



2006

Different Worlds Many Voices



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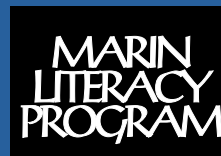
DIFFERENT WORLDS MANY VOICES



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Student Writings

2006



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Marin County Free Library



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Different Worlds Many Voices 2006 is dedicated to our tutors and teachers in appreciation for all the encouragement and support they have given to their adult learners. They generously contribute time, energy and expertise to help their students learn new skills in order to provide a better life for themselves and their families.

A special thank you to Paul Kagawa for continuing to take such outstanding photographs.

We would also like to thank Bryan Hendon for his photo on the cover and on page 13 and Imelda Macias for her photo on the cover and on page 55.

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FOREWORD

We are delighted to present *Different Worlds Many Voices 2006*, the fifteenth book of writing by adult students in the Marin Literacy Program. The encouragement and support of dedicated volunteer tutors and teachers, working one-on-one or in small groups, have enabled these students to craft their writings and tell their stories.

Many of the students whose writing is contained in this book participate in special projects sponsored by the Marin Literacy Program.

Marin Literacy Program's family literacy component has two projects that support parents and caregivers in being their child's first and most important teacher. **Families for Literacy** students, who have children under five, improve their basic skills while learning to read aloud children's picture books. The **F.L.A.G.ship** project (Families Learning and Growing) travels throughout Marin and delivers school readiness and health workshops to isolated young families from Marin City to Bodega Bay.

Inmate Literacy Services provides programs to incarcerated adults. At Marin County Jail, library services are offered, and students write for jail newsletters, participate in video learning and receive instruction in basic skills and family literacy. At San Quentin State Prison, students participate in **Project R.E.A.C.H.**, an inmate-to-inmate tutoring program, and the **F.A.T.H.E.R.S. Program**, a family literacy and parenting course.

The **West Marin Literacy Project** serves limited-English-speaking adults and their families through one-on-one tutoring and small group classes in this rural area. The project sponsors bilingual storytimes at the Point Reyes Library, citizenship and on-going GED classes, and a summer reading program for children at outlying ranches.

Whether adult learners are involved in special projects or participate in the main part of our program, their stories reflect the diversity of Marin Literacy Program's student population. This publication is an opportunity for them to showcase their writing skills and to raise community awareness about the need for adult literacy services in Marin County. Please note that whenever a story can be understood in context, the student's grammar is not corrected, so that the author's personal voice can ring true.

Marin Literacy Program's published authors invite you to enjoy their writings and share them with family, friends and business associates. Additional copies are available upon request.

Views, thoughts and/or opinions expressed in this publication are solely those of the authors and not necessarily the views, thoughts and/or opinions of the Marin Literacy Program or its sponsors.

Different Worlds Many Voices

Marin Literacy Program 2006 Student Writings

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Appreciations

My Light Bulb Came On

By Hector S

I want to talk a little bit about the good things that have come out of my incarceration. When I came to San Quentin State Prison I thought that everything would be a bunch of problems, but that's not how it was. I wanted to take advantage of my time being locked up. That's when my light bulb came on. I asked myself, I don't know English, so I need to take advantage of all my four years to learn English. I enrolled myself in a program called Project R.E.A.C.H. that's here in the prison. And thankfully to the patience of Ms. Nan and Mr. Rojo who are my tutors for the English class, today I can write these words and speak and read each day better. It's weird but I have something to thank San Quentin State Prison for, because they gave me the time to learn English as my second language.

Tutor: Nan Sincero
Inmate Literacy Services

Hector is an intelligent student who works hard to improve his knowledge of English. He reads English books on his own and likes to carry a dictionary around with him. His favorite way to learn is to play ESL "gato" (word tic-tac-toe) with his fellow students. I am so fortunate to have the opportunity to teach Hector and his classmates because they all have such a strong desire to learn and they are truly grateful for the chance to attend class.

An Important Experience in My Life

By Vicky G

I am married, the mother of three lovely children, two boys, 16 and 11, and a girl, 6 years old.

In March 2004, my friend invited me to form a volunteer committee and work as a fundraiser for a room to teach catechism classes to the children of Tomales, and around the community. I was very happy to accept and we worked hard to make a Kermeses (Mexican Food tradition) Mexican/American brunch that was very successful.

My children attend Tomales Elementary and High School, where for the first time the parents of EL (English learners) have a committee (ELAC). They elected me president of this committee and we work hard for the EL students' progress.

In April of 2006, I was invited to represent the Latino parents on a committee to interview 6 applicants for the high school principal. All questions were in English because it was a group of North Americans. I asked a question of each applicant. I felt proud to represent the Latino parents.

None of this would have happened in my life if my tutor, Mrs. Sheila S. Laufer, didn't help me with English classes. It is easier for me to communicate with the North American people. I want to say thank you to the literacy program and my tutor so I can arrive in this place in my life. I learned English with them so now I can help my family and my community in the United States.

Tutor: Sheila Swan Laufer
West Marin Project

Vicki is an amazing student and community activist. The list of ways she volunteers for the schools is very long. We have been working together for some years, and I am grateful to have her as a student and friend.

A Change in My Life

By Jie Z

My name is Jie. I came to USA in 1988. At the end of 2004, my husband decided to come to the USA with my daughter. I thought my English was not good enough to help take care of everything for them. So, I need to learn more English to help them. I didn't have enough time to go to college to learn. I must work. At this time, my friend told me about a program in the library. I went to the library and took a test and then I met my teacher Sue.

She helps me a lot. She not only taught me English, but also how to use the computer, "Yahoo Messenger," to talk to my family in China, and how to buy a car.

When my husband and daughter came here, Sue drove the car with me to pick them up from the airport, and a lot of luggage. She gave me a lot of help. I want to say thank you very much.

She teaches me English very nice, very carefully. When I spoke one wrong word, she corrects me a lot of times until I say it correct. Right now I speak English better than before. Thank you again Sue! This is the voice from my heart!

Tutor: Sue Erdman
Family Literacy

Jie is a bright, happy lady who has little exposure to the English language outside of her work in a Chinese restaurant. She was an accountant at a Sheraton Hotel in Tianjin (near Beijing) before setting off for the U.S. for a temporary visit, without her husband or daughter. After being here she decided she wanted her daughter to go to school here, rather than in China. So, after almost 8 years here by herself, she is reunited with her family and eager to help them become Americanized. She is delightful to work with, very generous in presenting me with gifts that help teach me about her culture, even as I help her adapt to ours.

Giving Thanks

By Teresa T

I came from Mexico to be reunited with my husband and to be a whole family.

At first it was difficult to get to know people. School was foreign to the children. Now it is a little better.

Here I learned to drive. I am going to school to learn English so I can understand and so I can get a job, because in this country everyone speaks English. Here, we are all treated well. The people here are nice and have helped us a lot, even though we are simple people. For this I thank everyone.

Teacher: Carla Twitchell
West Marin Project

When Teresa first came to California, she felt isolated and had no car. She went back to Mexico with her children, but her husband could only visit for short periods. She and her children came back with him to Valley Ford, where she is now happier, because she has a car and can drive and participate in school activities.

Thank You to Program REACH & to the Library of San Rafael

By Victor M-G

Thank you for helping me learn to read and write English. Thank you to my teachers “Nan” and to Mr. Rojo for their time and effort. You know my time was short. I wish it was longer so that I can learn more, but what I have learned is enough to help me with my family in Guanajuato, Mexico. Thank you for my diploma that I am going to receive. I hope to get a better job in my country. I know that I am going to be far away from you guys, but I will always keep you in mind. I know that some day I will be a big help as an interpreter with the people in Mexico.

Thank you for everything. And for what you have taught me. You guys will always be in my mind.

Tutor: Nan Sincero
Project R.E.A.C.H. Tutor: José Hernandez
Inmate Literacy Services

Victor made a big effort to learn as much as possible before he was paroled. He came to every class eager, well-prepared and happy. We all wish him the best in this new chapter of his life.

Learning to Live in Another World

By Adriana A

I am Adriana. I was born in Columbia in 1982. I grew up there with my parents and my two brothers and sister.

