

California Writing

An Anthology of California Perspectives Written by High School Students Across California

2005-2006

This anthology is edited and published by the California Writing Project at the University of California at Berkeley.

California Writing

When students learn to write about their history and heritage, their neighborhoods and communities, their challenges and hopes, they are better able to read and understand the words and worlds of others.

For thirty years, teachers in the California Writing Project have held that belief and have developed powerful classroom projects to engage their students in writing about personal, community, and civic issues. So when the California Council for the Humanities asked us to partner with them on a joint project, *California Stories Uncovered in the Classroom*, many of us saw it as one of those classroom projects in the making.

In that spirit, the California Writing Project offered students across California a wide range of opportunities to read, write, and then publish about four provocative themes:

- Growing up and finding our identity in a changing California
- Understanding how our community, history, and heritage have shaped who we are as Californians
- Grappling with the realities and challenges of life in California
- Dreaming of a better life in California, as newcomers or long-time residents.

Thousands of students have participated during the 2004-2005 school year, and with their teachers, they have developed local ways to go public with their writing—exhibits and galleries in school cafeterias, on university campuses, and at community centers; readings in coffee shops, in bookstores, and over videoconferences; and collections of writing on websites, as digital stories, or in print anthologies.

In order to create a statewide opportunity to go public, CWP invited students to submit writing for publication in anthologies that we hoped would include writing from students across California—students who mirrored California in terms of culture, community, economics, and language and students who were from all grade and ability levels in school. After all, we believe every student in California has stories to tell, perspectives to write, and issues to research.

Our hopes have been realized. In this anthology you will find writing that includes reflections, narratives, poetry, essays, multigenre pieces, and more. Some of what you will read is painfully honest, some is keenly observant, and some is persuasively direct. Authors include students who are not only newcomers to California; they are newcomers to our country and also to English. For other authors, school, and writing in particular, have been daily struggles. For others, writing is like breathing, and they put in extra work on their pieces in lunchtime or after-school writers' clubs.

What do these writers share? They all took the risk that is an integral part of publishing. Going public is a writer's act of hope, of faith, that his or her ideas and perspectives will find a responsive reader. We invite you to be those readers. Dive into this anthology, explore the students' writing, celebrate their progress, and help CWP shine a bright spotlight on their promise and potential.

*Jayne Marlink, Executive Director
California Writing Project*

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CHAPTER ONE

CALIFORNIA PERCEPTIONS

Corning, Defying Perceptions

by Tabitha Roden

Profuse quantities of handsomely colored green grass
Have their days numbered.
And the precisely kept scenic shrubs
They too will meet their doom.
The scorching sun of summer shows its wrath
Chasing away the innocence that spring portrays.
Cattle gather to dried up creeks
Once breathtaking rivulets of water.
Once a home of refuge for the herds.
Air so fresh, so pure
Quickly becomes too hot to abide.
The blistering sun makes us more vulnerable
The heat much too intense.
The slow pace city folk associate with country life
By no means represents a farmer
For farmers work sunrise to sundown
Mending and perfecting every aspect of their lives, not just their farms.
Traffic is nonexistent
Yet the distance to travel is great.
Appreciation for the music of the nocturnal
Is quickly taken for granted.
A misconception that everyone in a small community is friends
Not all are
Though, our differences are reconciled more peaceably.
Again that all here are cowboys
If so, where are the horses in my pasture?

12th Grade, Corning Union High School

The House On Tehama Street

by Anonymous

When I first saw what was to be our new home I was underwhelmed by its common appearance. Nothing jumped out at me and nothing tried to cling to my memory. It was easy to forget this place, to pass it over as ordinary. I had trouble remembering which one it was when we came back with our things so what could I expect from any passer-by? No none notices normality, especially when it is lost in a sea of houses as common as it is.

Part of me finds comfort in the realization that no one will notice where I live. It won't be a target for ridicule or a place people will cross the street to avoid. It is simply there, like all the others, masking lives that are anything but normal.

Yet part of me wants people to see it, to see what goes on behind that mask of normalcy. The windows are curtained so you won't see Mom reading her Bible or Dad getting drunk. You'll see the empty lawn chairs though, and the dying neglected plants. But you won't see me, waiting miserably for the chance to leave.

Our house is a shell, one that is begging to be passed over. And the mouth of this shell, the garage, swallows my happiness. It is chewing on my art and the characters I have written into existence, my escapes. They are banished there in the cold, sent there by angry hands. My things, my soul, sits behind that ordinary garage door and no one knows what's there.

12th Grade, Corning Union High School

Lie

by Ashley Wendt

In the end, California,
You're envied by all:
The glimmer, the glamour,
The sheen of success.
California, light up my name—make it twinkle.

Promise me you will.

California, make me glisten,
Make me glitter,
Make me positively gleam.
Give me your fame, your elegance.

I'll sell my soul to be like you.

California, you're gorgeous.
You're a brilliant star perfumed with radiance,
A shining diamond, flickering with splendor,
Complete with endless streaks of blonde hair.

You're rich, you're luxurious,
Brightly lit and mascaraed with allure—
California, you're fake.

Lie to me as nicely as I've lied to you.

12th Grade, North Monterey County High School

Why Do People Stereotype?

by Edgar Jauregui

Adapting to high school from middle school is very difficult. It was hard for me, because I came from a Mexican family, and stereotyping was a big part of my life.

Two weeks before officially being a freshman in high school, my older brother gave me a couple ideas about being successful. He also told me about the bullies in high school. Entering high school, I had three close friends, so we were a group of four. The first day came, and fear got to us because we heard what the older kids would do to freshmen. I witnessed many bad things I had never seen before. As I was walking to class, I saw three older students smoking pot.

The first two weeks passed by, and I was confused. My homies and I would debate about where to hang out and who to “kick it” with. We wanted to be known and to feel safe, so we started hanging out with the so-called cool people. Everything worked out perfect. We met many new people, and fear was not a factor anymore.

With everything going the way I wanted and dreamed about, one day I was called to the principal’s office. When I got there, I saw my three homies with police officers, the principal, and my three teachers around them. My first reaction when I saw them was fear. The doors closed, and the meeting began. First thing they did was search us and our school bags for any graffiti or drugs. I did not know what was going on, but I was not worried because we did not do anything wrong.

Finally, they asked us why we were there, and the reason was that we were being accused of being “NORTENOS GANGSTERS.” I felt really bad because the school staff was stereotyping me and my homies. It got me fired up, and I started expressing myself. I remember telling the cop, “Not every bold Mexican is a gangster.” The meeting was over, and we were put on a gang contract for no reason.

Everything that the cop told me got me thinking. I asked myself if this is what I wanted to be known for. I was confused and did not know why they would think something like that about me. All I could think was, “Why is something this bad happening to me? It is not fair. I have not done anything wrong.”

Students are not the only ones who stereotype others; ironically, educated people that are supposed to help stop stereotyping are doing what they are fighting!

12th Grade, North Monterey County High School

Pink Hair Clips

by Rose Tobisch

From Ironing to the Olympics women have come a long way from the kitchen. Society has begun to get over the egotistical manly man act and started to pay attention to the fact that women are just as capable as men. Although much progress has been made, struggles are still endured by many in the every-day bustle of getting by in America.

"I need someone to time the 20-40 run would anyone like to volunteer?" says Mr. Johnson. "C'mon guys. I need two people at least..." Two hands rise up in the crowd of physical education uniforms "Whose hand is that?" Relieved, Mr. Johnson looks for a face to match the hands. "Gina and Gwen. We will time for you." Mr. Johnson looks with certain dissatisfaction on his face. Suddenly two other hands pop up. "We'll do it, Coach," says Brad. "Well, okay, thanks boys." As Coach Johnson hands them the stopwatch and directs them where to stand, he glances back at Gina with a look of thanks but...no thanks. Stunned, the two girls sit down and ponder the events that have just taken place in their co-ed varsity weight-training class. Gwen, very noticeably perturbed, begins, "Are you serious? I mean honestly! Is he really that convinced we don't have the ability to push the stop button? Do we have 'moron' written across our foreheads or is it just our pink hair clips?"

As five o'clock rolls around, a few people file into the gym, time for tip-off. Guess who's the audience? Thirty—at most fifty—people in attendance, the vast majority parents, some younger siblings and a few boyfriends there to cheer on their sweeties. This happens to be a play-off game for the Lady Cubs. They have worked all season, sweat, tears, and endurance to be here at this game, but do they have a crowd to cheer them on to victory? No. Do most people even know it's a play-off game? No. This is no big surprise to them; they've grown accustomed to empty seats and echoes.

For some reason our society is mentally progressing very slowly to the concept of women being as capable and interesting as men. Sure, we've come a long way, supplied women with the same opportunities as men, and begun to make a dent in our way of life, and yet the mindset of Americans has been shifted very minimally. It makes me wonder if we will ever be on the same plane as men, if we will ever draw in a whole gym full of people without a boys' game to follow the girls. If the President of the United States will ever be a female.

