

**WRITING OUR HERITAGE,
OUR COMMUNITIES, OUR
PROMISE**

An Anthology of California Perspectives
Written by Elementary & Middle School Students Across California

2004-2005

WRITING OUR HERITAGE, OUR COMMUNITIES, OUR PROMISE

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 narratives, poetry, essays, biographies, 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

**GROWING UP & FINDING
OUR IDENTITY IN A
CHANGING CALIFORNIA**

SWINGING IN THE RAIN

by Melina Charis

Another rainy day in the middle of summer. Not typical California weather, exactly, but some people still walked bravely along the beach with their umbrellas high above their heads or drove around on the 405 freeway, glancing up at the sky every so often, happy to see that it wasn't raining yet. I hoped it wouldn't rain at all, but then again, I never did. California was where I had lived my whole life, yet I'd seen enough days like this to last me a lifetime. Some people think of sand and stars and sunshine when they hear the word, "California." But what I think of is simply home. My house, my bedroom, my front yard, which was where Mom and I were currently headed. Home was my favorite place to be in California, and I was happy to be returning there.

The gray clouds churned in the sky, and the promise of a storm loomed darkly over my head. Part of me hated summer rain, but part of me loved it just as much. No, the skies weren't vivid blue, tinted with smog, and the birds weren't singing, but somehow the heavy gray mist seemed warmer than usual, and the steady drops of rain that had just begun to trickle down the windshield of the car seemed calm.

I sighed as Mom and I pulled in the driveway slowly, carefully, cautiously, as if willing the slippery pavement beneath us not to let us slide away from security. I pressed my nose against the cold, frosted window and stared out at the glistening grass and the slumping tree that was my front yard. I thought I caught a glimpse of something else, however, but waved the curiosity away and turned back to Mom, who was humming a tune and easing the car farther up the driveway, but to me what seemed like a concrete hill.

Rain or not, it was still a day of many occasions. Today told us that we had lived in our house for two years now, something that definitely called for celebration. I loved it here; the smells, the sounds, the laughter, the memories, but I knew that something was missing. A place that I could go to be alone with my thoughts, away and unattached from the hustle and bustle of the house and from the worries and joys of life. That was why part of me loathed the rain. I was trapped in when I longed to be out.

Even though I had really been out all day at my very first day of summer camp, as I saw our house loom closer and closer, I felt as if I hadn't seen the sun in forever. Mom stopped the car and grinned at me, putting a warm hand on my shoulder as if letting me know that today wouldn't be as gray as it seemed. She had a knack for taking something silver and making it look gold. It was just the way she was.

"I have a surprise," she whispered excitedly, and my brow furrowed. What was it? It wasn't Christmas or my birthday or anything. It was just...today.

"What?" I asked curiously, but she had already opened the car door and bravely stepped out from the warmth of her seat into the windy cold. It had stopped raining, but as I slid out beside her I felt the tickle of a light drizzle against my face. I couldn't help but grin.

"Close your eyes," she said, and I did. This was like our routine. I knew that whenever Mom told me to close my eyes, I was going to like what I saw when I opened them. I felt her guide the temporarily blind me down the sloping lawn, across the slippery sidewalk, and all the way down to the old oak tree that never slept. It was always watching over us, but why was she taking me to it?

"Open!" She shouted at me, and I did. There it was. The swing. The one we had talked about getting for months now. It was hanging from at least thirty or forty feet of rope from the lowest branch of the weathered tree. It bent towards the ground just a little as I sat myself down on the wooden seat and pushed off from the muddy, wet grass. I felt the wonderful feeling of rawness below me, knowing that I was the first person to use it and the first one it would get to know, almost better than I knew myself.

It started to rain again, hard. The drops splattered all over the ground and fell from the dripping leaves of the tree as Mom ran inside the house, escaping from the rain. I wanted to get as wet as possible. I wanted to taste the salt on my tongue and know that it was washing everything away from me, every negative feeling I had cooped up inside. I didn't care at all that it was raining any longer, and before I knew it I was high in the air, reaching for the highest cloud I could possibly reach for and almost catching it between my fingers. I didn't mind that even though this was California, and it shouldn't be raining, it was. I laughed and kicked like I was a little girl, even though I was almost thirteen now. I didn't want to feel like a teenager at this moment. I wanted to be free, and I was.

7th Grade, Paul Revere Middle School

CALIFORNIA STORY

by *Conor Ishimatsu*

Wake up to the smell of sizzling bacon, burning toast and fresh cooked eggs. Rub the crust out of your eyes, feeling the rough, coarse texture as it falls apart into your lap. Take your first look of the new day seeing nothing but pitch black and a little light in the kitchen. Walk through what seems like a maze of sleeping people at your feet. Hear nothing but silence as you walk to the bathroom. Feel the dry walls for the light switch, finally touching a plastic lever flipping it on. The lights burning your eyes, it feels like you're staring at the sun. Soon as your eyes adjust, you do your business and then you walk out stretching. Then looking at the clock 5:45! Oooooohh!! We're late!!!!

Turn the lights on with haste, watch everyone jumping out from under the covers and running to pack their gear. The feeling in the room turns from calm and quiet to panic and chaos. It's like being at boot camp. As soon as you wake everyone up, you go pack up your wet suit and a towel along with some surf wax and a leash. Stand in line waiting to get some bacon, toast, and eggs and see the person in front of you drool while staring at the pile of food. There's enough food to feed all the king's men and all the king's horses and put Humpty back together again.

Packing our stuff in the trunk and tying the boards on the rack takes all eight of us. Finally ready in the car about to take off, I realize where's Nick? HE'S STILL SLEEPING!!! So we all get out of the car and four of us drag Nick into the car and the other three pack Nick's stuff up. It was so hard like dragging a bear from his cave and with only four guys. Then ten minutes later we're all ready to go (no more delays). So we head off to the beach.

This is a typical Saturday morning for my friends and me. We're surfers, and we like to go as early as possible even if we have to drag ourselves into the car. This usually doesn't happen, but Nick is a heavy sleeper. One time we threw water on him while he was asleep, and it was freezing cold. I mean we go into colder water but with wet suits; but this guy was only wearing boxers. We tease him that he's part polar bear, but he says, "No I'm German, geez guys, get your facts straight." On the car ride we make fun of each other for kicks and Julian gets teased the most. I would say something in his support, but I don't want the others to gang up on me.

We finally reach our destination: Zuma Beach. It's one of our favorite surf spots. If it's shallow and you fall head first, you better protect your neck and face with your hands. As we step out and take a big breath, the smell of cold salty water is so strong you can taste it in your mouth. It is amazingly silent only interrupted by the constant crashing of waves. We unstrap our boards and take our bags out of the trunk. Then the car speeds off leaving a trail of exhaust. We start our walk to the beach.

As we make it to the water, everyone freezes and stares ahead. There are perfect waves with clean barrels and perfect form. The water is so clean and clear you can see the fish swim and the seals play. It is an amazing and unimaginable sight. We slowly put on our wet suits while still staring at the waves and sea animals. We finally zip up our wet suits and sit there playing with the sand between our fingers and toes and admiring Mother Nature's beauty. Then we get up and run into the surf. The first step in sends a chill down our spines. The water is so cold I clench the sand with my toes. After we adjust to the water's temperature, we paddle out. The first wave of the day is going to crash right on top of us so we duck dive under it. As soon as we surface, I have the worst brain freeze. It feels like I ate three cups of ice cream in five seconds.

The first wave is caught by Julian. He gets into the barrel right after making the bottom turn. He comes out of the barrel and starts dancing on his board. We laugh so hard when he falls after the first dance step. Then I catch a wave. It's such a rush as I glide down the face, zoom up the face and do a quick snap turn riding the wave all the way into shore. Then Alex, Julian's brother, catches a wave. He makes it to the bottom and does a round house! All of us are shouting and cheering! When he gets back to the line up, he smacks Julian on the head and challenges, "Beat that!" Then everyone starts catching waves and amazing rides. It is the best day we've ever surfed.

The most memorable wave is caught by a man on a long board. He catches the wave of the day. It is incredible! He pulls into the barrel with two dolphins! You can see them in the barrel through the back of the wave. It is really amazing! Then we paddle in as the sun falls low in the sky, and we change into our toasty dry clothes. As we dress, we agree that today is perfection. Then my mom pulls up, we strap our boards up and pack our bags in the trunk. As I get into the car, I look at the others, and we all look at the beach as the sun sets. My friends and I will never forget this day because this day will be remembered as “The Perfect Day.”

7th Grade, Paul Revere Middle School

MY ENCOUNTER WITH A LEGEND

by Dylan Grace

I woke up early and headed to the trout pond at Kenneth Hahn State Park in Ladera Heights with my mom and my friend. The bite was slow, so my friend and I decided to see how the bite was at Venice fishing pier. We headed out. I wanted to try out my new wire shark rig, so I bought a whole mackerel and some squid at Nick’s Liquor store. Once at the Pier, I tied up some tackle and cast out.

The pier was packed with tourists as usual. When the bite was slow, we decided to impress the tourists by putting a whole mackerel on our lines and pretending we caught them. The tourists were very easy to fool except one. This lady was very down to earth and smart. This was when it all started.

As I reeled up my line out of the water, the lady asked me if I had just caught that fish. Knowing me, I said yes. Then she asked what kind of fish it was. Instead of telling her it was a mackerel, I told her it was a nimatoad. That name I got from a previously watched episode of *South Park* on Comedy Central. But just as I said it, two Latino boys about six to nine years of age walked up and told her it was a mackerel. I heard a strange Austrian voice behind me ask, “Why does it have cuts in it?” But I didn’t pay attention.

I wasn’t feeling that she believed me after the nimatoad joke, so I told her the truth. “I’m using it as shark bait,” I told her. She couldn’t believe it. She pointed at the fish saying, “Let’s get out of here” and laughing like a valley girl from the 90’s. Then she said, “Let me ask my husband.” I turned around to see if her husband was the kind of guy who knew about these things.

Suddenly there he was. Mr. Olympia himself—Arnold Schwarzenegger. The man; the myth; the legend of Venice beach. It was utterly unbelievable. I was in shock. All I said was, “Hi, Mr. Governor.”

