

# My Best Gift

Stories by Adult Learners



Partners in Reading  
Adult Literacy & ESL  
San José Public Library



# **My Best Gift**

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**PARTNERS  
IN READING**  
San José Public Library

Adult Literacy & ESL  
2019

# **My Best Gift Production Team**



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



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Without the Partners in Reading (PAR) adult learners who meet regularly to build their literacy skills so they can participate more fully in our community, we would not have this program. Also, without the adults who step up to work with staff and volunteers to take the bold step of putting their ideas and details about their lives on paper, we would not have a book. If you doubted that you would be able to write a story, we never did. We knew you could do it. So we say thanks to all the adults in the program, and especially to those who completed a story. Your words are powerful. Your stories are compelling. Your gifts plentiful. And we thank you for sharing them. If you are an adult who didn't write a story, please plan to write one next year.

Without volunteers to patiently help the authors organize their thoughts and their words so that they can get past the blank page, we wouldn't have many stories. Your work is invaluable and very much appreciated.

Special thanks again to MaryLee McNeal, a professional writer with more than 13 years helping PAR adults and, this year, their children tackle this writing assignment. MaryLee coaxes learners to do their best thinking and to take the risk of writing. Her workshop is magical as she skillfully helps learners open their minds to very quickly get their ideas out. For a group of people who struggle to read words, this prospect is a big challenge. MaryLee unlocks that creativity. She also creates handouts that learners and volunteers can use in their tutoring sessions long after the workshop has passed and that learners can also share with family.

Every book needs an editor, and Victoria Scott cheerfully gives her time to read the wonderful stories that PAR authors submit. Thank you for preserving the authors' words so that their voices shine through.

Every book needs funding to cover costs. Thankfully, each year the City of San José, the San José Public Library, and California Library Literacy Services provide the necessary resources of time and money to make this project possible. The book each year becomes a tangible way to celebrate the amazing and dedicated adults and volunteers who participate in this program.

The San José Public Library Foundation (SJPLF) has also been steadfast in its support of PAR. SJPLF asks its donors to support PAR so that we can make San José a more literate community for all.

Another important funder is the California State Library, now in its 36<sup>th</sup> year of providing the means for more than 107 libraries throughout the state to offer literacy services to adults and their families. Without that support, programs like PAR would not be able to provide such a depth and breadth of services to our customers.

Thanks to all behind the scenes who ensure that PAR has the resources to serve adults who want to build their own basic skills or who help others build their skills. With improved literacy, families and our whole community are stronger. We look forward to many more years of service to San José.

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

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- San José Public Library Foundation

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- Trader Joe's
- Walgreen's

## **Introduction to *My Best Gift***

As you read this book, Partners in Reading (PAR) will have just begun its 31<sup>st</sup> year as a vital program of the San José Public Library (SJPL). An essential feature of this long-running service has been the amazing volunteers who provide instruction and form a deep bond with the adult learners with whom they partner. In addition to building literacy, numeracy, and technology skills, tutors and learners form strong connections and build community. Learners come from a very vulnerable place by saying that they struggle with basic literacy skills. Volunteers give their time and talent. In these twice-weekly meetings, the magic of learning happens. Together volunteers and learners become partners in reading. We salute all the people throughout the 30+ years of PAR who have taken time out of their busy lives to set aside three hours each week to learn together. Volunteers often say that they learn as much as they teach. Learners have the chance to show the volunteers a special skill that they know and also become teachers as a result.

One of the ways adults can put their learning into practice is by writing a story. Each year we ask all PAR learners to write about a topic. This year's topic is about gifts. It can be a gift given, a gift received, or a special talent. PAR provides handouts and a workshop with our amazing facilitator, MaryLee McNeal. MaryLee has a gift for helping learners take on each phase in a simplified step-by-step way, so that within the space of an hour or two, most learners have the framework for a story.

According to MaryLee, the key is to write a very short, simple introductory sentence about the topic. This sentence usually encourages the reader to keep reading for more details. Then learners are asked to work with a volunteer to add more details to support the first sentence. Of course, a key element is to go back and check for errors, add more detail, and revise the writing. We want to make sure that all PAR learners understand that writing is a process, and that professional writers go back and change many words until everything looks and sounds right. The editors of this book tried very hard to make as few changes as possible so the authors' words are preserved.

We are pleased to present this book called *My Best Gift*, with the stories of 58 adult learners and eight children of adult learners from PAR. They are now published authors. Many of the adults have submitted stories on a regular basis each year when PAR puts out the call for stories. This year's book includes 17 adult authors who are writing stories for the first time. We look forward to reading their work for many years to come. Thanks to all who worked so hard to make these stories possible.

Thank **you** for reading their words and for supporting SJPL and PAR!



## **Program Highlights**

Partners in Reading (PAR) launched in 1989 to offer basic literacy services by trained volunteers to assist adults in San José. For 31 years PAR has enabled a wide section of the community to get better at reading, writing, and technology, with the help of volunteers, so that they can do everyday tasks independently, such as reading to their kids, following information from health care professionals, and paying bills. The result has been less isolation and more productivity for these adults. Each hour that volunteers contribute is valued in California at \$29.09.\* Since PAR volunteers contribute thousands of volunteer hours each year, the value is enormous.

Since PAR is located in Silicon Valley, it is essential to give adults opportunities to learn through technology. PAR has a great group of volunteer computer instructors who help adults in the PAR computer lab at the King Library. Among the topics are how to use a smart phone to keep a calendar, use learning programs, and retrieve messages. A frequent topic is texting. Others come in to learn about social media or how to apply for jobs. Some people work on spelling. Digital literacy is everywhere, in this area especially, so it is really important to help learners get comfortable with technology and become more independent. The seven Family Learning Center branches have the same learning programs that are installed in the PAR lab. Check them out at Hillview, Tully, Alum Rock, Seven Trees, Bascom, East Branch, and Biblioteca Latinoamericana.

*\*According to the Independent Sector Value of Volunteer Time 2019—California*

As part of the basic literacy tutoring program for adults, PAR has a family literacy program, Together We Read, aimed at breaking the generational cycle of low literacy. Six times a year PAR sends out children's books and parenting information to tutors to review with their learners. The learners' kids get free books for a home library, and the adults get tools to make family learning a priority.

This year, with a family literacy grant from the California State Library and the full-time services of an Americorps VISTA volunteer, PAR was able to expand its family literacy program into more high-need under-resourced communities in San José. New offerings included workshops, targeted outreach services, and giving families free age-appropriate books and learning tools such as chalk, activity coloring books, markers and mini white boards to encourage parents and children learning together. Susan Stone, a recognized authority on how to reach kids early and effectively, gave seven presentations about parenting and family literacy with the help of branch staff and community partners such as Catholic Charities and Sacred Heart Community Services. The workshops were translated into Spanish to reach a wider audience.

For 3½ years PAR has managed the Library's Career Online High School program, where participants complete a rigorous qualification process and then take 36 classes online to earn a career certificate and a high school diploma. With 51 programs currently participating throughout California, San José Public Library has one of the best track records in shepherding

students through to graduation, with over a 70% success rate. A high school diploma translates into better job opportunities and the potential to earn a higher income. For some a diploma also opens a gateway to higher education.

The best way to become a good reader is to read a lot. Within the last year PAR restarted its book club. Volunteers facilitate the process as learners read the texts together and then discuss them. It's a great supplement to regular tutoring sessions and can also be a chance to start learning while waiting to be matched with a tutor. Another way to encourage reading is through Quick Reads. These are materials that are high interest but have low reading levels, so that adults who struggle to read can still find books that they can access. The Quick Reads collection can be checked out at King Library just outside the PAR office, and at the Pearl Avenue, Santa Teresa, Edenvale, East Branch, and Educational Park branches.



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## My Hope

*By Abraham*

My best gift is the library. I learn about the computer. I can check my email. I can check the news and the weather. If I need help, I can ask Ellen or other people.

I can get books from the library. I can also renew them if I need more time to read them. My goal is to finish my GED because I may earn a higher salary.

I am happy while at the library. I have learned a lot.



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Abraham is trying to complete his high school education. He needs a better job.



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Tech Mentor volunteers, East San José Carnegie Branch Library

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# Jasmine

*By Megnaga Aimru*



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Megnaga wrote this story because her daughter is the gift that she always wanted.

My best gift is my daughter, Jasmine. When we found out I was pregnant, I was so happy! My coworker said it was going to be a boy because my stomach looked so big. Customers told me my stomach looked like a watermelon! I had a dream that it would be a girl, and my dream came true. When I talked to my baby in my belly, my dog got jealous. When the baby moved in my belly, she kicked me.

My daughter Jasmine was born on July 27, 2016. I was so excited and a little scared. My boyfriend was happy too, although he had wanted a boy. When my daughter was born, she looked like her daddy. My boyfriend told me that when she was five months old, she said “Dada.” I did not believe what he said, but when we got home she said it again. When she was seven months, she said, “Mama.” At nine months she crawled, and at ten months she walked.

Sometimes my daughter amazes me. I used to worry because she didn’t talk clearly, and I thought she would have trouble making friends

---

and reading. Now when she plays with kids at the park she is like a big sister and tries to take care of them.



Jasmine has grown so fast! She loves playing with her cousins and pretending to be their big sister. She reads books to herself, and she imagines playing with PJ, a cartoon character. She learns signs I did not teach her. She listens to me when I tell her to clean up her toys. When we buy her toys or give her food, she says, “Thank you.” I miss when she was a baby, but I’m so happy she is learning how to take care of herself.

I’m thankful that God gave me a healthy baby who blesses my life.



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A mom reading with her child

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## The Heart-Shaped Ring and a New Life Together

*By Claudia Alvarez*



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Claudia dedicates this story to her husband, Jesus, who gave her the gifts of a ring and a new life together.

It was my birthday, and the first birthday which I celebrated with my husband because at that time we started dating. He did something out of the blue to surprise me. He gave me a heart-shaped ring and asked me to be his girlfriend. Our story of love started on that day.

I was surprised with the gift wrapped in a small box in his hands. I could not wait to open it. As soon as I opened the gift my husband looked at me with his cheeks blushing and he placed the ring on my finger. It was a lovely moment when our feelings were connected.



Twenty-three years have passed since my husband gave me the heart-shaped ring. That ring represents the beginning of our love, a treasure of memories, and the best gift that my husband ever gave me.



---

# The Best Gift for the Best Daughter

By Carmen Arias

One day, my husband and I were talking about what gift to give our daughter for her school graduation. She had worked hard and studied hard. She had persevered. She would need transportation for work and school. She deserved a nice graduation gift to reward her. We decided to buy her a car.



My daughter and I were watching TV together one evening, when we saw a commercial for the Juke. She said she liked it and maybe one day could get one.

I found the car at the Nissan showroom on Stevens Creek Boulevard. It was perfect. It was pretty like my daughter. I knew she would like it. The doors were very different from other cars. They lifted up like gull wings.

It was a Nissan brand, not too expensive, comfortable for a petite body, with soft seats, and good room to carry things. Five people could ride together in it. My husband and I bought it!

*(continued)*

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The present was important to Carmen because it was a special day when her daughter graduated. The gift was very important to her daughter, too.

---

One day after graduation, I parked the car in the driveway when she wasn't looking. My husband and I told her that we had something for her outside. She went outside and was very, very surprised!

Her face showed such surprise. She said, "This is too much for me, Mama and Papa." My husband and I said, "This is for you. The best gift because you worked so hard in school."

I feel good because this is such a special gift for such a wonderful reason.

---

Carmen with her daughter and the new car



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## A Gift From Heaven

By Vaneska Aviles

Every day I feel blessed with the best gift of my life, my family. God has been good to me. First he gave me my parents and siblings. They live in my first country, El Salvador. Now my husband and my son, and also I have my husband's family here.

