeted me after school in the afternoon. Unfortunately, when I was in the second grade, he was lost. I was so sad about this. Later, we raised many cats to catch mice. I liked cats very much, and they liked me, too. Sometimes they even climbed into my bed, and snuggled and slept beside me at night.

When I was 15, we left our hometown and moved to the city. I often dream about my childhood home, which is very memorable.

Zhilin Liu was born in Xuchang, Henan province, China and lived there approximately 20 years. She now lives in Beijing with her husband, mother-in-law, and her two-year-old son, Zhong fu. Zhilin is a graduate from Central University of Finance and Economics in Beijing and a current visiting student at SJSU. Her major is economics, and she has also taught economics and finance part time in Beijing. Since she joined Partners in Reading in March 2008, Zhilin has been meeting with her tutor, Delores, who is a very kind and patient lady. Zhilin has learned pronunciation, new words, reading, and writing. In March, Zhilin attended the workshop held by PAR, and learned about cooking and yoga, which she enjoyed very much. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, surfing, and ping-pong.

Where Love Abides

by Jesse Nelson



My place of residence 17 years ago, I can remember. It was me, my mother, one brother, and two sisters. My mother, Diane, was excellent at taking care of her children where we were in our individual lives. My twin sisters, Melinda and Belinda, were both born with a disability. I have never seen two souls so pure. They are both going to Heaven for sure, God knows. You could be having a nervous breakdown and they would be cracking up laughing at you because that is the way God brought them into being—forever carrying around the soul of an innocent child. They are free from guilt, harmless and blameless. They are lights in the world, like a city on the hill that can't and will never be hidden.

My brother, Jerry—I have never had a friend like him. He was my shield that guarded me from danger. He protected and watched over me, even when I was wrong. I used to call it love when he would get into fights with enemies that I made. Now I would not even put a roach in danger!

When I was a child, I thought as a child. I did childish things. I was blind, but now I see that I must love others as I love myself, especially my family. We all want to live happy, joyous lives free from danger. My mother, excellent as she was in our home, was not always pleased with my brother and me. She was not happy with us when we would lean on our own understanding to follow the ways of the wrong crowd. We were putting ourselves in danger again, doing I-won't-say-what. She would have to carry the burden of the stress, wondering what could she do or how she could explain to us that the consequences of our actions could lead to death. Yes, I made my mother cry. Not knowing, thinking that I was cool. Now I know that I was a fool in my house.

I don't believe that any home in America is free from tension where love abides. There will be some staying up late wondering and worrying about the many actual problems and some that are just an illusion. I thank God that trouble does not last long and we made it through the good and bad times in my house.

Jesse was born 1979 in Stanford, CA and moved to Louisiana when he was 5 months old. He has two sisters and one brother. He enjoys going to church, studying the Bible and reading philosophy and psychology. He likes to explore the human mind and soul because he loves people. Jesse has been in Partners in Reading since January 2008 and works with his tutor, Sue. He feels that he has come a long way in understanding words by practicing reading, spelling and writing. He plans to continue the program and be an example to society.

A Memory of My Mom

by Hong Nguyen

I have many memories of my house in Vietnam. Two of my memories are about my mother who died in Vietnam in March 1991.

My mother, Nhi Nguyen, was the greatest mom in the world. She loved and took care of her children and my father very well. She was a kind and generous woman. She helped us grow and develop. She always helped poor people and neighbors who lived by our house with her warm heart.

I remember how my mom prepared the special food for the Lunar New Year such as coconut and ginger sweetmeat, rice cakes, and flower cakes. My mom would take me and my sister to the supermarket to buy vegetables, meat, ginger, coconut, fruits, green beans, pork and banana leaves. She was an excellent cook and had a special taste. She showed me how to slice coconut into very thin pieces, to measure sugar and to add flavor to the coconut to make

delicious sweetmeat on the stove. She made delicious flower cake with flour, eggs, sugar and vanilla. I could smell the sweetness of fruits, jam and flower cakes when they were overripe.

Inside the house, my mom decorated our altar with a vase of yellow flowers and a plate of five fruits: a young coconut, a mango, a pineapple, a papaya and a sweetsop that represented good luck and a prosperous New Year. On the table, we put a colorful tablecloth and set up a tea tray, a vase of peach blossoms and a box of jam. Outside the house, my dad set up some pots of yellow chrysanthemums, orchids, dahlias and kumquats. Now we were ready to welcome the New Year!

My mom was sick for several months and she died on the Passover Easter week. Before she died, she told some best friends and church members that, "You come to my house and help my family." She reminded me to take care of my brothers and sisters and help them finish their education and moral development.

When she died, I felt sad and missed her. My father, brothers, sisters, relatives and neighbors came for the services.

I felt very sad about her on this day, but I calmed down to participate in her services and the Mass. I was depressed, missed her and cried as much as I could. When I came back to my house, I looked everywhere in the house, such as her bedroom, living room and kitchen, where I remembered her working and sleeping. When my family went to bed at night, I couldn't sleep and cried the whole night. I wanted to stop crying but I didn't know why my tears still came out.