My friend just kept laughing and saying “Big Arnold.” “Big Arnold.” It was karma for my friend because seven days a week he repeated famous lines from *Total Recall* and the *Terminator*.

Arnold went on talking. The only words I could make out were “Back in my day I catch fifty pound thresher shark.” My friend kept laughing, so Arnold and Maria left on two new trek mountain bikes with two bodyguards riding behind them. As the day went on, I thought to myself, “I was standing in front of a Venice beach legend and talking to a Kennedy for fifteen minutes.” Not a lot of people experience that. I guess that’s the advantage of living in Los Angeles.

7th Grade, Marina del Rey Middle School

THE RESCUE MISSION

by Victor Gomez

Have you ever pondered that a simple, fun, and whimsical trip to the zoo would turn into a rescue mission? Well, my trip did. It all began when my family decided to go to the Los Angeles Zoo. First, there is Ashley, an energetic two-year old with a lot of strength. Next is Lily, five, my baby sister, also energetic and strong. Then there's Lindsay, a V-E-R-Y emotional six-year old. Followed by Kathy, a strange nine-year old with a vivid imagination. Maripaz, eleven and also energetic and strong. Then there's my sister Brenda, twenty-nine, and the comical mother of Ashley, Lindsay, and Kathy. Last but not least there's my mom, thirty-five, who cares for us, and there when we need her.

At first, when we arrived at the zoo, we made our way to the dinosaur display. Unfortunately, we didn't find it. Subsequently, we saw the alligator pit. Across from it, we saw the T-Rex den. My mom and Brenda, who claimed in confusion that we had to pay separately, remunerated the worker, and we went inside. After a roaring good time at the splendiferous zoo with lifelike robotic dinosaurs, we walked around eagerly. Trying to see the animals was like seeing a million-dollar bill from afar. We saw tigers in threes, bears doing their own display by moving back and forth bobbing their heads, and the largest marsupial of all, the kangaroo.

Previously, we had run into the chimpanzees. The creatures were up ahead. We saw these extinct birds, and I told my baby cousin Ashley to accompany her sister to see them. I watched her go the whole way. That was the last time I saw her. I ran to the giraffes where I saw a glimpse of Kathy and Maripaz, but no one else. My mind worked quickly, and I figured that Ashley must be with her mom. All of a sudden, there was a dreadful screech. Brenda cried out, "Where's Ashley?"

I replied, "She's with Kathy and Maripaz!" But Kathy and Maripaz both cried, "No!"

My heart raced and sweat beat down my forehead like a faucet. I turned and looked for my own sister, Lily. I found her as well as Lindsay. Everyone, except Kathy, Maripaz, Lily, and Lindsay, split up to look for Ashley. We screamed and screamed. Though it was only ten minutes, it felt like an hour. Finally, I went to check the chimpanzee's pen and luckily I found her there. My pulse slowed down like a rocket's jets shutting down, and I wiped the sweat off my forehead. I found her. My cousin was having the time of her life. She asked me, "Where are the monkeys?" Brenda held her hand for the rest of the trip. Sometimes, it seems Ashley just wants to escape.

The rest of the trip, thank God, went pleasantly. I do not know what went through Ashley's head or even Kathy's. Kathy saw her coming to her. I cannot see how they forgot about her. I hope nothing like this will ever happen again, or at least not permanently.

7th Grade, Marina del Rey Middle School

CALIFORNIA STORIES

by Naomi Hultslander

Once I saw a celebrity with her good looks and fancy clothes,
Two tons of makeup on,
Going to her shows,
She came and then she was gone,
Hoping no one ever knows,
That behind the mask she's wearing,
Where all seems composed,
She knows something's missing,
A void that is not filled,
She knows something is wrong,
Her heart is not stilled,
Because these things do not last for long,
All her riches are willed,
Why do we hide behind this mask,
Never really showing who we are,
Placing upon ourselves this awful task?

8th Grade, Renaissance Arts Academy

KILLER WHALES

by Charisse Yonetani

On the vast waters of Monterey Bay,
Orcas were coming out to play.
They were teasing us in a playful, comic way,
While tracking them, we lost our way,
Out onto the swells of Carmel Bay,

While dodging the boats left and right,
The orcas successfully escaped our sight.
The sun shone orange and bright,
And highlighting the magnificent whale sight.

Suddenly out of the ocean blue rose a big surprise,
A wonderful sight that was appealing to the eyes,
As high as the moon, the killer whale would rise.
It was a shame we would leave the water as the sun dies,
But maybe some day a chance would arise,
To see an orca jump back into the skies.

As we left the bay that day,
I dreamed of going back some day.
Back to the calm wonderful waters of Monterey Bay.
To behold the sight I saw that day.

8th Grade, Glick Middle School

TYPICAL CALIFORNIA GIRL

by Katie Lantz

Holly, Michelle, Gabby, Gola, and I excitedly hopped through the bus doors, as we all flew past the front and middle of the bus, heading straight for the back of the bus. Holly suddenly stopped when she reached the back of the bus. Not noticing Holly had stopped, we all piled up and fell straight to the ground. Laughing, Holly looked at Michelle, Michelle looked at Gabby, Gabby looked at Gola, and Gola looked at me. Happily, we all sat down in the very last seat of the bus, “the Cool Kids seat.” The other ten year olds looked at us with an evil glare. They knew it was our and their last year at camp, and they had missed their chance to sit in the cool seat. However, we didn’t care; we were sitting in that seat and we weren’t going to give it up. With the ten-minute trip down PCH and the smell of sticky leather seats in the blazing hot summer sun, we knew summer had begun. Realizing it was our last summer of being a little kid, and the upcoming year we would be moving on to different middle schools, and taking the risk of never seeing each other again, together we ran off the bus and squiggled our feet into the sand. Our feet felt the tiny particles of sand rubbing between our toes, as we yelled, “Were here!” We had arrived at our destination, and it was our last summer together at Zuma beach.

As we sprinted toward the breaking waves on the shore, we noticed how beautiful it was. Seeing the blue sky and the rippling effects of the glistening water, the white clouds floating over the sky like fluffy marshmallows, the yellow sand layered with pebbles and seashells, it was more breathtaking than it had been for the past five summers. We threw on some sunscreen and bolted toward the waves. Hearing the sound of the breaking surf, feeling the freezing cold water on our legs and the taste of saltwater splashing into our mouths, it just made us more excited than we already were.

About ten minutes later, Michelle and Gola complained the water was too cold and headed back to the shore. We looked back and in an instant they were lying on their back sun tanning. What could be more stereotypical for a California girl? They were just two more girls missing out on the fun for what they called beauty. I, on the other hand, never thought of myself as that kind of girl. Gabby and I rolled our eyes as we saw Holly drifting away to go suntan with them. It was Gabby and I left in the water as everyone else was on the beach eating their snacks. It started to feel like we were getting deeper into the surf and further from the shore until we suddenly reached a point where we couldn’t feel the bottom of the sand. Gabby was starting to get scared, so for her personal entertainment she grabbed a piece of seaweed and flung it under my leg. I screamed, “Oh my god! Oh my god, something gooey just swam underneath me!” She laughed and started singing the theme song to “Jaws.” It wasn’t nearly as funny for me as it was for her.

Later she told me what she had done. As we dove under a wave, the perfect wave, we looked backward. We had gone much further than we anticipated. As we were turning back toward the shore, we saw several sparkling grey flashes in the air that just as quickly disappeared under the waves. The sight was so beautiful; we swam toward it. Gabby reached out and screamed; she had touched the fin of one of the dolphins. By then, I was steaming with jealousy, so I swam over. As I saw one of the dolphins start to jump, I propelled myself into the air and my arm shot up so high I nearly expected it to fall off any second. As I looked up, I saw my hand stroke the side of the dolphin. Without any grace, I plopped back into the water. That’s when I thought maybe being the typical California girl doesn’t pay off so much.

The next morning Gola and I carpoled to camp. We were both sunburnt, her from sun tanning gone wrong, and me from refusing to come out of the water because I was having too much fun. Looking back on it, being sunburnt paid off since I got the chance to swim with dolphins. As I walked into the camp, I was surrounded by kids asking me questions about my swim with the dolphins. With a smile as broad as the Pacific Ocean, I simply answered each of their excited and slightly jealous questions with, “Amazing!”

7th Grade, Paul Revere Middle School

CALIFORNIA, STARRING ME!

by Allisen Beall

Verse 1

Truck ride, out of the state
The wind through my hair
Star shining, star bright
California, I'm going there

Gonna strut my stuff in Hollywood
Gonna live in Beverly Hills
Gonna lay on the beaches in Malibu!
A beautiful state, full of dreams
I'm a California star

Chorus

I'm gonna be a star!
In California
Gonna hit that state
With open arms
Knock 'em dead
and shine!
California star!

Verse 2

Dreaming of California
A California girl
Sandy beaches, sparkly ocean
California, I'm lovin' it there

Gonna see the sights of San Diego
Finally gonna see
Mickey Mouse
Gonna walk with my friends down to Venice beach
I'm a California girl
(chorus)

7th Grade, Marina del Rey Middle School

ONLY IN CALIFORNIA

by Brittany Rae McCulty

Verse 1

From small towns to big cities
From lakes to sandy beaches
Only in California
From wild animals to street gangs
From desert heat to snowy mountains
Only in California

Chorus

Palm trees wavin' (palm trees wavin')
Waves are rollin' (waves are rollin')
In California
Mountains risin' (mountains risin')
Higher and higher (higher and higher)
In California, yeah.

Verse 2

From industries to family farms
From fast foods to home cooked meals
Only in California
From love to hateful words
From gospel choirs to rock bands
Only in California

Bridge

The city sounds, the mountain breeze
The traffic lights and old pine trees
The love is all around us
Just waiting here to shine
The sights, the sounds, the smells
The smiles on everybody here
Guess California bringing all this happiness and cheer

Chorus 2x

Palm trees wavin' (palm trees wavin')
Waves are rollin' (waves are rollin')
In California
Mountains risin' (mountains risin')
Higher and higher (higher and higher)
In California, yeah.

