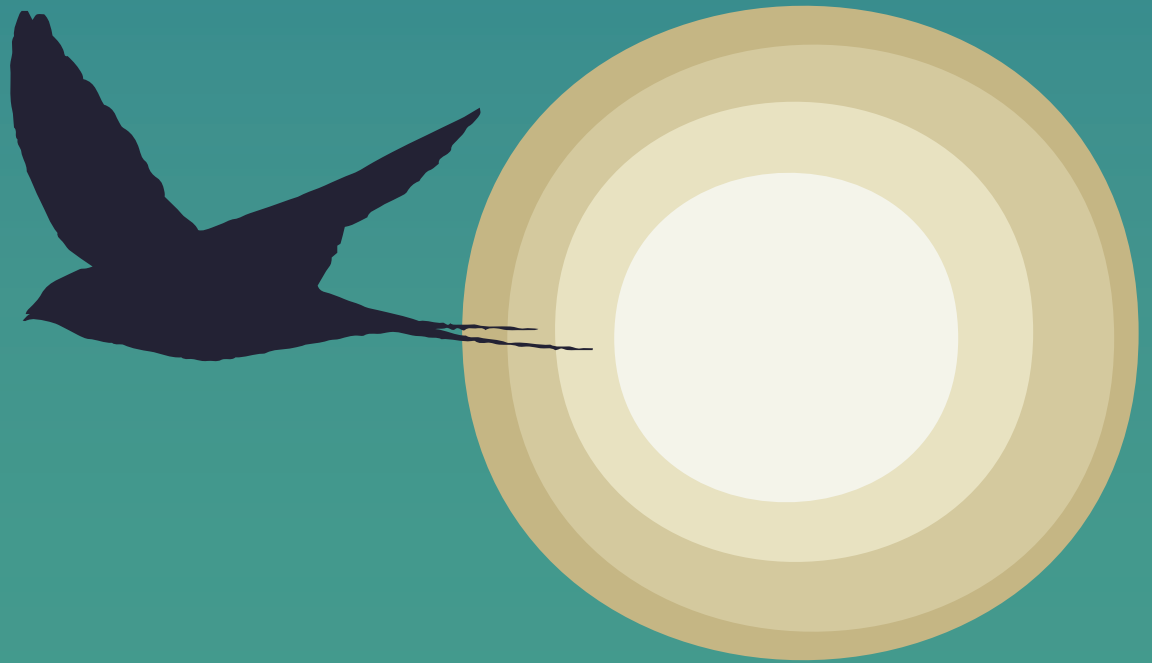


# In Our Words

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A Collection of Student Writing from Project Second Chance,  
Contra Costa County Library's Adult Literacy Program



VOLUME SIX



The scars left by the naysayers of my youth who said I would never read have turned into stars and I am no longer a victim. I am victorious! The crows can only fly so high, but I am now flying high with eagles.

– Martha S., PSC graduate



# About This Book

Think about everything a bird experiences on its flight—the wide landscape of fields, neighborhoods, and skyscrapers; the heat of the sun and the chill of the rain; the sounds of clouds bumping and of fellow winged friends calling out.

And now think what it would be like for that bird to be grounded. Its vision narrows, mind shuts, senses dull.

The journey of Project Second Chance students is just as colorful as that bird's. They just need the tools to soar.



***In Our Words***, a book of writings from Project Second Chance students, is a celebration of the gifts our tutors give to our student writers, and our students growing their wings.

The Project Second Chance staff, along with our wider library community, donors and volunteers, are grateful for our writers' creativity, bravery, and persistence, and our tutors' time, talent, and passion for giving.

Thank you, tutors and students. Sharing your experiences gives us all a wider, richer view of the world.

A special thanks to the tutors who supported the student authors in this book:

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# Table of Contents

## In Our Words – Volume Six

<b>Alicia F.</b> Calming Mind.....13	<b>Ju C.</b> How to Be Happy .....13 Lunar New Year in Korea.....27
<b>Bernard B.</b> Kindness.....6	<b>Judy H.</b> How I Started Hula Dancing.....24 My Long Hair.....21 The Piano and Me.....20
<b>Chiwon S.</b> A Popular Korean Dish.....32	<b>Julia H.</b> A Letter for My Daughter.....11
<b>Corina L.</b> Planning a Mexican Wedding in an English-Speaking World.....12	<b>Julie L.</b> To Governor Gavin Newsom.....25
<b>Ehte A.</b> Thanks, God.....14	<b>Leslie K.</b> Jeju Island.....20 Superstitions.....27
<b>Eliu O.</b> Thank You.....16	<b>Lisa G.</b> Classic Chocolate Mousse.....25 The Crown.....19
<b>Flavio D.</b> I am a Clown: Happy, Honest, Generous.....16	<b>Lisa J.</b> Lisa's Life.....18
<b>Hasina A.</b> Unforgettable Days of December.....32	<b>Lucia L.</b> Our Tahoe Ski Adventure.....34 Trip to New York City.....31
<b>Ike E.</b> Easter.....7 Skip and Jimmy.....7 The Oly.....17	<b>Manny N.</b> About Our Library.....23
<b>Jane T.</b> International Women's Day.....26	

<b>Mirae P.</b>	
My Proud Moment.....	10
The Most Memorable Moment in My Life.....	11

<b>Nargiza A.</b>	
Taking a Bus.....	18

<b>Parvin M.</b>	
Jury Duty.....	22

<b>Ricky R.</b>	
My Trip to Reno.....	23

<b>Rosa A.</b>	
My Vacation.....	6
The Family Vacation.....	19

<b>Roy D.</b>	
Lorenzo's First Fishing Trip.....	15

<b>Tenzin P.</b>	
<i>Charlotte's Web</i> .....	19
My Journey to the U.S.....	14

<b>Tseten D.</b>	
My Childhood in Tibet.....	8

<b>Veronica G.</b>	
To Know My Ancestry.....	17

<b>Veronica M.</b>	
The Day of the Dead.....	28

<b>Vicky D.</b>	
My Retirement.....	23

<b>Wenman L.</b>	
Funny Immigration Life.....	9
The Best Meal I Had.....	30

<b>Ying Q.</b>	
Landlord.....	29

## Kindness

by Bernard B.

We all need to learn to be kinder to each other. Kindness is help when someone needs it. For example, smiling at someone you don't know. It's seeing the need and filling it, it is unsolicited help.

The kindness of others has propelled me through my life to be a better human being. When I was new at being a longshoreman year ago, my bosses mentored me with patience and tolerance—repeatedly. When I was struggling with addiction, people in AA and NA just took my hand and help without looking for pay back.

We must always remember there's always someone that can use a helping hand and we can't be afraid to offer.

Anyone can stick out a helping hand to them, no matter their religion, economic status, color of their skin. It is compassion and kindness. It will make this world a better place. Thank you to all those in my life who helped me become a better man. My job is to do the same. And to all of people in Second Chance, but I hope I'm doing that.

## My Vacation

by Rosa A.

My vacation was to travel to Hawaii in April. I went to Hawaii from California.