I met my husband Eric ten years ago. We were dating three years and we have been married for seven years. All this time we have been very happy together. He loves me, and makes me smile all the time. He's very patient and he's also a good father.

Our son, Michael, was born October 8, 2018, bringing joy to our lives. When I was in labor, Eric never let go of my hand. Through my pregnancy I felt loved by all my family, both here and in El Salvador. My mom came to visit for a month so she could meet her grandson. We live with Eric's parents, and Michael can share time with his paternal grandparents.

*(continued)*



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Families are precious gifts from Heaven. We must love and respect our family.

---

Michael is a beloved child. When I look at his face and see his smile I feel that I am a blessed woman with the miracle of giving life. I love to see how he's growing and discovering the world.

The family is the most important foundation of society. As a family we should take care of each other and love and respect each other. I think the family is a precious gift from Heaven.

---

<http://noorjanan.blogspot.com/2012/11/el-salvador-world-study.html>



*“Everyone needs a house to live in, but a supportive family is what builds a home.”*

**– Anthony Liccione**

---

## A Dream Come True

By Sonia Baltodano

When I came to this country, I was 31 years old, and I lived in Los Angeles. I had two boys, and I told them, “Some day I will buy a Jeep, and I will drive beside the sea in Santa Monica Beach.” My sons said, “Mom, when you are retired, we will buy you a Jeep.”

The days passed, and my husband passed away. I worked hard. My mother lived with me and helped me with the children. I remarried. My husband bought a car, a Ford, because a Jeep was too expensive, but I always liked seeing Jeeps. My sons grew up and left home.

Finally, I retired two years ago. My mother is sick, and she needs me. My mother fell down. In the hospital they did an emergency surgery. After surgery, we needed to wait. Then Mashais, my older son, said, “Let’s go to Denny’s.” When we got to the parking lot, he told me, “You drive because I am tired,” and I said, “You are crazy! This Jeep is not yours, and I am still anxious.” It was a nice Jeep; finally I got to ride in one. After we ate, I needed to go home to pick up something. My son said,

*(continued)*



---

Sonia wrote this story because she feels happy that her children have grown up and have always remembered her dream.

---

“Mom, drive the Jeep. That was your dream. You drive because the Jeep is yours. Your dream is done.” I was surprised, happy, and I thanked him and gave him a big hug. I couldn’t believe it. My son told me he wanted to buy me a convertible Jeep, but he thought, “My mom always feels cold. It is better to get the other style for her.” I was laughing. I think my son forgot his mother is a senior. It is high to get in, but I still can do it.

Anyway, I feel happy and excited with my Jeep, but my best gift is the love of my children who remembered my dream for many years.

---

“Some day I will buy a Jeep, and I will drive beside the sea in Santa Monica Beach.”



---

## My Best Blessing to My Family

*By Lorpu B.*

My best gift to my family has been to care for them. I was able to build a beautiful house for my parents in Africa before coming to America. I built the house little by little, and the house is beautiful inside and outside. I got water running in the house so my parents did not have to go outside for it. My favorite room is the living room, and my parents really like their bedroom. I gave them this gift because they are my parents, and I wanted to do it. My parents are very happy, and I was happy because I gave them this gift.

I was able to send my daughter to school up to the college level. That is the only gift I can give my child. I told my daughter, “I want you to go to school and learn because I did not go to school.” She said to me, “Mom, I want to be a medical doctor.” She said, “Mom, I am happy that you are my mom. Some moms do not have time for their kids. Mom, I am going to make you proud,” and she is really making me proud in college.

---

Lorpu wrote a story for this book because she is so happy that she is able to read, write, and understand a little bit better.



---

## Giving Feels Good

*By Rick Bocanegra*



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Rick has lived in San José for a long time. He raised his family here. Now his children are grown, and he has time to take care of his motorcycle and many cars and bring them to car shows to share with others.

I am a firm believer that when you give, you get back much more in return. We should treat others as we would like to be treated. There is also the old saying that it is better to give than to receive. I try to keep these thoughts in mind as I go through my day and as I go through my life.

Reading and writing is not a natural talent for me. It is something I have struggled with for years and still do. Working with my hands on cars, in construction and in carpentry, is my natural talent and to this day still is. I have been able to work in a trade and learn a new one, all while raising my family. Now I'm looking forward to retirement with two pensions.

It makes me feel good to help others in any way that I can with what I know. I often give my skills to friends and people who need them. I believe that if all of us could help one another, how great that would be.



---

PAR has been very good for me and for many others as well. PAR paired me with my tutor, who is now my friend. He has volunteered his time to give me the help I need to read better and to feel better. I am very grateful. Thank you PAR.



*“When we give cheerfully and accept gratefully, everyone is blessed.”*

– Maya Angelou

---

## My Dream Trip to Europe

By Virginia V. Bravo



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Virginia and her husband will always treasure and will never forget their trip to Europe.

The best gift of my life was a surprise gift to Europe.

My children told my husband Daniel and me to sit down because they wanted to tell us something. My husband and I looked confused. My kids Andrea and Alex said, “Here,” and handed us a FedEx packet which contained tickets to Spain and Italy.

I held the packet to my chest and sighed with happiness. Wow, I never thought I would go there. What would happen to my job? Andrea said, “Don’t worry about that, I spoke to Bianca (my boss) and she was very nice.” Bianca said, “Okay, because you are special and have good kids. You are blessed by God.”

My husband and I visited Spain and Italy for two weeks. First, we flew to Spain and stayed in Madrid. Three days later we took a train to Seville.

We liked Madrid. It’s wonderfully beautiful, but we enjoyed Seville the most. We loved the cobblestone streets and the enchanting

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gardens. We were lucky to hear a concert in the open-air theater behind the cathedral. One week later we flew to Venice. A “Happy Honeymoon” note and a red rose from my children were left on the Venetian hotel bed. In Venice, we visited San Marcos Square, walked around, and viewed many souvenir shops.

A few days later, we took a train to Rome. Rome was rainy, so we dropped the luggage off at the hotel and walked to enjoy the evening lights.

In the next few days, we went to the fabulous Colosseum, the Vatican, and other museums. We arrived home with beautiful memories we will never forget.



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Virgina and her husband at Plaza de España, Seville, Spain

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# Let It Be

*By Robert Byers*

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Robert wrote this story about a special gift from his brother 43 years ago.

My best gift happened many years ago, but it is still very special today.

I had a younger brother named Ronlie. When he was 15 years old, he had a friend at Mt. Pleasant High School who went to a Paul McCartney and Wings concert. The concert was in June 1976 at the Cow Palace.

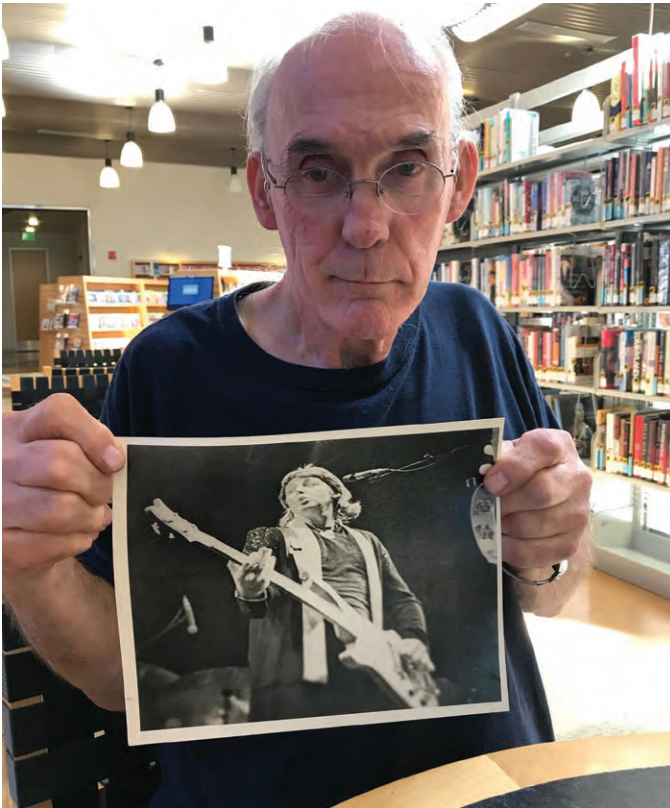
Somehow, his friend was able to get right in front of the stage, and he took a photograph of Paul McCartney playing his guitar. Then his friend developed it into a black and white picture in his photography class. One day, Ronlie gave the picture to me. He knew that I was a big Beatles fan.

Sadly, my brother was killed in a car accident in 1989 when he was just 28. On a foggy night he missed a curve, and he rolled the car. He was thrown out of the car because he was not wearing a seat belt. Unfortunately, he was pronounced dead at the hospital.

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I could not believe it when I found out the next morning. Ronlie and I did not always get along. We fought a lot, but I still felt sad that he was gone.

The picture of Paul McCartney is special because it is a memory of my brother at a peaceful time in our relationship.



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## Gift of the Future

By A. Chang

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A. wrote this story because this year the gift has been important for her and for her son.



I remember a gift that was important for my son, but also for me too. On October 26, 2018, my son called me and said, “Mom, I quit my job. I am moving to Florida and starting nursing school on November 1.”

When I heard that, I felt like I had won the lottery. “I know you don’t like school. Are you kidding?” I remembered when he dropped out of high school. I was so disappointed and hurt, but he hated school.

Now, twenty-two years later, he wanted to go back to school. I was very surprised and happy. I thought, this is a gift. I wanted to encourage him, but not only with words, but with actions. So I asked him, “What do you need?”

He said, “Nothing, I just wanted you to know I’m going back to school because I want the best future for my family.”

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So I decided that I wanted to help him have a better future by offering financial support and encouraging words. This is my gift to him. This gift is as important for my future as it will be for my son's future.



*“The presence of passion within you is the greatest gift you can receive. Treat it as a miracle.”*

*–Wayne Dyer*

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## Learning With My Family

*By Maria Cuevas*

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Maria wrote this story because she is proud of her granddaughter. She feels better about herself after writing this story.

I would like to share with you my best gift. I received it from my granddaughter five years ago. She introduced me to learning English. During her first year at school, she told me all about her teacher and her friends. I couldn't understand most of what she told me, but I do remember her saying: "Gramma, you must learn English!"



At that time I heard about free ESL classes held at the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library in downtown San José. I registered for one of the ESL programs there, which lasted for about 10 months. During these months I felt great. I discovered many things I was capable of doing and also met many people from different parts of the world. When the ESL program ended, I received from Partners in Reading a sweet and very patient tutor who is teaching me grammar and how to use the computer.



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My granddaughter also told me about the wonderful history about an amusement park called Frontier Village located near my house. In 1961 this park was full of attractions. In 20 years of the park's history, the attractions were changed. The owners closed the park in 1980 because they could not secure funds to expand it.

I learned a great deal from my granddaughter; however, every member of my family is also My Best Gift. I want to thank whoever inspires me to continue learning new things. My granddaughter expresses her love toward me every morning.



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## To Become a Mother Was My Greatest Gift

*By Doris Diaz*



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Doris wrote this story because it's a good opportunity to write about something she's grateful for.

I had not thought before about what has been my greatest gift. Then, I thought, a gift is something that brings happiness. So I didn't have to think too much to realize what my greatest gift is, because I have been grateful since it came, and it's just to be a mother.

It came double; God sent me two awesome daughters. They brought me the most wonderful moments in my life with all kinds of experiences, adventures, dreams, happiness, satisfaction, headaches, and especially love.

Cami shows me how to be clear, following her dreams no matter what, with perfect heart connection. From the time she was young, she knew what she wanted and many times she had to struggle. Today, my daughter is confident and successful, recognizing her strengths and weaknesses, and bringing balance and kindness to all aspects of her life.

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Tati shows me the peace of the journey but with impetus to be conscious with her decisions. I remember when she was nine years old, she asked her father to treat her with respect, love, and dignity, the same way she was treating him. From that day, she has shown kindness, fairness, and fearlessness. Today she works to protect the human rights of immigrants on the Mediterranean Sea.

