

My Greatest ADVENTURE

Stories by Adult Learners



PARTNERS IN READING
ADULT LITERACY AND ESL
SAN JOSÉ PUBLIC LIBRARY

My Greatest Adventure Production Team

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My Greatest Adventure Cover Photo Credit

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Acknowledgements

Partners in Reading (PAR) is fortunate to work with an amazing group of adults who have chosen to improve their reading, writing, and technology skills at the Library. Each year PAR asks for stories to publish in a book. Many people answer the call and work hard to write a story. We want to thank all the people who made this year's book, *My Greatest Adventure*, possible.

Thanks, first of all, to all PAR learners for being a part of this journey into books and writing, and especially for those who wrote stories for this book. It is important to connect your ideas and thoughts to writing. Everyone has a voice, and by writing a published story, you can share your voice with others. Your voice is important because you have a lot to say. We want to read about what you have to say.

PAR is fortunate to have so many amazing volunteers who like to help others. Your gifts of time, patience, and teaching are invaluable. You worked tirelessly with your assigned learners to become published authors. We recognize that writing is not easy for most people, and you encouraged these authors to take an idea and build it into a cohesive story. Writing usually doesn't happen once and then it's over; it is a process. You guided your learner to create a story and then work to make it even better. Your patience is truly a gift.

MaryLee McNeal is a professional writer who has helped PAR learners begin thinking and writing for more than 14 years. Her handouts show clear, easy to follow examples. MaryLee breaks down each part of the writing process so that they are not intimidating, and each step is short and manageable. Learners and tutors can complete most of the project during her workshop, or they can use the handouts at a later time. The result is always a product that represents PAR authors in the best possible way.

Sue Rizzi and Pam Cornelison carefully edited the stories this year so that the authors' voices come through and the stories are easy to understand. Thank you for giving your time to ensure that these authors' words are clear.

We offer our profound thanks to all those who make our book possible each year. While the 2020 book is online, we anticipate that next year's book will be even larger because it will be in print and will contain a special section with not only this year's authors but also the 2021 authors. We can always depend on the City of San José and the San José Public Library to enable PAR to produce this book by dedicating time and money to this project. Creating a book is a way to thank all of PAR's amazing volunteers and learners.

The San José Public Library Foundation (SJPLF) has been extremely supportive of PAR's work to build a more literate and educated San José. We thank you for your confidence in the work we do.

The California State Library has been supporting local libraries up and down California since 1985. The State Library's support brings low cost services to thousands of people each year with instruction provided by trained volunteer tutors to adults from all backgrounds and with many reasons for choosing to be lifelong learners. Many of those adults became new library users because of this service. Support from the California State Library is essential to serving our customers.

There are many other people who help PAR so that volunteers and learners can productively spend time together improving literacy skills and becoming partners in reading. Thank you to all who make this program possible.



Partners in Reading Appreciates Your Continued Support

2019–2020 Funders

- City of San José, San José Public Library
- California State Library, California Library Literacy Services
- San José Public Library Foundation

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Introduction to

My Greatest Adventure

As you read this book, Partners in Reading (PAR) will be in its 32nd year offering adult literacy services to San José Public Library (SJPL) customers. Since its inception in 1989, PAR has diversified to offer classes for English language learners, instruction in technology, numeracy, and high school completion. These services are critical because San José is home to people from all over the world, including San José, with varying needs and interests. As times have changed, PAR has adapted to increase its offerings. We are curious to see how these services will change over the next 32 years.

PAR learners are adults who seek to improve their basic skills so that life can be a little easier and more enjoyable. It is not easy to come into a library and declare that you need extra help with reading. Reading is a skill that is key to so many essential aspects of life and can affect parenting, one's health and lifespan, livelihood, and independence, among many other areas of life. Luckily, these adults are assisted by volunteers who help them by forming a strong team. They make learning easier by supporting the adults as they build confidence and skills.

One method of practicing these skills is by writing a story for the PAR annual book. This year's theme is *My Greatest Adventure*. When this theme was selected, we had no idea how much of an adventure 2020 would be. Since meeting in person is not possible currently, fewer tutors and learners were able to coordinate working on a story together. It was eventually decided that instead of producing a book in print we would publish an online version of *My Greatest Adventure*. Their stories will also be incorporated in the 2021 book, which we trust will be something you will hold in your hands when we introduce it on International Literacy Day in September 2021.

Until then, we want to honor all of the PAR volunteers and adult learners who have persevered through all of the 2020 challenges. We hope you are safe and healthy and have found ways to continue learning at home. When it is time, we feel confident that you will go back to your favorite San José Public Library branch to meet in person. We also thank you for being open to change and to trying new ways of learning, such as learning online, in conjunction with other learners. We have all rededicated ourselves to being lifelong learners as we share the miracles and the frustrations of distance learning.

Two important words to describe distance learning and what we have experienced in this unforgettable year are patience and flexibility. PAR staff has seen examples of patience and flexibility each day in our interactions with customers. We thank you for your good humor as we struggle to use this time wisely to help adults with limited literacy build their skills and enjoy learning new things.