8th Grade, Marina del Rey Middle School

LIFE STORY

by Caamera Parhm-Franklin

Verse

I ran away from my home California
I ran to get away from all the stars
The movies, magazines and all the trouble
A place where it's not polluted by the cars

Pre chorus

I went down to Texas
Traveled to Missouri
Just to see what I can see
But I guess I can't forget
about my California dreams
And to forget... There are some things I need to do

Chorus

I'm gonna
Travel to all the places of the world
Gonna leave California behind
Gonna meet the smiles of every boy and girl
Gonna put Cali in the back of my mind

Verse

I live now in a new place that I don't like
It's wild but doesn't compare to Cali's zoo
And the people here are way too nice for me
My head is so mixed up, I don't know what to do
I remember...

Pre chorus: 1x

Chorus: 2x

Bridge

What do I do?
California's gone
Where do I turn?
When some things gone wrong
No other place (no other place)
That I can trace (trace)
That is close to my home
I remember...

Pre chorus: 1x

Chorus: 2x

Verse

I decided that there is no other place
Than Hollywood or the floor's gum
So I guess there is only one thing left for me
I'm coming back, California, here I come!!!

7th Grade, Marina del Rey Middle School

WHERE I COME FROM

By Erving Jiminez

Where I come from is from west L.A.

That is where we play

I come from L.A.

That's where we spent our day

All we did was play and run

That is what we did for fun

Everyday we played ball

We were good even if we were small

We got dirty, we got in trouble

Watch tomorrow, we are going to make it double

Sometime we went to the clubhouse to play

That is where we went some days

Day after day it was the same

It was fun because it was all a game

We all told our parents that we have to go

And we all walk out the door

They used to call me Erv

I remember we always got full of dirt

We all had dreams

To become the biggest pro and we all said yup that's me

Now we all moved to different places

Now we can't see each other's faces

Well, goodbye

We are going to be friends until we die.

8th Grade, Marina del Rey Middle School

CALIFORNIA

THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE POEM THAT TELLS IT

by Sherri Ramirez

California, I can call my home
Where Pacific waters churn and foam.
With mountains tall and Redwood trees
It really is a sight to see.

With rivers vast that rush and run
And people bathing in the sun
A shining sea, some valleys low
Cali puts on quite a show

California, this state's a song
Home to voicer Tara Strong
This poem's pretty biased though...
Here's some stuff you ought to know:

Things are quite expensive here
Too many people far and near
The air is not the best around
There's too much artificial ground

The clichéd term "fun in the sun"
Does not apply to everyone...
For useless things, most care too much
Like cars and looks and other such

There's sights to see and things to do
But other states have that much too.
Nothing's perfect, *some* is great
It's just another normal state.

Cali has its ups and downs
Beautiful views but crowded towns
So before you come remember that
It's not all good, but it's not all bad.

8th Grade, Glick Middle School

YOSEMITE FIREFALLS

by Lily Radanovich

Yosemite is in the Sierra Nevada mountains of California. It was first inhabited 4,000 years ago by the Native Americans. Slowly the early settlers discovered Yosemite and its beauty. It became a state park in 1864 under President Abraham Lincoln and a national park in 1890. Getting to Yosemite wasn't easy in the early years. People had to wake up at 4:00 A.M. to prepare themselves and their wagon for an all day journey. Because of this, Yosemite Firefalls was an attraction that was started to bring visitors to the park and my great-grandpas Bompreszi and Schicher were a part of it for over 24 years.

Some of you might be wondering what The Firefalls were. The Firefalls were actually an accident. A man named James McCauley, so it is said, pushed off the red coals in anger when tourists did not show for his barbecue. People on the valley floor saw it and liked it so much that Mr. McCauley decided to do it more often. Years later, Mr. and Mrs. Curry, owners of Camp Curry reintroduced the idea. They made it into a nightly event to attract visitors, and indeed they came. At Camp Curry, the people would come nightly at 6:00 P.M. and wait for the show to start at 8:00 P.M. The show was of different dancers, singers, musicians and actors. The program was 1 hour long. Then the exciting moment came that they had all been waiting for, The Firefalls. The man at Camp Curry would call to Glacier Point (4,000 feet above) "HELLO, GLACIER."

The man at Glacier Point would call down to Camp Curry, "HELLO, CAMP CURRY."

The man at Camp Curry would say, "LET THE FIRE FALL."

Then you would hear, "THE FIRE IS FALLING." Then you would see the beautiful fire falling off the mountain, and someone would sing "*The Indian Love Call*."

What my great-grandpa did was collect and store red fir bark. The bark was then hauled up to Glacier Point and stored. In the morning, at 5:00 A.M., a worker would stack the bark at the edge of Glacier Point. At 7:00 P.M. they would light the bark on fire, and at 9:00 P.M. it would be ready to push off the mountain. They would rhythmically push the coals, so that it would look like a waterfall from below.

The Firefalls sadly ended on January 25, 1968. Lots of people were disappointed, but the poor meadows, so it is said, were being trampled. James McCauley's brilliant idea was closed down. At the very last firefalls, there were about 50 people who came.

What would Yosemite be like if there were no firefalls? The firefalls were started as an attraction to make money for the park and bring people in. Would Yosemite be as popular today without the influence of the firefalls in the past? Would it still attract as many visitors from other countries? Mariposa relies on tourists coming to the park. Would Mariposa be as big as it is without the tourism?

It is neat that my family was part of shaping California's history and that my family story touches so many people's lives. We still have my great-grandpa's truck that was used to haul the red fir bark for the firefalls. Someday I would like to help my grandpa and dad restore that 1936 Mack Truck.

6th Grade, Hickman Charter School

ROAD TO CALIFORNIA

by Gavin Ferris

Dust and dirt was all over Michael as he sat in the covered wagon. Michael had spent another sleepless night as he listened to Indians off in the distance. Michael's dad had heard that there was gold in California, so they left their home in Pennsylvania for the long journey out West. It was so cold, Michael held his little sister to keep her warm.

Michael had many worries such as if they'd have enough food to get them to California and if their wagon would get stuck in mud. They actually did get stuck, but they were able to get out.

After four months, they were finally there, and what a sight it was! Lush green grass, fresh blue water, and Michael could almost see the gold glimmering in the sun.

Like the boy in the story, I moved to California in a wagon; a station wagon that is. My family lived in North Dakota. We moved because my dad got out of the Air Force.

My family's ride to California took four days. We had fun because we were clean and warm, unlike the early settlers.

When we were on the road, I looked out the back car window and saw sparks. The trailer we were hauling had come off and was only held on by small cables. It was very scary for me. My dad was able to fix it, and we were on the road again.

Finally we were there. It felt like months, but thankfully it was only four days. Now it was my turn to see green grass and blue water and huge mountains.

When we got to California, it was hard to adjust because I was so used to snow and cold. It was also hard adjusting to leaving my friends in North Dakota. California and North Dakota are very different. Since North Dakota winters are so cold (one day it got down to 100 degrees below zero with the wind chill), California gave me more days to go play outside. In North Dakota there is flat land with little hills. Here in California there are valleys surrounded by mountains.

California has lots of fun places to go. A few of those places I have explored are China Camp, Point Reyes, and Yosemite. China Camp was a place where the Chinese stayed during the Gold Rush. Point Reyes was where Francis Drake landed over 400 years ago. When I was there, I climbed over rocks to get to an old lighthouse. Yosemite was where some Indian tribes lived. This year I'm going to Half Dome with my dad.

Courageous and adventurous people are the kinds of people who came to see California. Those are the kinds of people who still come to California. Since those people still come, I have great hope for California's future, and I'm glad it's my home.

5th Grade, Connecting Waters Charter School

I LIKE CALIFORNIA

by Kathleen Ferris

Living in California is fun because there is a lot to do and see. My family and I like to go to the beach and Yosemite.

The beach is fun because there are fish, and fish are fun. There's one fish I hate—a shark. It is dangerous, but other fish are friendly. I also like the ocean because I like the blue.

Are you wondering what Yosemite is like? Well, I've been there before. It is fun. What makes it fun? Well, it is fun to see Yosemite Falls. It is very high, but it is beautiful.

I hope I will always live in California. I wish I could give it a kiss.

2nd Grade, Connecting Waters Charter School

**UNDERSTANDING HOW
OUR COMMUNITY,
HISTORY, & HERITAGE
HAVE SHAPED WHO WE
ARE AS CALIFORNIANS**

AWAY AND BACK TO VIET NAM

by Christine Nham

“Mom, dad, let’s go!” yelled my sister. She was excited go get on the plane to come to America. My family came to the United States because there was a war in Vietnam in 1975. They came here to live a better life. My parents and my sister, Kathy, left their family and friends in Vietnam.

On April 21, 1992, my dad, mom and my older sister came to America and lived in California. When they arrived, they felt as if they were in a different world. The freeways and streets were full with dashing cars, plenty of American food was being served, and crowded malls and markets were full with English-speaking people.

When my parents and sister first arrived, my uncle asked them if they wanted to go to the market. Not knowing what a market is like in America, my sister responded with “No, I don’t want to go. It is too dirty!” because markets in Vietnam were usually dirty and smelly. Hearing my sister say this, my uncle and the rest of the family laughed at her and told her it is much different here in America.

As time went by, on February 1, 1995 my mom decided to have another baby. She then gave birth to me and named me Christine. I was the first in our family to be born in the United States. My grandpa in Vietnam knew I would be his first “American” granddaughter and decided to give me a Vietnamese name to keep my Vietnamese culture. He then named me My Tien, which means fairy in Vietnamese.

Since our family is the first family to come live in America on my mother’s side of the family, my mother knew she could not forget about them in Vietnam. Both of my parents began to work hard everyday to make money to take care of our family here and my mom’s family in Vietnam. At this time, my grandfather was beginning to get old and sick and because of that, she had to work even harder to care for him with medicine and doctor visits. My grandfather’s sick condition was getting worse because many years ago, on April 30, 1975 Vietnamese Communist soldiers captured him and put him into jail. During his years in jail, he became ill and his eyes became unclear, making it hard for him to see.

Finally, in 1999 our whole family decided to visit Vietnam for vacation. At this time, it was already too late, and my grandfather had already died. I was still young and did not know what was going on during that time. When my aunt told me my grandfather already passed away, my heart was broken and tears rolled down my face. He was someone that I’ve never met, but my love was still there for him.

