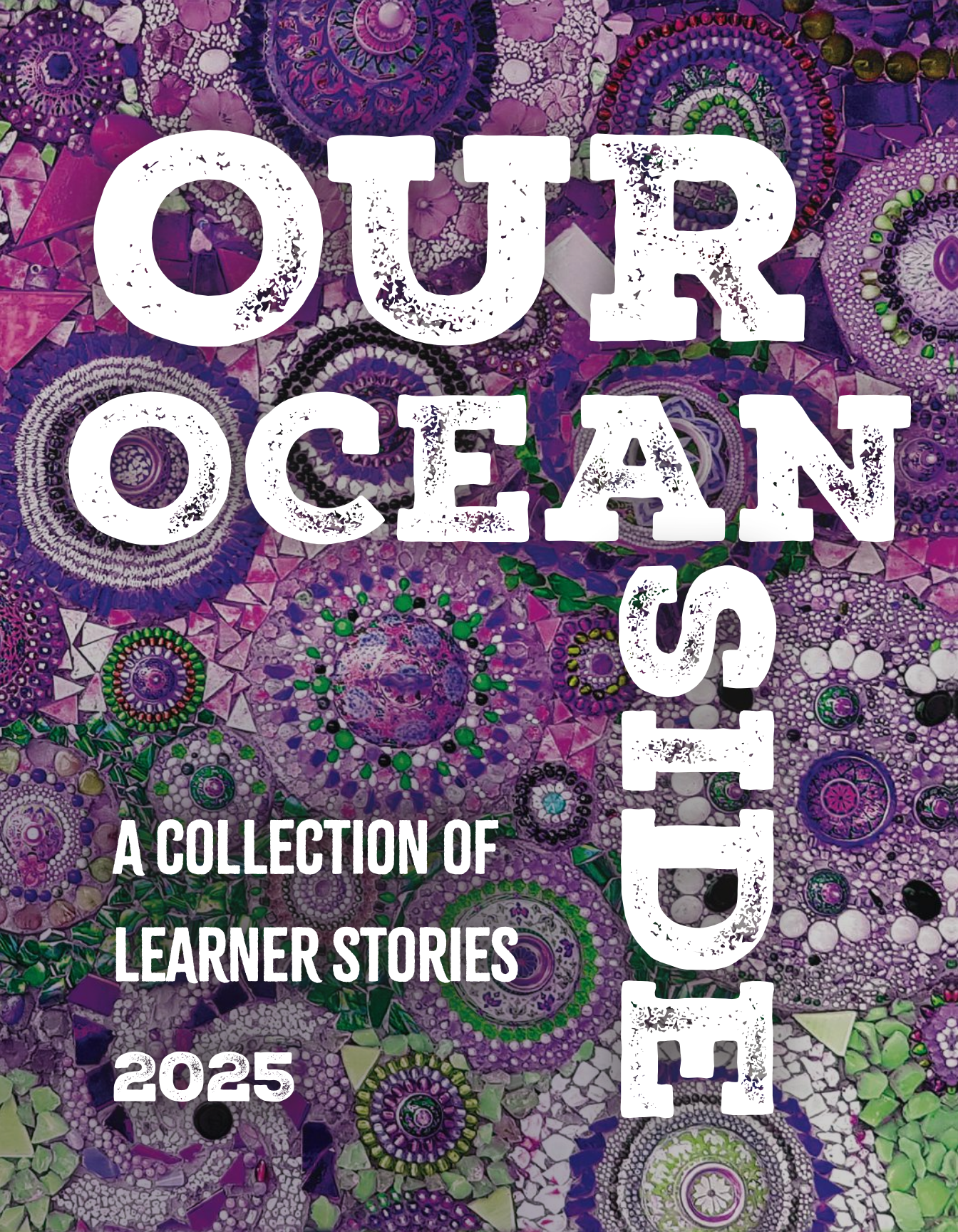




OUR OCEAN OF THE

A COLLECTION OF
LEARNER STORIES

2025

IN PRAISE OF

"Reading these stories gives a glimpse of the radical journeys our students have taken, the sweetness of their deep love for family and the courageous determination they have to create a better life."

- *Alison Inglis, READS Tutor*

"Beautiful themes emerge throughout: love, hope, family, optimism, perseverance, compassion, and dignity. You'll marvel at both the creativity and insight of these writers. Enjoy!"

- *Mike Kearney, READS Tutor*

"It is an honor to read and hear these authentic, impactful, and truly inspiring stories.

This book is a true labor of love—and it is deeply cherished." - *Panagiota Angelos, READS Team*

"Each one of these pieces is remarkable and incredibly vulnerable in their own right. I'm moved to understanding the power it gives learners when they find their voices, most in a second language!"

- *Monica Chapa Domercq, Library Board Trustee*

"I hope that all who read this feel a deep appreciation and respect for the intention, authenticity and vulnerability printed here. My deepest admiration to all who shared their story!"

- *Chelsea Eggli, READS Team*

"The works in this anthology display the courageous voices of the authors. The stories display how a dream becomes fulfilled, sometimes through pain and incredible odds."

- *Charlene Abretske Feliu, Cafecito Leader*

"The writing submissions in this book I found to be engaging & encouraging to all. They inspire, show hope & pride while capturing emotions from my own life experiences."

- *Linda Arce, Library Board Trustee*

"I was very moved reading the 2025 Anthology. Their writings remind us to keep our humanity at the forefront of our lives." - *Christine Lyster, READS Tutor*

"It's amazing not only that the authors write expressively, but also how they share such heartfelt backstories about their families of origin and their homelands." - *Mia Winter, Cafecito leader*

"Readers will be inspired and uplifted by the authors' voices and by the courage, resilience and determination that they bring to our community." - *Ricka Sprunk, Cafecito Leader*

"Authors write with warmth and insight about their childhood memories, life experiences, and hopes for the future. You will come away inspired by their work." - *Eileen Shearin, Cafecito Leader*

"Inside, you'll find stories of gratefulness, celebration, tragedy, courage, hope, laughter, and love. These are the voices of our Oceanside neighbors, friends, and family." - *Perry Veater, Former READS Team*

OUR OCEAN

A COLLECTION OF
LEARNER STORIES
VOL 3

SHIM

Oceanside READS
Adult Literacy Program
OCEANSIDE PUBLIC LIBRARY

An integral part of Oceanside Public Library's mission is to empower the community by promoting literacy, community connection and access. Oceanside READS Learning Center helps adults in Oceanside connect to one another, and access the learning spaces necessary to improve literacy and language skills in order to pursue their chosen goals as learners, parents, workers and community members.

Oceanside READS Learning Center and this anthology are funded in part by a grant from California Library Literacy services, a program of the California State Library and the City of Oceanside.

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www.oceansidelibrary.org

reads@oceansideca.org

DEDICATION

Because it takes a village, this anthology is dedicated to all who have supported each writer in this book in reaching a new goal.

"A writer is someone
who pays attention
to the world."

- Susan Sontag





About READS

OCEANSIDE READS IS A VERY SPECIAL PLACE.

Here, adults from all walks of life gather to learn to read or read better, learn technology skills, prepare for the citizenship test, develop skills for new jobs, practice English and more. READS offers free 1:1 tutoring for adults and hosts small group classes all over Oceanside. As a service of the Oceanside Public Library, our goal is to engage meaningfully with the community, provide access to whatever information is needed, connect people to each other and inspire new ideas and a sense of wonder as adults set and work towards their goals.

If you or someone you know would like to learn more about learning new skills as an adult learner or volunteering as a tutor, we invite you to get in touch. A wonderful group of kind, creative and dedicated volunteers provide ongoing support to our adult learners as tutors, conversation leaders and family literacy program leaders. We would love to have you join us.

“I love this place. The people coming here are very nice. They help each other.

It is a warm place. Like at home.” –Adult Learner





We all have a **STORY** *to tell.*

WHEN I JOINED THE CAFECITO CIRCLES to share what I called my 'Writer's Toolbox', I was excited. I am a former, but I think really, a lifetime teacher, so I wanted to do what I could to encourage the Cafecito participants to feel free to write down their thoughts, their stories, their dreams. Writing a moment, a memory, a life's observation is a powerfully personal act. The willingness to share these words demands courage because sometimes we fear we are inviting judgment.

So, I introduced ideas, techniques and some hands-on opportunities to encourage words on the page. It didn't matter how many because at Cafecito, words took on a life of their own. Through the act of spontaneous dialogue, writing happened. What started out with a few images, sights, sounds and smells evolved into stories and poems that grew into their own. Now, inviting us to share in the telling of their life's joys, sorrows, pains, hopes, and fears, is truly a privilege.

As a reader of their work, I was simultaneously delighted by the creativity, in awe of the struggles and obstacles met, and humbled by the insights reflected in the author's words. I have every reason to believe every reader of 'Our Oceanside' will feel the same.

- Mollie Tammone, Adult Literacy Tutor

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FIFTY-FIVE AUTHORS WORKED ON THIS VOLUME WITH EIGHTEEN VOLUNTEERS AND FIVE STAFF – WOW! THIS ANTHOLOGY WOULD NOT BE WHAT IT IS WITHOUT YOUR HARD WORK, ENCOURAGEMENT AND EFFORT.

To the READS team: Carmen Cruz, Chelsea Genack Eggli, Lupita Vergara, Panagiota Angelos and Perry Veater, thank you for encouraging our learners, endlessly promoting this project and creating a safe and welcoming space for these stories to be told. Mollie Tammone, thank you for leading workshops to encourage and expand writing at any level. Thank you to Alison Inglis, Charlene Abretske, Marie Town and Mia Winter who guided small groups at the anthology launch program. Amy J. Davis, thank you for your thoughtful help with cataloging this text. To Mike Stivers, for continuing to weave visual beauty into these narratives and poems.

To our tutors and conversation leaders whose learner's stories appeared in this publication – your support was instrumental. Those who helped writers with their pieces or whose learners writing appears in this publication:

- | | | | |
|---------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|
| · Maria V. | · Rosemarie C. | · Mark W. | · Steve F. |
| · Mia W. | · Alison I. | · Gloria R. | · Andy O. |
| · Ricka S. | · Mike K. | · Sonia R. | · Eileen S. |
| · Chelsea E. | · Barbie M. | · Erika V. | · Margaret D. |
| · Charlene F. | · Perry V. | · Christine L. | · Mollie T. |

A NOTE OF THANKS FROM OUR LIBRARY DIRECTOR:

To all those acknowledged-staff, tutors, and writers, profound thanks for expanding the City's literary artworks in deep and meaningful ways through your incredible collaborations. In addition, a special thank you as well to the families for supporting these efforts of growth, honesty and collectiveness.

- CJ DiMento, Library Director



FOREWORD

I HAVE VIVID MEMORIES OF MY MOM LEARNING TO READ AND SPEAK ENGLISH.

She came from Tijuana, Mexico, to Oceanside to marry my dad, the love of her life, and to make Oceanside her new home. Growing up during the Depression, she knew poverty and hunger all too well. Her dream became owning her own home and being able to provide for her family. I watched my mom work very hard, first in the fields, then in a rubber factory. The people she worked with spoke different languages – Tagalog, Samoan, English and Spanish, and they all learned to communicate in English. I got to listen to their conversations during annual company picnics.

Mom would also read the local paper, to find out what was happening in her community. I also remember her pouring over notes from school, making sure my dad attended parent-teacher conferences. She believed that education was the key to a better life for her children, as she was only allowed to attend school for one year. These early memories taught me that education is not just about knowledge—it's about dignity, courage, and the power to participate fully in life and achieve more. I was so proud of my mom!

That's why this collection of stories moves me so deeply. Within these pages, you will find voices full of heart—stories of starting over, of learning new languages and new customs, of forming friendships, and of holding tight to dreams that had once seemed out of reach. These are not just adult learner stories, these are human stories—of growth, of family, of finding your place and your voice.

As someone who has dedicated her life to public service in this community, I see the impact of adult education every day. I see it in parents who can now help their children with homework, in neighbors who speak with new confidence, and in citizens who step forward to lead, to vote, and to contribute in ways they once thought impossible. This work matters. These programs matter. And the stories here are proof.

The READS Learning Center has such a tremendous and positive impact within Oceanside. Over its twenty-six year history, READS has become an integral and core service of our Library and is truly valued by City leadership and the community. This third edition of *Our Oceanside: A Collection of Learner Stories* once again captures the special and profound work of the READS learning community. This third volume, alongside, the first two, are cultural treasures of Oceanside and a true celebration of literacy.

I invite you to experience these stories with an open heart, to learn from the journeys chronicled here, and to recognize the strength and potential that exist in every person who begins their learning journey at the library. May these narratives deepen your appreciation for education, community, and the promise of new beginnings. To the authors: thank you for sharing your stories so generously. You remind us all what it means to keep growing, to keep reaching, and to never give up on the power of your own story.

