

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

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

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

*Jayne Marlink, Executive Director  
California Writing Project*

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**CHAPTER ONE**

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

# WHAT IS A SMALL TOWN?

by Brett Henderson

Corning, California has a population of close to seven thousand people. Seven thousand people aren't many; in fact, seven thousand of anything really isn't much anymore. 100,000 people regularly gather at football stadiums and auditoriums, in shopping malls, on street corners, or in telephone booths (well, maybe I'm exaggerating a little bit on the last two). In any case, Corning is just big enough to be classified as anything at all, so we who live here call it a town.

My town is a bit unusual, even among its peers. No nearby city has a Burger King located a block away from an orchard. In fact, orchards seem to be dispersed randomly throughout town, including the commercial sections. No one seems to notice though, because if you grew up here, you are used to agriculture popping up frequently, no matter where you are.

Take, for instance, olives. Corning has the distinction of being called "The Olive Capital of the World." It is easy to see why, considering I have an olive orchard, my friends have olive orchards, and there is a giant Bell Carter olive plant smack dab in the middle of town. In fact, Corning probably consumes the most olives per person of any place in the world, if only for the fact that those eating the olives are supporting the family business. I feel like a traitor when I don't order olives on my pepperoni pizza.

It isn't just that little green fruit that makes Corning what it is though. There are acres of rice paddies, almond orchards, rows of prune trees, figs, and manzanita. Fruit pickers may as well hold their annual convention here in the fall because they'll all be here anyways. If it's green and it sprouts out of the ground or falls from a tree come spring, then someone here is bound to grow it. We are a farm town, but what exactly does that mean?

A great thing about Corning is that we are close to so much. We are in the middle of a valley, but mountains, parks, and the like are only 2-3 hours away. Big cities such as San Francisco and Sacramento are just another 2-3 hours. Lake Tahoe: 3 1/2 hours. The ocean, Oregon, or Nevada: 4-6 hours. But it may be more revealing to state what is here, instead of what is close. Three stop lights, one movie theatre (one movie per week), zero malls, zero dance clubs, zero everything else you can possibly conceive of except trees. Maybe I see the town's deficiencies through a teenager's eyes, but when you have to drive thirty miles to pick up a pair of football cleats, or you and your friends are renting movies for the third weekend this month, the town seems close to desolate.

So why would anyone want to live in our village of small town gossip, a place where only this year was a Starbucks built (gasp!)? Why have people been drawn toward the rather puny gravitational pull of the "Olive City?" The answer isn't simple. Many people enjoy the beauty and clean air of our private little valley in Northern California. It's nice for those who have lived in San Francisco or L.A. to escape city life. On the negative side, many people stay here, just like anywhere else, for fear of change and moving somewhere new. Others just want to stay around their family and life-long friends. For some it's a combination of all these factors, and for some reason, people seem to like it here.

There are some nasty rumors going around about Corning, and all of rural America for that matter. Apparently they don't sell toothbrushes here, and the clothing stores are lined with cowboy boots. Everyone here supposedly shops at giant, all-purpose stores (rhymes with ball cart...) and rides horses to work. These myths are, of course, false. The rural environment I see is much different. It is warm and cordial, yet still in touch with the rest of the world. It is laid back and down-home, but with an eye to the future. Most of all, it is a place that parents, children, and everyone else for that matter, can be proud to live in.

*12th Grade, Corning Union High School*

# CALIFORNIA RELIEF

*by Nathan McNamara*

The dust swirls, thick, caught by the storm,  
Sand in the wind, blinding,  
To breathe, to choke, inhaling sandpaper,  
The desert coughs in frustration, and no one can help but think of the indoors.  
The winds cuts razor sharp across the land and the sun glares, bleary, through the relentless churning clouds of sand.

I don't live there.

The sleet, wet and thick, blanketing the city, covers the rooftops and chimneys which belch pale gray smoke from futile coals.  
Light and life are dimmed.  
The pounding, deafening roar of hail on the thin roof of an old car scares the passengers, ruins the paint, and chases away cheer.  
The dull, incessant onslaught of cold covers the hard, lifeless stone and dull, lifeless people.  
Thick, smooth ice coats the narrow roads; no one can go anywhere, but why would they want to.

I don't live there.

The burning, scorching sun bakes the sidewalk in mid-afternoon.  
Indescribable; no sound, no movement.  
The air is dead; the countryside is numb, the town is melted.  
Heat rises from the pavement, cooking the air, distorting light. Mirages waver, suspended, deceiving. The few clouds in the empty sky do little to dull the pain.  
The searing, smoldering ball of fire sits unmoving in the aching blue ceiling.

I don't live there.

The ground, cracked, gapes into the barren skies. The dead weeds lie strewn on the rocks. The dry, empty air sits motionless, unstirred.  
A set of animal tracks lies undisturbed in the dirt. It is weeks old. The dirt looks frozen, immobile. Wood chips rest like silent, tiny boulders in the sand.  
The old, weathered, withered trees sag, too tired even to groan. Brown, parched leaves hang limply, waiting for the breeze that will never come. They are cracked, shriveled, devoid.  
The land is desiccated.

I don't live there.

The world is a soup.  
The people walk, stumbling, through their homes. The air conditioner broke from over use. They are irritable, drowsy, uncomfortable. Sweat clings to the side of their necks, beads, slides slowly down their backs. It drips from their noses and chins. Where they do not sweat, moisture collects anyway.  
The humidity is thick, relentless, pervasive in the heavy air.  
A fog, a mist, a warm clot, a sickening swamp.

I don't live there.

In the mornings, dew forms silently on the emerald surface. By dawn it has formed a single crystal-like sphere on the crisp, pointed tip of the leaf.

A calm wind ruffles the needles of the tall, proud pines nearby. The dew droplet falls.

The sweet, sharp notes of a songbird pierce the morning air.

A flutter, a quick dash of movement from a tree, and it floats. Red, yellow, blue, black, the plumage of this small bird reflects the early light.

The sun rises, cresting the hill. A white, pure illumination is given to the land. The clean air, cold and fresh, enlivens the spirits.

The green, lush foliage covers the landscape. Small animals skitter about. Life shifts, the night world giving way to the day.

Beneath the plants, grasses, brush, flowers, and vines, the damp, earthy dirt lies still and anticipating.

Behind the tall bushes and dense trees, modest houses for moderate people sit nestled.

People stir within, welcoming the day.

The atmosphere is calm. Life is abundant, but peaceful.

I would love to live there

And I do.

*12th Grade, North Monterey County High School*

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## **CORNING**

*by Lindsey Hoag*

This is the only place I know where I can burn up a tank of gas, just  
**driving**, watching, thinking.

As the sun sets behind the mountains, the moon rises, along with an intricate plan  
With the passing of the minutes, the hopes of an eventful evening slowly dissipate

I often feel like my life is moving faster than the minutes

Even when I spend time with my friends, in nothingness

Through the windshield of my car, I see the town that I live in

I wonder how long I will call it “**my town**”

It **scares** me

I complain about the population, and that I have to leave to really do something

Just to be like everyone else. To appear ambitious.

I want to be something good. I want to make my family proud.

I look into the rear-view mirror and see my past sitting behind me, still and safe

The blinker beckons me to make a turn in another direction, yet I hesitate

A red light, the obstacle. A choice, a chance.

When it turns green, I only know one thing

I want to drive without a destination, forever, but my future calls me, just like the empty light on the dash.

*12th Grade, Corning Union High School*



# **MINE IS CALIFORNIA**

*by Patricia Lopez*

Nobody knows this land like I do.

No one.

But I have seen the shadows of its earth under the night's brightness,

Tasted the sweat of the wind the days the sun won't rest.

Only I have been a witness to its water's true color.

I alone have been there to see the palm trees coil in their dance to echoes of the air.

Nobody understands you like I do.

No, nobody.

But I have seen you reprimand the frightened waves,

Torn and savored your fruit straight from your womb.

I have seen you glow with pride when painting over the night into the day.