I came to the USA in 2005, and since this moment my life changed because I started to learn about the life when you are an adult, and you are far away from your family. I miss them very much but here I live with my niece and my sister-in-law, they're my company. In fact they make me feel happy. Also I feel very lucky to be here because I have learned much about another world, culture and language, but all those things have not been by myself. I have had people who have been my angels here, and they taught me all that I know now. For example, my tutor has been helping me get better in my English, my boss who trusts in me and gave me the opportunity to work with her, without knowing English, and my family who has been my support to keep going in this way that I choose.

I just have to say thanks to everyone who has been part of this process, in particular my family for their constant support, to my boss for the trust in me and for her patience, and for my tutor who gave me her time to help me learn this language. It is not easy, but with their help it is not impossible.

Tutor: Helen Abe
MLP Main Program

I have been working with Adriana since September of 2005. When I first met Adriana, I asked her what her goals were. She said she would like to be a journalist one day. This does not surprise me since she is a very good writer. Her thirst for learning has helped her to grasp the English language quickly. I believe it is due to her intelligence, her former education, as well as her desire to learn. She has enrolled in ESL classes and loves every minute of them.

Preparing for the Streets

By Claudio R

My name is Claudio. I'm serving a six-year sentence in San Quentin Prison, where I learn how to understand more about myself. In here I have friends and we share part of our lives. Now I live in H-Unit. One of the units is called the Success Dorm. The Success Dorm helps inmates to prepare for the streets. It requires inmates to participate in self-help programs. I'm in the Success Dorm because I want to better myself. One of my programs is Project R.E.A.C.H. It's where I've been learning English, because when I arrived here I had no idea how to write one word in English, and now I have benefited by learning how to read and write in English. I really thank this program and my teachers who are Ms. Nan and Big Red and also to all the tutors that help the program.

For fun we play soccer, dominos, cards and other games. But what I learn in here (R.E.A.C.H.) is how to share part of my life with somebody else. It doesn't matter what race, because I know how to share with all people.

**Project R.E.A.C.H. Tutor: Robert Frye (Rojo)
Inmate Literacy Services**

Claudio is a long-time student of mine, and I have the honor of interacting with him in many capacities. He's affable and a very driven student with a zeal for knowledge. I'm proud to call him my friend.

I'll Start With a "Thank You"

By Cuitlahuac M

When I first got here at San Quentin, I couldn't speak any English. I learned about a program here to help improve lives — Project R.E.A.C.H. I decided to join the program to improve my life. In the class I meet my teachers Ms. Nan and Mr. Rojo. They are the people that have helped me so much. I can now speak some English and with more time to study, I will walk out of here capable to talk to others and do well in my life. I will always be grateful to them because they are the people that have made a difference in my life. I owe them a lot, but I'll start with a "Thank You."

Tutor: Nan Sincero

Project R.E.A.C.H. Tutor: Robert Frye (Rojo)

Inmate Literacy Services

"Cui-cui" told us that he used to watch his friends go off to REACH class every Wednesday night, while he stayed in H-Unit and did nothing. Then, after talking with these friends about learning English, he decided to join them, and we are all glad he did! Cui-cui is an intelligent and kind young man who is now really hungry to learn. He's a joy to have in the class.

Thankful

By Javier Z-N

My soul feels how I need you, [learning] English. Without you I'm nobody, I can't find a good job, I neither speak nor understand, I feel wasted, lost, I can't understand nothing, all around me it's darkness. I need you, REACH Program. I know what I'm needing down into my soul. I miss you when I'm not in [the] classroom. For long, long time I'm looking for you, and finally found you.

REACH, you're my Savior to find a good job. I wanna put all my effort to learn something from you, because you're the best teacher I really know in all my life. Thanks [to] God for giving me this opportunity! Teacher, teach me in your English class. You'll be in my heart forever and nobody can rob your memory out from my heart, like a big and good friend. Teacher, thanks for taking care of me, giving me the best of your help.

In my eyes, you can see what I need of you. In my expression, how to pronounce the word sound, so it's not correct, so I need work in this, as you can see, and this is the best place and time to do it, so I would like [to] continue my study in this class. Thanks [to] God for giving me a 2nd chance and letting me learn a second language and learn a little day by day. Thanks for letting me participate in the REACH program, and also the most important thing, for letting and helping me to have a good and wonderful relationship with all, each person of REACH – Teacher Ms. Nan, Rojo too, pupils, everyone. God love everybody.

**Project R.E.A.C.H. Tutor: Robert Frye (Rojo)
Inmate Literacy Services**

Javier is a newer student who already had a fairly good grasp of English. His biggest struggle is with conjunctions, but he's a great student, always asking questions and is committed to learning.

A Generous Act

By Maria R

My husband works at a big hotel. One day a young couple asked him where cars, that are towed away, are taken. My husband knew, and he left work to drive them to the tow yard. At the tow yard, he waited one and a half hours in line with them. To take the car out would cost \$250.00 and the young couple only had \$25.00. My husband paid their bill with his credit card and hurried back to work, hoping they would pay him back.

One week later, an older couple came to the hotel looking for my husband. With the president, the staff managers at the hotel congratulated him with balloons, a card with money, and a thank you note. They told my husband that the young couple that he helped was their son; and the father is a famous writer for a newspaper in the United States, and he would like to write and publish this story. At the same time, the hotel wrote the story in their magazine.

And now if you are a guest at any Ritz Carlton Hotel in the world, you will read about a driver in San Francisco. His name is Juan J. Isaza.

Note: The story went to the newspaper and somebody read it and sent him \$50,000.

Tutor: Victoria Tuorto
Family Literacy

Maria was born and raised in Huila, Columbia. She and her husband Juan moved to the United States almost 21 years ago. They have been married 22 years and have a daughter named Kathleen who was born in the United States. Maria wants to improve her English skills.



Customs & Culture

My Job in Mexico

By Ofelia M

I am from Jalostotitlan. When I was single, I worked in a company that made feed for cows. My job was to carry the purchased items that passed by on a conveyer belt and put them in a place where the customer could take them to their car or truck. I liked this very much because I could spend all day going from one place to another and I never got bored. My pay was very good. Not every one who worked at that place got paid as well as I did. For this reason I liked my job very much. I never got tired.

Teacher: Carla Twitchell
West Marin Project

Ofelia misses the parties of her native Mexico. She is slowly getting accustomed to life in California. She has been here two years, and learns quickly. She is involved in her children's school programs.

Nostalgia

By Fabiola G

What I miss most is my family, my customs, and the plaza in my town. I remember how much fun I had with my friends. We played basketball and had competitions. When I see piñatas, I remember how much fun we had breaking them and gathering the candy. Now I tell my children that when it's their birthday, we will make a piñata. They like that.

Everything is different in Mexico, but I am slowly getting used to life here because of my children. I want them to have better than what I could give them in Mexico.

Teacher: Carla Twitchell
West Marin Project

Fabiola lives on a ranch in Point Reyes and is active in her children's school. She has lived in the U.S. fourteen years and delights the class with her sense of humor.

Airport Confusion

By Maria B

At the airport in San Diego, there were people from many places showing their documents. Clerks were frustrated trying to get answers to their questions, and immigrants were angry trying to understand what was wanted of them. The people were from different cultures: Arab, Chinese, and Latin. My biggest emotion was fear. I didn't know what they were asking me. My lack of sufficient knowledge of English keeps me from getting better jobs. At the interviews, if I don't understand what is being said, I am not offered the job.

Teacher: Carla Twitchell
West Marin Project

Maria was born in the small, pretty town of Michoacan, Mexico. As a young woman, she moved to Guadalajara where she married and had four children, who are all married now. She also has ten nephews and nieces whom she misses very much. Maria came to the U.S. to learn about the people and customs, and to explore different types of work. In Guadalajara, she was a nurse in a hospital but became bored and tired of the routine. Now she wants to try other things before getting old. She participates in a conversation group helping her American friends learn Spanish.