I was scared because I never been traveling for more than two hours by plane. But at the same time, I was excited because I was going to the island of Honolulu.

When I arrived at the airport, I was surprised by the weather. It's totally different from California and the time difference was three hours. When I went to the beach, I couldn't believe how pretty the water looked. I took a tour around the island; it was big. I went to the temple of the Buddha and I went snorkeling. Also I went to Pearl Harbor. After Pearl Harbor, hiking a little mountain.

I liked everything except the food; for me is too salty. I wish I had more time because I was only four days. I went to Polynesian Park. I liked all performances. I hope to come back again because Hawaii, it's beautiful island.

## Easter

by Ike E.

On one Easter in the 60's  
My wife talked my friend, Terry,  
And me into going to church  
She had to talk hard and long  
But she won  
We told her the roof will collapse  
If we went in the church  
We were late  
So we had to go in the basement  
Because the church was full on  
the main floor  
Sometime during the service  
The congregation above us  
stood up all together  
With a loud THUMP!!!  
Terry and I said  
"See we told you so!!!"



## Skip and Jimmy

by Ike E.

Jimmy's dad and mom wanted  
to go fishing  
So they all got in the car  
with Skip, their dog  
And headed for the  
San Joaquin River  
Jimmy was seven years old  
They got into a boat  
About three hours later  
Mom was in the stern with her  
line in the water  
She was sound asleep  
Dad was in the bow with his  
line in the water  
He was asleep...too  
In the middle of the boat was  
Jimmy and Skip  
Jimmy saw three kids playing  
on the river bank  
And he wanted to play with them  
Skip was getting jumpy and started  
to jump around  
All of a sudden Skip jumped out of  
the boat and went for a swim  
Jimmy got him back in the boat  
and Skip shook  
And sprayed Mom and Dad with  
cold water  
And woke them up  
Dad looked at me and Skip and said  
I guess it's about time we go back  
And Skip and I got to play with the  
kids on the bank!

# My Childhood in Tibet

by Tseten D.

Hi, my name is Tseten. I grew up in Dege, a very small village in eastern Tibet. It is a beautiful place with many clear lakes, high mountains, green meadows, and pastures. Nowhere in the world, I think, can you find as quiet and peaceful a place as my village. My family was half nomad and half farmer. We owned 155 yaks, 55 cows, and 200 goats and sheep. We also had two horses and four cats. We lived in nature and we rode in nature.

There were no cars, traffic, highways, skyscrapers, shops, or gas stations anywhere. It was an Eden where I could hear the chirping of birds, buzzing of insects, the moos of yaks, bleats of lambs, neighs of horses, murmurs of waterfalls, and the melodies of leaves in the whispering breezes.

I was such a naughty and curious little girl that everyone in my village branded me a tomboy. I was not afraid of anything. I started riding horses, yaks, goats, and sheep at the age of seven. I rode miles through valleys, over mountains, and near the rivers to herd my yaks, sheep, and goats to good grass.

Sometimes out of curiosity I tied the tails of cows together, and I put plastic bags on the heads of sheep—just to scare,

not suffocate—them. If my mammy saw what I was doing, she punished me—by putting me with the sheep and goats in the basement for hours! I just kept playing with them. My mammy screamed at me, “Oh god, what should I do with the girl!” But my uncle always let me out whenever I wanted. In fact, he let me do whatever I wanted. He is like my godfather, and he still loves me from the bottom of his heart.

It was such a different childhood compared to childhoods here in America. There was no toy shop where I could buy toys like we have here. I never heard of Legos, play dough, colored pencils, or stickers. But I am sure the things I played with are rarely seen or used by children in this country, either.

I used raw yak dung like kids here use play dough, to mold many different things and then let them dry in the sun. I used flowers instead of Legos. I picked hundreds of different natural flowers and made beautiful necklaces, bracelets and hats—pieces of natural artwork. I’d mix up the petals and try to figure out which belonged to which stems—not easy! I played with nature.



# Funny Immigration Life

by Wenman L.

It takes time to adapt to a new culture and life style at the very beginning in new country. It is worth noting that in the first few years of immigration, life was more excited, challenge and fun. My friends and I shared our experience living in America and laughed.

I never had cheese in China. I was happy to have all kinds of cheese in America. One time, I was satisfied with a piece of cheese with friends. My friend asked me, "How was the cheese?"

"Delicious." I replied.

My friend continued and pointed the cheese, "How did that part taste?"

I asked back, "What do you mean?"

"The outside."

I confused, "What's outside?"

"The wax wrapped around the cheese you ate." I took the cheese and looked it closer, and I saw a thin layer of wax. I was embarrassed. After that, I cut the outside layer of cheese, or I don't eat the outside part.

I was checking out with six flowers in a Safeway. The cashier asked me, "How many?"

I answered, "Sex." The cashier slowed her work pace slightly and made a short

gentle eye contact with me just raising her eyeball. From that reaction at the moment, I knew I pronounced "six" to "sex." It's the vowel sound that all Chinese have the most difficult time to speak right.

A friend of mine, she doesn't feel awkward at all. She had a dinner with her husband and she ordered salads. She asked a waiter passing her table, "Can you warm my salads in microwave?"

The waiter said, "You ordered salads—it's salads."

She said, "I know, please take it and warm it for 30 seconds." The waiter looked at her in strange way.

I called her on one Saturday evening while she was watching a movie. I was surprised how she enjoyed the movie that she hardly speaks any English. When she called me back, my first question was, "What was the movie?"

She said, "I don't know."

I asked her again, "What did you do during the movie?"

She answered me in a delight tone, "My husband watched the movie and I slept."

Few years passed, we gradually assimilate to a new society, and enjoy life in America, and make less fun of ourselves.

# My Proud Moment

by Mirae P.

It was Christmas season and I was in 5th grade. I had three friends that used to play a role game. One day we became detectives, and another day we became aliens and astronauts. We enjoyed playing make believe. But we were pretty serious about our play. And I think we were all creative.

One day, one of us came up with an idea that we should do a good deed. We started talking about what kind of things we could do together. We decided to donate some money to a nursing home where they needed our help. We were all excited about our plan. We had several meetings after school. We had to decide many things, like where we wanted to donate and how we could make money. Eventually, we decided to do caroling.

On Saturday, we stood in front of the subway station and sang Christmas carols for about eight hours. We were nervous about singing in front of strangers and whether or not the people would donate. Then people started to put money into the donation box. So we were all excited and we were walking on air.

We were just kids singing carols on the street, and the people supported us and donated the money! That meant a lot to us.

After we sang carols, we checked the money box and counted the money. It was about a hundred dollars! The next day, we bought some fruits for the residents and went to the nursing home we wanted to help. We donated all of the money we had from our caroling.

The nun in the nursing home suggested that the residents would be happy if we said hello to each of them. We got carried away. We sang carols and danced for them. One of the elder ladies burst into tears suddenly. She might have been so lonely and missed people. She said to us, "Thank you so much for coming to see us." I had a lump in my throat. I heard that some of the residents didn't have family and some people were abandoned by their family.

After I got back home that night, I was so proud of myself and felt so good that I could make the people smile.