The day our family returned to the United States, my parents once again had to leave their friends and family behind in Vietnam. As we were leaving the airport, tears rolled down my mother’s soft silky face onto her “ao dai” (a Vietnamese traditional dress). In my mother’s mind, she knew it was another goodbye and that it would be many more years until she will get to reunite with her friends and family again.

4th Grade, Fremont Elementary School

CALIFORNIA STORIES

by Yasmine Cherif

When my parents first found out that they were going to have a baby, they quickly started trying to think of names for me. It took them almost the whole nine months to decide on the perfect name. They went through several names such as Sarah and Farah. Finally they decided on Yasmine which means “Tunisian Flower.” My parents were not actually the ones who chose my name – it was my grandmother. My grandmother always liked yasmine Tunisian flowers – they were her favorites. She told my parents, and they were very excited because they thought the name was very beautiful, and they still do! My full name is Yasmine Nour Cherif. You know what Yasmine means; Nour means light; and Cherif means noble.

I was born on Saturday, June 18, 1994, at exactly 4:30 P.M. It was a very sunny day when I finally arrived and weighed in at 6 pounds, eleven ounces. I was 21 inches long. My mom, dad, grandmother, and Afaf (a very good friend of our family) were present at my birth. Afaf was very excited and happy for my parents because he knew they wanted a girl. My parents knew ahead of time that I was going to be a girl, and they were very excited about that because girls are special! (It’s a good thing because there were two more girls after me. Their names are Mimi and Serena.) They thought I was the cutest baby they had ever seen and were so happy that I was healthy. I am so lucky to have my parents!

Ten years later, I am a student in Mrs. Gonzalez’s fifth grade class at Lowell Bayside Academy in Long Beach, California. Everybody thinks I’m a “girly girl,” but I’m not. Maybe it’s because my uniform sometimes has lace on the collar. My favorite sport is basketball. California schools make it easy for girls to be able to play whatever sport they want. Last season, I scored 103 baskets for my team. I consider myself very athletic, in addition to being pretty funny, talkative, and creative.

As you can see, I have a great life! I am happy to be living with my family in California. I can’t think of anyplace else I would rather live. My parents say parts of California remind them of Tunisia, and some parts actually remind them of some cities in France. I would love to visit those places someday, but for now, I am happy living in California where I can be close to the beach that I love so much! I guess California is what makes our family great!

5th Grade, Lowell Bayside Academy

CALIFORNIA STORIES

by Joan Lee

My name is Joan Lee, and I am Cambodian. How did I get my name? Well, the way I got my name was from my dad, who is sometimes mistaken for the actor, Jackie Chan. When my dad was in a refugee camp in Cambodia, he met a woman named Joanna Campbell who was part of a Christian organization that helped people from the camps escape to freedom. From what my dad tells me, Joanna was a very nice and caring person. My parents never even considered any other names because they thought Joanna was a good name and the perfect name for me. However, when I was born, the hospital clerk spelled my name J-o-a-n, so my parents just went along with it. They enrolled me in school as Joan but call me Joanna at home. When I was younger my mom called me Songvit which means “skinny” in English.

At the time when I was born, my face looked big and chubby. On the day I was born, only my mom, dad and the gynecologist were there. My parents knew I was going to be a girl from the ultrasound. I weighed six pounds and nine ounces when I was born in the evening at Long Beach Memorial Hospital. Nothing funny or unusual happened because I was just a very calm baby. If my mom wasn't home, I would cry until I lost my voice. Once my mom had to go to the store for some cooking supplies and put me down for a nap, so that I wouldn't know she was gone. But when she came back, I was in my dad's arms crying in a squeaky little voice that was all I had left because I had been crying the whole time she was gone.

Now I am very quiet around people, which is very different than when I was younger. I am not into sports, but I really love arts and crafts. That is very different from my mom who is very energetic and loves to exercise. All of the girls in my family have long hair, but I have just recently cut my hair. My dad keeps pushing me to play some kind of sport, so I am considering track and field. I am in the fifth grade and will be going to middle school next year where I will be able to try out for track and field, but I don't think I will get on the team. At least I will have the opportunity to try out.

I am here in California because my parents were able to escape from Cambodia. I am glad that my parents came here. Otherwise, I would have been raised in Cambodia and would not have my friends and the kind of life that I have here in California. I am a different person because I live in California than I would be if I had been raised in Cambodia. I would like to visit there someday, but California is my home.

5th Grade, Lowell Bayside Academy

CALIFORNIA STORIES

by Andrew Dawson

“Whaaah!” I shouted as I arrived in this world, so small, so cute, and so adorable. My name is Andrew Dawson, and my parents chose the name Andrew because they liked it, and they thought it would sound good with the middle name they had chosen. My middle name, Douglas, is after my grandpa. At first my mom wanted to name me Andre, but not everyone liked it. My mom and dad argued about it and finally chose Andrew. Andre Douglas Dawson would have been alright with me – I sort of like that name. For awhile, they just called me “Bud or “Baby D.” At last a decision was made, and Andrew Douglas Dawson stuck. It really fits me.

I was born at 4:22 P.M. on October 9, 1994 at Saddleback Women’s Hospital in Aliso Viejo, California. I had a squeaky little cry, but boy was I strong! When I was born, some of my relatives were there. There was my mom, of course, and my dad and grandma. At first the doctors thought I was going to be a girl, but they were surprised when I turned out to be a boy! My parents had the name, Mandy, all picked out. Now they would have to go back to Andrew. When I was born, I was really small. I weighed just 6.8 pounds and measured only 19 3/4 inches. The first words out of my dad’s mouth when he saw me were, “Hi Bud.” That was pretty funny, and the nickname stuck to this day.

I am older now, 10, and go to one of the best schools in the state of California—Lowell Bayside Academy. I know that because we are a California Distinguished School and a Blue Ribbon School. The best teachers in Long Beach teach at Lowell. I am proud to live in Long Beach where the schools and lifestyle are the best! California has its own unique lifestyle. Where else can you go to the beach, the mountains, the desert, and another country all in one day? I love that I live near the beach, near parks with lots of trees, near a big school and right next to a big lagoon.

One of the things that I love best about living in California is the people. They are generous and very happy people. Californians are good citizens because they know and obey their civil rights. My second favorite thing about living in California is the scenery. California has the most breathtaking sights, such as the Pacific Ocean, the majestic mountains, Highway 1, and the Redwood Forest. There is Hollywood, San Francisco and Long Beach, with all of their tourist attractions and natural beauty. Everywhere I look, I see green palm trees, and above me, the clear blue sky. The third thing I love about California is the weather. It is never too hot or too cold and usually gets just enough rain.

I love living in California where I have so many choices. I can swim or skateboard almost every day of the year. I am especially glad to live in California because it is such a diverse state. That is especially evident in my city, Long Beach. I meet people from all different cultures and backgrounds all of the time. All these different people, and all of their traditions, help make up this great state in which I live, California! I am proud to be a Californian!

5th Grade, Lowell Bayside Academy

THE SWEET CALIFORNIA

by Helen Huang

It was a hot and sunny day in 1992. My grandma, Amy, and my grandpa, Juan, got on the plane and came to California. It took them about 22 hours to get here. They saw clouds, and they were as white as snow. While on the plane, at night, they slept. Daytime they ate and rested. Twenty two hours later, they were in California!

They saw green trees on every street. They saw birds flying above. Amy and Juan hoped that they could work in California and earn some money to have a better life.

They walked on the streets. They saw many Chinese people. They made friends with them. It reminded them that they're Chinese too. Amy and Juan worked together in a sewing factory. They lived in their daughter's home, in California.

Then years passed. Amy and Juan's son came to California and bought a house in Alhambra. Now, they all live there. Amy and Juan are old now. However, they are still very healthy. Sometimes, Juan reads newspapers and mows the lawn. Juan likes to go to Chinatown. He always sits at the park and talks to his old friends. Chinatown is his favorite place! Amy likes to sew because sewing is a good way for her to earn money. They are very proud of themselves.

Amy and Juan were sewing in China too. Juan was a helper. He helped Amy. My family likes to sew, and I want to learn how to sew too.

Amy and Juan explained, "I miss China because I came here long time ago."

"I have a happy family!" Amy said.

"I am in a wonderful home." Juan agreed.

I know Juan and Amy are very happy in this family.

4th Grade, Fremont Elementary School

THE IMPORTANT THING ABOUT FREDDY MAE ROUSE

by James Price

The important thing about Freddy Mae Rouse is her Grams who taught Freddy Mae how to sew.

Freddy Mae was born December 24, 1932 in Ringold, Louisiana.

She moved to California when she was ten in 1942.

Almost all her life she made clothes.

She majored in home economics.

She was a seamstress.

But the important thing about Freddy Mae Rouse is her Grams who taught Freddy Mae how to sew.

7th Grade, Marina del Rey Middle School

MY HERO

by Allison Yamamoto

My hero is Kenneth Fujii. You are probably wondering who this is. He is my grandpa. He is a retired dentist, and if someone were to ask me to describe him, I would say he is brave, thoughtful, encouraging, and understanding.

When my grandpa and I (and sometimes my sister Karisa) have free time, he always entertains us with his stories. Most of the time his stories have a lesson, or sometimes he tells us about his life.

When my grandpa was younger he was sent to live in a camp. Camp was what they had when America and Japan were at war. America was scared of the thought that some Japanese Americans would spy on them, so they took most of the Japanese Americans out of their homes and put them into camps. (It was not the kind of fun camp.)

Several years later my grandpa went to the Korean War. He said he felt like he owed it to America. After the war was over, he returned home, barely injured.

My grandpa was a very brave person, and I am proud of him.

4th Grade, Genevieve Didion Elementary School

LUIGI MARIO DI NINNI

by Carliana Di Ninni

One day, in January, in 1957 a wonderful thing happened in Buenos Aires, Argentina. A boy was born, and his parents named him Luigi Mario Di Ninni after his grandmother, Maria Luisa. When Luigi was about four years old, he moved from Argentina to New York in the United States. After some time, he moved to Connecticut.

In Connecticut, Luigi went on picnics with his family and friends. He played baseball, softball, football, soccer, and basketball. He enjoyed going to the beach. His best friend was his cousin, Eddie DiRenzo. Luigi and his friends had snowball fights in the winter and tomato fights in the summer. At East Hartford High School, Luigi won several medals for running track. Luigi remembers that his parents worked hard, sometimes with two jobs to get situated, being immigrants. His mom, dad, and his track coach taught him to do what was right and what he could do with hard work and discipline.