I am the one that has tasted the life in you, I have smelled your green,

I have wept under your tears.

Nobody knows me like you do.

No one.

But you have heard me whisper into the dark when I am alone.

You alone know my deepest thoughts,

My sadness, my joy.

Only you have been there always. You are my oldest memory, my oldest friend.

And I alone stand at the edge of your endless water,

Knowing that you are mine, and mine alone.

I am home.

*12th Grade, North Monterey County High School*

# CENTRAL BLOCK

by Kelsey McCurdy

My dress clings to my boyish figure as I quicken my step to some internal drum. Time is like molasses, but I've got places to go, people to see, a lust to be inspired visually. I watch the people walk past me, one by one.

It's early afternoon in San Luis Obispo, and the businessmen are sitting in cafes, stuffing deli sandwiches into their stiff mouths. I watch as they chew their lunch, their thin lips devouring every morsel of food. Their eyes light up as young college girls strut across the crosswalk, towards a strip of stores jam-packed with the latest fashions. Others read the Wall Street Journal, as though religiously, taking each stock's daily worth as gospel.

I walk past the café, focusing on a handsome young Bohemian walking ahead of me. He plays a bongo drum, creating a beat in which I believe his soul was constituted. He smokes a cigarette with a casual ease, a Zen-like energy oozing from his pores, pouring from his lanky fingertips. I walk past him towards Garden Street and make a left.

On Garden Street, I see the usuals smoking their Camels, twisting their faces into expressions of hopeless angst. I think back to the first time I saw my dear swain, Chris. I remember him sitting in the corner of the closed jewelry shop, delicately curving his ink-drenched fountain pen across the span of notebook paper, creating a masterpiece with a simple flick of the wrist. There was such beauty in his spontaneity of line. These images cling at my collar and grow heavy. They tug at my ankles, devour me like a tasty treat. All I know is to keep walking.

It's late August, and the air is thick. I can feel the season wrap itself around my skin as the faint smell of beer creeps out from the central bars. It's 2 P.M., and the townsfolk are already drunk. I hear men yell at the cars waltzing by, their engines screaming in a reply of delight. I maintain a steady stride although my legs are tired, my feet numb. I should have worn different shoes. I sit down on a bench, presuming that the businessmen I saw earlier are folding up their papers as I rest, ready to get back to work and become cash money millionaires. Maybe I should opt for a change of scenery as well.

I get up and start walking once again, wishing I had pockets to jam my idle hands into. Clouds begin to blanket the city, and the sky grays like an old woman's skin. I pretend that the downtown streets are ancient wrinkles, laugh lines, past etchings of despair. The humans on these streets are only mere fragments of forgotten tales, lurkers that quickly vanish from the memory altogether. I walk across these stories, content in living my very own fable until the sky sags with weight, urging me to pay the \$1.25 fare and ride the long bus ride home.

*12th Grade, Morro Bay High School*

# **TERMITE HILLS**

*by Zachary Wills*

Oak trees warp into monoliths  
strangled by electrical wires.  
Rolling hills flattened,  
must make room for the masses.  
Termites,  
destroying their home as they build it.  
Familiarity and kindness,  
replaced by uniform blue vests and yellow smiles.  
No time for a face-to-face chat,  
just broken shouts through cellular devices.  
Families formed,  
on weak reception.  
Oil stained pavement,  
smog stifled sirens.  
White noise shattered,  
by the barren call of a crow;  
a solemn reminder,  
that this will all fall.

*11th Grade, Temecula Valley High School*

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# **MY TIERRA**

*by Eva Acosta*

My sore hands beat the dirt  
Like the sun beats my skin  
Fingers raw and tender  
Feel like hot peppers in a child's mouth

The stark contrast of pale yellows  
And shades of green glide into a point  
Rows of cartons sit numbed and harsh in their surroundings  
The dirt so barren  
I wonder how it ever gave birth

I pick the cabbage of its supple womb  
Watch it roll off my hands and into its cradle  
I see men  
Pick and pluck  
Cradle life  
In their own hands  
As they watch their lives roll with the pale leaves

Men like us don't belong here  
Like the cabbage taken from the womb  
It is only waiting to darken and spoil

*12th Grade, Temecula Valley High School*

# PRELUDE

*by Abraham Aragundi*

“Play the prelude of the first suite, and don’t forget you have destinations. Bach always takes you somewhere,” Maggie said. I took a deep breath, emptied my thoughts, and prepared myself to be taken into a journey of everlasting bliss. I placed my dark, coda bow on my soft, warm strings.

I gently commenced with the first luscious note that filled my heart with so much pleasure. I had already entered into Bach’s realm, a generous realm that invites one to question and forget at the same time.

Mountains and hills of notes amend to darkness and insecurity. I went up the proud heavenly stairs of notes and reached the fermata. A place where my cello and I share souls forever. My violoncello decided to speak to me; it revealed the story of two perfect beings lingering in God’s paradise—such perfection. Toward the end of the piece, my heart began to rebel and rebel, as to say, “This is too sacred for me.” I hit the last note and all was unmovable silence, a silence that respects and admires you.

I slowly grew invisible to the realm. I was back to reality. “That was heaven,” Maggie said.

I smiled and replied, “Yes, Bach is far greater than heaven. Words are not worthy of describing such a feeling.”

She then told me, “I have a friend that plays in a Baroque Orchestra, Musica Angelica. She will be so ecstatic to meet you.”

Later, I checked my inbox. Who is Jane? Her message stated, “Hi, this is Jane Levy, Maggie’s friend. There will be two tickets for you tonight. I’ll see you there, and enjoy.”

Such joy I felt, such joy! This meant so much to me; the opportunity to enter a cult of Baroque musicians was rather lovely.

I arrived at Grand Zipper Hall. A harpsichord was in the center of the stage. I felt the urge to get on stage and simply press down on a key just to feel the vibration of this Transylvanian instrument go through my fingers. To the right of the delicate harpsichord lay a mourning violin with its six gut strings and arched angelic bows. I had walked into a 17th century painting, a painting that forever will maintain its value in my soul. I sat down and waited for Milton’s glorious trumpets to command an army of cherubs.

Suddenly the right stage door opened and out came music’s servants. The old and wise crowd of white-haired clouds politely applaud. I felt the urge to scream and whistle.

The concert mistress came out in her long, dark dress and frizzy hair, graciously walking toward her ebony stand.

The commander of passion was ready to invite me into innocence.

The lights were dimmed to complement the tone of Bach’s hauntingly beautiful aire, a gift to mankind. I did not hear the music but listened. I felt pain as the Lament commenced. The violins and the crying violas were destined to meet one of my tears. My blood decided to stop its usual velocity and simply admire. “Oh, Bach, why do you summon the gray clouds in this luminous day?”

That day I felt the warmth and unity of every instrument, the place where Bach took me.

*11th Grade, Renaissance Arts Academy*

# **MY GUITAR**

*by Taylor Schlom*

## **The First Time He Held a Guitar**

He handled it like it was a priceless work of art.  
He picked it up and let it all come out.  
Although it sounded horrible through another person's ears,  
Through his ears, it was brilliant.

## **The First Performance**

His legs were shaking like it was below zero,  
Even though his palms were drenched with sweat,  
He thought that he was alone,  
But he had the "greats" with him in his mind.

## **His First Experience with a Drummer**

At first he plugged in,  
He and his guitar were alone in the room.  
Until the drums kicked in...  
Then he was accompanied by a beat on his long musical journey.

## **His First Band Practice**

Instead of being stuck as a radical virtuoso,  
he was joined by a bass and drums...  
At last his journey had begun.