Crossing the Border

By Raymundo P

When our group tried to cross the border, we were assaulted by some bandits who took all our money and valuables. We tried again, but the border patrol saw us and we had to hide in an abandoned car where we spent the night. We were caught, and again deported. An immigration officer told us that if we followed orders and returned to Mexico, nothing else would happen to us. He said he had to turn us back, or he would lose his job. I suffered other misfortunes until I finally got to Pt. Reyes.

Life here is very different, mainly because of the language. It's true that there are very nice people who try to teach us their language, but it is difficult to begin a new life. When I started working here, I was told by an American that it would be better for me to work with English-speaking people rather than Spanish speakers so I would pick up the language more quickly. He said that if I stayed with the Spanish speakers, I would always remain in low-paying menial jobs.

It's true that this is a country with many opportunities, but for an immigrant, it is very difficult because we don't have as many rights as do the citizens. We suffered to get here and must show that we can go forward and overcome the pitfalls and misadventures. I know that with much effort, I will succeed. I would do it all again.

Teacher: Carla Twitchell
West Marin Project

Raymundo was born in a small town in Mexico. When he came home from school, he would help his father in the fields. There was very little entertainment or hope of advancing his life, so he decided to take a career course at college. His parents didn't want him to spend his life in the fields as they had. He studied two years, and then began to work for the company Pemex as an assistant electrician. He married and had two children but had to leave them when he came to this country in hopes of a better economic future. He is determined to refine his English skills.

Differences

By Araceli F

There are more and better jobs in the U.S. than in Mexico. The salaries in the U.S. are better, we have more benefits, and we pay less for our house. Here when we work on the ranches, a place to live is included with the work. In Mexico we have to pay rent.

I feel safer in the U.S. than in Mexico. In Mexico, my grandmother's house was robbed three times. The thieves cut a hole through the roof which was made of adobe and wooden beams.

The food in Mexico is spicier, and the parties last longer than in the U.S. Parties are for the whole town, and they last two or three days. We have mariachis and dancing at the parties. In Mexico, when we babysit for relatives, we are not paid, even by the relatives. Here we are paid, even by relatives.

Teacher: Carla Twitchell
West Marin Project

In Mexico, Araceli helped her father milk cows, clear the fields of rocks, and plant corn, wheat, and alfalfa for the livestock. She started driving a pickup when she was ten. There were fourteen in her family, and she saw that her parents suffered and worked hard to support the family. It was particularly hard in the years of drought. She comes to English class with her sister, adult niece, and children.

The Road of Hope

By Maria R

Nine years ago, I arrived on foot in Texas. We had driven to the border by car. There I arranged my legal documents. When the immigration officers saw my son with his little suitcase, they laughed.

It happened that when we were at the airport to come to San Francisco, we left our briefcase with all our documents at the ticket counter. When we were on the plane, I asked my husband, "Where is our briefcase?" He replied, "Oh, I don't know!" We spoke to one of the attendants, but she did not understand us. We waved our hands and arms to try to make her understand, and she told us to get off the plane and catch the next one. It was all very difficult because no one understood us. It felt as if I had been hit in the head, but after half an hour, we found the briefcase and got on the next plane.

My husband was the first one to come to the United States. After six or seven years, he sent for me and the children. It was a long time, but it was worth the wait. At the airport, people were friendly, but because we didn't know English, we ran away instead of trying to talk to them.

Teacher: Carla Twitchell
West Marin Project

Maria lives in Petaluma with her husband and two sons. One son is working, the other is in high school, and Maria works part-time. She has been attending English Class for four years.

No Regrets

By Guadalupe R

When I arrived here and saw my brother, I felt a great emotion because I had not seen him in two years. Later I met my sister-in-law and nephew. I rested awhile then saw my sister and met my other nieces and nephews. I was happy to see them, but at the same time I was sad to have left my parents and my life among my friends. But this is a pretty place and now I know Pt. Reyes better. If I had stayed in Mexico, I could have continued with my education, but I have no regrets. We have better jobs and more money here, but life is more difficult because we can't get a drivers license. We are always worried about incurring traffic violations where we might lose our car, or get in trouble with the laws.

Teacher: Carla Twitchell
West Marin Project

Guadalupe worked as a sales clerk in a paper store while she was going to school. After earning her diploma, she came to the U.S. and stayed a year and three months. She returned to work in Guadalajara where she was happy going around with her family and friends. She returned to the U.S. with her brothers. She now lives with her sister and is hoping that her parents can soon come to live with them. She is a shy but conscientious student.

Las Vegas

By Leticia H

It is a very pretty place, big, with many lights, streets, freeways, large stores, and a lot of Latino people. In Las Vegas, I met many people that were friendly and we went out to get to know the city. We bought clothing in which to meet my family. Everything was very nice for me.

Leaving my home in Mexico to come to the U.S. was an adventure that I never thought would happen to me. I didn't think I could make it, and I wanted to turn back, but when I thought about wanting a better life, and the sacrifice of leaving my little girl in Mexico, I continued for her sake.

Teacher: Carla Twitchell
West Marin Project

Leticia comes from the small town of San Salvador near Puebla, Mexico. She lived with seven siblings, but after her mother died four years ago, each followed a different path. She is 24 years old and has a five-year-old daughter. Since she didn't know what life would be like in the U.S., she left her daughter with her father and sister, but misses her very much. She is a lively student and eager to learn.

The Dentist

By Pilar B

My daughter Laura was baptized in Mexico, and I was happy about that.

I took my son to the dentist to check his teeth. They gave him an anesthetic to pull out his tooth. In Mexico, the doctors do not ask a lot of questions like here, to see what the problem is or to determine the condition of the patient. After that, we went to Los Angeles to celebrate my son's birthday with my sister and her family. We ate chicken, soda, and dessert. It was very nice.

Teacher: Carla Twitchell
West Marin Project

Pilar grew up in her grandmother's care. She helped a couple who owned a pharmacy. She visits her family in Mexico and in Los Angeles. She is a faithful student of English.

Two Births

By Marta A

The births of my two children were very different. In Mexico, my child was born by Caesarean section. The doctors put me in a room where there were more than fifteen other women. This is typical of those who have insurance from their employer. They told me that everything was fine, but in the end they made me sign for a Caesarean operation without explaining why. Here in Petaluma, it was not like that. Here they took care of me very well. I was in a room by myself and they were always keeping an eye on me. For this reason, I would like to have another child here.

Teacher: Carla Twitchell
West Marin Project

Marta lived in a small town until her father sold the house because the roads to the stores and school were difficult to drive. In the new town, she met her husband and married him seven years later. She and her husband and children go on errands and visits on his day off. She is happy to be attending English class and is the youngest member of our group.

Coming to Tomales

By Maria R

With another woman, I entered through San Isidro and arrived in the town of Buena Vista. I stayed there a year with my son and his family and then came to Tomales. I passed through the immigration line without any misfortunes. They told me only, “go forward,” which I did.

Teacher: Carla Twitchell
West Marin Project

Maria lost three children: one in pregnancy, one as an infant, and a teenage son in an accident. She now lives with one of her nine remaining children in Tomales. She is respected by her younger fellow students who encourage her eagerness to learn English.



Families

Learning a Language

By Yen P

It is so hard to live in a new country and you do not know their language. I still remember when I came to the United States with a little bit of English. Every time I went out I was so nervous because people talked to me so fast, I didn't understand them. I never thought how difficult it would be for me to live in America when I didn't speak English. Everything depended on my husband; even a job he found for me.

Then I started to work. I had a chance to speak English. I tried to talk with my coworkers, so I learned more from them. After work I took ESL class.

When I moved to San Rafael, I heard of the Marin Literacy Program. Now I have a great tutor who helps me a lot. Something I don't know, she tries to explain it for me. My English is much better than before. I can help my kids with their homework. I can communicate with people.

I was planning, that when I had children, I would raise them and talk to them about the value of education. Now I am lucky to have two beautiful children. My son's name is Philip who attends first grade and my daughter is Michelle, she is in kindergarten. I and my husband will work hard to give them a better education than us. We hope one day it is coming true.