11th Grade, Corning Union High School

Footsteps

by Luis Soto

Violence it could be his second name
And happiness could be his first
One stealing from another
Innocent people dying
There are children crying.

Why do I like this country????
I have my old friends since I was little
There are a lot of things that I miss
I think this could be like a quiz.

Now I am in this new country
A new language and a new culture
It's a small town, but it's a big country
A country with opportunities.

Without this country my mom wouldn't be alive,
American doctors saved her.

11th Grade, Golden Valley High School

The House on Houghton Avenue

by Jared Henry

I have always lived in the house on Houghton Avenue. I never lived across from the city pool, or in Gridley, or Durango. All I have known is the last house, the house where my parents finished raising their kids. I never saw the beginning or any part of the middle. I came trailing on the end, so while I don't know the beginning at all, I know the end better than any of my siblings.

I knew you had to twist the front door handle to the right, and I know that you don't anymore. I knew what the carpet was like in the weird orange color, and green, and the new speckled beige. I carried out the old spa, tore off the old slats, and watched the new spa dropped in with a crane. I've been on the new roof to put up the new lattice.

I've seen the fallen almond trees in our orchard, and carried off the wood that is now burning in our wood stove. I put together the new cabinets, and painted the fence. I've seen the pool liner bubble out and get changed twice, and I don't know how many times I've cleaned the filter. I was in the pool when it sprayed filter aid into the water, and spent the whole summer working on cleaning it.

I could mow the lawn in my sleep, with three very different lawn mowers. I know which trees have low-hanging branches that make you duck, and that all of them do when they are loaded with almonds. I've even ridden the lawn mower behind the suburban when it was broken. That was fun.

I've seen the pine trees trimmed higher and higher each year, and drug away the branches. I've backed up the camper trailer to the field, and gotten it out when it was stuck. I've seen the little old trailer reduced to a towable platform.

I know where the barrels full of pine-cones are, and I've picked up more pine cones than I can count. They make impressive fires in the burn piles. I've rotor-tilled and planted the gardens. I've picked fruit from every tree, and even named Herbert (the mandarin tree) a long time ago.

I have stood by the pool, looked through the living room window, through both sides of the atrium, and my bedroom door and window to the other side of the house, and I've done it from the other side. I've moved couches in and out. I've restocked the bookshelf after it was emptied when we put in the new carpet. I know how to get the air vent to stay after you change the filter.

I don't know the beginning, but the end is my beginning. Really it may not be the end, only the end for me, but it isn't even the end for me. It is only the end of this part of my life. Next there will be a new beginning for myself, and for my family.

12th Grade, Corning Union High School

A - Nee - Nee

by Leah Fortson

I refuse to be another Black statistic,
bound by racial prejudices, injustice and social confinement.

A-Nee-Nee aint just fo my mama, it's fo every mama I eva met.
I refuse to be invisible, silenced stereotyped and challenged.

A-Nee-Nee aint just fo my daddy, it's fo every daddy or paternal fatha I eva met.
I refuse to be the minority, with a loud voice I advocate: "I'm Black and I'm proud, I'm black and I'm proud."
I am a majority.

A-Nee-Nee aint just fo my people, my brothas and sistahs.
A-Nee-Nee is for the politicians and bureaucrats, the governors and the senators, the state legislators, the presidents of
foreign nations all over the world.
A-Nee-Nee Is for the president of these United States of America?

Yes, A-Nee-Nee, You, I need you.
To stand up against the prejudices, injustice and social confinement.

Because I am invisible, ignored and cast down by the proprietors of society.
Because I am silenced, before conception, my home language snatched.
Because I am stereotyped "Nigga this, nigga that."
Because I am challenged and ultimately denied.

Yes, A-Nee-Nee, You, I need you.
Because without you I might be another Black statistic,
bound by racial prejudices, injustice and social confinement.

?th Grade, Foshay Learning Center

Under Cover

by ?

Olive trees in the distance
Three stop lights and no malls
A small town you ask
Only one main street
Judged as a place with no opportunities
Without greatness and the desire "to be"

"to be?"

Being the underdogs
Potential, desire, and heart

I look up
We dream too
Working hard without comfort
Looking at the same sky the world has all seen
We work just as hard
Living in a town of 7,000 people
We are only begging to be underestimated

?th Grade, ?

Small Town Living

by ?

Do you know me?
She knows me, he knows you
Everyone knows everyone here

Fortunately I am not from this place
Yet she was born here, he was born here
I think their parents also grew up here
And their parents before them

Gossip flows here, like the money that flows into these rolling hills
“Did you hear about her?”

“Yeah I heard she was going to cheat on that test”

“Well she’s lucky she didn’t”

“Yeah or we would’ve made sure the teacher heard about it”

Failure helps one learn
Yet in this place
Failure costs you everything
The very instance of your blunder
She knows, he knows
Everyone knows everything here

She said, he said, they all were mistaken
“Did you hear about her?”

“Yeah I heard she was going to cheat on that guy”

“Well she’s lucky she didn’t”

“Yeah or we would’ve made sure he heard about it”

Do you live here?

?th Grade, ?

Switching To Hicksville

by Brittany Flaherty

Preface

Hi! I'm Brittany Flaherty and I'm writing my multi-genre paper on moving here from Antioch, CA. Now, as some of you know, Antioch is a semi-large city with no livestock or wide-open spaces, really. So moving here was a huge culture shock, but I got over it. Enjoy.

Rule Number One: Don't Talk About City.

Small? That's An Understatement:

I remember the first time I stepped inside of Richfield school. Or, rather, outside. All the classrooms were outside, and I stared around nervously. There were only about 8, which I found kind of odd. Bidwell (my old school) had at least 30+ classrooms, and I wondered if this was a 6th grade only school. That would make sense! The nurse ushered me into the classroom where a heavily bearded man, Mr. Springer, who would be my 6th grade teacher, greeted me. I glanced around the classroom before being seated with two blonde girls, Renee and Danielle. There were only about 23 students! What a small class! I turned to Renee and whispered, "Where are all the other 6th graders?" She looked at me oddly. "These are the only ones!" she whispered back, and smiled at me. I smiled back, but inside I thought, "What? What kind of school is this?" Mr. Springer continued with class. After a couple of hours, I wondered when the bell to switch classes was going to ring. Again, I had to ask Renee what was up. She responded in the same tone as the reply before, saying we only had one class a day! Again, I was baffled. I must be in the wrong place! Sadly, I was not.

Rule Number Two: Pretend like you've been around olive trees your whole life. Don't, DON'T, mention they creep you out.

In The Summer of 2001:

Dear Diary,

Yes! School is over. It's getting easier and everything, but I still don't like it very much. It's hard to fit in with kids that been together their whole life. It seems that I've missed the meeting where everyone gets best friends, but I'm doing okay. I hang out with mostly Danielle and Renee. Renee has been here her whole life, but is still nice, and Danielle is just as much of an outcast as I am. Oh well, maybe 7th grade will be better. I hope so. I miss Antioch...especially our old house. It was so gorgeous and big. And all the trees and flowers...it's like a palace compared to this dinky little house. And even the desert beats it foliage wise. But, at least we are getting a new house when the old one is sold. It's a good thing; I hate being crowded in here with my grandma and grandpa's parents. I wonder how long it will be until I get used to here? Until I call it home. Until those olive trees quit creeping me out.

Love,
Brittany

Rule Number Three: Don't openly flirt with boys. We girls largely outnumber them and the girls become resentful if you try to go after one.

Wanted: Smart People

Students who do their homework and provide thoughtful insight to varieties of different subjects are wanted for this year's 7th grade class. Students are expected to do homework daily and participate in all activities. Also, come with an open mind and good attitude. For more information, contact Mrs. Fralin.

Rule Number Four: Don't openly admit liking school, or point out how useful and enlightening it is. That's just asking for it.

Meeting Kylie

I get onto the crowded morning bus, craning my head around, looking for a seat. Near the back I see Kylie, a new student, sitting by herself. I fight my way to the seat and sit down.

Brittany: "Hi, didn't you just move here? Where did you come from?"

Switching To Hicksville by Brittany Flaherty

Kylie: "Yeah, I moved here from Chico. Man, I hate it here! Don't you?"

Brittany: "Yeah! I moved here from a big town too. Antioch."

Kylie: "Really? That's where my aunt lives. This is so awesome! Everyone else here is such a hick. And what's with the cows outnumbering people? That's just sad."

Brittany: "I know!"

We spend the next 15 minutes talking and laughing. Good thing we had something in common.

Rule Number Five: Don't talk to the super loser kids. It so happens that they aren't very friendly, so that shouldn't be hard.

A Year Later...

Corning Daily News:

The 23 Students pictured above are the graduating class of 02-03 for Richfield School. These students are considered the best and brightest of the surrounding Corning area, excelling in state testing and other such things. The graduation will be small but memorable, and friends and family are strongly encouraged to attend. The after party will be held at the Bowl'O'Rama in Corning.