*9th Grade, Corning Union High School*

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# **HOLLYWOOD**

*by Jessica Theresa Lewis*

Hollywood with its sidewalk of stars  
Lots of partyin'  
No one ever leaves the bars  
So many people, so little space  
Everyone who come here tryin' to win the race,  
From who will be the next American Idol  
And get their fifteen minutes of fame  
To those who want to be a household name.  
Some of the most beautiful people are found in Hollywood  
Like Christina Aguilera and Halle Berry  
But you get to look that beautiful after starving yourself  
And plastic surgery  
Actors, singers, and dancers come here  
For their time to shine  
But most never make it to the front of the audition line.  
"You, too tall. You, too fat. You're just ugly,  
What were you thinking wearing that?"  
Hollywood is prejudiced against certain types of people  
When it comes to the entertainment business  
No one is equal  
Either you're better than the others  
Or you're no one.

*12th Grade, Fairfax High School*

# **THRILLS OF DANCE**

*by Chelsey Hicks*

**“Dance isn’t a form; it’s a way of life.” –unknown**

## **The Gym**

When I open up the doors of the gym, I see the Corning Cardinal boys’ basketball team playing their hearts out on the court. The rooter’s section is filled with faithful fans wearing matching “crew” shirts. Family members and faculty cheer our boys on. Of course, our cheerleaders loudly cheer and occasionally show their perfect toe touches. The walls of the gym are covered with signs saying such things as “Go Cards,” and “Eat Em Up.” On the other side of the gym is the opposing team’s rooter’s section. Sometimes the two rooter’s sections get into screaming matches. The basketball games are always a lot of fun.

**“Dancers aren’t made of their technique, but of their passion.” –unknown**

## **Before the Routine**

“Chelsey, I am so nervous! I swear, I think I’m going to either pass out or puke before we even get on the court,” Kayla said dramatically to me.

“Don’t worry! You’ll be great, and you know it. My leotard is killing me, I hate wearing these stupid things!”

“I know, me too.”

“Hey, only 30 seconds left ‘til show time! Look how huge the crowd is!”

“Don’t tell me that... Everyone is going to see me mess up; I’ll probably fall flat on my face.”

“Don’t think that way; you won’t mess up.”

“Alright well, it’s time to line up...”

“Here we go! Good luck!”

**“It takes an athlete to dance, an artist to be a dancer.” –unknown**

## **Rules for Drill Team**

- \*Always be on time.
- \*Hair must be pulled back, and completely out of face at all times.
- \*No piercings or jewelry allowed while performing.
- \*Wear lots of make-up when you perform.
- \*Make eye contact with the audience.
- \*ALWAYS have a smile on your face.
- \*Be peppy in front of the audience.
- \*Use lots of facial expression, and show attitude while you perform.

**“We dance for laughter, we dance for tears, we dance for madness, we dance for fears, we dance for hopes, we dance for screams, we are the dancers, we create the dreams.” –unknown**

## **Stream of Consciousness**

“Okay 30 seconds to go... Oh my gosh, the crowd is so big tonight... look at all those people! I’m right in front of the rooter’s section! I hope I don’t mess up in front of all these people... Oh gosh, there’s Jeff, he better not watch me! Wait a second—who is that girl he’s with? No, don’t think about it. Just kick his butt later... I hope I do good. I hope I don’t mess up after that first turn... Oh great, Mom’s videotaping this! Okay, time’s up... halftime—here we go... chill, you can do this...”

**“To dance is to be out of yourself. Larger, more beautiful, more powerful.” –Agnes De Mille**

## **Performing**

I can't explain how many feelings I get the night of a basketball game before I perform. As I get my uniform on, I am so nervous. Freshman year, sometimes it was so bad I thought I would throw up. Now, I don't get as scared. Then, when we stride in through the doors of the gym, all eyes are on us, eager with anticipation. A feeling of nervousness and excitement hit me at the same time. As I finally start my performance, my heart is pounding. Many thoughts go through my head. "Is Jeff here? Don't mess up on the ground work!" But when I start, I shut my mind off and I just dance. I let all my feelings come out in my performance. As the routine ends and the crowd is cheering like crazy, I can't help but smile. It is the best feeling in the world. Then, my cue comes to turn and walk off the court in unison with my fellow dancers. As I do this, I feel a sense of pride and confidence. I run with my teammates up to the dance room to change, telling them with excitement, "I can't believe it! I didn't mess up once!"

**"Dancers are the athletes of God." –Albert Einstein**

## **Dear Diary,**

Tonight we performed our "Senior Routine" for Drill Team. For this routine, we dress up as old men and old women. When we perform it, we are supposed to be ourselves, only 50 years from now (well, except for the fact that some of us are dressed as men). I couldn't believe how alive I became in front of the audience. The crowd was already going crazy, cheering with anticipation as we walked onto the gym floor. I could hear my friends cheering for me as we walked into our beginning formation. It pumped me up and encouraged me to really go for it with my performance. When I saw my parents and my friends in the stands, this time I didn't feel embarrassed. I was excited. After the performance, as I breathed heavily, exhausted from dancing my hardest, the crowd went crazy, cheering and laughing at our humorous routine. The boys in the rooter's section started a chant- "Drill Team! Drill Team! Drill Team!" This was the most fun performance I have ever had. I can't wait for the "Grease" routine next week. I hope the crowd likes that performance just as much!

Yours Truly,  
Chelsey

**"Dancing with the feet is one thing, but dancing with the heart is another." –unknown**

## **Corning Observer Article**

Friday night, Corning High School's Drill Team did an awesome job again at halftime of the Varsity Boys' Basketball game. The "Senior Routine" they performed was a big hit with the audience, as they received a standing ovation at the end of their dance. The girls had the crowd loving it as they hobbled to the court with canes and walkers, dressed as themselves, 50 years later. They had even seemed to put on some weight for the performance... using pillows! The crowd was eating it up, cheering and laughing all the while. So come watch Drill Team at next week's Homecoming game when they perform their highly anticipated "Grease" routine. You will love seeing the girls dressed in adorable poodle skirts and the "boys" in cool leather jackets. This is a performance all the family will enjoy! They will be dancing to bits and pieces of several songs from the hit movie, *Grease*.

**"When you get the chance to sit it out or dance, I hope you dance... I hope you dance." –Lee Ann Womack**

*10th Grade, Corning Union High School*

# BISCUITS, GYPSUM, JEEPS

by Emmaline Hartel

I love to go camping. It's what makes life worth living and what keeps me sane. I remember the last time I went camping. It was in the desert between California and Arizona, in a ghost town near Blythe.

There live my Uncle Dave and Aunt Bevvv. Uncle Dave spends his time looking for adventures. By adventures, I mean mines. A long time ago, their home was a mining town, with a school, and an airport, and other long-forgotten things. Now, only a chimney and a sort of museum of old things that another couple has collected remain. And the many holes and tunnels made by the miners.

Those tunnels draw my family to this barren place. We explore gypsum mines, turquoise mines, copper mines, and sometimes even gold mines. Of course, all the high quality stuff has been taken, but you can still go to any of my relatives' homes and find piles of turquoise.

Amongst all those tunnels, one is far better than the rest: Patton's Mine.

General George Patton was reputed as the only man Adolf Hitler was afraid of. And this ghost town is where the general trained his troops.

Patton's Mine is the largest of the human anthills. While most are one or two levels, this former gypsum mine consists of seven.

The first two or three levels make it apparent that the mine is larger than the others. You are obviously underground, but the many openings and air shafts still bring in the sunlight. On the fourth level everyone turns on their flashlights. The fifth level is peculiar because it is the only level that your feet don't stir up dust when they land. The reason for this is that rain water once got in and turned the ground to hard cakes that crack when you step on them. If you turn your lights off now, you will experience true darkness, a phenomenon most people only think they know. This is darkness so complete that your eyes will never become adjusted. So dark that the blind can see more than you. As my grandpa says, "You could poke yourself in the eye and never see your finger."

The sixth level is a treasure trove of souvenirs. During the Cuban Missile Crisis of the 1960s, the government stocked this level with barrels of water and tins of Survival Biscuits. Survival Biscuits, I've found out, are shaped something like graham crackers, and wrapped in paper. I once brought up two tins of these biscuits, one as a room decoration, and the other to taste. Although I'm admittedly not the most sanitary person, I still wasn't about to follow my grandpa's lead in eating the biscuits off the rat-infested floor. His defense begins, "But they were wrapped in paper, and I knocked the dust off!" Mind you, this is the same man, who, deciding the Sani-Potti porta-john could make some money on eBay, dumped out the contents of his prize before putting it into his Geo Tracker.