Tutor: Milly Oppenheimer
Family Literacy

Yen has learned and retained much new vocabulary in the last two years. Since she is eager to learn more about the culture and history of her new country, we enjoy spending part of our time in conversation about a wide variety of subjects.

My Dream

By Sotero A

To my daughter Ashley and my wife Ana.
I want a better life for me, my wife, and Ashley, who is my daughter.

It is the reason why I am taking this program which really helps me a lot.

Being a chef is one of my goals. I decided to be a chef because it will help me to get a better job. One of my dreams is to open a small restaurant with a good view to the ocean, big windows, some pictures from Mexico, and Latin music. I would have an unusual kitchen in the middle of the restaurant. I am thinking about Mexican food. It will have my good taste and be original dishes.

Right now I am working so hard and saving some money.

This life is giving me the experiences to get my dream and someday I hope to do that.

Tutor: Dianne Sheridan
Family Literacy

I have been working with Sotero for over a year. He is an eager and motivated student. His goals of improving his English skills and eventually having his own restaurant are part of an greater desire that his family will have a good life together.

Macias Family Dreams

By **Beatriz (Betty) and Juan Carlos M**

We were married on February 19, 2003. We came to this country for a better life. We have one son, Carlitos, who was born on April 25, 2005. We are a happy family.

Carlos works six days a week at the cheese factory in Point Reyes. Carlitos and Betty stay at home. Sunday we go to church and then visit family in Cotati.

We like living in the United States. In Mexico there is no work. If you need an operation, you are told to go home and come back when you have the money. The minimum salary is four dollars a day.

We like studying English because it is necessary for our future. We have many dreams. Some day, we hope to make the dreams real. We dream of buying a house and owning a business – a Mexican grocery store. We dream that Carlitos will go to the University one day. We want for Carlitos to not do heavy work, but to work with his head, not with his body.

Betty's father said every day, "Study, study for a better life." When Carlos was seven, he was working in a cow food factory, putting corn and soy into bags, so he could help his mother buy food. She also said to study for a better life.

Tutor: John Haas
West Marin Project

Carlos and Betty are both from Jalostotitlan in the state of Jalisco, Mexico. They live on a ranch in Point Reyes Station, CA. They have been in the Marin Literacy Program since September 2004. Betty studies photography. Her work was included in a student exhibit at Gallery Route One.

Step by Step in Life

By Mergyul A

This is a sequel to my first story. I want to share with you how my life has become better every day since I came to the USA. My education is still going on; beauty school and English classes in the public library. This program and my tutor help me to develop my abilities. My favorite place to visit with my daughter is the library. We have time to read books and play games.

Now I want to tell you about my family. My husband works and takes care of our daughter, Berna, after school. She's in second grade and a very good student. When I have time, I like to spend time with kids in Berna's class. We read stories and play math games. I am so happy because now I am able to help my daughter with her homework.

My work in the beauty salon is going very well. I like to tell my friends and clients about Bulgarian traditions, history and food. I like to share recipes. They are very interested in European culture and many of them are going to visit Europe.

My life is enriching quickly because English gives me step-by-step progress to be a person who I am now.

Tutor: David Layne
Family Literacy

When Mergyul arrived in the U.S, approximately two and a half years ago, she was able to speak some English. However, often, her then six-year-old daughter had to help translate from English to Bulgarian. Mergyul owned a beauty shop in Bulgaria. She is now studying to obtain a license to practice her trade in California. She expects to complete her class work and sit for her license in November of 2006.

My Dream: Now It's a Reality

By Julia M

Years ago I had a dream that I lived in the United States. My name is Julia. I'm from Peru where there is this wonderful place, called Machupicchu. I arrived in the United States on December 2nd, 2004, at 12:00 pm. When I flew over San Francisco, I saw two big bridges that felt magnetic to me.

On December 3rd, I went to San Francisco with my sister and mother. We visited the tomb of my godmother and grandmother. They were my treasures, but my God gave me two more treasures, they are my parents.

My goals are to speak English very well, to teach in kindergarten, to have my own childcare with my younger sister, a husband and two children, my own home, and to travel to other countries.

Now I live in Novato with my older sister, brother-in-law, niece, and nephew. We are a great family. I'm happy because I have a friendly English tutor, her name is Rachel. Every Sunday I'm learning more English when Rachel and I work together.

Everyday I tell God, "Thank you for my life because I'm always meeting wonderful people."

I dreamt it and now I live it.

Tutor: Rachel Dent
MLP Main Program

Julia is a university graduate from Lima, Peru, where she worked as a kindergarten teacher. About a year ago, Julia left Peru to live with her two sisters in Novato. She arrived here with very little knowledge of English but very motivated to learn so she can work and become independent. She also studies ESL at College of Marin and at Human Needs in Novato. As a teacher, Julia is very much in tune with her own needs as a student and has helped make me a better tutor for her.

The Gate

By Dominick B

My little Hon and I are sitting on that special hillside that I picked out so many years before when I was her age. We lean back and she starts to ask the questions. When did they first start to build it, Dad? How high is it, Dad? Can we walk across it, Dad? I answer all the questions for her, but no matter how many times I see it, I'm just as awed as she is. It's my favorite landmark in California. No matter how many times I drive or walk across it, I'm still intimidated by its majesty; there is nothing as regal as this special bridge. I feel that just walking across this bridge makes me part of her history. Then my little one asks the inevitable question – how come, Dad, they call it The Golden Gate when it's really red? I look at her and say "To me, Hon, it's the royalty of the Bay and it's always golden."

Teacher: Stella McCready
Inmate Literacy Services

Dominick is a 50-year-old gentleman who loves to read everything from Steinbeck to Edgar Rice Burroughs. His favorite subject in school was World History. He enjoys kayaking, an interest he shares with his teenage daughter.

My Dream

By Julio A

When I moved from San Carlos Sila to California, it was very hard because I left my friends and family. When I got here I was surprised because this is a very big country where I can have anything I want to have. It wasn't important for me to learn the language because I was thinking of going back to my little town. But all my plans changed when I met my wife one year after I got here to the U.S.

We had our first baby six years later. We decided to have another baby. My family is the most important thing to me. I want to give them everything I never had. This is my American Dream now. Also I would like to say thanks to Kathleen, who is my tutor, and thanks to the people who work in the literacy program.

Tutor: Kathleen Weinberg
Family Literacy

When Julio realized he wasn't going back to Guatemala, he worked hard to learn English on his own and has done an outstanding job. Julio is working towards gaining U.S. citizenship, furthering his career, and being the best parent he can be. I admire him for those goals and so much more.

My Big Change

By Yajaira A

When I came to the USA I felt strange because I didn't speak English and I didn't understand anything. My dad brought me to the USA to study English. But I was missing friends and especially my family. This was the first time I was separated from them and I felt so strange because this is a different country. I was thinking to live here for a few years and then go back to El Salvador, but something changed my plans.

I met my husband, the man who changed my life, and I have two beautiful kids.

Now I am studying English because I want to have good communication with my kids and for the future too. I want to say thanks to Kathleen for being my tutor and also thanks to the Marin Literacy Program.

Tutor: Kathleen Weinberg
Family Literacy

Yajaira juggles work, marriage, motherhood, and still has the energy to further her education and the education of her kids. She would like to pass the GED test, and it's evident that with her will to learn, this is possible. It's a joy being a part of such admirable goals.

My Life Has Changed

By Alejandra D

In my country, El Salvador, life was very difficult when I was small. My father died. My three brothers and five sisters were very young. I worked a lot because I didn't have money to pay for my school.

I graduated Secretarial Studies. Next I got a diploma in Computation. I worked every day. One day I decided to come to the United States. My life changed, I needed to help my mother. She's old and life is hard.

After I went to California, I needed to find work even part time. Now I have been babysitting to support myself. There were many people who needed help to speak Spanish because they spoke dialect. I volunteered to teach them but I also needed to speak English. Next I went to the San Rafael Library. Now I have a tutor. She's Sonya Gambera. Now I can speak a little English.

In my country I never had a boyfriend. Now I have a Guatemalan boyfriend. I'm pregnant and my baby will be born in April. Now my family is happy. I love you my baby!