## The Most Memorable Moment in My Life

by Mirae P.

A life is challenging. Sometimes it make us frustrated. When I have fears or I feel like I am not on the right track in my life, I look back on an event in my childhood. That one day, my heart was full and I regarded myself as a good person.

I think those moments in my childhood have built my spiritual strength and filled my heart. And I am so proud of the fact, we children did this all by ourselves—had an idea, made a plan, carried it out, and were able to help out to residents of the nursing home.

Now I am 40 years old. I told my 10-year old son this story about my childhood and he looked at me with respect. Sometimes parents want to teach a lesson to their children or have them learn it in school. But it could be more significant to children when they hear their parent's real story. And at the same time, sharing my story with my child gives me a chance to look at myself and also helps me to get my confidence back.

I would like my son to experience something memorable in his childhood as well. So he could be reminded of it when he grows up. I am sure he would get positive energy from his memorable moments and move forward in healthy way.

Thinking back on this story, it reminds me I should build up our family's memorable moments.

## A Letter for My Daughter

By Julia H.

Dear Melody,

This year is my happiest year. You are the first child who will graduate from a four-year college in our family. I know you are very smart, talented, and kind. You are the sweetest, most thoughtful and understanding girl. I am lucky have you as my daughter. We are so proud of you. I wasn't a perfect mom. Dad has a different way to teach and love you. We might have a Chinese traditional way to teach and love you, but we both love you very much. I know you had your own target. You already know what makes you happy and you pursue it. Chase your dream. Never stop trying. Never stop learning. Follow the path of your choice in the future and remember that we'll continue to trust you and support you. I am very excited to go to your graduation. I am so happy for you. I love you forever.

Love you,  
Mom

# Planning a Mexican Wedding in an English-Speaking World

by Corina L.

For two years, I and my fiancé talked about our wedding day. Every person has a dream about how they want their wedding day. However, although both are happy, it is difficult to make decisions together having different ideas. And we were not the exception. For example, where did we want to have it, what kind of food and music, and how many guests? All those details took time for us. Probably the reason why it was difficult was because we were needing a place to have the ceremony and a reception hall for the party afterward. Applications for rental places are always in English, so it was not easy for me, who is still learning English, to understand about prices, rent time and rules of the place.

Finally, we chose December 15th to be our wedding day. Because I love to run around the Lafayette Reservoir, I wanted to do our ceremony in this amazing place. My fiancé agreed. So, I started with the reservation for the stage at Lafayette Reservoir. It was not easy. The day I went there to make the reservation, a lady told me that I need to do this online. When I tried to do this at home, it was confusing for me to choose the stage place and how pay for parking permits. So, I went back at the Lafayette Reservoir office.

Fortunately, I received help from Jim, a park ranger there. He helped me make the reservation online and I paid for parking permits for my guests. I am thankful for his help. The next step was to reserve the Community Room at the Lafayette Library. This reservation was easier because it was a paper application. I did both reservations on the same week. It was exciting because I was able to make everything speaking English.

I am grateful to God for all this experience. It was amazing to make reservations at places where people speak only English and read information such as rental contracts in English, too. I think learning English is a process, like how people learn to walk—step-by-step. Programs such as Project Second Chance offer supports during this process. From last year, I have a tutor from PSC and am feeling more self-confident to speak English with others. Because I am feeling more confident speaking English, I completed everything I needed to make my big day came true.

# How to Be Happy

by Ju C.

I finished *Endeavor: Book 5* last week. I have learned about many things in this book. I have never thought about these topics in my life. So I am glad to learn about life stories. I am interested in the topic "how to be happy."

I came to the USA five years ago. I was not happy living in America because I suddenly changed my life. I still wanted to keep my old way of life. I hated driving every day. I did not like learning a lot of American customs. I missed my family and friends. I have a husband here, and we have decided to live in America. Although I tried to stop my negative feelings, I did not know how to feel better. I complained about everything. No one cared about my complaints for a long time. When I started repeating them, many people did not want to be around me.

One day I realized my behavior, but I did not know how to stop it. Nevertheless, my husband listened to my complaints for three hours every day and hugged me. He was a patient person for me. I stopped this behavior, and I walked outside with him. I saw pretty flowers in warm weather in California. I had been missing the good weather because I was inside every day. Eventually I decided to change my life. And now I often go out myself, and I meet people in many classes. Also, I started learning a lot of arts.

I now know "how to be happy." If you want, you have to change your view of the

world. The world never changes for you. If you have a different perspective, perhaps more positive thoughts will make your life better. So your mind is very important. I believe that you can find your happiness. You can catch the bluebird of happiness.

## Calming Mind

by Alicia F.

The only thing I need  
Is to breathe the fresh air  
Of the green fields.

Let my eyes enjoy nature's  
Yellows and blues. Let the air  
Calm my busy mind.

Let nature give peace to my soul  
with the singing of birds.  
Especially at morning, the singing  
of many different birds.

The birds give thanks for a new day.

I couldn't ask for anything more,  
Since God painted the most  
Beautiful picture with nature.

I have only to stop and enjoy  
Red, pink, purple and many other  
Colors of the flowers.

I thank God for beautiful nature.

## Thanks, God

by Ehte A.

Every day I say thanks, God, for everything. Because I can see, I can hear, I can feel, I can smell and I can taste. In addition to the five senses, I can walk, I can talk, I can think.

Thanks, God, for air because I can breathe very well. I am thankful for the alarm that goes off in the early morning hours because it means that I am alive.

I am thankful for being sick once in a while, because it reminds me that I am healthy most of the time. It is very important for me that there is a facility that takes care of my mom very well because she can't stay alone. So I thank God for that.

I am also thankful that I live in the U.S. because it offers many things and has helped me and my family, including the Library and Project Second Chance.

And finally, thank you God that I have a good family and that you gave me a good heart to be nice to people and to help them.

I am thankful for any things.

## My Journey to the U.S.

by Tenzin P.

On May 28th, 2000 at 10:00 a.m. we arrived to New York JFK Airport. Someone picked up my friend and I went with her. Then a few hours later my friend picked me up and I stayed at her home one or two days. Then a few friends came to see me and took me everywhere! We went to the Statue of Liberty, Central Park, and the Twin Towers. Another friend lived in California and she called me to come here. Then I moved to California in January, and in March or April I got an Indian family nanny job. In the morning, I went to work and in the evening I went to Berkeley Adult School to study English.

I started to apply for asylum. Someone introduced me to a helper. Her name is Yangchen and she had an old mother and older brother whose name was Jumpa. His family and friends called him JT. The whole family asked me where I came from, then I told them everything about my story! He told me, "If you had a problem, tell me and I will help you. You are my daughter."

A few years after, he passed away. Then one year later, his mom passed away, too!

# Lorenzo's First Fishing Trip

by Roy D.

I took my grandson, Lorenzo, on his first fishing trip. Before the trip, I went to Big Five for a fishing license and Dramamine. I didn't want to get sick in front of my grandson! My grandson was twelve, so he didn't need a fishing license.