I just want to say to Cami and Tati that I love you guys forever, with my mind, my heart, my soul, and I'm a proud mama. You made my greatest gift come true.



Doris (center) with daughters Cami, left and Tati, right

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## My Old Lady

*By Daniel Duran*



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Daniel is 64 years old and was born in San Antonio, Texas. He moved to California when he was eight years old. He now lives in San José. He joined Partners in Reading to learn to read and write better.

A great gift in my life was meeting Julia. I met her on April 26, 1990, 29 years ago. Ever since then we've been together. We grew our relationship, even though her kids didn't like me because they thought I stole their mother! When I took her to my apartment, she didn't like what she saw—so she got me to kick people out who were druggies too. And I stopped using drugs so that I could be with her. About five years later she saw how bad I looked, so she made me go to the doctor, and later when I was bleeding from the colon she made me go back. In the hospital they told me I had colon cancer. A year later they told me I had liver cancer, and after that I had lung cancer as well as a hernia. Through all the hospital visits, three surgeries, and the chemo, Julia was always there beside me. She sat with me for hours in the hospital, and when I went home she watched over me and checked my staples, brought me food, and helped me go to the bathroom when I couldn't walk that well.

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When Julia broke her hip last year, I was there for her too. She was in the hospital for a month and I visited her almost every day (until she told me to stop coming!). When she came home, I helped her get in and out of bed, opened the door for her to go to the bathroom, and helped her up and down the stairs. When she could start walking with a walker, I carried a lounge chair around so she could sit down whenever she got tired.

Without Julia, I would probably be dead. I didn't care about myself. She's the one who told me to go to the hospital. She saved my life.

*“The greatest gift that you can give to others is the gift of unconditional love and acceptance.”*

– Brian Tracy

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## Raising My Grandkids

By O'Neal Durgin, Jr.



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O'Neal wrote this story because he loves his grandkids, Julian and Kayden.

I raised my grandkids, Kayden and Julian, starting in 2012, and I had a lot of fun with them. When I started taking care of them, Julian was one and Kayden was two. Every day my boys wanted to go for a walk in the park. After the walk Kayden and Julian always said, "Poppa Neal, we love you so much." I always said to my boys, "I love you boys so much, and all I want is for you to get an education for yourselves. I did the best I can, but you can do a lot better than me."

My boys came and visited with me on February 23, 2019. They picked up their allowances. Giving your grandkids an allowance is a good way to stay in touch with them. I give my grandkids 5 dollars a week, which they pick up when they get around to it. Kayden had 30 dollars and Julian had 20 dollars. Julian said, "I'm going to save my allowance like Kayden, Poppa Neal." Julian and Kayden said to me, "We love you Poppa Neal," and I said to my boys, "I love you more than you boys know."

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All I want is the best for the two of you. All you have is each other. You have to remember that it is important to stick together.”

It was a little more fun to raise my grandkids than my own kids, because I can play with them even more. That is what makes it a wonderful gift.



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## My Music

*By Monica Fernandez*



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Monica wrote this story because she loves to sing and dance. She wants to show everyone her talent.

My best gift is being a hip hop Latismo dancer, singer, songwriter, guitarist, and keyboard player. I got new band stuff my brother-in-law Lenny Garcia gave me, and an electric guitar too. I love to sing and dance and play guitar and keyboards. My music I write is Christian music. My name is Musical Monica, and I am very talented. I love to perform in front of a whole lot of people. In the future I would like to sing in a recording studio and make music videos.

My dreams are big, but I have to make it happen. I want my voice to be heard on radio. I love my hip hop, playing guitar, and keyboard. I love to sing a lot, and I will never stop because singing is very important to me. I would rather be singing and dancing, playing guitar and keyboards than being bored and wasting time. You know, life is too short to waste your music and your dreams. Why waste a gift of music when I have it right in front of me?



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Performing is wonderful, but only being in the limelight for a little while. My future gift is to meet a rock star to help put me on stage so I can perform and go on tour to start recording my music. I want to be somebody and be a star and be on radio and TV. I know I have big dreams, but it doesn't mean I can't show my talent. I have to get out there and make it happen and not waste it.



*“The greatest gift you have been given is the gift of your imagination—what do you dream of wanting to do?”*

**– Amanda Lindhout**

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# My Precious Daughter

*By Maria Garcia-Jimenez*

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Maria's daughter is a miracle that came true.

The best gift that life has given me is my daughter. My husband and I were happy with our three boys, and when we found out that we were expecting another baby we were excited, but at the same time a little worried that we might have another boy.

When we received the news that we were having a girl, my husband and boys were very happy. Sophia was born on February 21, 2013. She brought a lot of happiness into our lives. Sophia is smart and very silly. She can make us laugh when we are sad or at any time with her jokes.

Sophia's arrival was a big support for my older son. Before she was born my older son was having some hard times at school, but with Sophia at home he always put a smile on his face when he arrived home and saw her. He used to spend a lot of time playing with his little sister. He read books to her and even played dolls with her.

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Sophia is now 6 years old and she loves to learn new things and write letters to her friends and siblings. I love when I go to work and I find pictures and notes from her that say, “I love you, Mom.” She always carries a notebook and colored pens with her.

Sophia changed our lives forever. She brought happiness to our family and our lives with her spontaneous and bright personality.



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Brothers protective  
of their little sister

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# My Wonderful Parents

*By Imelda Garcia*

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Imelda's story is about her parents. She wants to honor them because she is so proud to be their daughter.

I am very lucky and proud to have the best parents. They take care of me and all my siblings.

We are a big family. I have six sisters and two brothers. We were born in Zacatecas, Mexico. Because of the family size my father didn't have enough income to support us in Mexico. That is why my father came to the United States in 1976 to find new opportunities while my mother stayed behind with us. She took care of the entire family by herself and waited for financial support from my father. He would send his earnings to my mother so she could provide food and education to me and my siblings. We waited with our mother in Mexico for 12 years before joining my father after he received his U.S. legal resident status in 1988.

My best gift is my parents, because they worked very hard to take care of the family. Despite the physical distance, they worked with each other to keep the family united.

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Thanks to my parents, I was able to obtain a degree in accounting in Mexicali, Mexico. Every day I say thanks to God for my parents. Because of them, the entire family is here in San José, California, and we have a chance at a better quality of life in the U.S.

Thank you, Mom and Dad for keeping the family together. I love you!

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Imelda's family portrait



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# The Best Gift That Changed My Life

By FTG

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FTG writes that when she met Abare, it changed her life forever. She gives thanks that she has a trusted friend for life.



When I came to the United States, I needed a friend I could trust and who could give me comfort in time of need. Abare Dokobi gave me that comfort. He is the best gift I ever received.

Twelve years ago, we met at a friend's house for Thanksgiving dinner. Abare is funny and very intelligent. With his cheerful attitude and loud voice, he cracked jokes. It felt so comfortable being around him.

I remember the first time we drove to San Francisco on Highway 280, a wide road, surrounded by beautiful green hills and colorful spring flowers. Seeing the Golden Gate Bridge, the Pacific Ocean, and driving down Lombard Street, these images I will never forget! Abare helped me get my driver's license so that I can show people the beautiful areas that he showed me.

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Abare is my mentor. He always has time to listen to me. He gives wise advice and encourages me to believe in myself. He taught me that I have choices in life and to always believe in my dreams.

Even though Abare has limited mobility and difficult health problems, his strong personality and faith help him deal with his immense suffering. He always says, when I am down, “Tomorrow will be a better day.” I will never forget what he did for me in the beginning of my journey in America. That’s why I am so glad and able to help him now in his time of need, because Abare has always been there for me.

It has brought us closer to each other. This is the reason Abare Dokobe is my perfect gift.

*“In everyone’s life, at some time, our inner fire goes out. It is then burst into flame by an encounter with another human being. We should all be thankful for those people who rekindle the inner spirit.”*

**– Albert Schweitzer**

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## My Prized Possession

*By Rosemary Gonzales*



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Rosemary wrote this story to encourage readers to have hope if they go through problems.

Let me first introduce myself. My name is Rosemary and I come from a dysfunctional family of nine (three boys and six girls). My mother was a single parent who was on welfare. She had a hard time providing for her nine children. I went through a lot as a child growing up and as an adult dealing with past hurt. That is why I can say from experience that Jesus is my prized possession. He is my best friend who I can always depend on. The Lord is always there through pain and hardship. People will let you down, but God is always faithful to His word. He can't lie. He is God.

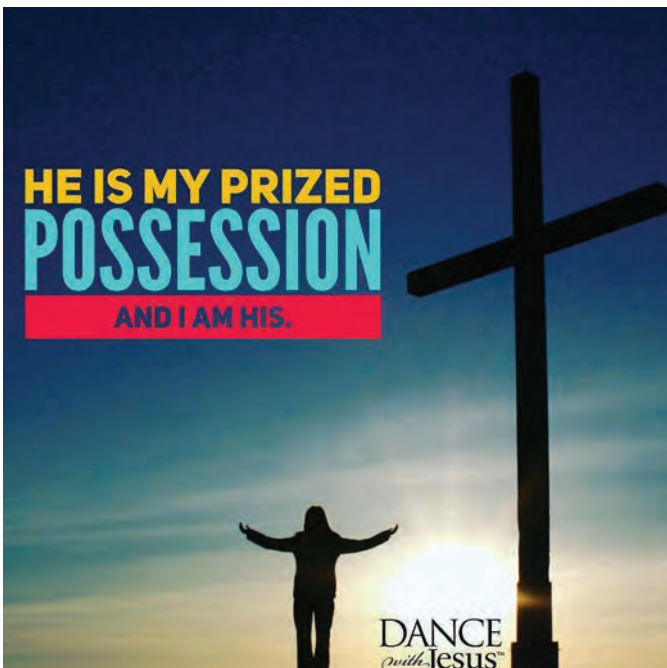
Even when I was going through financial hardship, trying to keep a roof overhead and needing a job, He was there for me. I dealt with my family's problems even when I was hurting, and no one knew but the Lord, who knows all things and sees all things. He knew the tears that I shed at the moment when I couldn't take life anymore: He was there to strengthen and comfort me, to let me know He is with me through it all and He will never leave me. There was a time when depression would try to get a hold of me, but I would refuse to be depressed.



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I would fight depression off by praising Him in my heart for the good times as well as the bad times. It was hard to do, but as I continued it got easier each time. He gave me peace and joy in the midst of all my problems, knowing He is in control of my life and everything that happens in my life. He will work it out for me.

It is a learning and training process to learn to trust in God. This is what you call “the sacrifice of praises,” when you don’t feel like praising God, when everything is turning upside down all around you. And you don’t understand why this is happening to you. All of this is why Jesus is my prized possession.



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## My Four Best Gifts

By Erika Guizar



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Erika writes that her children are the most important people in her life, and she wants the best for all of them.

As I was growing up, I never imagined that I would have children. Now as an adult, I have four children. They are my best gifts and the best thing that has ever happened to me. All four of my beautiful children are special and different from each other.

My oldest child is my 12-year-old son. He is shy and loving. He likes to play Legos and share them with his brothers. He is proud of what he builds and likes to show me his creations.

My second gift is my eight-year-old son. He has lots of energy and seems to be always moving. He dances, runs, walks, and talks constantly. He is also shy and loves hugs.

My seven-year-old princess is my third gift. She likes to change her clothes as often as she can and then look at herself in the mirror. She loves to dance, sing, and paint. She is loving and caring.

My fourth gift is my baby. He is two and wants to do all the things he sees his brothers and

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sister do, but he also wants to be independent. He likes to say “Please” and “Thank you” when I give him things. He loves giving and receiving hugs. He is shy, too.

I love my children so much, and I would do anything to see them happy. Watching them laugh and play is my world. My life is better knowing that they’re okay. I thank God for blessing me with my four best gifts.