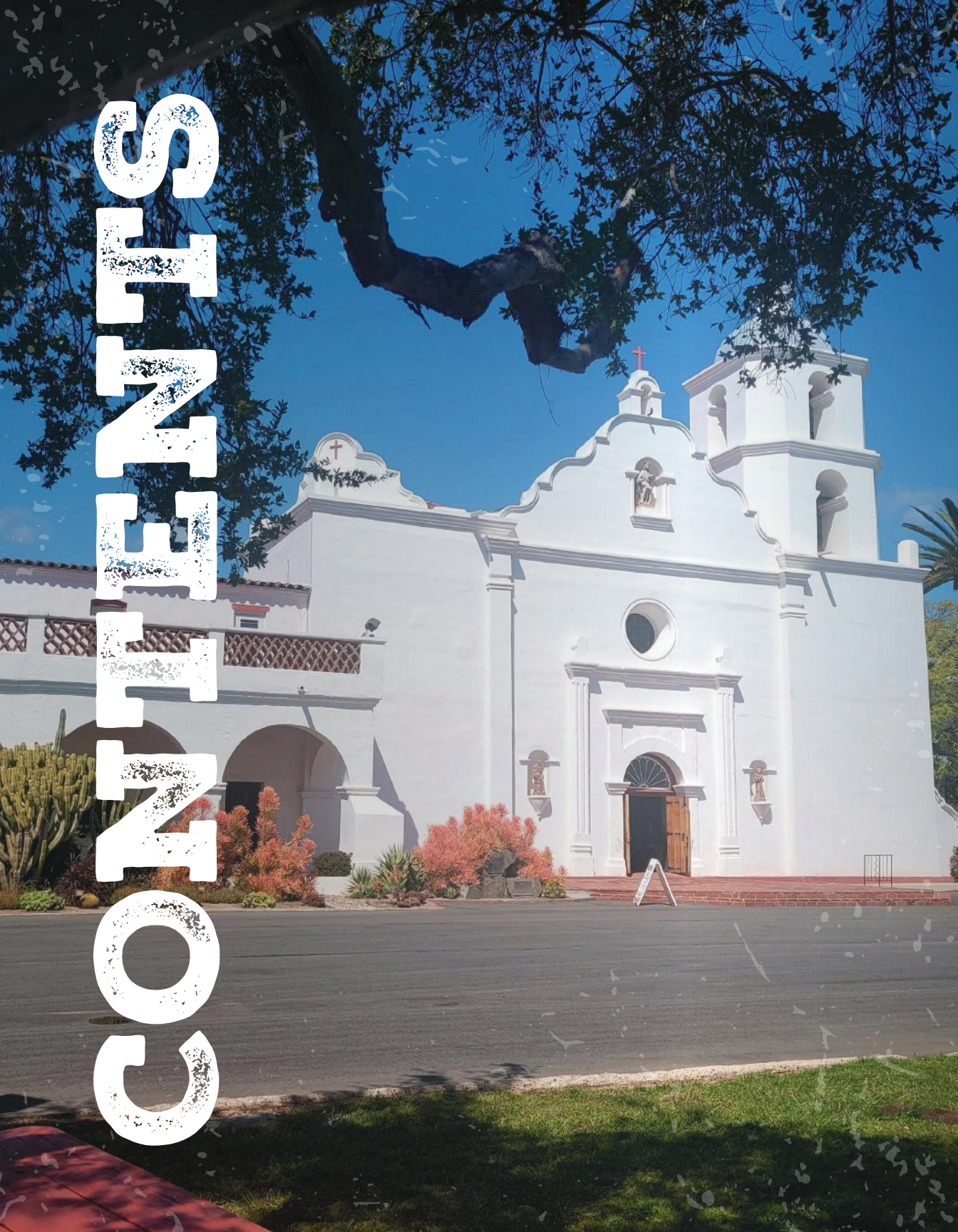
With admiration and respect,

Esther Sanchez

Mayor of Oceanside



SENTECON



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— 1 —

DREAMS

IRENE SOTO

When I Left Home

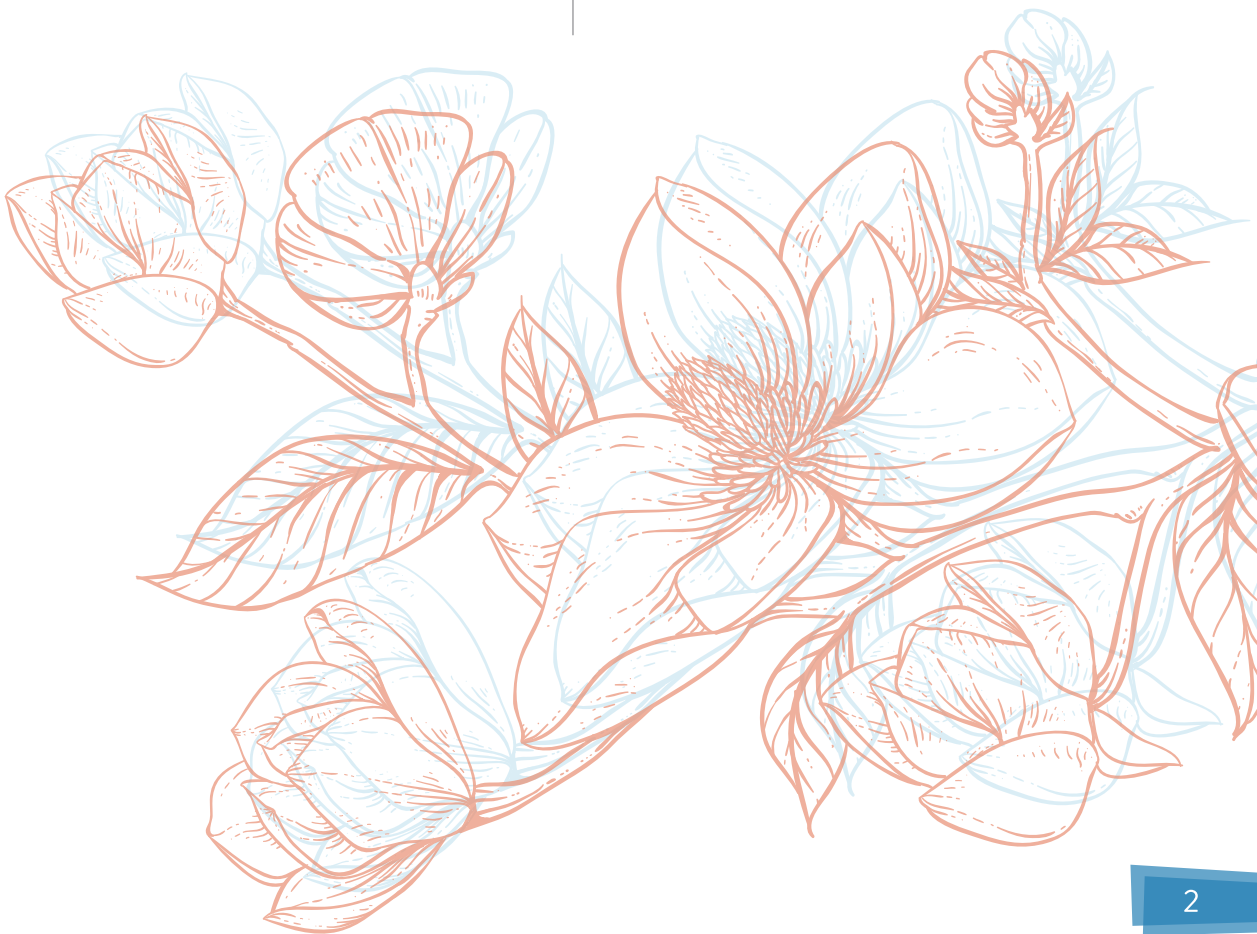
When I left home and came to the U.S. I was looking for new and better opportunities. I left my country because I was a single mom and I wanted a better future for my family. I learned a new lifestyle, and the language was difficult for me. How do I deal with that? Attending English class and trying to learn the language.

HYUN KIM

Mystery Future

When I think of my future, I feel mystery. But I am feeling good because I am planning to do something.

I want to try something new such as taking a gardening class, learning English and taking a cooking class.



STUDENTS
LEARNING ENGLISH
GROWING
READING
SPEAKING
FEELING GRATEFUL
MOTIVATED AND INSPIRED
WRITING
OUR OCEANSIDE

EDITH, IRENE, JOSEFINA, MARIA, MARY, SHOKRIA

Dreams at READS

WHEN I THINK OF DEATH

By Josefina Zarate

I SEE MY BODY INSIDE THE COFFIN

AND INSIDE THE EARTH.

I SMELL THE FRESH EARTH.

I HEAR THE VOICES AND WHISPERS.

I FEEL COLD AND RELAXED.

I WANT TO SEE GOD

AND MY FAMILY.

I WOULD LIKE TO SAY

THANK YOU, GOD, BECAUSE

I ENJOYED MY LIFE.

WHIM NIGHT

By: Aaron, Danny, David, Elizabeth, JDB, Liam,
Nicki, Rachel P., Rachel W., Travis, Reina

SICAL

The background of the entire page is a dark, atmospheric photograph of a forest floor at night. Several large, glowing blue butterflies are scattered throughout the scene, some in sharp focus and others blurred in the background. In the center, two small, glowing mushrooms with textured caps and thin stems grow from a mound of dark, mossy earth. The overall lighting is soft and ethereal, creating a dreamlike and magical atmosphere.

Beautiful, delicate wings
In a magical forest
In a light room

Sleepy butterflies
Like snowflakes
On a tree

WHO AM I?

BY RASHIDEH EJTEHADI

MY NAME IS RASHI.

I'M FROM IRAN.

I'M GRANDMA.

I ENJOY WHEN I HEAR HIS VOICE.

MY GRANDCHILDREN GROW UP.

HE IS HAPPY AND HEALTHY.

MY GRANDSON PRETENDS HE IS BIGGER
THAN THE OTHER CHILDREN.

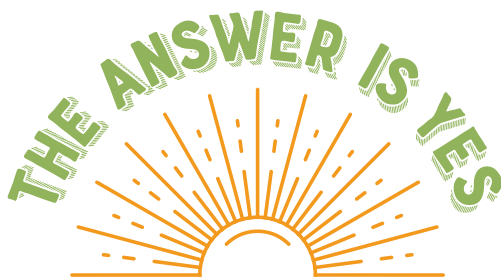
I FEEL VERY GOOD AND ENJOY HIM.

I HUG AND TOUCH HIM EVERY DAY.

I WANT HIM TO GROW UP WITH PEACE EVERYWHERE.

I KNOW IT'S A VERY GOOD EXPERIENCE.

I'M ENJOYING BEING WITH HIM.



MY NAME IS DANIEL.

TODAY I FEEL GREAT, HEALTHY,
HIGH SPIRITED, FULL OF AMBITION AND
LIFE'S CHALLENGES WITH LOVE.

SOMETIMES I AM GIVING MORE
AND RECEIVING LESS,

OTHER TIMES I AM RECEIVING
MORE AND GIVING LESS.

BUT ALWAYS I AM A MAKER OF
TRUE, HONEST, TRUSTING LOVE.

I ASK THE WORLD, "ARE YOU REAL?"

AND THE ANSWER IS: YES.



BY DANIEL A. BEATTY

REGRETS!



I REGRET MANY THINGS,
LIKE LYING IN MIDDLE SCHOOL
— SAYING I ATE CHICKEN AND
BEEF THREE TIMES A WEEK
AND DRANK MILK EVERY DAY,
WHEN ALL I EVER DRANK WAS
WATER OR LEMONGRASS TEA,
AND ATE TORTILLAS WITH SALT.

IF I HAD TOLD THE TRUTH

I WOULD HAVE GOTTEN
A SCHOLARSHIP.



BY
AMALIA MORALES RAMÍREZ

THREE CHEESE ★ SURPRISE ★

IRENE AND JESSE MET ON THE JOB TWENTY YEARS AGO. WE BOTH WORKED FOR THE SAME SCHOOL DISTRICT AND WE MADE PIZZA FOR ALL THE SCHOOLS IN THE DISTRICT. BY THAT TIME, OUR DAUGHTERS WERE EIGHT YEARS OLD AND THEY MET FOR THE FIRST TIME AT A MCDONALD'S. OUR DAUGHTERS ARE STILL FRIENDS TODAY.

Our favorite job was making pizzas. Every Friday, students lined up excitedly, waiting for a fresh, cheesy slice. Irene was the expert at rolling out the dough while Jesse took pride in spreading the sauce and sprinkling just the right amount of cheese and toppings.

One Friday morning as we were preparing for lunch, Irene noticed something odd. "Jesse, where's the mozzarella?" she asked, looking around frantically. Jesse's eyes widened, "I thought you grabbed it from the refrigerator." We both realized our mistake – no cheese meant no pizza, and no pizza meant a cafeteria full of disappointed kids. "We have to think fast," Jesse said. "What else do we have?" Irene checked the fridge, "We have shredded cheddar, some feta, and... cream cheese?" Jesse rubbed her chin, "Okay, what if we make Three Cheese Surprise pizza? We can mix the cheddar and feta and we can put the cream cheese instead of sauce and hope for the best."

With no time to waste, we got to work. When lunch began, students hesitated at first, but after the first few bites, they loved it. "Wow, this is actually amazing!" one student said. By the end of lunch, every slice was gone and the principal even came by to compliment us, "I think you two just invented a new school favorite!"

Irene and Jesse high-fived. Maybe next time, we'd remember the mozzarella, but until then, the school district had a brand-new pizza on the menu!

I am Edith Garcia.

I am a mom, a wife, sister, daughter and gardener.

I wonder if my children will be good people.

I hear my mother's voice.

She says, "You are too young!"

I see that she is wise.

I wish that I had I been more mature.

I pretend to be strong.

I feel satisfied.

I touch "life" and grab it.

I worry about dying because I believe that

my children will still need me.

I know one day will be better.

I am a very valuable person.

EDITH Z. G.
I Touch Life

Suitcase

Filled

with

Dreams

ON NOVEMBER 1ST 2003, MY SISTER OFELIA AND I TOOK A PLANE THAT TOOK US TO TIJUANA.

I was 24 years old. It was very sad for me because I was going to leave my mother alone. I remember that my mom made a pumpkin sweet that I love, but I couldn't enjoy it because the flight was so early. We packed a small suitcase with about two changes of clothes and filled the rest with dreams.

I was looking for an opportunity for a decent life. In Oaxaca the salary was 200 pesos a week, but in Tijuana it was 600 pesos a week for work in a factory. I worked making electrical plugs, 800 plugs per hour, ten hours per day.

I had to leave my mother and my land because poverty was destroying my dreams. I learned that in life there are sacrifices, so, if I wanted a better life, I needed to leave my mom.

I wanted a house made of blocks for me and my mother. I could not build her a house, but there's a program called "Piso Firme" (Solid Floor) where the only thing we pay for is the labor. So, we paid to have a floor put into my mom's adobe house, and we replaced the tiles with metal sheets. I bought her furniture and a washing machine so she wouldn't have to wash by hand anymore.



by AMALIA MORALES RAMÍREZ

EVEN THE AIR SMELLS OF DEMOCRACY

I was afraid what my daughter would do
when she first came to America.

What would she eat?

Where would she live?

Would she be happy?

I'm glad that she is getting used to it so easily.

I could smell the unique scent of the sea
and the delicious aromas of various foods from many countries.

I stopped being scared when I heard my daughter say
I felt like I was back in my homeland.

I was in a hurry to go and see that beautiful country.
So, I am happy to be in a country where
even the air smells of democracy.

BY
NYAMSUREN
BUDBAZAR

In the process of me being a man that is 58 years old, going through life's expectations, I have a dream to be a creature of love, not a maker of hate. I'm going to be someone who is true, honest and trusting with love. Because love is the most powerful and life creating feeling that grows, I am a believer in sharing my gift. I think it's a gift to overlook all the bad and look at life's creations with a good, positive mind. When I was a young teenager, my mind was so open to everything and all of life, that I absorbed all the different voices and I had a lot of questions. I had to ask, "are these voices pure love?" When I would see people do things like speeding, drinking and fighting, I learned that I had a choice to accept something good or accept something bad. This is where I got more knowledge of love instead of hate.

True, honest,
trusting love

After years of making some bad choices but still growing as a man, I began to accept love and now I am growing more, and fast. Every day I see myself growing more and that I am healthier, happier and caring about my family and the animals and friends that are around me that are God's gift. Being obedient to Jesus Christ and God's ways allows me to help others out with this knowledge I have. It allows me to be there for someone when they have need. This helps create good energy and lets us have good, honest, caring and trusting thoughts and love.

I want to give back what I have received, especially to my dad. I'm getting older, I have seen my mom and brother pass away. Getting older is a scary place to be in and I want to be there for him and be helpful and have a chance to be a caregiver and provider for my dad and others. I want to show them happiness and give them love, showing that I'm still there and have love for him. It doesn't matter how old you are. I don't want him to be scared, I want to be able to grow together and get closer as father and son. Love is medicine.

by
Daniel
A. Beatty



I AM WHAT MY MOTHER RAISED, a woman with principles and values, a warrior of God.

I wonder what would have become of me if my mother had not been such a good mother?

I hear rules, advice, and restrictions from my mother.

I see the lack of paternal support that really made my mother struggle alone, with four daughters to raise.

I want, with all my heart, to lighten my mom's load and see her happy without shortcomings.

I pretend to be happy without the anxiety of tomorrow, without shortages, and to feel safe.

I feel powerless for not being able to provide her with a better life and feel sad for not being able to give her everything, including my time.

I touch my mother's body in a warm embrace with love and sweetness. At the same time, I worry who will look after me in my old age if my husband is gone first?

I know my mother left peacefully knowing that I was protected by a good man who loves and respects me.

I am Mary Nicolay, a brave woman who decides to live each day as if it were my last, who wouldn't change anything I have experienced, because thanks to all my experiences, **I AM THE WOMAN I AM.**

STRONGER TOGETHER

Attending Cafecito,

I feel happy.

First class under the trees -

So many students,

So many teachers.

Excited, empowered,

Made me motivated.

I don't have fear.

When I speak with confidence,

I feel powerful!

Oh my gosh! I understand!

Independent, secure and smart.

Expressing my feelings,

Making connections,

Yay! I made it!



READS DISCOVERY STORIES GROUP

Ada, Amalia, Angela, Edith, Elvy, Esther, Irene,
Josefina, Maria, Mary, Monica, Nicole, Teresa

OMAR GARCIA

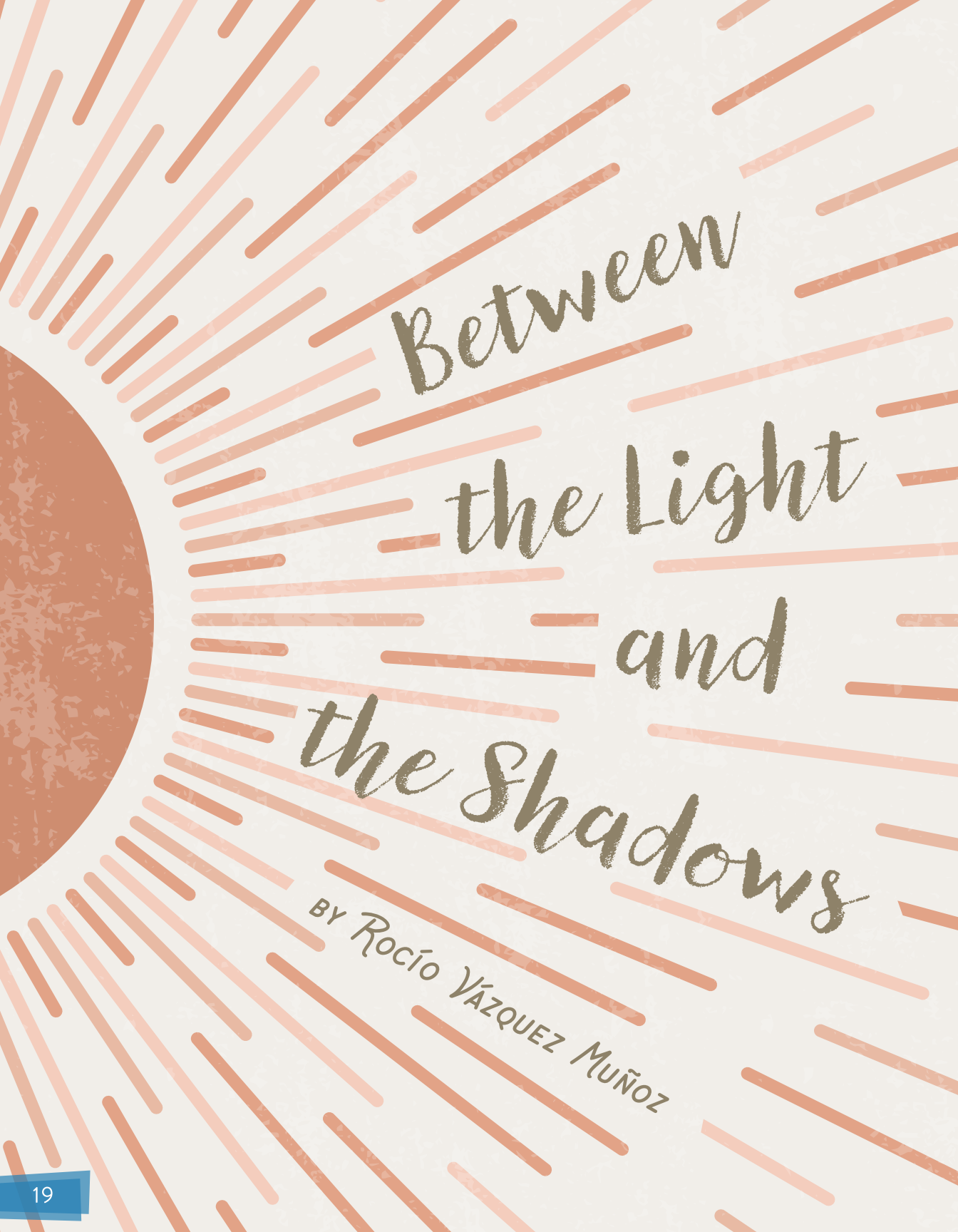
My Dream

My goal in my life was to get my high school diploma. This was hard because the courses are different from Mexico to the USA. First, studying was hard. I finished school in Mexico when I was 15 years old and I completed secundaria (middle school). After 27 years, it was hard to study again. My parents had very little education. My father went to school only in second grade. My mother never went to school.