The person who helps PAR learners begin the process of writing a story to be published in a book is MaryLee McNeal, who leads by example. MaryLee is a published author with wonderful experience to share with new writers. This year's book is about adventures. Most authors wrote about adventures traveling. While we stay home this year, it is nice to read and learn about far away places. With MaryLee's help and later with help from volunteer tutors, PAR authors have taken us on tours to Hawaii, Israel, Ireland, North Dakota, and many other places. Another popular theme of these stories is education. We are glad that the adults in PAR think of continuing their education as an exciting adventure.

We hope you enjoy these stories. If you are a learner in the program and have not yet written a story, please think about working with your tutor to write a story for next year's book. If you are a volunteer, with the handouts and support, your learner can write a story for the book. We know you can do it together! If you are new to PAR and are reading one of our books for the first time, please consider becoming involved with this crucial work. We look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you, and please enjoy these stories. You can use them during your tutoring sessions for a great lesson and for inspiration.



Program Highlights

Partners in Reading (PAR) began operations in 1989 to train volunteer tutors to work on basic literacy skills with adults in San José through a grant from the California State Library and with extensive financial support from the City of San José and the San José Public Library. Since that time, services have expanded to include instruction in technology, classes for English Language Learners to build conversation, and a robust family literacy program.

With dedicated volunteers, accounting for the bulk of the instructional time, PAR has leveraged support to provide a wide variety of services, depending on the needs of the adults. And then came the pandemic.

With services unavailable in person, learning new forms of communication and technology and teaching them to both volunteers and adult learners became paramount. The silver lining is that, despite the hardship, we are all adapting and learning in creative ways. We can't wait for the day when we can be back together learning in person and learning more efficiently. But we are confident that all we have learned during this difficult time will be put to good use.

Tutors and learners have sent emails with grammar, reading, and writing activities, have mailed assignments to each other, have spoken on the phone, and have used powerful technology such as Zoom, FaceTime, Google Duo, and texting to communicate. The skills formerly learned in the computer lab have become even more important. While progress is initially slow with time spent learning how to log in to and navigate these various platforms, it is extremely rewarding to see so many people adjusting to these learning tools, many of which were created right here in our neighborhood.

While many are able to avail themselves of these technologies, the pandemic has highlighted the problem of access to technology in this community. Some of us are able to reach the internet easily, while others don't have the technology or the skills. Therefore, we are so grateful to the Library and the City for their emphasis on bridging the digital divide by offering hotspots for checkout so that all library customers can get on the internet. The Family Learning Centers are offering a small pilot for customers to check out hotspots and laptops. All units in the Library have also increased their workshops to teach those unfamiliar with technology about how to get connected and use these wonderful resources.

Imagine that you have never used this technology, and you struggle with reading and writing. That's where PAR comes in. Since many tutors and learners have decided to take a break during Shelter-in-Place, PAR staff has been offering classes ranging from English Language Learner Chat groups, to learning with TED Ed videos, and reading current events in the Good News class. PAR is planning to offer more classes in the coming months.

Volunteers have always been the backbone of PAR instruction. Each hour contributed by volunteers is valued at \$31.51.* Whether tutoring a group or an individual learner, or working in the office, volunteers provide essential services that greatly enhance the work that the small PAR staff is able to offer. We cannot thank you enough for your gifts of time and talent to help adults in San José become more literate.

In normal years PAR gives books and parenting information to adults with children under 14. This year, the handouts have focused on taking good care of mental and physical health during these unusual times and on providing much needed resources such as food for families who are struggling. With a state library grant last year, PAR began increasing outreach to underserved communities in San José by giving away children's books, talking to adults about PAR services, and offering workshops for parents by well-known educator Susan Stone. Outreach in 2020 has been a challenge, but it has continued through partnerships with agencies that serve our target population, such as Catholic Charities and Veggielution.

The one service that remained unchanged is the Career Online High School (COHS) program, which PAR has operated since early 2016. With 105 graduates to date and more on the way, this program is all online and has provided a way for adults to earn a high school diploma and learn new skills to prepare for better paying jobs and careers. COHS is linked to a library pilot that is only open to COHS graduates, who can earn a bachelor's degree through the Library.

PAR is committed to serving adults in San José who want to build basic literacy, conversation, and technology skills, and to help families grow and learn together. We are curious as to how we will go forward and adapt in 2021 and beyond.

Partners in Reading (PAR) launched in 1989 to offer basic literacy services by trained volunteers to assist adults in San José. For 31 years PAR has enabled a wide section of the community to get better at reading, writing, and technology, with the help of volunteers, so that they can do everyday tasks independently, such as reading to their kids, following information from health care professionals, and paying bills. The result has been less isolation and more productivity for these adults. Each hour that volunteers contribute is valued in California at \$31.51.* Since PAR volunteers contribute thousands of volunteer hours each year, the value is enormous.