We drove to the Emeryville Marina. After parking, we went to the bait shop to purchase leaders, hooks, and weights.

We boarded a commercial fishing boat that had a three-man crew. It was still dark at five in the morning. It was cold and I was half asleep. We went into the cabin where it was warm. There were coffee, donuts, and cookies. They were good! But Lorenzo got sick inside the cabin. The crew told us to go outside to feel better. Lorenzo was still sick outside, so I went back in and cleaned up after him.

The crew told us what to expect, where we would be going, and how long it would take. We went under the Golden Gate Bridge. We wore hats and gloves when we were not fishing because it was cold and windy. A deck man put the bait on Lorenzo's hook.

Someone caught a big squid. A deck hand yelled, "Cut the line!" because he knew that squids squirt ink and make a mess!

The fisherman didn't want to cut his line, so he battled the squid onto the boat where the squid made a big inky mess!

Lorenzo caught his limit of 23 fish! The fish were ling cod, halibut, rock cod, and salmon. Lorenzo was really strong for a 12-year old, so the work of catching the fish was easy for him. Some of his catches were "piggyback." That means when he caught one fish, another fish tried to eat the first fish! So, he got two at once! We had to hurry to net the fish because the second fish wasn't hooked. Lorenzo got piggybacks three times!

It was a long day and we were tired after our eight-hour fishing trip. Lorenzo and I have fond memories of his first fishing trip.





# I am a Clown: Happy, Honest, Generous

by Flavio D.



A clown is happy. A clown is generous.

When people ask me, "What do you do?" I answer, "I'm a clown to be honest. To be honest, I'm a

clown" because a clown is true in every moment. Even when he exaggerates, he just exaggerates the truth. Everybody smiles when a clown falls down or when he makes a mistake and I explain that this demonstrates that everybody makes mistakes and this is normal. It's okay. It's not a problem.

The clown brings lightness to life.

There are several clown types, for example Laurel & Hardy, Chaplin, Bozo, Chaves, Three Stooges. A clown works in the circus, theater, street, birthday party, hospital, and also for private companies. This last place is curious because a good way for everybody to fix information in their brains is through humor.

When clowns work, they work with the soul of 6-years old child, and every adults one day was a child.

To be a clown, you should have empathy, charisma, sincerity.

Everybody says "clown" when want to express something negative, thinking clown is inferior, but clown is much more than red nose.

## Thank You

by Eliu O.

When I was a child, I wanted to be a secretary. I wanted to study, but my mother didn't have money to send me and my sister to school. One day I was walking and I looked in the sky. I saw an airplane and I thought one day I will go in the airplane. When I migrated to America, I really flew in the airplane. It was very nice.

This year, it was my dream to fly to another country. When my daughter finished her high school, she came home and told me about a program in the school. They have a field trip to Europe. In the moment I said nothing. I thought about it for a short time because it is very expensive for me. I decided to go to the meeting about the trip, and later I decided to go to Europe!

I like to think about going to Europe. I dream. This is my opportunity. I said, "Thank you God, for all my blessings in my life, for the life I have, for my family, for the opportunity to fly to another country." God is good.



## The Oly

by Ike E

When I was a laborer in 1962 I was  
working in Livermore, California

It was 110 degrees in the shade  
and no shade

We had just finished the first section  
of the housing tract

I had a Jeep with a trailer to pick up  
20-30 feet of foundation forms

And haul them to the next site

I pulled up next to a house already built

I was there for a while I had a load on  
the trailer

A man came out of the house

He saw me standing with the sweat  
flowing down my face

He invited me in his kitchen

He gave me an Olympia beer  
right out of the freezer

I tilted the little bottle all the way up,  
it drained in two seconds

He gave me another Oly

I drove off with the biggest  
smile on my face

And the Oly between my legs

I was the happiest laborer at work  
that day

By the way . . . I don't drink

## To Know My Ancestry

by Veronica G.

A few months ago, I became very  
interested to know where my family  
came from. I had the opportunity to meet  
Ms. Marilyn at Project Second Chance.  
A few months ago, she told me that she  
searched for her parents' family history.  
So, I became more interested to know  
where my last name came from. She  
gave me the address where I can get help  
about how to start. So, one day I went  
to the place called the Family History  
Center at the Mormon Church in Concord  
with not much information. I barely just  
started the project. From there I went to  
my parents to ask for the information I  
needed. My mother and I went through  
some documents until we found the  
birthdays of my grandparents. So, now  
I have information. I will go back to the  
church and see what they find. Also, my  
parents are planning to go to Mexico, so I  
asked my mother if she can get the birth  
certificates of my grandparents so I will  
be able to find the birthdays for my great  
grandfathers. In addition, I'm planning to  
do Ancestry.com. I'm so excited to know  
more about where my family came from.

## Lisa's Life

by Lisa J.

How was I going to get down off that shelf  
with God's help?

Take life one day at a time.

Sometime the world seems so cold.

I feel afraid in everything I do.

I believe in God who help me in life.

I am one special person.

I have lots of confidence to read.

I have a Sober Birthday come up Feb 17  
this year.

I like movies and music and flowers.

I was over fifty I chose to go back to  
school and learn to read.

Love your friends, love your family.

Love yours, love your life.

And that walks hand in hand with you  
through your life.

To take each day as it comes.

But keep trying, do not give up hope.

It is okay to feel anxious when things  
aren't working our way.

It's okay to think and worry and cry.

I am sad today. I want to cry today.

I fix dinner for my family.

When it rain, I am sad.

I am happy in the sun time.

My apartment is nice.

We are going to help Mary Anie, wife  
pastor at conference March 25-26-27.

I had fun at the Valentine party.

We made Valentine cards.

I read the devotion daily in the morning.

## Taking a Bus

by Nargiza A.

I used to take a bus to the library. Drivers  
don't allow mothers to put a stroller  
with a child on the bus. They told me  
they are "doing their job." I had diapers,  
extra clothes for my child, books, and  
groceries. I had to take out everything  
from the stroller, fold it, hold my child and  
everything at the same time.

1. It's unsafe for mothers and a baby taking  
the bus this way.
2. It's uncomfortable to get on the bus and  
get off from the bus.
3. It's dangerous to put the stroller under  
the seat because it's hard to hold the  
stroller.

I don't have three hands!

Some strollers are heavy and big with a  
car seat. You can't fold it together. I can't  
leave my child on the sidewalk. You have  
to get on with a child or with a stroller. It's  
uncomfortable and unsafe.

How about mothers who get on the  
bus with 2-3 kids? How about people  
who don't drive a car? How do they  
get somewhere they want to go with  
children?

## The Family Vacation

by Rosa A.

The family vacation was a trip to Yellowstone.

In July, we went to Yellowstone from California. It's far away and my husband drove for twelve hours for several days. Everybody was happy. They hoped to see a bear cub, Grizzly bear, bison, moose, and elk. I was astonished because I couldn't believe what we saw.

The huge animals were scary. I never thought that we would see the animals so nearby. One bear walked around the car. It was beautiful. The children and my husband were also very excited. After we saw the animals, we went to a rodeo. The children didn't like it because they saw how the people were cruel to the animals, and the animals were tied. But when we were at the little town, they forgot about the animals. They were interested because the town had a lot of things that you can buy, like shirts, coffee cups, keychains, towels, hats, etc.