Second, you need to spend time studying every course. These are mathematics, history, science, writing and reading. I took the classes at the school. I bought a book for each course. My hardest test was mathematics. For this course I took one year to pass the test. I repeated the mathematics test four times. Finally, I passed the test!

Third, for me, it was very important to get my high school diploma for a better job. Now I speak more with my co-workers and also my partners. I can understand more about emails and numbers for business and speak more English with my partners. I can talk to suppliers on the phone in English. I can understand them and they can understand me. Also, I speak to the customers in the dining room.

Another reason for getting my GED was to try to be a good example to my kids. I want my kids to never stop going to school. I push my kids to go to university. Right now, I am thinking about taking a class for a chef certificate because I speak more English now and also have my high school diploma. I think my dreams are already reality. I am ready for a new goal in my life. In conclusion, never stop working for your dreams.



Between the Light and the Shadows

BY ROCÍO VÁZQUEZ MUÑOZ



*WHEN THE SUN RISES, THE BREEZE EMBRACES
ME, AS FRIENDS WOULD AT HOME.*

*ALTHOUGH TIME CAN TIRE US, ITS LAUGHTER IN
MY SOUL NEVER LEAVES.*

*FEELING YOU BY MY SIDE IS A SWEET COMFORT,
A BEACON IN THE FOG, A WARM LONGING.*

*BUT THERE ARE DAYS OF LOSS AND COLD THAT
I FEEL IN MY CHEST, WHERE LIFE WEIGHS ME
DOWN AND EVERYTHING IS COMING UNDONE.*

*AMIDST ADVERSITY, I RAISE MY VOICE, SEARCHING
THE SKY FOR A RAY OF SUNSHINE.*

*BLESSINGS ARRIVE WITH WHISPERS OF PEACE,
HEALING THE SORROWS THE SOUL STILL BEARS.*

*So, I CONTINUE THE JOURNEY, WITH RENEWED
FAITH, FOR IN EVERY EMBRACE, LIFE CALLS ME.*

*ALTHOUGH I SOMETIMES FEEL TIRED, LOVE AND
HOPE NEVER FADE.*

Be still and know,
God Loves me.
Need a friend – just one –
Who can back me up
Faithfully – Dream with me.

The need to feel alive,
Today – All in.
Put my best foot forward,
To meet Today's Goodness,
To be myself,
Free from suppression,
Free for expression.

Explore the Creative,
Inside the Wild Act–
What is Hidden,
What is Wild,
What needs courage–
To Act.

Ponder
An amazing world–
Its meaning
Way up in the Blue,
Pull out all the stops
From my Sensation–
Listen. Look. Touch.

Adventure arrives
In Style–
Singing, Dancing, Painting
Reading, Writing–
Strong feet keep moving.

S.C.

Way Up In the Blue

Knowing that my children and family are good. I like to listen to music, cook and walk. I dream about being able to speak and understand English. I am proud of myself.

- JUANA SANTOS DE VARGAS

My family, traveling to Mexico, spending time with my grandson, listening to music. My favorite things to do are walking, listening to romantic music, cooking new recipes and exploring. My dream is to learn English, attend English class and practice English with my classmates. Also, losing weight. I am starting to eat more healthy food. I am proud of my big family and of myself.

- LILIA YVETTE DOMÍNGUEZ

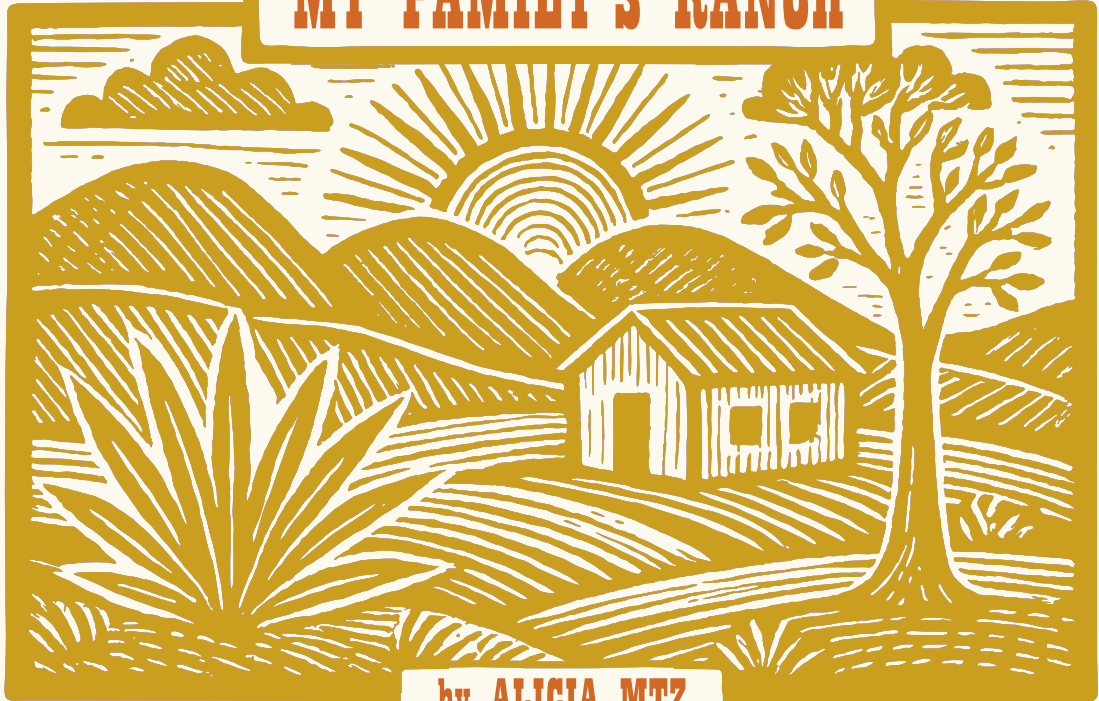
What makes me happy? That everything I do turns out well. I like to do creative work. I like to communicate in English – speaking with people. I am proud to be able to understand other people.

- CARMEN OROZCO

To have a healthy life. I like swimming, walking, reading and writing stories. I would like to improve my English. I would like to explore and learn other parts of the world and other languages.

- ALICIA MTZ

MY FAMILY'S RANCH



by ALICIA MTZ

MY NAME IS ALICIA MARTINEZ. I was thirteen years old when we moved to town from my family's ranch. The rent went way up at the ranch. There was no electricity, no running water, a dirt floor and the walls were adobe. At night, it was very cold. My parents suffered because they had eleven children - with mama and papa that made thirteen mouths to feed!

On the ranch, we had many animals: cats, dogs, birds, chickens and a horse. My mother took care of pigs and my grandmother took care of her cows.

At night, I searched for fireflies. I heard crickets and frogs in the distance from the river. As an adult, after I moved to the US, I went back to the ranch. I wanted to check in on my father. After fifteen years, my mother had passed away. My father passed away two years ago.

The ranch had changed. My father and mother do not live there anymore. No more children snatching fresh tortillas from the long table with twelve chairs. Mom never sat at the table, she was always too busy tending to us to sit. I found that the ranch I loved lives in my memory now. It was not the same. I had many stories to tell about the ranch to my family. Now I sit and reminisce about the chaotic and interesting childhood I had.

Hearing Their Hearts

by NICOLE ESTUPINAN

I am Nicole Estupinan.

I wonder if my children and my parents are happy.

I hear my parents ask me when I'm going to visit them.

I see my children be responsible.

I want to feel in good health to help my mom clean.

I pretend to be healthy.

I feel proud of my achievements.

I touch my children, I hear their hearts.

I worry about leaving my girl alone.

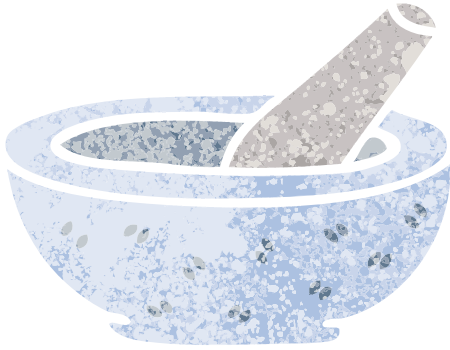
I know her brothers help her.

I am a good mom.



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CONNECTIONS

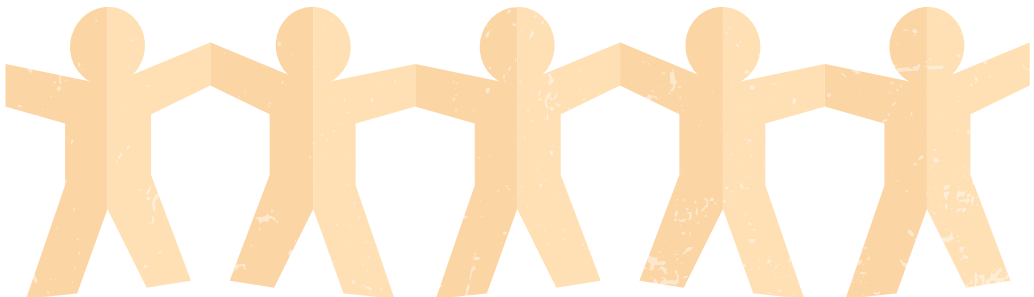


EDITH Z. G.
Smells Like Home

I see my husband's family. I smell the rain. I hear my husband's family talking. I feel alone. I don't know how to connect with them at first. I want to go back home. I miss my parents and my siblings. I miss cooking with my mom when we made tortillas. Smells like home.

NICOLE ESTUPINAN
My Champions

When I think of my children, I see my sons as good, responsible, professional men and my intelligent daughter. I smell their perfume. I hear them talking and smiling. I feel proud, blessed, and happy. I want my children to achieve their goals, that they would be united and that they help each other.



Life,

An Adventure at Oceanside Public Library

OCEANSIDE IS A BEAUTIFUL CITY NEAR THE BEACH WITH A BEAUTIFUL AND ACCESSIBLE LIBRARY FOR THE COMMUNITY. AT THE LIBRARY, THERE ARE MORE THAN JUST BOOKS TO READ. THEY OFFER MANY PROGRAMS TO HELP ENHANCE PEOPLE'S EDUCATION BY CREATING A CLOSE-KNIT COMMUNITY.

by **Lupita Vergara**

They offer book clubs for all ages, story time, yoga for kids, art classes, video games and more! Make sure to take the opportunity to visit the library and see the programs they offer each month. You can better enjoy life connected with your family by going to some of these library programs. It has been life changing for my family to attend many programs like book clubs, cooking classes, and arts and crafts. It has helped us to stay closer as a family and to learn different basics in life and cultures.

School work can be challenging, especially on difficult days when you're tired or feeling down. The library offers a fresh perspective and a place to relax. For instance, when my husband took our older daughter to an art class there, they both participated and had a wonderful time. This break from routine strengthened their bond and helped them connect in a meaningful way.

One day, my son had a difficult time at school. When I asked what happened, he simply said, "I don't want to talk." That afternoon, I took him to the Teen Book Club at the library. Afterwards, his entire mood changed. He said, "Thank you for bringing me. I feel very happy, Mom." On our drive home, he pointed out the sunset, saying, "Have you seen how beautiful it is? Look at all the colors. Life is amazing." Hearing him speak this way filled my heart with happiness.

When my younger daughter struggles, she sings the songs from storytime that lift her spirits. My children have flourished attending Oceanside Library events throughout their childhood. I've witnessed remarkable personal growth in each of them because of these experiences. Nothing brings me more joy than when they ask to visit the library.

The experiences my children and I have had have been incredible. We've learned many concepts and tried new things our family wouldn't normally explore - from new recipes and cooking classes at Spice Club to discovering different species and cultures at Cool Beans Club, where we also learned about healthier food options. These programs have enriched our family in countless ways, and for that I'm deeply grateful.

Thank you to all the staff for their hard work and effort.

Thank you, Oceanside Public Library.



TWO WORLDS,

BY YANIRA ANAND



They say love knows nothing of borders, that it needs no passport or permission, that when two souls are meant to find each other, the universe lays bridges, crosses oceans, and connects paths they never imagined would connect. Two worlds, two cultures, two hearts, thousands of miles apart, one day found each other, and began writing their story together.

This is my love story—one that was born across the distance, but destiny wove our paths until we met in the same place, where love found its home.

It was a day in September, five years ago, when my husband was on a yoga retreat in the Andes of Peru. As part of his retreat, he was hiking from the city of Cusco to Machu Picchu over five days.



ONE HEART



On the third day of the journey, the group decided to stop and rest in a valley with natural hot springs, a beautiful and magical place nestled between the mountains. I, on the other hand, was on a work trip, overseeing the construction of a hospital in a town near Cusco. Since I was already in the area, I decided to take the weekend to visit a place I had heard wonderful things about, the hot springs of Cocalmayo. It was in that magical place where he and I met. He spoke no Spanish, and I spoke no English. We lived in different countries, and came from different cultures, and yet neither the language barrier nor the distance could stop our souls from connecting.

After two years in a long-distance relationship, we decided to unite our lives. I moved to San Diego and we had a simple civil wedding. It was so simple for the amount of love we shared, that we decided to marry again, this time in the place where it all began, where destiny brought us together, in Peru.

Three years after that, we gathered our whole families together to celebrate this magical event, and people from different cultures and backgrounds joined us on that incredible day. No matter what language they spoke, what united them that day was love, and that made that day one of the most remarkable moments in our lives.

I can say that that wonderful day, when I made the decision to visit the Cocalmayo hot springs, changed my life. It was that day that allowed me to meet my soulmate. Thanks to it I'm here today, in a different country, raising my own family, with a baby in my arms and writing these lines. Thank you, magical day in the mountains of Peru!



I am very grateful in my life for having met such an intelligent and charismatic woman who was very enthusiastic about the programs that READS offers. She inspired so much confidence in me that I went to visit the center.

