
Humor Me . . .

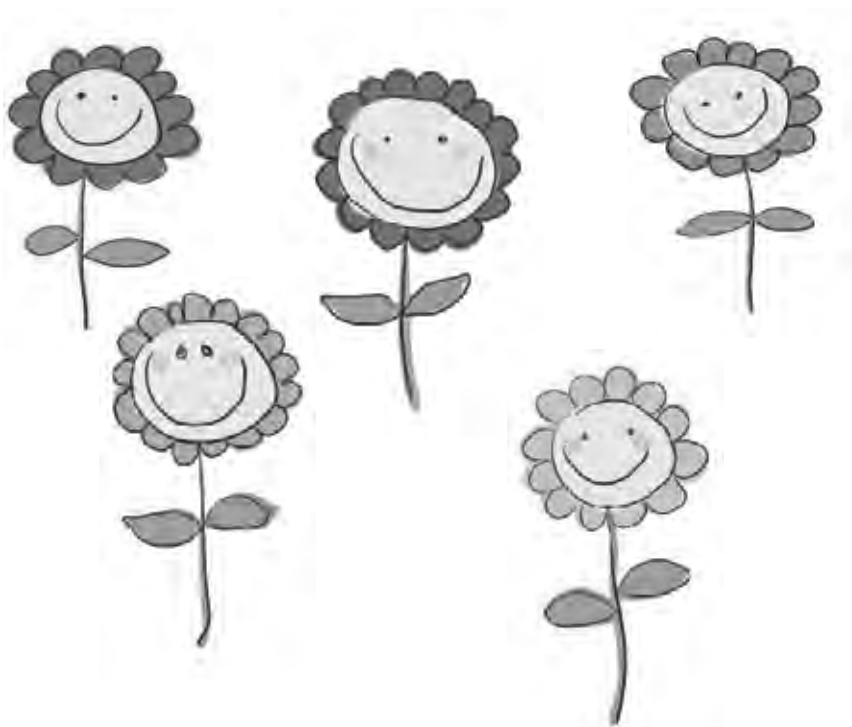
and other stories



Partners in Reading
Adult Literacy Program
San José Public Library
2009

Humor Me . . .

and other stories



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San José Public Library
2009

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Humor Me

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Introduction

We are pleased to present the 2009 edition of Partners in Reading adult learner writings. We congratulate the adults who worked hard to develop and write their stories for this publication. They enrich our lives.

Each year, Partners in Reading program participants are asked to write a story about a specific topic that will be published in the learner book. The theme of this year's book is *Humor Me*. Included are writings that make you smile and laugh out loud, and touch your heart. They are stories that reflect the personal experiences of learners from Partners in Reading and are told in their own words. The editors have tried to keep the learners' words as written and only made changes for greater clarity.

This edition includes some special features. In addition to the *Humor Me* essays, there are learner pieces on general topics and essays on the presidential election that were submitted for the Partners in Reading Writing Challenge.

New developments in the program and highlights of the past year are included in the final section.

To the Adult Learners

Writing can be very difficult. It can also be scary to write about yourself for other people to read. Even if it is hard, many learners have decided to write. We thank you for that.

We are honored to read your words that let us know who you are. We hope that now and in the future you will read what you wrote and feel a sense of accomplishment. The book that you hold in your hands is the result of hard work. Enjoy it. Celebrate it. Read it and then read it again.

Share this book with your tutor, with your family, and with friends. The stories will make you laugh and they will make you cry. They will make you feel proud of everyone who has worked so hard to put their thoughts on paper.

If you did not write a story this year, don't worry. Think about writing a story for the book next year. We all look forward to reading your thoughts and ideas.

Isaac Likes to Share . . . Everything!

By Yeshi Abdo

My son Isaac is two years old and likes to share everything, especially with his little sister, Betty. When he wakes up in the morning, he lies down like a puppy dog in the hall outside her bedroom door waiting for her to wake up and share the day with him. When they eat breakfast, they pour their two cereal bowls into one and eat from it. They do this even if I give them two separate bowls because Isaac likes to share. If Betty takes a bath alone, Isaac cries. If Isaac takes a bath alone, he cries—and so does Betty. So most of the time, I bathe them together because Isaac likes to share.

Isaac also has an older brother, Bruke, who goes to school. When Bruke does homework in his room, Isaac waits in the hall until Bruke comes out to ask a question. Then Isaac runs into Bruke's room and he makes a mess because he has no homework of his own and Isaac likes to share . . . *everything!*

Yeshe came to the United States from Ethiopia in 1996. She has been in the PAR program for six years. She enjoys learning to read and write and bringing her children to the Families for Literacy program.

A Lesson

By Farah Azizi

The beginning of this story is not humorous. I remember a month ago when we lost our bird. She was with my son at our apartment and suddenly when the door opened she flew away. My son hurried outside to look for Greeny, but he didn't find her. He called me at work. He yelled, "Mom," and cried, "Greeny flew away." I couldn't believe it.

The next morning we went to the bird store, the place where we bought her. When my son explained to the lady, she asked "Did you clip her wings?" I told her no just because Greeny flew in the apartment and she sat on the light and any time she wanted she went to her cage. She was happy in this way. The lady asked "What did you want to teach her? You showed she can fly and she understood that she can go."

That afternoon when we came back home I was very sad and thinking about what happened. I wanted to get

Greeny's freedom but I didn't know that when she found out she could fly maybe she would not be safe. Then I thought about my 15-year-old son when he asked me to let him go out with his friends or go to their house. I didn't know about their identity or their family and they didn't know about us as well. I remembered Greeny's story. My son doesn't understand the dangers outside and I wanted to clip his wings to keep him safe. When I thought about this I smiled.



Farah Azizi is a homecare giver who lives with her husband and two sons. Her hobbies are reading books and listening to the radio. Farah started working with her PAR tutor in February, 2009. When asked about PAR, she said, "I really enjoy it. It helps me to read and write better. I appreciate that the library has this program."

Sweet Pea

By Earlene Chapman

My cat Sweet Pea makes me laugh. Sweet Pea is very beautiful and she has the most beautiful coat. She is a red bull's eye tabby with hazel eyes and a white collar; her paws are white. They match her collar. She has long white whiskers. Sweet Pea is the funniest person in my family. She acts like a person so much that she gets on my nerves because she talk so much.

First thing in the morning she wakes me up demanding her breakfast. There are times when I like to make people laugh, so Cliff and I put Sweet Pea in the car, and she just loves to sit and lie down in the back window and give herself a sun bath. When people see her they can't believe what they are seeing. Sweet Pea makes everyone laugh. If anyone is in a blue mood she will make you laugh just by having fun herself. She can make your day because you can't help telling someone about the cat in the car.



Sweet Pea

One morning as I was getting ready for work, Sweet Pea jumped inside my dresser drawers, leaping from one drawer to the other and playing with everything and anything inside the drawers. I went to the kitchen for a short time and when I returned she was nowhere in sight so I closed all the drawers and left for work. When I returned home I did not see Sweet Pea anywhere. I was nervous and a little upset, because she is usually at the door waiting for me when I arrive. I thought about earlier that morning

how she was playing in the dresser drawers so I went back to my bedroom, I opened my drawers, and there she was, fast asleep. I woke her up and she jumped in my arms and gave me an earful.

To this day I still remember how she was talking and looking into my eyes as if to say “It’s OK: I forgive you, but don’t do that ever again. And I know you love me.” Every day Sweet Pea makes me laugh.

Earlene was born in St. Petersburg, Florida. She enjoys spending time with her very loving and special cat Sweet Pea and taking care of her. Some other hobbies that Earlene enjoys are riding her bike and fishing. Earlene also takes care of her 5-year-old twin grandchildren, and as a member of PAR for two years, she has found the joy in confidently reading with them. Also, if there were an award for “Most Punctual,” Earlene would surely win!

Gone Missing

By Iye Conteh



Having a C-section isn't a joking matter, but when I think about mine I still smile a little bit.

It all began at 3 p.m. on Saturday, June 1, 1996. My husband and I were on our way to Good Samaritan Hospital to have our second baby. We were admitted without any problem and I was taken to a private room. There wasn't too much pain, but, 12 hours later, there hadn't been too much action either. My husband, Mohammad, had gone home to try to get some sleep. Meanwhile, the doctor told me that natural childbirth was not recommended. He said, "I believe you should have a C-section."