Epilogue:

I really hope you all enjoyed my paper on my move to Corning. I think that it will be interesting to people that have lived here their whole lives, seeing what it's like to be new and see all the different things that aren't there in other cities. But not all of Corning is bad. It's nice to see the stars at night, and to not be so crowded. Corning is a very diverse area that offers a lot of good things, and I'm ultimately glad I moved here.

10th Grade, Corning Union High School

CHAPTER TWO

CALIFORNIA CHILDHOOD

What Makes You So Strong?

by Alishia Gadsen

What makes you so strong mother?
Is that you went through excruciating labor
To bring one two or three children into this world
Or is it how you seem to raise that little boy or girl
Is it how you got them to school everyday
Or is it how, that with the little money you had
You were able to pay so your child could play and be happy?

What makes you so strong?
Is it how you worked so hard to get that food to the table
But didn't seem to get a bite
Is it how you held two jobs for your children
Just so you all could live in that beat up old building
Or is it how you cried when one died from that drive by.
But through it all you still support
Your other children with what they need
Just so they wouldn't have to go down the street
To sell that weed.

What makes you so strong, Grandmother?
Is it how you took in your grandchildren
After their mother was strung out on drugs
Or is it how even though all of the children
kept coming in, you still were able to
provide them all with love.

What makes you so strong?
Is it how you stayed up all night
With your grandchild who was a crack baby
Or is it how you stayed up all night
For that other one who was boy crazy
Is it how even with your arthritis and diabetes
You were able to see to longer into older age.

ALL MOTHERS what makes you so strong?
Is is how you put up with the people who
Have done you wrong?
Or is it how you put up with people who execrate you
And you refuse to let them affect what you say or do

What makes you so strong?
Is it how you love your child no,
Matter what they have done
Whether it be from stealing from you
Or shooting someone with a gun?

What makes you so strong?
Is it how you showed them that
This is not the end
But it's when life begins
What makes you so strong?

Jorgy Porgy

by Janina Burgos

Drenching us in darkness
Only a small light shines thru
My mom, Estela
The woman with brown/black hair
She rushes us to bed,
My sister and I.
We knew what was coming next
What she told us every night
What she was told
By her mother.
Every cold, starless Belizean night
"Jorgy Porgy"
The man skettel
"Pudding and pie"
Her accent like the light
Through a key hole
Always shone thru here
"Kiss the girls"
I drifted always here
Never to the end...
Johanna says it was:
"and make 'em cry"

3rd Grade, Foshay Learning Center

The Hard Life

by Alondra Vasquez

Every time that my father had to leave my family and me it was very sad. But I never thought that it would be sadder when I had to leave my family. I will always remember the day that I decided to come to the United States. A couple of days before I came to California, I was happy because I wanted to see the U.S., but I never thought I would experience the worst sadness that I ever had.

I decided to come to the U.S because at that time we had fixed our passport, but it was not easy. We went to Ciudad Juarez Mexico to get our passport, but we could not fix it. The second time we had no luck, and, finally, the last time, we got it fixed. But we spent too much money, and we could not come to the U.S with the entire family, because we didn't have a place to live with all my family. Then I said to my father that I wanted to help him to work in the U.S, and that when we made money and rented a house, we could bring all our family. But my father said, "No you are so young." Later he said, "It is ok. You can help me to work." My aunt who lived in Castroville said to my father, "Bring your daughter and she will live with her other aunts, uncles and cousins and with her grand father." It made me so happy. I thought I would work very hard, we would rent a house for my family, and we could live together in the U.S.

Finally when the day came in April 2000, I was very sad, because I had to leave Mexico with my father. I had to leave my mother, sisters and brothers, and I was crying. I wanted to be in the U.S, but with all my family. When I was crying, my mom said, "Please daughter don't go." But I knew that it would be the best way to help my family that I loved so much. When I had to go to the airport, it was very sad, because I never was far from my mother, sisters and brothers. The only reason I left was for my father who had to work far away from us in the United States.

When I finally arrived to my aunt's house in California, it was in the night. My aunt greeted me, but she was not amiable. My father said to my aunt, "Look, it is your niece." But my aunt didn't say anything. After weeks my aunt's house was like a hell, because I slept with one of my four aunts and one of my three cousins. But when my aunt woke up to make her lunch for her work, she left the alarm clock on, and I could not keep sleeping. During the nights where we wanted to sleep at eleven o'clock, she was watching TV or listening to music. On Sundays my aunts, cousins, uncles went to parties, and my aunts and cousins didn't invite me. Later my father said to me, "Daughter, if you want to go to any place, I can go with you." But I said, "No I want to stay at home." And my father went alone to the stores or to the parties.

The work was very hard. I picked strawberries. I missed my family, and for two months I cried. After four months I went back to Mexico, to be with my family, but I had to keep coming to U.S two times more with my father. I had to live with my aunts, but the last time that I came, my father and I could bring my family here, too. For two or three months, we had to live in the same house with my aunts, but later we could rent an apartment to live with my parents, brothers and sisters.

We were living so happy in our apartment, and I was still working in the strawberries fields. One day in November of 2002 my father said to me, "Daughter you have to go to school because it is so important for your future. I do not want you to have to work in the fields all your life." I did not want to go to school, but I did.

I know that in Mexico and in other countries there are millions of people like me, who had to leave their families to come to the U.S.A to work. Like for me, it is a sad decision, but they have to make a decision to stay with their family or to come here. I will always remember the day that I decided to come to California, and I think it was a good decision for me and for my brothers and sisters.

12th Grade, North Monterey County High School

Is the Sky Falling?

by Janté Pruitt

Boss Hog, Chicken Little Scroungie,
All the names you used to call me.
Hey scroungie, stay with me
Hide in the closet so they wont see
12:00 pm it's time for lunch and "Little Bear"
Hey Chicken, Is the sky falling?
Haha, No papa it's not.

Hey papa, how's it going
Well Scroungie, I'm making it
I heard you ran into a wall?
Yeah papa, and I broke my wrist.
Mama said you ran out of pills
Papa, why is the sky falling?
Don't worry chicken, its not.

Hey papa, how are you?
Well I'm alive
Papa what's on t.v.?
In the Heart of the Night, Law & Order
Here chicken, we'll watch what you want
No papa, I'm distracted by the sky..
It's really close to the ground, like its falling.
Papa, is the sky falling?
No chicken, and it never will.

3rd Grade, Foshay Learning Center

My California Childhood

by Kelsey Marrujo

I briskly traipse the busy street,
Past where the crossing guard does stand,
And note the marks of summer heat
On sun-kissed cheeks in scorching sand.

In every clink of metal swings,
In every whoop, in every cheer,
In every hour the church bell rings,
The echoes of my youth I hear.

Oh, how the splashes in the pool
Rejuvenate the soul within!
And that sensation of renewal
Augments as longer days begin...

Ads for yard sales posted in town
Memories of vending juice provoke:
My cries of "Ten cents! Come on down-"
The never-ceasing family joke.

And in the midst, a jolly tune
Awakens those sprawled, getting tan.
The loungers praise the month of June-
The season of the ice cream man.

Yet through the sweet laughter I hear
How whispers of the ocean breeze
Keep always Californians near
And bring outsiders to their knees.

12th Grade, Woodrow Wilson Classical High School

Memories

by Tiffany Kelley

Sitting at the table on a cold steel chair that has holes in the old leather. My mom next to me, both of us waiting for my brother to walk through the door. The door swings open, and I get a surge of excitement that within seconds is crushed when I see it isn't him. As I wait, I get knots in my stomach, and it twists and turns, making me nauseous. The door once more starts to creak open as I hear the guards yell, "Kelley's up!" As the guard moves aside, I see my brother! My heart races and I run to him as fast as I can, to give him the biggest hug I can manage. I back away so my mom, too, can hug him. We sit down at the table, and my eyes scan him from head to toe. He looks much older, twenty-six now. He is wearing his uniform and has to sit facing the guards so there's no suspicion. I can tell by his constant fidgets and unsteady look in his eye, he's stressed and sleep deprived. As they talk, my mind is off in another world. It flashes back to memories of us as younger kids, with mommy and daddy at our old house laughing and joking. Those memories are so old, I can hardly make them out any more. I can feel a lump in my throat as I try so hard not to cry. I look into his eyes, and I can feel the overwhelming love I have for him. My older brother, my protector.

Once free to do as he pleased, he is now cooped up in a cell like some kind of animal at High Desert State Prison in Susanville, California. My eyes swell up with tears as I get that all-too-familiar rage in my heart, that comes from one American issue, discrimination.

As my brother has explained to me, people in prison are literally separated by gangs and race. In society, we say gangs are bad and racism is wrong, that violence should stop, yet in prison, these things openly occur. Guards, inmates, and visitors alike know the "rules" of prison life and how it works. If an inmate doesn't have respect, he's likely to get stabbed or ambushed by rivals. Guards know this happens and do nothing about it. Having a loved one in a place like this, day in, day out, is one of the scariest things you could imagine.