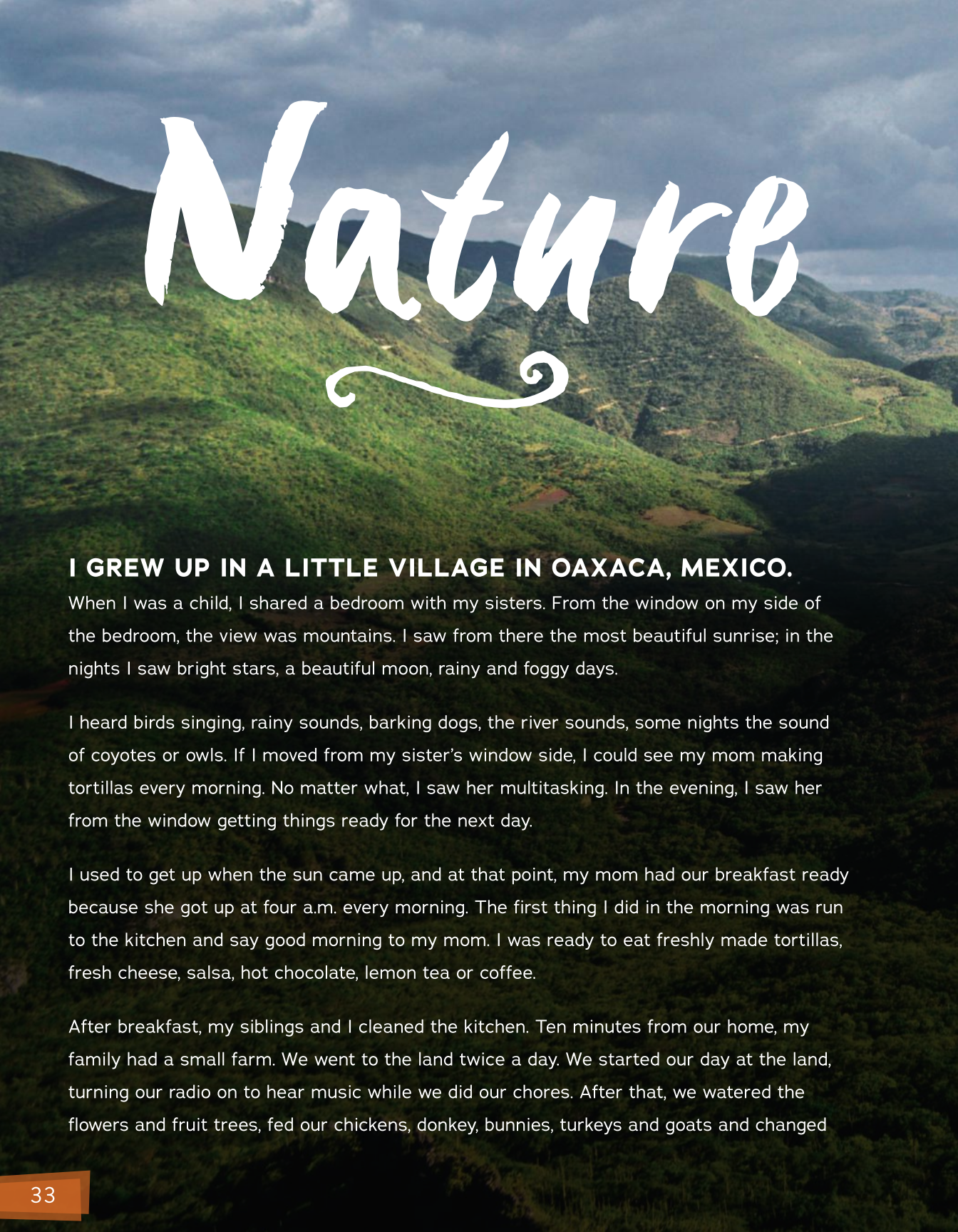
READS is a special place that offered me the opportunity to learn English as a second language. It meant a lot to me as an adult and a parent that I could have the opportunity to continue learning and have a tutor. I spent two years with her. We met at the Mission Branch Library twice a week. I am deeply grateful to her for all the work we did, the books we read together and, most of all, the time she spent with me. Cafecito is a program where I met people who gave me the confidence and security to converse in English while enjoying different topics. I feel very fortunate to continue attending various programs that help me to continue to grow.

I like working at READS. It is a good opportunity for me to continue learning and connecting with the community. For me, READS is a big family. It is a nice place to see how people are transforming, growing and learning. I thank all the volunteers for their time and collaboration at READS. I feel very fortunate to find people in my path who inspire me to continue learning. I admire and appreciate all the work and effort that my colleagues do for each program. **Thank you, Oceanside READS.**

LUPITA VERGARA
READS Changed My Life

I thank the universe for
giving me a beautiful starlight that brightens
up my life. Her name is Alejandra. She is my beautiful
daughter. From the very first moment she was in my womb, my
heart was filled with immense joy. Since then, we have always enjoyed
every minute of our lives together. Thank you for all the beautiful memories
since your birth, like your first word being “mom”, your first steps, your first
falls (those hurt me more), your first scribbles, letters and so on. Daughter, I’m
grateful for each of the moments we enjoyed when we played hide and seek. You
liked going to the zoo to see the hippos. I feel grateful, daughter, because you’ve
always been very loving and caring toward me, even today. You are always so
attentive, asking, “Do you need something mom? Are you okay mom?”
I feel very grateful for all the places we enjoyed together. I feel
grateful to life for giving me this beautiful starlight that
brightens, my daughter. I love you with all my
heart for this much happiness.

CARMEN GRACIDA
Beautiful Starlight



Nature

I GREW UP IN A LITTLE VILLAGE IN OAXACA, MEXICO.

When I was a child, I shared a bedroom with my sisters. From the window on my side of the bedroom, the view was mountains. I saw from there the most beautiful sunrise; in the nights I saw bright stars, a beautiful moon, rainy and foggy days.

I heard birds singing, rainy sounds, barking dogs, the river sounds, some nights the sound of coyotes or owls. If I moved from my sister's window side, I could see my mom making tortillas every morning. No matter what, I saw her multitasking. In the evening, I saw her from the window getting things ready for the next day.

I used to get up when the sun came up, and at that point, my mom had our breakfast ready because she got up at four a.m. every morning. The first thing I did in the morning was run to the kitchen and say good morning to my mom. I was ready to eat freshly made tortillas, fresh cheese, salsa, hot chocolate, lemon tea or coffee.

After breakfast, my siblings and I cleaned the kitchen. Ten minutes from our home, my family had a small farm. We went to the land twice a day. We started our day at the land, turning our radio on to hear music while we did our chores. After that, we watered the flowers and fruit trees, fed our chickens, donkey, bunnies, turkeys and goats and changed



Connects Me to My Childhood

by CRUZ MARTINEZ

the water buckets for our animals. We cut some colorful flowers for our kitchen table's centerpiece and mixed flowers with green leaves or rosemary.

We spent hours and hours in our garden, taking care of our fruits trees and vegetables and removing the bad grass. On a beautiful sunny day, we took our break under a huge avocado tree, eating fresh, juicy, crispy red apples, juicy oranges, delicious peaches or sometimes simply fresh lettuce with lemon juice and salt.

During our summer breaks, we spent all day at the land. My mom brought us our yummy lunch like corn tamales, tlayudas, guacamole, salsa tacos, mole, etc. She cooked with fresh ingredients from our garden, including chicken meat, turkey meat and sometimes she roasted rabbit meat. She made agua fresca with the seasonal fruit and for a snack she made us different jam flavors like strawberry, apple, peach or quince. We ate the jam with fresh homemade bread. On the way to our home in summertime, after a busy and joyful day at the land, we heard the cricket sounds and we saw the lightning bugs flying around us.

In my adult life, when I feel overwhelmed or have mixed emotions, I connect with nature to center myself. If I close my eyes, I can see myself in our family land in Oaxaca. When I hear the nature sounds, they reconnect me with my most cherished memories from my childhood.



Tree of wisdom

by Carmen Gracida

These words are dedicated to my teacher, Chelsea.

Chelsea is like a leafy tree that provides us with shade with its branches of wisdom. All of us who approach this tree are offered its protection. It covers us all from the sun's rays which is ignorance. This tree has so many branches of wisdom that it covers all of us who approach. It is helping us escape the ignorance in which we find ourselves. It's so beautiful how each of us progresses every day. Chelsea sees the system that helps us understand the English language. All the events she builds and creates help all the people around her so that we have better preparation. I feel very proud of its shade which protects me from sun's rays, and I thank you infinitely for covering me with your branches of wisdom which help me progress in my English every day.

Chelsea, thank you for being like a leafy

Ahuehuate tree that covers us with your wisdom.



Connections that I have made through the library changed my life. Five years ago, I didn't imagine what a positive change my children and I would have experienced.

My first experience was taking my daughter to join the storytime at the library. After months, I noticed the library has a variety of programs for different ages and interests.

While my daughter attended three different book clubs, she bloomed into speaking, writing and reading two languages. My toddler son also joined an age appropriate storytime. While I was with my son at the storytime, one mom told me about READS, which is an Adult Learning Center that offers several resources to improve English literacy skills. Months later, I joined their 'Cafecito' program to improve my conversation skills. I found inspiration when I saw other people improving their English skills.

I heard from another participant that 1:1 tutoring was available, and I was interested in finding out more.

I now have a tutor, and I'm improving my reading and writing skills.

The library gives me the opportunity to network with people who have the same interests that I have and to learn about other cultures through their programs such as summer STEAM camp, cooking classes, gardening, book clubs, yoga classes and much more. My children and I are inspired and motivated to learn more.

With all we have experienced so far, I know my children and I will continue to be involved with all the library has to offer. I encourage you to join where you can.



HYUN KIM

Dessert in Many Places

When I think of my first years in the United States, I saw dessert in many places when my husband and I went on a picnic. I saw having a large yard at every house. I saw fat people. I saw people in wheelchairs at the market. I felt comfortable because the weather was warm. I felt tired because the sun was much hotter than my country. I wanted to go to school to learn English. I wanted to volunteer to meet people. I liked to meet people. Making friends was not easy because my English was poor. I lived in Glendale in my first year. After a year and a half, I moved to Santa Clarita. I lived there for 14 years. Now, I am living in Fallbrook.

HEIDY ♥

My Tutor Gloria

I remember the first day when I met Gloria. I had a hunch that she would be the right person to help me learn English. I feel very happy to have her as my tutor. I believe that God sent her to me because, for a long time, I prayed for a teacher who would help me learn English at my own level. I love Gloria. She is very kind, patient, smart and sweet. Most importantly, I can be myself, and I feel very grateful because she taught me to pronounce and write correctly. She corrects me kindly. She is always in a good mood and welcomes me with a smile and hug. I like the friendship we have. She teaches me with me her knowledge and wisdom. I appreciate it a lot. For me, she is my tutor, but more that, she is my friend and counselor. I greatly value the time she gives me. I am so happy she's in my life. Gloria, thank for everything you do for me.

PHILLIP GABRIEL RAMIREZ

Happy Boy

Nephew

Loving, silly

Giggles, crawls, dances

He's a happy boy

Diego Flores



OFELIA COLORES

Sounds of Life Surround Me

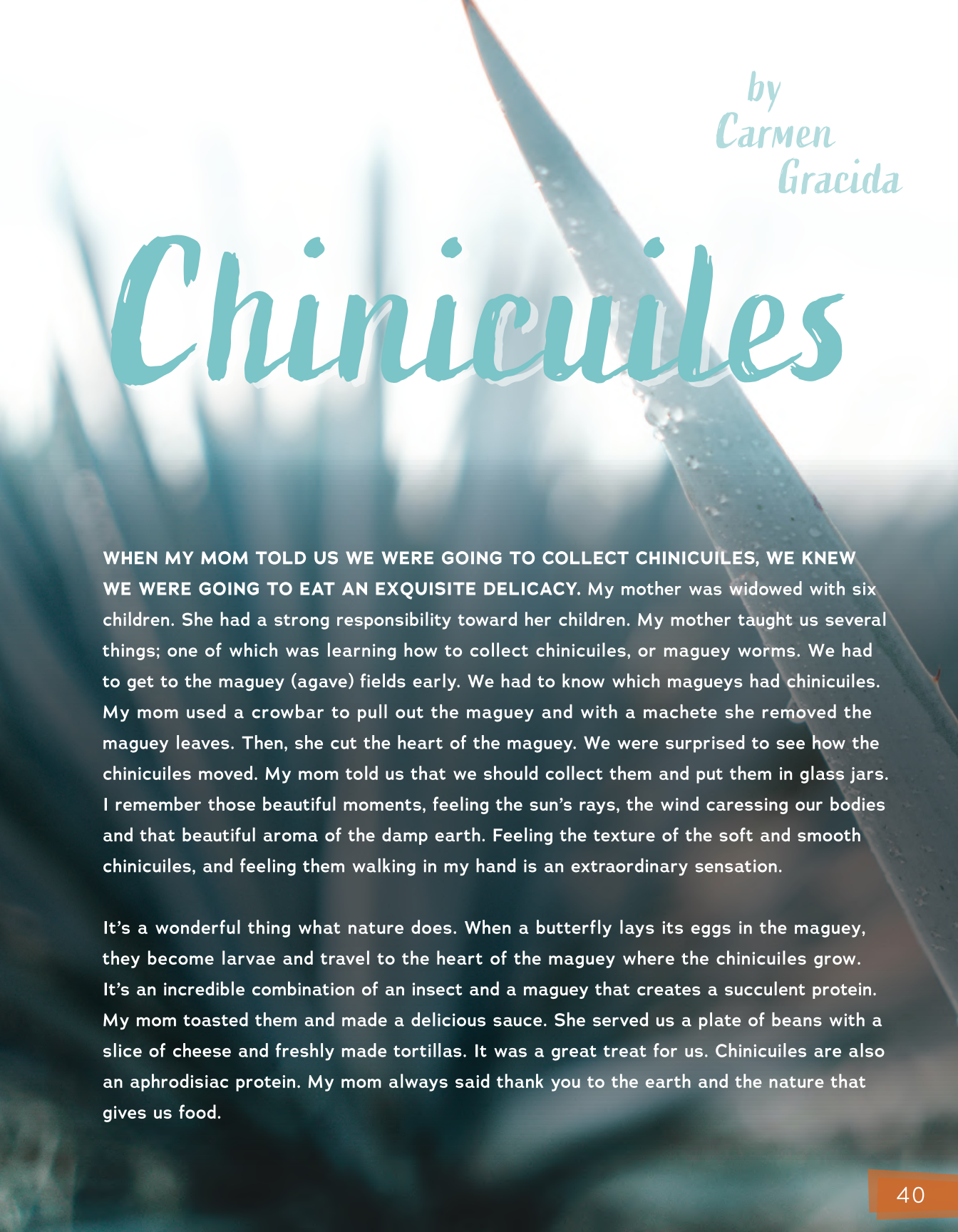
I think of my childhood home. Sitting outside I see mountains, sheep, cows and a kitchen alive with movement. There are five children playing – three girls, two boys, a garden full of memories.

There are tortillas sizzling, corn, chicken, fresh vegetables, rice, mole, and beans cooking.

The sounds of life surround me. I hear the sound of cleaning. Pots clanging, dishes being washed, clothes being laundered, tortillas being made.

Too much to do for a child. I want an adult to take charge, a parent to guide me back to school, to play and dream once more.





by
Carmen
Gracida

Chinicuiles

WHEN MY MOM TOLD US WE WERE GOING TO COLLECT CHINICUILES, WE KNEW WE WERE GOING TO EAT AN EXQUISITE DELICACY. My mother was widowed with six children. She had a strong responsibility toward her children. My mother taught us several things; one of which was learning how to collect chinicuiles, or maguey worms. We had to get to the maguey (agave) fields early. We had to know which magueys had chinicuiles. My mom used a crowbar to pull out the maguey and with a machete she removed the maguey leaves. Then, she cut the heart of the maguey. We were surprised to see how the chinicuiles moved. My mom told us that we should collect them and put them in glass jars. I remember those beautiful moments, feeling the sun's rays, the wind caressing our bodies and that beautiful aroma of the damp earth. Feeling the texture of the soft and smooth chinicuiles, and feeling them walking in my hand is an extraordinary sensation.

It's a wonderful thing what nature does. When a butterfly lays its eggs in the maguey, they become larvae and travel to the heart of the maguey where the chinicuiles grow. It's an incredible combination of an insect and a maguey that creates a succulent protein. My mom toasted them and made a delicious sauce. She served us a plate of beans with a slice of cheese and freshly made tortillas. It was a great treat for us. Chinicuiles are also an aphrodisiac protein. My mom always said thank you to the earth and the nature that gives us food.

Letter to

Dear Yareli,

You are special, unique, powerful, intelligent, kind, and beautiful inside and out. You have these qualities and many more. You fill my life with beautiful moments.

I want to explain how important you are in my life.

1. I cook your favorite dish, because I like to hear you say, "Thank you mommy for making entomatadas."
2. I like to comb your hair and create different styles because I know that you like to show off your hair.
3. I help you with your homework because I wish to learn new things from you. For example, everything does not need to be perfect. Also, you remind me it is ok to make mistakes because mistakes are signals to keep improving. Remember, my daughter, education is important. It is the light in the darkness.
4. I love to hang out with you and see your face light up. We have been making enduring moments. For example, when we visited Disneyland to celebrate your fourth birthday you were thrilled to meet your favorite characters. Also, we went to Legoland. You spent hours playing with Legos. You rode all the rides. And, you smiled a lot. Sometimes we took vacations to Mexico and visited your family. This was important because now you know about the roots of your parents.

My Daughter

It is important to balance your life. You have to schedule your time for learning new things, relaxing, studying, doing your homework, and making your own decisions. These are some tips for your successful life.

1. You can accomplish anything you want.

Work hard at what you like to do and overcome all obstacles.

2. Don't be afraid to show your emotions.

Laughing and crying will make you feel better.

3. If you feel you have a problem, questions, or doubts, do not hesitate to ask me, dad, teachers, or relatives. We will be happy to help you. Look for the solution and remember that at the end of the tunnel there is light.

Never forget that your mother has the biggest love for you.

I love you with all my heart.

I love you with all my mind.

I wish that you will become an excellent professional at whatever field you desire.

by Rosa Maria Pliego Diaz

I see my life as a box, limiting my vision for years. Should I think outside that box? Or should I expand it from the inside out? Through learning and exploring, many corners of that box have been filled. The borders expanded and connections began. These experiences brought different colors into my life. Like a pebble dropped into a silent pond, ripples expanded and change happened.