Suddenly, I started to feel serious labor pains. My husband was called, and when he arrived, we went to the operating room together. I told him that I could not have a natural childbirth and his eyes got very big, like saucers.

“That means they will have to operate, right?’ he asked.

“Yes,” I replied, “and you have to sign a paper to authorize it.”

“OK,” he said.

He seemed frightened. Suddenly, I looked up and he was gone. The nurse came to take me in to the operating room.

“Where is your husband?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” I answered, “but I think he may be afraid of operations.”

“Well, you’d think he was having the baby,” said the nurse.

My baby boy, Abraham, was born happy and healthy at 3 p.m., 24 hours after our arrival. When I awoke, my husband was with me. “Have you seen our new baby boy?” I asked.

“Yes, he is healthy and beautiful!” he replied.

“And where did you go?” I asked.

“Well, uh, uh, I got a little dizzy—the whole C-section thing seemed scary.”

“That’s OK,” I said. “Our new baby makes up for everything.”

Now, when my husband and I are watching television together and a hospital show like *E.R.* or *Gray’s Anatomy* is on, and there is a childbirth scene, I look over to him and say, “Are you planning to leave any time soon?”

Iye started with PAR on June 16, 2008. She came to the U.S. from Sierra Leone, West Africa, in 1995. She is married and has three children ages 19, 13, and 12. She works part-time as a hairdresser.

Antonio and the Mountain

By Margarita Guillen



My husband Antonio and I were driving to the mountains. My husband was driving very fast. When we drove down the mountain, my grandson, Antonio, said, “Everybody’s all aboard.” Antonio was scared and he said, “Mommy, we’re going to fall down!” We were laughing. Antonio told my husband, “Pappi, again, go fast!” It was funny that Antonio was scared but he liked it.

Margarita has been in the program for more than one year. She works at San José State University. Her grandson likes to ride in cars on windy roads.

Unlucky Day

By Enedina Herrera



When I was eighteen years old I used to be a party girl. I say a party girl because I celebrated every good thing that I did in my life. So one day in February, on my sister's birthday, my siblings and I sang the birthday song in the morning. Fortunately for her it was the weekend, so we called our friends and we rented a cabin and we had a little party for my sister to celebrate her birthday.

The next morning we went out to buy natural milk straight from a cow just because we were anxious to drink it. The surprise of it was that the milk made us go to the bathroom because it was the first time we tried it. After that, we decided to go to the volcano.

Of course, the volcano had erupted a long time ago. Unfortunately I was wearing high-heeled boots that day, and my friends and siblings, were wearing sports shoes. After being on top of the volcano, we decided to go home.

A moment while we were walking and running down the volcano's steep side, I noticed a heel thrown in the sand (the sand was really fine) so I was thinking, "Oh, somebody was wearing heels, too, like me, but forgot it in the sand," and I was laughing about it. But when I got to the bottom of the volcano it was flat, and one of my sisters told me that I had lost a heel. I started laughing because I thought of the heel in the sand and how I had thought it was from somebody else and not me.

Of course, I got red and everybody was laughing at me. I was most embarrassed that my boyfriend was there at that moment. I felt like a little child. I wanted to find a place where I could hide myself.

Oh my gosh, it was really embarrassing. Then my boyfriend asked me, "Oh, from which way does the moon rise?" because my boot was pointed upward because I had no heel. It was a really, bad, sad and unlucky moment but I had to continue with it until we got home. To get home took two hours of walking. So during the trek

home, my friends, siblings, and boyfriend were making fun of my boot. Finally we got home, and my mom was asking me why, how, and who made my boot look like that. I explained it, and she was laughing, too. But I didn't feel bad in that moment because I was at home and I was ready to clean myself up and wear a clean outfit and nice sports shoes.

Finally I learned that I have to wear what the occasion asks for.



Enedina came to Partners in Reading in 2008. She likes to meet people from different countries and cultures. She enjoys coming to Partners in Reading because she is learning to write and read better, and she likes her tutor Samantha.

The Wig

By Debbie Hodge



I have a friend that lost her wig. It was where I work, a very long time ago. It was at lunch when the lunch room was full; I mean it was full up with employees. Someone was telling a very funny joke at our table at the time, and she threw her head back and her wig fell off; just then everyone in the lunch room laughed out so loud I can hear them right now.

Well, when you have on a wig, you do not want anyone to see what is under it, because maybe that day, you just have had a bad hair day.

Debbie has three children, but raised four. She likes sewing and making clothes. She has been in Partners in Reading for fifteen years and graduated from the Adult Learner Leadership Institute. Debbie says, "I have had some great tutors. I have learned how to read, and now I am working on my spelling and writing. I think that Partners in Reading is one of the greatest things that has ever happened to me."

My Spread-Out Toes

By Hyunjung Kim



My husband and I have the same spread-out toes.

Before my husband and I got married, we went to the beach. We took off our shoes and walked around the beautiful beach. The sun went down on the blue ocean and a shimmering deep orange toned the waves. The sand stretched out around us. It shimmered in the sunset and felt soft like powder on my skin.

But I was embarrassed to show my husband my feet. When I stepped on the sand, it came out through my spread-out toes. My friends call me Duck Feet because I've got a big space between each toe like a duck without the webbing. I can move each toe individually like a finger.

My husband was surprised that I have a big space between each toe. I thought that he was surprised because of my

spread-out toes. But the real reason is he has the same spread-out toes!

It is destiny that my husband and I have the same spread-out toes.

Hyunjung is an artist. She does fine art. She has been in Partners in Reading for about one year. She has had a lot of help from her tutors Jessica and Ana.

Military Base

By Joanna Lee-Pak

Ten years ago in Korea, I visited a military base. At that time, the soldiers had gone out to meet their family and friends, so the buildings inside were empty.

My close friend and I wanted to go to a toilet. But we couldn't find a toilet for visitors. Finally, a few minutes later, we found a toilet on the fourth floor, but there were only men's toilets and the toilets had shower stalls next to them. The military base's building was empty, so we looked there quickly and then we went into the toilet. After we were finished, we went outside. We were surprised that a soldier was taking a shower. So we were hesitating as to whether we should go out or not and we decided that after counting to three, we would run out of there. I rushed outside the room with all my strength but when I turned around, my friend wasn't there.

I was fearful and I was getting worried. After a while, she came out looking surprised, so I asked her “What happened to you?” She whispered that she and the soldier had made eye contact. We were afraid, because we didn't want other soldiers to see us. So we ran outside as fast as we could. Sometimes, I remember that day and laugh by myself.



Joanna is from South Korea. She has lived in San Jose since September 2008, when she first came to study English. She just recently got married and is currently looking for a full-time job. Joanna believes that since she

started studying with PAR, her English vocabulary and pronunciation have improved. She hopes to improve her English skills even more and would like to thank both the program and her tutor.

Funny You Should Say That!

By S. Lee

I would like to share some funny stories that involved some Korean friends or friends of friends because of not understanding or misunderstanding the English language. Before the 1980's, we started to learn English as a Second Language in middle school in Korea, not from kindergarten age as most Koreans do today. We learned the alphabet first, then how to say, "Good morning. How are you today, Mr. Kim?" "I'm fine, thank you. And you?" and of course the very important and polite form of: "May I help you?" We memorized these sentences but we didn't have the opportunities to use them in conversation.

A Korean lady came to the U.S.A. with her husband many years ago. She took driving lessons as soon as she came here. It took a long time and very hard work before she passed her driving test. One beautiful sunny morning she drove out to Stevens Creek Blvd. She didn't know that the slow lane merged into Freeway 17 and before she knew it she had automatically entered the freeway. She was very scared and con-

fused, so she pulled over onto the shoulder. It was the time before cellular phones; she didn't know how to get help or what to do. But suddenly there was a savior; a policeman was approaching. She was very happy to see him. She cried out, "May I help you, Officer? May I help you?"

The policeman said with a smile, "Ma'am, I think *you* need my help."

A friend of my friend's brother had just arrived at the airport from Korea. He was looking for the restrooms but he couldn't find them. He was desperate for help to find the restrooms when he saw the information desk. He ran to the lady at the information desk and said eagerly, "May I help you?"