Anyway, about the Survival Biscuits, I found out that you never want to eat these things. The aftertaste—as well as the during-taste—is horrible. I won't describe it to you on the basis that I can't remember how it tasted exactly, nor do I wish to.

From the sixth level, you can ascend a side shaft, which brings you to mine-car rails and multitudes of bats. I like bats, and once got hit in the head by one. It didn't hurt; it was just funny, especially since my older sister was freaking out (she doesn't like bats).

Now, the seventh level. That is the real mystery of Patton's Mine. I've never been on the seventh level, but I've seen it. Well, I've seen the huge steel door with the small barred window. Behind that door, legends tell of buried jeeps and maps and plans, all left by General Patton himself.

My crazy uncle promises to someday bring his Sawz—all to the door, so we can break into the forbidden area. Someday we might, and Patton's secrets may be revealed, but then again, not every secret can be out in the open. Some of them will remain buried deeper than tools can excavate.

11th Grade, Birmingham High School



# CALIFORNIA

by Stephanie Adams

One culture in California I find myself completely out of touch with is the culture of no cultures; it is rich with blandness, and it has no accents. Its people are pale, pink, tan, brown with powdered eyelids and expensive purses, shoes, pants, jackets. This ultimate Californian Anti-Culture has a cuisine made entirely of rich ethnic food somehow squeezed into commercial packages and Americanized enough to please the universal crowd. These people do not make tamales on Christmas, they do not pack bento lunches for their children, and they most certainly do not take the time to roll out their own pasta dough. The only cultural rituals consist of beautification: a religion of sacrificing health and skin to acquire an image. They do not frequent temples or churches; they frequent tanning salons, plastic surgeons, commercialized clothing stores with bright labels and outlandish patterns. One enters this religion flesh ugly, and emerges as plastic beautiful. Nirvana is the attainment of perfect radiance.

These are not my people. I am Mexican-German-American-What, but this does not mean my family makes tamales on Christmas, or that I live in East L.A., or that I am rich with culture at all. In some ways I am part of the Anti-Culture; I love Panda Express and Yoshinoya. However, I know enough to love dim sum and shabu-shabu, real chow mein and real teriyaki chicken. Somehow the art of painting my body with chemicals and cosmetics has always been lost on me. I do not look like one of the Anti-Culture; my eyelids are not shadowed, my eyelashes are not inked, and my skin is a natural brown never attained through self-tanning.

The Anti-Culture is both embarrassing and amazing. Scientists in California, the Gods of Anti-Culture, research and research for companies and advertising to figure out how to design the best product and packaging, the most appealing image for the consumer. How to make smoking look good, tanning look good, laser surgery, liposuction, teeth bleach, fast food. But no one seems to be researching how to solve global warming, how to eliminate poverty in the streets of L.A., how to keep you alive. They are researching how to package death. Make it look good. If there is one mantra about California, L.A., the Anti-Culture, it is Live Fast, Die Young, and Be Famous.

*11th Grade, Ramona Convent Secondary School*

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## A MOMENT HELD IN TIME

by Carina Valle

She was competing in barrel racing. The sky was clear and you could even smell the spring air. As she was coming at full speed around the last turn, her horse fell and trampled on her arm. The fresh blood from her injured arm would be a memory she would never forget.

\* \* \*

It was a hundred and ten degrees outside. She could feel the dense, moist sticky air on her tan body. Her take-off would occur in less than thirty seconds. The block was wiggling around under her tight grip. In an eye's blink she was in the ice cold water. She felt as though she had dived into a world of no worries. That feeling was one of a lifetime.

\* \* \*

Ever since they locked eyes, they knew they were going to be best friends. You could feel the tension in the air that hung between them. The eagerness to talk to one another was greater than the fear they both felt. When the first word was spoken, it was like someone took bricks off my shoulder. She was a remarkable human being.

\* \* \*

The sun's rays were striking her reddened cheek. It felt as if though all eyes were on her. The bell rang like a bullet that shot right through her body. What she had been waiting for so long was finally there.

*9th Grade, Corning Union High School*

# LIVING IN CALIFORNIA: UPWARD MOBILITY

by *Aria Hanna*

I have been living in California the whole fifteen years of my life. I have never lived anywhere else, even though I have always dreamed of it. I have lived in many different cities and homes and been happy in most of them. The first home I lived in was in Echo Park, Los Angeles. I was born in that home on my parents' bed. My brother was as well, almost two years after me. This house was on a street called Avon, which was up on a steep, hill-like road, with many trees and bushes all around. I do not remember much from that house, but I am pretty sure we lived there, my mother, my father, my brother, and I, until I was probably a couple months old. Sometimes we still go and visit that house, but it has changed much more now.

The second house we lived in was also in Echo Park. I remember this house was also on a steep, hill-like road, which had many steps leading up to the house. It was medium-sized, with a big, beautiful backyard, and a big backyard porch. It had a huge tree in the backyard that my dad built a tree house in. Despite all the great qualities of this house, I remember some not-so-good qualities. I remember we used to hear gun shots outside almost every day and night, and it scared me so much I was practically crying. I was terrified that one day someone might come to our house and we would be stuck at gunpoint. I also remember there were these crazy people who lived across the street from us. Basically every day we would hear what sounded like a woman being beaten by her husband and screaming and yelling. I think even one day we may have seen them throwing things outside and yelling at each other. It was horrifying. The last thing I remember was the time when we just got back from a trip. We were bringing our suitcases in the front door, so we left it wide open for a few minutes, and within that short time, we were robbed, and most things in our suitcases were taken. We found our suitcases thrown out on the steps, with clothes and things thrown all over. So as you can tell, this house was not so wonderful, or at least just the city. We lived there until I was about two or so.

I believe the third house we lived in was in Sierra Madre. I really enjoyed living there...well, for the most part. Sierra Madre is such a wonderful town. It is so beautiful...there are trees everywhere...and the people are so incredibly friendly and nice. We went to a great pre-school and kindergarten as well. The teachers were so nice to us, and we met so many people and made so many friends there. The house we lived in was pretty big. It had a nice-sized dining room, kitchen, and living room. Downstairs it had a huge room, where my mom had her office. The backyard was unbelievable. It was so huge! There were beautiful trees, bushes, and green grass everywhere. I remember there were a bunch of trees that my brother and I would always climb on, and we always had a blast. The front yard was great too. When my grandmother lived with us, she planted a nice little rose garden there. There was also a huge driveway that was perfect for when we had many guests over who needed to park their cars. However, the weird part about living there was that there were these nice, but strange, little boys named Sean and John who lived next door. They would always come over and want to play with my brother and I, and they would never leave us alone! The other bad part about living there was that we ended up having to leave the house because strange things were happening with the landlord, and I believe she was charging too much for us to rent the house. So we left this wonderful house for good, when I was about four or so.

The next house we lived in was in Arcadia. The city is pretty nice, a bit expensive, but we managed to find a decent house there. Living here was not so fabulous though. The house was large...we had two enormous living rooms, one with a beautiful fireplace in it. This was the first house we ever had a fireplace in. I remember my mom having her office in the second living room, but it was too small and cramped. The kitchen wasn't too big, and neither were the bedrooms. We had nice-sized back and front yard porches though, with a pretty big backyard and front yard, and the kindergarten I went to in this city was satisfying. Unfortunately, I remember the time my mom's car was broken into and her purse was stolen from it. We also had very weird, obnoxious neighbors. The most important thing I remember was how our roof would always leak when it rained. We tried to get our landlady to help us, but she didn't do anything about it. So we decided to leave when I was six or seven.