This would not have happened if I had not come to READS. It was like a chemical reaction; it expanded me from the inside out. I read more books, learned more words and gained the confidence to communicate in English. I grew the courage to reach out and talk to strangers. Because I can communicate, I am throwing pebbles into other people's lives.

I met volunteer tutors through the training programs they provided. After retirement, their talent still shines to enrich a learner's life. Through their wise words, I am now able to imagine different career paths. Our tutors are wonderful! I wish I had known about this program when I first came to the United States.

I talk to learners from different backgrounds at Cafecito sessions. I feel their efforts to learn and sense their struggles to strive for a better future.

I also attend Family Literacy for young children and family, to prepare myself to be an English-reading Grandma. I am happy to see young mothers reading to their babies while interacting with the well-designed crafts. This program is held once a month in the evening, so mothers are able to bring their school-aged children too. After a simple meal, the whole family reads together. I believe this activity plants the seed of reading habit in these families. This habit will be a powerful influence in their children's lives. It will empower them to thrive in the sea of knowledge.

I will continue to read as well. I will set out for deeper water, and I will climb bigger mountains in the world of literacy. Exploring to fulfill my curiosity, I don't have to make a big impact with each step. Each step will leave its mark.

And when the sun sets in the horizon, I will rest in Oceanside.

SC



Pebbles in a Silent Pond

Y Young at heart, with a spirit warm and bright
O Optimistic, keeping family close and tight
L Loving sweetness in all she would do
A Active and hardworking, through and through
N Never surrendering, her strength shined so true
D Dedicated always to those she held dear
A Amazing in every role she would bear

D Darling grandma whose love knew no bounds
I Incredibly loyal as mother and friend
A Amaryllis, red and vibrant like her soul
Z Zestful energy, positive even when unwell

G Gave life to three children with endless love
A Appreciative of life's simple treasures
R Radiant woman with a beautiful smile
C Celebrated her children's joys with delight
I Indulged in her favorite treat, Ferrero Rocher
A A kind and gentle spirit who touched many lives

LUPITA VERGARA
My Wonderful Mother-in-law

WHEN I WAS A KID, I played with my friends and went to school. I really had a good childhood and enjoyed it. I was born in Bamyan Province, Afghanistan. My parents are from Afghanistan and I was a Hazara. I had a good feeling as a child.

My first experience was my travels which were very long and challenging. My first trip was from Pakistan to Brazil where I was in the air for twenty-two hours, an experience I had never had in my life. It's true that you mentioned that these experiences remind you of hardships, but getting to where I am now, where I have a good life, it is worth it. Yes, I think it's different. Maybe there are some who haven't faced this challenge. I wasn't feeling well at the time. I feel good right now and with the problems I've faced, I feel like I've become stronger than I was before. I learned that one must persevere in the face of hardships and challenges.



PERSEVERANCE

by **SHOKRIA HAIDARI**

It occurs to me that everyone's life is different and challenging, and everyone has their own problems in life. I stood up to challenges and difficulties and I always tell myself that I have to be strong. In every area of my life, problems and challenges, my dear husband has helped me and inspired me. My husband supported me financially and took care of the children sometimes when I was sick.

The background is a colorful mosaic of irregularly shaped tiles in various colors including red, blue, green, yellow, and white. In the center, there is a circular medallion with a complex, multi-layered geometric pattern in blue, gold, and red. The overall effect is one of intricate detail and vibrant color.

— 3 —

COURAGE

AMALIA MORALES RAMÍREZ

Woman of Faith

I am Amalia Morales Ramírez.

I wonder why the time flies.

I hear the laughter and voices of my daughters.

I see the blue of the sky and beautiful flowers.

I want a happy and peaceful world for everyone.

I pretend to fly over the mountains. I feel happy, blessed, and grateful.

I touch the faces of my daughters, Daranny and Sofia.

I worry about not reaching my goals.

I know it is not easy, but I know it is not impossible either.

I am friendly, happy, sometimes crazy, and a woman of faith.

PHILLIP GABRIEL RAMIREZ

Courage

One time I was surfing too many times, I was trying! But I was on the board by myself, I kept falling off on the board. Plus, the waves and my board hit me down. When I was walking on the rocks my feet really hurt and felt pain. I was on my knees. I did a little wobbling. I did it! I was so scared because I was falling off the board. When I was under salt water, my mouth was wide open. I started to cough it out. The ocean water is really freezing, icy cold, because my body started shaking. I was wearing a wet suit to protect my body. It makes me warm. I did my best. I was like a celebrity surfer...and I was so tired.



I AM THE OCEAN.

I WONDER, WHAT IS INSIDE THE SEA?

I HEAR THE STRONG AND BEAUTIFUL WAVES.

I SEE BLUE-GREEN SALTY WATER.

I WOULD LIKE TO CHANGE

THE SALT WATER TO SWEET.

I PRETEND TO BE A MERMAID

SO I CAN GO TO THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA.

I FEEL HAPPY AND I FEEL SAD.

I TOUCH THE BEAUTIFUL ANIMALS INSIDE THE SEA.

I WORRY ABOUT THE GARBAGE IN THE SEA

THAT PEOPLE THROW ON THE BEACHES. I KNOW THE REALITY.

I AM THE OCEAN! PLEASE HELP ME.

CARING AND RESPECTING EVERYONE INVOLVED

ARTS AND CULTURE –
NO MATTER THE COUNTRY WE ARE ALL ONE

FRIENDSHIP IS EASY HERE BECAUSE WE ARE
VULNERABLE AND SHARE COMMON GOALS

EXCITEMENT FOR OUR THURSDAY MEETING

COURAGE TO LEARN AND SPEAK A NEW LANGUAGE

INVOLVEMENT: WE TELL STORIES OF OUR WEEK
AND LEARN FROM EACH OTHER

TEAM: WE CELEBRATE EACH OTHER'S MILESTONES
AND SUCCESSES

OUTRAGEOUS LAUGHTER, JOY AND COMMUNITY

ALICIA, ANGELA, BOLD, ISABEL,
JESSICA, NAIMA, TERESA
We Are All One

JOURNEYS ARE LONG AND ARDUOUS.

THE HARDEST PLACE TO BE IS IN THE MIDDLE.

YOU CAN SEE HOW FAR

YOU HAVE COME AND HOW FAR IS LEFT TO GO.

I FEEL I AM IN A LABYRINTH WITH MANY OPTIONS TO TAKE.

WHATEVER CHOICE I DECIDE WILL HAVE OPPORTUNITIES OR CONSEQUENCES.

THE LABYRINTH

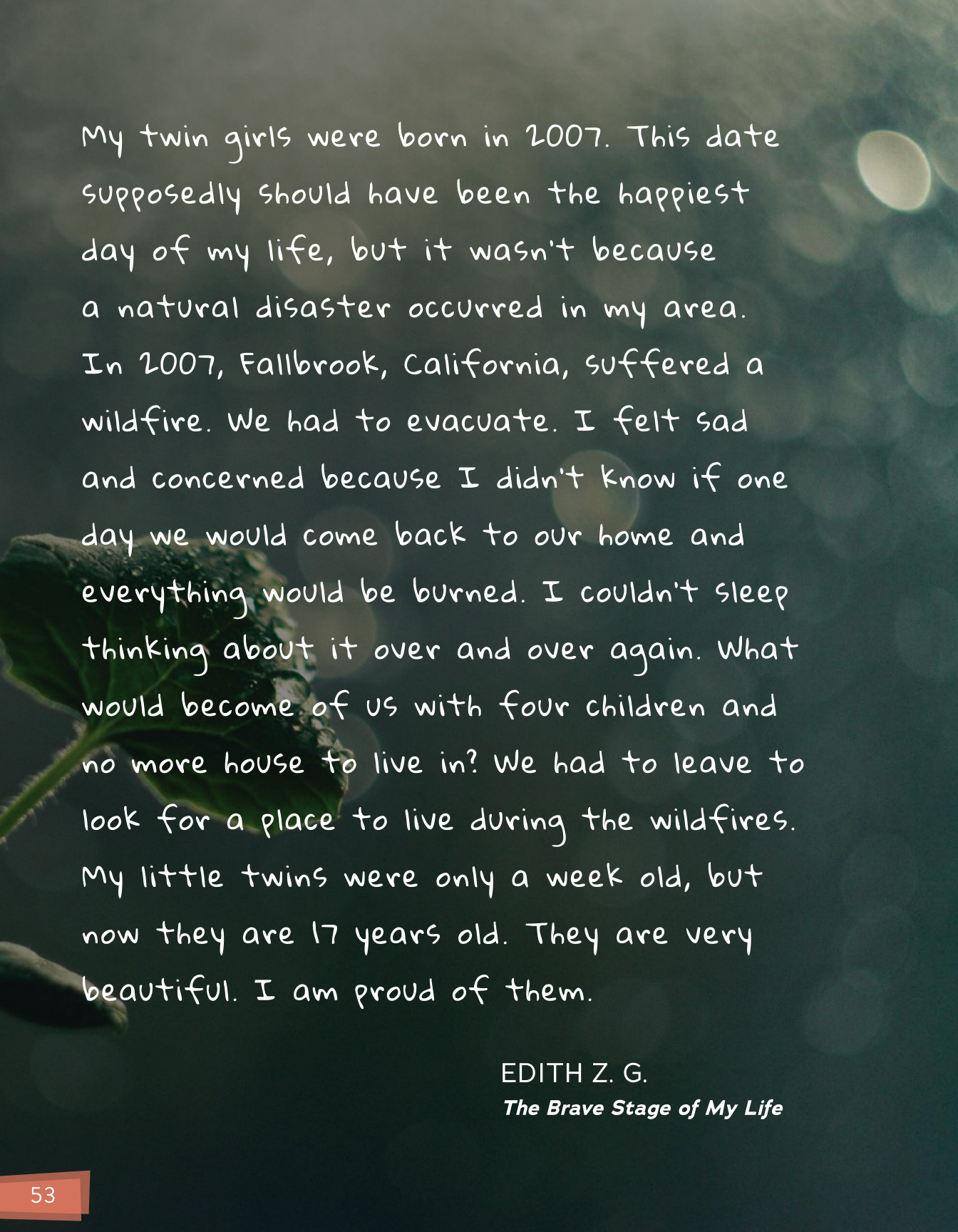
ANGELA
REYES

I AM BEGINNING TO TRUST MY CHOICES

AND THE OUTCOMES ARE BETTER THAN I THOUGHT THEY WOULD BE
WITH THIS SACRIFICE, THERE IS SO MUCH PAIN. THE PAYOFF WILL BE WORTH IT

THE DOOR WILL OPEN AND LIFE WILL CHANGE.

THEY WILL WALK THROUGH THE DOOR.



My twin girls were born in 2007. This date supposedly should have been the happiest day of my life, but it wasn't because a natural disaster occurred in my area. In 2007, Fallbrook, California, suffered a wildfire. We had to evacuate. I felt sad and concerned because I didn't know if one day we would come back to our home and everything would be burned. I couldn't sleep thinking about it over and over again. What would become of us with four children and no more house to live in? We had to leave to look for a place to live during the wildfires. My little twins were only a week old, but now they are 17 years old. They are very beautiful. I am proud of them.

EDITH Z. G.

The Brave Stage of My Life

A Courageous Move by Nicole Estupinan

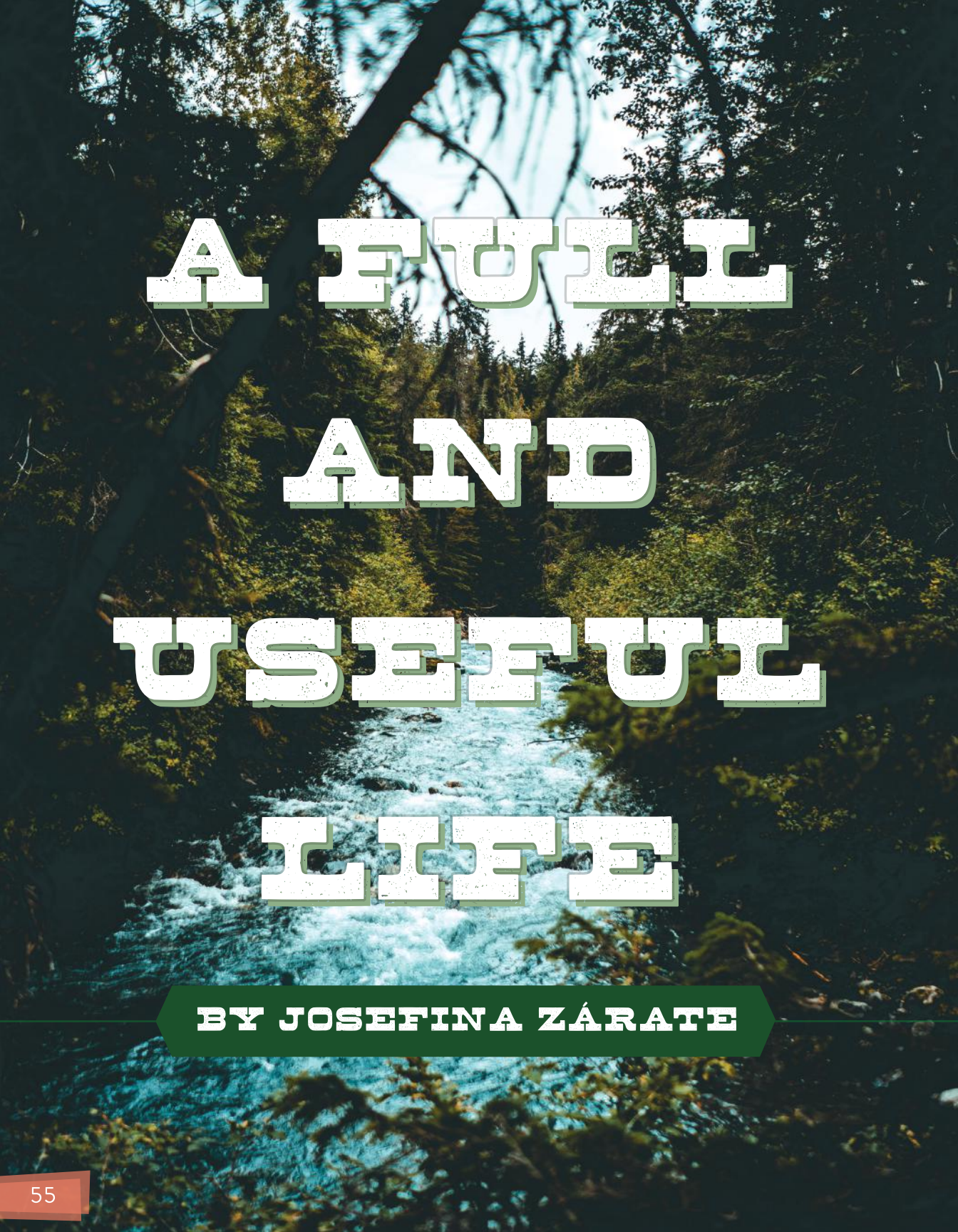
When I left home, it was very sad and courageous to leave my family and friends, my boyfriend, and my church commitments. I was looking for a country of opportunities, aid facilities, and different programs. Programs to improve my English, acquire food and housing.

I learned to drive and everything was new. Then, to speak English. I learned about different races and different cultures. I dealt with that by attending classes, buying the “English Without Barriers” course.

Speaking English, adapting to this country, obtaining citizenship, and living with people who are not my family were all difficult.

I thank my father for having emigrated with me. I thank God for everything he has given me and for my husband, my children, and my family. If I could do something again, I would change the way I came to California because I came in a bus ride with no money, no food, and it was scary and exhausting.

I regret that I’ll never look at my grandparents again. I could have gone to see them, but I missed the opportunity. What is next for me is that I will continue in my classes and achieve my goals to improve my English speaking and writing.



A FULL AND USEFUL LIFE

BY JOSEFINA ZÁRATE

WHEN I LEFT HOME, I was fifteen. I just wanted to leave, because I felt alone among my family, and I had an opportunity with my friend. What was I looking for? It's sad, but I just wanted to get away from my family. I wasn't looking for anything, because in my house I had everything. I left because I didn't feel part of my family. I felt like they didn't love me. I was resentful.

I learned that resentment is bad and causes separation. It wasn't easy to have money to support myself. I learned how to miss because I missed my parents. Everything was new for me, the city, the people, crying for no reason. It was difficult to work to support myself and live alone.

It's sad, but the first ten days I spent crying. Between tears and work, I continued my life. The years passed. I had my family, I loved my children, but I still felt alone. When I was 26, I thought about suicide. When I was 27, I joined a support program, Neurotics Anonymous. There they taught me to forgive my family and never feel alone again.

I am grateful especially to God because all suffering is a learning experience. Thank you, God, for my life, for my parents, my husband, Armando, my children, Carlos, David and Amanda. To Oceanside READS which give me the opportunity to write and remember a part of my life; to all the staff who teach with love and to the tutors who give their time - thank you!!!!