Now, I still remember my mom even though she died many years ago. I believe that my mom is still alive with me and my family every day.

Hong comes from South Vietnam, Saigon City. She left her country to immigrate to the United States in 1998. Hong moved from Oklahoma City to San Jose in 2001 and lives here with her father and family. Her hobbies are listening to music, watching television and movies, studying English and Spanish, walking running, drinking water, searching the Internet and traveling. She has been a member of PAR since November 2007. She is interested in learning and improving her writing, reading, speaking and listening skills from her tutors Ms. Marcia and Ms. Kathy. Hong has worked with preschool children aged 3-5 years old at the Parkway Child Development Center since 2004.

Lucretia Avenue

by Kevin Nguyen

I live with my mom, my brother and my step dad on Lucretia Avenue. We have lived there for 15 years. I share a room with my brother. It is a mess because neither of us clean it up. When I am in my room, I can hear buses, cars and airplanes. When I am in the living room, I can smell Vietnamese food. My mom makes it for us, and it is really good.

Kevin enjoys playing sports, going out and hanging out with friends and watching movies. He has been in the Partners in Reading program for 8 months. He goes to school and works at Hollywood Video.

From Afghanistan to San Jose

by Najiba Nouzaie

This is a story about my family coming to the United States. In 1985 we went to India from Afghanistan. In 1986 we came to New York. New York was a very cold place to live. After a year and a half we moved from New York to San Jose, California. My son was sick with weather allergies, and the doctor said we should move to a warmer place. We decided to come to San Jose because the weather is nice and we have a lot of friends and relatives here. San Jose has nice, warm weather, and so my baby got better.

I am happy we live here. I have a nice house and many friends and family. Now I am very happy because I found the Tutor Program and I am learning to read, write, and speak better English.

Najiba lives with her husband and three sons in San Jose. She has a daughter who entered Berkeley this year. Najiba also has a part time job at her local school and likes walking in her neighborhood park for exercise.

Washing Was So Hard

by Virginia Olivo

The house I grew up in was in downtown San Jose. It was a small, old house, built in 1901.

I sat on the porch with my brothers and sisters. I remember playing red- light/green-light out in the front yard. We had so much fun.

I can still visualize our old washing machine agitating and the clothes sorted on the kitchen floor to be washed. The washing machine had a wringer that you had to push the clothes through.

We had a breakfast nook in the kitchen. I would sit there and help my Mom make enchiladas. She was such a great cook. I can see her rolling out the flour tortillas. I would put them on the skillet and turn them with a fork. I was always scared that I would burn my finger tips.

The most touching memories I have of our home were

about my mother. She showed so much love and affection. It was a little run down but she made the house beautiful.

She only met one of her grandkids, my daughter, Melissa. My sisters wish she had met them all. It warms my heart to see my grandson, Jacob, sitting on that porch now like I used to when I was a child.

Virginia graduated from San Jose High School. She is very proud of her beautiful daughter, Melissa, and of all the positive changes Melissa has been making her life. Virginia has an extremely close relationship with her grandson, Jacob, and her nephew, Adrian.

Virginia has been a bus driver here for over nineteen years. She considers it a privilege and a joy to be able to work with special needs children. She first started in the PAR program over six years ago. Today, she takes advantage of all the programs available, including workshops and leadership programs. Virginia enjoys going to the beach, aqua aerobics and seeing movies. She feels blessed by having such an enjoyable life.

Memories of Home

by Norma Penafiel-Beher

I have so many memories from my home in Chile. The most unforgettable one is my view of the Andes Mountain from my bedroom window. Every time I saw the giant, white mountain with its eternal snow, I felt happy and enthusiastic. Back then, the air looked so clean and clear. I used to open the curtain so the light would come in and I could have this beautiful view.

Our kitchen was remodeled in a country style. It was a bright and beautiful kitchen. The counter had a flower design that looked very pretty. The color was almond with soft pink flowers and the kitchen window curtains had the same flower design.

I remember my mother was at home full time. She cooked us delicious Chilean food and baked us cakes and our favorite cupcakes. I invited my girlfriends to play in our playhouse and pretend to have tea. My mother baked

cookies and cupcakes and we had juice or real tea to go with it.

My brother Geno and I used to rent a scooter. We would pay money to our neighbor and he let us ride his scooter for one hour. So we shared the time a half hour each.

I remember I had a happy childhood.

Norma is happily married and she has one son. She is currently taking classes at San Jose City College. She wants an AA degree in Child Development. She likes to spend time with family and friends during weekends.

How I Grew Up

by Huan Quach

This is for my grandmother. When I was little, I lived with my grandparents and my aunt and uncle on a farm in Vietnam. I had to work with my uncle on the farm. It had a lot of mosquitoes, lots of trees, and nice weather. You could sleep outside and enjoy the wind blowing. Nobody lived around us for a mile. You could do whatever you liked. I went fishing with a rod and caught shrimp with a net. I dug in a hole and caught some snakes. I climbed up the coconut tree and picked some coconuts, then took a knife, made a small hole for my mouth, and drank coconut juice.