A Korean couple owned a supermarket. They hadn't been there long when the store was hit by a strong earthquake. The owner's wife was trapped under the fruit stand and buried under a lot of fruit. Rescuers came to help the victims. As soon as the lady saw them, she screamed, "May I help

you? May I help you? I'm buried under the fruit stand. May I help you, please?"

A man was hit by a car when he was crossing the road and pulled under the car. Soon the rescue team was there to help. One of them bent down and asked with much concern, "How are you, sir?" The injured man remembered the answer he had memorized in Korean middle school and said in a weak voice, "I'm fine, thank you. And you?"

A guy was working in a gas station years ago, before self service. One day a customer drove up to the gas pump and said, "Three bucks of gas." The attendant went inside, looked and looked. Finally, he came back carrying two boxes and said with apology, "I'm sorry, sir, I find only two box."

Another guy went to the supermarket for the first time. He filled his cart with lots of things and stood in the checkout line for a long time. Finally, it was his turn. The cashier smiled and asked, "Plastic or paper, sir?"

The shopper whipped out his credit card and said, “I have plastic here.” In Korea, credit cards are called plastic.

A man was working late at night in the 7-11 store. Two robbers came into the store and one of them yelled, “Hold up!” The man, not understanding the robber’s purpose, said, “I’m very sorry, sir. I don’t have hold up but I have 7-Up.”

My friend, a Korean lady, had a full-time job and was also very religious. She went to an early morning church service every day before going to work. She attended every late Friday night service, which was from 10:00 p.m. to 12:00 midnight. Of course, she went to church every Sunday; to the early morning service, the regular service, and the evening service. In between, she did all the grocery shopping, cooking, cleaning, and laundry for the week. By Monday she was very, very tired. Unfortunately, she always nodded off at work. Her co-workers complained to her supervisor and told him that she was lazy and out of it. The supervisors wondered if she took drugs. One day he asked her,

“Helen, do you take drugs?” she said, “Yes.” He asked, “Did you take a drug today?” She answered, “Yes, I did.”

The supervisor left her in a hurry and came back with the personnel manager. The manager said, “Your supervisor tells me that you take drugs. Is that true?” she answered, “Oh yes, it is. I can’t get enough sleep, I’m always tired, and I have headaches. I have to take drugs.” The manager asked, “What kind of drugs do you take, Helen?”

She answered, “Extra-Strength Tylenol.”

In Korea, we thought “medicine” and “drug” mean the same thing. When I read these stories to my tutor, he laughed a lot. I hope that you think these stories are as funny as he did. If not, “May I help you?” But not with plastic or drugs!

S. has been meeting with her tutor, Fred, for one year. She is from South Korea. She loves living in San José.

Watch Out!

By Shauk N. Leong



When I was 10 years old my friend Aye invited me to her family's water festival. The water festival is when people pour and spray water at each other. This means to wash away bad luck, and welcome good luck. In my country, the water festival is from April 12th through 15th, before the Burmese New Year's day, which is on April 16th. During this day you don't throw water at monks, pregnant women, and older seniors.

When I arrived at Aye's house, she gave me sweet rice balls. These balls are the size of a nickel and are sweet. We eat them for dessert. I ate four sweet rice balls first, but the fifth ball was very hot. Oh my Gosh! I was sweating. My face was red! My friend was laughing. Aye's family had hidden hot chilies inside a few balls as a joke! What could I do? I drank water but it did not work. It was still hot, so I ate some candy. After they stopped laughing, I was better.

Even though they tricked me, I was still laughing. When I think about this, I smile.

Shauk was born in Burma. She has lived in San José since 2000. She says, “I am always busy with school, work, and family. I appreciate Ellen, Effie, and Kelly from the Partners in Reading program. I also want to thank my ESL teacher Kirti.”

Recipe for Burmese Sweet Rice Balls

A. Ingredients

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------|
| 1. Sweet rice flour | 1 pound |
| 2. Regular water | 2 cups |
| 3. Palm sugar | 8 ounces |
| 4. Fresh coconut | shredded dry |
| 5. Salt | 1 teaspoon |
| 6. Sesame oil | 1 to 2 teaspoons |

B. Preparation

1. Mix sweet rice flour with water and salt to make dough.
2. Make nickel-sized balls and put a piece of palm sugar in the middle of each ball.
3. Drop each ball into boiling water.
4. When the balls float up, put them in a pot of cold water.
5. Transfer them to a plate and sprinkle some sesame oil and fresh shredded dry coconut on the top.

Crab Story

By Fitzroy Leslie



My crab story still makes me laugh. It happened about 17 years ago and I still remember it clearly.

It was sunset on a hot, clear Saturday on the corner of Gregory Park Road and Cottage Drive in the community of Gregory Park, which is in the city of Portmore in the parish of St. Catherine, Jamaica. This city is what an American might call a suburb of the capital, Kingston. It is a crowded and poor community with some hard-working and some lazy people. This story takes place at a bus stop across from Gregory Park Primary School and the only gas station. It is a very busy and noisy place.

My friend and I were in Gregory Park and we used to dare each other. One day my friend, Dell, put her hand into a crab bag, so I put my hand in, too. We did it a few times, and guess who got caught?

The joke was on me because the crab pinched my finger. It hurt so much that it took away my strength and dignity. So I cried so hard. I tried to take it off but it wouldn't come off, so my friend helped to get it off by kicking it. Then it came off but the claw was still on my finger. So my friend pried it off. When I tell the story, I feel my finger as if I just got bitten.

Fitzroy is married to Kathleen. He loves to cook and would like to work as a chef. He has been in the program for a few months now.

Duct Tape, the Cure-All

By Darryl Redfield



Everyone has a story about the uses of duct tape.

A couple of weeks before my sister Diamond's wedding, she was having problems with the plumbing in her apartment, so she asked me to fix it.

I said, "Yes, do you have any duct tape?" We laughed as we shared stories about the unconventional ways we had used duct tape in the past to help with life's little problems.

As a joke, I bought five rolls of duct tape, but four rolls came up missing. I thought her husband-to-be, Jake, had taken some rolls to work in his car. I had to go to Home Depot to replace the missing rolls, but when I got home the last roll was also missing. I was very upset, so I told Diamond, "I will finish the work after the wedding because the tape keeps coming up missing."

On the day of Diamond's wedding she looked so beautiful, so thin. I wondered how she had lost so much weight overnight. I knew that she hadn't eaten much that past week. Maybe I just hadn't noticed.

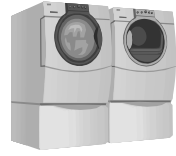
I finally finished the plumbing work and called Diamond on her honeymoon to let her know I was done. When she picked up the phone she sounded like she was in pain, so I asked, "Are you in pain?" "Yes," Diamond said. "My honeymoon night I will never forget. Jake and I were up all night pulling off the duct tape! That's how I looked like I lost so much weight in a short time, by using the duct tape to wrap and pull myself to look thin!"

I knew duct tape can sometimes help with life's little problems, but that time it helped Diamond with a "big" problem!

Darryl works full time and goes to college part-time. He devotes many hours to his union as chief steward. He is married and has two beautiful daughters. He also enjoys Raiders games when he has time.

Lupe — Sunshine All the Time

By Luz Maria Reyes



Note: Names in this story have been changed to protect the privacy of family.

My cousin is one of the funniest people I have ever come across during my lifetime. Her name is Guadalupe, but most of us know her by the nickname, Lupe. She is the one who gets everyone together for family gatherings and parties. Lupe is always laughing about anything and this makes her very sociable and always “the life of the party.”

One of my favorite memories happened when Lupe was nine years old and went to visit our grandmother in a little town called Oaxaca. This town in Mexico had no electricity and no modern household appliances such as washing machines for laundry. Lupe was visiting from Mexico City, which is a developed city with most modern conveniences.

One day, Lupe wanted to help by washing the laundry. She approached our grandmother, Mama Kuala, and asked, “Where do I wash my clothes?” Mama Kuala replied, “At the presidency, my child.” The presidency is the name of the regional sheriff’s office and was a location for administrative functions as well as a small temporary jail.

After listening to Mama Kuala, Lupe put all of her dirty clothes in a bucket and started to walk towards the Presidency Office while thinking that this place would have washing machines and electricity. Meanwhile, many family members were watching Lupe as she went through the process of packing up the dirty laundry, walking out the front door, and beginning the trek up the hill toward the Presidency Office. Our family members began to laugh very hard as they watched Lupe.