If I could go back, I'd like to climb the mountains with my father and my family, run in the river and in the rain, and walk among the trees. What makes me sad? Not having been obedient to my parents, not having told them that I love them. I regret many things, like not having gone to school to learn English and not giving my dad and my mom a kiss.

I will be following the 12-step recovery program of Neurotics Anonymous and the Oceanside READS learning program that God gave me as a means to live a full and useful life. I want to continue enjoying my life and this world as if it were the last day of my life. Every day that passes, I reach my final goal and every day of my life, I feel younger. Thank you to everyone who is here.

Pianguas y Purrujas

by Joana Hernandez



I grew up in the jungle in Costa Rica. I lived with my mom and nine kids with no electricity. The road was only sand. We had a well, and I carried water every morning. I filled a tank. I had to sweep the leaves to help my mom. I looked for firewood. My first job was finding pianguas, black mollusks. We needed to go in low tide and we looked for four or five hours. We put them in a bag. The purrujas (no-see-ums) would bite me. My mom made coconut oil mixed with kerosene to repel the purrujas. I liked to help my mom so we could all have food. I didn't like how covered in clay I would get. I did this with my sisters, Mirna and Lilian, and my brother, Alexis. My brother would make charcoal. This happened in Playa Zancudo, Costa Rica.

The first time I came to the United States, I was 22. I tried many times to come here after that, and they didn't give me permission. Nine times I was rejected. I had two children in Costa Rica and now my son and daughter live in the United States. I later



met an American in Costa Rica and we got married. I got a green card. Much later, I prepared myself to study to get my American citizenship and the first time I tried, I passed! I'm super happy to become an American. I'm very grateful to the people who supported me like Alison and Charly. Alison is my tutor and I felt very comfortable with her. She taught me English and prepared me for my citizenship test. Charly is my boyfriend and he gives me support, he helps me a lot and taught me a lot of things, like how to read. He is strict but helpful. I feel so comfortable. He drives me everywhere. I feel so happy with him.

So I could study, I went to Oceanside READS and studied in the Library with Alison. They have wonderful people helping other people to improve themselves. I want to say thank you for the opportunity to learn – la jefa, Chelsea, and Alison gave me the opportunity. Now, I am studying to be a nursing assistant. I feel proud of myself because I tried and I can do it. I want to learn more every day. I want to read and write more. I want to prepare myself to help others. Pura vida.



★ Playa Zancudo



Avocado Family

by ANGELA REYES

**DREAMS FOR A BETTER FUTURE
FOR MY FAMILY HAVE FUELED
MY EFFORTS TO BRING MY
HUSBAND AND DAUGHTER HERE
WITH ME IN OCEANSIDE.**

I have been here for two years. I'm excited thinking about us all together, but I'm devastated to be separated. At the advice of my lawyer, I have to visit my family once every five months. I see many changes in our daily video calls. Some changes show up only in person.

Sept. 29 2023, 1pm Guadalajara Airport

I always dress Hayley in a dress with a big matching bow in her hair. Today's was pink. We had just dropped off my luggage, and we walked to the security checkpoint. We hold hands, I was in the middle. I knew I had to leave them. In preparation, the past week I kept telling my daughter I would be leaving, but I would return every five months until we can all be together. She was five years old and smelled of peaches. I let her wear my perfume when we left the house. I left it with her so she will wear it and think of me. I boarded the plane and cried in my seat.



Galaxy S23 Ultra

Feb. 14 2024, 7am Guadalajara Airport

Once the doors open, I see them and run to them, I drop my luggage behind me to embrace and kiss them. It felt like my life had been on pause the last five months and someone just hit un-pause. I looked at my daughter's hair. It was so long, and she was taller by a few inches. My husband was thin. He said he missed my cooking. I love avocado stuffed plushies and gave each of us one as a gift. My husband and I each have a half of a plushy avocado to fit together and my daughter has her own baby avocado. Hayley told me she would take care of the baby avocado. She takes her avocado everywhere, even to sleep. These pieces represent our family. We take pictures of different places with the avocados. I have lots of pictures!

Jul. 13 2024 7am Guadalajara Airport

Hayley is doing well in school, is taller, and loves to play UNO. She takes the responsibility of school very seriously even in my absence. She loves to share what she learns and can count 1-100. She is learning English, and I'm so proud of her.



Feb. 15 2025 10:30pm at home in Guadalajara

My daughter takes her own bath now, I don't need to bathe her. She is the teacher's star pupil in 1st grade. Our avocados are all together. I hold hers and she holds her father's and mine. She made the decision to cut her hair. It was to the small of her back. It is now shoulder length.

Despite the distance, this family is strong. If I am okay, they are okay. If they are okay, I'm okay.

Our journey continues...



A GOOD THIEF - by RO

I was away from home. It was beginning to get dark in the afternoon. I was walking along one side of the big avenue. There was a long path with green plants and big trees. I decided to go sit down on a bench to rest for a little while.

A young man, who looked fine and polite, wearing dark clothes with a cap, approached me and said: "You are going to give me everything you have right now or I cut your face."

I tried to stand up and he pulled my handbag out of my hands. When I tried to take it back away from him, my cell phone came out. I grabbed it quickly with one hand while holding my bag with the other hand. At one point, he looked in my eyes and asked me, "The phone or the bag?" – meaning that he was giving me a choice to keep only one of my items. "My cell phone," I answered quickly. No doubt about it!

Material things come and go, but all my family memories are saved on my phone, and I know sometimes it is difficult to get them back, especially when a member of the family is gone.

As soon as I said "teléfono", meaning "cell phone" in English, the man let it go and ran away with my entire purse. I regret losing my house keys and the little bit of money in my wallet, but I was glad to save something precious to me.

In the end, I was left thinking I was lucky and very grateful to be attacked by a good thief!

I am strong, I am brave, I am more than just a name.

I wonder if my growing wisdom will hold me through.

I hear the call of my flight to board the plane,
and my strong heartbeat.

I see the fluffy clouds through the plane window.

I want my husband and daughter to come with me.

I pretend that they are next to me, when the reality
is that they are 1,427.9 miles away from me.

I feel the kisses from my daughter and my husband
welcoming me at the airport.

I touch my daughter's hand on my right side
and my husband's hand on my left side as we
walk through the city.

I worry if this will take too long.

I know that we are a united family and that we
are doing well despite the distance and wait.

I am resilient, I am strong, I am a mother
and I can do this.

Resilient United

by Angela Reyes

The background of the page is a photograph of a landscape at dawn or dusk. A dense line of trees is silhouetted against a sky filled with soft, white and grey clouds. A low layer of mist or fog hangs over the trees, catching the warm, golden light from the sun, which is not directly visible but creates a strong glow. The overall mood is serene yet somber.

THE SHADOW OF

I GREW UP IN TENNESSEE AND ATTENDED TENNESSEE PUBLIC SCHOOLS. By 1979, when I entered high school, I realized how elementary and middle school had failed me in learning languages arts, especially reading and writing. These skills were needed for me to pass the required state tests and graduate. Through remedial classes and practice, I did manage to graduate in 1983.

It wasn't for lack of ability that I fell into the cracks of the educational system. I was passed from grade to grade without learning the skill sets of reading and writing. But it wouldn't be for another 39 years that I would finally face my fears of knowing that I didn't actually have all the skills that I should've acquired in the 12 years of school. The burden that I had carried secretly for years, just like an addict: illiteracy.

by
CARLTON L.
LISENBEE

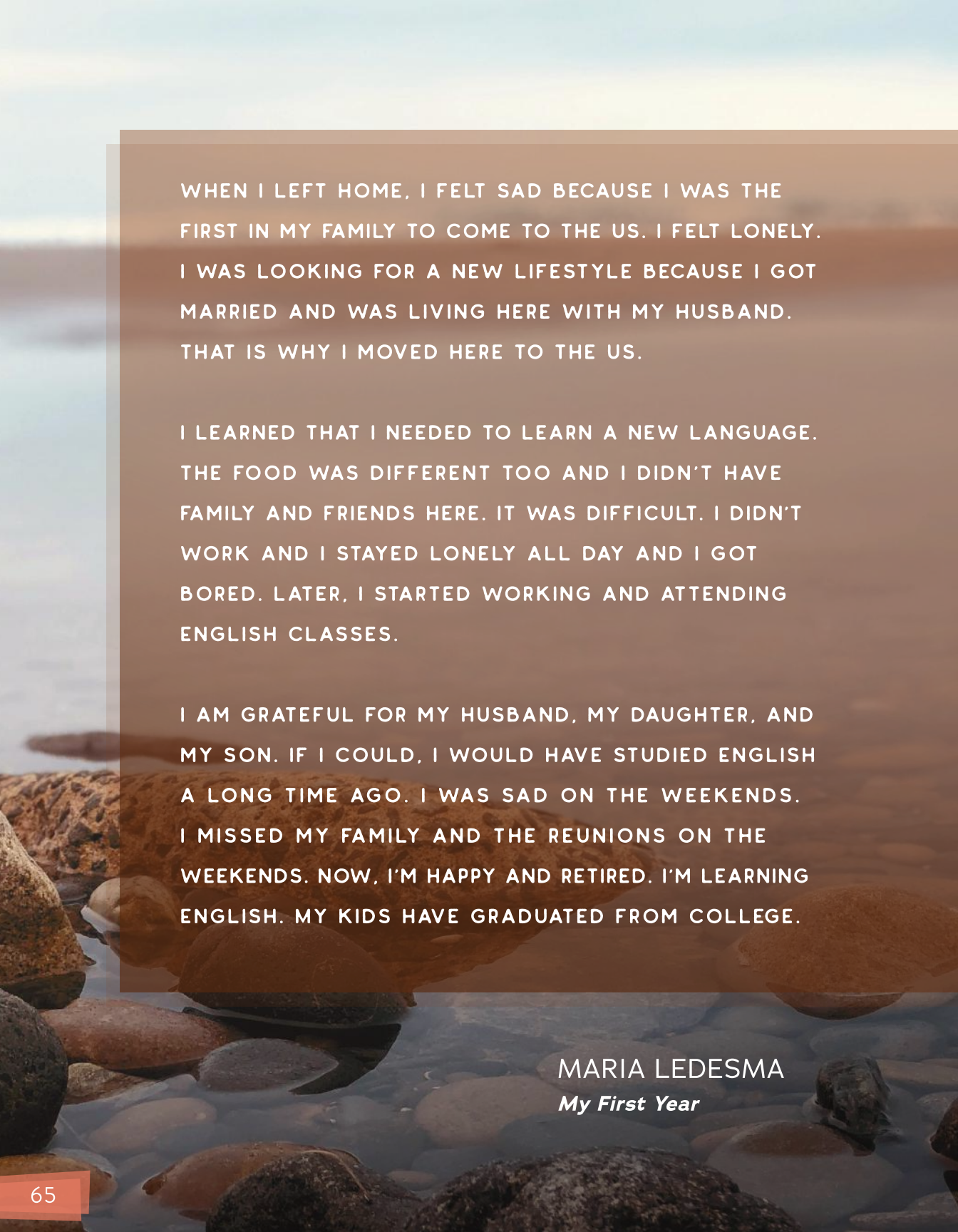


MY FEARS

I had found ways to hide the shame and embarrassment. Because of low self-esteem, I never set goals or took on challenges. I was too afraid to step out of the shadow of my fears. This mindset cost me years of promotions, growth, and achievement. Nevertheless, by some miracle, I was successful. I think, sometimes, but never dwell on it, how much more I could've accomplished if I would've addressed this issue earlier in life.

In 2020, I got the courage to make a decision: to set out on a new journey in life and set myself free from these walls. I wanted to become literate. So, I decided to seek help, guidance, and expertise from Oceanside READS. The last five years have been a rewarding experience for me as my reading has greatly improved.

I'm middle-aged now. But I discovered it's never too late to develop the educational skills, confidence, courage and motivation. ***For me, the sky is now the limit.***



WHEN I LEFT HOME, I FELT SAD BECAUSE I WAS THE FIRST IN MY FAMILY TO COME TO THE US. I FELT LONELY. I WAS LOOKING FOR A NEW LIFESTYLE BECAUSE I GOT MARRIED AND WAS LIVING HERE WITH MY HUSBAND. THAT IS WHY I MOVED HERE TO THE US.

I LEARNED THAT I NEEDED TO LEARN A NEW LANGUAGE. THE FOOD WAS DIFFERENT TOO AND I DIDN'T HAVE FAMILY AND FRIENDS HERE. IT WAS DIFFICULT. I DIDN'T WORK AND I STAYED LONELY ALL DAY AND I GOT BORED. LATER, I STARTED WORKING AND ATTENDING ENGLISH CLASSES.

I AM GRATEFUL FOR MY HUSBAND, MY DAUGHTER, AND MY SON. IF I COULD, I WOULD HAVE STUDIED ENGLISH A LONG TIME AGO. I WAS SAD ON THE WEEKENDS. I MISSED MY FAMILY AND THE REUNIONS ON THE WEEKENDS. NOW, I'M HAPPY AND RETIRED. I'M LEARNING ENGLISH. MY KIDS HAVE GRADUATED FROM COLLEGE.

MARIA LEDESMA
My First Year

MARY NICOLAY

My Mom's Smile

I see her joy in the midst of suffering and her concerns. Her face, her hands, and feet are tired due to all the wear and tear of work and suffering. I smell her delicious food and the love shown in every single thing she did for us, her daughters. I hear her feet. She is worried and anxious. I hear her voice asking how we will get ahead. Her tiredness wears her down and gives her a great weight on her back, all for the great love of a mother. I want to help, but I don't know how. I am just a child.



HAZARAS GENOCIDE

BY SHOKRIA HAIDARI



HELLO DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS, WITH RESPECT
TO ALL OF YOU. MY NAME IS SHOKRIA HAIDARI. I AM
FROM AFGHANISTAN. I WANT TO SHARE MY STORY
ABOUT THE HAZARA GENOCIDE IN AFGHANISTAN.

Hazaras in Afghanistan have increasingly been killed in pre-planned attacks and have become victims of internal politics, even in hospitals, schools, places of worship, public transportation, workplaces, weddings, sports clubs, markets, cultural events, social gatherings and their homes for many years. The recent wave of terrorism targeting this community is not a new issue. Attacks on Hazaras have deep roots in Afghan history. In the late 19th century, when Amir Abdur Rahman Khan was the ruler of Afghanistan, he led a campaign of mass violence against this ethnic group. Hazaras endured persecution and experienced massacres in the 20th century—including mass atrocities in provinces and districts, like Kabul in 1997 and Mazar-i-Sharif in 1998—which has also intensified in recent times.

The destruction brought about by Abdur Rahman laid its foundations and resulted in enslavement, seizure of Hazara agricultural lands by Pashtun tribes and the forced displacement of almost sixty percent of Hazaras. Changing the current plight of the Hazara can only be accomplished by relationship of understanding between the Hazara and the Pashtun. Truly understanding the current plight of the Hazara requires examining the issue of the historical violence sanctioned by a fascist government that currently holds power. The Hazara women community is deprived of cultural activities, human rights and education. Freedom of expression is non-existent and entertainment is banned. This is potentially "hidden" from the media. I believe this should be in the international spotlight with the media and with regards to human rights concerns. I believe that the mass violence that was carried out by the government of Abdul Rahman is ongoing. We Hazaras are still victims of this violence.

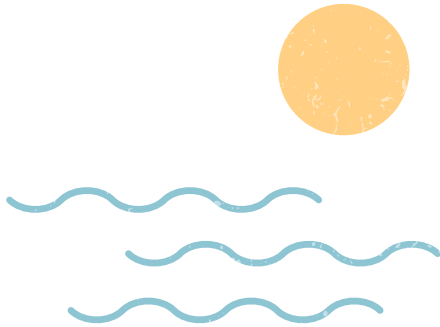
With respect, Shokria Haidari





— 4 —

GRATITUDE



OFELIA COLORES

Sand Between My Feet

I remember walking the Oceanside beach to have fun and not think about anything – happy and relaxed with my family.

Water, rock, and sand is between my feet, looking to the sea and jetties.

The waves hitting the rocks.
People are talking to each other.

Delicious food near the sea,
So much to see.

I want to make s'mores
with my family.

SHOKRIA HAIDARI

Birthdays and Weddings

I remember my wedding celebration very well. A good feeling that only happens once in a person's life.

Every day I go to the park with my children and my husband and play together. It makes me happy and festive. Recently, I celebrated my son's birthday. My family and kind friend were with me. I am eagerly awaiting the birthday party of my eldest son who is important to me.