Today, when I eat food, I remember who grows the food. My grandparents grew bananas, coconuts, yams, corn, and mangos. If you live on a farm, you always have something to do, always have some fun. You feel like you can be your own self and do whatever you like. When you are little, you are not responsible for anything.

My grandparents were poor. They didn't have enough money for me to go to school. They took care of me the best they could. Without them I don't know if I would still live in this world. Sometimes they gave me a rough time. Sometimes we didn't have food to eat for a day. But I understood. We worked so hard and still stuck together. I will always remember them the rest of my life.

My grandmother and my grandfather and my uncle taught me a lot of things about the world—things that I didn't know about. Especially my grandma. She loved me and my sister so much, and I will never forget her. I hope one of these days I have a chance to pay them back what I owe them. They are my heroes. I still remember them from my heart. I know they are still poor right now. Even I am still poor. How can I help them out? They live too far from me, in another world. I always miss them. When I think about them, my feelings hurt. Their picture is always in my mind. I hope one of these days I have money to help them out. This would make my feelings better than right now.

Every day I pray to God to help my grandparents and everybody poor in the world. Grandma and aunt and uncle, I want again to thank you. My life now is a rough time and I still remember you all the time. I love you, grandma and uncle. I don't know when I can pay you back. I hope you can understand. Sometimes I am upset and so lonely, and need you with me. I know that's not going to happen, but I still have a lot of memories of all of you.

Huan came to the United States when he was 14. He lived in Rockport, Texas, for four years. He came to California and has lived here sixteen years. He has a wife and 17-month-old daughter. He really enjoys his daughter. He never had a best friend until he met his tutor. He tells his tutor, Rick, a lot about himself, and he learns a lot from him. Without Rick, he would not be able to read and understand English better than before. "Thank you once again, Rick. I really mean it."

Small Town in the Mountains

by Cesar Ramos



When I was nine years old, my father got an important job. He became a prosecutor of a small city. So my father, mother, and I moved from the capital city to a small town.

In the capital city, nobody knew who I was, or where I lived, or why I was there—and nobody cared. But here in this small town, it changed. I became a celebrity because I was the prosecutor's son. So the people in the street recognized me, the people in the stores gave me quick service, and the police knew me.

In the beginning, I did not understand why the people gave me a lot of attention, but later I understood that this small town had a lot of problems because the last prosecutor had preferred to receive bribes before making justice. So my father was the hope in order to change this situation, and I was the new prosecutor's son. This was the reason the people gave me a lot of attention.

My life changed in this small town because my eyes saw how justice worked. Many times I saw people come to my father's office, people who were humble and had no education, and people who sometimes did not speak Spanish. My father gave them something that they wanted. This was respect, orientation, and justice. Many times my father spoke to them in their native language, the Quechua.

My life changed in this small town because normally I spent a lot of time watching TV, but in my new town I did not have TV. And more, all noise was new. In the city, normally I listened to traffic, people, radio, TV, but in this town I was listening to birds, horses, dogs, cows, pigs, and sometimes just the rain was the only noise.

Normally, I played with toys that used batteries or toys that I needed to assemble, but in my new town I made my own toys with recycled things. Normally, I saw animals on TV, but in my new town I played with horses, dogs, and cows. My life changed when I moved to the small town in the mountains, and it changed forever because I will never forget those mountains.

Cesar was born in Peru. He thanks Partners in Reading for the support and his tutor Lizbeth for being patient with him.

Weed, California

by Darryl Redfield

I remember waking up in “the bricks”. It was the worst place in the world to wake up.

“The bricks” was the name my friends and I called our neighborhood. The name was taken from the older drug dealers and gang bangers who had been in prison. They called prison “the bricks”. With all of the police activity in the neighborhood, and with the police helicopter always around, at times it was like I was in “the bricks”.

All night, the “ghetto bird” was our and about, and the neighborhood drug dealer walked around with the “ghetto blaster”. Some nights when the “ghetto bird” caught its prey, the whole neighborhood when quiet, no drug dealers could be found. Some nights we had several helicopters chasing after drug dealers, and some nights the radio from the drug dealer serenaded me to sleep with a nice, slow song. I would fall asleep after 3:00 a.m., and I had to get up at 6:00 a.m. to go to school.

In 1983, I had to be at the bus stop at 6:30 a.m. to catch the school bus. My school was in North Hollywood, 45 minutes away, but the 110 and 101 freeways made it longer. My mother wanted me to go to school outside the neighborhood. She felt like the school outside the neighborhood was better because there were no shootings and not gang bangers there, and she felt the education was a good quality education.

Since my friends who I grew up with went to a different school, Markham Jr. High School, I had to make new friends. My first year I met Kalesha, my first girlfriend at Walter Reed Jr. High School.