Tutor: Sonya Gambera
MLP Main Program

Alejandra came to California from El Salvador about 6 years ago. She started in the Marin Literacy Program in October 2004. She is looking forward to the birth of her child in April 2006. Improving her English is important to her.

The Thread of Life

By Laura G

My first time that I have my boy was in San Francisco, in 1988. He is 18 years old [now] and I have one more. His name is Omar Alberto. He was born in Marin County in 1997. Now he is 9 years old. My older boy is graduating this year and I am happy. I hope that he will go to college. My other boy will start middle school this fall. I hope that my other boy goes to college too because I think there are more open doors to this life. I think that it is important to have an education. I think that it is never too late to learn.

Tutor: Beth Galletto
Family Literacy

I have been working with Laura for several years now and I am always impressed with her determination to succeed. She has been through hard times in her life, but nothing stops her. She keeps working hard to make her life better for herself and for her children.

My Wish

By Maria Elena S

My name is Maria Elena and I am 39 years old. I was born in Michoacan, Mexico, and I am married for 19 years. I have six girls and two boys. My older son Eduardo has one more year in school to graduate. The rest are still in school and have a lot to go through. My third daughter is preparing for her fifteenth birthday.

Our main goal is to buy a house for our kids' future. I want to learn English so I can help them in their homework and to communicate with people better. I know I have a big family, but after all, I am really happy and proud of my family.

Teacher: Virginie Kortekaas
West Marin Project

Maria Elena first came to this country 18 years ago. Between her eight children and her job as a housekeeper, she still manages to find time to attend ESL classes every Saturday morning! She is very dedicated to learning English because she wants to help her children with their homework. Her children are her pride and her happiness.

I Couldn't Find Phoebe!

By Ana Angelia R

I wanted to say about my little daughter, 8 year old Phoebe. She has her first class dance presentation. She has make-up with red lips, mascara lashes, blue eyes, big, big, earrings and a braided hair piece with a big rose flower.

She looked beautiful and different.

My two nephews and my sister-in-law were looking for Phoebe to take her picture but they couldn't find Phoebe. She looked so different.

Tutor: Carla Thomas
MLP Main Program

Ana is studying English so she can better help Phoebe. Ana's family does everything together. They are a special family.

Illness

By Claudia P

My husband had pneumonia. He was in the hospital for three days, and the doctor told him to rest for two or three weeks. His boss was upset because that was too much time to lose from work, and my husband was the one who took care of the cows. My husband has been working on the ranch for ten years, but he had to go back to work after resting only seven days. When he got sick, I felt badly also because I wanted to help him, but I couldn't help him breathe. He had a fever of 110 degrees, stomach ache, and headache. In the hospital, they covered his whole body with wet towels, and they gave him antibiotics and oxygen. When he came home from the hospital, I tried to take care of him and now he is much better with my help, care, and love. We will overcome this with the help of God.

Teacher: Carla Twitchell
West Marin Project

Claudia was the ninth of twelve children. She married at sixteen and had her first child at seventeen. It was a difficult pregnancy. Now she has two boys and a girl. She is a leader of our Tomales group of students.

My Peaceful Yucatan Childhood

By Gabriela A

I was born in a little town near Merida, Yucatan. I'm the fourth of five children. By the time I was born, I had two sisters and a brother. My father was working as a baker and my mother as a housewife. My younger sister was born when I was six years old. I grew up with my parents, my siblings, and grandparents, close to my uncles, aunts and cousins. My grandfather had a big house where I could run all around with my siblings and cousins. That life was peaceful.

My grandparents died when I was fifteen years old. Then my family and I moved to Merida. In that city, my parents had a small business. Two years later my oldest sister got married and came to live in this country. My other sisters and brother got married too and moved to other cities. My brother has been living in Coahuila and my sister has been living in Quintana Roo since they moved from Merida. My parents are retired now. They still live in Merida with my daughters and I am living in this country with my husband, but I want to go back to Merida.

Tutor: Olivia Parkinson
MLP Main Program

Gabriela is an amazing woman. In Mexico, she earned her PhD in plant biotechnology, and worked cloning genes to save pineapple from disease. Her English includes such words as mitochondria and radioactive! She came to America to learn English to further her career. Her goal is a big and admirable one: to be able to speak and understand English well enough to get a job in a lab. I think they will be lucky to get this bright wonderful woman.

A Short Distance From Home

By Daniel L

You were always looking upon us from the outside; torn by the devastating divorce of our parents. It affected you the deepest... my poor beautiful sister.

It must be lonely out there away from the façade of happiness. At least come in and pretend that the world is a wonderful place. Have you been crying all day? I have been too.

The wind is picking up and the sun is beginning to settle. It's going to start getting cold and the repairs on the house are almost finished. I hope that your broken heart will mend in the same fashion.

Come in and let's forget about all of this for a while. I need you big sister. We can run and laugh like we always do. We don't have to hide anymore.

The night fell and now you're gone. I miss you every day but in my heart you're only a short distance from home. May peace be with you until we meet again. I love you Lori Diane.

Teacher: Stella McCready
Inmate Literacy Services

Daniel is a super energetic 32-year-old who loves to point out life's foibles and quirks in his writing. Daniel's bravado is usually hidden behind enthusiastic dialogue and good-natured, amusing writing. His serious writing, as expressed in this piece, often starts at a very deep place and then blossoms into an expression of powerful love and caring.



Insights & Dreams

Becoming a U.S. Citizen

By Alicia R

Fifteen years ago, my children and I moved to the United States from Mexico. My husband, Efren, was already living in California. We live in this country because there is more opportunity for work. For me, the most important reason to become an American citizen is to be able to vote. I want to help choose our leaders in Marin County, the State of California, and the Federal government.

Filling out the application form to become a citizen is very difficult, because I am still learning English, but my tutor helped me. Two weeks later I received an appointment to get fingerprinted. The next step was to prepare for the interview and test. I was nervous, because I didn't know anything about American history, and thought the test would be hard.

I took an English class and a special class to prepare for the citizenship test. My friends, Lupe, Elvia, and I went to Petaluma once a week for three months. It was fun because every week we studied American history together. When I finished the course, I continued to study with my tutor. We made flash cards, one for each practice question, and games to test each other. Some days I had more correct than she did! I studied for 6 months and learned what I needed for the test. The letter finally came with the interview date. My tutor and I went to San Francisco together on the ferry. I was nervous, but looking back, the test was easy.

A month later, I went to the swearing-in ceremony. I felt very emotional. After thinking about this for so many years, I couldn't believe I was finally here at the ceremony. My three children and my friend Martha came with me. The ceremony was in a large auditorium with more than 1,000 new American citizens. And now I can vote!

Tutor: Martha Danly
West Marin Project

Alicia came to the U.S. from Mexico. Her children attend Santa Rosa Junior College, and Tomales High School. Today is Easter Sunday, and I am enjoying a bowl of menudo at Alicia's kitchen table.

Things I Am Learning in Prison

By Ramon H S

My name is Ramon. I was born in Sinaloa, Mexico. When I came to the United States from Mexico, I came with an illusion of being able to help my family. What followed instead was me ending up in prison.

I give thanks that I have learned to speak a little English. With the help of my teachers, and the tutors at the REACH Program assisting me, I hope to be able to improve my skills in the language. I must remain in prison for the next thirty-one months, but I hope, in that time, to learn all I can to be able to give a better future to my family.

Some of the things that I have done in the past have been bad, but now I have left that life behind ... I have others to protect now. I came to prison because I used drugs. Now, with this opportunity, I want to study English to get a job in order for my family to live better.

**Project R.E.A.C.H. Tutor: Tom Torchia
Inmate Literacy Services**

It has been a distinct pleasure to coach Ramon in his usage of the English language. Several of the men who come to Project REACH have become personal friends of mine. Yet, beyond this, I have learned more Spanish from them than they have learned English from me.

I Got a Big Surprise

By Cristina B

One day I opened an English book and I started to read. I read two paragraphs. When I was halfway to the next one, I stopped reading the book. Then I closed it. After that, I moved away from the desk to a quiet spot. I started to celebrate my success. I couldn't believe what was happening to me. I was so grateful. I was reading English.