I can't believe the madness of a place like this. The stress the inmates experience daily is enough to overwhelm anyone. Someone who has no idea about prison would be horrified at the sights the prisoners see and the daily events that plague their lives. Imagine not only living your life locked up in a cell, but having to always watch your back, never being able to just let loose and relax, constantly having the fear that there could be someone around every corner waiting for you.

People in prison committed crimes to get in the place they are, I know, but they are people, too. A lot of people in prison are mixed with other people of their race that committed crimes way more severe than their own. Such as my brother, for a fight, could be cell-mates with someone who committed murder. Most murders that occur in prisons are quiet, and guards usually don't even know until they find the bloody stains at their next check.

Every day I pray for my brother, hoping that nothing happens to him. I know that prison violence and discrimination are huge problems that won't go away easily, but they really won't go away when nobody puts forth any kind of effort to stop it. To think you could go to prison for something as minor as a drug charge or fight, and be placed next to a person who committed murder, is not only scary, but wrong.

As I sit on the chair and ponder my thoughts of rage and despair, my brother and I lock eyes for a second, and I know right away he knows just what I'm thinking. I see a tear slowly squeeze out of his eye as he hugs me and says, "Everything's gonna be all right. Just smile."

11th Grade, Corning Union High School

The Greatest Influence

by Nathaniel Borer

PREFACE

Matthew David Borer was a major factor in how I'm going to shape up as a man. He was also my father. He was a man that you could meet on the street and instantly become lifelong friends with. He taught me a lot of morals and lessons that I will remember for the rest of my life. He had adrenal cortical carcinoma, one of the rarest cancers in the world. He told me this in April of 2003. He died on September 9, 2005. This is my way of showing him and the world how grateful I am for him.

"Live like you were dying." Tim McGraw, "Live Like You Were Dying"

The Perfect Matthew Borer

Ingredients

- Red hair
- Hazel eyes 180 lbs. of flesh
- 3 sons
- 2 daughters
- 3 wives
- 3 brothers
- 2 sisters
- 7 nieces
- 7 nephews

Directions

Combine the hair, eyes, and flesh. Stir in the sons, daughters, wives, brothers, sisters, nieces, and nephews. Put in a 6'1" pan and put it in the oven. Bake at 400 degrees until skin turns reddish-white or until the hair falls out. Serves all with love and support.

My 14th Birthday

Dear Journal,

June 15, 2004

Today was my birthday, but everybody forgot. I woke up thinking my dad and brother would wish me a happy birthday, but they didn't. My dad took me horseback riding, and on the way there my dad remembered and apologized for not saying it sooner. We got to the horseback riding place and the person my dad scheduled the time with forgot to sign us up in the computer. The manager said he was sorry and that he could get us a guide but we'd have to go with a bunch of girl scouts. We went with the girls and it was actually pretty fun. After our ride, my dad wanted pictures of my brother and me with the horses. We went over and posed by the stables and right when my dad took the picture, a horse licked my face. My dad made copies, and now everybody in my family will make fun of me when we look at photo albums.

From,
Nate

"Look at this photograph. Every time I do it makes me laugh." Nickelback, "Photograph"

Cancer Ruins Everything

This is awesome; I get to go to a dude ranch... I wonder if it's going to be fun... hope we don't have to get up early every day... have to pack... uh-oh... not enough clothes for the trip... have to wear same outfit twice... better call Mom so she doesn't freak out when we don't come home on the right day... I hope they have a pool: I need to do some exercising... phone's ringing... okay, my dad got it... why is he going outside?... must be a friend he has to break the news to... he looks sad... hope everything is okay... he's coming back inside... cancel the trip... this must be a joke... has to start medicine right away... medicine would make him too sick to go... man, this sucks.

"Now if you must go, I won't tell you no." Neil McCoy, "Then You Can Tell Me Goodbye"

Anemia

"Hey Debbie; where's my dad," I asked as I got into the car.

"He's at home, probably on the couch sleeping. He wanted to come with me to pick you up, but he didn't have enough energy, Nate."

"So what's on the agenda for this weekend? Did you rent any movies?"

"We wanted to wait until you actually got here because we didn't know what you have already seen. Your dad really wants to see Lord of the Rings, Return of the King."

"That was a good movie."

"Nate! You've already seen it?! Don't tell your dad because he really wanted to watch it with you."

"O.K." I knew it would make him feel better if I didn't tell him and that was my main objective for the weekend.

"When I get where I'm going, there'll be only happy tears." Brad Paisley, "When I Get Where I'm Going"

The Worst Birthday Present

I pulled into the parking lot at McDonald's in Williams. I waited for a couple of minutes before my step mom and dad pulled in to pick my brother and me up. They got out of the car and we went across the street to a Chinese restaurant to have lunch. When we were done, we got in the car and started the return trip to Vacaville. We got home and he sat us on the couch; he was almost in tears. He sat us down and explained that he had been taken off his medicine. I thought that was a good thing, and it meant that he was better. Then he dropped the biggest bombshell. He only had 3 more months to live. I was in shock. I looked at my brother and sister, and it was like looking in the mirror, seeing the exact same blank expression on their faces. I thought it might have been a joke, actually that was what I was hoping. But when I looked at my step-mom, I knew they were serious. That was the worst birthday present I ever received.

It Happened

It was during F period

My mom pulled me out of school

I went to the attendance office

She had been crying

I knew something was wrong

She told me something

That thing I will never forget

We had to go to Vacaville

Because if I wanted to say goodbye

I had to do it now

I got to my dad's house

Went into his room

He was lying lifeless on a bed

He was in a coma

My eyes started to water

I held his hand

I told him I loved him

I started to cry

My aunt gave me a hug

I couldn't stand to see him look like that

I went out of the room

My step-mom called in the adults

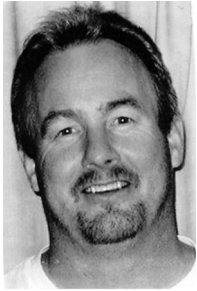
They all came out crying

I knew it happened

His 2 year battle with cancer was finally over

"He's buying a stairway to Heaven." Led Zeppelin, "Stairway to Heaven"

Vacaville Obituaries



Matthew David Borer
Oct. 17, 1965 - Sept. 9, 2005

In Vacaville, California, a Celebration of Life will be held for Matthew David Borer at 1 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 17, at Nadeau Family Funeral Home, with David Hicks officiating.

Matthew died Friday, Sept. 9, 2005. Matthew passed away at home after a courageous bout with cancer for two years.

Matthew graduated from Billings West High School in 1984.

Survivors include his wife of seven years, Deborah of Vacaville; daughter, Emery Borer of Vacaville; stepdaughter and stepson Chrystal and Scott; sons, Nathaniel and Brandon of Corning; mother, Harline; father and stepmother, Thomas and Jean; sisters, Teena and Vicki; brothers Michael, Thomas, Duane; brothers-in-law Jim and Tom; and sisters-in-law Patricia, Sharron, and Tonya.

My Memories

My dad loved sports. He loved watching and playing football, baseball, and racing, but I was never really big on those sports. I did play soccer and basketball. He didn't really care for these sports, but he always enjoyed watching me giving it all that I had to win the game. He came to a lot of my soccer games and I always gave 110% to make him proud because that's how he played sports. I wanted to show him that I cared just as much about sports as he did. Then as I got older I started to realize that I didn't have to play the sports he liked because his reactions to the games he watched of my sports showed that he was proud watching me do my best at anything.

My dad only made it to one of my basketball games but I liked that better because basketball is my favorite sport. That game he watched was the best game I ever played. When I scored I'd look up in the stands and see the look on his face, and I realized with his support I could do anything. Then he said I did a good job at halftime as I walked into the locker room. That was the highlight of my day and that basketball season.

My dad died on September 9, 2005. Now even though he's gone, I know he'll always be with me, pushing me to do my best. He'll be my breath during a break and my choices during the game. I made a promise to myself, saying that I would play every game in the future like I played that day for him. I kept my promise with my best game now at 18 points and 17 rebounds, which is 6 points and 11 rebounds better. I know he was watching, and I knew he was the one that gave me the energy to play that game. I just hope that he was proud of me.

10th Grade, Corning Union High School

I am From....

by Justeen Bellinger

I am from the spiritual ward
A child of prayers and tears
I am from wise decision tips and turns
I am from stained glass windows
Unable to see the outside world.

I am from religious backgrounds
I am from John 3:16 & Luke 2:52
I am from Psalms 23 with arms stretched
Out like an oak giving tree.

I am from playing outside till the sky turns orange
I am from generations of field workers,
Potatoe lovers and French speaking blacks.

I am from a place of the unknown
Lost in a universe where I stand not alone,
On a narrow path with cushioned walls,
Garden fresh lilies and bright skies are along my side.