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

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

This year, with a family literacy grant from the California State Library, PAR was presented with the opportunity to expand its family literacy offerings to under-resourced communities in San José by offering workshops, doing outreach, and giving free books and learning tools such as chalk, activity coloring books, and mini white boards. Susan Stone, a recognized authority on how to reach kids early and effectively, gave seven presentations about parenting and family literacy with the help of branch staff and community partners such as Catholic Charities and Sacred Heart Community Services. The workshops were translated into Spanish to reach a wider audience.

For 3½ years PAR has managed the Library’s Career Online High School program, where participants complete a rigorous qualification process and then take 36 semesters online to earn a career certificate and a high school diploma. With 51 programs currently participating throughout California, San José Public Library has one of the best track records in shepherding students through to graduation, with over a 70% retention rate. A high school diploma translates into better job opportunities and the potential to earn a higher income. For some a diploma also opens a gateway to higher education.

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

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



My Vacation in Nicaragua

By Sonia Baltodano

Sonia wrote *My Vacation in Nicaragua* because her trip was amazing. She went with her friend from high school, and they enjoyed it together.



ate a delicious lunch in the main lodge. We went outside. We saw beautiful trees. We walked over a small bridge. They have horses. We saw a "dormilon" (sleepy head animal).

On the first day we took a long hike. We walked on gravel roads. We wore boots and carried walking sticks. We forded rivers, walked around a beautiful mountain, crossed bridges, and we walked down slippery roads. I felt nervous, but it was amazing, fabulous, a lot of adrenaline. Finally we found a beautiful waterfall called, "El Eden." We are seniors, but we did it. It wasn't easy.

When we got back to the main lodge. We drank coffee and ate Nicaraguan cookies. Then we had dinner, and we saw a movie. Our rooms were high on the mountain, far from the main lodge. I was so tired, but I saw a wonderful view. The weather was cold. I slept with a mosquito net, but I didn't see one.

The next day, I got up at 6 a.m. I took a warm shower. After it we had a good breakfast, a plate with beans, cream, eggs, fried bananas, fruits, cheese cake, pitaya juice, and coffee. They gave us a cacao bean. They said it gives a lot of energy. We saw the cacao process and how the silkworms make silk. The silkworms ate baby morera leaves, lettuce, or quelite cake. The silkworm cocoons look like cotton.

They have a place for preservation of butterflies. It was a room with fishing nets. I saw some zebra butterflies. Also we saw arboricola frogs. They are small, green, and have red eyes. I held one on my hand. It jumped to my friend's shoulder, and she was screaming, and we were laughing.

We walked around coffee trees. I took a red coffee seed. During our walk we saw a collection of old Jeeps. I love Jeeps, and my friend took a picture of me with them. We had a good time. It was an amazing place, and we gained new knowledge.



My Surprise Adventure

By Robert Byers

Robert is retired. His story is about something that happened to him.



My adventure was not planned. On January 15, 2020 at 4 pm, I was sitting in my bedroom studying. Suddenly, there was a loud crash and my mobile home shook hard. I heard things fall off the shelves and break. My housemate, Elias, and I ran to the living room to see what happened, but we could not open the front door. It was jammed because the walls were crooked. We had to wait for firemen to help us get out through the back door.

When we were outside, we found a fire truck, a police car, and an ambulance. A car had run into my mobile home and knocked it off the foundation. I thought it was an earthquake, but it was an accident. After the firemen inspected the mobile home, they had to “red tag” it. This meant it was no longer safe to live in. This was a helpless feeling. We could have been homeless, but Elias called his niece, Bonnie. She and her husband, José, said we could stay with them. They had extra bedrooms so Elias and his wife and I each had our own bedroom and bathroom. Thank God, we had a place to stay. Bonnie and José did not charge us any rent, so we helped with household chores, bought food, and paid for utilities until we could move back into our own place.

Meanwhile, there was a lot to do. We had to move the usable furniture, clothes, and other things out of the mobile home and into a storage unit. Then I had to find a new place to live. But first, I had to talk to my insurance agent to find out what I could afford. The driver had insurance too, so together with mine, I could buy a new mobile home. The new one had to be built first. It took longer because the “Shelter-In-Place” order stopped construction. Moving home was delayed until the summer.

(Continued on page 3)

(My Surprise Adventure continued)

There were a lot of people to talk to and a lot of papers to sign. This kept me busy for many weeks. I had to have the damaged mobile home removed because I wanted to stay in the same space at the same mobile home park. There was new furniture to buy and dishes and glassware to replace.

I am excited about my new home because it is larger and everything is new. We moved into our new home at the end of June. This adventure was not a fun one, but it had a happy ending.

"We have stories to tell, stories that provide wisdom about the journey of life. What more have we to give one another than our 'truth' about our human adventure as honestly and as openly as we know how?"
– Rabbi Saul Rubin



Traveling to a New Adventure

By Maria Cuevas

Maria wrote this story because she would like to travel. It would be nice to visit North Dakota. She hates that she has never visited before.



I will feel great joy in me when with my family, especially my oldest granddaughter, who is very curious about traveling to know the state where the native Sioux are living.