My aunt Adelina yelled, “Lupe—are you crazy? Please stop, you are making me laugh so hard that I need to go to the bathroom.” Everyone continued to laugh hard after watching Lupe and her process of helping with laundry, which

was based on her belief that the Presidency Office had the washing machines and electricity that she needed to help with the family chores.

Everyone in the family tells this humorous story about Lupe and the laundry over and over again even many years later; this event is a cute and innocent story that still touches our family members.

Luz Maria Reyes spent her childhood in Mexico City and now lives in San José with her husband and one year old son. She enjoys studying English and spending time with her family.

Confusing Prices

By Sokna Sar



There is a funny story that I always tell my family. It was about my neighbor and me. We were confused with the prices at the store.

I went with my neighbor to the outlet store in Gilroy. We were looking for something we could afford, like small purses. At the store we saw the sign for a sale. The sign said, “99 for sale.” Then we saw a lot of people get in line to buy the purses in that store. Many people in the line and the sale sign made us think the prices were cheap.

In the store we bought a lot of purses. We got eight purses from that store. My neighbor and I got four purses each. We went to the cashier to pay for our purses. We were very surprised the total was \$800.

We thought the cashier was confused about the prices. She said, “This is the Coach store. It isn’t the 99 cents

store.” The price was \$99 for each. The total for the eight purses was \$800. It was not \$8.

When we came back home, we told this story to our relatives. Our relatives asked us, “Have you heard of the Coach store before?” They said Coach was a brand name so the prices were not 99 cents as we thought. This story is something that we all laugh about.



Sokna is Cambodian. She came to the U.S.A. in 2002 with her brother and now lives with her mother. She likes to exercise every day, such as riding a stationary bicycle. She also likes to sing karaoke. She has been in Partners in Reading for eight months.

Did I Forget Something?

By Balbir Singh

My grandson, AJ, was two years old when this story happened. My son always dropped him at my home before he went to work. One day my son had to go to work early, so he could not come. He told his wife to drop AJ off at my house. My daughter-in-law came to drop him. She drove past my house as she was busy talking on the phone. AJ started yelling, "Mom, Mom, you missed the house!" Finally his Mom heard. She turned around to come to my house, but she turned the wrong way. AJ started shouting again, "Mom, Papa never came this way. What are you doing?" She took a U-turn but pushed on the gas pedal too much and barely missed the ditch. Finally when they reached our house, he rang the door bell. He was very excited. He told me, "Dadi (Grandma), Mom doesn't know your house. She passed it two times." Then he went upstairs and told the whole story to my daughter. Later, when his Dad came, he told the story again. He repeated the story five more times, sometimes adding more and sometimes deleting some.

His mom had told him not to tell the story to anybody. At dinner time that day, when everybody was eating dinner, AJ asked his mother, “Mom, I forgot what you told me not tell anybody. What was it? I am sorry I forgot.” All of us laughed when we realized what had happened. His dad said, “Don’t worry. Mom and I also sometimes forget things.” He looked at his dad and said, “Papa, you forget Dadi’s house too! Next time I will go with you. I always remember her house.” He is now five years old. Even to this day, when they drive up to our house he asks, “Papa, do you remember the house?”



Balbir is from India and came to the U.S. in 1980. She has four children and three grandchildren. She is an extremely motivated learner and has been working with PAR for about eight months now. She hopes to speak, read, and write English well, so that one day she can teach others and help her grandchildren as well.

Caught in a Cross-Fire

By Maria Soto



My daughter often teases me about the fire I started in our church.

It happened in 1999. My mother, my daughter Berenice, my son Carlos, and I were attending the nine o'clock Mass at St. Guadalupe's Church in San José, California. It was a beautiful spring morning and the church was filled with people dressed in their colorful Sunday best. We had found a seat in a center pew, where we enjoyed the sermon and celebrated the remainder of the mass with our priest, Father Flynn.

While the people filed out at the end of the Mass, we decided to stay behind to light a candle and say a special prayer. We did this by approaching the right side of the altar and kneeling in front of a statue of the Blessed Virgin Guadalupe. Normally, one puts a coin in a slot and then picks

up a candle, lights it, says a prayer of thanks or forgiveness, and then places the burning candle back into its particular candle-holder. As I lit my candle and knelt down to say my prayer, I first made the sign of the cross by lifting the lighted candle first up to my forehead, then to my chest and finally to my left and right shoulders. Unfortunately, and unknown to me, when I touched my hand to my forehead, the lighted candle-flame had lit the hair on the front of my head and it had started to smoke. I happened to look over at my daughter, who was closest to me, and noticed that she was reaching out to me with a strange smile on her face. Suddenly, she was pounding me on the head with both hands while saying, "Mommy, mommy, your hair is on fire!" Then I started pounding on my head with my own hands. Fortunately, my daughter had prevented any serious damage and except for some singed hair, a lingering smell of smoke, and an embarrassed look on my face, I was fine.

For just a moment everyone was silent. Then my sister started laughing, my mother began to giggle, my son was

both laughing and giggling, and finally, so too was I. I even think the Virgin of Guadalupe smiled briefly, but I may have imagined that.

It was a long time before I lit another candle in church and I was very, very careful when I did it.

Maria joined PAR on June 20, 2006. She was born in Puebla, Mexico, and came to San José in 1988, when she was 24 years old. She worked in the electronics industry for 17 years before starting her own daycare business in 2004.

High Five

By Maria Torres-Gafford

I think everything started when my husband Bill and I received a letter from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to appear for an interview in reference to the Petition to Remove the Conditions on Residence, after we had filed the I-751 Form. Bill and I had been in that office twice before to deal with changing my residency status. In fact, I was interviewed some years ago as part of the process. My interviewer was a very serious female officer. From our previous experience there, we knew that the people who worked there had very formal manners and their facial expressions looked very serious. They also wore formal clothes, and when they talked to us, their voices were authoritarian and monotone. Whenever we were there, our feeling was that we were surrounded by soldiers. The atmosphere there was to obey, not socialize.

However, in October of 2008, my interviewer was a little different. At least this seemed to be the case to me. That day

Bill and I arrived at the Department of Homeland Security, and we followed their directions: we showed our INFOPASS appointment to the security guard, presented our identification, and passed through a metal detector. Then we walked to the waiting room to be called by an officer. So we sat for a half hour. During that half hour, I paid attention to everything that happened: the doors opening and closing, people entering and leaving, people of all races and ages. Suddenly, my interviewer called me. My husband and I approached him. We greeted each other, and he asked us to follow him. Through a corridor and many turns, we followed him in silence.

Since we had greeted each other in a warm and friendly way, his behavior made me feel confident and comfortable. As an English learner, I usually pay attention to body language and clothing to help me “read” a situation and understand it. So I had noted that the interviewer’s attire was more casual than formal in comparison with his colleagues. He also walked happily, in a very relaxed manner. For a few

moments, I forgot where I was. I also thought he was only an assistant of my interviewer. I was wrong; he was my interviewer. The first thing that he asked when we were in his office was to present our official identification. The second was to raise our right hands and swear to tell the truth. I could not understand verbally what he had said, but I read his body language. I believed that he lifted his hand in order to greet us with a high five. I was ready with my hand to give him an enthusiastic high five like I had seen. Suddenly, my husband stopped my hand and told me, quietly but urgently, “No, Baby! NO!” Immediately, he clarified my mistake to the officer explaining, “I am sorry, but my wife is learning English.”

The officer understood my confusion, and the procedure continued. I almost burst out laughing. I had to make an incredible effort to hold onto my laugh. I had to think of a trouble in my life to avoid bursting out in laughter. Fortunately for us, my adjustment of status was approved. In my mind I gave myself an enthusiastic high five.



Maria is from Puebla, Mexico and has lived in the U.S. for five and a half years. She is a housewife and an English learner in Partners in Reading (PAR). Since January 2009 she has had a part-time job as an AmeriCorps member in PAR as well. Her husband Bill works as a maintenance mechanic for the San José State University Police Department.

Maria and Bill live in downtown San José in a small and cozy condominium. She loves to read and walk and to enjoy dark chocolate.