As an adult, Luigi moved a long distance from Connecticut to San Diego, California. Later, he moved north to Sacramento. For about twenty years, Luigi worked in prisons, and now he works as a Deputy Commissioner in parole hearings. He usually works in jails where people are held after getting arrested.

In August of 1995, Luigi was introduced to Carliana Di Ninni, his third child. Carliana knows he is helpful and works hard like his parents and his track coach taught him. What really touched Carliana is that out of all Luigi's experiences from Buenos Aires to Sacramento, he said his greatest accomplishment was having Alexandra, Angielee, and Carliana Di Ninni with Linda Jean Di Ninni.

4th Grade, Genevieve Didion Elementary School

GROWING UP AS AN ARTIST IN CALIFORNIA

by Hanna Record

At times, growing up an artist in California can be hectic. Since I am an artist, I attend all of my acting classes, ballet classes, jazz classes, tap classes, singing lessons, hip hop classes, plus auditions for musical theatre, movies, commercials, or television. If I do get into a show in a principal role, my schedule would be school, a one hour and a half dance class, a three hour rehearsal, come home and maybe, if assigned, write an essay for the wacky Arts School that I go to. Speaking of my wacky Arts School that I go to, my Mom and I must drive at least twenty minutes to get to it. Luckily, it is worth the drive because I get a great education at my school and my mom is the dance advisor. I love my school!

The reason, probably, why I am an artist is because I was brought up with three artists in my household; my Mom, my Dad, and my wonderful sister. My mom is a dancer, a dance teacher, a singer, and a superb actress. My dad is a comic, impressionist, a glorious singer, a writer, and an actor. He also knows how to tap pretty well. My sister was once a dancer and a singer. In her high school years, she was a wonderful actress in her performance of the “Fairly Odd Couple.” I know it sounds pretty wacky, but in a way my two dogs are artists, too. My big yellow Labrador retriever, Belle, knows how to tango with me and my little Cairn terrier, Emily, knows how to do ballet. My house is full of artists!

I am not only an artist when I am dancing, singing, or acting, but I am also an artist on paper. I love to draw. I draw birds, abstract pieces, people, cartoons, still models, dogs, cats, underwater visions, mystical worlds, mystical fairies, insects, different types of hearts, nonsense illusions, various fashions, and I love to paint and color. I have a saying that I made up that helps me to really look at a still model and use the correct shades of colors. The saying goes, “Look at the model, look at it hard, look at it as if it is your own back yard.” This saying means to look at something thoroughly and memorize the vision that you just witnessed. (Like how you should know your back yard like the back of your hand.) I started drawing in pre-school, and I have loved it ever since. There is a difference between my two arts, and they are that I have been taking dance classes for a long, long time, and I have only taken about six art classes that were private. The good fact about taking only six art classes is that they were all helpful and fun! I also would like to make a famous masterpiece before I am twenty-one years old. I love drawing!

When I am an adult, my dream is to either be famous for whatever my profession is at that time or be a principal dancer in a company. It would be amazing if I could dance all of the original lead parts in classical ballets before I am twenty-one years old. I would like to be like Christine Shevchenko because she is already a sixteen-year-old ballerina. If I ever became a sixteen-year-old professional in whatever I am doing at that time, my days would be much different than what they are today.

In my future artistic years, I hope to become a professional in this world of amazing art. If I don't end up as a professional artist when I grow older, I hope to go on and do something that I really love, even if it's different.

My arts mean the world to me. I was raised to be an artist, so I will probably grow up to be an artist.

6th Grade, Renaissance Arts Academy

ONE MORE SOUND

by Victor Carmona

I come from a family that likes music
I'm from a mom who likes the guitar
And from a dad who likes the piano
Under the hand that I play are the strings
That sound as a beautiful and peaceful sound
When I play the strings it sounds like the one beautiful sound there is
When I play the piano it sounds like all the notes of all instruments
As if nature and all this world is made of music

I'm from a melody that plays and plays until the end
If there was to be no music then the end of noisy and quietness will be gone
As I speak, there's a tune
As I cry, there's a tune
As I scream, there's a tune
Sounds as if music is all nature and we need.

7th Grade, Marina del Rey Middle School

MY MOM

by Katerina Stupina

My mom loved living in Kazakhstan because she liked her life there. My mom was born in Kazakhstan and grew up with two brothers. My mom's parents liked to work and they were young. My mom lived in a beautiful, big house. She had a peaceful life when she grew up. My mom liked having new and beautiful things. In my mom's country, the shops were better and the clothes were beautiful. The buildings were better too. Right now my mom lives in California.

My mom moved to California on September 26, 2004, one year and a half ago. My uncle invited my mom and her family to come to the United States. My mom has relatives over here also. My mom liked living in her old country better. My mom likes California because of the environment and the weather. One difference between Kazakhstan and the United States are the roads and freeways. The roads and freeways here are better than Kazakhstan. My mom has found a home in California because her relatives live in California, but she misses Kazakhstan.

3rd Grade, Bryte Elementary School

MY MOMMA

by LeAnna Rains

My momma loves living in California, but she has not lived here her whole life. My momma was born in 1969 in Ontario, Oregon. She grew up with two brothers, four sisters, and two loving parents.

Her parents worked in the business of produce production and packaging. In their spare time, they volunteered in their children's schools and church. Her parents' favorite hobby was dancing to Country Mexican music. My momma lived in a huge house with a large backyard. She would go on great family vacations. Her favorite place to visit was Mexico, where she would learn about her heritage.

My momma's family always celebrated Christmas for two days. The entire family would go to my great-grandparent's house early Christmas Eve. The fathers and kids would go pick a tree, while the mothers baked delicious treats and candies. The day was filled with activities such as tree trimming, ornament making, and cookie decorating. At night they would have a grand feast followed by the exchanging of gifts. Then my grandfather would hurry home to beat Santa. My momma would go straight to bed because she would get up early and open presents from Santa Claus. The day would be spent honoring the birth of Christ, by going to Mass and participating in the re-enactment.

My momma loved her childhood. She played in the snow during the winters and swam in the river during the summers. My momma really likes California also.

My momma moved to California in 1992, thirteen years ago. She moved here to help her oldest sister with her family. My aunt's husband had died in a traffic accident, and she had three children. My momma was there to do anything they needed.

What my momma like most about California is the warm weather that is almost year round. She is not a big fan of the icy roads during an Oregon winter. She also likes volunteering at Bryte School. My momma is happy living here in California.

3rd Grade, Bryte Elementary School

MY MOM

by Tatyana Savenko

My mom lives in U.S.A. now, but she grew up in Uzbekistan. My mom was born on April 11th, 1962 in Tashkent. My mom was fine. She grew up in a friendly and funny family. Her sister and her brothers loved her. When my mom was small, she liked to keep perfume bottles and candy wrappers. She also liked to make dolls out of fabric. My mom has one sister and three brothers. My mom lived in a beautiful house, and she had a garden. In the garden were apples, cherries, pears, grapes, and lots of flowers. My mom's mom and dad were very kind to her. My mom is a very good person.

My mom came to the US in 1994, 11 years ago. When my mom was small, it was very hard to live in a Muslim country, and it was hard to find a job. My mom likes it here in California, better than her old country because they can go to their church. My mom and the rest of her family still go to a Christian church. My mom is the best mom.

3rd Grade, Bryte Elementary School

MY MOM

by Vanessa Yang

My mom lives in the United States now, but she grew up in Laos. My mom was born in Xieng Kuum of Laos in 1962. She grew up with six brothers and five sisters. My mom's dad was in the army, and her mom would always work. Her mom would work all day long cooking, feeding the animals, and working in the garden with no breaks at all, only one break for lunch at twelve. My mom lived in a stick and wheat house; it was a big house. My mom liked to go to school at Laos, where she would sing. My mom would go into the forest and swing on the trees. She enjoyed playing with her Barbies also. She would help feed the cow, pigs, and chickens also. My mom was very healthy and was always in the garden. My mom grew up in Laos, but she lives in California now.

My mom moved to California in 1980, twenty-five years ago. My mom moved to California because there was an army that was unfair. My mom likes to live in Sacramento. My mom likes living in the United States, especially staying home and picking up her children. My mom has found a home in California and the United States because the unfair army is not here.

3rd Grade, Bryte Elementary School

WHY MY FATHER CAME TO CALIFORNIA

by Danny Cortes

My father is from Michoacan, Mexico. There he had to endure many hardships because in Mexico there are less opportunities for work, and limited ways to survive. He knew if he came to California, he would have a much better life. He came to this country with my mom and cousin. My dad left most of his family in Morelia, Mexico in a pueblo called Titzio. He came in hopes of having a better life.

My father needed a visa to come to the United States. In Mexico, he would look at the clerks, who were my uncles, and the American flags they had in their humble stores. At the airport, he'd see people boarding planes to the United States. He knew that would be him someday.

My Dad has been living here in California for 30 years. He began working as a cattle rancher, and as a gardener. For many years, he worked with his dad. He is very grateful that he now has a job at Lowe's. My Dad tells me, "Danny, if we lived in Mexico, it would be harder to go to college because there are less opportunities for us. Be very thankful that we're here in the USA. If you stay in school, it will pay off. If you work hard, you will be successful throughout your life."

My older brother says, "Stay in school, and if you do, you might get into USC." I want to go to college and maybe even play football at USC!

I am grateful my Dad has paved the way for my family here in the United States. My Dad's struggle has made it easier our family and for me. And one day I will make him proud.

5th Grade, Aloha Elementary School

PILGRIM

by Kathy Nguyen

My mom is a pilgrim. She is from Vietnam. She left Vietnam at the age of sixteen because of the war. She had to live in a house with two couples that she didn't know.

My mom is a pilgrim, and she was miserable. She felt lonely and sad when she left her family because of the war. She left her brother, sister, and mother behind. When she made enough money to go back to Vietnam, she was proud to see her country, but she was not proud to see it ruined. The house that she grew up in was in pieces. She broke into tears at what she saw—skeletons. The skeletons are the remains of soldiers who died. My mom cried when she had to leave Vietnam to go back to L.A.