I am from rugged brown streets disguised in gold
I am from a broken family now together and whole
I am from raging tempers left and right
CONFUSION, FRUSTRATION, MY HEART STILL RACIN!
No peace, No sleep and Prayers through the night.

I am from a tall white door
Waiting to be opened
So that I may explore!

This is where I'm from!

?th Grade, Foshay Learning Center

Disowned

by Jennifer Couper

I could taste the morning breath of awakening. I woke up to the glaring sun and the smell of bacon. I walked into the bathroom, turned on the shower, and ran the water as I brushed my teeth. The minty taste of toothpaste woke me up a bit more. Yelling and screaming came through the door, as if it were a soap opera coming from the television set. The volume of the yelling drifted away as I stepped into the tepid water. I got into the shower, smelling the shampoo, oblivious to what was going on elsewhere. I was isolated from what was happening outside that door. Slightly confused, I turned off the shower to listen to more of the nonsense.

The aroma of bacon became the smell of burning. I walked out in my robe, leaving a trail of water behind me. My feet became cold, clinging to nothing. I walked into the kitchen to see the neglected bacon burning. The crying and yelling continued from the living room. Now I could here the bacon popping out of control into my ears. It was a live soap opera in my living room, my mom and dad as the cast. I was the viewer watching it on mute. I heard nothing but my pulse, a constant beat echoing in my head and body. Feeling neglected, I stood and watched this episode of chaos. I walked over to my mom, her cheek damp as morning dew. My dad was filled with anger, like a bomb ready to explode with insults and emotions, which is exactly what he did.

I walked over to kiss my mom on the cheek, I could taste the bitter, salty taste of our tears combined. The awful smell of my dad's car exhaust blew into my face, creating a feeling of emptiness. The feeling was aching and unbelievable. I still smell the scent of my dads' cologne, slowly being abandoned in mind.

As I held my sister, she screeched out of control. I heard tears dripping onto the floor, every drop acknowledging depression. Imagining myself touching his arms as he leaves, I can feel the hairs running through my fingers. I can hear him yelling into my mom's face, like a commander to his soldiers. I hear his voice echoing through the hallway. I hear his voice shaking the family pictures.

I drift over to the photos, running my fingers over my dad's face. Feeling the vibrations of his voice running through my body, I am covered in goose bumps.

He left. It had finally sunken in, but I had to be strong for my mom. She was filled with misery. I couldn't be the sorrow picture hanging on the wall. I needed to be the rejoicing child, a delightful happening in my home.

My mom was like a corpse, dead of emotions. Her emotions spilled out, emptying her soul. She felt deprived. I felt helpless. All I could do was pretend. Pretend that everything was alright.

I felt empty. I held everything inside, yet still felt empty, empty of compassion and pity. I have taught myself to be hidden, to keep everything a secret and just hold it within myself. I avoid all problems. I'm sure I appear happy, or at least I hope I do, but I know one of these days I'm going to break down. I'm going to become a public exposure of bad feelings, feeling naked of emotions, revealing to everyone what is really behind all these layers of clothes and skin. Until then, I will stay secluded, hidden from my mom. I don't want her to endure the same feelings of hostility, so I stay hidden.

?th Grade, ? High School

Starting Over

by Karen Trevino

All my life was packed up in boxes and stacked in the car ready to be shipped away to an unknown destination; unknown for me, at least. I was moving from San Diego, my home sweet home, to San Bernardino on August 29, 2005. The day that we were moving was the hardest and saddest day of my life. I was trapped in depression and I couldn't escape. The whole way there I was screaming inside, wanting to let my anger and frustration out, wanting to scream at my mom for ruining my life! I never dared to do so; I just stuffed it all down and tried to be brave.

It all started a year ago. My mother met a man in Salt Lake City, Utah, when she went on a business trip. They fell madly in love with each other and decided to get married. I was very excited and happy for my mother; she had finally found someone very special who respected her and loved her, and my whole family. I wasn't at all happy when I heard the news that she wanted to move to San Bernardino. The day that they announced their engagement was the same day they told me they were planning on moving. I felt as if my life was crashing down on me.

I hated their decision of moving. I was determined to stay. I was not moving at all! Or so I thought. I couldn't let this horrible thing happen. How could I? How could I just leave everything I had and start out new in a different city? How could I leave my family, my friends, school, my goals, my future, and my whole life? I couldn't even bare the thought of it. How could I live through this? It cost me a million tears, many hugs and kisses, a thousand goodbyes, and many memories about my life in San Diego.

My mother came to me one day and we had a little talk. She told me how selfish I was being. She told me I was only thinking of myself and not thinking about all of us, about how this change could be really good for us. I started to give it a lot of thought and I finally came to the decision of giving it a try. I said to myself, "What the heck, I'll give it a try, and, who knows, maybe I will like it."

At first I was as negative as I could be. I was missing everything back home and I thought I would never be happy here. As time passed by, I started making friends, I started getting used to the life style here, and I adapted. I met a person who had a great impact on me. He's made me realize that things aren't that bad, that everything happens for a reason; life is just how it is and you just have to take it by the horns. It may not sound realistic, but because of him I found myself changed in a good way. He has inspired me to make the best of time while I'm here. I can now stop thinking about the negative side, and start looking at the positive side of life. I never would have found this out about myself if I hadn't decided to come; I never would have met this person who changed me for the better. I guess I just have to remember to take big risks in life and hope for the best.

11th Grade, Corning Union High School

?

by Fonda Williams

When we are children, life is but an adventure waiting. We create a reality that's not really there, becoming the most extraordinary people in the most unusual places, making the worst of times or places become glorious, because in a child's mind, anything can happen.

I'm about seven or eight years old, playing in an abandoned apartment building with my friend Mikal. Mikal is 10. He is taller than I am and fat, which makes him strong in my eyes. We are running through the building laughing and playing. I'm Catwoman and he's Hercules. We're throwing rocks aside so that we can save the innocent people from the earthquake. I'm climbing on walls, leaping around and yelling to the people not to worry. "We're here to save you."

Mikal, playing Hercules, throws a big rock out of the way and says to me, "Look, Catwoman, we only have two more rocks. Let's save these people." I meow and say, "I'm coming." So we move the last of the rocks and take the people we have saved out of their apartments where they have been trapped. We are cheered on. Having the feeling of accomplishment and pride, knowing I just completed a civil duty in a world all my own, I feel as though I'm in a dream.

But dreams don't last forever. Soon my friend Mikal and I are back in reality where we are two little Black kids playing on the streets of Watts. Walking past the projects, back to our homes, we witness the many horrors that turn people into predators, making us innocent victims of the villains on my street. Guns, dice, beer, and weed are the rocks we would like to throw aside along with the poverty that forces homeless people to dig through the garbage for cans so they will be able to eat. In our dreams, we are the protectors, the ones who make the world safe. But once our dream fades, the world's meanness takes its place, and we wonder who will make the world safe for us.

?th Grade, Dorsey High School

CHAPTER THREE

CALIFORNIA DREAMIN'

The Past, Present, and Future

by Eric Oum

I am a Californian,
A clash of cultures combined,
One Cambodian, centered upon and American society,
Standing, safe and secure,
Physically,
Many dreadful scars remain.
I remember my people,
Suffering in history.
I sleep soundly,
Knowing I will awaken to hug and carress
The bright sunshine through my window,
A golden state, a golden life
I straddle two different continents.

I am... my Mother's Eyes
Despite my physical hunger and malnutrition,
My courage is strong and I see beyond my reach.
Escaping death, like a cat with nine lives.
Beyond my visions—I see hope,
I see a Future worth striving for,
One Future worth living in,
I see...life.

I am my Family's Future,
Proud and noble, Angkor Wat,
Standing high and mighty
Seeing all there is to see.
I look forward,
Only to fall back upon the past,
Knowing how luck I am,
To be a part of this generation...
To be a part of the American society,
To be true to myself,
To represent who I am.
I am a Californian...
I am Cambodian.

12th Grade, Woodrow Wilson Classical High School

Hmong People Move

by Yeng Thao

Laos, a jungle where we used to live
Now, it is a death place
Hmong people running
Some north,
many south,
east, and west
through the jungle
Vietnamese people are hunting them like animals
Bodies are lying dead on the jungle floor
While spirits are left behind.

Running from Laos to Thailand
That's where we started our new life
Hunting and farming
That's what we did to survive.

Now, as we migrate to U.S.A., life has improved
Education is what we focus on.

We live in Merced,
California,
in the middle of the Central Valley
We still farm and hunt
But education
is
life.

11th Grade, Golden Valley High School

My Life

by Bao Chang

My life has been a sweet, bitter, and tough one. I am the oldest child in my family. My life in Thailand only lasted 6 years. There were lots of hardships and difficulty in finding food. We lived in a refugee camp where we had to pay to get back into it. The refugee camp was surrounded by a wall with only one way in and out. My family was so poor that when my mother finished her shopping she would offer the guards food instead of money to get in. There was one particular guard whom my mom bribed with an egg in order to come in to the camp; my parents called him the egg man. One day, my mom gave him an egg but the egg man gave it back because he saw that she didn't have much food with her. Whenever my mom boiled the eggs, she would let me and my sisters eat it first. Then when we were done she would eat the left over, if there were any.