Maria says, “My experience with PAR has been wonderful. I can read and write English better; I speak it and understand it better as well. I am feeling confident and more independent. My life is easier now. I really appreciate the job that PAR staff, sponsors, tutors (especially Sarah Nielsen), and volunteers do in order to make this free program available. My aim in my life is to confront life’s challenges with knowledge and without tears. Since I have been working for AmeriCorps, I have been acquiring the tools and knowledge that are necessary to confront my personal challenges.”

Haunted House

By Richard Truchetta



I work at a haunted house called Gyros, and it is fun. I remember this one time in October 2002, the night was cold and it was black outside. The wind was howling, and it was pouring rain. You could hear the drops crashing on the roof and the thunder was booming while the lightning lit up the sky. You knew you were going to be in for a memorable night. One man was walking through the house saying he wasn't scared of anything until he came into my area.

I jumped out, and I scared him. He was scared so badly he screamed and hid behind his girlfriend. I still continued scaring him, and he crawled like a baby into the next room. This was a grown man crying to get out. I told his girlfriend he was a wimp and to see me later that night. I knew I did my job very well that night. It was funny, and this is what I love to do.

Richard has worked at the Haunted House for ten years. He is an actor whose job is to scare people. He is really good at it. He has been a learner with PAR for three years. He has learned to speak better and spoke to a group of new learners at orientation. He has written a story about work, and he is finishing a story about his life, which he is typing on the computer. Richard is a native of San José, and he likes living here because there's a lot to do. His boss and his girlfriend pushed him to come to this program. Their support was really important to him. He loves music and plays guitar.

My Car Key

By Chiao-Ling Wang



One Saturday morning, I went shopping to spend my Macy's gift card. I took into the fitting room two pairs of jeans of the same size and color at the same time. I tried on one pair of the jeans and slid my car key into one of the jeans pockets, to test if the pocket was big enough for my car key. Then, I bought one pair of jeans.

After I looked for shoes, hats, and bags, I prepared to go to Costco. When I arrived at my car, I discovered my car key had disappeared! Now I was scared and I ran at a fast speed back to the fitting room. I looked in each room carefully, one by one. Oh, my God! "Where are the clothes?" I asked a saleswoman with a trembling voice. "The lady took them upstairs!" she answered.

I couldn't believe that; this had never happened to me before. Suddenly, I saw the same jeans I had tried on still

hanging on a coat hanger on the front door. I nervously checked the pockets. “I got it! I got it!” I shouted with excitement!

This was my first serious shopping mistake! I bought the wrong pair of jeans!



Chiao-Ling lives in San José with her family. Her hobbies are reading, singing, hiking, and teaching at the Chinese School. Chiao-Ling says, “Kate is my genius PAR tutor. She teaches me how to write. To learn a new language, you have to know the culture. She explains to me American people’s thinking, customs, and habits. That is an easy way to understand and study the language. Every week, she brings many supplementary materials for me from the Internet. She encourages me and gives me support. We have lots of fun times! I really appreciate her teaching, and need to continue working with Kate to become a real American person.”

Sweet Memory

By Yiling Wu



My mom is a great cook. I always enjoy her cooking. When I was little, I liked to follow my mom around the kitchen. I would love to see what my mom was doing in the kitchen, and playing the same thing in my doll house. So I guess I learned how to cook at that time.

When I grew up, I was still interested in cooking. I remember one day I decided to cook rice noodles for my sister and brother. I had confidence that I could make a good rice meal. After my brother tasted it . . . he and my sister both felt kind of strange about the rice noodles. My sister said that the taste is okay, but the feeling about the rice noodles is not right, like something else. Then my brother answered, “Yeah, I have the same feeling . . . it seems rice noodles are a little bit too hard. Really like one thing.” Suddenly my brother said, “Huh ah, I know, I know what it is like. It is like rubber bands. See? The color and the feeling of chewing rubber bands. Why would you make rubber bands for us?” I

answered, “What? That is not rubber bands. I just forgot I should put rice noodles into water to let it soften first.” We three laughed so loudly.

Yiling loves cooking, traveling, and spending time with her family. When she and her husband have vacation time, they always plan a trip. They really enjoy traveling, whether in the States or overseas. Yiling says, “To see different cities, to experience different lifestyles is exciting. Everything about travel is learning and adventure.”

The Guy Who Mixed Up Words

By Anonymous

I worked with a guy named Emilio. He was always messing words up. When winter would come we worked overtime. After a twelve-hour shift we would take a dinner break. After dinner we would sit and go through our schedule for the week. At the end of our break he always said, "Let's go face the elephants," instead of "face the elements."

During summer we always had to take a first aid class. He would ask me if I was signed up for the VCR class, and I would have to tell him it was the CPR class. We worked with a man named Macedonus, and Emilio would always ask me if I had checked with Box of Donuts about the job.

This learner has been in Partners in Reading for a little over a year. He is married and has children. He is working very hard to improve his reading and writing, and his tutor is very proud of the progress he has made.

Other Stories

The Backpack

By Geungu Lee



Everybody has a backpack.

No one takes off the backpack.

Sometimes we feel a heavy weight that was a problem.

The backpack is life.

I want to know what is inside my backpack and I want to prepare for problems.

I can't see my backpack because I never take off my backpack.

Only I feel the weight of my backpack.

If we don't take off our backpack we have to endure the weight.

We saw the other people's pain from their backpacks.

Family, friends, and neighbors have problems but we can't help.

We can only stand with them.

We can hold their hand.

We can share our love, and we can make a good journey.

Geungu has been meeting with her tutor for six months. She came from Korea to the United States about ten years ago. Her tutor says she is making tremendous progress. She is devoted to her three children and her husband.

White Van Woman and the Pigeon Shed Motel

By Miriam Pineda

Note: In the Dominican Republic, it is considered a sign of good luck when pigeons come to someone's house.

My grandmother was born in a very poor family in the Dominican Republic. Her mother died when she was nine years old. She had to raise her four brothers and three sisters. She never heard about her father. When she was fourteen years old, she got married and had five children, three boys and two girls, but her husband went away when her oldest child was seven years old. She only went to school for two years, but she had perfect writing and reading, and her pronunciation was always excellent. I remember always admiring this quality in her.

To raise her children she had to work but had no profession. It was difficult. First she worked in a grocery store, and

she made candies to sell on the street. Little by little she was saving money. Soon she bought a truck. At that time, no women were driving, but she decided to drive because she could not pay anyone to drive her. She drove her truck every day, including Sunday, from 6:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Every single day she drove to many different suburbs, and people were surprised that a woman could work like a man. When she arrived home, she continued to make candies, and her two older children had to sell them after they arrived home from school. Soon she was doing better economically and bought a house for her family. After that, she thought to build a second floor on her house to make more money because she had to pay off the loan for it.

She called the house the “Motel El Palomar” (Pigeon Shed Motel); it was the first motel in the town. People who did not live in the town could find a place to sleep.

Meanwhile, her children were growing; she gained the respect and confidence of all the people in the town. Soon her

opinion was important, sought after for major decisions concerning the progress of the town, Barahona. She was very famous as the woman who fought to gain a profitable future.

One day she bought a white van that she drove all her life. She celebrated the birthday of her white van every year because she said, “My white van is another grandchild for me!” In the town people called her “White Van Woman.”

I remember her all the time. She taught me many things and gave me much advice which helps me to continue her example. However, the most important thing that reminds me of her is her immense love for me. When I walked around the town and people saw me, they called out, “She is the grandchild of White Van Woman!” It makes me feel proud having had a grandmother with an immense heroism. She was and remains my heroine.



Miriam recently came to the U.S. from her native country, the Dominican Republic. She already has completed several courses at San José City College and hopes some day to be an airline flight attendant. One of her hobbies is belly dancing.

Partners in Reading Writing Challenge



The 2008 presidential election was historic. It was important to many, and voters cast their ballots in record numbers. More than 132 million people voted in this election. Learners in the Partners in Reading program were no different. They were very interested in the candidates and in their positions.

Many Partners in Reading learners registered to vote, studied the issues, and voted for the first time. Some became citizens so their voices could be heard. With such high interest, it seemed like a perfect topic to write about.

So Partners in Reading sponsored a writing challenge. Adult learners were asked to respond in writing to the following questions:

1. What did the election mean to you?
2. How was this election different?

-
3. What will people say 100 years from now about this moment in history?
 4. Do you think anything important will change because of this election?