We also went to eat bison steak and burgers, and everybody liked it except my son, who ate tacos al pastor, his favorite.

This was a very nice vacation. I wish I could go back again because Yellowstone is a huge and beautiful park and the family was happy.

## Charlotte's Web

by Tenzin P.

I want to tell you something about *Charlotte's Web*. E.B. White wrote this story in 1952. This story is showing about how to help each other in friendship. It takes place on a small farm and county fair in the 1950's. It is about a pig named Wilbur who is saved first by his friend Fern and secondly by his friend Charlotte and her miracle spider web. There are two interesting characters. Charlotte is an older spider who is caring, creative, and clever. Fern is a smart young girl who loves animals and is devoted to Wilbur, her tiny pig. I wish everyone could read this wonderful book.

## The Crown

by Lisa G.

I would like to tell you about the crown in the Hercules Library. The crown is in a glass case, and it belongs to Miss Hercules. I see the crown on Tuesdays and Thursdays when I come to class. One day, I want to have a great crown and feel like a princess. There are ladies in line for the crown at the library. The crown shines so pretty in the glass case. The crown has stones and diamonds on the crown. One day, I wish to wear the Miss Hercules crown for just one day.

# The Piano and Me

by Judy H.

My name is Judy. When I was about ten years old, I was very envious of people who could dance and play piano. However, during the Cultural Revolution in China, crazy politics swept across the whole country. For a ten-year-old girl, anytime I had the opportunity to hear music or to dance, I felt that I had to go to watch or listen.

Decades have passed. I have never forgotten my dreams. My son grew up and went to college. My childhood dreams slowly reappeared in my mind. Often I asked myself, "Why don't you start doing it? What are you waiting for? When you are older, will you regret waiting?" My answer was, "No, I won't wait." I had to start the first step, which was learning to play the piano.

Today, I still remember the conversation between the sales lady and me at the musical instrument store after I was warmly welcomed. "Where is the piano player?" she said as she turned and looked down.

"I will be the player," I said.

"For yourself?" she said.

"Yes," I answered.

"I have worked here for six years. You are the first one I have seen who is buying a piano which is not for kids!" she said.

I got the piano that day, and soon I found a piano instructor. Normally, I went to work during the day and practiced piano in my leisure time. Unfortunately, my instructor passed away from cancer a couple of years later. She will always be in my mind.

## Jeju Island

by Leslie K.

Jeju Island is my favorite spot in Korean. Some Koreans say that Jeju Island is the Korean Hawaii.

Jeju Island has many attractions and gorgeous beaches. You can visit a lot of beautiful, scenic spots, museums, and theme parks. You can also golf, hike to the top of Mt. Halla, or walk Olle Trails. There are many kinds of Korean traditional foods such as bibimbap and bulgogi.

I think the best time to visit Jeju Island is from March to April. It is a good time to plan a holiday in Jeju. The weather is warm at this time. You can see many beautiful spring flowers in Jeju.

# My Long Hair

by Judy H.

My name is Judy. I have very long hair and some of it's naturally curly. My long hair has been with me for almost my entire life, so it has become my identity. I have a strong feeling that my hair is integrated into my body. To me, it's just like my arm or my hands. That's why when I thought about cutting it off many times in past decades, I never really did it. Who would hurt herself?

Here are some true stories about my hair. Often people ask me questions about my hair. I have been asked all sorts of questions, such as:

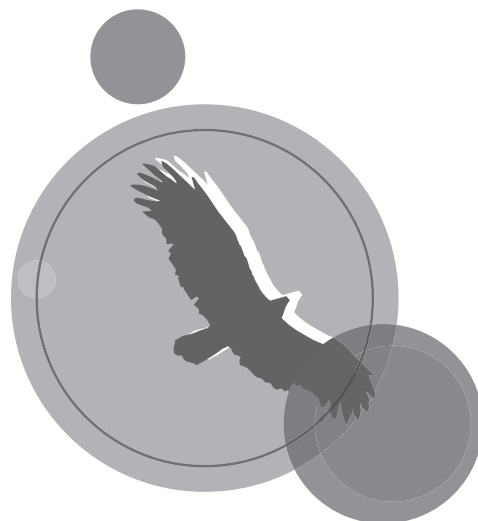
- Is it really your own hair? Not fake hair?
- Have you ever cut it off before?
- How many years has it taken to grow that long?
- Is it part of your religion to not cut your hair?
- Do you wash it every day?
- How long does it take to wash it?  
Two hours?
- Can I touch your hair?
- Why don't you cut your hair and donate it to cancer patients?
- How do you braid it to the end? Can you show me?
- How hard is it to wash?

Usually, I joke around when I am asked the first question. I say, "This is my fake hair. If you touch it, it will fall out." However,

I was touched by the question about cancer patients. What a good thought by a good-hearted girl. I promised her that I would donate my hair for cancer patients someday, and I will, for sure.

Another one of my experiences was something unimaginable that happened. One day, when I was vacuuming at home, I found a quarter hiding in the rug. I bent down to pick it up without turning off the vacuum cleaner. At the same time, my braid fell over near the machine. Of course, the powerful cleaner quickly sucked my hair into it. I almost fell down. All I remember now is that I pressed the off button immediately and smelled the stink of burnt hair. My hair was about two inches shorter from that day on.

I have loved my hair from day one and still do. It has been the focus of conversation and attention and of many adventures. They are all good memories.



## Jury Duty

by Parvin M.

Almost four years ago, I received a letter from Martinez court to call me for jury duty. The next day, I had an English lesson with my lovely tutor, Jane, so I told her that I was invited for jury duty, and my English isn't good enough to do that. She laughed and said, "This is a summons, and you have to go, but since you are not comfortable with your English, you can be excused with a reply on the letter." I did so, but they didn't accept my excuse and wanted me to go there in advance for an interview to evaluate my English. When I went there, a man who had a strong accent asked me some simple questions and said, "Your English is better than mine. You have to be present for your summons."

The day came and I went there at 8:00 a.m. After going through security, I went to a hallway where some other people were waiting to enter the main room. The room was very big, and in the corner a young man was sitting at a desk with a computer in front of him. I went to his desk and told him that I had a problem understanding English. He said, "Don't worry, you would be interviewed before joining the jury." So I became more relaxed and sat in a chair. Some minutes later, a lady came in, went to a lectern, and talked to the audience. A few minutes later, a

tall man came in and talked, but I didn't understand either of the speakers. I just looked around to see what was the reaction of people and saw that they were listening and then started working on their laptops, iPads, or cellphones. I had none of them with me because I never had this experience.

An hour passed, and a person came and called some names to be interviewed. This happened three times, and I was so bored just looking around and seeing people who were busy in silence, doing their jobs. Three hours passed, and finally a person came in and said something. Then people began to leave. I asked someone if we should leave. She said, "Yes." They had chosen whomever they needed.

I was called two years later again from S.F. Court, but fortunately they accepted my excuse.