Though finding food was hard for my family and friends, we all tried to live as normal as we could. At night we would have a big fire where almost everyone came, sat, and talked. When the smoke was coming towards us, we would sing a little song or poem we created to make the smoke go the other way, and sometimes it did.

There was a place, more like a small market, where we could go and buy our rice. I remember how crowded it was; people talked and laughed and there was a lot of yelling. I was on top of someone's shoulder; there were carts to carry the rice and everything. The most difficult was to get water; we had to go to a stream and get the water there. Thinking about it now is embarrassing, but we took showers outside in the open.

In the year 1996 my family and I flew over to California. The food on the plane tasted so different from what my family and I were used to; we had a difficult time adjusting to the new food. If that wasn't hard enough already, my mom was also pregnant with my third sister. My parents had come in hope for a better place where their kids can grow up and live in freedom.

When we landed in San Francisco, my uncles, aunts, and many other relatives were there waiting to welcome us to America. It felt very awkward to see Americans, Mexicans, and different races of people. I remember being very confused about where I was and what I was doing there. My uncle told my mom and dad that we would be riding in his car. That's when I got my first taste of American soda; my uncle offered it to me when we were in his car. I remember that I didn't like it because it tasted very different from the ones that I was used to, and I didn't feel comfortable drinking it.

The ride to Merced was very long and tiring. I didn't recognize anything, so I fell asleep. When I opened my eyes, we were at my uncle's apartment. He told us that he, along with my aunt and my other uncle and grandmother, lived in the upstairs apartment. The biggest challenge for my family and me then was getting used to the new environment that we were in.

Not long afterward I had to go to school. The most embarrassing part was when I didn't know how to ask to go to the bathroom, so I peed in my pants. I was also embarrassed by the way I talked; most of the kids would make fun of me just because I couldn't speak English. After about three or four months I got along with them just fine, but I still couldn't speak much. I was trying my best. Lots of my friends were always helping me out with anything that I didn't know. The fun part about school was being able to hear the teacher read and doing all sorts of activity, but the activity that I liked most was drawing and painting.

When my family moved out of my uncle's apartment, I had to stay. The reason was that I was going to school and my parents wouldn't be able to take me. I stayed with my uncle, but I visited my family from time to time. My uncle and aunt took me almost anywhere that they went. When I visited my family, it seemed like the ride lasted forever, but now that I traveled those roads many times, it didn't even seem to last five minutes.

In the third grade, I got held back because I could not talk or read as well as other kids, but the teacher let me decide if I wanted to stay or move on. I chose to stay, and I didn't mind because Ms. Schwemler was my best teacher. The second year with Ms. Schwemler was just as fun and full of surprises as the first year.

As I started to acquire more English, I learned to translate for my family. Most times when I translated, I felt very nervous; however, there were many times when I just couldn't translate. It wasn't that I didn't want to, but it's because

I didn't have enough comprehension. I couldn't translate something that I didn't understand.

In the fourth grade, Mr. O taught me about the many colors that I could put together to make other colors. He was like an art teacher, though he was more talented than I had ever thought. Mostly throughout the year in his class, we worked more with coloring and maybe finding out about who I was.

Fifth grade was when the big changes came. There was a lot to learn before I became a middle school student. My grades were pretty decent, but I never really paid full attention to the work I was doing. Mrs. Briggs taught me so much about being who I am and always looking to the bright side of things and not the dark side. Of course, not all the teachers would say that, some teachers don't say a thing about that at all.

I did have a lot of fun, but being ten years old means a big responsibility. I was the oldest, and as such I had a responsibility that I should have realized when I was only eight. My responsibility is to watch and care for my younger siblings. One other responsibility was cooking; I didn't mind it much but sometimes food is hard to prepare.

From when I was in the third grade, I participated in an after school program. It's not at school; it's at the Housing Authority. That place taught me a lot of education; they taught me about the importance of reading, not to smoke, and to help the community. There were also clubs that I was a member of, such as the 4-H Club and Reading Is Fundamental (RIF). I had such a great time cleaning the community and did service work. Much of the summer time I helped with the Milk Bar at the fair and toured the students who were visiting the Old McDonald's Farm. As for RIF, we had won medals two times in a row for reading and for having the most participants in the program. My sisters and friends were also in those programs.

When I was about to turn eleven, I had four sisters and two brothers; one of my brothers was a new born. My life at home was a whole lot different from my life at school. My mom did everything she could to help with my schooling. She tended to the babies at the same time that she went to the open house and PTC meetings. I love my mom for helping me so much; she encouraged me to do my very best and wanted the best for me. Whatever I wanted, she would try to buy it for me if I needed it.

Middle school went by in a flash, but from the time that I could join in the CJSF (2ND Semester of seventh grade) I went for it. I also joined soccer because playing soccer makes me feel free. Life at school was so different from my home life. In eighth grade, I played soccer, softball, cross country, and track. I felt very proud of myself that I could do so much in one year.

Today, even though school is going great for me, my parents' marriage is slowly falling apart. I don't really care about my father, but I care a lot about my mother; but I couldn't tell her just to get a divorce. The main issues my parents faced are just personal disagreements. It's all about what I want, what you want, and all the mistakes you made but I didn't. It is a pain that my siblings and I have to go through this. I wish I could stop it. I go through life with tears in my heart, but somehow I manage to put a smile on and pretend as if my life is perfect.

Now, I'm a freshman in high school, and I try to have fun. I returned to the after school program to do my community service. I wanted to help the program that has always and will always help me. My friend, Anna Moua, also went along with me to help. She's a really good friend, but if I were not doing the service work, she would not do it also. Whenever she couldn't go, I would; after all, it was for my own good.

We both work on an activity together called "Make a Difference Day." I wouldn't say that it is easy because it isn't. We have to make phone call and try to make our project work; if it doesn't we have to start all over and do something new. In the end, we end up doing something that will change my life. We plan to do a fundraiser, use the fundraiser money and buy books for the foster kids. We work really hard on that project, but we didn't do it by ourselves. The staff at the Housing Authority helps us a lot.

The day finally came when we could go and read to the foster kids. We have three destinations, Modesto, Atwater, and Merced. We all went to Modesto to read there in a school that was for the foster kids. I had a great time; we had not only read, but we also played games and talked. Just before we had to go I went to use the bathroom and when I came out, all the foster kids were gone; they had gone home. I was very upset; I had wanted to say bye more than any of my helpers, and yet they got to say good-bye. What hurt me the most was that one of the little boys had wanted to say good-bye to me but couldn't; it broke my heart.

My Life by Bao Chang

We came back to Merced to have lunch at McDonald's. Pete, a retired principle at Rivera Middle School, volunteered to buy us lunch. After lunch we split up into two groups, one group stayed in Merced and read to the foster kids in Merced, and the other group went to Atwater and read to those foster kids. I went with the group to Atwater. And once again, I felt so horrible for those kids who had to go through so much. I was glad that I was able to help them out with reading.

After that, my life has never been the same. I am always helping and doing my part and loving almost anyone I see who is in danger or in a bad situation. I am always looking for a way to help others if I am not in need of help. Life is always bright for me but, then, at home life is gray.

I thought that New Year 2006 would be a wonderful year for me to start a new and be happy about my life. I was wrong. Towards the end of January, my life had taken a turn for the worse. My dad and mom were in a huge argument; they took the argument to our relatives so they could help deal with it. As it turned out, they only helped my father to get his way and only listened to his reasoning, even though my mom wanted a divorce; our relatives said no, and that she should return home to stay with my dad and the kids.

I knew what was to come on the last Monday of January; my mom told me what she planned to do. I held on to the hope that she would return for us. I went to school that morning not feeling really well. As sick as I was, I still went to do my community service. My dad picked my sisters and I up. I was really tense because I knew that my mom had left the house and had not returned.

My dad did not take us straight home; he went to our uncle's house and asked us if we saw my mom's car. My annoying little sister said she saw her car, but she didn't stop right there; she also added that there was also a police car. My insides went dead; I didn't dare move because I was so afraid that my dad would yell at me. My dad knew that I knew almost all of the things that were going on. I did not glance once at my dad. All the way home I kept telling myself that when I get home I would call my uncle's place and tell them that my dad saw my mom's car and the police car.

I forgot all about the police car and what would happen next; I got home and started to cook for my little brothers and sisters. They were all hungry. I knew because my father never cooks for them. Just when I was about through with the cooking, my mom came home... with the police right behind her. My heart pounded so hard that I thought I would burst. The police officer was very nice. He told me to translate...ME! Of course, if I didn't, who would?