After that, my mom had to support herself. She did not have enough to pay her rent. Then she went to work at a furniture factory. Eventually she made enough money to buy a house. She did not have a car, so she rode a bike to work. My mom would cry when someone spoke of my grandma. Her life was miserable without her mom. But she survived through it all. She managed to go through a lot of emotional feelings. But now, my mom's life is full with joy and happiness because her mom finally came. We raised enough money to sponsor my grandma to come to America.

My mom is also happy because her kids have a good education and get good grades. We also cheer her up when she's down. She is no longer sad and lonely. She is glad she came to the United States, but she still misses Vietnam.

4th Grade, Fremont Elementary School

THE LIFE OF CARMEN ALFARO

by Jesse Portillo

My grandma was an immigrant from El Salvador. In El Salvador, she and her family were very poor. She worked hard to help her family. She had to work hard for food. She worked, washing dishes in a very small diner. At age 13, she worked in a wholesale cosmetic store. She was the second child out of 12 children. She started working at age 11 and full time at age 13. Life was very hard for her at that age.

Finally, my grandma took a bus to California in search of new opportunities and a better lifestyle. When my grandma first came to this country, she taught herself how to read and speak English. How? She bought a Spanish/English dictionary and a Dr. Seuss book and started translating words into English. After that, she worked as a maid 5 days a week and spent the weekend with my mom. She was 16 years old then. At age 18, she worked at a sewing factory, where she worked really hard to learn more and more about the fashion industry. She even owned her own factory, named after her first daughter—Elizabeth's Fashion. She also owned another called A+ Sewing.

Nowadays my grandma works for a clothing manufacturing company called ABS, owned by Allen Swartz, and she is the production manager. She has raised 3 children and now is helping her son raise his children (me and my brother David). My grandma is now a citizen of the United States and a very successful woman.

4th Grade, Fremont Elementary School

PILGRIMS

by Elaine Woo

Would you want know about a woman from China? My mom was born on June 14, 1962 in a volcano-like village. She was very poor and couldn't go to school. She ate salty fish, a little bit of soy sauce, and drank water from the dirty and greasy lake.

She lived in a broken house filled with bugs. She had 5 brothers and lost 2 sisters. The 2 sisters died because they had a sickness similar to cancer. My mom and her brothers had to work and baby-sit for the money.

Three years later, when my mom was 19, she was allowed to go to America because her friend helped her fill out her application and "Boom!" she was allowed to go to America. She packed her things and said good-bye to her friends and family.

In America, she didn't know where to go or what to do. Her life had changed. A tour guide showed her around the country and her new home. She woke up one day feeling alone. She went shopping and bought a lot of useful stuff. She ate Panda Express, but the food didn't have a lot of home flavor to it.

Over 6 months had passed; my mom finally had the guts to call home. Her mother sounded happy to hear from her little girl. She told her mother about America, and she told them that she would try her best to bring her parents to America.

My mom finally convinced her friend to help her fill out the application to bring her parents to America. She got her driver's license and went to pick up her parents from the LAX airport. She waited for hours until she saw her parents again.

Two years passed, and my mom met a man. They started dating and said "I do" at their wedding. My mom had my sister Shirley, me, and my baby brother Jackie.

Mom's life is the most interesting story I have ever heard. She now is a wonderful mom, wife, and soon a grandma. I want to thank my parents for bringing me to this world. I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for them.

4th Grade, Fremont Elementary School

THE INDIAN TERRITORY

by Gary Roberts

Before I wrote this essay, I thought my family roots started in Europe. I didn't realize some of my ancestors settled somewhere other than California. As I researched, I found out that our pedigree and family tree didn't exactly match my theory. The story starts in Oklahoma in the Indian Territory during the late 1800s.

My great grandfather, of Irish decent, settled in Oklahoma during the late 1800s. He traveled all the way across Oklahoma to visit the chief of the Indian Territory and bought one of his daughters. He married her, but a few months later she died, so my great grandfather returned and obtained another wife--Sookie--for free as if this were a money-back guarantee. They married and started a family. When my great grandfather arrived, by wagon, at the county seat, to register the birth of his son, he had forgotten the name that he and Sookie had picked out for him. The baby's name was supposed to be Milton Eugene Smith, but he forgot the Milton part and gave him the name...Eugene Smith. That gentleman is my grandfather. As a boy, he was raised in the Indian Territory and was exposed to hunting with rifles, which helped him later in life during his service in the army.

I don't know much about my grandfather's childhood, but at age eighteen, he married my grandmother Betty. When he was drafted into the army during WWII, he was stationed in Pensacola, Florida. As a truck driver and mechanic, he transported men and cargo on an old truck. Also he was ranked as a marksman. Once his service time was up, he returned to Oklahoma as a rancher.

Soon after he received a phone call from Aunt Ruth, his sister, asking, "When are you coming to live in Modesto? A new sugar mill just opened up and you might get a good job there. They are also hiring truck drivers and the pay is good."

My grandfather and my grandma Betty drove in an aged pick-up truck from Oklahoma through the Great Plains, over the Rockies, across the Colorado River, and over the Sierra Nevada, all the way to the Central Valley of California. That is 1,150 miles.

They bought a small house in Modesto, and Grandpa got that job at Holly Sugar, in Tracy, as a mechanic and truck driver. The pay wasn't enough, so he got a second job at a gas station along the "Old" Highway 50. At the end of the year, my Grandpa Eugene didn't feel safe commuting beside the San Joaquin River from Modesto to Tracy because of the treacherous fog. They shopped for a house in Tracy, so he wouldn't have to commute.

The houses were too expensive, so they decided to rent. Later a housing development opened up; it was the first development in Tracy to have fireplaces and electric kitchens. The house they purchased in 1954 cost \$9,500. This was the house that they would live in for the remainder of their lives.

My family's roots are firmly in place in California. Someday, I would like to visit Oklahoma, but I would never want to live there because I am content living in California. My great grandfather and grandfather's intriguing lives help me appreciate who I am now.

7th Grade, Jefferson Middle School

MY DAD CALLS ME 'PIOJO'

by Karen Rojas

I come from L.A.

I come from Culver City

I come from theme parks

I come from the projects

I come from *Manzanita*

I come still smell my mom's enchiladas

I can still feel my hair in knots

I can still see my brother combing my hair

I can still taste the *mole*

I can still hear the oil jumping around

I can still see my mom getting burned

I come as a child to the new world

I know that I can move on

I come from the river

I come from the streets

I come from food

I come from a Mexican family

I come from San Diego

I come from a circus

I come from a funny family

I come from school

Where kids pretend to be cool

I come from McDonald's

Where I could eat all I want

I come from daisies

I am crazy

You can say I'm crazy

But you're just hating.

8th Grade, Marina del Rey Middle School

BRIGHT AND BEAUTIFUL

by Akemi Alden

My Chinese name is Xiu Jie Guo. It means bright and pure. My Japanese name is Akemi. It means bright and beautiful. My mom and dad chose Akemi because its meaning is close to my Chinese name's meaning. I was born in China on June 10, 1998. My mom and Dad adopted me when I was eight months old.

We lived in San Francisco after I was adopted. We moved to Sacramento when I was two years old. My Mom's parents, my Bachan and Jiichan, lived in Sacramento too.

Sometimes I feel a little sad because my birth mother couldn't keep me. Growing up in California is good and fun because it's like being on a journey. I learn new things and go to new places. I'm lucky because my Mom and Dad chose me.

1st Grade, Genevieve Didion Elementary School

GOONG-GOONG'S LIFE

By Tristan Fong

My grandpa's name is Narisco Garcia Wong. I call him Goong-Goong. He was born in Matamoros, Mexico on October 16, 1940. When he was growing up, he was able to spend some of his childhood in China and part of it in Mexico. It made him feel happy because he knows more about his Mexican and Chinese cultures.

When he first came to California, he and his family had a grocery store, but they didn't speak any English. They didn't even know the difference between the Mexican and the U.S.A. currency. When the customers came in, they trusted them enough that they would pay them the correct amount for their groceries. Lucky for them they had loyal and honest customers!

When he was in China, he was in the middle of a war and had to hide in the hills with his family and friends. They were all pretty scared. I think this was pretty interesting because I didn't know he was in a war.

One of our family traditions is Chinese New Year. Our family closes the year and begins the new year with the whole family. We usually have dinner at our house.

Some of Goong-Goong's family is still in Mexico City, Hong Kong, China, and other parts of the world. He speaks Chinese, Spanish, and English fluently. Some day, I would like to go to these places.

1st Grade, Genevieve Didion Elementary School

CHAPTER THREE

GRAPPLING WITH THE REALITIES & CHALLENGES OF LIFE IN CALIFORNIA

TWO WORLDS

by Luz Napoles

Mi mama does not call me Luz, she calls me Nana.
When she's mad she calls me by my first and middle name, "Luz Maria".
Mi mama me llama Nena pero yo soy Luz para todo el mundo.
En la escuela yo soy muy timida pero en mi casa yo abolo demasiado mucho.

When I'm in school I babble both languages
At home I also jabber both languages
We all walk in two worlds because we have a life at school and another at home.

At school I pay attention to the teachers
At home I pay attention to the TV.

My life at school is to be a great student and get good grades
My life at home is to be entertained and watch as much TV as I can.

I wear different clothes in my two worlds.
Jeans, sweatshirts, tomboy for school
And warm, soft, comfortable pajamas at home.

I dream in Spanish and English
La vida is buena y divertida.

8th Grade, Marina del Rey Middle School

A PLACE TO BELONG

by Marlene Perez

Everyone has a need to belong. It doesn't matter who they are, what they look like, or from where they come. Many people go through similar hard times, especially immigrants because they leave their loved ones and their native homelands. Immigrants often feel as if they don't belong in this country like farm workers that harvest our crops, or mothers who work in the sewing factories. Although they adjust over time, still many feel like foreigners.

In *Molly's Pilgrim*, Molly was not the exception. She felt she had to learn English to improve her life and to defend herself. Just like Molly, Ana from *Home at Last* went through the same struggle. She had to learn English to become comfortable in her new homeland, and to help her mother, who neither spoke English. Ana's mother also felt as though she did not belong here in America.