We are very interested to know the history of Native Americans and to see how they are living and listen to them about their ancestors. We would like to see the rituals, the masks, the clothes for every occasion. Also, if it will be possible to taste their food. I would like to visit them at longhouses and see inside, and ask them where is the bedroom?, where is the kitchen? and where is the bathroom?, but first we'd like to know the history of when Joseph Brant became a Christian, and he worked on translating the Christian Bible into Mohawk.

We will fly from San José, California to North Dakota, and during the flight I will explain to my granddaughter the common things between native Sioux and native Aztecas in both countries, the U. S. and Mexico, like the way the tribal chief always wore special clothes. The Sioux has a shaman and Aztecas have a shaman too.

When finally we arrive there and we can see all the things we want, then I can say this was my GREATEST ADVENTURE.

When I came to this country I started to hear interesting stories about Iroquois, who call themselves Haudenosaunee meaning, "People Building a Longhouse" and I've felt the wish to go to that state.



My Cyber Adventure

By Marisela Cuevas

Marisela has been married for 24 years. She is a mom of three children. Marisela considers herself a relentless woman.



When the pandemic started, I never realized that my whole life would be a crazy adventure, especially in my work area. I am a Community Worker, and I love doing my job as an in-person instructor. I never imagined doing my work any other way. My first thought was, “How can I do that?” I was afraid, but at the same time I was excited about learning how to teach in a new style through online applications. That was when my cyber adventure began.

I had to take many steps. First, I started to explore some platforms such as Meet, Zoom, Webex, and Microsoft Teams, among others. Second, after researching the platforms and based on my work requirements, I decided to use Zoom. Then I had to learn all about Zoom features, such as how to schedule a meeting, how to use breakout rooms, how I could help the participants if they needed help, or any other issues related to the Zoom platform.

Nothing was easy when I started this adventure. The hardest part in the whole process was engaging the parents to participate in this new style of distance learning, I had to face many obstacles and barriers that gave me a headache, but at the same time helped me to see these as a growth opportunity. In the end, my accomplishments were My Greatest Adventure: 19 virtual presentations, many Zoom trainings, and more than 100 participants.

“Technology will never replace great teachers, but in the hands of great teachers, it’s transformational.” – George Couros



The City of Bessbrook

By O'Neal Durgin

O'Neal went to Ireland, and it's very interesting.



My name is O'Neal Durgin, and I have traveled to Ireland. Ireland is the most beautiful place to visit.

The city of Bessbrook was interesting. I enjoyed the country atmosphere. I went to the technology museum, which had a lot of old artifacts from Ireland. In particular, there were old military cannons. I had never seen those before.

In Bessbrook, there is a bridge called the 18 arches. It is around a quarter of a mile long. It was constructed in 1849, and is the highest viaduct in Ireland. I also went to the Giant's Causeway, which is one of the natural wonders of the world. The Giant's Causeway is made of lava and erosion, which form hexagon-shaped rocks.

While at the Giant's Causeway area, I also went to the Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge. The bridge is 66 feet and is 98 feet above the rocks below. I did not want to go across the bridge, but my family went across the bridge as I watched. It was high.

We finished the trip off by going to the Guinness brewery in Dublin. We got a free beer, and the Guinness was the best Guinness that I ever had.



[Photograph of Giant's Causeway]. (n.d.). Road Trips For Families. <https://www.roadtripsforfamilies.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/The-Giants-Causeway-738x355.jpg>



Unforgettable Moments

By Rosa

Rosa is so happy to be in the Partners in Reading program. She believes it is great to show people there is no limit for learning, especially when someone can get an education.



One of the greatest adventures of my life was the first time I traveled to San Diego to visit SeaWorld. I loved traveling along the road to San Diego, looking at the beautiful mountains and farms with horses and goats.

Everything was new to me at SeaWorld. I had never seen a place like that before with all the whales and dolphins. People were friendly and welcoming. My daughter, Denice, was four years old then, and she loved petting the dolphins, monkeys and seals.

We also saw lions and tigers in cages, and we saw colorful parrots that whistled to us. When we petted the dolphins their skin was so smooth. The dolphin pool smelled like the ocean. We enjoyed watching seals bounce balls off the tip of their noses. The seals also waved to us with their flippers. We made videos of Denice petting the animals, which we love to watch at home. I liked the acts on stage at SeaWorld where trainers had dogs perform tricks.

SeaWorld was a very special place because it made me feel happy being there. Our family ended up going to SeaWorld four times because we loved it so much.

“Traveling in the company of those we love is home in motion.” – Leigh Hunt



Hello Kitty's Adventure

By Monica Fernandez

Monica wrote this story because she loves Hello Kitty.



Hello Kitty wanted to go on an adventure. She wanted to go across America to go and find her adventure there. She took a plane from New York City across America. She had a ticket to fly around the world. Hello Kitty had her suitcase packed and she was on her way across America. She had a very long flight to get there.