My dad was told to stay as far as one hundred yards away from my siblings, my mother, and me. After I finished translating, we had to pack our things and get going. I thought that we would only be away for a few days, so I didn't pack all I really wanted. But I did take a lot of socks and all of my clothes, along with my pillow and perfume.

There was a lady outside of our house who would be taking us to a place where we would be staying. She was pretty nice. I rode in the car with my mother, while my sisters rode with the lady. We stopped at her office to wait for another lady who would be taking me and my mother along with my three brothers in her car to the "safe house." When we got to the "safe house" I found out that we would be staying there longer than I expected. There were other families there also; there was also a Hmong lady there and three Mexican families. The house was crowded so our family had to sleep in the garage. My mom and I put the kids to sleep then spent the rest of the night writing and checking the forms that we were supposed to fill out. Then, I had to wait until midnight for another lady to come and be a second witness to Isabel; Isabel put our money and valuable belongings in a safe place. By the time we were done, it was already 12:40 a.m.

My mom said that she wanted to stay at the "safe house" forever, but now she decided against it; there were too many complications with other families who were also there and a lot of misunderstandings. Two weeks later we were moved upstairs to sleep in one of the rooms because three of the Mexican ladies and their children left. The room was big enough for my family and me to stay in.

Most of the times I felt that the staff were racist to us. It seemed that whenever there were complications with the Hmong family and Mexican family, they would be more on the Mexican side and support them. One day the complication fell on the little brother; I came home from school just to be dragged into the office to talk about my little brother's behavior. As it turned out, Luz, a Mexican lady, spanked my little brother because he had hit her daughters. I was really angry with her for doing that because if my brother hit her kids and she's that angry, how would she like it if my mother were to hit her kids?

That night I had to cry myself to sleep. I was not better over the weekend; I had headaches and really bad stomachache. During the first two Mondays or so, I called to the "safe house" to be picked up from school a lot because my head hurt so much and I could not concentrate on my school work. I felt anger so much easier now because of so much sadness and misery; I could not tell my mother how I was feeling because I didn't want her to worry about me.

I have thought that the New Year would bring something special, that when New Year came...I would be able to change and be happy with life. As it is now, my life has taken on a roller coaster that will not stop any time soon. All I can do is hold on to the hope that everything will be okay and that my life will be back on track once all of this is over.

Living a life full of hardships, I am glad that I was able to get some fun out of it. We are supposed to learn a lesson by making mistakes. I have made a lot of mistakes and one thing that I really learned is that we should appreciate what we have. There are more that I have learned in life; life is exactly like the Pandora Box, or the opposite where life can be good but there will still be something evil in it, just like the Yin and Yang, one side is white, yet it has a black dot indicating that there are some unpleasantness there, and vice versa. I have lots of regrets, but never had I regret being who I am and what I am. I am proud of myself. I will never forget that life is full of hardships, but like the rainbow at the end of the storm, my life will be back on track and there will be a rainbow waiting for me and my family. I won't lose hope for that chance of happiness. I can't wait until that day comes.

In anyway, I am glad to be in America where I know I am free and that there are programs that will help me and my families. I don't know how my life would be like if I were still in Thailand. Would I be in a field working day and night with no education? Would I be married right now? Would I get the chance to be who I am and be free for a while? Would I be hungry? I don't know how life would be like, but I am glad that I'm here in America, here in the land of freedom and peace

9th Grade, Golden Valley High School

A Dream Becomes Reality

by Blanca Castaneda

My name is Blanca Castaneda and I am a senior at Golden Valley High School located in Merced, California. When I was in Mexico, I had a dream. My dream was to come to the United States to have a better life and a better education. To this day my goal is to be successful in life and in my education.

To realize my goal it is not easy; it is hard but my family and I are working hard to make my dream real. A lot of difficult things are in my way to keep me from success. One of those things is that my parents have to work in the fields whenever there are jobs available. My parents feel that getting an education is important and a priority, this is why they sacrifice themselves by working very hard in order for me to be able to receive an education.

My parents encourage me to go to school to have a better life and future instead of working in the fields like they do. That is why I am in school to get a better education. My education goal is to become a business administrator. When I become a professional in business administration, then I will have made my dream come true.

My parents had a hard time like me, too. It has been difficult for me to have a better life and a better education because being an English learner makes my dream more difficult. I don't even know how to write and speak English accurately. Now I am learning, so I can make my dream come true. Education is important to me. It is why I am working hard, so I can get a better education. My family is helping me to do so. My education is really important to me.

12th Grade, Golden Valley High School

The American Dream

by Cristian Trujillo

I live...

Surviving day and night against stereotypes.

I walk with open eyes aware of the world

It seems to me like a conspiracy.

You can not label me--

I want the American Dream.

I dream...

I don't give up; it's just too many lies

I come from a foreign country.

Men and women are treated differently--

I am Mexican, I am Chicano, I am a Californian

Caught in a world of confusion.

Soldado universal que pelea la batalla

Sin mirar atras.

Soldado con conocimiento multicultural.

Sin ninguna arma, solo la honestidad.

Mis convicciones van mas lejos que mis amores

Somos ir a la escuela.

I want the American Dream.

I fear...

Tortured souls walking on a lonely road

They run and hide,

I kneel with a broken heart--

It needs to stop.

I struggle...

Education and knowledge are power.

I go to school--I stay in school.

I appreciate what I am offered

I don't forget where I come from

The American Dream is within my grasp

I wait ...
One man in a family of six.
Eighteen years passed by my mother's side,
She raised me to be a good man.
I wait and wait, but my father never comes--
He is a fugitive of my heart.
It's all forgotten, I'm closer to my goal.

I'm Christian...
It's who I am.
This is my identity.
I love God.
A celestial warrior never gives up.
I have great expectations toward life,
Now is the time, my dream has almost become, a reality.

I'm Cristian...
I walk with open eyes,
I have it in my hand.
I won't let it go.
I won't let it fly.
I want the American Dream.

Translation of third stanza:
A universal soldier that fights the battle
Without looking back.
A soldier with multicultural knowledge
Without weapons, only honesty.
My convictions go beyond my love
I just want to go to school.
I want the American Dream.

Being Twelve and Acting like Twenty

by Juan Martinez

Here in California there are lots of people that are immigrants. They have a dream like anybody else. My uncle, Abel Martinez, was one of them. He had to start growing up faster than all the other kids. Why? Because in his family there were fifteen kids. So, my grandparents sent all their kids to work, and my uncle was one of them. He wanted a better life, so he decided to migrate to Merced, California and leave Ensenada, Baja California. He left everything behind because he didn't care. He wanted a better life for himself and his family.

Abel started his life all over again, but he thought in his mind, "I have to suffer so my kids won't. I'm going to sacrifice myself so that my sons won't have to work like I did." Now he has a better life than when he was a kid. His sons are good and he doesn't have to worry about his kids working like he did.

I guess his dream of coming to California and having a better life came true. My uncle thought California was a place of opportunities. I guess he was right. I've learned that you just have to work hard for what you want.

9th Grade, Golden Valley High School

Living in California

by Mongo Yang

Living in California has changed my life and my parents' lives. They've got what they always wanted: freedom, a house, cars, jobs, and a family, and I'm happy with what I have here. We like living in California better than any other state because the weather, food, and everything else is great. That's why I think that my family fits in Merced, California.

I was born and raised in Merced, a small town in central California. I like it here because I'm used to everything. I know my way around and where every thing is. I'm going to a great school in Merced, which I think is better than any other school in California. Merced is a place of happiness because I'm always happy here. I never get tired of staying here even though I'm in love with L.A. It reminds me of my favorite scent, sweet pea, because it smells good and my favorite fruit, bananas because they have a lot of bananas there. My family likes to eat fruits and this place has plenty.

My parents came here from Laos, and they like it here, but they don't really like the American traditions. They want us to keep the Hmong tradition, but we don't like it. They are teaching us what they were taught back in Laos, but we would rather do it our way, the American way. My parents don't really have a dream here because their dream was back in Laos. My dream is to become a photographer and open my own studio in L.A. I want to be a famous photographer so that I can take pictures of famous people. Merced means a lot to me because I was born and raised here. I have family and friends here that I grew up with. It's given my family a home and everything that we own. My family likes living here because it's the only place that we've lived in California and it's been great. Merced is the place where my family fits in California. They don't plan to move out of California or Merced, but I plan to move out of Merced someday.

10th Grade, Golden Valley High School

A Hard Life.....The Life of an Immigrant

by Lilly Carrillo

Preface

To the reader, as I was starting to try to write my multi-genre paper I had trouble on picking a topic to write about. I actually tried writing about three different topics. First about living in a house with two different cultures, then about my quinceanera, and last but not least about my mom. Once I chose my topic it was like some one just lit me on fire I just kept going and going and going like the energizer battery. The reason why I choose the one about my mom was because she has been one of my best role models. Most of the genres I wrote from the perspective of my mom but some of them I wrote from my perspective. I enjoyed writing this paper and hope that you enjoy reading it and maybe you can relate to some of her experiences.