That year, for two weeks after school in the afternoons, the Allstar Games were held. We had several competitions in softball, basketball, and track and field. Track and field was when Kalesha and I could root for each other in person. We signed up for the same events: the 50 yard dash, the 100 yard dash, the 200 yard dash, the quarter mile, the high jump and the long jump. My friend James dared me to sign up for the 100 yard and 50 yard dashes

for 9th graders, although I was in the 7th grade. Of course, James was in the 9th grade and also like Kalesha. I set the school record in the 50 yard dash and in the 100. I beat all the 9th graders, so in the rest of the events I had to go against 9th graders. I still won all of the events.

In the summer of '85, back in "the bricks", I had my first summer job at the Y.W.C.A. as a campcounselor. I also attended bible studies every Thursday night. Also that summer, my friends, Erich and Eeddie, and I were on the football team. That summer of '85, I also go involved in track and filed again. I did not know I would become a start in the neighborhood.

I went to Compton College to get out of the neighborhood, but I did not want to be there either. I prayed to go to a different school, but with certain conditions: I wanted a place where ther would be snow and where I would stay in a dorm at a junior college. I walked out of the cafeteria and the student government was giving away books. I did not know why I stopped at the table. I saw the booklet for the College of Siskiyou in Weed, California. I picked up the book, and guess what, they had snow and dorms and it was

cheap to go there because it was a junior college.

I went there in the spring o '92. What a big culture shock! Quiet, no gang bangers or drug dealers, and no “ghetto bird”. Everybody knew everybody, just like Little House on the Prairie, and at night it was VERY quiet.

The best place to wake up is in Weed. If I could choose where my home would be, I would choose Weed, California, mostly because so many fond memories are there.

Darryl has been in PAR for several years. He and his wife, Veronica, are excited about their new daughter who will be born in September. They also have a 4 year old daughter, Savannah. Fishing is a new hobby for Darryl, but he also likes to go to Oakland Raider games.

Childhood on Cherokee Street

by Janeen Robbins

The home I remember most was on Cherokee Street in Salinas. I lived there with my family in the 1970s.

What I remember most about the house was the picture window in the living room. You could see the whole street from this window. On rainy days, I would go to the window and watch the rainfall. It was peaceful to me. It was also fun to watch our neighbors act up.

I learned how to ride my bike at this house. The bike was a Schwinn Stingray. It was fluorescent green with weird handlebars and a banana seat with a bright orange flag. The first time I learned how to ride my bike, I hit a pole and hung on. The whole family laughed at me.

My sister, brother, and I played games with the neighborhood kids, sometimes hide-and-seek and kick the can. The next-door kids sometimes spent the night. Late at night we

used to sneak out and buy candy cigarettes and pretend to smoke. We used to buy a whole sack of candy for a dollar.

On Cherokee Street, we didn't have video games or DVDs, but we had a lot of fun playing outside with our friends.

Janeen was born in Salinas, CA. She lived with her uncle Ruben for a long time before he passed away two years ago. She wrote this story in remembrance of her uncle, who had a big influence on her life.

Being With My Family On Christmas

by Elizabeth Sandoval-Jones



My family is the most important thing in the world. I've spent my whole life teaching my three children to hold family and the value of family close to their hearts, and I still believe that doing so is very important. On Christmas Eve, I really saw that what I worked hard for my whole life had paid off. What I'm writing to you is a brief description of one of the best times of my life, to see my children together after all this time, to see them loving each other and caring as all families should.

My daughter Cynthia flew in from Las Vegas two days before Christmas. She was here for the four days. My son Michael lives with me. He did not work over the Christmas holidays so he was able to spend more time with his sister. They prepared everything for Christmas Eve dinner the day before. My eldest daughter Sara, my grandson Alex, and Sara's husband came over early on Christmas Eve to start

cooking. I enjoyed seeing my children get along well and that they were old enough to have their own lives. I was pleased to see my children working together by cooking and preparing all the dishes for the day. It was wonderful to be with the family I love very much.

We celebrated Christmas on Christmas Eve. The dinner was enjoyed by everyone. Around midnight we opened our presents.

I didn't do too much because of the operation that I had on November 20; it was difficult for me to move. I was in pain most of the time. I am grateful that my husband was with me and helped with everything. Being with my family on Christmas was wonderful; it was a wonderful Christmas Eve.

Alex received many presents. He really enjoyed his second Christmas spirit. He knew that Christmas and Santa Claus go together. He played with some of his new toys.

After we opened the presents, we went to sleep. The next day Sara, Alex, and Sara's husband left. Cynthia and Mi-

chael went to see their father's side of the family in Redwood City. My husband and I went to celebrate Christmas with his brother Eric and his family. We took some tamales and ham that we had made the day before. We ate and watched movies and we had a good time.

Being with my family on Christmas was delightful, I thank God for that.

Elizabeth has been with Partners in Reading for four years. She thanks PAR for the support and thanks her tutor Ian for being so helpful.