She was a very happy kitten. She wore her best dress and her sparkling shoes. She wanted to fly into the city of San José, CA. When the flight was over, she got off the plane, got her suitcase, and hopped on the VTA bus.

In San José she saw many tall buildings and coffee shops. Her favorite coffee shop is Starbucks. She loves to drink cafe latte and eat at McDonald's. She met many people. There was a person in San José.

Hello Kitty said, "Do you know the way to San José?"

Hello Kitty said, "Hello! My name is Hello Kitty. I came all the way from New York City. Where are you from?"

The lady said, "I am from here. I live here in California."

Hello Kitty brought her something from New York City. She opened the gift. The lady was so surprised to see it was a puppy, so she named the puppy Ruby. Her name was Maria, and Hello Kitty flew back with them to New York City.

Hello Kitty says, "The end. See ya."





Learning English Has Opened Up My Life

By Chelo Garcia

Chelo wrote this story because learning English has changed her life forever.



When I left Mexicali, Baja California in 2004 to move to the U. S., I met my friend, Julian. He invited me for a cup of coffee at Starbucks. He ordered a cup of mocha coffee for me and a cup of black coffee for himself. I drank my coffee but it didn't have any sugar in it. It was a black coffee. We both laughed because we got the same coffee. He apologized for not knowing how to say in English what kind of drink we wanted to order. I realized then that I needed to learn to speak English.

I started my adventure taking English classes. I was working at Los Altos Country Club as a housekeeper for one year. Then I got another position as an attendee in the lady's locker room. It was very difficult for me because the members only spoke English. My co-worker, Rita, laughed at me when I didn't pronounce correctly the members' last names or some new words.

After 5 years of being a resident in the U. S., my sister, Imelda, and I filled out the application to become citizens. I studied for the test and even though I was very nervous for it - I passed!

Now I feel very happy because I can order my favorite coffee drink and I feel more comfortable speaking and listening in English. I now have better conversations with members, co-workers and my boss.

Thanks to my tutor, Edie Kuhlmann, for her patience and teaching me a lot. She is part of my greatest adventure.





The Best Adventure in My Life

By Tatiana Gutierrez

Tatiana wrote her story because she wants to share her experience about how her life has changed. She hopes her story can help people who are in the same situation that she was in a few years ago.



Two and one-half years ago my life totally changed. My husband and I decided to move to San José. So, I left my country (El Salvador), my family, friends and job. The first year was very hard for me because I didn't have family or friends here. Also, I didn't know the language very well.

Sometimes I felt sad and depressed. Living here was so hard and different for me. However, I decided to follow a plan: I will learn English and then I will find a job in my field. I enrolled in ESL classes and also practiced my speaking skills with a volunteer from the Partners in Reading program.

During that time, my husband and I decided to become parents. We thought that it was time to have our first baby. After two years of living here, I feel more confident about the language, and my husband and I have built a new life here. I've also met friends who are very supportive.

Now, I'm pregnant and these have been the most wonderful eight months in my life. I totally changed my mind and plans for the future. My plans are now around my baby and his life, and my professional life is not my priority. I'm considering ESL classes and improving my English skills, but for the moment I have another purpose in my life, which is caring for my little baby. Now I'm living the best adventure in my life.

"There really are places in the heart you don't even know exist until you love a child."

– Anne Lamott



New Horizons

By Mitra

Mitra was anxious to practice her writing in a real story context.



Four years ago, there were three things that happened to me. I came to America. I got married. I began to learn a new language – English.

Learning English was a second try. It was long after what was taught in my high school. It was also very different from what was taught. It is also very different from my first language, Farsi. That makes it an exciting and challenging adventure.

The American culture is also very different from Iran. I am very happy to become acquainted with this culture. People are free.

“Travel isn't always pretty. It isn't always comfortable. Sometimes it hurts, it even breaks your heart. But that's OK. The journey changes you; it should change you. It leaves marks on your memory, on your consciousness, on your heart, and on your body. You take something with you. Hopefully, you leave something good behind.” – Anthony Bourdain



Panama Adventure

By Herman Haro

Herman wrote this story to show the exciting trip he took to a country called Panama and to visit the Panama Canal.



When I took my first view of Panama City, out of the airplane window, I thought it looked amazing. On my drive from the airport, I saw different styles of huge buildings and houses. It was like being in San Francisco.

Later, I went on a tour of the whole city, and we visited Causeway Island. The next day we travelled to Gamboa, a harbor for a boat tour of the Canal and Monkey Island. The water was very rough because the big ships were making big waves.

My first impression of the Panama Canal entrance was that it was very huge. It had long flights of stairs that lead to doors. There was a large sign with individual letters that said Miraflores. I entered the museum building and walked towards the back, where I saw a huge U-shaped balcony that viewed towards the canal.

It was very crowded and windy. I was very excited to see the canal and learn how it works. The canal seemed narrow for the huge ships to pass by in the teal colored water. Along the canal there was a train to guide the ships and help the captains pass through the canal. After my tour, I then proceeded to the museum, where I saw exhibits of how the canal was built and how it changed the ecosystem.