The last house we have lived in is in Monrovia, the one we are in now...the best house of all. I remember first moving here when I was going into first grade at an excellent elementary school..., and picking the room that I wanted. My grandmother lived with us, so she had her own room, the biggest one in the house, which I got as my room when my grandmother moved away after she found a house for herself. So I shared a room with my brother once again. This house has a fairly large backyard, with two huge orange trees, and a peach tree, which is cut down now. When we bought the house, it came with a Jacuzzi, which I remember hanging out in practically every hour of the day. We would always invite people over at parties and gatherings, and, of course, the Jacuzzi was the main event. Unfortunately, the Jacuzzi broke, and so we had to get a new one. My dad built a tree house in the peach tree for my brother's seventh birthday.

The tree started to die after a while, and so we cut it down...tree house and all. My dad also built us a beautiful Sukkah in the backyard, which is a traditional Jewish house that the Jews build and stay in on the Jewish holiday of Sukkot. Every year on Sukkot, we always have the Sukkah still there for us, so we don't have to worry about making a new one every year. My dad planted a bunch of flower and vegetable gardens all over the backyard as well. The front yard is fairly large as well, with a huge, beautiful tree that my dad built another great tree house in. It also has big, magnificent, jungle-like plants growing around the outside of the house. Inside the house, the dining room is a decent size, as is the living room and the kitchen. We have a laundry room in a part of the kitchen, which isn't too big, unfortunately. All four of the bedrooms are nice sizes, which really helps for a family of four. My parents' room is a good size, my mom's office is just about almost the perfect size, my brother's room is a great size for him, and my room is the biggest in the house, so it is just perfect for me! My brother and I have our own bathroom, which is basically only mine, and my parents' have their own bathroom, which works out wonderfully. We have done much remodeling to the house lately, like painting, moving around and buying new furniture, getting central air and heating throughout the house, and much more. We have gone to three different schools while living here, which shows how much we love living here and how we do not want to move. We are also buying this house for the first time, which is great, because none of us want to leave anytime soon. We have friendly new neighbors living next door now, fixing up and remodeling the house completely. There were hardly any bad memories in this house...mostly all good, from the time we got our first dog to the time we had my Bat Mitzvah celebration. We have lived here for about nine years, and I definitely do not plan on moving soon, until I am off to college.

I must say, living in California has been both such a struggle and a joy. I do not think I will ever want to live anywhere as beautiful and lovely as here, despite the bad memories living in those terrifying cities. Living in California has changed my life...if I lived in any other state, I have no idea how different and strange my life would be. California has got to be the best place on earth! We have theme parks like Disneyland, California Adventures, and Raging Waters that I am pretty sure they do not have in any other part of the country. We have beautiful beaches, huge palm trees, golden sand, and the shimmering blue ocean. I sure do not know what I would do without the fabulous Golden State of California.

*9th Grade, Renaissance Arts Academy*

# DO YOU LIVE NEAR ANY MOVIE STARS?

by Candace Call

## Prologue

How do other people outside the state view California? Since I have been to several different countries and many different states, I have come in contact with many diverse people, but all with the same view of California. It is interesting to see how all these people can have basically the same ideas, and misconceptions, about how all of California is.

Many people only know about California from what they see on TV and in movies. Thanks to TV shows like “The O.C.” and countless movies set in Southern California and San Francisco, people have stereotyped all of California to be like the areas they have seen on the screen.

In reading this please don’t assume I’m not fond of Northern California. I still have loyalty to this part of California, even if there isn’t a beach in sight.

Myth #1: All of California is like Los Angeles—beaches and non-stop entertainment.

## La Playa

Dear Diary,

I have just arrived in San Fernando, Spain! It’s so hot here you wouldn’t even believe it. I had to ride on the train for ten hours to get here. Along with that, the heat, and jet lag by the time I got there, I was about ready to crawl into a bed and not come out for a week.

After meeting up with my host family at the train station, we headed out to lunch. We started up a conversation right away and talked about everything from the weather, to religion, to how life in Spain is different from life in California. It was a fun experience talking over a big bowl of seafood salad. The restaurant was nicely air conditioned, and I was just beginning to relax.

I was feeling pretty confident answering all their questions until they asked me, “Vivas cerca de la playa?” What the heck was “playa?” Suddenly the restaurant didn’t feel so cool, and I could feel the leather seats starting to stick to the back of my legs. I gulped, and responded with fake confidence, “Si.” When we got to their house I sneaked a look at my dictionary, and discovered that it meant beach. Now that makes me wonder what else I said yes about. I think they asked me if I lived in a really big house. They probably think I live in some mansion in Beverly Hills, and I go surfing every week. Oh well, let them think I’m some rich white girl from Southern California. Besides, how could I explain to them, in my Spanish, about Los Molinos? Well, Adios!

## Foreigner

“Are you from around here?” A native asks me while I’m in Spain.

“No, soy de California” I respond in my American-accented Spanish.

“Oh, really? How cool!” she replies.

She then turns to her brother and, as I walk off, I am sure she is telling about how cool California is, and how it must be so fun to live by all those movie stars. Little does she know that I live on a farm with walnut trees, nowhere near Hollywood, or any other big city for that matter.

## Leti’s Letter

Hello! What’s up?? Candace, I’m Leticia—and I’m well. Excuse my mistakes, but I don’t know writing English very well :) Other day I recorded when you stayed in San Fernando with me, really, I passed very well with you, and I hope that you’re coming new to San Fernando and so you’ll meet my friend, Alejandra... and Claudio. If you ever visit Spain you can go to my house OK? ☺ I see a series “O.C.”~ New Port is near to your house?

Love,

Leticia Moreno Cordero

**Myth #2: Everybody in California surfs, and the weather is perfectly warm in the summer and pleasantly cool in the winter.**

### **Opposites**

California is a big place. We have every kind of climate imaginable, from desert and coastal climates, to mountain and Mediterranean climates. We have huge cities, and many fruitful, agricultural areas.

Some people get this image in their minds that all of California is like Southern California. For instance, when two German exchange students came to live with us, they were sorely disappointed. It was very different from what they had imagined. They couldn't believe we lived twenty minutes away from our school, and our town had only 1200 people in it. They didn't know how they were going to survive three months in this little farming community.

Why are people so surprised, and disappointed, when they come to Northern California? Really it's not that this area is so bad. It is just completely opposite from what they expect. I admit it is quite a shock if you are expecting gated communities and inviting beaches. However, when the shock wears off, you begin to appreciate the beauties this area has to offer: the green pastures with cows and sheep, the blossoming orchards in the springtime, the rolling hills, quiet lakes, and the mountains with their forests of fir and pine.

In the end, our German students were really sad to leave. They came to appreciate this underestimated part of California and enjoy it for its subtle beauties and peaceful, rural way of life.

**Myth #3: California has all the best products. Anything you buy here must be cool because it's from California.**

### **The Coolest State**

My cousin Amy comes from a big city in Utah. There are three malls in her city; all are over twice as big as our lone mall in Chico. When she came to visit last summer, one of the first things she wanted to do was go to the mall.

Why, I asked myself, would she want to go to our minuscule mall, when she has so many more options at home? The only reason is that our mall is in California. She didn't care that there wasn't much there; she just wanted to show off to her friends at home, that her clothes came from California, the coolest state in the U.S.A.

**Myth#4: Everything is better in California. Period. End of discussion.**

### **Cons to Los Molinos**

It's junky.

Many people are poor.

You have to drive a lot to get anywhere.

There is nothing to do.

It is a slow town.

Everyone knows what everyone else is doing.

There are no movie stars, except for Tom Hank's mom, but who cares about his mom?

There are no beaches.

Disneyland is twelve hours away.

**\* Can't this be the same in other small towns too?\***

**Pros to Los Molinos**

It's not crowded.

It's quiet.

You can still see the stars at night.

You can be loud and not worry about anyone calling the cops.

People are friendlier.

Traffic isn't even a word.

Crime is a lot lower.

You get to think up lots of creative things to do for fun.

There are a lot of opportunities for involvement and success in our small high school.