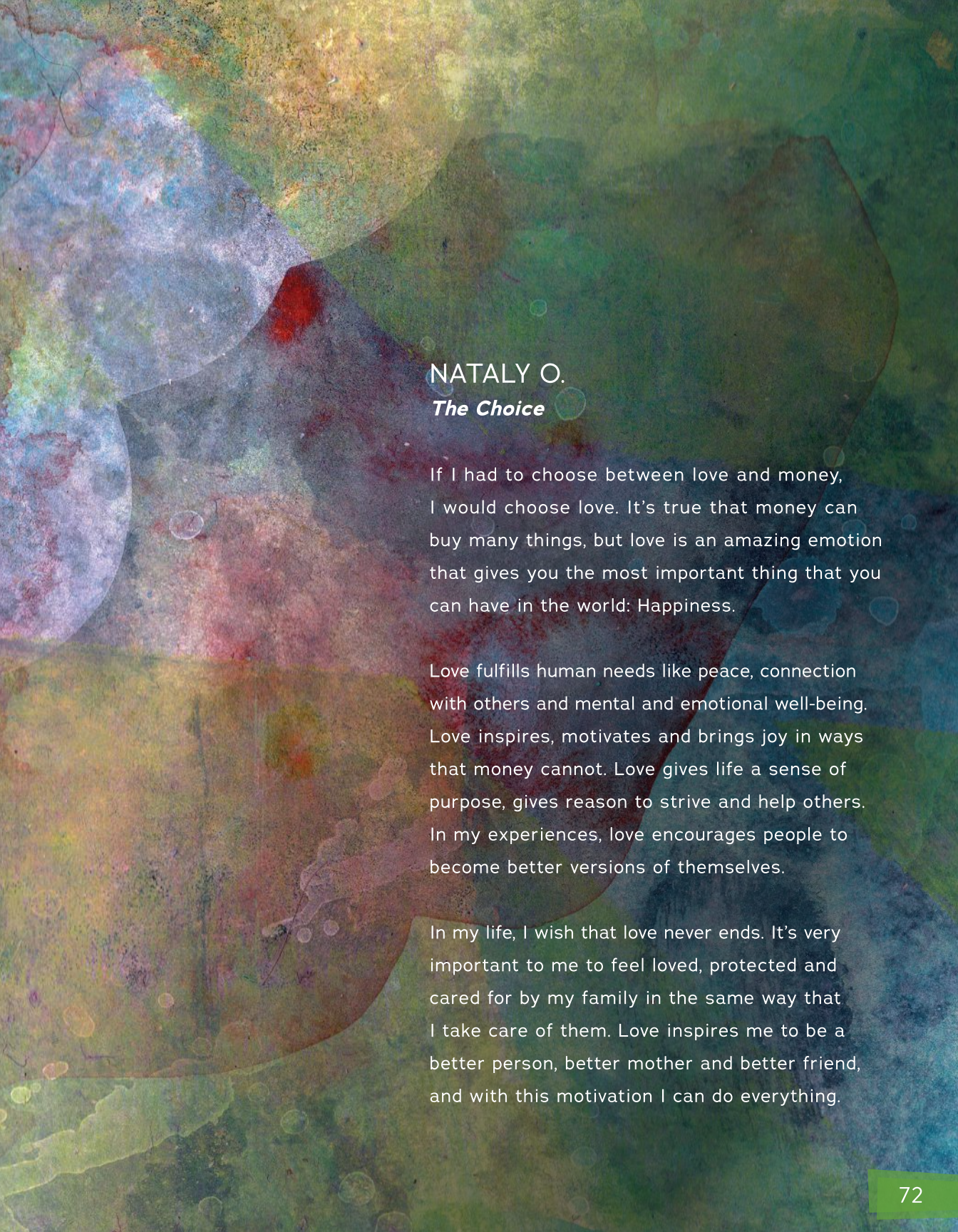
MY BROTHER, ARMANDO, studied at the Colegio Brothers Maristas, then he went to work with Atorio Vidre, a Spaniard, the only owner of supermarkets and hardware stores in the city of Santa Ana, El Salvador, close to the central market. Although my brother had a lot of talent for business, he was always doing things in the garden to sell what he grew by his hand.

We had good times when growing up. Mother liked Christmas. Mother and brother went places around in some cities to buy statues of clay and make a big display in the corridor of the house. Brother made painted posters with images of lakes, mountains, the moon, and the stars. He would open the garage at night so neighbors could go and stop by to see and have a cup of cocoa. Another big celebration they made for me was the 1st Communion with a breakfast after mass, all day after was a party. Brother made the ice cream in a big bucket of wood. Everyone said, "We want more." Brother, after many years of work with Vidre, went into business with a supermarket in the house where we were living with mother. After she passed, we made the whole house into a supermarket. Brother worked so hard and all the product of his hard work I inherited when he passed.

I lament they didn't have enough life to live. They didn't even get to the age of retirement to come to live with me in this beautiful and marvelous country where I live now. It's the best of the world, I love and adore it and I don't want to change it for any other.

I'm very thankful for family and friends
for accompanying me in these moments.
"To the natural!"

ROSA ALICIA PINEDA-LACK
My Brother Armando



NATALY O.

The Choice

If I had to choose between love and money, I would choose love. It's true that money can buy many things, but love is an amazing emotion that gives you the most important thing that you can have in the world: Happiness.

Love fulfills human needs like peace, connection with others and mental and emotional well-being. Love inspires, motivates and brings joy in ways that money cannot. Love gives life a sense of purpose, gives reason to strive and help others. In my experiences, love encourages people to become better versions of themselves.

In my life, I wish that love never ends. It's very important to me to feel loved, protected and cared for by my family in the same way that I take care of them. Love inspires me to be a better person, better mother and better friend, and with this motivation I can do everything.

GRATITUDE



BY ROSA ALICIA PINEDA-LACK



WITH THE GRACE OF GOD AND ALL MY SAINTS, I'M VERY GRATEFUL FOR HAVING KNOWN MY PARENTS IN LIFE.

My father, Carlos Portillo, mother, Rosa Pineda, and brother, Armando Pineda Portillo, to whom I keep a deep gratitude.

My father was the son of a Spanish immigrant, Jesus Portillo, who came to the countryside of Chalchuapa in Santa Ana, El Salvador, and he was married to Ester Trejo de Portillo. My father was born there and both my father and grandfather were mayors of the city.

I'm his daughter and I was born in his home in Santa Ana, El Salvador, in 1939, in the presence of my uncle, Carlos Pineda Castro, the older brother of my mother, and Navy Nurse Victoria.

When father passed, I inherited from him his fortaleza (strength), his vigor, and his energia (energy).

My mother, Rosa Pineda, was the daughter of a Spanish immigrant, Jose Pineda, who came to the country of Chalchuapa in Santa Ana, El Salvador, and he was married to my grandmother, a Spaniard, Juana Josefina Filiberta Castro v. de Pineda. They were merchants selling merchandise along the border in Santa Ana, Guatemala. My grandmother, Mama Beta, as we call her, kept a place in the market in the city for as long as she lived in order to go on Sundays or festivals to sell her merchandise. Her family is very known, distinguished and professionally educated.

I was raised by my mother, Rosa Pineda, and my brother, Armando Portillo, from the age of 6.5 when my father passed. I give my eternal and deep gratitude with all my heart to them. They had a very difficult time and arduous work. They gave to me all my education in the best Catholic private schools of the city and I was there with a very disciplined education. Mother and brother took care of me and in all aspects, they gave me all and their love.



WHEN I CAME TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA it was a big change in my life, because I was the first in my family to come to the USA. I came to America after I got married to my husband. Because he had been here for many years, he didn't want to go back to Mexico. I felt lonely because I didn't work, I didn't study, and I missed my family.

Coming to America

After five years of marriage, my daughter was born. She was a beautiful baby. She was an easy baby because she slept all night. Then, my second child was born. He was an adorable baby. He smiled all the time. I felt rewarded and fulfilled because I was involved in my kids' education. I was a volunteer at my kids' school and I took my kids to the library often. I registered my kids for the Summer Reading Program every year. I taught my kids the importance of education. I find life rewarding because of the effort I put into my kids' education. Now I have a doctor and a mechanical engineer. I'm proud of them.

by
**MARIA
LEDESMA**



Independence Day



Remembering history

4th of July

Bright, shiny, sparkly

Fireworks are beautiful

Warmth

Be careful, don't touch

A broken star

Might cause an explosion

Ba-ba-boom!

NEXT CHAPTER
BOOK CLUB

Aaron, Danny,
David, Elizabeth,
JDB, Liam, Nicki,
Rachel P., Rachel W.,
Travis, Reina

My Classroom is Important to Me

My first memory of the library was that I came here knowing no one but Chelsea and not knowing any English. It was difficult for me at first.

I felt like an outsider because I didn't know anyone here, and now

I'm happy because I have good friends here. My favorite place is the beach and the library. Looking at the beach is relaxing and joyful.

What I love about Oceanside is my classroom which is important to me. What I need to improve is my language which needs to be improved in Oceanside.

by Shokria Haidari

I love birthdays and I love parties.

I went to Los Angeles for my birthday.

It was 2 ½ hours. That's a long ride with good music.

My sister Miranda has Spotify. I like it.

The Hollywood Walk of Fame is where the stars are.

Miranda calls me a star.

I had a list of my favorite stars to find.

We found a star with JB on it. That was cool. It was cement, not real.

The real stars are brass and are in the sidewalk.

We got an iced mocha with a BIG donut.

I was hyper! We saw so many stars. I love it.

I saw 26 stars I knew...but there isn't room for all of them here.

Here are my best:

Elton John – musician,

Godzilla – from the books I read with Miranda,

Johnny Depp – actor from Pirates of the Caribbean,

Dwayne Johnson – wrestler! I love WWE and Wrestle Mania.

There are 2,800 stars. I have a new list for this year!

fluttering,



Being in California is a blessing for me. I have been fortunate enough to visit some of the heavenly places in this beautiful country, like Yosemite National Park. But, even if I wanted to stay, I don't belong here.

That's why I'm going to return to my roots - to my beautiful Mexico. I know it won't be easy, but it's not the end of the world either. This country has taught me that with hard work and discipline, dreams can be achieved. I'm incredibly grateful to the people who employ us, because that way we have food on the table for ourselves and our families.

I thank God for taking care of me and I am grateful for being here in this beautiful place, Oceanside READS. This is like my home - the staff, students and tutors are my family here.

My goal is to continue practicing my English and studying alternative medicine because I believe it is very helpful for everyone in these times. I will also upload videos to my YouTube channel for tourists about traditional recipes and customs from my state. I would like it to be in three languages: Spanish, English and Mixtec, which is my mother's tongue.



In Mexico I imagine myself enjoying a delicious and aromatic hot chocolate with freshly baked Pan de Yema, and when I look out the window I can see the beautiful colors of the garden flowers swaying in the gentle morning breeze. I can hear the buzzing of bees, the fluttering of hummingbirds with bright colors and long beaks, and butterflies of different sizes and colors also enjoying the sweet nectar of the flowers.



Buzzing,



I can also hear the murmur of the small stream a few meters from the house and the sweet melody of the “huitlacoche bird” and the turtle dove perching on the branches of a blooming plum tree.

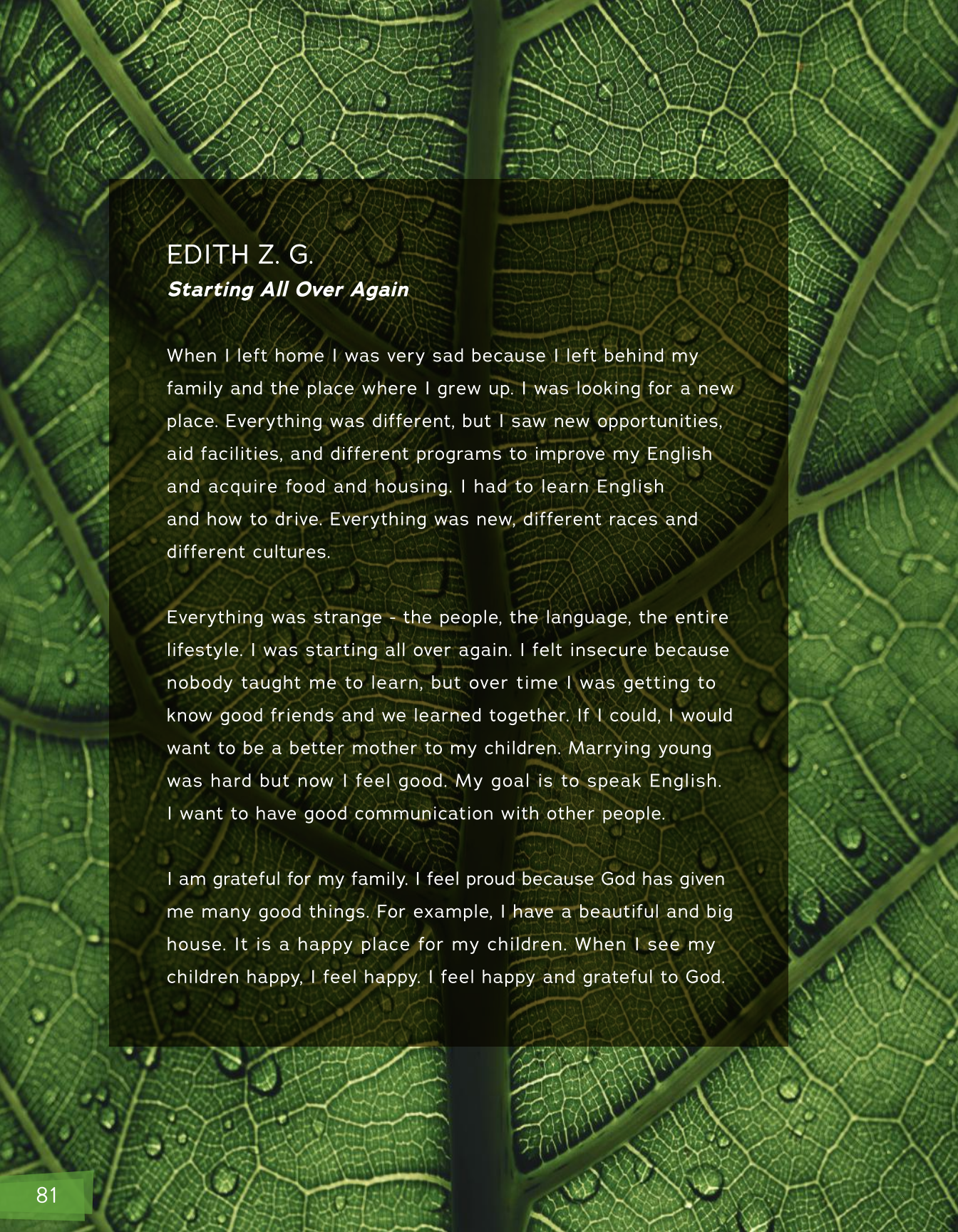
The sun is shining brightly, and I feel immense peace and much gratitude for all the blessings I have. I can hug my mother and my entire family.

Thank you, God. Thank you, Life.



Dreaming

by Amalia Morales Ramírez



EDITH Z. G.

Starting All Over Again

When I left home I was very sad because I left behind my family and the place where I grew up. I was looking for a new place. Everything was different, but I saw new opportunities, aid facilities, and different programs to improve my English and acquire food and housing. I had to learn English and how to drive. Everything was new, different races and different cultures.

Everything was strange - the people, the language, the entire lifestyle. I was starting all over again. I felt insecure because nobody taught me to learn, but over time I was getting to know good friends and we learned together. If I could, I would want to be a better mother to my children. Marrying young was hard but now I feel good. My goal is to speak English. I want to have good communication with other people.

I am grateful for my family. I feel proud because God has given me many good things. For example, I have a beautiful and big house. It is a happy place for my children. When I see my children happy, I feel happy. I feel happy and grateful to God.



GRATITUDE

≡ BY DERLY NERIETH ≡

MY GRANDMA, TERESA GONZALEZ, IS MY HERO.

She is strong, protective, loving, and is my second mom. She cared for me and my siblings from the time we were born because my parents worked all day.

I remember she taught me how to cook, clean,
care for my siblings, and love God over all things.

I try to put her teachings to use every day. It's not easy, but I try. There's nothing better than her food, sharing moments together, and her words and her hugs for me.

Now I live far away from her in a different country. Even though we talk on the phone, it's not the same as being with her in person. I appreciate all the moments with her and the parts of her that live in me and will love forever.

I wish I had more chances to give back to her,
even a little bit, for everything she has done for me.

IN TIJUANA EVERYTHING WAS DIFFERENT FROM MY HOME TOWN OF OAXACA:

a lot of people, heavy traffic, garbage on the street, foul smell from sewage.

But, despite these details, Tijuana is the most visited border in the world.