This was my first exciting trip to Panama. I would love to return to Panama in the future again.





Traveling to a New Place

By Joyce

Joyce likes to travel because it helps her experience different lifestyles.



My greatest adventure is traveling to a new place. I wish to travel twice to Alaska with my husband. One reason is to enjoy endless daylight in summer and another is to enjoy an all-natural light show in winter.

I imagine in the summertime, the day is long, the night is short and the weather is very pleasant. We would like to stay in a log house by the forest with a perfect backdrop that includes clear streams, lush trees, all kinds of bright flowers and tall mountains. When the wind blows, there would be a light fragrance! We would like to visit Alaska Veterans Memorial, Denali National Park and drive ATV vehicles.

In winter, the day is short, the night is long, the weather is snowy and looks magnificent. I picture the local people are very enthusiastic and friendly. First, we would go dog sledding. Next, we would choose a delicious lunch of freshly caught seafood, a dish made from local birch barbecue, walk by the Chena River and visit a museum. Then, we would go to see the northern lights, which are very gorgeous. It shines everywhere and bumps into the air, giving off different colors. Our smart camera records the very gorgeous northern lights and us. Finally, tired and happy we would go back to the hotel in Fairbanks.

Traveling to Alaska I would see different places, scenery, know different things, and feel different lifestyles. That's why I would like to travel to new places.

“You must go on adventures to find out where you truly belong.” – Sue Fitzmaurice



A Simple Thing Can Bring Happiness

By Mayfe Nieto



An adventure can be many things. Every day can be an adventure for some of us, or a trip perfectly planned can turn into adventure.

I would like to begin my story by saying that my husband and I love to travel. We like to take any opportunity to disconnect from the daily routine. It could be something we decided at the last minute or something we planned ahead. We agree that any time is a good time to enjoy ourselves.

Last year, we chose New Orleans to go for our summer vacation! Why New Orleans? Well, because there is a lot of history, traditions and heritage to learn about, the weather is nice, it has many attractions and exciting things to do, and the food is absolutely delicious.

We sailed along the Mississippi River on a steam boat, had an exquisite lunch with local food and music. We had a marvelous time. It is impossible to decide what the most enjoyable part of the trip was; however, running in a heavy rain in the middle of the flooded streets to catch our flight back home in time, was definitely an adventure that we will never forget.

So, why not take life as an adventure, why not find enjoyment in the simple things? We never know how good or bad something will be until we try it! As I see it, we can live life creating memories to treasure.

“The biggest adventure you can take is to live the life of your dreams.” – Oprah Winfrey



Playing a Keyboard

By Vaneska Palma

Learning to play a musical instrument is fun and helps to improve memory power and creativity.



My greatest adventure was when I played the keyboard in the orchestra of my school. It happened in El Salvador in 1991-1992. I was in the seventh grade and I was thirteen years old.

Everything started when my father gave me a keyboard. I remember I wanted to know how to play the keyboard, so I decided to take some lessons at my school. My professor was a nun. Her name was Sister Margoth. She was a nice and enthusiastic person. At that time she was forming an orchestra. She invited all of her students to belong to it. We were a group of thirty girls between twelve and eighteen years old.

Learning to play the keyboard was a great achievement for me. I learned to be organized and disciplined with my time. In order to be in the orchestra, you had to get good grades.

The greatest part of this adventure was a contest. We participated with the orchestra in a local contest between schools. The contest was in another larger school. There were ten orchestras competing. The competition was difficult, but we won second place! This was exciting. We rehearsed a lot, and I remember how much fun this was.

This adventure changed my life because I was part of something important and I made the decision to do this by myself.

I think the discipline that you need to play an instrument is the same that you need to achieve success in other areas of your life.



My Adventure as a Swimmer

By Ida Joy Robinson

Ida wrote this story because she likes to be physically fit and look good!

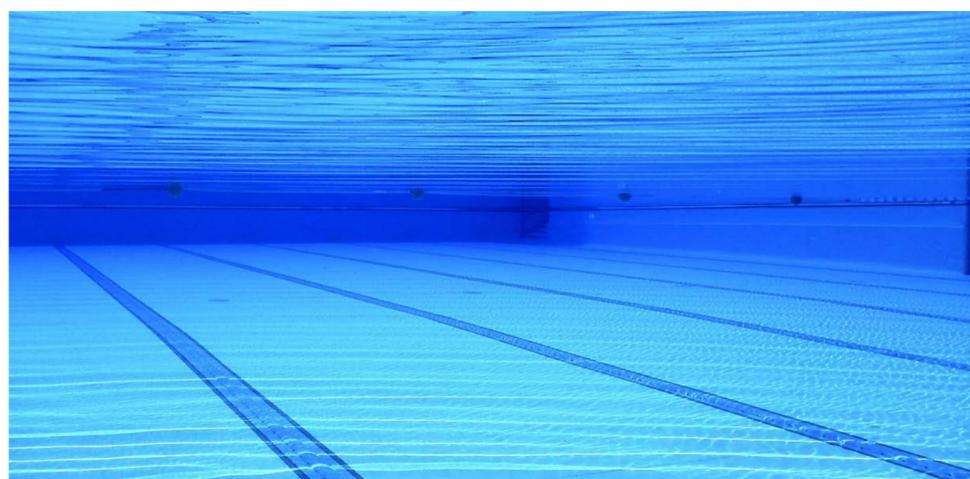


When I was younger, I experienced a serious knee injury from jogging. Years later, in the early 1980s when I was 33, I joined the YMCA. I had decided that since I could no longer run, I would transition to a discipline of swimming. I participated in a regimen of swimming for many years, using it as my daily workout.