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Mocomi presents:  
Say Thank You,  
Sorry, Please  
<https://mocomi.com/>

*“I’m inspired by the love people have for their children. And I’m inspired by my own children, how full they make my heart. They make me want to work to make the world a little bit better. And they make me want to be a better man.”*

– Barack Obama

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## My Special Time With My Husband

*By Biliso A. Hami*

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Biliso wrote this story because she and Ali only have one day off a week to happily spend time together.

My best gift is spending time with my husband, Ali, when he is not working. On Saturday there is no alarm waking us up early in the morning. Sometimes we go to Panera for breakfast. I like to order a coffee, and Ali likes a latte with dark chocolate. He likes a cinnamon toast crunch, and I like a plain croissant with cream cheese.

After breakfast we like to go to the mall. We enjoy walking and looking at all the shops. Two weeks ago we bought a new blender. We love to make smoothies at home. I also bought a gray and black striped sweater. Ali found a new hat and scarf to buy for his job.

After shopping we usually go to visit our friends for dinner. We buy a cake at Safeway to take for dessert. Then, Ali takes me to Khadar's house, but he has to leave me and go to work. My friend Khadar often cooks American food. I like a veggie hamburger and soup and salad.



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When dinner is over and Khadar and I have cleaned up the kitchen, we go to the living room to talk and watch TV. We usually choose to watch action movies. Later, we have black tea with the cake. At 10 o'clock my husband, Ali, comes back from work to drive us home. I feel so happy about this day.

Saturday together has been my best gift. I have spent a lot of time with my husband Ali.



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## Living in San José

*By Mitra*

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Mitra says that part of learning English is learning to write.

I have lived in San José for three years. These three years have been my best gift. My gift started when I got to San José. I came to get married. I got my driver's license. Making new friends has been very important. I learned about American food and restaurants. I still cook and eat food from my native country. But sometimes I eat American food. I am learning English.



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Students in ESL class

I met Bertha one month after my arrival. I met her at school. We were studying English. We found that we lived very close to each other. We spent a lot of time together. I liked Bertha because she was fun, smart, positive, and happy. We were best friends. I am sad because she moved to Missouri.

I have a chance to learn English. That is a very important part of my gift. I did not have the chance for more education in my native country. I have that chance now.

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## My Christmas Gift

*By Herman Haro*

My best and most memorable gift was a mountain bike I received during Christmas of 1998. The bike, a gift from my parents, came in a huge overwhelming box.

It took most of the morning to assemble the bike. I clearly remember that day, because I was a kid, and I didn't know how to use tools. Upon completion of the joyously challenging process of assembling my new gift, I was rewarded with my new bike. The frame was unique, blue that changed colors with the sunshine, and it had two-tone rims of flat black and chrome spokes and rough-looking tires.

I proudly went for a ride on a bike path with rocky terrain in the cold December morning. My bike gave me freedom to go everywhere on my own time, to travel to school, and to enjoy it on the weekend at the park. That's why it's my best, most memorable gift. Until this day I still own the bike and have never sold it. I have no plans of selling the bike or giving it away.

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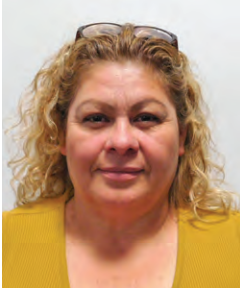
Herman wrote this story because his bike was a special and memorable gift when he was a child. He has kept the bike for a long time and still has it today.



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## Reviving Our Love

*By Irma H.*



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Irma wrote this story to improve her writing. She is learning every day, even though English is not her first language. She has been with Partners in Reading for about three years.

One day I was watching TV when I saw a commercial about a cruise to Hawaii. Immediately I thought, this is the gift I'll be giving to my husband for our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, which is in August. I realized we hardly spend any quality time together. This trip will give us an opportunity to remember those days when we started to date and revive our love. We will spend time together, just us away from our daily chores. I wanted to give him a break from his everyday hectic job. So the next day I purchased the tickets. When my husband was back from work, I slowly slipped to our bedroom, holding the tickets behind my back. My husband was totally surprised when I handed him the tickets, because he never expected something like this. He hugged me and kissed me. Then he said, "I love you." He expressed that this is the best gift he ever got and it made him feel special.



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We will be enjoying the food, the casino, bar, the dance shows, the pool, the games, the views from the front and back decks of the ship—which will be all open ocean around us—and local markets where the ship halts. We will also be getting a chance for scuba diving and capturing the same in the photos. These were some things on my bucket list, which I always wanted to do with my life partner. This trip will be one of the most cherished moments of our life.



*“The greatest gift of life is friendship, and I have received it.”*  
– Hubert H. Humphrey

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## A Fantastic Day

*By Ernesto Jimenez*



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Ernesto came to California in 1984. He lives with his beautiful wife in San José and loves to travel.

I left Los Angeles in the early hours of October 31, 1984, for my brother Carlos's house in San José, California, which would become my home city. I hadn't seen Carlos since he left home back in Mexico seeking a better life.

Now Carlos was married to an American lady named Tyna. She was seven months pregnant with my nephew Marcos. I knocked on the door. Tyna opened the door wearing a pumpkin costume! The fact she was seven months pregnant made the costume look perfect. I started to laugh, but because I did not know her I stopped. The only word coming out of my mouth was "Wow!" She tried to explain that it was fine to go to work wearing a costume that day because it was Halloween.

Later that morning, Carlos arrived. He was a delivery driver. He asked me to go with him to finish his route. One of the stops was the city of San Francisco. Going to San Francisco for the first time is very special, but going to San Francisco for the first time on Halloween is pretty amazing.

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I really wanted to see the famous Golden Gate Bridge. I had seen the bridge so many times in pictures and movies back home, but now I saw it live. It was a wonderful experience, driving through the financial district seeing the skyscrapers. I was amazed to see so many people walking in their costumes, people driving cars wearing masks and funny hats. It was truly a fantastic day.



© GingerWorks Photography

The only feeling I can relate it to is opening your Christmas present, but instead of the feeling lasting only a few minutes, mine lasted the whole day.



© Chronicle/Michael Macor

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## People Are My Gift

*By Narinder Kaur*



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Narinder didn't speak much English before she joined PAR. She has been with PAR for almost five months. She has learned a lot.

I have two very important people in my life, my daughter, Priya, and my husband, Sukhi. They are my best gifts.

I grew up in a village in India. In India, parents choose who their children marry. Parents force their children to marry. Some Indian communities are very strict. My parents forced me to marry a man who was very greedy, and he was very strict in his religion. I first saw him on the day of our marriage. After a few days of our marriage, he kept asking me to bring a dowry. But my parents could not afford to give money. So my husband divorced me.

Priya gave me a purpose to my life. I was pregnant at the time with my daughter. After I was divorced, I became a burden to my parents. I worked hard and faced many difficulties to raise my daughter and to educate her at any cost. I wanted to send my daughter to an English school in India. I raised my daughter by myself. My life is a gift because my daughter gave my life meaning.

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I came to America with my second husband Sukhi. He made my life by giving me a helping hand. He is very nice. He accepts my daughter. He takes care of me when I am sick. He helps me with kitchen work. He is very honest. He always tells the truth. He took me to England to see my sister last winter. He always organizes family trips, such as Disneyland and Universal Studios. He always takes care of my parents. He applied for their citizenship and health insurance. We go for a hike every weekend at Alum Rock Park. We hike for five miles. When we reach the top, we spend some time sitting on the bench and looking at the view.

These two people helped me through the hardships in my life. They really are gifts.



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Alum Rock Park

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## Double Happiness

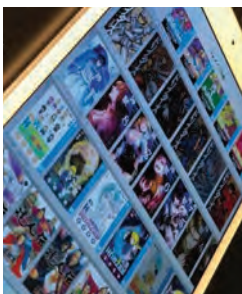
*By Aya Kumatami*

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Aya wrote this story because this gift gave her family happiness.

My best gift is a tablet that I gave to my husband last year for his birthday. I gave a tablet because he likes to read manga. Here in America, we can buy manga, but they are expensive, there aren't many titles, and there aren't many stores that sell them. I'd like him to read manga from the online store in Japan.

If he could buy the real books here, he would not put them back on the shelf after reading them. He would scatter the books on the desk. He would bring them to other rooms in the house and leave them there. He is not very good at cleaning. The mess gives me stress.



When he is done reading manga on the tablet, he doesn't need to clean up anything. All his books are kept in one place. No mess gives me no stress.

He can read manga any time he wants. He is happy that I am happy that I don't have any stress from cleaning!

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# My Road to Success

By Fitzroy Leslie

My greatest gift is Partners in Reading (PAR). After I left high school and applied for my first job, I was a little scared because I couldn't fill out the application.

I went to a supermarket in Jamaica. When I asked if there were any jobs available, they gave me the application form.

I took a taxi to my sister's house and asked her if she could help me fill the form out. After I gave it to them, they told me that they would look at it. I got the job.

It wasn't too hard to get a job. It's just that reading is my problem. But somehow I always got around work without people knowing I couldn't read.

When I met my wife, we moved to California. It was a different environment where I definitely needed to read more to get around. A lot of times, when my wife was at work, I would go for a bike ride and I'd get lost. I'd call my wife or my mom and tell them that I was lost. They would ask me what the sign said, and I'd spell it out because I couldn't read.

*(continued)*

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Fitzroy wrote this story because he really appreciates how PAR has helped him meet his goals.







My wife came home from work and told me that someone told her about PAR. She asked me if I would go. I said, “Yes.” We went together to the King Library, and that was the best thing that ever happened to me. PAR is my greatest gift. This program really helped me to read street signs, get my driver license, get jobs, and even get my citizenship. Thank you for your help to get on the road to success.

*“If you work hard at anything, you’re going to experience some success. And the greatest gift is when you have something you really love to do and you can integrate that into your work life. I feel like it’s a real privilege that I get to do something that is good for my community and good for the world. But it’s also pleasurable for me.”*

**– Robert Kennedy, Jr.**



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## My Favorite Hobby

By J. L.

A few years ago, before I came to America, I learned Korean traditional dances and I absolutely loved it.

This all started when I was about six years old. My mom took me to the Korean children's program at church. There, I experienced dancing and singing for the first time. Unfortunately it was a very short time. Once I outgrew the program, I stopped dance classes altogether.

Afterwards, throughout my childhood and adulthood so far, I've tried many activities and sports, including exercise. But none of them interested me that much. Fast forward more than 30 years later, I remembered the dances that I learned in church, so I searched for different types of dance classes, and that's when I found traditional Korean dance. I enjoyed learning this style of dance so much that I pursued it for three years.

*(continued)*

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J. L. wrote that you are never too old to learn something new and fun. You never know, you can discover a new love.



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My favorites are the Salpuri and the Taepyeongmu dances. These styles have very slow and precise movements. When I dance, I feel like a bird gliding in the air and I can blank out everything. All the stress in my mind automatically leaves.

Korean traditional dance became my all-time favorite hobby. You're never too old to learn something new and fun. I gave myself the best gift of something I really love to do.

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Dankook University's traditional Korean dance performance at Southern Oregon University



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## The Gift of My Life

By Porfiria Lopez

The best gift I've ever been given is my life, which my parents gave me. I was born in Oaxaca, Mexico, in a small village called San Sebastian Teitipac. Coming from such a small village and having no money, I thought I'd live out my life there, never going anywhere.

However, I have had many surprising opportunities to travel, which, amazingly, someone invited me to and paid for. At the age of 18, on my first trip, I went to the town of Tebanca in the state of Veracruz, Mexico, a picturesque place with beautiful nature and many kinds of tropical fruit, birds, flowers, and palm trees. On the second trip, I went to the city of Veracruz and had the wonderful experience of seeing the huge Gulf of Mexico. At still another time, I went to Huatulco, Tehuantepec, and Salina Cruz, all popular ocean beaches in Oaxaca. Then, in Mexico City, I visited the famous areas of Chapultepec Park, Chalma, Cuernavaca, and La Villa.