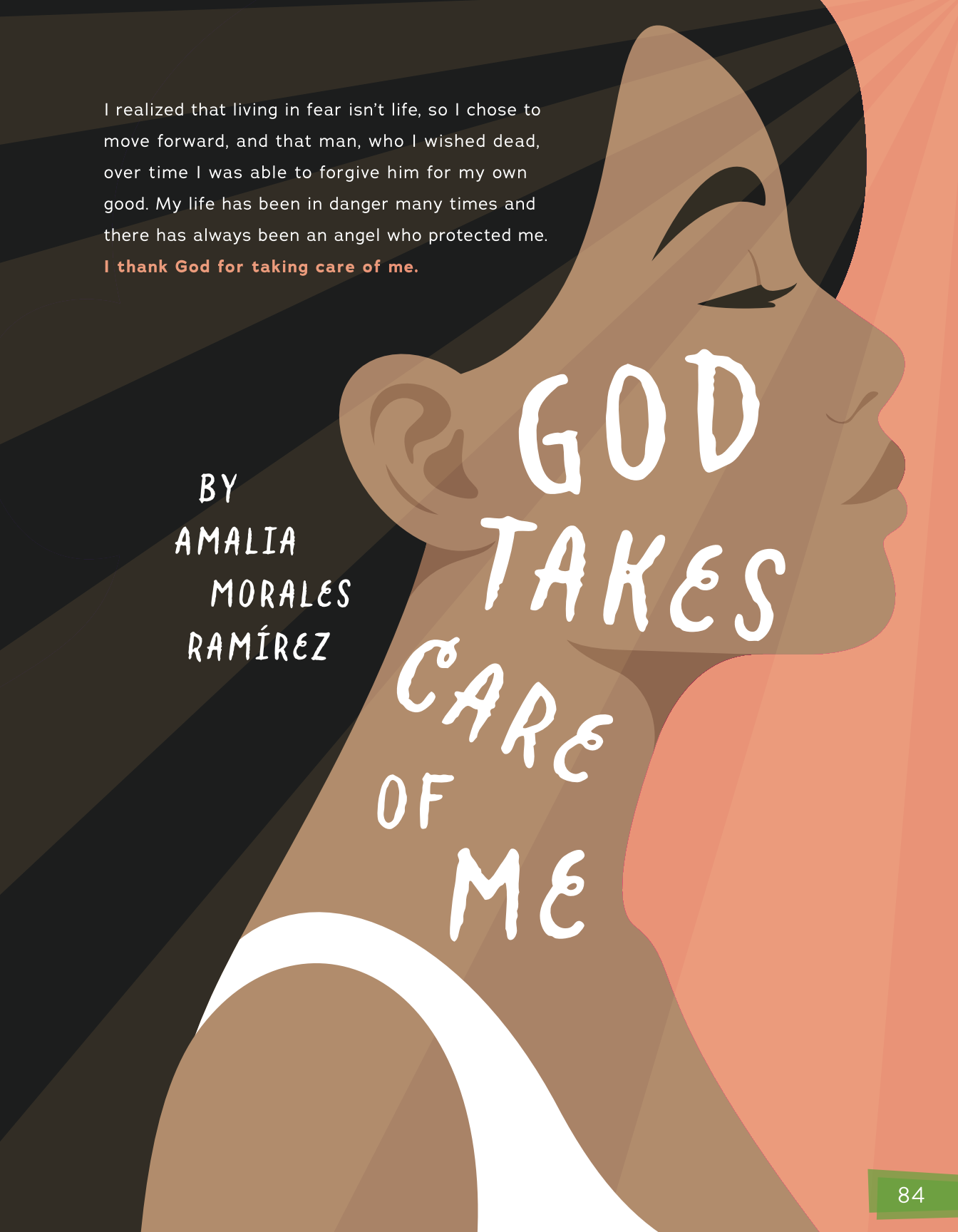
Most of its inhabitants are honest and hardworking.

Sadly, many people use illegal drugs and cause a lot of violence and robbery. So, it is very dangerous to walk at night or early in the morning. I was always afraid to go to work because I left home very early.

Early one morning, I was waiting for a taxi, when a man approached me. I felt a little scared, but it was a public place. He asked me a very offensive question, and when I turned to look at him, I felt the edge of a knife at my neck. I felt an immense cold that paralyzed me, and I thought I would die that day. He ordered me not to scream, otherwise he would cut my throat. All I could think was that my life and my dreams could not end there. I prayed to God for help with Psalm 23.

Across the street, there was an abandoned property and he was taking me there. We crossed the street dodging the traffic. My mind began to imagine the worst, and I had a terrible fear that I would die without putting up a fight. So, before entering the abandoned property, I screamed at the top of my lungs for someone to help me. The man covered my mouth, but someone had already heard my cries for help. That someone was a man who came armed with a bat. He confronted him and ordered him to let me go. Then, when I was free, he asked me if I was okay and that he would call the police. I don't remember exactly what I said to him, but I ran away aimlessly from there. That good man saved my life that morning. May God bless him always.

That event changed my life. I had never felt as afraid as that day. I could no longer go out at night or early in the morning. My peace and trust towards strangers was gone. I liked going to church in the evenings, but I stopped going because I no longer felt safe. I had nightmares at night. I didn't want to leave the house, and I started to get depressed. But I told myself if God let me live, it was to live happily and in peace with myself and with people. So, I sought help from my church members and a psychologist.



I realized that living in fear isn't life, so I chose to move forward, and that man, who I wished dead, over time I was able to forgive him for my own good. My life has been in danger many times and there has always been an angel who protected me.

I thank God for taking care of me.

BY
AMALIA
MORALES
RAMÍREZ

GOD TAKES CARE OF ME

The Thrilling Moment in My Life



One of the most thrilling moments in my life was when my daughter was born. When I saw her face for the first time, I cried with happiness. As I held my daughter, she grabbed my shoulder and cried. In this moment, I understood how big the love of a mother is for her daughter or son, and I realized my life would change. I had a big responsibility to teach proper behavior and kindness and guide her through life. Every day I balance my home to provide a loving environment. Now, six years later, what I have learned, my mother learned many years ago. My love and devotion to provide for my daughter will endure forever.

I love you, my little sunshine.

by Rosa Maria Pliego Diaz

Joy In The Air

by Ofelia Colores

My family, two daughters, a son and a husband.

A home full of energy,
hugs all around.

More home cooking,
More family time, more joy in the air.

Christian music, relaxing tunes,
TV playing softly, family talking,
Laughter filling every corner.

Happy in the warmth of home,
Surrounded by Love, and family.

I want a different job.
I want to visit Mexico with my daughters and son.

I dream of a new house and a new car!
What I need is to always be together with my family.

I am proud to be the daughter of Antonio and Victoria Perez and sister of Chary, Dago, Beta, Magui, Gaby, and Cheque. I was born in the beautiful state of Oaxaca, Mexico.

My father immigrated to the USA in the 1970s. My mother finally immigrated in 1989, the same year I came, too. Due to the sacrifices my parents made, my siblings and I have been able to get ahead in this country. We have always worked hard to be good citizens to make our parents proud.

After seven years of being in the US, I discovered that, at my side, I've had my soulmate, my childhood friend, Antonio O. He had moved to the US about a year after I did. I have spent the last 28 years with him. He is my favorite person, who I admire and respect the most, as a friend and father. I am grateful that he has given me the opportunity to become a mother to our kids and raise them to be great human beings. Anthony, Alondra, and Ximena, you have been my everything and have made me the happiest mother in the universe. I love you with all my being.

Now, at 53 years, and after so many both wonderful and difficult experiences, I have discovered a dream I had hidden within me. With the help of the Oceanside Library, I grow closer to my goal. I found a beautiful community to help guide me. In the library, I found a light to help motivate me and give me the help I need to reach my goal.

This light is someone named Chelsea. She has helped me work hard and has so much patience for me. Her believing in me means so much. Thank you so much, Chelsea, for your time, and I wish for you to be healthy and happy.

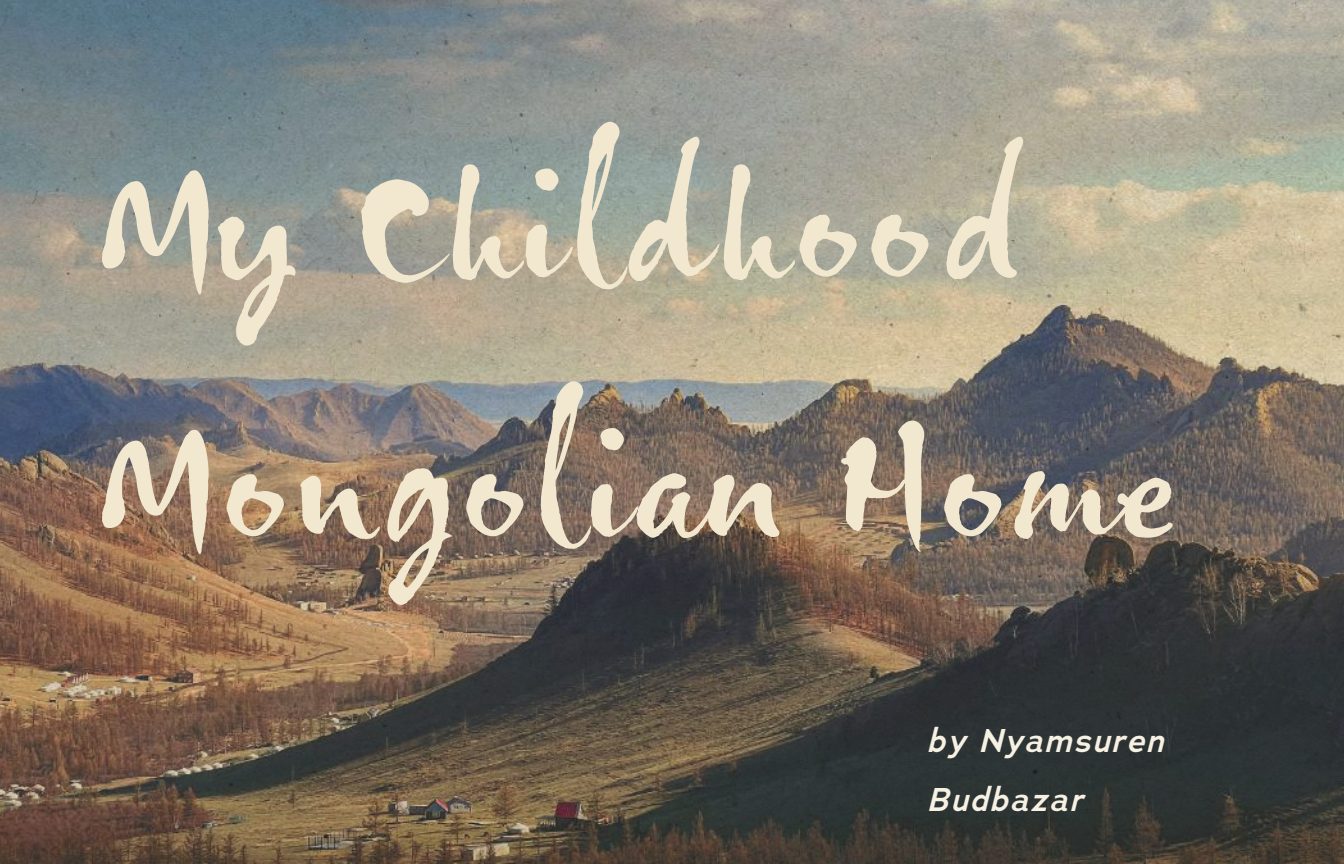
None of this would have been possible without Mrs. Christine, who has helped me in this journey. You have been so wonderful, Mrs. Christine. Thank you for being the pillar of this chapter in my life. Your patience and motivation have allowed me to want to keep going.

I am also grateful towards the Cafecito program, including all the teachers and members. With everyone's help, I hope to continue to learn and perfect my English. I'm forever grateful to God for allowing me to live in a country with these opportunities.

Gratitude for My Life in America



by MARIA DEL
PILAR PEREZ P.

A scenic landscape of a Mongolian valley. In the foreground, a small village with a few houses and a red-roofed building is nestled in a valley. The middle ground shows rolling hills and a river winding through them. In the background, there are rugged mountains under a cloudy sky. The title 'My Childhood Mongolian Home' is written in a large, white, cursive font across the top of the image.

My Childhood Mongolian Home

*by Nyamsuren
Budbazar*

My place of birth is a small village. There is a river and a lake. It has a very beautiful landscape with trees and mountains formed by the eruption of volcanoes. My parents lived there, my father was a teacher and my mother was a doctor.

My village is very cold in winter. It snows a lot. It is windy and the river is strong. I can hear that noise, and I can smell the smell of dairy products.

There are many kinds of birds and animals in the forest. You can hear their songs. You can hear the sounds

of the fast-flowing river. You can also hear the sounds of five types of animals: camel, horse, sheep, cow, and goat.

Our family was very happy. We all went to school and kindergarten where we all did our homework. We were raised by parents who took care of our younger siblings very well. We read a lot, studied well at school, and actively participated in community activities like playing sports.

I want to go back to my childhood Mongolian home.

THURSDAY CLASS

by Teresa Lopez

I see a small group of friends coming to an English class.

The teachers motivate us. We learn pronunciation, reading and speaking English.

We are encouraged to experience new things.

I smell the wood in the paper of the book. I remember the smell from when I was a little girl in school.

I hear my classmates participate in class and I understand them a little more, and that motivates me to participate too.

I feel very happy and very grateful to my teachers for the support and the patience they always give me.

I want to continue participating in the program because I feel like I'm learning a little more each time, and that motivates me and makes me feel very happy to be in the Cafecito group.

I have been attending Cafecito for over a year! I will keep coming. I'm proud to come to Cafecito.

Do you want to **WRITE YOUR OWN STORY?**

WE HOPE YOU ARE INSPIRED! HERE ARE SOME QUESTIONS
TO HELP YOU FIGURE OUT WHAT YOU WANT TO SAY.
MAKE QUICK, SIMPLE NOTES OF INTERESTING IDEAS.

What do you want others to know about being you?

What major changes have you had in your life?

What are you passionate about?

What do you feel strongly about?

Where did you come from? How did you get here?

What are your dreams? How will you get there?

What or who motivates or inspires you? Why?

WRITING IS A PROCESS.

Here are some ideas about how to write your own story.

- 1. Collect your notes on ideas you want to share.*
- 2. Pick one idea and write about it. Pretend you are telling a friend about it.*
- 3. Put the piece away for a while.*
- 4. Reread and rewrite. You can share the story with your tutor or friend.*
- 5. Repeat steps 3-4 until you feel you are done.*

Thanks to “Alameda Reads” for this outline.

PAGE	ARTIST	IMAGE DESCRIPTION
Cover	Irene Soto	Mosaic pattern
iv	Jorge Alberto Vega Barrera	Man walking near fence
vii	Kat Carbone	Pier at sunset
viii	Abraham	Oaxacan celebration
xi	Bianca Bonilla	Community Roots Farm in Oceanside
xiii	Brynn Stivers	Oceanside Civic Center
xiv	Christine Jones	Mission San Luis Rey
xvii	Pamela Heckel	Roberts Cottages
1	Nattasak Buranasri	Mosaic pattern
5	Pixabay	Butterflies
7	Kier in Sight Archives	Flower close-up
10	Wolfgang Hasselmann	Flower
11	Alena Ostoukhova	Suitcase
12	Josh Hild	Oceanside coast
13	Helen Brook	Palm
15	Nadezhda Vinogradova	Face
17	Alisa Aleksandrova	Tree
19	Hanna Morozova	Sun
23	Anastasiia Garashchuk	Ranch woodcut
25	Nattasak Buranasri	Mosaic pattern
26	Matthew Britton	Mortar and pestle
27	Pok Rie	Field
29	Yanira Anand	Family photos
32	Casey Horner	Starburst
33	Daniel Arrazola	Mountains
35	Aloysius Patrimonio	Tree illustration
38	Ekaterina Ilchenko (Ice cream) / Tatiana Goncharuk (Flower)	
39	Lubos Chlubny	Tortillas
40	Bruno Cervera	Agave field
41	Karthik B K	Mountains
43	Michael Piepgras	Water rings
45	Harry Adhi Subangkit	Flowers
46	Zabihullah Habibi	Mountains
47	Pongsak Polbubpha	Mosaic pattern
48	Ian 2201 (Mountain) / Harry Arts (Wave)	
49	Krisnanto Ahmadi	Mermaid
52	Home Privilege Real Estate	Labyrinth
53	Evgeniya Shustikova	Plant
55	Redd Francisco	River
59	Angela Reyes	Family photos
62	Stephan Mahlke	Airplane
63	Aaron Burden	Bird in flight
65	Kat Carbone	Rocky beach
66	Bagus Prakoso	Mother and child
67	Ali Azad	Afghan man
68	Sima Ghaffarzadeh (People) / Mahdi Ansel (Lake)	
69	Montian Noowong	Mosaic pattern
71	Oswaldo Martinez	Mountains
72	Paul Blenkhorn	Abstract texture
73	Anastasiia Garashchuk	Woman and cactus
76	Pixabay	Sparkler
77	Daniel Durin	Ocean
78	Leo Bayard	Hollywood sign
79	Mika Wegilius	Yosemite
81	Clay Banks	Leaf
83	Anastasia Yelchinova	Portrait of woman
85	Rosa Maria Pliego Diaz	Family photos
87	Sachi	Purple sky and shrubs
88	Rosa Maria Pliego Diaz	Family inset
89	Alexander Popovkin	Village and hillside

PHOTOGRAPHY

& Illustration

CREDITS



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