## My Retirement

by Vicky D.

For me, it was an easy decision to retire because I was not thinking to retire yet. But the company was not making enough business, so they decided to lay off employees from different departments. I was one of them. About four months or so later, I got a call asking me if I was ready to go back. They wanted me back in the same position with all the same pay and benefits, as if nothing had changed. I was enjoying my freedom. That was when I made the easy decision that it's better to be retired than go back to the same place again.

Once I retired, it didn't take me too long to find a lot of things to do to keep myself busy. I didn't have to get up early. I got a part-time job.

I had free time to go to the Senior Center for exercise classes and to go back to school to improve my English. I got to know new people. I really enjoy all the trips and activities. One of the best trips was to Port Costa. There is small but beautiful church. Also, there is a restaurant. On Sundays, they have live music. If you buy a drink, you get a free lunch of a cup of soup and a slice of pizza. It is a beautiful place to spend a Sunday, walking around the water and smelling the fresh air.

I love to work in the garden, have friends come over, and spend time with my grandchildren. The bad thing is that I don't get a pay check from work anymore, but I am happy working and earning money on my own time.

Thank God life has been good to me. I'm still going to Project Second Chance to improve my English. What else can I ask for? Retirement has been wonderful!

## About Our Library

by Manny N.

When the library closes, I don't know what I'm going to do. I ride my bike here, on the bike trail. I wonder if I will be able to ride my bike to the new library. Will I be able to read and write? Will I have a place to learn to read and write? I hope it will work out!

## My Trip to Reno

by Ricky R.

Last week, I went to Reno by train. I stayed two days at the Pepper Mill and gambled and ate and drank. I won \$140.00 on the penny machines. I shared some of my money with my friend. I had a great time!



# How I Started Hula Dancing

by Judy H.

In the year 2014, my family moved to California from the big snowcity of Madison, Wisconsin. One day, I accidentally found out about the hula class at the Hercules Senior Center, and I joined as soon as I could.

To me, hula dancing was totally brand new. I had only learned about it through the media. Over the period of three years, I gradually learned the essence of the dance, through practice and performances. Yes, our group voluntarily performed for some senior centers, senior homes, and festivals.

Hula dancing is unique. It is very different from other dances. The dancers move their hips in time to the musical beat. Hula music is slow, and it easily makes people calm down and feel beautifully peaceful. It looks pretty simple. However, the movements of waist, hips, and knees are not that easy. It's especially hard on the knees because the dancers are always bending and moving their legs during the dance.

Usually, a good imagination and positive emotions are needed during hula dancing. The dancer's hands, bodies and facial expressions tell stories. Most of the movements represent the natural world

and human emotions. To me, the best part of the dance is that I'm always picturing beautiful Mother Nature in my mind. What a good moment!

Last Chinese New Year, our hula dance group participated in a celebration party in Richmond. I chose two wonderful, famous Chinese songs for our performances, "The Moon Represents My Heart" and "Jasmine Flower." It was a pretty successful show. The audience gave us long and loud applause.

Here are the lyrics to "The Moon Represents My Heart":

You ask me how deeply I love you,  
How much I love you.

My heart is true. My love is true.

The moon represents my heart.

Gently a kiss for me,

Has broken into my heart.

Such wonderful days,

Let me think about it forever...





## To Governor Gavin Newsom

by Julie L.

This is Julie L. I heard that you are thinking of passing a law banning payday loans in my town. I know that payday loans have high interest rate and it causes debt to some people.

However, I am against to make payday loans illegal. It could make it uncomfortable for some people to live. As you know, only checking account, ID, and job are needed to get a payday loan. Since it is easy to use, it can be helpful for some people who feel desperate under certain condition like emergency situation and enforcing bills. Moreover, there are various kinds of places which people can borrow money, not only payday loan company but also banks, their works, and friends or family.

So, people can choose one which they can manage. Even though they choose the payday loan, since the Truth in Lending Act passed, consumers must be told the cost of all now. Customers know all the facts.

And there are about 25,000 payday loan stores in the U.S. If you make that law, employees who are working for payday loan company may lose their job at once.

Please seriously consider that law.

Regards,  
Julie L.

## Classic Chocolate Mousse

by Lisa G.

8 ounces bittersweet chocolate, melted  
3 tablespoons orange liqueur  
2 tablespoons light corn syrup  
1/4 cup powdered egg whites  
3/4 cup warm water  
1/2 cup sugar

In a large bowl, mix the chocolate liqueur and corn syrup. In another large bowl, combine the powdered egg whites and warm water, stirring until the powder dissolves completely, about two minutes. With an electric mixer on low speed, beat until foamy, increase the speed to medium, and beat until soft peaks form. While mixing, slowly add the sugar. Increase the speed to medium-high, and continue beating until stiff glossy peaks form.

With a rubber spatula, stir about one third of the meringue into the chocolate mixture. Stir well, then fold in another third of the meringue. Gently fold in the remaining meringue until completely blended. Refrigerate the mousse covered until firm, at least three hours.

# International Women's Day

by Jane T.

In the United States, nobody really celebrates International Women's Day, but in my country it's a huge national holiday. We celebrate it on the 8th of March. No schools, no work for this day. Stores closes early.

All men congratulate all women that they know—wives, mothers, grandmothers, daughters, sisters, friends, colleagues, coworkers, and even kids' teachers. We appreciate every single female in our life. As a woman, you started to expect this holiday maybe a week before. It's something in the air...

At kindergartens and schools, there are performances where kids invite their mothers, grandmothers and pay tribute to them by reading poems, singing songs, dancing, and giving presents. Also, male kids congratulate their female classmates with the performance as well and give them little souvenirs. As a parent, I gave my boys candy or flowers, so they could give it to their female teachers and congratulate them with the 8th of March.

Usually one day before, at work, our male colleagues give us little presents or a cake. I used to have a boss who came to every department with a bottle of champagne and a box of candy to congratulate women

in person. Sometimes, when it wasn't a busy day, all women were allowed to go home early to make all necessary preparations for the International Women's Day.

When the day comes, you wake up with stupid feeling of happiness, with a smile on your face. You don't have to do much today because it's your day, and you are the queen today! You see a bouquet of beautiful flowers on the table. Your man and your kids give you presents and tell you how much they love you, how they are lucky to have you, how much you mean to them. Your phone is ringing, and messages keep coming and seem to never stop. You will hear a lot of compliments today. Even walking on the street some guy that you have never met before make you feel really special by smiling and saying, "Congrats with 8th of March!"

Of course, there are cases when something went wrong—no expected bouquet or gifts. For that man who messes it up, we have an idiom, "The way you faced the 8th of March is the way you spend the whole next year." Which means we women have the full right to remind you men, as many times as we want, that you messed it up!

## Lunar New Year in Korea

by Ju C.

Many Asian countries have Lunar New Year. Many Americans know about Chinese Lunar New Year, but they don't know about Korean Lunar New Year.