**\*Maybe Los Molinos isn't so bad after all\***

**California is Everything**

California is all coastline

like classical music is only for old people

like a nerd always wears glasses

like a cow is always spotted black and white

California is one big city

like a jock is always stupid

like all babies are cute

like all Americans have blonde hair and blue eyes

California has celebrities on every street corner

like all cafeteria food is gross

like if you cross your eyes they will stay that way

like if you break a mirror it's seven years bad luck

California has perfect weather

like if you shave your hair it will grow in thicker

like babies come from storks

like Tom Cruise is my next door neighbor

*10th Grade, Corning Union High School*

# **FOOTBALL TOWN**

*by Brent Bickley*

## **Preface**

To many people, a community's love of high school sports, especially football, probably seems simple minded. But this paper is about a small, rural California town whose spirit and tradition are envied by its rivals.

Beginning with children in youth programs and progressing through high school, one can feel the excitement as a participant. Later, as adults, the spirit to participate as fans takes over, everyone urging on their teams and maintaining a sense of involvement.

## **My Home Town**

Corning is a small town in Northern California; the population is 6,886 people, and our town has some of the best sports traditions in all of high school sports. Corning is known for its olives and football. Corning is nestled among some of the most bountiful olive groves in California. Our football teams have claimed several section championships.

The six Northern Athletic League teams are Corning, Central Valley, West Valley, Las Plumas, Anderson, Yreka. All of these high schools have a football team, and all are pretty respectable at playing. Last season, Corning won the freshman and junior varsity leagues while the Varsity faltered in third place.

## **The Passion**

Dear Diary,

The people in Corning live and breathe sports year round. The most popular sport is football. Young children to grandparents can be seen cheering youth football as well as the high school program. Our most bitter rivals are the Orland Trojans and the Red Bluff Spartans. The games are always spirited, with no team ever a clear favorite. The younger kids, not yet in high school, play football for the Corning Lions. The kids dream of how someday they will be out playing for the Cardinals under the lights on a Friday night, hoping to win a section championship. The reason I know this is because I was once a Lion and now am a Cardinal on the junior varsity squad. I'm looking forward to playing on the varsity and winning the big games against our rivals. At this time next year, I hope I will be on the varsity team.

Brent

**As Coach Hall and Coach Minto say, "Football is about Jackets and Boards."**

## **Athletes Wanted**

Corning High School is looking for some tall, strong, athletic, high school students that also have the "need to win" attitude. We have some of the best coaches in the country who have a need of talented and dedicated athletes. If you decide to play for us, you will only improve our chances of winning a section title. If you win a championship, you will not have to worry about what you will do after high school. College recruiters will come asking you to go their college. College students are available to those high school student athletes needing help. Summer jobs are also available to potential athletes. If you are interested, please call 555-9000.

In Corning, most of that is not true. The teachers here at Corning push you to be the best, athletically and academically, and they will not pass you just because you are an outstanding athlete. The grades you get, you earn. Corning is not like the movies where all the great athletes have to do is show up to class. The teachers are not just going to give a grade. They will try to work with you to help you raise your grades. The teachers are also very much caught up into school spirit and encourage everyone to share in the fun.

**“You guys play each game to get a pay check at the end of the season. When you win league, that will be the biggest paycheck.” -J.V. Assistant Coach Billy Torres.**

### **Touchdown**

The wonderful, loud chirp of the referee’s whistle signaled another Cardinal touchdown.

The crowd roaring, the band playing the fight song, and the cheerleaders cheering, are all part of Friday night.

This doesn’t always happen, but when it does everybody is happy.

We can feel the vibes of the fans.

The feeling of winning is one of the best feelings alive; the thought of knowing you did your best to win, the feeling of hoisting the cool trophy in the air.

When we jog onto the field for warm-ups, we can smell the freshly cut grass and the freshly painted lines.

Only on Friday nights, do the Cardinal stadium lights shine so brightly that they can be seen from I-5.

**“It takes a West Side League team to show a NAL team how to win” -Coach Hall.**

### **Football Talk**

Welcome, Corning Lions. As a Coach, I’m looking forward to having you on my team. Did you know the people in Corning live and breathe sports year around? Last season my son was on the NAL championship J.V. squad. But oh, how he wanted to be on the field helping the varsity win the big rivalry games against Orland and Red Bluff. The Varsity went to the playoffs but was eliminated in the first round against Central Valley. We have won many section titles but never a state title because California does not have a state championship for football. But in my son’s senior year they are supposed to have one for the first time in history. I hope they come through with this idea. I hope that in my son’s senior year he can play for a state title. I hope we can have the same success as some of the other teams. All it takes to win is a little bit of sweat and blood.

**“Defense wins championships” Coach T–Tom Tomlinson.**

### **The Big Game**

A couple of years ago, my cousin played in the section championship game. I went to watch and cheer the Varsity Cards to victory. When they won, I could feel the warmth in the stadium. When I saw how happy each person was, I knew I wanted to experience that feeling too. During the game, it sprinkled a little bit so that the field was muddy. After that game, the lush green field was turned into a mud pit, and my cousin Ty and his friends dove through the mud. They didn’t care how muddy they got; they just won a section title. Their smiles were shining right through the mud. When the photographer took a picture of the trophy, everybody on that team was happy; even the kids that didn’t play much knew how special this was. Those moments will stay with me forever. I want to win one just like they did, because everybody had fun on that team.

### **Epilogue**

I have heard people from neighboring towns comment about the strong community support, the supportive fans, and the always-tough teams Corning is known for. Some of these people say how they wish their teams and town could have the same tradition and support as Corning. For this, I am glad to say I am from Corning High School.

*10th Grade, Corning Union High School*



# **MY LIFE IN CALIFORNIA**

*by Andrea Harrison*

This is my home  
It's where I belong  
I put my yellow thongs on  
And head to the beach  
Here I can smell the ocean breeze

On my way to the picnic  
I stroll to the park  
And hear little dogs bark  
Dad's on the barbeque grilling up meat  
The smell is making me squirm in my seat

School is here  
Time to fear  
So much work to do  
I feel like an animal in the zoo

The time is passing quick  
Thank goodness because school is making me sick  
Work, work, work, I never stop  
Knowing my education will put me on top

The rainy season has come  
Big gray clouds are no fun  
I see a beautiful rainbow  
When the rain stops  
That's when I know  
That living in California  
Is the only way to go

*9th Grade, Pacifica High School*

# **CALIFORNIA NOSH**

*by Allison Swenor*

“Can I have a California Nosh, please?”

“That’ll be \$4.93 at the window.”

Super seed bagel baked to perfection and warmed to softness

Schmeared with mustard and mayonnaise.

It smells perfect and stylish and cultured.

Fresh green sprouts and tomato,

Grown beautifully the natural way,

Are sandwiched

Between salty tuna mix

To make the ultimate meal.

Can’t forget the chique avocados,

And the sliced pickle on the side.

Perfect balance of food groups,

Healthy, popular, and quick-to-eat.

California Nosh is the best of its kind.

Recycled paper bag with one napkin

Handed to you in the drive-thru window

So you can get to the movie on time, the appointment on time,

the meeting on time, the date on time.

Versatility and nutrition don’t stop the flow of life.

*12th Grade, North Monterey County High School*

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# **CHANGES**

*by James DeAngelo Berry*

See growing in these times is sometimes hard

We’re dealing with so-called friends that try to make you think the poison out there is good for your body

Then we’re dealing with cold-hearted teens who like to harass you and torment you every single day

Then we’re dealing with our appearance around our so-called friends

Making sure we got certain name brand clothes, so nobody won’t make fun of your  
off-brand clothes

And some of us try to be somebody we’re not, just to attract certain people

And then life likes to throw curve balls at you

Somebody dear to you passes away

Your whole life does a 180 degree turn

Everything is going fast as the years go by, still hurting from your loss

Now you’re at the point when your life is settling down

After moving four different times and to four different schools

You’re making the right friends that are not into putting that poison in their bodies

You get along with everybody; everybody gets along with you

Now this is where growing up gets fun

*9th Grade, Grant Union High School*

# **SEARCHING FOR IDENTITY**

*by Jon Beaty*

Where is California's identity?  
Is it in the trunk of the Redwood,  
the mist of the ocean?  
The beams of the Golden Gate,  
the lights of the cities?  
Behind the O in the Hollywood sign?  
Zooming down the Matterhorn,  
resting on the Queen's deck?  
Where is the spirit of California hiding?  
Well, look in the mirror,  
It's staring back at you.