My Hometown

by Phal Sek

When I close my eyes, I can still see my home in Cambodia. I lived in this home when I was a child. Of all the homes that I have lived in, I loved my parents' home the best. My dad built it right after he got married. It has four bedrooms and one huge living room. It's about 14 feet above the ground, to prevent water from flooding it, since once in a while a flood would occur because we lived near a river. Once a year, my father let the water run into the pond in our backyard to collect many kinds of tropical fish to raise in the pond. We also grew vegetable plants, like water grass and water lilies. It was beautiful all year round in my backyard garden, and when my fruit trees blossomed, they smelled very nice.

There were different kinds of fruit trees in the backyard, such as orange jackfruit, guava, and mango. I still can smell the fresh air in my backyard as I fed my tropical fish. We also raised cows, pigs, chickens, and had a dog named Akmao, which means "black." We named him after his color. He was a smart and helpful dog. He would guard and

protect my chickens and keep the cows from wandering too far from the ranch. Unfortunately, he was killed by a snake during the war, when he went to check the underground shelter where my family used to hide from bombs and bullets. I loved my dog. He followed me almost everywhere. He would walk in front of me and bark to let me know if he saw something strange. He was part of my family. I loved to play and to chase birds with him in the grassy field. It was a lot of fun.

At noon, when the weather was hot, I liked to go swimming with my friends. Sometimes after school, my sister and I went to visit my parents, who worked in the rice field across the river every day, to make sure everything was fine. We would cross a tiny bridge made out of logs with bamboo hand railings. I still can hear the water running below, mixed with the sound of the birds singing in the fruit tree at the end of the bridge, during the quiet afternoon. It felt so peaceful—but not for too long. The war came, and it was very violent. My house was burned down, and the farm where my mom and dad used to produce lots of rice was taken away by the Communists of Khmer (Cambodia) Rouge.

After the long war, we had nothing left. More than half my family and relatives had died. At this time, we decided to escape and look for freedom. We heard that America is like heaven, where everybody can easily get rich, so we came here, hoping to make a lot of money, live in peace, and have freedom. It may be true for some people, but for us it was not true and we got lost. We found that we needed to speak and understand English well in order to get jobs and survive.

Now here I am, thanks to the Partners in Reading Program, getting help in learning to read and write English. This makes my life easier every day. One day, I am going to do the same for others who have struggled in their past and have a hard time living in America, because I understand what they are going through.



Phal and his family

Phal was born in Cambodia. His education was disrupted by war. Currently he work as a custodian at San Jose State University. He joined Partners in Reading in February 2008 and enjoys working with his tutor, Amnon.

When I Think About Home

by Jackie Smith



The two houses that I grew up in were in California, in the county of Santa Clara. I grew up in Palo Alto in the best of times, in the 1970s. My brothers and sisters went to the same school. Most of the time we had Ms. Greerer come to babysit us. We lived in a four-bedroom and one-bathroom house. We had the best time ever playing outside.

We played in our large backyard. We had two fruit trees—one fig and one apricot tree. We had a grapevine on the side of the house. But most of all, we played on the tire swing. We were content in our life then. Both grandmothers came to visit and played jump rope with us. We were surprised they each took a turn with the jump rope on the patio.

My mother told us we would have to share and take turns with the tire swing. My dad put the rope on the branch and

then tied it. Then he hung the tire. At last we could swing on the swing. My sister and I would make up songs to sing.

My mother talked about moving to another house, in San Jose, and three months later we moved into a five-bedroom house there. Since it was a new house, my family came from all over to see how they could help. My eighty-two-year-old grandfather, "Little Daddy," came to visit and planted beautiful roses along the sidewalk and beside the house. They were red, yellow, fuchsia, and white, my mom's favorite colors. Whenever you came to our home you could smell them.

My Aunt Beverly drove Uncle Mitchell, his family, and my grandmother to visit our home. Both sides of my family were united. It was new but it was nice. We shared conversations. My grandmother gave us instructions in our new house. She wanted us to help keep up the new home because it was so much bigger than the old house.

This was my favorite house, on Camden and Leigh. The best times were in the early 1980s. When I walked through the front door, I could always smell delicious food that my

mother was cooking. The living room was a place where our family would sit, pray, and celebrate holidays together. We also sat in the kitchen and shared fun times. Two of my younger sisters played with skates, bicycled, and learned to play music. The other did drill team. The years passed by so quickly. If you were there, you could just see them right now in the backyard playing football.

In my early twenties, I learned how to drive. My other cousins, Manual and Gino, came to help me learn to drive through town and on the freeway. They also showed me the way to the Department of Motor Vehicles in Blossom Hill. My mother had some extra time to help me. One of the times, when my mother was teaching me, my sisters were in the car. My mom told them to be quiet. She said, "She's learning to drive." She would give me directions in the car. Next, I was able to make an appointment to take a test behind the wheel. That was a big thing to accomplish.

At this house, I received my first driver's license. Before you know it, I was driving. Now that I knew how to drive, my parents gave me more responsibility and I was able to take my sisters to church. I worked, too. I was responsible and con-

tributed to the family. I gave back and helped my family.
Everybody did their share.