*(continued)*



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Porfiria wrote this story because life is an amazing gift for her.



Oaxaca, Mexico

Incredibly, after visiting so many places in Mexico, I moved to San José, California, and have lived in this big, beautiful city for 21 years. My sons were born here, and I have made trips to San Francisco, Salinas, Santa Cruz, Foster City, Carmel, Los Angeles, Santa Monica, Stanton, and Disneyland.

When I think about all the unbelievable opportunities I've had in my life, it seems like a miracle, because without money or plans to leave my village, I've lived the life of a character from, perhaps, a TV show or a book. That's why I consider my life to be the best gift I've ever been given.



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## My Current Life

By *Elleni Mekuria*

I have received a lot of good gifts throughout my lifetime. In my life my best gift that God gave to me is my church and my children. Both of them are very important for my healthy life.

When I say healthy life, this means not only physical but spiritual and social too. Religion is the base of my life. I thank God that my parents connected me with their religion, Christianity. As I grew up I always put Jesus Christ first. My upbringing was around the church, studying the Bible, worshiping, and praising the Lord with other followers. When I came to the U.S., I felt lonely and frustrated living without my church and my people. Even though I wanted to have a baby, I didn't want to raise the baby without my church so the baby could be baptized and receive Jesus. With my church I pray with others, we help each other, we eat and do many things together. Spending time with others makes me happy.

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Elleni wrote this story to share her best gift and to thank God.



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The other best gift I received from God was my children. He gave me two physically and emotionally healthy kids. He gave me my kids to raise. They are not only my kids but they are my friends too. He makes my life full.

My church plays a big role in my life, and it is important that I worship in my own language and with my people. Because of this, I raised my kids to know God, know our language, our culture, and live together with others in love. For me, this is my success. I always thank God that He has given me both.

*“Inspiration is the greatest gift because it opens your life to many new possibilities. Each day becomes more meaningful, and your life is enhanced when your actions are guided by what inspires you.”*

– Bernie Siegel

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## Gifts With a Meaningful Purpose

*By James Mendoza*

So let's talk about gifts. There are many kinds of them. Gifts that are given, received, or that we possess in ourselves. But when we shop for a gift or choose one, how much time or thought went into it? That is also true for gifts that you alone possess.

The gift I possess is the gift of realizing. Let me explain. I'm James Mendoza, a 62-year-old Peruvian-American native Californian, raised in Silicon Valley kitty-corner to the Shark Tank. So I know downtown pretty well. Living there, I had a rough life growing up, even from being in Catholic school. That didn't make any difference to rich Catholic school kids, who weren't very nice either. So life went on, and so did I. I started drinking and doing drugs. One day after work in 2008, I didn't feel well, so I went to the hospital E.R. There they told me I was very sick. So I said, "What is it?" They said I had end-stage cirrhosis and had just six to eight months to live.

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James says he has never written anything throughout his life, so he submitted this story because he wanted to see how well he has learned from his first two tutors.

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I was in shock, scared of what would become of me. So I started to think about everything. It's incredible what you come up with. But nevertheless, it's all-consuming. After all that time and thought, I realized that life is not over, and I've never been one to give up. I have a lot to give and hope for in my life. So I faced this intimidating, daunting, seemingly insurmountable task. Well I'm still here, thanks to hard work and diligence, plus I think someone up there really likes me. We all need to take some time and ponder what a gift really means to us. Stop and realize, be mindful. It might just bring a smile or save your life.





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## Pendant Necklace With a Watch

*By Toshiko Miraflor*

My best gift is a pendant necklace with a small pearl watch from my younger brother. The pendant is made by Mikimoto Jewelry Company. The silver-colored pendant is about the size of a quarter and is shiny. It is very lovely. It was a gift for my 61<sup>st</sup> birthday. I received it from my younger brother on the airplane when we came back from a day trip to Nara Prefecture in Japan.

It was 17 years ago, in the early spring. My younger brother and I visited Nara Prefecture to see the cherry blossoms at the Hozanji Buddhist Temple in Ikoma City. We took a cable car up from Ikoma Station to the temple on a mountain. The flowers were in full bloom all over the temple grounds. The white and pink flowers were so beautiful, and their fresh scent attracted me. When the wind blew over the flowers, the petals flew up into the air, and the fallen petals covered the ground like snow. I really enjoyed such a beautiful scene.

My brother passed away six years ago by an accidental death. The pendant reminds me a lot of my younger brother and our childhood memories with our family.

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Toshiko wrote this story in memory of her younger brother.



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## Open My Eyes

*By Donaji Montes*



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Donaji is a Mexican businesswoman in Silicon Valley who helps digital technology companies in their international endeavors. She enjoys growing, learning, and enjoying the dance of life.

Have you ever realized how fortunate you are? I have been depressed, overwhelmed, confused, and I have felt hopeless, lonely, and without a sense of direction in life. When I am like that, complaining, pointing fingers, being the victim seems the natural way to behave. My mind imagines stories of what is going to happen, and a tragedy or disaster seems inevitable.

I believe in God, and He is so loving and great that it always gives me the chance to start over again ... and again. When I pray, meditate, and allow myself to align myself with Him, something out of this world happens, and He enters in my heart and allows me to open my eyes.

Yes, I open my eyes literally every morning, but it goes even further. He opens my eyes to His greatness, to the blessings in my life, to realize that He can touch my heart using everything in the world: with the sea, the

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sunset, the moon, a kid's gaze, a song that I love that I haven't heard in such a long time, or a friend calling me to share good news. He gives me hope and switches my attitude to be positive, playful, responsible for my choices, to face my challenges and fears, and to trust in the process.

The best gift I have in life is to have lived for the last 36 years, and the opportunity to start over again as many times as I have needed.



*“Write it on your heart that every day is the best day in the year.”*

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

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## London, My Angel

By R. N.

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R. N. wrote this story to share his feelings for his granddaughter.

My best gift is my granddaughter. Gloria and my son made me a grandpa. I thank God I came to be an abuelo. One morning my son told me Gloria was having a baby. This news made me happy.

My granddaughter was born in March 2018. Her name is London Jade. She likes to push her walker. London loves to make funny faces. She enjoys playing with the remote control and her baby phone. I feel great when she is around me. When I carry her, it feels like I am holding a little angel. I enjoy watching her grow up. London will always be in my heart. She is my best gift.



© Mariia Masich/iStock

*“You don’t choose your family. They are God’s gift to you, as you are to them.”*

– Desmond Tutu

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## God's Gift to Me

By Edith Navarro

My father is one of the best gifts I could have ever had. He taught me so many things about being a successful person.

He had little school education, but he was smart and hard-working. He built at least three businesses. His most important business was raising bulls to sell for meat. He grew corn for people and also for cattle to eat. He also grew agave for people to make tequila. Because of his example, I had my own business owning a restaurant with my then-husband when I was 19 years old.

He gave a private school education to all nine of his children, and it's important to me that my children get a good education too.

He taught me with his wisdom and life example to be brave and to value myself as a woman. He showed me how important it is to help others. When I was struggling with serious problems, he told me to look at myself in the  
*(continued)*



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Edith's father died in March 2019, and she is feeling motivated to remember him.



mirror and see what a strong and valuable woman I am. He told me all the time that I am beautiful, smart, and strong. He told me God will help me through anything.

His influence, his quiet yet strong presence, was always there. I can never thank him enough for being an amazing example of a true human being in my life. My father died March 19, 2019, and now I realize what a great gift he was to me all my life.

*“My father gave me the greatest gift anyone could give another person, he believed in me.”*

**– Jim Valvano**

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## Lucky Charm

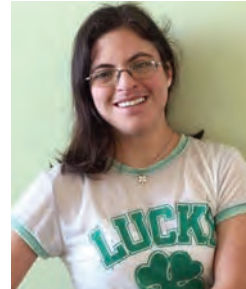
*By Kathleen Nicolas*

My dad really, really loves soccer! He was eight years old when he first started playing. My dad has played soccer for sixty years. He plays on two teams. One team is called the Dukes of Edinburgh. The second team is the Britannia Arms.

Every time I was at the soccer game, the team won. The coach told my dad that I was the team's good luck charm. So they gave me the gift of being their lucky charm. I have been their lucky charm for almost eight years. I have two lucky charm shirts and a necklace that I wear to the games.

When the team plays in Hawaii, I can't go. So instead, I make them my famous oatmeal raisin cookies for good luck. My dad takes the cookies to Hawaii for the team. I dance to the song Lucky Charm by Keith Urban every time the team wins a game. I call it the Hawaii Happy Dance.

I love being the lucky charm. It makes me feel like I'm helping the team to win. I want to thank the team for this very special gift of being their lucky charm.



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Kathleen wrote this story because she loves rooting for the team.

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## The Gift of Love

*By Mayfe Nieto*



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Mayfe wrote this story because she wanted to express her love and gratitude to her mom in a way that she has never done before.

My best gift? I didn't realize until I was an adult that I had received my best gift as a child. I didn't know then just how valuable and important it was to make me feel my life was complete.

When I was a child, my best gift was there to help me take my first steps, say my first words, and play my first games. There were hard times and tears, but there was also so much laughter and fun.

Throughout my life this marvelous gift has given me more gifts than I have used, and I am still using them in my daily life—such as love, passion, moral values, a career, how never to give up under any circumstances, and how to manage different situations. I have learned that everything in this world has its own value, and no matter what, I have to be respectful. Life is about choices.



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Although I have had many opportunities to say how thankful and fortunate I am to have this gift in my life, I feel like there are no words that are good enough to express the gratitude in my heart.



I wish that you, MOM, could stay close to me for as long as this life permits, so I can give my best effort to make you feel happy and proud of me. You, MOM, are my BEST GIFT. Thank you so much for this and more. I love you, MOM.

*“I love and adore being a mother. It’s the greatest gift I’ve ever been given.”*

– Uma Thurman

# From Istanbul to San José: What Impresses Us About Life in the U.S.

By Murat

Murat is really impressed by people and society in the U.S. after moving here. That's why he wrote this story about life in this country.

After my family and I moved to the U.S., we were impressed in many ways with how we were welcomed into the society.

First, information from the government is presented in other languages. For example, I took my driver license exam in Turkish. This demonstrates that California accepts people for who they are. It is pretty obvious to see that the California government and society embrace diversity and pursue an environment in which every single person feels included. Because of this, many people willingly contribute to society.

Second, another impressive thing is that people are encouraged to volunteer in many aspects of society. Not only individuals but also companies and libraries promote volunteering. Also, they encourage students and job seekers to volunteer for something useful for society.

Third, people are friendly and talk to you, especially when you're in suburban areas. No matter what culture or nation you come from, greeting and smiling at each other is a kind of responsibility.



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Finally, public schools tend to be very good and therefore there is no need to send your kids to private schools. The public schools here also have programs to improve English language skills for international students, which makes them feel welcome here.

In conclusion, although we were anxious about moving away from Turkey, we have had many good experiences with the diverse culture and generous people that made the transition easier for us. Now we feel comfortable and enjoy living here in the San Francisco Bay Area.



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## Helping My Neighbors

*By John M. Oliveri*



My greatest gift is helping my neighbors. Once or twice a week, I cook dinner. I bring chicken, steak, or pork chops, with salad and rice. I also mop their floor and vacuum the rugs. I help them bring their groceries in from the car and mow their lawn. My neighbors are like family. I help them because it makes me happy.

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John wanted to do something new, so he wrote this story.



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## My Best Gift: My Parents' Example

*By Veronica Orozco Suarez*

My parents showed me how to be happy. They didn't tell me how to be happy, but I saw how they did it. My parents worked hard in their own roles. It is not easy to be good parents, but they did it very easily. They loved and corrected us in their own ways.