After that, I started to go to the Marin Literacy Program. My English has improved and my books have been open since then. Also, I keep turning the pages, and I've been looking for more.

Tutor: Madeleine Provost
MLP Main Program

Cristina has been in the Marin Literacy Program since 2003 and has become a regular contributor to the student book of writings. In September 2005, when MLP initiated a new program called the book discussion group, Cristina was our first intrepid member and she has been an active participant in our bi-weekly meetings ever since. It has been a privilege and a pleasure to be a part of the same reading group as Cristina, and I particularly enjoy hearing about her childhood experiences in the Dominican Republic.

My Family

By Maria F

I am Maria and I would like to share with everybody one of my many dreams. It is that I would like my kids to study for a good career. I would like my son Angel, 9, to be a lawyer, so he can help defend everybody who does not know the laws, especially people from Mexico. For my daughter, Yadira, 8, I would like her to be a veterinarian because she likes animals a lot, especially dogs. I want the best for my children.

**Teacher: Virginie Kortekaas
West Marin Project**

Maria is from Mexico and has been here for three years. She works as a babysitter and helps out at the Bodega Bay Elementary School, where she prepares snacks for the children and assists wherever she is needed. She has a gentle and warm personality, and works hard on her English. She is a wonderful mom to her two children, who helped her write her story.

My Family Dreams

By Mirella P

H! My name is Mirella. I came here from Mexico. I have been living in California for 13 years. I'm married and I have two children. My sons' dreams are to play guitar like a professional and go to college.

My husband and I dream that we will learn more English and get a better job, and make our children's dreams come true. I would also like to fulfill my own life-long dream. When I was a girl in Mexico, there was never money to go to school and become a teacher. Now I'm working in my children's school. I help all the children with homework. My dream is slowly becoming a reality.

Teacher: Virginie Kortekaas
West Marin Project

Mirella is a very bright and energetic woman who works as a parent coordinator and aide in her children's school. She loves to draw and dance and help her children with their homework. She has a warm, outgoing personality, is very organized and involved both in school and in the community, and I think she would make a wonderful teacher.

Life is Too Short

By Yaneth A

Life is too short. Every day people are eating and drinking because tomorrow they will die.

But they are forgetting something very important. They are never thinking of God.

The promise of God is: one day life won't be too short. If you like this promise, you need to read the Bible. When you are reading the Bible, you are more happy in your life and never think any more that life is too short.

Tutor: Carla Thomas
Family Literacy

Yaneth is a full time preacher of Jehovah's good news to his human family.

Releasing My Spirit From Its Prison

By Alexis L

Being an addict of crystal meth, my spirit has been imprisoned for the past 10 years. Reading Michelle Jessamy's quote, "Release my spirit from its own prison," hit me like a ton of bricks. Being incarcerated for about half of the sixteen months I have been clean has actually helped me to learn how to release my spirit from its prison, as well.

As a young child, my inner spirit was as free as the wind; with my imagination and creativity running away with me at times. When I tried crystal meth for the first time at 15, I immediately put bars and walls around my spirit, imprisoning it and enabling me to become the person I thought everyone else thought I should be. Through writing and reading and meditation, I am learning day by day how to release my spirit from the prison I built around it.

**Tutor: Mary Jo Bassing
Inmate Literacy Services**

Alexis is a bright young woman and pretty upbeat most of the time. She has talked about having missed a good part of her relatively young life because of drugs and she knows she cannot get that time back. She is interested in art, among other things, and I think would like to have a life that includes art as a pastime or as part of a career. She is capable of succeeding at any number of things, if she puts her mind to it.

Dreaming for a Better Future

By Maria H

My dream is to learn English and to get a better job. To learn English is really important to me because knowing and understanding it will make my future more successful. It will also help me by helping my daughters in their homework.

I have 22 years of marriage. I have four kids. There are two girls and two boys.

My other dream is to have two houses of mine. One here, and one in Mexico where my parents and my brothers and sisters live. But what I really want is for my sons and daughters to go to college and study a great career.

Teacher: Virginie Kortekaas
West Marin Project

Even though Maria has been in this country for 22 years, she has had very little exposure to the English language and has never learned how to drive, which she regrets. Now, however, she expresses a strong desire to better herself and learn English. Her oldest daughter helped her to write her story. Maria is very motivated and works hard at her English homework and in her job at a creamery.

My Life

By Isabel T

Hi. My name is Isabel. I am 25 years old and my partner is 29 years old.

I have five years in the United States. We are so happy because I am pregnant. I like my life in this country, because I can work for some money, and now I can help my mom and siblings. I want to learn English for better work and someday make my house in Mexico, for a better future for my baby. My dream is someday to come back to Mexico because I miss too much my family, the food, the culture, the freedom, and all.

Teacher: Virginie Kortekaas
West Marin Project

Isabel is a bright young woman who arrived here from Mexico five years ago. Right now she works in housekeeping, but she studies very hard and would love to become a cashier. She is a wonderful student who always helps others in class. She will be a great mother and is very excited about her first baby, who is due to arrive in October.

Some Day I May Rise

By Kevin W

I n the ground, out of sight
in this County of numbers
which everyone counts
and hates and wants,
I sit in a cell
small enough to recognize every shadow
and try to put all the words in the right order
but all the pronouns have been confiscated.
And there is of course madness
and terror too,
in knowing there's
a ticking under your shirt
A clock
that can never
be wound again
once it stops. . .
Some day I may rise
out of this pit,
and holding myself together whole,
will smile on the living world again
And if I feel
two inches shorter than myself
I'll stand real straight
and maybe no one will notice.

Teacher: Stella McCreedy
Inmate Literacy Services

Kevin has a wonderful talent for using the English language in a carefree and expressive way. He loves playing with familiar words in new ways. He enjoys using his imaginative writing to explore and express life's questions.

My Many Dreams

By Maria C

Hi. My name is Maria. I am 39 years old. My husband and I came to the United States in the year 1989. It has almost been 17 years that I have not seen my family in Mexico.

We have three kids, 15, 11, and 9. My husband is a citizen and I am a resident. I am happy because I can go visit my family in Mexico now.

The life in the United States is very fast but everybody gets used to it. Everything is very different. The first thing is the language, but now my kids help. Even though I have a long time living in USA, I don't know a lot of English. I go to school so I can learn it more. One of my dreams was to have a house, and we already made that dream come true. Now the principal thing of my dreams is that my kids be professionals.

Teacher: Virginie Kortekaas
West Marin Project

Maria is a warm and radiant woman with a ready smile, who comes to class with her niece and nephew. She is a wonderful mother to her three children and keeps long hours as a housekeeper, yet she diligently does her homework. Her smiling face is like a ray of sunshine.

What Do We All Have in Common?

By Tina G

We are all women and obviously we are here for some crime that we did at some point in our lives. We were all trying to fulfill some kind of need that we were missing in our regular life, whatever addiction it might have been. Drugs and alcohol are not the only addiction; getting a rush from getting away with something is a real adrenaline kick and that can be considered an addiction. I just feel we are missing something inside – some kind of emotion. But if we only let our problems and worries to God we would never have made the mistakes we made. Instead of pulling together as women, we are separate from each other, which is sad.

**Tutor: Mary Jo Bassing
Inmate Literacy Services**

Tina has been through a lot emotionally since she came to jail and has come to accept whatever the consequences may be of the behavior that landed her there. English is her mother tongue but she speaks unaccented Spanish and willingly translates for Hispanic women in the class who have trouble understanding English. Tina is good to others and never puts herself first. A career as a translator is a real possibility for her.