Jackie and her husband, Leo, have three children, one daughter, Leah, and two sons, Jasper and Sherman. Her hobbies are camping, hiking and swimming. Jackie participated in the Henry Huffman Institute in Santa Clara. She enjoys being a lifelong learner and would like to be an advocate for other learners, encouraging them to never stop learning.

The House on Mt. Whitney Drive

by Chris Smythe

There are always a lot of people in my house on Mt. Whitney Drive. Even though it's a small house, we are always able to squeeze in one more. There are always a few extra animals bouncing around, too. Since this is my husband's and my house, we can bring home anyone we want. I still come home and find a person or two lying on the couch, as people are from out of town and need a place to stay. They have their own keys. My cockatoo parrot is in a cage by the window, and when someone has some food, she screeches because she wants some. She also says, "Hi honey!" when she wants to be petted. A lot of times we have Mexican or hip-hop music playing. We barbeque a lot on the front porch, even in the rain, and everybody helps. I love coming home to my house on Mt. Whitney Drive when it's full of people and full of life.

Chris Smythe is lead custodian on the swing shift at San Jose State University, stationed in Martin Luther King, Jr. Library. Chris' favorite pastime is volunteering for CARE which is a dog and cat rescue.

Chris is in Partners in Reading for a six month writing session. She is interested in finishing her college degree.

Sunday Morning Tradition

by **Richard Solorio**

I had been married about ten years to my beautiful wife, Rosa. Our oldest daughter, Priscilla, was eight years old, and our son, Santos was a newborn. It was a tradition to go to my in-laws, Rafael and Estella, every Sunday morning for breakfast. I have three brothers-in-law and three sisters-in-law, so you can see any gathering is an event of great proportions.

The menu is menudo (tripe), barbacoa (shredded beef), frijoles fritos (refried beans), chili and tortillas. To drink, coffee, sodas, Corona or Tecate beer. Estella and Rafael start getting things ready the night before. Estella starts cutting and cleaning the menudo so she can put it to a boil. She cleans the beans so she can soak them before she puts them to cook. Rafael starts the fire early in the poso (a hole in the ground) because it takes a lot of wood to make enough coals to cook the barbacoa overnight. They get up early in the morning to start preparing the food. Estella starts adding the ingredients to the menudo and the finishing touches to the chili, beans, and the barbacoa. Rafael

pulls the barbacoa out of the poso and takes it to the kitchen so Estella can prepare it.

As the family arrives, they all greet each other with a warm smile and a hug, as they anticipate the wonderful breakfast they are going to consume. The ladies go straight to the kitchen to see if Estella needs any help. The family is so large that we eat in waves. As soon as we come in, we are seated at the table and served the menudo and barbaoa and all the fixings. We eat until we are bursting at the seams and happy as ever. As the new wave of family members enter the house, the people sitting at the table get up to make room for them, with the usual greeting and the acknowledgment that the food is out of this world.

The kids start playing games in the backyard and the adults begin to discuss the events of the week to come. It is a lot of work for Estella and Rafael to prepare breakfast for the family, but hearing the grandchildren playing the backyard and the laughter of the adults is a great joy for them.

Many years have passed since Rosa and I moved away, but every so often we go back to enjoy our traditional Sun-

day breakfast at Estella and Rafael's house. They are now retired and living the usual grandparents' life of babysitting and running around with grandchildren that they love so very much. Sunday breakfasts still happen but are not as large as they used to be, as the children and grandchildren have gotten older and begun to live their own lives. When my in-laws visit here in the Bay Area., Estella cooks our traditional Sunday breakfast that we have grown to love and appreciate for all these years.

I have been married to Rosa for twenty-nine years now, and Estella and Rafael have come to be like my own parents whom I love and appreciate very much.

Richard Solorio continues to improve his reading and writing skills, which has helped him succeed in his job. His love of family and his Mexican heritage define him.

My First Flight

by **Maria Soto**



Often, when I close my eyes, I can still see the home that my family moved into in Zacatlan Puebla, Mexico, almost 40 years ago.

It was a new house that my father built for our family of six brothers, three sisters and my mom. I remember the smell of the smooth new wooden floors, and, when looking up, seeing the green leaves and branches of the trees that grew over our house. The reason I could see the trees was because our roof was not yet finished. But it did not matter to me because it was summer and the weather was sunny and warm.

I was six years old and I was excited about starting my first day of school in the fall. But, before that, I was anxious to explore and play in our house and especially our big backyard. There were many pear and apple trees that I used to

climb in order to reach the fruit that grew on them. I would bite into the apples to test whether they were sweet and ripe. Sometimes, they weren't, but I ate them anyway.