As you can see from the stories that follow, adult learners were very responsive. We thank each author for writing such a thoughtful essay. We appreciate hearing the opinions and ideas of each person on the election and its importance to them.

A panel of judges reviewed each essay and selected one winner in the categories of beginning, intermediate, and advanced writing. We congratulate the winners, Balbir Singh, Earlene Chapman, and Maria Torres-Gafford. Each winner received a gift certificate for Barnes and Noble bookstores.

We thank the judges who took on the difficult task of selecting the top essay in each category. They are:

Shanti Bhaskaran, Director, Read Santa Clara

Susan Clark, Director, Common Knowledge, and
creator of the *Easy Voter Guide*

Scot Guenter, Professor of American Studies, San
José State University

Everybody did a great job: the authors, the judges, and the tutors. Enjoy the essays about the 2008 election.

Writing Challenge

By Leticia Alonso

This election meant a lot to me because Barack Obama is the first Afro-American president in United States history. He is an example for all American citizens. If he can do it, everybody can do it.

We hope he makes a lot of changes for our country. One of the changes we are wishing for is to send back the troops to their families.

Of course we are not waiting for him to do everything. We need to work hard, too.

And this election was different because the Democratic Party won, and almost all the Senate Democrats won, too, and this is very important for all U.S. citizens.

Writing Challenge

By Sonia Baltodano

1. What did the election mean to you?

This election represented hope for immigrants like me, who came to this country to escape the restrictions of a socialist society, and President Elect Barack Obama offers a more democratic way of living. The immigrants hope to get a new amnesty, and a new change with the economy.

2. How was this election different?

It was different because for the first time an African-American won the election. It was also different because Mr. Obama is a young person from a modest home background, so he is able to understand our situation, our feelings. He has new ideas. The citizens of the U.S. didn't expect an African-American to win.

3. What will people say 100 years from now about this moment in history?

People will say that it took 145 years for white people to believe in the ability of a black man to govern this country. This is the first time that people have thought that anyone could become president of the U.S. as long as that person meets the requirements.

4. Do you think anything important will change because of this election?

I believe there has to be a change for the better; nationally, the economic situation needs to be improved. Health insurance for each citizen is a necessity. Internationally, Mr. Obama is capable of dialoguing with world leaders. The minority hopes that Mr. Obama will be able to improve our lives. Mr. Obama has the knowledge and ability to stop wars in the world. The world believes that Mr. Obama can help change the economic situation at home and outside of the U.S.

Some Thoughts About the American Electoral System

By Kim Bui

As a new resident of this country, this is my first time witnessing an election in the United States. I found this a good opportunity to learn how people in America vote and compare this to the way people in my country vote. I am not sure if I can express all of my thinking in writing, but I will try to mention a few aspects that I consider the most interesting ones. Those are the cost, the effectiveness, and the freedom people have in the two electoral systems.

The first impression I had of the U.S. electoral system is that it's very costly. The candidate spends millions of dollars on his campaign, to advertise himself and to gain support from the popular vote. I couldn't believe that such a huge amount of money could have been spent on this purpose. In my own country we don't even know who the candidates are because they never spend their own money for this

purpose. We just know who our new leader is when the election is over. In my opinion, when we lose something, we get something else. In the case of U.S. candidates, they get their name popularized, their fame, and, more importantly, they get support from citizens. The candidates in my country do not have a chance to let the people know about themselves, and therefore they are less likely to have support from the citizens.

The second thing I noticed about the U.S. election is the ineffectiveness of the system. At first, I thought that since the candidates spend a lot of their money in order to receive votes from Americans, the winner would be the one who receives the largest number of popular votes, but at the end it turned out to be totally different from what I'd thought. In reality, the winner could be not the one who has gained the majority of votes from citizens but from the senators and representatives and others who are members of the Electoral College. Thus, to me, this electoral system is not an effective one because it doesn't reflect the voice of

the voters, the citizens of the country. The case is totally different in my country, even though the winner, the prime minister, is the one who receives the largest support from the citizens. But those votes are also ineffective because, as I said before, we don't know anything about the person we vote for.

Finally, I have to agree that the U.S. electoral system reflects a lot of freedom in the country. The candidates come from different parties, and each party has its own goals and strategies for its campaign. People can vote against and for any party they like. That makes the candidates fight each other by all means to obtain votes. These could be a candidate's personal life, strategies, and even bad words. This contradicts what happens in my country. We just have one party, and people are not allowed to criticize each other in public. That's why the citizens will never know the weaknesses of the candidates they vote for. This is not a good thing, but it is an unchangeable rule that has existed for a long time in my country.

In short, selecting the leader of a country is an important thing to do, and how to make it a cost-effective system is something we, the young generation, should think about. As for me, I disagree with the monopoly system used in my country and with the multiple-party system used in the U.S. So far, I have found that people in my country don't really vote with their voices as do the people in America.

What the Election Meant to Me

By Earlene Chapman

This election meant a lot to me as an African-American. I grew up in the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., generation. Dr. King believed in change. He worked hard for change in a nonviolent way, and so many Americans were inspired. We worked together as Americans for great change.

Obama has this amazing spirit of heart that touches many hearts. We believed in him; we could feel the good in him. Obama's life growing up was tough, like so many Americans, and he had to work hard to change his life. He has the knowledge to take on all the challenges that will change all our lives for the better. Yes we can.

This election was different because whoever won, history would be made—America's first woman president or America's first African-American president. This is an historic time in history.

I don't know what people will say 100 years from now, but there are some things I believe they will say. The American people believed the government was moving this country in the wrong direction. The American people really voiced their opinion by voting for Obama, who has the distinctive ability of knowing change is needed to get the American people to trust in their government again.

Obama has opened the door for change. The American people can make the changes that will make government work for all the people. Yes we can.

Writing Challenge

By Santa Dandan

1. What did the election mean to you?

The election was important to me because I think Obama will be a good president. He has good ideas. He cares about people like me. He will work on education for kids. He cares about health care insurance. He cares about older people who are on Medicare and Medi-Cal getting their health care and medication. He cares about the economy. We spend money like crazy, like senators going on fancy trips. It is a new beginning. It is historic because there has never been a black president. His cabinet will be different because he is getting people who know how to run the country. I hope in four years we will be in a better place with the economy. Our gas prices are going down.

2. How was this election different?

The election was different because in the primary Obama was running against a woman. Also there was a woman on the other side for vice president. A lot of people fell in love

with Obama. Obama was not in politics very long. More young people voted. We knew he was president by 8:00 p.m. It was very exciting. I was very happy. I loved his speech.

3. What will people say 100 years from now about this moment in history?

People will still be talking about it 100 years from now. I'm glad I was here to see a black man be president of the United States.

4. Do you think anything important will change because of this election?

Yes. I think the way government is run will change. They always make promises and don't keep them. I hope this will change. I think more women and minorities will try to work hard to have a better life.

About the November 2008 Election

By Hyunjung Kim

I felt different in the November 2008 election because I gained confidence as an American by participating. I learned how important the election and our right to vote is.

The 2008 election has strong historical meaning. Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton's participation shows race and sex don't matter to be a president. Everyone is equal, but we have a stereotype of the president as only a white man. We awoke to the fact that anyone can be president who has passion for the United States.

Obama is the first African-American president. I hope in 100 years people will say he was the president for everyone rather than just the first African-American president.

Obama changes our stereotype that minorities can't hold power. I believe all people will make a stronger union. I

hope we can work together, because I think not only one person can change the country. We need to change it together.

Remarkable Election

By Sunnam Kim

I believe that many people who watched the process of this election won't forget the November 2008 election because Obama was elected the first African-American president in U.S. history.

I am sure that the November 2008 election was the most remarkable event in U.S. history. I was very impressed that many Americans participated in this election and it was recorded as the highest voting rate in the past 100 years in U.S. history.

After all, Americans selected the first African-American president by believing in him as their leader. We can remember that Dr. King gave us the historical address of "I Have a Dream." I think that his dream came true in this election.

"Change" was Obama's slogan, and I believe that America demonstrated "change." This "change" will be to encourage

all immigrants that they may get equal opportunities in the U.S.

Writing Challenge

By Young Kim

The November 2008 election was a very surprising moment for everybody. When an African-American became the first black president, it was an important historical event. This was a new start for foreigners like me and for Americans also. I think everybody has chances in America.