I want to talk about Korean Lunar New Year. We call it Seollal. I'll talk about three subjects: food, clothes, and customs. Most Koreans eat tteoggug (beet rice cake soup). If you eat this soup, you will gain one year in age. I ate many bowls of tteoggug when I was young because I wanted to get old quickly. And Korean people eat Korean party food together. Those are kkochijeon, jabchae, and galibijim. My favorite food is kkochijeon. This food is so yummy.

Many Koreans wear a hanbok (Korean traditional clothes) during Seollal. I wore a hanbok when I was little. I like to wear this clothing. Hanbok is colorful and elegant, but it is a little expensive. We wear hanbok and then bow to our ancestors in front of a ceremonial table.

We have special customs during Seollal. Many children wait for this day because most adults prepare new, clean money for their children. I remember my aunts and uncles gave money to me. If children bow to grandmother, a grandmother will tell a good speech to them and then give them money. Older people need to prepare

new, clean money from the bank. Usually we put money into new white envelopes. Most banks are crowded in this season.

Many Koreans go to ancestral graves. They clean the graves. So, we are so busy during Seollal. Seollal is a big holiday, so we rest for three days.

## Superstitions

by Leslie K.



Koreans have quite a few superstitions. For instance, if you turn on the fan and sleep in the room with the door closed, you could die. Another

superstition many Koreans believe is that you should not write your name anywhere in red. If you do that, your parents or close friends could die. Additionally, Koreans believe that you should not eat slippery food like seaweed soup before an exam. Otherwise, you won't be able to pass the exam. Koreans have many interesting superstitions. Some still believe some of them and some do not. But I think it doesn't matter because superstitions are becoming a fun topic in our lives.

# The Day of the Dead

by Veronica M.

In Oaxaca, we celebrated the Day of the Dead with a big party for our ancestors. This celebration starts with building an altar on a table and decorating it with cempazuchilt flowers. You can find this kind of flowers only in this season between October and November. The name of this flower is in Náhuatl language and means “twenty petal flower.”

In our countries, this celebration is very special because we have the belief that the souls of our dead relatives come on this date. We prepare and decorate the altar with the dishes, fruits, and beverages that they enjoyed when they were alive. On the altar, we put a special bread that is made only for this celebration. This special bread has a body shape with crossed arms and a face and is decorated with sugar or sesame seeds on the body.

We put candles and their pictures. According to our grandparents, this celebration lasts five days, starting on October 30 with the first white candle and a white flower on the altar to welcome the souls who have no family there.

On October 31, we put the second white candle with a glass of water and a white bread like a bolillo for the people who died in an accident and don't eat. On November 1,

we wait for the children's souls. On this day, we put all sweet food, like sweet tamales, chocolate, and candies. November 2 is the day of the adults. On that day, we put spicy food, beer, tequila, cigarettes, and we burn incense of copal.

The last day is November 3. We put the last white candle and we burn incense of copal. We let the souls go, asking them to come back the next year.

In some places in Mexico on November 2, they spend all night in the cemetery, but it isn't scary. It is a really big party with music, lights, and food.



# Landlord

by Ying Q.

Everyone has certain memories from childhood that can never be forgotten. When Ms. Mary was explaining the article “Local Governments to Enact Rent Control on Residential Property” for me, my thought seemed to have stopped when she mentioned the word “landlord.” It evoked a very deep memory from my childhood.

My childhood years coincided with the Cultural Revolution (1966-1977) in China during which family origin was often used as a way to treat people differently. People whose family origin, as determined by the officials, was “landlord” were discriminated against because it implied that you came from a family of greed and exploitation of others. That was the idea of the communist and socialist system in China from 1949 to 1977.

My family origin was tied to my grandfather’s and it was “landlord.” I remember when I was in elementary school, there were about fifty students in my class, led by Ms. Wang. Class management was often the most difficult task for Ms. Wang.

To calm down the chaotic state of the classroom, Ms. Wang had her own way. She would loudly say, “Students whose family origins are the working poor or farming poor, stand up!” Most students

stood up except for a few including myself. Ms. Wang would then lecture, “Your parents had no money to go to school in the old society of China, but today under the leadership of the Communist Party, you are able to enter school. There is no reason for you to not follow the rules and listen to your teacher. You should be sorry for your parents.” After those tough words, students quieted down for a while, but it never worked for long because of the large number of and the young ages of the students.

I was very embarrassed whenever Ms. Wang said those words, lowering my head with no courage to look at others. I felt like everyone was watching me and they would find out that I had a “bad” family background. I experienced this scene often during the six years with Ms. Wang in elementary school. The feeling of fear and shame stayed in my heart.

The political policies in China began to change after Mao’s death in 1976. Market economy, introduced to China in the 1980s, completely changed the lives of Chinese people over the last 30-plus years. The meaning of “landlord” has completely changed too, now referring to rich, successful business owners of admirable status. However, the experience of being labeled “landlord” in my childhood is engrained in me forever.

# The Best Meal I Had

by Wenman L.

After the Cultural Revolution and recession years, China was very poor. There weren't much food to eat. Even simple candy was a luxury. All the food was provided by the food stamps. Food was in great shortage. One person had 0.5 kg of meat in a month. Longing for the New Year dinner was the only way to alleviate my hunger for food.

During the New Year, the government rationed double amount of food for everyone. Some produce never been sold or seen in the market could provide for New Year event. My mother started to prepare New Year dinner two or three months early. She prepared snacks first and they could keep for a while. She sautéed sunflower seeds, broad beans, peanuts, and she own style sweet potato chips. Preparing meat was more work because there weren't many kitchen appliances to help. She cut meat in small pieces to make sausage and used pine tree branches to make smoke meat.

I was amused to watch her performance. When we put everything together, I was astonished and thought my mother was amazing.

The meal wasn't simple. Mother asked us to start with two kind salads. They

included chicken and veg salads, and then she started adding some warm dishes with two sautéed veggies and two meat dishes. The third course we had steamed fish and pork ribs dishes. The next were soup combination using the chicken broth, it had many kinds of vegetables and meat in it, and steamed sweet sticky rice with dates, walnuts, and little black sugar. The last were two desserts. After the oily food, the fermented sweet sticky rice dessert cleaned the greasy sensation. The fermented sweet sticky rice contains natural gentle sweetness and alcohol.

The dinner was big and long. The process was from salads, sautéed dishes, steam, soup, and desserts. We had to warm the dishes again during the dinner. The meal was fabulous. The snacks were placed at the side for after dinner. The big dinner wasn't only to satisfy for craving for food. It was meaningful of blessing, and the 12 dishes was a metaphor of 12 months to have prosperous life.

Today there are plenty and variety of foods. I have tried expensive meals in the fanciest of restaurants. But the tastes never beat the dinner I had as a child.



# Trip to New York City

by Lucia L.

Our family took a flight from San Francisco to New York City during mid-December. We stayed in a nice hotel in Times Square. That night, we had dinner at the hotel restaurant. The next day, we went walking on Broadway Street and 6th Ave. When we crossed the street it was crazy. Nobody stopped for the cars. There was so much traffic! The police car was close, but the officer was just relaxed and enjoying his life! It was just a regular day for him. We took some pictures with many people in Disney costumes.