My best adventure began when I moved to my current address 10 years ago. At that time I set a personal goal of becoming an avid swimmer. I was able to swim all year round, in all kinds of weather conditions. I enjoyed feeling the water on my skin, sometimes cool and sometimes warm. It was a delight to see familiar faces and hear the laughter of others. Watching some of the swimmers doing laps, I began to feel challenged to improve so that I could compete against them.

I pushed myself ridiculously hard, swimming as much as 35 to 45 minutes each day. During the winter months, it would be especially brutal and scary. The outdoor pool was not always heated, and at times I would be there alone. Soon, though, because of my hard work, I became such a vigorous and speedy swimmer that I achieved my goal and was able to pass the others when doing laps.

Swimming was an exhilarating adventure, and I often experienced what joggers call a “runners’ high,” a transcendent, meditative state. I was proud that I had reached my goal.





My Teaching Adventure

By Ashraf Sadr

Ashraf decided to write about her job and share her adventure about becoming a teacher.



I was born in Iran. When I was 5 years old, too young to go to school, I liked to invite family's children and neighbors' children to play school, to tell them stories and sing songs to pretend that I was their teacher.

We had a big house and a deep pool. One day while we were playing, one of the children fell into the pool. All the children were shocked, and they were scared. We saved her life, but my parents told me "you must stop teaching". I had to obey and became very sad, but I still wanted to be a teacher.

I studied hard at school and college. After 15 years, I graduated from college and got a job as a math teacher. My greatest adventure was being a real teacher. I continued teaching for 40 years. I worked very hard and always loved my students.

In 1979, the Islamic revolution happened in my country. Before the revolution, we had a strong relationship with the U. S. Iranians liked Americans. After the revolution, everything changed. Many years passed. We decided to move to the U. S. because of our children's graduate school. Now we are living in San José, California.

I hope to improve my English Language skills and teach math at a U. S. school soon. I want to thank all the people who are helping me achieve my goals, especially Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Library's staff and tutors.

***"In learning you will teach, and in teaching you will learn."* – Phil Collins**



My Greatest Adventure Lies Ahead of Me: Writing Stories for Children

By Manju Shahi

Manju was a teacher in her native Nepal. She wrote her story because she wants to write stories for children and help them with their education.



My greatest adventure is yet to come: writing stories for children. Being a mother and a professional teacher in Nepal, I realized that we must protect children from exposure to scenes of violence, which is difficult because between the ages of two and seven, children imitate the characters they see or read about in story books, TV shows and cartoons.

So, I would like to give children, especially children two to nine, the opportunity to read about positive things through stories, focusing on their moral education and environmental awareness. According to his/her age and capability, a child will learn vocabulary, numbers and colors, a general knowledge of living and nonliving things, a sense of humanity, the value of education and health, and the cultures and traditions of other people. The child will also gain an understanding of media content, TV and cartoons.

I am going to do my adventure with the help of PAR in the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library. My volunteer teacher, David Muhlitner, will help me with my writing, and a young artist will draw the pictures in my story book. PAR members will help me with printing and publishing. All my friends, including my best friend, Peggy Kilduff, and family and supporters, and many children, will enjoy reading the stories.

I can't wait to start my greatest adventure of life: writing stories for children.

“One child, one teacher, one book, one pen can change the world.” – Malala Yousafzai



Going to Israel

By Jacqueline Smith

Jacqueline wrote this story because she has always wanted to visit and see the customs of Jerusalem and walk where God walked.



I could hardly wait to visit there. I would need my very important passport for my 13-hour flight. My passport will ensure that I will return home. That's so important on my journey.

I could hardly wait to see all the main attractions, plus the highlights and taste the kosher foods, the clothing for women and meet the passed down traditions. Of course, the Wailing Wall. So much to do and see. My oh my! I could hardly believe that the day I purchased my tickets for me and my husband, Leo. We are very blessed to walk where God did.

We also visited Jerusalem, where I heard musicians playing familiar music in the synagogue where I joined the ladies in song and dance. The dancing ladies were warm and welcoming.

I then went to Mount Zion, just outside the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem and went to the Upper Room, the location of the Last Supper and Mount Sinai in Egypt. The next day I went to Jesus' tomb in Golgotha. I ended our trip by visiting the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.