Leaving My Rancho

Dear Virgin Mary, please help my familia and me to get to El Norte in safety. Help me overcome all of my problems. Please protect my little boys from any danger. Let them know how much I love and miss them. Help them understand why I left them. Also help me to be able to return for them within a year. Lead me to the path that leads out of poverty. I hope that you hear my prayer and please have mercy on me. Amen.

Rule # 1: Have faith throughout your journey.

Los Angeles

Looking for a better future

Obstacles always in my way

Sacrificing, what seemed, everything

Always doing any thing just to survive

Nothing would stop me

Generous people willing to help

English classes after a hard day at work

Longing for home and missing my boys

Escaping poverty

Satisfaction is what paid off

Rule # 2: Don't give up what you want most for something that you want now.

Arriving in Yreka, CA

Dear Diary, October 2, 1988

Hooray we made it! I was surprised how "easy " it was getting here compared to other stories that I have heard. I am so excited and can not wait until we find a job and start making those big dolares. Hopefully we find a job soon so we can support our selves. I already miss my little boys. It seems like I have been away from them forever. Well it is late and I must sleep now.

Hasta luego,
Maricela

Dear Diary, October 3, 1988

Hey guess what! We got a job and it is only our second day here. My husband's last employer gave us a job picking onions. We start tomorrow I am so excited, I can hardly wait. There is only one problem; the job is far away and we do not have a car. Well let's not let that get in the way of our success. We will figure something out. Hopefully, we are lucky like we have been until now, and I can return to Mexico for my boys very soon.

Con Mucho Carino,
Mari

Dear Diary, October 4, 1988

Today was my first day on the job. I think that I was so excited that I did not even feel tired. Picking those big, white, and juicy onions made my mouth water. Well tomorrow I start English classes at some lady's house and I have to walk. I am going to sleep early to have enough energy throughout the whole day tomorrow. Hopefully tomorrow and every day after today goes as well as it did today.

Good Night,
Maricela

A Hard Life...The Life of an Immigrant by Lilly Carrillo

Dear Diary, October 5, 1988

Oh my gosh! I am so tired. Today was one of the longest days of my life. First I had to go to work until four in the afternoon and then I had to get ready to go to my English class. I left around six fifteen so that I would be on time. During the class I was so lost the whole time. I do not think that I will ever learn this strange language. It is so difficult. I did not get home until ten and I still have homework to do that is if I can do it.

Sweet Dreams,
Mari

Rule # 3: Do everything possible to make your dreams come true.

Going back for my boys

I'm so happy. Que voy hacer. It's almost Sept. 20, 1989 I will soon see my boys. I can't wait to have them with me. It seems like soooooo soooooo long since I've seen them but at the same time so soon. I thought it would take longer, I want the best for both of them y my baby that's on the way. Will my baby be born on the way to Mexico? I know that the journey is dangerous but I must go. What will I do? Will I be able to support them? Will I be able to give them the best or at least a better future? Will I be disappointed in them? too many "?'s" but at the same time so happy.

Rule # 4: Be optimistic.

A New Baby

Maricela and Daniel Carrillo are proud to announce the birth of their newborn daughter. Lillian Abigail Carrillo who was born at the Siskiyou General hospital. She was born on December 29, 1989. She was 6 pounds and 7 ounces. She will be joining two older brothers. Jesus and Omar.

Rule # 5: If you have children make them the most important thing in the world.

Arriving in Corning

When you arrive in a new place you don't really know many people. You have to learn to trust people that you don't really know or people you don't know at all. You must accept help from whom ever is willing to help; especially if you don't have any family or close friends where you move. My mom came to Corning with my brothers and me due to problems with her marriage. She didn't want us to suffer. She came looking for a new and maybe a better job. She learned to trust a family with whom we lost contact with for a long time but now we are very close.

Rule # 6: Work as hard as you have to; in the end it will pay off.

A meaningful place to a Mexicano

From what my mom has told me I think that a meaningful place to Mexicans is the fields or better known as el "fil." El "fil" is their life. That's where they learned to play, work, and have fun. One day I asked my mom if it was tiring to work in the fields and she responded with a quick No. She also said that she liked it very much and had fun doing it. To her it was part of everyday life. It was also necessary to work or else you could not survive. She is now grateful that she learned at a very young age to be a hard worker. Even though now she does not think that she would be able to work how she did long ago, she still thinks about the wonderful experiences she had.

Rule # 7: Keep working harder.

My mom's to do list throughout her life

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Go to El Norte | *Things completed are checked |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Learn English | <input type="checkbox"/> Find a strong religious base |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Become a U.S. citizen | <input type="checkbox"/> Give my children a better future |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Learn to drive | <input type="checkbox"/> Finish H.S. education |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Raise my self esteem | <input type="checkbox"/> Study a career |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Get certificate to be a T.A. | <input type="checkbox"/> Own my own business |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Find a strong religious base | <input type="checkbox"/> Play a musical instrument |

Rule # 8: Make goals and achieve them.

Drastic changes in culture

Mexico

Lavar ropa a mano	Laundry
Tortillas hechas a mano	Food
Frijoles de la olla	Food
Burro o caballo	Transportation
Espanol	Language
Pesos	Money

And of course there are many more.

U.S.

Weird machines/ hard to operate
Buy old packaged tortillas
Taco Bell
Cars
Spanglish or English
Dollars

Mistake?

This was the conversation between my mom and the immigration representative when my mom went to her citizenship interview.

Rep: What's your name, your address, your phone number, where do you work (flipping through papers)

Mom: My name is Maricela Bermudez, my phone number is 824-6567 1/4 1/4 1/4

Rep: How did you enter the U.S.?

Mom: Without inspection

Rep: (holding a package) This is your test

Mom: What?!!!! I already took the test and I sent in my results with the application

Rep: Let me look for it (flipping through paper)

Rep: Oh here it is

Mom: When do I need to come back

Rep: You will receive a letter within 2 or 3 months stating your appointment to swear and receive your certificate

Rule # 9: Stick up for yourself at all times.

What a Coincidence

One of my mom's old friends from Yreka called her with some good news. She had received her appointment to go swear. She told her what day, what place, and what time. The whole time my mom was just smiling. She too received her appointment for the same day, the same place, and the exact same time. They both went to together and of course celebrated afterwards.

Rule # 10: Have FUN!!!!

Epilogue

As time went by

Since my mom was young she learned to be a hard worker and to make the best out of life no matter what kind of situation you are going through. She has gone through many difficult times in her life. She has overcome all of her problems including language barriers, low self esteem, discrimination and many other things and for that I look up to her. I think that one of the most difficult times was when she had to raise my brothers and me.

Things that I remember

by Jessica Barajas

When I am asked “What makes you want to be an artist?” My answer has always been “art.” I’m very passionate about art. Ever since I was a little girl, I would always watch my dad draw. I always wanted to draw just like him and be as good as him. I loved the way he would start out with a blank sheet of paper and end with something I could stare at and imagine what it would be like to be in. I loved the smell of his box full of pencils, and the drawings in his portfolio. They smelled like paper and pencil lead. I still remember the music he would play on the stereo while he drew. I still remember some of the band’s names: Queen, Pinkfloyd, and The Eagles - three of the greatest bands in history. Everything my dad drew I loved; my passion for art came from him. I just think it’s so wonderful how someone could draw something similarly as to a picture but drawn using his own hands and a pencil or pen.

My dad wasn’t the only one who inspired me in art. Everyone in the world who makes art and has art as their passion inspires me as well, but my dad was the one who made me believe that if I tried hard enough, I could be great at it. I draw all the time at home and, at school it’s something that I love to do, especially when I’m by myself, concentrating without a rush. It takes time to make something look good, so I like to take my time. The thing I hate is when I try to draw something and I can’t, so I get really frustrated. A time like this makes me wish that my dad was here to help me. There are just so many things my dad could teach me now.

I love the smell of my box full of pencils and the smell of my portfolio filled with the drawings that I’ve done, and I love the music that I listen to while I draw. I love the feelings that I get after I finish a drawing that I worked on so hard. Everyone in the world could draw if they would just try. I wasn’t naturally born knowing how to draw, I just draw and I get better at it. Nobody can ever know what they can do until they try and if they really want it, it will happen. I want to get better at my drawing skills and I will because I will keep on trying until I’m known with the best. I don’t want this to be just a dream; I will pursue what I want and I will be great at it if I keep on trying.

9th Grade, Golden Valley High School

Acknowledgements

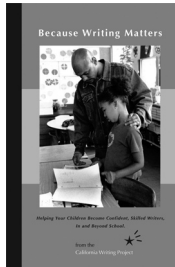
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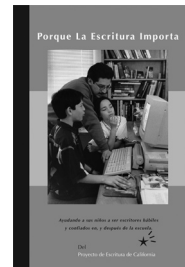
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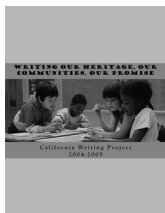


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