Both Ana and her mother were seeking a better life. Just as Ana's mother suffered, Molly felt unwelcomed at the beginning; but with perseverance, Molly soon adapted to her new community.

I will always look back on the day when I first met my friend, Maria. Her family emigrated from Chile; and as Molly and Ana, my friend did not speak English. She felt out of place because she wanted to make friends, but the kids would not play with her because she only spoke Spanish.

One day she came to me, and we spoke Spanish for the longest time. I told her to have a positive attitude about learning a new language. I said, "Maria, I will help you speak English." I taught her how to say, "My name is Maria." And each day Maria's English improved.

Maria's experience reminds me of myself when I did not speak English during pre-school. While playing with other children, listening to my teacher read stories, singing songs, and drawing pictures, then explaining the drawings in English, my English began to blossom like a beautiful rose.

I learned my new language during my younger years, but now I am deeply grateful that I am bilingual and bicultural. To me being able to speak two languages is very important. It is my path to a university. Speaking both languages will help me obtain a job I need and love.

I think it is important to have self-worth, and to speak our own language. No matter where we come from, we all have the need to feel like we belong someplace. Speaking our own native language can do that for us.

6th Grade, Aloha Elementary School

THE IMPORTANCE OF TWO LANGUAGES

by Krystal Zamarripa

Molly's Pilgrim and *Home at Last* are two stories that tell how immigrants may feel when they are made to feel like they don't belong here in America. Each story also focuses on how two families struggled to learn English to communicate with others for real-life purposes. Not knowing English made it hard for them to live with dignity. Like the characters in these stories, my Grandmother had the same challenge.

In both stories, the characters feel like they don't belong. They feel helpless, left out, unwanted, and as if they were nothing. No one.

In *Molly's Pilgrim*, Molly uses English to defend why she made her Pilgrim doll differently. She explains to her teacher, "My mother is a Pilgrim. My father is a Pilgrim, and I am a Pilgrim, too. We came to America for religious freedom." She says this because her teacher and classmates think her doll is an ordinary doll. But the doll is an example of Molly's mother dressed as a Russian Pilgrim. This is who she was!

Like Molly, Ana's mother has to defend herself, too. When she goes to a store to buy chicken, she is an easy target because she doesn't speak English. At the end of the story, Ana's mother returns to the same store where she was cheated. When she goes to pay, the price is wrong again. She argues, "Chicken on sale. Chicken on sale!" She then gets the price she was supposed to pay. That proves that she was not going to be overcharged again!

Both characters' experiences remind me of when I was seven years old; and I went with my Grandma Maura to a bank in Seal Beach, California. We drove up to the parking lot and met a security guard. We had to tell him where we were going. My Grandma tried to pronounce the word BANK correctly, but she couldn't. "BAK, BAN, BAEK," she said. I tried to tell the security guard that we were going to the BANK, but he didn't listen to me. So he didn't let us into the parking lot that led to the bank and stores. But then he thought a moment, and he finally realized what my Grandma was trying to say.

This experience proves why it is important to know English in America. Now I'm nine years old, and my English is a lot better than before. In the future, I plan to attend a university here in California because I can read, speak, and write English.

Like Molly and Ana's mother, I can use English to stand up for myself. But still, I know I am forgetting my own language, Spanish. I realize I am losing my Spanish, but I'll try my best to not lose it because it's important for me to speak to my family, especially my Grandmother. Now I understand why both languages are equally important to me, why being bilingual is important.

4th Grade, Aloha Elementary School

I BELIEVE IN WHO I AM

by A.J. Hayes

Sometimes people from different countries who speak different languages may feel alienated when they come to a new country like the United States. One of the problems is not knowing English and not understanding the American culture. I remember a time when my Grandma Kim had this similar experience. I call my Grandma “Ma”, which means mother in Vietnamese.

When I was about two years old, my Grandmother was taken from her own home in Vietnam and brought to the United States. She came to live in Moreno Valley, California during the Vietnam war. I think in the beginning, she probably missed her home and didn’t feel comfortable here in a new land. But she had my mother, my aunt Michelle, my sister Amanda, and me to comfort her and to teach her new ways.

In the beginning, she couldn’t speak English, so we helped her learn English along the way. Now that I am ten years old, she speaks, reads, and writes in English, but still with a Vietnamese accent.

My Grandmother explained to me one day, “It doesn’t matter that I speak a different language or that I come from Vietnam, I still believe in who I am.” I’ve always remembered this.

During the time when I’d play baseball, she’d motivate me and cheer me on. “Go A.J.!” When I made the GATE program, she said, “Great job, A.J! Always try to do your best.” She has always wanted me to improve my life.

In my own life, like my Grandma, I’ve been taken away from people who were my friends and family when times were unstable. But it was Ma Kim who made me feel stable during those hard times. Each time I left, I learned new things along the way. Ma Kim helped me learn the different parts of me. I am one fourth Vietnamese, one half Mexican, and one fourth Caucasian. Without these parts of me, I wouldn’t be who I am today. I am proud to be who I am! And I will always try to be as courageous as my Vietnamese Grandmother, Ma Kim.

Even though people run into tough times like my Grandma, I believe they must always look deep inside and believe in who they are. I know I do! I shall always believe in who I am!

4th Grade, Aloha Elementary School

WHEN I FIRST BEGAN ENGLISH

by Helen Uribe

When I barely started school at Robert F. Kennedy, I was so nervous because I hardly knew English. I spoke better in Spanish. I also felt that a lot of students wouldn't know Spanish. And my classmates didn't. They were all MONOLINGUAL! I thought it was going to be OK, but it turned out to be a big disaster!

All they did was mumble words I didn't understand. They also made fun of me. My mom kept saying it would be okay, but then I got even more worried than I was before. One day I was going to class, but I began to cry. I knew that I had to go to school, but how could I go if all of my classmates laughed at me? After a while, I got over it and learned English. So I went to school, and I took a lot of bravery and went in.

When my teacher asked me a question, I answered her in English. So everybody was amazed. I made lots of friends. I am now here, and I improved a lot in language. I hope you don't go through the same thing I did.

5th Grade, R.F. Kennedy Elementary School

HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE A BROKER?

by Michelle Cardenas

My parents don't speak English, but I don't mind if they don't speak English.

What I like about them is that they are my parents and that is one thing they are good at. I don't worry about what language they speak or where they are from. The only thing I care about is that they are my parents. I don't know who taught me how to speak Spanish, but when I was two years old, I started to speak Spanish.

I like it that my parents don't speak English because when I translate, I have fun translating for them. But sometimes, I wish my parents knew how to speak English because sometimes my brothers and I have trouble translating some words. So we sometimes have to use the dictionary to translate for someone who does not speak the same language as the others in my family.

4th Grade, R.F. Kennedy Elementary School

WE ALL WALK IN TWO WORLDS

by Anthony Lara

We all walk in two worlds
In life and in death
We all say the truth
Sometimes we tell a lie
Lying, is dying, there's a connection.

We all walk in two worlds
One ying and one yang
You might be melancholy
It's up to you to choose.

We all walk in two worlds
In life and in death
You don't always get what you want in life
In death you regret.

We all walk in two worlds
Where nothing is forever
And we all are improper in one way or another,
What is for sure,
We all end up resting in a quiet peace.

8th Grade, Marina del Rey Middle School

HARD CHANGES IN LIFE

by Theresa Leverett

Hello everyone, my name is Theresa Leverett. My family and I moved to California on December 5, 2003. I live in a little town called Waterford. I go to Waterford Middle School, and I am eleven years old. When my family and I moved to Waterford we didn't know how things would end up for us here. So, we went with the flow of things in this town. My family and I may not be Mexican or Portuguese; these are the main nationalities in Waterford. We are Hawaiian and White, and we are happy to be what we are in life. We don't act like something we're not.

When I was a young girl, I did not know how to speak English because I spoke Hawaiian at home. When people spoke to me in English, I would get so mixed up because I did not understand what they were saying. I would ask my mom, "Mom what are they saying?" She would then translate for me. When I was around five years old, I started speaking English. It was confusing for me then because it was hard to speak both languages at the same time.

Even though it was hard for me to learn English, I was able to pick it up pretty quickly. I was very glad for my new accomplishment, but I started to forget my Hawaiian language. Sadly, I am not able to speak Hawaiian any more. My mom did not enforce the Hawaiian language at home when we started school. That is one of the reasons why I started losing my Hawaiian language. Even though I don't speak Hawaiian, I am able to understand what my family is saying to me in Hawaiian. I am very proud of my Hawaiian culture, language and heritage. I wish I would not have lost my Hawaiian language because it means so much to me and my family to keep our Hawaiian heritage in our family.

5th Grade, Waterford Middle School

MY LANGUAGE

by Janelly Angulo

Hi, my name is Janelly Angulo. I'm eleven years old. My parents are from Mexico, and in Mexico, people speak Spanish. I was born in Modesto, California, but I live in Waterford. My family and I have been living in Waterford for seven years. I'm the oldest child in my family. I'm proud to say that I speak Spanish and English well.

I know how to speak Spanish because my parents have spoken Spanish to me since I was a baby. I didn't speak English when I started school but I immediately learned the language in Kindergarten. Since I am bilingual when we go to the doctor's office and the doctor doesn't know how to speak Spanish, I'm able to translate for my mom because she does not know how to speak English. I also have to translate for her when someone calls her on the phone, and they don't speak Spanish. I write down what she wants me to say. Then I translate it into Spanish. I also have to translate for my mom when someone calls her on the phone and they don't speak Spanish.

If I didn't speak Spanish, it would affect me tremendously because I wouldn't be able to communicate with my grandparents or aunts who live in Mexico. It is great to be able to speak to my family in their native language. If I didn't speak Spanish, it would hurt me because I wouldn't be able to communicate with my family members who only speak Spanish. Since I speak both languages I've been able to help my fifth grade teacher, Mrs. McClure, at Waterford Middle School translate for a Spanish-speaking student in Spanish who came from Mexico. Being bilingual has helped me be a very good translator. I've been able to translate for him, and I've been able to help him in every subject.