Women in Action

By Linda F

My name is Linda and I am a single mother. My niece Lilly was talking to me about opening a business, a massage and beauty spa. In December I talked to Marilu, my daughter, and she said it is a good idea. I do, too. Two years ago Lilly and I took a small business class in Oakland and graduated, so we learned a lot about opening a small business. Lilly has experience in the spa and beauty shop, but not my daughter and me. We need to go to school to get the license. This is most important. Now I got a loan so we got money for the business and school. Lilly got a loan too. Marilu starts school in April, and I might to go to a night school in Santa Rosa. We need to be able to do all the jobs in case someone is out sick, or on vacation. Our customers need and deserve to be taken care of, so that the customer returns. We have a real estate person looking at places for our business, and have people who can fix it up for us, to have areas for nails, hair, make-up, and massage rooms. We went to LA and looked at different places to get the best prices for furniture and everything for the beauty and spa salon, all the beauty supplies and decorations. This year we will be ready to open "Solymar's Serenity Spa." We will advertise our opening in the newspaper, radio station, and flyers so the people know the location. Everybody is welcome. We will have a grand opening with surprises, such as gifts for our first customers.

Tutor: Doris Enberg
MLP Main Program

Linda and I have been working together for a few years and have gotten to be good friends. When we get together, we talk about what's going on in each other's lives. I think the conversations are an important part of our lessons. Her English and comprehension skills have really improved. Her story attests to what an energetic and optimistic person she is. I admire her strength, courage, determination, and great sense of humor, and value our time together.



Reflections

In Time

By Douglas W

Remembering my life like a song...

Carrying through the rhythms of sweet music
Light-hearted or denied – moments never left behind.

Reflecting back upon my mind, my memories
Like a gentle touch ... freedom from my pain.

Living all things merely in the moment
Through the ringing of a bell or the vibrant sounds of voices.

Calling out a chorus from somewhere lost, yet, not forgotten
Where we live and love within the sound of sighs on high winds.

Moving my soul are so many memories,
Echoes of my past heart – inside my mind and within my heart.

Harmonizing sounds of birds in song in flights of fancy,
Familiar upon my face as summer rain, as withheld tears I've not yet cried.

Ending softly – a reluctant reminder of fond memories – of lost loves.

Teacher: Stella McCready
Inmate Literacy Services

At age 52, Douglas looks back in this writing, "In Time," to find clues and meaning for the future. Music has always been and continues to be an important part of his life. In a recent self-appraisal writing, he stated that "Learning is my passion. Animals are what stirs my heart. Kindness is what I hope to leave others as my gift."

Experiences with Friends

By Jesus R

There are a lot of good experiences that I still have in my memory. Things like playing games together, school time, walking around town, traveling, working together, and a lot of hobbies. But the nicest experience is when we grew up together.

Growing up with my friends was a very good experience. We went through a lot of good things and I am never going to forget. I remember when we played soccer and almost all the time we were fighting at the end of the game because we didn't want to lose. But later on the next day we forgot all about the fight and we were playing together again. I have good friends from those experiences. I have a very good friend, his name is Salvador. He is a very good soccer player, the best of the team. He is also good at playing guitar. Sometimes he brought his guitar to my parents' house and played and we both sang. Maybe we scared the whole neighborhood, but I think we didn't care too much about that. Each time I go back to Mexico, he always is looking for me. We talk about many things and we remember many of those good times we passed through together.

Remembering everything I have done with my friends since I was a boy until I was a teenager is always a good experience. Remembering is like living all those good times again.

Tutor: Deborah Jones
West Marin Project

Jesus came from Mexico to work in the U.S. when he was 18. He lives here now with his wife and four children. We have been working together for 4 years as he is studying to get his GED. He is a good student, family man, and friend.

Remembering Mississippi Magic

Artis H

Man, we had so much fun at the old tree in Mississippi!
I remember the big rope ooh, ooh, whee, whee! My turn.

I remember all the boys taken chances. Don't let go boy!
I remember the berry bushes...
I remember the smell of the cows in the pasture – the moo's, moo's.
Man, I miss that!

I wonder how the rest of the family are doing now.
I had so much fun back then.
I remember the cotton fields.
I remember the long dirt road and the animals.
I remember trying to catch the pigs – that big hog was mean!
Man, I miss that!

Teacher: Stella McCready
Inmate Literacy Services

Artis is a quiet, sensitive gentleman who enjoys recording his youthful memories in prose bordering on poetry. His writings, a newly found talent for expression, are filled with bittersweet memories of his childhood.

My First Impression

By Jose G

I passed through Hollywood on my way to Los Angeles. It is a big city with neon lights, limousines, and expensive cars. The freeways in Los Angeles are complicated with many exits and entrances, and the people drive very fast. The gas stations are automatic and more technological than the ones in Mexico where attendants still pump the gas. The tall buildings impressed me by their architecture. I like Los Angeles because it's a beautiful city. It is clean and there are a lot of people in the streets. In Mexico there are more buses than cars.

Teacher: Carla Twitchell
West Marin Project

Jose is proud of his two little girls who live in Mexico. He lived in Mexico City where he had various restaurant jobs. He is anxious to return to Mexico to be a good father to his children. He works in a restaurant in Point Reyes. In English class, he often assists the teacher in explaining the English lesson to his peers.

Los Angeles

By Martin G

One of my first impressions of Los Angeles was seeing such tall buildings, and such neat and well-constructed streets. It happened that I came during a rainy period. I felt good because I was with nice people and was near my destination. We walked together around the city. For this reason I can say that Los Angeles is very nice. My life has been very different since I arrived in the U.S. It is very difficult for me to go shopping because I don't understand what people are saying. I'm happy when I can be with people from my country because we can share memories.

Teacher: Carla Twitchell
West Marin Project

Martin is happy to be living in Point Reyes with brothers he has not seen in many years. He finished high school in Mexico where he was a metal worker. He is the newest member of our English class.

A Part of My Life

By Flor M

A part of my life is written in the book *The May Queen*, edited by my tutor Nicki Richesin. Nicki and I worked together to write this for her book.

I feel satisfied with this work because many people will have the opportunity to read my story and the message from it. The wish is to try and have a better life and give this to your kids.

Sometimes we can try to give happiness to our children by keeping their parents together, but in many cases it doesn't seem right and it is hard to recognize that the man we chose is not the best person to be a father.

I have already started over in my life and am married with Andres, a Mexican man, and we have two lovely boys, Erick and Jonathan. I have to say thanks to the Marin Literacy Program because with the tutor program, I know my tutor Nicki who gave me her time for free and helped me with the challenges in this country.

Tutor: Nicki Richesin
Family Literacy

*Flor is such an incredible woman. She faced what would seem insurmountable hardships to come to this country and leave her home in El Salvador. She has sacrificed a great deal for her children and is a wonderful mother, wife, and friend. I consider myself so fortunate to have met Flor four years ago, and having her in my life has been such a gift. She has shown such generosity and kindness to my family. When she slowly started sharing her story with me, I realized how important it was to include it in the anthology of women's stories I was editing. You can read more about Flor's story in her essay, "Crossing the Border," in *The May Queen: Women on Life, Love, Work, and Pulling it all Together in Your 30's* (Tarcher / 2006).*

Tucson

By Beatriz G

Tucson is very different from Mexico. The people are nicer, and the cities are bigger and cleaner. I liked the buildings in Tucson very much. I felt very good being there because when we went around Mexico, I saw a lot of poverty, and here it is different.

Teacher: Carla Twitchell
West Marin Project

Beatriz has been married for six years now and has a son. She lived well in Mexico, but did not have prospects of a good future. Her husband came to the U.S. before she did, but it was hard to live apart. He returned for his family, and they have lived here a year and a half. They both miss Mexico and their families. She brought her newly arrived brother to our class.

Living in New Mexico

By J. Manuel P and Delores C

For three years, from 1999 until 2002, we lived in a town which was very small and isolated. During this time I worked on a dairy ranch, the same work I did in California. Although the work was the same, I felt that California was the better state to live in for many reasons, including the climate, the people, and the schools.

In New Mexico, the temperatures reached 109 degrees, very hot, and when it was cold, everything froze.

At school, the children were not allowed to speak Spanish, their native language. The local people who were Spanish speaking did not accept the newcomers, even though we spoke the same language. We had a big house, but the children did not come to play with our children. Good tortillas were not available in the store and we had to make our own each day. I earned less in New Mexico for the same work that I do here.