We also thought it would be fun to build a swing to play on. My oldest brother found a rope that looked strong enough to hold me and an old bicycle tire to use as a seat. He tied one end of the rope around the tire and tied the other to the end of a sturdy branch of one of our large apple trees. I was ready for take-off. "Okay, Maria," said my brother, "climb aboard!" I was excited but a little nervous too. I put my legs through the center of the tire and hung on to the rope with both hands while my brother pushed me higher and higher and higher. The breeze was cool on my face and, as I reached the highest point of my swing arc, I could see our new house in the distance. It seemed to be watching me back. "Have fun!" I thought it said. I laughed and laughed. I felt like I was flying.

I don't know if that house is still there, or the apple and pear trees, or the swing either, but it really does not matter – my memories of them will live with me forever.

Maria was born in Pueblo Nuevo, Mexico in 1963. She came to the United States in 1987 and settled in San Jose with her brother. She worked for a company called Sanmina for 15 years. She later started her own daycare company in 2004 and continues with that today. She has six children and her youngest, Abigail, is 3 ½ years old.

Playing Football at Home

by Andrew Swickrath

Have you every felt like a kid, but you were not? It happened to me when I was 20 plus. I lived in San Jose with my brother. Where we lived there were about six or seven kids that played there. The kids were all in elementary school. Shortly after I got there, the kids came over and asked if I would play football with them. So I did, because I like to play sports.

What I remember is hot summer nights, tossing the pigskin with the boys, running around yelling. I did not know how hot the nights were until I felt the sweat on my forehead. The heat did not bug me. To see the boys having fun brought me a lot of joy.

Years later, one of the boys that played football with me told me that a lot of his success in high school sports was in fact due to all the times my brother and I played with him.

That is why hot summer nights remind me of the times that I played with the kids when I lived in San Jose with my brother.

Andrew Swickrath lives in San Jose with his wife Angel. He works as a cabinet maker, and in his free time he likes to play golf. Andrew has been in the PAR program since February 2008. When asked how he likes the program, he said, "Truthfully, I should have done this many years ago. It makes learning fun."

Remembering My Childhood in Vietnam

by **Truyen Tate**

My unforgettable childhood memory was when I lived with my family in Danang, Vietnam. It is a small city in the middle of Vietnam. It belongs to South Vietnam, where there is a beautiful beach with blue water and smooth sand.

Unfortunately, my dad passed away when I was six years old and my youngest sister was one month old. He left behind my mother and seven children (five girls and two boys). One of my dad's cousins wanted to adopt me and my older sister, but my mother did not accept that. She wanted to keep all her children, and tried different ways to make money. First, every morning, she cooked sweet potatoes and carried them in the street to sell for breakfast. Second, she asked my older sisters and brothers to carry fruits for sale after school around our neighborhood. Many people in my neighborhood felt sorry about our circumstances, so they tried to help by buying all of it.

Next, my mother began to work with ancient treatments from a medical book my grandfather left for her before he died. She treated neighbors who got sick with acupuncture and she gathered different kinds of leaves to make medicine. At first, she didn't get any money for this. When the people were well and they believed in her work, then they gave her money. After that her treatment expanded everywhere. Then she became famous and made good money. She asked the country people to sell her the leaves she needed for treatments. All the people in my family chopped, washed, and dried them. When the leaves were dry, we put different ones together and folded them into newspapers. When the patients came to our family for treatment, my mother sold them the leaves.

The best memory that I will never forget is my mother. She always encouraged her children to go to school; however, she had to pay a lot of money for this. She passed away four years ago, in the Lunar New Year. She was a good mother and a smart person who took care of her whole family.

I love my city and the neighborhood where I grew up, and all the people who helped my family. If I have money one day, I will visit my homeland and all my relatives who still live there. I will go swimming in the beautiful blue water and play in the sand on the beach all day, like I did during my childhood.

In 1989 Truyen came to Hong Kong by boat from Danang, Vietnam. She stayed in the detention camp for 3 years. During this time, she worked for the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR). After she passed an interview and screen by Immigration HK and an interview by the U.S. Refugee program in Hong Kong, the U.S. INS accepted her case. She immigrated to America in 1992. She wants to thank the USA for helping her and the USCC (Catholic Charities Immigration Services) for sponsoring her here. Truyen married Gary Tate in 1994 and they have daughter, Lucy, 13 years old. Truyen works at Parkway Childcare Center and is studying ESL to improve her English.

Asfaha's Memories

by Asfaha Tewolde



My name is Asfaha. I have two brothers and one sister. Their names are Berhane, Letaye and Haddis. My mother's name is Hargu and my daddy's name is Tewolde. I grew up in Asmara in Eritrea, Africa.

I went to Saint Mary School. My teacher's name was Mr. Tekeste. He taught me to read in Tegeriga. He was a strict teacher. I walked to school.

My friends were Abraham and Berhane. We played soccer after school. Sometimes we went to the stadium to watch soccer. We went to see Indian films.

At Christmas my family celebrated. We had a Christmas tree. We went to church. We went to visit my Grandma and Grandpa in their village at holidays.

Asfaha Tewolde was born in Asmara, East Africa, Eritrea. He has a daughter and a son. He likes to read the Bible, go to the library and work on the computer. He goes to the library to work on his reading with his tutor .