My mom is still confident and brave. My dad is still thoughtful and wise. They both have strong faith in God. I have learned to be faithful by watching my parents' examples and attitudes.

I learned responsibility and how to keep my family together in harmony. They taught me to work hard for the things I want and to never give up. I learned many positive lessons from the experiences of their lives.

One of the biggest gifts I received from them is my strong faith in God. Now I can enjoy my life and I have time to do it easily. These gifts from my parents I can pass on to my own children.



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Veronica wrote this story because she loves to learn. She likes to write and see how her English is improving. She wants people to know about each other and to let them know that many people like the same things and live in the same place, but we don't know each other.

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## Gestures Found a Friend for Me

*By Raul Ramirez*



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Raul wrote this story to describe his first experience with Americans. He is from Mexico City and was surprised by the way people treated him so well in the mountains.

I walked to Safeway. I was looking for a job. Instead, I found a friend.

I didn't speak English but I asked the man who was breaking concrete in the aisle for a job. He didn't speak Spanish, but he understood my gestures. He moved his hand around, back and forth, as he tried to tell me, "Come back tomorrow."

The next night I came back, and Ken hired me. He had a hard time understanding me, but he liked the way I worked.

Soon I told a Spanish-speaking friend of his, "I can't work for Ken anymore, because I don't have a home anymore in this place." So he told his friend, "Let me talk to my family about Raul. Give me one week, OK?" I gestured, "Yes."

After one week he offered me a mobile home at one of his properties in the mountains, and I gestured, "Thank you!"

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Soon I met Ken's family: I met Grandma Nancy, Ken's sisters, Margaret and Ana, Ken's son Junior, and Margaret's son Jake, and also their friend Antony.

I had a hard time with the way I spoke to them, only in gestures. So Margaret bought "English Without Barriers," a videotape, and the first day, I started to say one word, "Please." Soon I learned how to say "Thank you," as Margaret cooked food and talked with me, teaching me more English words.

Today they respect me as I learn more and more English, and as I teach them about demolition, without gestures! I am grateful that I found a friend at Safeway.



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## Finally Got It

*By Darryl*



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When Darryl was going to school and working under a lot of stress, he needed fun in his life, so when the opportunity came along to buy the Mustang, he hopped on it.

My best gift to myself is my convertible Mustang. As far back as I remember, I always wanted one. I remember when I was in high school, my best friend Crystal and I used to say when we grew up we would buy His and Her black convertible Mustangs. I fell in love with the powerful engine and how fast the car could go. Crystal loved the body style of the car. She thought it was sexy.

In all the years since then, a Mustang has lived in my subconscious, so every time I went to buy a new car I looked at a Mustang first. My Ford Focus was giving me problems. It was two years old, and I needed a car to get back and forth to work and school, so not having a car was not an option. This time the car salesman made me an offer I could not refuse, so I bought my first Mustang Convertible, black on black, and I added a Kenwood stereo with Apple Car Play. If you know me, I have to have sound in my car.



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I wonder if I could get my medical insurance to pay for the Mustang with a doctor's order because it has become my therapy car. It makes me feel young and youthful again. Ask my wallet because of all the speeding tickets—LOL. It eases stress from a hard day of working, and when I'm stuck in traffic while blasting the radio, it soothes me.

Best gift EVER! From Darryl to Darryl.



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# The Dream That Drives Us

*By Paco Reyes*

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This is a story for all parents who have a dream for their children to go to college.

My best gift will be when my son and my daughter graduate from college. This is important for me because everyone in the family has been working hard every day for a better life for our children. When they graduate from college, my children will have more opportunities for their lives because they will have better educations. I know my life will then change, too.



I wake up every day and remember that I need to work hard. Why? Because college is expensive, and my children need to go college. The parents are the ones who need to focus on the money because the university is not cheap. My children shouldn't worry because if they worry they might be distracted and not focus on their studies. They will do the best they can and get better grades if they're not stressed. When they finish college it will be time to get better jobs.

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My life will change when my children bring me their college degrees. I won't need to work as hard any more. I will relax more, calm down, be less stressed, but the best part will be when my children start their careers and support their own families like I did.



*“We need to teach the next generation of children from day one that they are responsible for their lives. Mankind's greatest gift, also its greatest curse, is that we have free choice. We can make our choices built from love or from fear.”*

**– Elisabeth Kubler-Ross**

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## Family Influence

*By Teresa Rinconi*



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Teresa is a mother of two daughters. She is currently getting her GED and wrote this story because she feels very proud of her family and all the values they taught her.

My family is important to me because they support me. They have affected me in three ways, by my family's positive attitude, by giving me a good education, and by giving me lots of responsibilities when I was a little girl.

My family always had a positive attitude. My parents lived in difficult times in our small town in Guerrero, Mexico. There was a lot of poverty. They gave me the best ideas to achieve my goals. I felt motivated to overcome many obstacles. It brought me optimism and made me more successful in life.

My family affected me by giving me a good education. Even though my parents did not have an opportunity to study, they still wanted their children to study and have a better life. My parents always gave me the opportunity to go to school. Education expanded my vision and helped me develop discipline in my life and provided me better earning opportunities. I graduated as a Lab Technician and worked for twenty-five years in a hospital in Mexico City.

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My family affected me by imposing lots of responsibilities. I grew up helping my mother in the kitchen, and I had to do chores in my house like cleaning, cooking, and taking care of my little brothers. I had to help them with their homework. My family background made me into a responsible individual and also independent.

I am lucky to have a family who supported me with their values. It has made me as successful as I am today.



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Medical Lab  
Technician at work

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## A Dose of Humor

By *Ida Joy Robinson*



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“A merry heart  
doeth good like  
a medicine.” –  
Proverbs 17:22

I believe the best gift I possess is my sense of humor. This gift developed in me through the years of adversity and trials. I simply learned not to take myself so seriously and to smile more. I studied comedians’ style, body language, and unique techniques. This reinforced my own creative approach to the art of wit. As a counselor, I find that I can get my point across more effectively when I use humor.

Daily I look for humor in situations. For example, I was at Denny’s with a friend who loves to eat. After he had eaten his lunch and half of mine, he noticed a partially eaten steak sandwich on the table next to ours. Exclaiming, “Americans are so wasteful!,” he grabbed the sandwich and wrapped it in a napkin. Just then, a young man came out of the bathroom. He said to the waitress walking by, “I went to the bathroom and left my sandwich on the table. When I returned it was gone.” My friend

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heard this conversation, turned red in the face, and whispered to me, “Let’s go now. I am so embarrassed!” I was laughing hard as we walked to the car, and I told him that he would now be listed on Denny’s most wanted list for sandwich snatchers.

I desire to enlarge my gift of humor in years to come, spreading joy wherever I go. What the world needs, like love, is a dose of humor—especially on a cloudy day.



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## The Promise Kept

(based on a true story)

By Margarita “Mango” Salguero



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Margarita has two children and three grandchildren. She is from Jalisco, Mexico, and is 50 years old.

A long time ago (1992), my daughter and I came from Mexico. I wanted to buy airplane tickets from San Diego to San José, but I didn't speak English. My friend bought the tickets, and I felt bad because I couldn't do it myself.

When we arrived in San Francisco, we used the train to get to San José. I used my first English word, “tickets,” to take the bus to my new home. I promised myself that someday I would go to school to learn English.

Since that day, I learned many words in English, but I couldn't write or read very well. I volunteered at Gardner Senior Center for eight years. I learned that when you give time to another person, some day maybe someone will give their time to you.



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Twenty-seven years after I made my promise, I was watching television and the program talked about Partners in Reading at the San José Public Library. I was so excited, and I said, “This is my program!” Now I’m coming to tutoring and I’m learning to read and write in English. I’m proud of myself because I can write and I can read books to my grandchildren. And I can buy my own tickets!

My best gift is giving myself the opportunity to keep my promise. I’m grateful to my job for giving me time off and I’m grateful to volunteers who spend their time tutoring. I am blessed.

*“The greatest gift is a passion for reading. It is cheap, it consoles, it distracts, it excites, it gives you knowledge of the world and experience of a wide kind. It is a moral illumination.”*

– Elizabeth Hardwick

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## The Priceless Ring

By Elena Shirokova

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Elena has lived in Silicon Valley for five years. She has been in the PAR program about three years.

Last year, before my birthday, my 12-year-old son Yury wondered what I wanted as a present. “What would you like for your birthday?” he asked. I said, “It could be anything as long as it is made by your own hands.”

I started to notice noises coming from his room in the evening. I realized he was trying to make my gift. I guessed that it might be something made of wood because Yury was learning woodworking at school. His father had bought him some tools and this was the sound I was hearing. I thought he might be making a frame for one of his pictures.



The day before my birthday I could tell that Yury was excited. He threw his arms around me. No box, no fancy wrapping, just the two of us and warmest birthday wishes. First he gave me a card he drew himself. Next came the gift. He held out a ring of light brown wood, glossy with lacquer. Yury waited, watching me closely for

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my reaction. I smiled with joy and put the ring on my finger. It fit perfectly! I hugged him and gave him a kiss on the cheek. Yury had a big smile. He noticed that my eyes were watering and asked, “Why are you starting to cry?” I said “I’m very touched!” and thanked him for the gift.

I can’t think of this moment without tearing up. It is one of my favorite memories.



*“Surprise is the greatest gift which life can grant us.”*

– Boris Pasternak

# The Gift of Faith

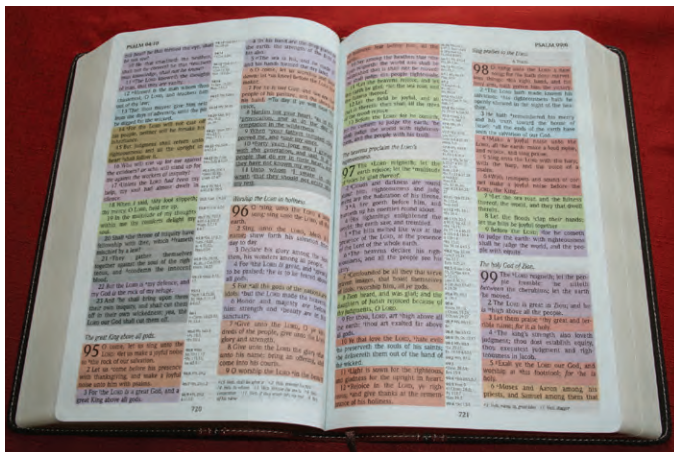
By Jacqueline Smith



Jacqueline learned about how to visit people in convalescent homes through a class at her church. Then she taught others about the importance of visiting people when they are sick.

I got the gift of a highlighted Bible from a group of friends. This Bible was similar to one I found at the library. It was simplified. The highlights and the pictures made it easy to find the messages inspired by the gospel of Jesus Christ. My friends and I studied it, and then we took it to a convalescent home to share with the patients. We sang and studied with them. They enjoyed it, and it made them smile.

The gift I was given became a gift for other people. By reaching out and greeting the patients with a big smile and a gentle touch, the Bible created a connection where we all could feel the presence of God.



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## The Smith Family

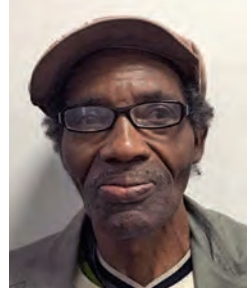
*By Leo Smith*

My wife is my gift.

We have been married for 33 years. We met in San José, California.

She had the chance to visit my brothers Henry and Cleo. They both lived in Los Angeles, California. My younger brother Paul and I invited Jackie over for brunch. She liked the kitchen wall we had painted. Later, Jackie and I went to a family reunion, as well as to my brother Cleo's block party in Los Angeles. After we were married she also visited my mom and dad in Oklahoma. She took our two oldest children. She stayed with my two sisters Darleen and Ruth, along with my nephews and nieces in Oklahoma City.