I've been able to help him with Math, Science, and Social Studies. I even help him sound out words. On the first day of class he was very nervous. He even started to cry because he didn't know anyone in the school. I remember him crying all day long. Mrs. McClure comforted him and told him he would have many friends, and that some of the students in the class spoke Spanish, and that they would be able to translate for him and they would be his friends.

I am very proud of my two languages which are Spanish and English. I don't need a translator because I'm fluent in both languages. I'm glad that I'm able to help my mom translate and that I've also been able to help my teacher in the classroom. I'm proud of being Latina and speaking Spanish is part of my culture; I'm proud of who I am.

5th Grade, Waterford Middle School

LANGUAGE IS MORE THAN A TOOL

by Carolina Navor

English is important to me, and so is Spanish. It is important to me because it is more than just a tool; it is part of my culture and affirms who I am. *Molly's Pilgrim* and *Home at Last* have one thing in common, the importance of learning English. English is an important tool for the main characters because they use it to prove themselves capable of fitting in here America, but they do not want to shed their own language.

Molly learned English, but her classmates thought she spoke it very poorly. One day Molly's teacher instructed the class to make Pilgrim dolls for Thanksgiving. Molly's teacher said her doll wasn't a Pilgrim. So Molly bravely explained, "My mother is a Pilgrim; my father is a Pilgrim; and I am a Pilgrim. We came from Russia for freedom." In English, Molly defended herself to make her teacher understand!

Like Molly, Ana came to America from Mexico with her family, which is much like my own family. Soon Ana learned many new English words each day at school from her classmates. One day Ana went with her mom to the store since her mom didn't speak any English. She needed chicken. The clerk charged her a lot more than what it was worth, even though it was a special! Ana told her mom, "Mom, you should learn English." She enrolled in ESL classes, took an oral English test, and passed it. About a month later, she went back to the same store to claim her rights with the same clerk. "Chicken on sale! Chicken on sale!" she kept saying, pointing to the sign. The clerk could cheat her no longer! Ana was very proud of her mother. Her actions show she refused to let people treat her unfairly just because her English was not perfect.

In both stories, English was an important tool for Molly and Ana. They used it wisely, and valued it very much. They learned English quickly, but they never forgot their own language and culture, just as I have never forgotten my own language and culture.

In my family's case, English is a very important tool, as well. My mom and dad both need it to work at their jobs, just as my brother and I need it for our education. I use English to think, learn, and state my opinions. I also use English to problem-solve. And I use it for academic learning, too.

Although I value English as a learning tool, I still value my Spanish language because it is the language of who I am, the language of my parents. In my mother tongue, I pray to God and express my love to my family. When I watch Spanish television with my family, I am more connected to the world because I can find out what's going on in two languages. Being bilingual and using both languages as important tools makes me feel proud of having two ways of communicating to my family and to the world.

5th Grade, Aloha Elementary School

CHAPTER FOUR

**DREAMING OF A BETTER
LIFE IN CALIFORNIA**

CROSSING OVER

by Elizabeth Renteria

Crossing the border,
Hoping to find what's more in life.
All the opportunities,
Education and money.
Tired of looking over your shoulders to those painful nights
Of your parents raving and shouting,
About how there's never enough money to put food on the table or
All the gun shots you hear in fear that you'll be next.
Hoping to forget all those painful memories but forever remembering those
Fun-filled days of celebrations.
Like on September 16th, how'd we go to Hidalgo Guanajuato to celebrate our
Independence from Spain.
There was never any school or work that day just a big pachanga
Or on the Virgen's dia Santo we would all go to church and be there till 12 A.M. to
Sing the mananitas to her on her special day.
Oh how I wish those days were here to stay.
Hoping to find new things
But never forgetting the old.
Never being able to replace the mariachi music you hear on New Year's Eve
Or the taste you forever savor when you eat unos sopas from the lady on the corner
Down the street
Or when we used to play soccer on the street in front of your house till late on
Those unforgettable celebration days
I will always carry them with me
Either bad or good.
Siempre en mi Corazon.
Forever in my heart.

8th Grade, Glick Middle School

WRITING AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY FROM A GRANDPARENT'S POINT OF VIEW

by Stephanie Sadoma

When I was a baby, I loved to crawl. I remember playing with my cousin Erica. She was two months younger than I was. I often bit her. But we were still best friends. I enjoyed drinking from my milk bottle. A funny thing that happened to me was when I pooped on my brother.

Second grade was the best year of my life. I remember going to Olive Garden. Going to the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk was my favorite place! That year I had the funniest teacher in the world. I enjoyed music folders, Fun Fridays, elbow tag, and computers.

In high school, I was a smart student. My friends and I played volleyball. I was the best. I was a cheerleader too. I had a lot of friends. My goal was to graduate from high school. As an adult, many exciting things happened to me. After high school, I went to UC Davis. When I finished college, I became a teacher. When I was 20, I got married. I had twins. Their names were Mechelle and Lianna. I lived in a mansion and drove a shiny red convertible.

As a grandma, I have outstanding memories of my life. I wish all my grandchildren will be happy in their lives. I hope I will live long. My grandchildren will always love me and remember me.

2nd Grade, Bryte Elementary School

WRITING AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY FROM A GRANDPARENT'S POINT OF VIEW

by Andrea Salcedo

When I was a baby, I was funny. I remember when my bird was chasing me. A funny thing that happened was when I took the keys so my dad couldn't leave. When I ate, I was messy. The food was all over the ground.

Second grade was the best grade of my life. I remember going to Mexico. I had the best teacher in the whole wide world. In P.E., I enjoyed playing elbow tag.

In high school, I was a cool student. I was the best cheerleader in the world. Traveling to San Francisco was fun. My goal was to graduate from high school.

As an adult, many exciting things happened to me. I went to UCLA. After college I became a teacher at Bryte School. I lived in a two story house.

As a grandma, I have good memories of my life. I wish my children will be rich and happy. I know my children will always remember me.

2nd Grade, Bryte Elementary School

WRITING AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY FROM A GRANDPARENT'S POINT OF VIEW

by Jacob Askew

I was a hungry baby. Riding on the train was something I remembered. A funny thing that happened to me was fighting with my cat. I enjoyed playing with my cat!

Second grade was the best year of my life. I remembered going to Union Valley. I had a cool adventure. My sister Heather got bit by a mole. She thought that she had rabies.

In high school I was a cool student. I played soccer. I was the best player on my soccer team. I traveled to the San Francisco Zoo. My goal was to graduate from high school.

As an adult, many exciting things happened to me. After college I went to UC Davis. I was a science professor at UC Davis. My best car was a red jeep. I lived in a big house.

As a grandpa, I have special memories of my life. I wish my kids will be rich and happy. I hope I will live for 100 years. I know my kids will love me forever.

2nd Grade, Bryte Elementary School

WHAT IT MEANS TO ME TO LIVE IN CALIFORNIA

by Reyna De Leon

To live in California means a lot because my parents came here to give my brother, sister, and I a better life. We are trying to do our best in school. My parents are also doing their best to give us a better life. I think they are doing well because my mom is going to school to learn more English and my dad is working so we can have money. Although we really like it here, sometimes I wish we could go to Mexico and San Salvador to visit our loved ones and the family members I never met.

5th Grade, R.F. Kennedy Elementary

CALIFORNIA DREAMIN'

by Allison Ferris

*California
Beaches and theme parks
Surfing and fun
Lying on the beach catching the sun.*

Everyday I get to lie on the beach and soak up the sun. After I've had enough sun, I go surfing on some gnarly waves. On my way back to my beachfront home, I say hello to my next-door neighbor, Brad Pitt...then I wake up.

Even though this sounds like a very nice dream, many people think of California in this way. They think everybody has a beach-front home, knows how to surf, and lives next to a movie star. When I went on a mission trip to Alaska, people would ask me how many times I had been surfing. My answer would be...zero.

Beauty and diversity are what make up California, not beaches and theme parks. California is filled with beautiful vineyards, giant Sequoias, mountain peaks high, valleys low, and so many different kinds of people.

Yosemite is one of California's breath-taking national parks. With its tall pine trees and beautiful meadows, it is one of my favorite places to go camping. Yosemite is also home to the famous Half Dome. Half Dome rises over 9,000 ft. high, and it is my goal to one day hike to the top of this awesome mountain. Yosemite Falls is also a big attraction to Yosemite National Park. It is one of the most magnificent waterfalls in all of California.

I also mentioned vineyards. Napa Valley is full of them. The vineyards cover hill upon hill of Napa. Napa wine is known throughout the world, and it has won many awards.

Stretching high to the sky, like a skyscraper, Mount Whitney is the highest point in California. It reaches 14,494 ft. high. And California's lowest point is Death Valley, which is 282 ft. below sea level. No wonder it's called Death Valley.

Giants can be found in California, Giant Sequoias that is. They are said to be the largest living thing on the Earth. Isn't it great to be known for something big?

Have you ever wondered how California helps the rest of the U.S.? Think about this: California grows half of the country's fruits and vegetables. Almonds, artichokes, raisins and figs are the #1 foods that California produces.

Chinese Americans, African Americans, Mexican Americans, American Indians, and many other people and groups who make up our wonderful state of California. It is really great to be able to live in a state that has so many different cultures. Because of all the different cultures we are able to try many different things...like food.

Yes, California has beaches and big cities, but it also has beautiful forests, great camping places, and it helps provide the rest of the country with fruits and vegetables. Just as the land of California is diverse, so are the many different faces you see. If you take a walk down a street in San Francisco, or just look in your grocery store, you will see a multitude of different nationalities. Yet you have something in common with them, you are a Californian just as they are.

*California
Vineyards and trees
Camping and food
People from all different cultures under the moon

The people are different,
And so is the land
But we're all Californians
Working hand in hand*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

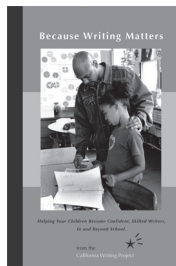
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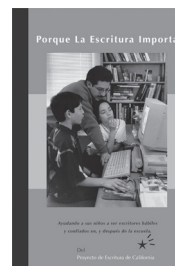
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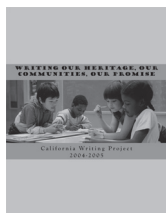


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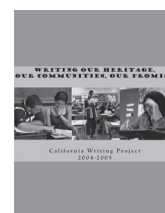
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