Pixabay. (n.d). Urban City of Jerusalem [Photograph]. Canva. <https://www.canva.com/media/MADQ4xyZYuw>



My Hawaiian Adventure

By Maria Torrico

Maria has three children. She is married to Ed, and they live in San José.



On May 30, 1993 I had my best adventure ever. My husband and I had just gotten married. He gave me a surprise honeymoon trip to Honolulu, Hawaii.

When we arrived at the airport, the vans picked us up and gave us leis (flowers). They said “Aloha,” which means welcome. The van took us to our hotel. We visited a big mall, the beach, toured in a boat and then we ate at a buffet.

The next day we had a Continental breakfast and they took us to a big mall. There were many souvenirs, chocolate and candies. I bought a Hawaiian shirt and maxi dress and souvenirs for my friends.

The boat tour was a beautiful experience. The buses took us to the dock where the boats were. One gentleman was telling us several times, “Your boat number is 15”. Later I forgot the number. In the boat we had a big brunch: seafood, salad, fruits, punch, dessert, and piña coladas. It was hot. We danced and we chatted with different people. When we got off the boat, most people were drunk and they forgot their number. They figured it out by the name of their hotel.

The beach was very beautiful. I loved to walk on the sand. I was impressed that the water was warm, not cold. They were serving cold drinks. It was very relaxing and many people were rowing in boats. Everybody was enjoying this place. This amazing adventure to Hawaii is something that I won't forget.

***“May your adventures bring you closer together,
even as they take you far away from home.”***

– Trenton Lee Stewart



Taft

By Thomas Valdivia

Thomas wanted people to know about Taft College. It was an adventure being away from home for two years.



The best adventure of my life was going to Taft.

Taft is 30 minutes away from Bakersfield, California. It is a community college. Taft offers classes. They offered me classes for living independently. They also offered drama, math and computer classes. My favorite class was computers.

At Taft I met my roommate, Collin. He was from San José too. He is still my friend. I also met my friend Kevin. Kevin was a freshman when I was a sophomore. I met a teacher and coach named Brook. She taught me how to run track and field. Collin ran track and field too. We both still run.

The special things about Taft are the friends I made and the jobs they gave us. Taft made me feel independent. After going there two years I brought that independence back home with me.

“When I discover who I am, I'll be free.”

– Ralph Ellison



Eduardo Arenas Silvera. (n.d). {Photograph of Taft College Courtyard}. Measure A - Taft College. <http://www.measure-a.info/Slideshows/Royal/img/Large/7.jpg/>



Alaska Voyage

By Silvia Wilder

Silvia has very good memories about her Alaska trip with all the majestic views. She met people from different countries. This was a dream come true for her.



Alaska was one of my favorite adventures that I ever had. My husband took me for my birthday in September 2014 on a Princess cruise.

The first port we stopped at was Juneau. We went for a hike uphill for three hours and we came down in a gondola, enjoying amazing views, including a tiny ship from far away. I could not believe that 2,400 people fit in it!

On the second day we explored Glacier Bay National Park. The ship pivoted in the Bay, providing a panoramic view of the layers of the blue ice. The glacier continuously broke off large chunks of ice into the water, with a thunder cracking sound and giant splashes.

The next day we stayed all day on the ship. They provided activities, entertainment and food all day. Good thing we could go and burn some calories at the gym! We also walked around the ship. My husband and I pretended we were Rose and Jack from the Titanic, but instead of standing in the front of the ship we did this on the back, so nobody could see us.

On the fourth day we stopped in Ketchikan, where we took a seaplane ride. Before the ride at 9:00 am they gave an all-you-can-eat crab breakfast; we were worried about what could happen. Good thing nothing happened, and we enjoyed the ride.

Just remembering I feel the adrenaline again. It was amazing, this once in a lifetime adventure.

“Life is either a daring adventure or nothing at all.”
– Helen Keller



Discovering My Passion for Flowers

By Ling Yeung

Ling wrote this story so she can share her passion for flower arranging with others.



My Greatest Adventure was taking a flower arrangement course nearly twenty years ago in Seattle. I had always dreamed of being a florist. When I see flowers, I always feel joyful and loved.

The course was three weeks long, and on the first day, we visited flower wholesalers. There were lots of varieties of fresh cut flowers that I hadn't seen before. We learned that flowers needed to be stored at different room temperatures, depending on their natures. Learning how to care for fresh cut flowers to extend their lifetime was extremely useful. The comprehensive course taught me how to design for all occasions (including weddings, funerals, and daily arrangements) and different customers (corporations, hotels, and events). My hands-on work improved every day with instructors' feedback. I learned how to calculate the material costs of arrangements and price them effectively to ensure good profit margins and stay within budget. The graduation project was the most challenging, because our team had to create Christmas decorations with a limited budget and timeline. We satisfied the customer's needs, fulfilled all the requirements, and showed our creativity. It was an unforgettable experience for me.

Even though I can't be a florist, I fall in love with flowers every day, and am always eager to learn more and share my creations with others. I often send my pieces with my blessings to friends and family at their important moments. Flower arranging is now my life-long hobby that I usually enjoy with my sons.



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