We have three young adult, lovely kids. We had the pleasure of also raising my three nephews. We also have four grandchildren.  
*(continued)*



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Leo wrote this story because he wanted to thank his wife for all the things she has done for their family.

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After 33 years of marriage, she still brings joy and happiness into my life. Our love for each other has deepened over these many years. We care for and love our children dearly and find great happiness by having them in our lives.

I am truly grateful for my wife Jackie, and can't imagine my life with anyone else. I love her. My dream is to write a love letter and thank you to Jackie.



*“Happy is the man who finds a true friend, and far happier is he who finds that true friend in his wife.”*

**– Franz Schubert**

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## Keeping Hope Alive

*By Rufus Stevenson*

My best gift is not boxes filled with things, but beautiful presents that hold so much more: love, kindness, gratitude, forgiveness, hopefulness, caring hearts, and the gift that keeps hope alive—the people in my life.

Antidote to mass destruction, I am my own weapon of mass destruction. That is why my best gift is so important to me. I am a U.S. Army veteran suffering from mental illness, also known as Traumatic Brain Injury, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and depression. I don't mean to make any excuse for my disorders. It is what it is, and I live with them every day. I have been trying to be my own hero and deal with my disorders myself. For example, when I get upset about not being able to do some simple task on the computer or forget a password, which happens a lot with memory loss, I may turn to some old behaviors, which cause more problems.  
*(continued)*



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Thanks to Partners in Reading (PAR) and his best friend J. PAR has helped him keep hope alive in his life, which is a priceless gift! Thanks.  
Keep hope alive.  
Rufus Stevenson,  
U.S. Army Veteran



That is why people are my best gift—VA health care and the people I work with. I call them the Untouchables. They have pointed out to me some of my weaknesses. Of course, I rebelled; that is what makes someone his own weapon of mass destruction. I thank God for the people who see things in my life that I don't see or refuse to see. They have saved my life. So I ask every veteran who is facing life's ups and downs, fears, and, of course, thoughts of taking one's own life—give VA health care a call, AKA the Veterans Crisis Line, 1-800-273-8255.

*“At the point where hope and reason part, lies the spot where madness gets a start.”*

– Dean Koontz



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# My Special Mother's Day Gift

*By Genet Tesfagabr*

I got money for Mother's Day!

Sunday was Mother's Day. When I got up in the morning, my kids cooked a delicious breakfast of scrambled eggs with tea. Later, we went out to eat lunch. When we came back home, they told me to stay in the bedroom. After a while they called me to come out, and they said, "Close your eyes." When I opened my eyes, the surprise was one hundred dollars.

This is the best Mother's Day gift I have ever received! I am going to save the money for something special.

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Genet wrote this story for the book to share how special her family is to her.



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# My Uncle's Gift

*By Maria Torrico*

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Maria is married and has three children. She wants people to know how happy she is to be in the United States.

Long ago, my uncle who lives in California came to visit my family in Bolivia. He told me about the United States. Twenty years ago, I wanted to come to the United States. I watched movies and heard from people that it was a beautiful country with many opportunities. I could learn English, work, and go to school. I called my uncle and I asked if I could come to the United States. He was so happy to have someone from the family. He said, "I will send you an airline ticket and the invitation to come." After about one year to do all the papers and my passport, I couldn't believe I was going to the United States. It was the happiest present I could receive in my life.



I remember I was flying on December 28. After 12 hours I arrived at San Francisco Airport. My uncle, aunt, and cousins could help me in the new country. We were very happy. It was a beautiful country; to me everything was big. The first thing I did was to go to school to learn English. I worked part time in a delicatessen

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at Stanford Shopping Mall. It was not easy. I learned all kinds of bread names. I worked as a helper in the kitchen.

I live in San José, California. I have a husband and three children. One day I want to take my children to where I grew up. I haven't been back since I came to the United States.



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View over Lake  
Titicaca, Bolivia

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## The Special Olympics

*By Thomas Valdivia*



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Thomas wrote this story because sports are important to him.

A few years ago, I started sports. My teachers made us sign up for wheelchair basketball! I didn't know how to use a wheelchair, but I did know how to play basketball. It was fun.

One of the teachers was a runner and taught me how to run faster. She asked me to go to the Summer Games at the Special Olympics in Southern California. It was hard. I had fun.

This is my life. Now I'm waiting to see if I get into this year's summer games at UC Davis. We'll stay in the dorms.

My teachers gave me the gift of the Special Olympics, and now I'm training hard. Here we go.



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2018 Northern California  
Special Olympics at UC Davis.  
© Wayne Tilcock/Enterprise photo

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## Coming to America

*(the Silvia Wilder version, not the Eddie Murphy movie)*

By Silvia Almanza Wilder

In 1997 I got the most wonderful gift that changed the direction of my life. My boss, Manuel Maldonado, offered me the opportunity to come to work for him in Branson, Missouri.

Working in Branson was an amazing experience. I enjoyed the change of seasons and friendly people. Manuel helped me get my visa to enter the United States legally. He wrote a letter to the U.S. Embassy, where he explained the reason he needed me here. A few years later this helped me get my green card, and later become a citizen of the United States. This is the proudest accomplishment we immigrants can achieve.

In 2001 I moved from Missouri to Chicago, IL. Chicago is a beautiful city with a lot of places to explore and wonderful memories. In 2005 I moved to California, where I met my husband, and I started learning more about American culture. As time passed I got more interested in learning the English language. Now I live in San José, where I continue to work on improving my English, thanks to Partners in Reading.

*(continued)*

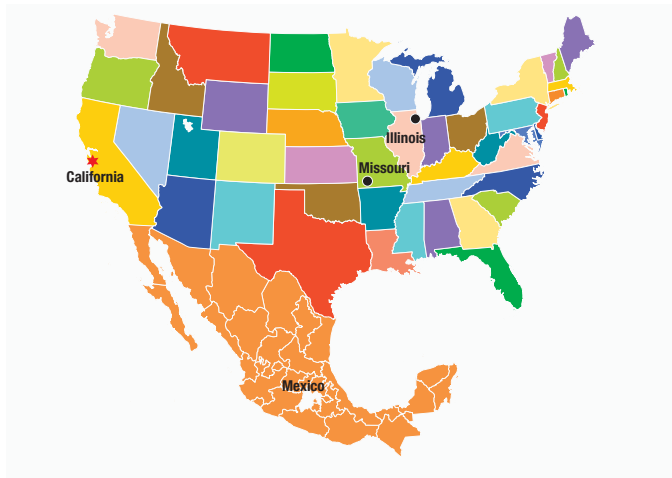


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Silvia is happy and enjoying her life in the United States. If this gift hadn't happened, her life wouldn't be this way.

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Although most of my family lives in Mexico, once I married, I knew California was my “place,” and it is where I want to be. Coming to America gave me more opportunities in a safer environment. Coming to the United States was my best gift because it led to many events, which brought me to where I am today.



Map by FreeVectorMaps.com, <http://freevectormaps.com>

*“My fellow Americans, we are and always will be a nation of immigrants. We were strangers once, too.”*

– Barack Obama

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# I Am So Blessed to Be a Grandma

*By Mercy Faith Wong*

My precious gift is my granddaughter Anais. I saw her the first day she was born, and she was beautiful! I couldn't stop looking at her tiny little feet and tiny little hands. I counted her toes and her fingers and wrapped her little hand around my finger. It's just like the time when my son was born. Now she's getting bigger and bigger, at six years old and graduating from kindergarten.

I have fun with her. Every time we meet we do something different. When she comes to my home we play games like Go Fish, or she pretends to be a little chef in a restaurant and she will ask me what I want to order. Sometimes we play Barbie dolls.

Sometimes we go out. Once we went to the flea market to ride a horse. The next time we went to see the movie Aladdin with Will Smith. Once we ate Chinese food at TK Noodle, our favorite restaurant. On Sundays we go to church, where they have free Chinese food. We both eat with chopsticks.

I love my granddaughter so much—more than the world.



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Mercy wrote this story to practice reading and writing better.



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## The Gift You Remember All Your Life

By Viktor Yakauleu

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Viktar wrote this story about the role of books in his youth.

In my youth, a book was one of the best gifts at many events. I clearly remember the gift from my grandma. It was *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain. It was difficult to read because of little letters and few images. But step by step, I began to read more every day. The story of the adventures of American boys was very interesting. Later I could read other books by this remarkable author.

In the USSR, a country without private property, to buy a good book was difficult. There were special bookstores and libraries in every town with a lot of books on the shelves, but they were propagandist literature or works of so-called “official authors.” To read them was very boring.

When people received inside information about the sale of a popular book, they stood in long lines early in the morning. They gave a number to everybody who stood in line. The other way to read a desirable book was to go to a library. But every library had the same problem—a deficit of the required, interesting books. A reader needed to wait a long time after he or





she was wait-listed in the book's record card. In the last decade of the Soviet Union, you could buy a book if beforehand you gave 40 pounds of wastepaper. The people who lived in large towns had more possibilities to buy things, including books.

My family lived in a small town in Siberia, but my grandma, who was a teacher and knew four languages, lived in Moscow, the capital city, 4,000 miles away. I loved my grandma. She was smart and very kind and always sent books to me. Normally, to get the parcel with books, I waited three or four weeks. Now, in the USA, I use books at PAR. It is very convenient for people who are only starting to learn English or have a not-so-large vocabulary.



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## Child Authors, A Family Story



In 2019 Partners in Reading received a grant from the California State Library to expand family literacy programming. With the funding, PAR was able to offer seven family literacy workshops in English and Spanish to inform parents about library and literacy services at the San José Public Library. In addition, PAR created an opportunity for children of PAR learners to write a story.

MaryLee McNeal offered a workshop and inspired the kids who attended to go through a process very similar to the one their parents went through when they wrote stories for *My Best Gift*. Eight creative children shared their words with you about their families. We celebrate their efforts and hope you enjoy reading about their lives.



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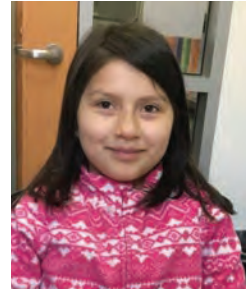
# A Special Gift for My Dad

By Elizabeth Candia

It was in May, in the spring. The flowers were blooming and the sun was shining. My mom was pregnant, and she was going to deliver me. My mom, sister, and brother were there, and the person who was most excited was my mom.

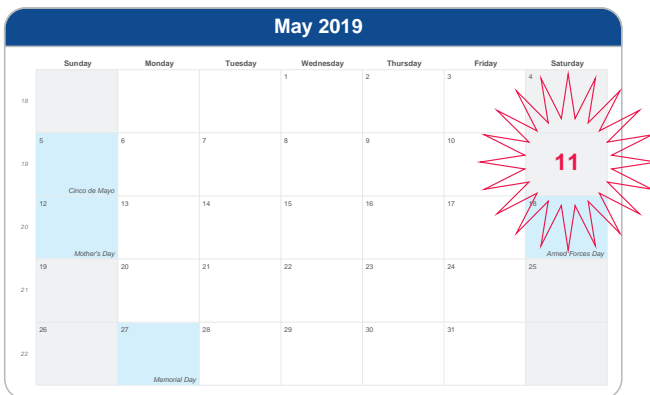
When I came out, the first thing that my mom said was, “She is so cute.” Then my brother and sister came in to see me and hugged me tight. We were in the hospital for two days.

May 11 is my dad’s birthday, and his present was me. My mom had never thought that she would get another baby, which was me, so I turned out to be special. This is the story that was told to me.



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Elizabeth is nine years old, and she likes English.



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# My First Time Camping With My Family

*By Luis Diego*

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Luis Diego wrote this story because it is a story that always puts a smile on his face. He also wrote this story because this story always has a special place in his heart.