My First House

by **Maria Torrico**



I love and remember the first house we lived in after I got married. The house had an enormous yard. In the yard, we had fruit trees: pomegranate, peach, plum and fig. We also had cactus. The house was big with 3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms and 2 living rooms. The kitchen was big with a dining room. In one living room there was a mural on one wall.

The reason I love this house is that my children were born there. My daughter, Vaneza, loved to play in the yard. Her favorite fruit was a pomegranate. When I opened it, she ate one seed at a time. I remember her first birthday party. The children and parents enjoyed the big back yard. My son, Bryant, liked the house, too. He wanted to go in the yard to play soccer. He ran and played.

In this house, I had happiness and sometimes sadness. My happiness was I enjoyed playing with my children and my sadness was my family was in my country, Bolivia, and

couldn't see my children growing up. After years my mom came to see the grandchildren. After that, my oldest brother came when Bryant was 3 years old. My brother liked to play soccer with Bryant. I was so happy.

When we are in the area, my children remember the house. My family loved it.

Maria was born in Bolivia and came to California in 1991. She married Ed in 1993 and lived in her first home for eleven years. In that home her children were born, Vaneza, 14 and Bryant 11. They now live in their own home. She loved the Partners in Reading program.

Memories From Home

by Anna Tran

My name is Anna Tran. I am from Saigon, Vietnam. I left my country a long time ago. I escaped from Vietnam by boat after South Vietnam lost the war.

I have a lot of memories about my family. I want to tell you about my special memory of my mother when I was child growing up in Vietnam.

My mom is the best mom; she took good care of me and my 7 siblings. She was very pretty when she wore “Ao’dai” (traditional Vietnamese dress for women). She was very nice with her children. She never raised her voice to me and my siblings. She talked softly to us even when we made mistake or we made her angry. She kept calm and taught us everything with her warm voice.

Now, every time I think of her, I remember her cooking. Every day at the dinner table, my mom asked me, my sisters and my brothers, “What would all of you like to eat for

dinner next week?" I told her about the food that I wanted to have for dinner. Then she made a list of the meals that she would cook for that week. For example, on Monday she made my favorite food, on Tuesday was my sister's food, and on Wednesday was my brother's food. When I came home from work, I saw my favorite dish on the table. That was "sour shrimp soup" that Vietnamese call "Canh Chua Tom." I ate a lot and enjoyed dinner with my family.

At dinner, I was happy and talked with my parents, sisters and brothers. We shared the problems or the stories of work and school. This was the way we got through the hard times and encouraged each other. Sometimes we had a lot of funny stories. We laughed and made joyful noise at the dinner table.

I love and I am grateful for my mom and dad who guided me and taught me everything. They are always helping me and standing by me when I need them. I know they gave me 100% of their love to me and my siblings. Someday, if my parents pass away, I will never forget them in my life.

Anna was born in Saigon, South Vietnam. She was a refugee in Galang camp in Indonesia. Now she lives in San Jose. She works in a childcare development center. She likes to work with children, cook, read and look at nature such as mountain, beaches and forests. She is grateful to the people who help her to improve her English.

Our House

by **Thomas Valdivia**

I live with my mom, my dad , and my sister Rebecca in Evergreen. My mom picked the house that we live in. We live close to the hospital where my dad works. There is a basketball court outside. My neighbors are crazy and party every Friday night.

Thomas likes to play basketball and hockey and hang out with his friends. He has been in Partners in Reading for 8 months. He works at Zanatto's and is a student at San Jose City College.

Memories of Home

By Lai Fong Vo



Love, happiness, friendship, noise—these always surrounded the neighborhood that held my childhood home. When I was about four years old, we lived in a house in Hong Kong, at Wein Chai. It was a two-bedroom house made of wood, and there were about twenty similar houses on the same street.

My father went to work and my mom stayed home to take care of the family. All the children in the neighborhood stayed home, too. We didn't go to school until seven or eight years old. Some girls did not attend school, only the boys.

In the afternoon all the girls and boys hung out together. We played games like jacks, hide-and-seeK, jump rope, hopscotch, and pingpong, and sang traditional songs. We had fun. Sometimes one of us forgot something we

needed to do for our mother. We all tried to help out to get it finished. We shared everything about our daily life, what happened, either happy or sad.

In the evening, after dinner, we all went outside together. Boys and girls surrounded the older neighbors and listened to them talk about the past—war, history, communism. That was of great interest for us.

About six years later, the government took over our homes. We had to move. We felt sad because we moved to different places. All the past was memories. One thing I never forgot was the truth and simple friendships living in that house gave to me.

Lai Fong is originally from Hong Kong. She has been in the United States for 25 years. In her spare time she enjoys cooking and doing yoga. She joined Partners in Reading and has been working with her tutor, Sue, since November 2007. Sue is very helpful and patient. This story is her first writing after 23 years. She very much appreciates Sue and the program for helping me to write it.