It was a very hard decision for Americans to elect a black president. However, they had confidence and trust in the black president for their leader. They believed in him. It makes a very big change in America and to the world. In my opinion, this election was a promise of equality. Ever since the Civil War, many people have tried to complete the equality. It was a little delayed. People struggled, but they succeeded this time.

After 100 years from now, many people will be proud of this election and there will be no difference no matter what color

or age someone is. I hope this election will bring firm equality. Barack Obama will inspire African-Americans and other races to become more active in the community.

Writing Challenge

By Hannah Lee

Before the election, I didn't think Barack Obama would be elected. Because I am learning American history with my teacher, I know there is prejudice about African-Americans. The November 2008 election made a big impression, causing me to change my mind. Barack Obama was elected the new president. He is the first African-American president. It means everybody gets a chance.

At this time, the economy is bad. The people want America to be great. They need a powerful president. This election is different because people cared more about political issues than economic issues.

One hundred years from now people will say, "At that time, people voted for the basis to make America great."

Because of this election I think the Iraq war will end and the members of the U.S. Army will be back in their homes

from Iraq. At this time, the economic recession will be getting better. Democratic values will be more popular with the new president than Republican values.

Writing Challenge

By Gordon Nelson

WHAT this election means to me:

Obama did not win the election. He bought his way into the office of president. Also, he is young and McCain is old—the people were afraid that McCain wouldn't live long enough to finish his term. McCain gave the election gracefully, like the honorable person that he is.

WHAT I would tell someone about this special election:

We should pray for the president and the nation, support them by daily prayers. Obama believes in gay marriage and abortion.

I like him as a person, but I just hope that he will prove himself as the president and keep his promises. He said he would promote jobs and help the economy.

WHAT I think people will say 100 years from now about this election:

This election would open the doors for different races to run for president—like Mexicans, American Indians, East Indians, Asians, Russians, and even Australians; maybe even Englishmen, to bring us back to the beginning. But I don't think the Earth will still be here in 100 years—it depends on God. If God wants the Earth, heavens/universe—it depends how people behave. If people are still here, there might not be enough food to feed them because of overpopulation.

Presidential Election of Obama

By Jesse Nelson

The 2008 presidential election of Obama versus McCain meant more to me than any other election ever, for the wrong reasons. It was the first time I was ever moved to pay attention to the candidates. Barack Obama is African-American like I am, and this is why I was compelled to conscientiously observe what was happening.

Now I must admit and confess that was the wrong way to think. It was an injurious and unwise way to think. I had to remind myself of the saying that “All men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.” When I had admitted this to myself, it became clear to me that ethnicity of a person should not have mattered but the spirit and character of a person should always be what matters most. Is his heart right?

How will he lead a people if he does not have clean hands and a clean heart? He must be a man who will not take bribes or ever make a statement or promise openly under oath deceitfully.

After I removed the race mentality, I focused on the soul of the men. After I contemplated deeply, I still chose Barack Obama. After listening to his speeches, I know that he is a spiritual man who believes in God and is trying to live a Christian life in an unchristian world. So I believe that he will try to the best of his ability not to lean on his own understandings but in all of his ways, acknowledge God. I believe there will be important changes with this election only if Obama keeps his mind steadfast on the word of God.

Writing Challenge

By Janet Park

The November 2008 election made history for many reasons. It made history because most people want to change the political power and we're expecting that Barack Hussein Obama is going to make change for the well-being of the common people.

Obama is the first black president in America since 1789, (when George Washington became president). In 1862, President Lincoln was responsible for the emancipation of slaves. Outside there appeared to be equality, but inside people did not see change in America. With the election of Obama, minorities feel that there is hope, and they feel confident that there will be change.

Election 2008

By Cesar Ramos

In a world with huge differences, where a few have everything, some have enough, and many have nothing, we felt we could change these differences when a man said: it is time to change.

This election was different because it is now that we begin to build a nation for everybody. Moreover, we are contributing to make a better world. This election will be remembered because Obama, a man who doesn't come from a traditional political family and who has an immigrant father, was elected president of the United States. He became the first African-American president.

In this election, Obama felt empathy for the pain suffered by hundreds of African-Americans. He shows us that in order to improve our future we need to erase all discrimination. It is a long way, and he made the first step saying: it is time to change.

Writing Challenge

By Melody Sek

If the president is an outstanding president, it could mean that the country has more jobs; if the president is a good president, it could help protect the country from war. We need to have a strong president. But I'm not sure about Barack Obama. Maybe the way he talks makes people trust him more. We don't know yet how he will be, if he will be a good president, until he starts.

Elections are special because only one person can win. No one knows which of the two choices is better. Choosing the right one can mean a better future. It doesn't matter what color a person's skin is if he or she is an outstanding president. The president should not discriminate, either. There are so many different nationalities in the United States—the president should represent all of them. The skin does not matter—this is a big country with many people. The president should do a good job for all.

In 2108, many people will still be surprised that a black person became president after black people were slaves of white people. But I think even then there will be discrimination and people who don't like him. There will be people who complain about Obama because of the color of his skin and the strangeness of his name.

Writing Challenge

By Balbir Singh

In the last year, many people lost their jobs, homes, health care, and savings. Some of them do not even have enough to feed their families. They have nowhere to get help. Hence the election this year was very important for me, because I hope the new president has new ideas to start helping families get back on their feet.

The election was different for three reasons:

- a) It was the first time an African-American man was running for the president's office.
- b) It was the first time a white woman competed in the Democratic primaries for the president's office.
- c) It was the first time a Republican lady governor was nominated as a running mate for the office of vice president.

Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, and many others fought for equal rights in the last hundred years, which has brought us to this moment. I hope in the next hundred years we can see probably an Untouchable leading India or a woman leading the U.S., and we can reflect on this moment of 2008 for such achievements.

What I Think About the Election: The November Election Making History in 2008

By Jackie Smith

What I thought about the election in the year of 2008: in the summer we were hoping that it was about to change history. At San José City College, which my daughter attends, she gave me a car bumper sticker that was just like my Dad's, Mr. Dumas. My son Jasper was so inspired that he came home with the newspaper. Also, the election led to the biggest talks about the U.S.A. that some of my work associates discussed with me. Obama's presidency will make a change. That was the act of compassion.

The day before the election, we just laughed and played a poll game. Just for fun I bet my friend that if Obama won, the loser had to donate to a good cause. No matter what, in the neighborhood some people are happy for change and

others are waiting. In general, people are a little quieter. At my job I used my talent to carve a silhouette of Obama's face on a pumpkin during the Halloween holiday. Our teacher won an award. It was unbelievable but only GOD has the last word. All my family members are still talking. Our job is to watch and pray for hope, peace, spirit, and love.

Writing Challenge

By Andrew Swickrath

The November election was a big event. This election was going to be different because there was going to be a first. There was going to be the first African-American as president or the first woman as vice president. I think that people would say that 2008 was the year that history was made. I hope that the new president will make a lot of important changes to make the United States of America a better place.

Election

By Hadas Teklemichael

I voted because it is my right, and I wanted my voice to be heard.

I voted for Obama because he is good for the middle class and he wants affordable health care for all citizens of the United States of America and legal residents.

He wants to fix the economy. For example, he wants to reduce taxes for middle-class people, and also he wants to open thousands of small businesses. He also wants to bring the troops home in a timely manner. Barack Obama mentioned that he delivers all the things that he promises.

Writing Challenge

By Asfaha Tewolde

Barack Obama is our next president. We waited a long time for peace in the world. I hope Obama can make it happen, especially in Africa. I am happy you won. The president of Eritrea is happy, too.

Barack Obama is very smart and very intelligent. He knows the situation of the world. He can bring change and peace. He has the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, and Martin Luther King, Jr. He can open the door to bring people together. President Elect Obama himself wants peace and the economy to grow in America and the rest of the world. He has the right ideas to solve the problems. He needs the support of the Senate and the House in Congress. The president elect is talking to President Bush, and former Presidents Clinton and Carter to get information to help him. In foreign policy Barack Obama needs to talk to other leaders from Cuba, Iran, Lebanon, Korea, Syria, and countries in Africa.

One hundred years from now people will know that President Barack Obama ended the war in Iraq.