In the summer of 2017, my family and I were invited to go camping with our next-door neighbors. I was very excited for this specific camping trip since it was going to be our first camping trip that we had all been on. I started to imagine the beautiful sunny sky and having fun with all of my family.

Once it was time to go to the campsite that our neighbor messaged us to go to, we started to get hot, tired, and very hungry. Once we finally arrived at the campsite we were told to go to where we had started to look for our neighbor, since he said that he was going to be waiting for us at the entrance. Then, we saw our neighbor walking in the opposite direction.

My dad swiftly jumped out of the car and had started running toward the neighbor while trying to get his attention, when suddenly we noticed that the man was not our neighbor! My dad came running back and started to get out of the campsite.

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Once we told our neighbor our current situation, he said that he had sent the wrong site and that the real site was close by. Once we finally arrived at our campsite, we finally had the day that we had planned out. At the end I had an absolutely wonderful time with my family, going to the lake and having a warm campfire where we ate marshmallows and laughed at my father's goofy adventure.



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Luis Diego and his family

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## The Other Side

By Akailliah Smith



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Akailliah enjoys spending time with her family, and she likes to cook with her uncles.

I went to a movie with the other side of my family. We always have fun with my dad's side of the family. I am the oldest. I am 10. My brother is the second oldest. He turned 9 years old. My younger brother is 2 years old. Last but not least, my sister is the youngest. She is 3 months old.

So where were we? I hung out with my cousin, and she is 11. She did my hair. She has a younger sister too. We agreed the younger kids bothered us when they were younger. We always have fun. I love her smile.

We all went to the movies to see *Little*. It was fun. My cousin and I loved the music and the special effects. My favorite part of the movie was the BMW.

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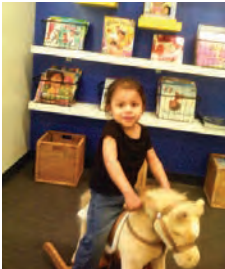
## Out With Grandmother

*By Aucto Smith*

On a spring day with my grandmother, my great aunt, and my sister and brother, we take a bus to downtown. We take the elevator up, up!

Grandmother pushes me in the stroller into the big, big room. I see the glass. Outside I see a big tree. Other people are coming and going. I eat yummy snacks, orange tangerines, orange cheese, purple grapes, and round crackers.

Two libraries in one day!



Aucto



Akailliah, Devahn, and Aucto

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# The Day My Mom Gave Me Something Special

By Devahn Smith

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Devahn loves to make origami and airplanes.

Mom gave me money for my birthday. It made me laugh.

I told my mom, “I love you, and I will never forget about this day.”

The color of my object was blue, and it was made out of glass. I got it when I was a kid at age 7.

I push the trigger (the tail). That’s how it works.





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## My Lost Sister

*By Hermon Girmay*

My older sister did something very scary/funny. First, at Best Buy, my older sister was with my mom. She was acting crazy, and she was running around everywhere and then got lost. My mom didn't know where she was, so she looked everywhere for my older sister.

“Oh no! Where is she?” asked my mom. My mom was scared, so she asked security. Then they finally found her in the toy area. That was very scary and funny.

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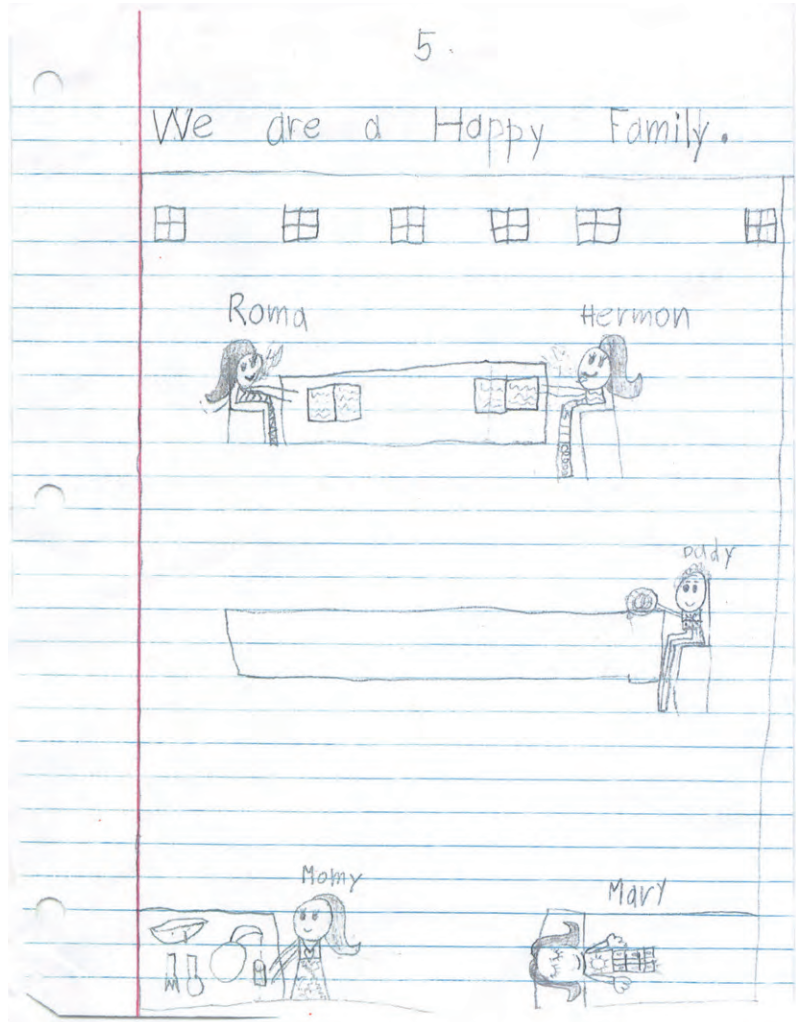
Hermon Girmay was born in February 2010. She is in the third grade and is 9 years old.



# My Happy Family

By Mary

Mary is 6 years old. She was in kindergarten when she wrote this story.



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## My Interesting Family

By Romina

Everyone in my family is interestingly different. First, my dad likes sleeping, going to the gym, building parts of airplanes at United, and because he works there, we got to go to Japan, Seattle, Hawaii, and many other places.

Second, my mom cooks the best food ever, is very fun, caring, likes to exercise, and likes to write.

Third, I am Romina, the oldest out of Mary, Hermon, and me. I am in sixth grade, 11 years old, and about to turn 12 in July in the summer! I used to do gymnastics, but I'm still not as good as my sister Hermon.

Fourth, Hermon is the middle one. She is very talkative and gets annoying. She is in third grade and is currently nine years old. She doesn't take gymnastics but knows how to do back flips, front flips, hand stands, and aerials, which are cartwheels in the air.

*(continued)*

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Romina is 11 years old and is in sixth grade. This summer her family will go back home to East Africa to Eritrea for a month.



©<https://www.thelittlegym.com/blog>

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Lastly, the youngest is Mary. She is in kindergarten, six years old. Mary loves creating things. Sometimes she plays way too much and doesn't do her homework, and she goes crazy all the time.

In conclusion, it makes me feel very happy because of all our crazy and cool differences.

*“For there is no friend like a sister in calm or stormy weather;  
To cheer one on the tedious way, to fetch one if one goes  
astray, to lift one if one totters down, to strengthen whilst  
one stands.”*

– Christina Rossetti

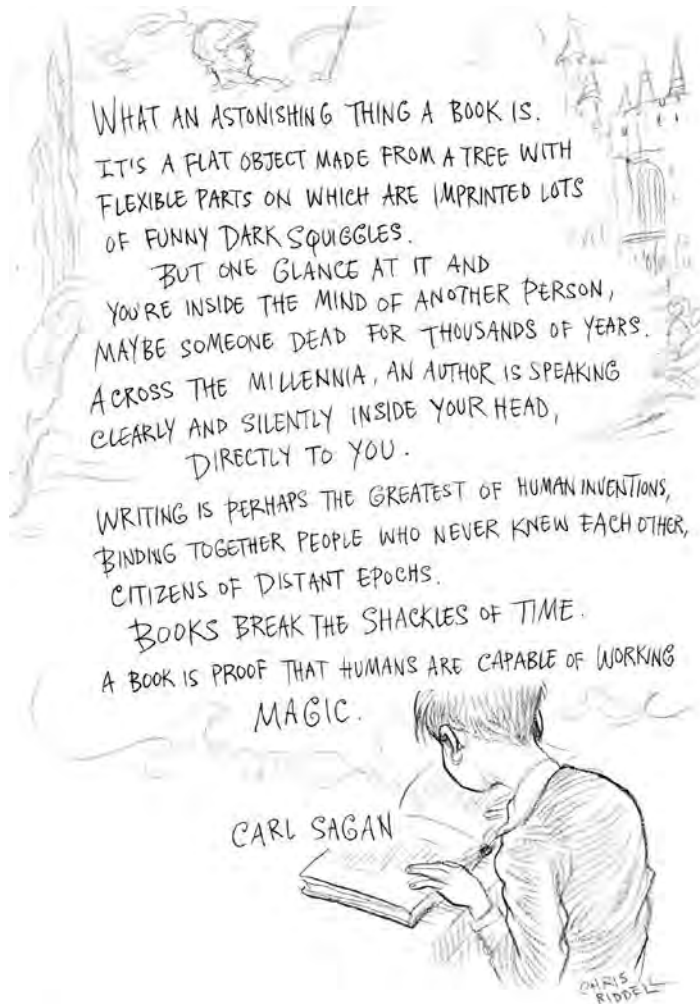




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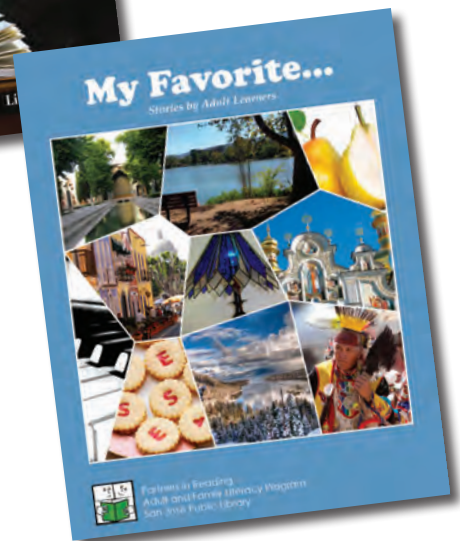
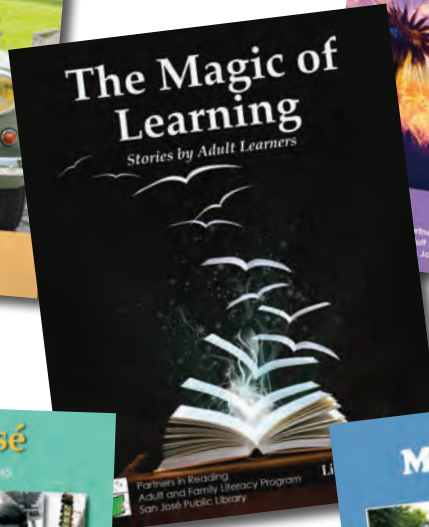
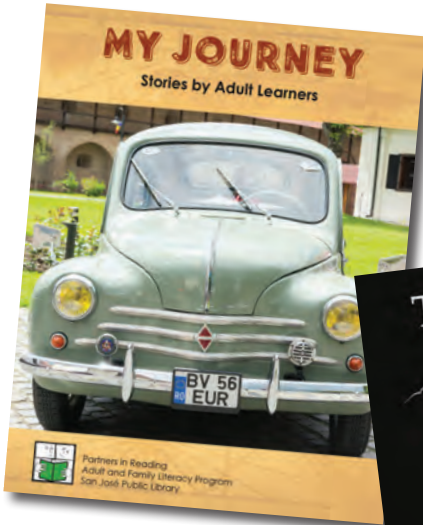
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San José Public Library  
Partners in Reading Program

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