*9th Grade, Pacifica High School*

# **CALIFORNIA DREAMING**

*by Amanda Truong*

I lay on the streets of L.A.  
Where I sit and cry each and everyday  
I just want to say,  
“California, please pray.”

I have a daughter,  
I don't know her father.  
There isn't any food or water,  
How do I feed my lovely daughter?

From begging and digging through the street,  
We had enough money for us to eat.  
We saw a man, who didn't look neat,  
But his smile was sweet.

His skin was really light,  
He looked like he needed a bite,  
I couldn't get him out of my sight,  
So I gave him some food and he looked all right.

It turns out he's a wealthy man,  
He then offered me some land.  
An offer that was not refused,  
The answers to my prayers had been issued.

I turned the land into a homeless shelter,  
For those less fortunate than me.  
For this act of giving never ends,  
I made some new friends.

I have found a better life in California,  
Through the kindness of one man.

*9th Grade, Pacifica High School*

# DEAR GRANDPA

*by Amanda Davis*

Dear Grandpa,

I've been so busy with school and church that I let time pass me by sometimes. I still miss you and think about you more as I'm getting older. These are days when I wish you were still near, and could see what I'm growing up to be. I think you would have been proud of me that I'm going to college to do what I really want to do—not for the money either. I still live in Capay with Mom and Dad and Paul. I think Dad misses you more now that he's retired and had the same health problems you had when you were younger. Even though he talks about moving way from here, I know he won't. There will never be another Capay for us. Time is slow and relaxing here; no one needs to rush or leave any sooner than they want to. Dad loves Capay just as much as I do, but you already knew that.

I want to live here forever. You would too if you could see this view, smell and feel the wind die down during a summer sunset. If you could only be here when the rain falls softly on the earth on a cool January evening. There are days when I wonder how much more beautiful the mountains might look if it were fifty years into the past. Maybe even a hundred. What would the land look like, I wonder? Could the actual place my house rests on once have been a pioneer's campfire, or an Indian's village?

My main question has become, "What makes Capay so simple, and why hasn't it become a city like those around it so long ago?" John Bidwell once called Chico, 'El Rancho Chico', but it now has its own college and baseball team. I don't think poorly of cities, of course, Grandpa, since you lived in one once, but I have always felt secure in Capay. Never have I moved, even to another house. There is something peaceful about Capay that causes one to stay, as if time slows down. Do you think time can really stop? I know it sounds silly, but that's what I feel like after coming home from a busy vacation to the city or even after a long day of school. Both of my parents came from cities, one even from another state. They found Capay by chance, and saw no reason to leave. There are people in Capay who have lived here for many generations. Some are even from the two families that supposedly started this farming district. I wonder how this came about, and what made them stay?

Capay means stream in the language of the Wintun Indians. We now know that Wintuns occupied a great portion of northern California before miners and families came to settle. In 1844, a pioneer by the name of Josefa Soto was granted a piece of land in Northern California. Not only was Josefa a woman buying her own land in the 1800's, but she also succeeded in starting a farming district without the help of anyone. Manuel Micheltoarena, the Mexican Governor of the Department of California, gave her the land. Although quite a few stories have been written about Josefa, it's hard to say how she knew about the land. The land lay on the western bank of the Sacramento River and north of the mouth of the River Capay (Stony Creek). It extended five leagues from south to north and two leagues from east to west.

Josefa's goal was her own cattle ranch, and for her, this was the land to do it with. The land was deeded to many people up until 1910. After all that, all of the people owning portions of land were able to farm and grow crops or even start small businesses. This land was developed and known as El Rancho Capay. In 1917, the first church of Capay was established. By 1924, three churches had made their mark and even a few schools formed. Many small cities began this way too, with people owning portions of land and expanding with buildings and providing more jobs for people. But Capay never became a city; it was barely able to be a district.

What makes all of this history of Capay enriching to me is that I'm living in the middle of the excitement. Grandpa. Did you know that the first church ever built in Capay still has relations attending the church I go to? At the end of the road I live on, is the Sacramento River where many Wintun tools have been found. Every day of my life I can see the same mountains and the same sunset that Wintuns saw when they first settled here.

Everyone needs a Capay to come home to or at least visit, don't you think so? Some place that has importance to them and serves as a refuge where time slows down, and sometimes stops. I want to live here forever, and I will. My fiancé and I will move two blocks away and continue being a part of Capay. We will have our own farm to grow and harvest. Some day people will discover Capay as I have done, and they will see how such a family of people cannot be torn apart by cities or religions. They will finally understand what is so serene about Capay, about a place that has found a way to pause time. I now know a way to express Capay in writing. Thank you for listening, Grandpa, and letting me stop time with you.

Love, Your Granddaughter

*12th Grade, Corning Union High School*

# THE BATTLE FOR MONO LAKE

by Tyanna Schlom

Dark clouds smother the sky, threatening rain as I walk along the lakeshore. Thunderheads have imposed their presence here the entire week, and give no sign of taking their leave. Lightning cracks open the nearby mountain crest as I head back towards the car. I knew my last day at Mono Lake wouldn't bring me the sun-drenched weather that so many flock to California for. I didn't care—just being in this place was enough for me. It was my last taste of the magic of Highway 395, of the lonely high desert and its solid mountain enclosures—there is nowhere in California, or the world, like it. Tucked away in California are these mountains and deserts, in forgotten valleys, distant forests, and hidden canyons where an untamed spirit and grandeur remain. Seagulls catch the updraft above the blackened, choppy waters. Humanity fades away, and nature comes into focus. A place where time ends and life begins—a primordial sea: brine shrimp, alkali flies, and tufa towers that pools in the sagebrush bowl below the backdoor of Yosemite. Even the air smells pure and clean here. Earth and sage, salt and water all mix and cleanse the soul's palette. I ease my way between the guard posts of white and chalky tufa towers, memorials to an enduring battle: the war to save Mono Lake. A place of great struggles and raw beauty, the lake is a reflection of both prehistoric past and modern efforts to keep it alive. The fight between two great forces of California—the water-thirsty beast of Los Angeles, and the group of grassroots citizens that banded together to stop the destruction of one of the last great places of the region, culminated at this lonely place. Mono Lake is the spirit of California, a place rich in beauty that can so easily be destroyed.

High school geography textbooks tell us that on the leeward side of a mountain range there is a rain shadow—an arid region beyond the mountains where precipitation is scarce. I contemplate this information as I turn away from the wind. Gusts sweep over the lake, creating miniature-breaking waves. The saline brine churns salt molecules into the atmosphere and disperses them. I close my eyes and suddenly it is no longer Mono Lake—it's the sea, and I'm breathing in the soggy, salty air of the Pacific. I open my eyes again. The ocean has given way to the shrinking inland sea of Mono, and the heavens pour down on me. I remember that geography textbook again, and how your experiences can be so different from what you read. A book can say that Mono Lake is just a barren wasteland, but the people who have actually explored the basin know better. I run back to the car, realizing I left my jacket there. As I move up to the parking lot, I notice the markers that the people of the Tufa Reserve placed, carefully noting the water levels of years past. Mono Lake was not so salty, not so shallow once. The creeks that once flowed into it were rich in life, fragile ecosystems that were carelessly destroyed by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, diverted to feed its own needs instead of Mono Lake.