There were no Mexican restaurants. The only store was Wal-Mart, which was expensive. These are some of the reasons why we decided to return to California where we have been living well for eleven years.

Teacher: Carla Twitchell
West Marin Project

Manuel is from Guadalajara. From a very early age, he worked alongside his father in various jobs, but never neglected his studies. At sixteen, he worked as a delivery man for a candy company, and then he worked as a bus driver for four years. He is proud that he never had an accident. He speaks English well and is eager to refine his knowledge of the language. Delores began working in a shoe factory at the age of fourteen. At fifteen, she went to live with an aunt, and there she met her husband. She married when she was sixteen, and they moved to California. She now has three children. Her husband encouraged her to come to English class with him.

On Top of the Truth

By James A

I'm satisfied with the colors I see. I see green. I see beige, I see blue, I see white. I see gray. I even see dark brown – just like me. Just like me. I've been told my whole life that I am black – a misperception perhaps or the lie of all lies to make, or keep me trapped, trapped! I must make my escape from the wolf in sheep's clothing for good understanding in this wilderness.

Teacher: Stella McCreedy
Inmate Literacy Services

James is a quiet, introverted 37-year-old who enjoys reading biographies and history. His writings often start out as prose and drift into poetic rhyme with a rap beat. In search of a larger truth, James often explores his important ideas in writings; first, by asking the poignant questions and then, by seeking out significant answers.

Who I Am

By Juan N

I 'm a brown man
a heart-of-gold Chicano
with a laugh like sunshine
a hand to help
or a hand to hold
I'm one soulful señor
that will never grow old!

Tracing Shade

brown sugar notes trace down
into our warm red souls
making different people feel
the joy of love
sometime sadness

music is heaven and earth
as it travels we keep the beat
a dance
a cry
a laugh
even hate

music shades rainbow colors
that travel from here
to the milky way
hip candy
how sweet it is

Tutor: Carolyn Hardee
Inmate Literacy Services

Juan enjoys working independently on his writing skills and reading the dictionary.

Remembering School Days

By Hamid N

When I was studying at the permanent Superior Agricultural School (afterward a member of the Tehran University), above our dormitory's entrance door had been hung the following poem in the Farsi language that I have ventured to translate. The poem was framed and written very well. Students would follow its instructions as a motto. "When at night the birds go to their nests, the villagers are walking to their homes. But on the morrow be up before the birds sing."

The poet with this poetic gift and impression had exposed a reality, but never had explicitly painted the villagers' hard and painful lives.

Woe! What bitter events! Because of World War II our country was occupied by Allied armies, prices went up day by day and tranquility was gone.

The late Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin visited Tehran at the end of the war. At the Tehran conference they named Iran the "Victory Bridge."

The present government under the influence of the religious, has sided with Russia. The permanent Superior Agricultural School, now a part of Tehran University, has become a battle ground of ideas, and students have been illegally put in prison or suspended from study.

Whether the motto remains is a question.

Tutor: Jane McColgan
MLP Main Program

Hamid is a native of Iran. In his country he was an agricultural engineer and later became a lawyer. His children were all educated at American universities. He is eager to become more fluent in English.

Taken

Randy S

AGGRESSION, so I live in hate.
OBSESSION, it's just too late.

DEATH, is in my mind.
BREATH, it's all behind.

WHY? We'll never know.
LIES, how far will they go?

SHATTERED, memories leave scars.
SCATTERED, how far apart they are.

FRIEND, really a brother.
END, there will be no other.

STRIVE, to be okay.
LIFE, was taken away...

Never forget...

In Loving Memory of Rob-Jon
12/3/73 – 4/1/90
Taken too early.

Teacher: Stella McCready
Inmate Literacy Services

In this memorial writing for a lost brother, Randy reaches down deep to find expression. Anger, love, loss, regret, acceptance – all can be found and felt in this writing. Many of Randy's energies are now being re-born and re-directed to his newborn son, named Rob-Jon in honor of his brother.

Having a True Friend

By Pedro G

Hello. I think this is a good time to thank all the people that have [made] this program Project R.E.A.C.H. ESL possible. Especially my teachers Ms. Nan and Mr. Rojo. Thank you for your time, patience, and dedication. Well, I hope to speak good English some day.

Always I have thought that having a good friend is important. That's why I want to remind you of these words. There is always a person that: is proud of you, thinks of you, you are important to, that misses you, wants to talk to you and be at your side, hopes that you don't have problems, is grateful for the support that you give them, would like to hold your hand, wishes that all your things turn out well, that you are happy, that you search for them, gives you a gift, hugs you, admires your strength, can't live a moment without seeing you, loves you for who you are, considers you a treasure, appreciates that you are their friend, wishes to know you better, that wants you [to] know that they are ready to listen to you and hear that you care about them, wishes to share with you your dreams, lives for you, trusts in you, listens to a song and remembers you.

Someone needs you to say all these things for him or her. Many people come and go from our lives but only true friends will leave an imprint on our hearts.

**Project R.E.A.C.H. Tutor: Robert Frye (Rojo)
Inmate Literacy Services**

Pedro never ceases to amaze me. I was absolutely blown away upon reading his submission. I've been working with Pedro on and off for three years. His grasp of reading and writing English has improved dramatically in that time, and he is always thirsting for more. He's very humble and I'm extremely proud of him.

A Test of Love

By Guadalupe R

This happened many years ago when I was a little girl. My father told me to bring the calves to drink milk from their mothers. Always my father wanted everything fast and perfect. I ran to the corral and brought one calf. I ran so fast I couldn't see my mother had brought out the hen and new chicks. I stepped on two of the three chicks, killing them because I was in such a hurry. My father came and said, "What happened with your mother's chicks?"

I was so scared of my father; I said I hadn't seen the hen and chicks on the patio. He started to get angry and yelled, "When you brought the calf maybe you stepped on them and killed them!" He tried to hit me. My mother was so pregnant at the time, but I didn't realize it – my parents never told us we would have a new baby in the family. My mother picked me up, held me against her, and said, "Don't hit her." My father said, "Put her down. She is a danger to you, she's too heavy and you need to care for yourself." My mother said, "She is my daughter, too!"

Two days later, my sister was born. My mother loved me more than anyone else, but I only had her for eleven years because she passed away a few years after this incident. I need her in my life and I miss her a lot. She was a wonderful woman and she gave me proof of her love that day.

I love my sons with all my heart, but I wouldn't put a new baby in danger. I know I could never pass that test of love.

**Teachers: Anna Gottreich and Nina Bellak
West Marin Project**

Guadalupe is a dedicated mother of two in our West Marin Advanced English Class. She grew up on a ranch in rural Mexico, in the state of Jalisco. A lively storyteller, and a highly motivated student, Lupe has a special presence which adds greatly to our class.

This House is School for Me

By Andres L

I was born in 1974. In Mexico, I did not finish the 6th grade. I help work on the ranch, with the dairy cows, and in the corn field. I ride horses for fun. I like horses and music. My father likes to listen to me singing Rancheras. I am singing all day at work.

In 2002, I come to Nicasio and work at the horse ranch of Alphonso Ramirez.

Then, I was coming here learning carpentry to start a new house. Alphonso say, "You go help Milly and Richard continue the house. You learn concrete, then the framing, a lot of cutting of angles. Divide the house to the bathroom, kitchen." Before I don't know the tape measure, but now... Then put the siding, the roof, and the scaffold around the house. At first I think is hard, but later is not too hard. I helped do the electricity, a little mistake sometimes, but I put in the switches and lights. I taped the sheetrock and I painted the house. This week I start putting tile in the bathroom. I am learning and happy with Milly and Richard. Everyday we study with lunch and dinner. I'm a student of English because in this country you need it too much. But now my teachers are Milly and Richard. They teach me everything! Carpentry English and they give me lessons for voice. I need to learn to sing Mariachi!

Tutor: Milly Biller
West Marin Project

Andres was born in Los Angeles, but his family ranches near Jalos, Jalisco Mexico. When we started building our small in-law house, he had very little English and no carpentry skills, but we have found his aptitude for learning to be utterly amazing. We love teaching him.