The second day, we went to the top of the Empire State Building. There was a magnificent view of New York City and the Hudson River. After that, we went to the art museum. We saw a lot of statues and paintings by famous painters. It was so good time. We went to the spy museum. There was a laser room that was a game. You had to press the right buttons to turn off the lasers and get through. We only had 30 seconds. I did very well the second time. So fun!

Then we bought tickets to see two Broadway shows. It was awesome. Even though there was a mix-up with our tickets, someone else had the same seats. Everything was okay. King Kong was very modern because the gorilla was huge and

mechanical. It took many actors to move the gorilla. It looked very real. The action was very dramatic and many people cried at the end. The next show we saw was Aladdin. This one was a love story. The singing was excellent.

The last day, we went to the Rockefeller Center to see the Christmas tree and go shopping. And finally we flew home. I loved our trip to New York City. It was so much fun!



# Unforgettable Days of December

by Hasina A.

I had a very exciting and unforgettable couple of weeks. I saw my aunt and my cousin after fourteen years. That's why I was very excited and very happy. We picked them up from the San Francisco Airport and brought them to our house. They will be here until 30th of December.

We enjoyed doing many things together. We went to a lot of different places. In San Francisco, we went to the Golden Gate Bridge. Another day, we went to Six Flags in Vallejo, and after that we went to the restaurant for dinner. Another day, we went shopping in Livermore. After shopping, we ate dinner in Livermore.

On another day, my sister-in-law and her family invited my aunt and my cousin for dinner at an Indian restaurant. Before we went to the restaurant, my sister-in-law took us to the Monterey beach to watch the beautiful landscape there. Then we went shopping in Monterey. We took a lot of funny pictures and had lots of fun with each other.

In evening, we watched movies or sat with each other and talked about the past times when we were kids. We also talked about when they left Afghanistan and came to America and we were left there.

During this time, I cooked delicious food for them.

It was marvelous for Yamin too, because he saw my aunt for the first time (my mom's older sister). Whenever my aunt talked, Yamin said, "Mom, she talks like my Grandma and her voice is also like her." I was very happy because I felt like my mom was here.

When my aunt came and saw me, she said, "When you were born, I was in high school and sometimes took care of you. Now you are a mother and have two children." She is very happy for me.

I tried a lot to make them happy while they were here. We had a very good times. That's why it's unforgettable.

## A Popular Korean Dish

by Chiwon S.

Bibimbap, a traditional Korean food, has been passed down from the Joseon Dynasty in the 1600s. One theory of the origin is that the Korean king had bibimbap for lunch when the royal family visited. Another is that after a ceremony for ancestors in Korean New Year, the family shared the food to pay tribute to



the ancestors' spirits. Third theory, the family made bibimbap using the rest of the food from this year and greeted the New Year with new meal. The last theory is that during farming season, the farmers had meals several times each day. It was difficult to prepare meals, so families made mixed food instead.

Whenever I visit Korean restaurants, I usually order bibimbap because it's healthy, delicious, and fits almost anyone's appetite. Bibimbap's literal meaning is mixed food with rice. "Bibim" means mix and "bap" means cooked rice. We sauté each ingredient separately because ingredients need different cooking times.

Here is how to make bibimbap:

1-pound beef tri-tip, sliced thin  
1 bunch spinach, steamed  
1 bunch bean sprouts, steamed  
4 eggs, beaten  
4 cups cooked rice  
1 carrot, julienned  
1 zucchini, julienned  
1 red bell pepper, julienned  
5 ounces mushrooms, sliced  
sesame oil  
vegetable oil  
sesame seeds, roasted  
garlic, minced  
soy sauce  
vinegar  
gochujang (Korean hot pepper paste)

Marinate beef with mixture of soy sauce, black pepper, sugar, garlic, and sesame oil. After about 30 minutes, sauté beef until well done. Put beef in a serving dish. Mix spinach with mixture of soy sauce, garlic, and sesame oil. Remove to a serving dish.

Mix bean sprouts with salt, garlic, sesame oil, and sesame seeds.

Fry eggs with vegetable oil. Flip and cook second side. Remove from the pan and slice eggs into about 3-inch lengths.

Sauté carrot with salt and vegetable oil until slightly cooked. Sauté the zucchini, red pepper, and mushrooms same way.

Make sauce by mixing  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup gochujang, 1 tablespoon sesame oil, 1 teaspoon sesame seeds, 1 tablespoon sugar, 1 teaspoon vinegar, 1 teaspoon garlic, and 1 tablespoon water.

To serve, put rice in individual bowls. Have everyone top their rice with prepared ingredients, having each one in a separate part around the edge of the bowl. Put eggs in center. Sprinkle sesame seeds on top. Before eating, mix all ingredients together with some sauce. Enjoy beautiful colors and the delicious taste during the meal.

# Our Tahoe Ski Adventure

by Lucia L.

We planned the President's Day weekend in Tahoe. We left on Friday at 2:30 p.m. for Heavenly Ski Resort. I usually enjoy driving, and that day it started out very nice. Some people do not like driving because it makes them nervous, but for me that is not the case!

After Sacramento, the traffic was awful—bumper to bumper. My optimism was gone after ten hours of driving! My husband said we still had nine more hours and he wanted to turn back home. I said, "No, we have already come so far."

To make things worse, the weather became terrible. People even started to pee behind their car! At this time, I was thinking to myself, "This drive to Heavenly is not very heavenly!" It was 4:00 a.m. Saturday, and my navigation said we only had 38 miles (one hour and 50 minutes), but my husband said we had six more hours. I didn't believe it! We got to Edgewood Hotel at 10:00 a.m. Saturday, and the people there were so nice. They gave us champagne after I told them we had been driving 19 hours from the East Bay. We had breakfast and then slept all day. My body was exhausted and shaking.

On Sunday, we went skiing and it was fantastic! The weather was great. But bad

luck followed us again. The power went out at 1:00 p.m. and the gondola was not working. We had to wait for buses to rescue us on the top of the mountain. Three buses came after two hours. At dinner we celebrated surviving another day. We decided to stay another day to avoid traffic. By talking to other people, we found that I had the race for longest drive of 19 hours, and I didn't want to repeat that.

On Tuesday, we drove home. The weather was nice, sunny day, and it only took us three hours and 50 minutes to get home. It was awesome. I felt like we had only driven home from Walnut Creek. Home sweet home! Everybody was happy to get back home.



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### **Project Second Chance Mission Statement**

Project Second Chance (PSC), Contra Costa County Library's adult literacy program, provides free, confidential instruction in reading, writing, and spelling to adults struggling with basic literacy skills. PSC recruits, trains, and supports volunteer tutors who work one-on-one with adult learners to help them achieve their individual literacy-related goals and empower them in their work and personal lives.

If you know an adult who speaks English and needs help with basic reading or writing, please tell them about Project Second Chance or suggest they ask for help at their local library.



PROJECT SECOND CHANCE  
*Adult Literacy Program*  
CONTRA COSTA COUNTY LIBRARY  
[ccclib.org/psc](http://ccclib.org/psc)

**Project Second Chance**

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