Writing Challenge

By Maria Torres-Gafford

1. What did the election mean to you?

The election means change to me because it had more voters. The Democrats made effective use of the computer and raised huge sums of money. An African-American candidate won the presidency, and for the first time a woman, Hillary Clinton, had a good opportunity to win the presidency. These changes encouraged people to get involved in this election. This election woke up the interest of the whole world.

2. How was this election different?

This election was different for various reasons. We had the participation of two women. For the first time one was running for president, and for the second time in history one was running for vice president. The democratic primary election was different, too, because it had candidates of different racial groups, an African-American, Barack Obama, former Senator of Illinois, and a Latino, Bill Richardson,

Governor of New Mexico. These differences tell us that any person, without import to his or her religion, gender, race, or economic level, is able to be the president if he or she has the skill.

3. What will people say 100 years from now about this moment in history?

This moment is historic, similar to when the Berlin Wall fell, because nobody thought that it would happen. Perhaps people will say 100 years from now about this moment in history that the most important thing to achieving success is a candidate's preparation, contact with the needs of the American people, and a belief that her or his victory is possible.

4. Do you think anything important will change because of this election?

I am sure a lot of things will change from this election. I am going to mention only one because for me it is the most important. Now a lot of African-Americans and other mistreated groups know that they have the possibility to

achieve success. They just have to apply themselves. Now a big barrier in their minds is gone. Yes, they can! or Yes, all of us can do it!

Writing Challenge

By Thomas Valentine

As a great-great grandson of a slave, and as a worker who taught voter registration in the Civil Rights Movement, it is hard to believe what has happened in the twenty-first century.

There are no words. It's all emotion. Everything changed. Being raised in the South, under a law where I got arrested for walking down the street with my sister, a mulatto, seeing a young man of African and European descent become president has changed my world and the world of my grandkids. People of color in this country now know that they can aspire to the highest office in the land. That is fundamental change. What we do with it is the question.

Vote

By Lai Fong Vo

I have had my citizenship for nine years. I always wanted to vote but I never did. Last year, 2008, I made it because I set up my plan to register to vote. That was an exciting moment for me and for Sue, my tutor. We looked up information about voting. I never had any experience voting in my life.

First the Democratic Party had two people running for president. One was a young African-American man, the other a woman. Finally Barack Obama won the campaign. Republicans nominated John McCain, 72, for his party. He picked a woman to be vice president. It didn't matter who won, the election made history.

What did the election mean to me? I say—if you have a dream, do the best you can and you will achieve the goal. I want to thank the Partners in Reading staff and especially my tutor, Sue. Without their help I could not have made my dream come true—voting for the first time in my life.

Program Highlights

Families for Literacy

Families for Literacy offers opportunities for children under five years of age and their parents to share engaging events, learn together while having fun, and enhance the parent's role as the child's first teacher through storytelling and quality books.

Combine Families for Literacy with children, adults, fun, pizza, dogs, and with adventures on the road and through the pages of beautiful books. Add a dash of paper, scissors, glue, markers, fruit, vegetables, and crayons. Season with entertaining and informative visitors, and you'll find we have had a wonderful year. We have had family programs, both in the library and on the town, featuring programs about the King Library and on book making, kindergarten preparedness, dental health, behavior management, nutrition, and swine flu. We've had visits to San José Children's Musical Theater's production of *Pinocchio* and to San José State University; to Magic Carpet Theatre's interpretation of *Beauty and the Beast*; to Emma Prusch Farm Park, finding gourds on vines and pot-bellied pigs chomping

cantaloupes whole; and to see art and science at the San José Museum of Art. Thank you to all learners and tutors for your participation, and to Julie, David, and Kit for making it all possible.



Workshops

In October 2008, PAR hosted a health workshop aimed at encouraging our tutors and learners to **Get Off the Couch**. Participants learned how to get and keep moving with San José State University's Kristen Kirkendall. PAR tutor Nancy Nuzzolillo led the group in making healthy, delicious dishes. The health workshop series has covered many topics and has been well attended. PAR would like to acknowledge Nancy Nuzzolillo for her unfailing commitment to these special programs.

PAR also held workshops on writing résumés, job searching, and other computer classes to help learners become more comfortable with technology as they look for jobs. These classes were held at the King Library and at Tully Community Library through the Family Learning Center.

To prepare for the November 2008 election for president, learners and tutors attended a voting workshop to under-

stand both the national elections and the many propositions that California voters were asked to vote on.

Workshops give learners a chance to meet other people in the program and enhance what they are studying with a tutor. In the next year, join us for one or more workshops to see for yourself how fun and helpful they are. You will be happy you did.



The Adult Learner Leadership Institute

Through support from the California State Library, each year library literacy programs in the Bay Area offer a six-month program for learners who want to develop leadership skills. Learners meet monthly at the Santa Clara Mission Family Reading Center, where they study with other learners to build confidence in public speaking, organizing events, fundraising, research, and other leadership skills. Together they learn how California state government works and ways to make their voices heard.

Learners from previous Adult Learner Leadership Institutes run the workshops and teach the skills. This year PAR learner Debbie Hodge came back to be a mentor. Each person develops better decision-making ability and learns the importance of getting involved in community activities. Adult learners become spokespeople for literacy as they learn to effectively present the needs and issues of this important cause.

This year two PAR learners completed the program.

Do you want to improve your leadership skills? Do you want to present your ideas with confidence and feel good about talking to anyone? Join the Adult Learner Leadership Institute. By the end of six months you will be confident and comfortable leading others.



Photos courtesy of Read Santa Clara of the Santa Clara City Library at the 2009 Adult Learner Leadership Institute Graduation. Staff members Loren Rucker of Read Santa Clara with Debbie Hodge and Jacquie Brinkley of the California State Library with Maria Torres-Gafford.

Partners in Reading Celebrates 20 Years of Serving the Community

In 2009 Partners in Reading reached a milestone—20 years of serving adults and families in San José to improve their reading, writing, computer, and life skills. This called for a celebration, and that we had!

More than 150 of our closest friends joined us at the Mayfair Community Center to recognize the many accomplishments of adult learners and their tutors, as well as staff. All enjoyed good music, delicious food, and great ambiance while reflecting on the past and anticipating a growing future. We were honored to have Ray Blockie, volunteer tutor emcee and City Councilmember Ash Kalra address the important role of libraries and their literacy services. Program participants Debbie Hodge and Yeshi Abdo followed with inspiring words. It was an evening to remember.

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- *Partners in Reading* has served 4,003 adults over the past 20 years. Adults typically participate for two years, with various levels of activity depending on their goals.
 - Volunteer tutors are the backbone of the program, with 3,162 tutors trained who average about two years of service.
 - Volunteers have contributed 105,137 hours over 20 years, at a projected value of \$2,309,860 (Independent Sector Volunteer Rate).
 - Together adult learners achieve 650 to 750 goals each year. Some goals achieved in the past year include:
 - 85% reached their goal of reading a book or newspaper for the first time
 - 76% achieved their goal of writing a letter
 - 88% achieved their goal of learning to use computers, send emails, and search the Internet for jobs, health information, and more
 - 68% achieved their goal of reading a book to their child
 - 57% reached their goal and can now help their child with homework

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- 84% reached their goal of voting for the first time.
 - 55% who set the goal to get a promotion, find a job, or get a better job achieved it.



Tutor Team

Three tutors—Ray Blockie, Beth Hughes, and Gretchen Leavitt—recently launched a tutor support program to enhance tutor satisfaction and increase PAR’s capacity to serve more learners. Feedback from tutors about the PAR program indicates that tutors want to find ways to connect and share with one another, both in person and through the Internet. Nine other tutors have now joined the team to implement many of the ideas. Some of the members spoke at a recent tutor training and connected with PAR’s newest tutors. Look for other exciting changes soon.

AmeriCorps

Partners in Reading is fortunate to have two AmeriCorps members working in the program, Maria Torres-Gafford and Effie Chiu. Both Maria and Effie tutor adult learners, who need to improve their literacy and language skills. In addition they orient new learners to the computer lab and help adults research online, apply for jobs, and practice their reading and writing.

The AmeriCorps members also help organize special events, as well as assist with tutor training, learner orientations, and recruitment. That pleasant voice greeting you on the phone will very likely be Maria or Effie. Their assistance and contributions have been assets to Partners in Reading.



Maria Torres-Gafford, Effie Chiu, and PAR Office Specialist Teresa Avila at our 20th Anniversary.