As you drive down Highway 395 through the Owens Valley on a windy day, you can taste the bitter, biting wind as it stings your eyes and mouth—the product of LA's parched mouth, emanating from a dried up playa. Once blue like Mono, it is the now deceased Owens Lake: a dry bed that is no longer a source of life, but a creator of stinging alkali dust storms. The only place these acrid storms do not penetrate is in your enclosed car. But in the metropolis' growing thirst for water, the Owens River and its Lake were no longer enough to satisfy its ever-lengthening drinking straw. The DWP gradually stretched its arm farther north, until it seized the Mono Basin. Slowly it began to choke its creeks—the very arteries it needed to survive, its green and blue veins of life died away. And the lake shrank.

But there were people who knew better. The effects that were beginning to show on the lake shocked them. When the shore drew back, it exposed a land bridge to an important nesting area, leaving thousands of migratory birds, who had made their home on the islands of Negit and Paoha for ages, exposed to predation and death from coyotes. A man named David Gaines formed the Mono Lake Committee, a group of brave souls who stood up for a wild land that could not. They worked to make sure that Los Angeles should never be allowed to

do such a thing again. With the efforts of the Committee and others, the Lake could now fight back. Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area formed, and the restoration of the lake began. Slowly, the green and blue hues of life once again returned to Rush Creek and the other tributaries that end their journeys at the lake. Mono reclaimed the land connecting the islands. Although progress has been made, it will be many long years before Mono will return to its original capacity. No longer does Los Angeles take its water mercilessly and heedlessly, and now acts with a much more responsible hand to the land. Mono Lake won its first battle, yet there are—and unfortunately will be—many others. The latest is a proposed subdivision within its boundaries of the Scenic Area, now threatening the environmental integrity and raw beauty of the basin. The proposal would line Mono's western shore with a group of tract homes. The committee continues to fight its progress with grassroots supporters. Only time will tell whether their endeavor will be triumphant over the encroaching development that still threatens Mono Lake.

Turning onto the highway now, I drive back to Lee Vining, but slowly, with the highest setting on my windshield wipers as a deluge of precipitation pounds down on my car. Eventually, I pull off of the road altogether and wait for the cloudburst to pass. Slowly, the rain passes, moving to the south. I am able to see the crest of the Sierra again, veiled at the top with the white gauze of falling snow. Driving to the very foot of these mountains, I enter the hamlet of Lee Vining, home of the Mono Lake Committee. The doors are open for the day, welcoming many others and me. We marvel at the accounts and artifacts of the Battle of Mono Lake. Photographs, exhibits, and maps all chart the progress of the lake as it gradually regains health. The committee headquarters is the fort that protects Mono Lake, and people who share a love for this area are its soldiers—the ones who help keep the lake alive, the people who care, who take action. When you first visit the committee, you can see people who are marveling at Mono for the first time. When I went to Lee Vining, I did not just see solitary people at the visitor's center. I saw families, friends on vacation, people from Los Angeles and elsewhere, all learning and sharing their newly-found knowledge about Mono Lake, becoming excited and inspired to help save the lake. They are part of a spirit of optimism in California, one that believes to change things for the better, the power lies in the hands of the people. A dream that believes you can solve any problem if you care enough about it. However, these optimistic people must have caution.

Not everyone knows the power and history behind Mono Lake, nor do they bother to find out. Everyone does not share the fight of those who care for the lake. Some people wish to develop the land surrounding Mono, and want to build a vacation home there, or create more real estate. Others do not care at all, because they have not taken the time to explore the lake, or even travel outside their own sprawling city or suburb. For every few people who stop there, a few hundred drive by, on their way to Yosemite, Reno, or other places along 395. Those few hundred will never support efforts to save the lake. But, for the committee and the people who care, all they can do is hope that the ones who do stop on their way elsewhere will have been inspired by the efforts to keep Mono Lake alive. For, with any luck, the people who do take time to stop will be the ones to help save the last pockets of wild California, which even as I write, the new subdivision or vacation home developments draw closer to.

*12th Grade, Corning Union High School*



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

# EIGHTEEN

by Bryana Turner

I have always been an enigma to most people; they can never figure me out. Once they think they have me down, I throw them another twist. According to Carl Gustav Jung, “The most terrifying thing is to accept oneself completely.” I tend to disagree. Accepting yourself is the easy part; not knowing whether people will accept you or not is the terrifying part. I am half African American and half Lithuanian Russian, but I don’t look like a stereotype for either part. When people try to guess my ethnicity, they first presume that I am Latina, Pilipino, or Asian. Once I tell them that I am none of those ethnicities, they give up. When I tell them that I am half African American and half Russian they don’t believe me and say, “You don’t have black hair” or “You don’t act black.” I am a combination of hope, cultural history, dreams, tolerance, and acceptance.

My great grandfather on my mother’s side is of Lithuanian Russian heritage with Jewish culture thrown in. In 1916, being of ethnic minority in Russia and fearing reconignment into the Russian army, for which he had already served, he fled his homeland in the shadow of the night and arrived in the “land of the free,” America. He listened to the radio and read the newspaper daily to become fluent in his new language. After his first year in America, he was able to save and send for his wife and three children to come over seas. My great grandmother used that money to pay a “coyote” to sneak her and her three young children out of Russia. Diamonds were sewn into the lining of the children’s jackets to pay for survival during their journey. After my great grandmother and three children arrived in America, my great grandfather went into his own business selling thread and needles door to door from a cart. He was very industrious and saved enough money to move his shop from a cart to a storefront. As time went on, he purchased the three stores adjacent to his and opened the first department store in St. Paul, Minnesota. He eventually brought over eighteen other relatives, and the diamonds are still apart of our family. My mother is a reflection of the hopes and dreams that my great grandfather brought to America with him.

Since my father’s family is of African descent, their heritage was either never recorded or lost throughout the years. The oldest living relative on that side of my family is ninety-five years old—Bill, my grandfather. He lived on a farm in Arkansas until he was three, when his mother passed, and his father remarried to a woman my grandfather grew to love and call his mother. From Arkansas, they moved to Wisconsin. When my grandfather was a young man, the Great Depression hit, and he left to travel the rails to look for work. He remembers those days with fondness as his small world began to open up. He eventually returned to Wisconsin where he met and married my grandmother. Together they had three children who they showered with love and whose education they fiercely encouraged. My grandfather, who never was able to complete college, ensured that all three of his children would. To guarantee his children’s interest in furthering their educations, he encouraged eighteen of their neighborhood friends to further their educations as well. When two adults, such as my grandparents, can affect the lives of so many of their neighborhood youth, they should be and have been celebrated. Their wealth is not that of money, but rather of love and kindness. My father is a manifestation of my grandfather’s desire for education.

Now looking at both of my families’ roots, I wonder if it is a coincidence that both of my grandparents played such an imperative role in eighteen other lives and in my first eighteen years of life. I am a reflection of two cultures culturally combined. I represent everything that is good about California—diversity, acceptance, and tolerance—and this is my family’s California story.

*12th Grade, Woodrow Wilson High School*

# NEW TRADITIONS

by Antonia Chihuahua

Christmas Eve, 1995 was like any other December 24. My family had gathered to celebrate the birth of Christ. I wait for the praying to be over because I am told by my mother that “Jesus has a special gift for every deserving child on Christmas.” I am eight, and I know how to tell time, but I also know the praying will not stop until midnight.

Finally, my sister, cousin, and I each get Jesus’ gift. Although there are other gifts under the tree, I don’t pay much attention to them. I was told that Jesus is always watching over me so he must know what I want. Veronica, my cousin, enters the circle of surrounding adults. She opens her gift; it is an exceptionally beautiful porcelain doll. My family smiles and happily remarks how pretty they look together.

I stand up because I know it is my turn to open my gift. I go in the center of the circle formed by my family and open my gift. “Una pelota! (a ball),” I shouted, but it seemed like I was the only one excited. My family stared puzzled, wondering what had happened.

Later, as my dad kissed my forehead when tucking me in to bed I told him, “Dad, God really does look over me. I never had a ball before. But why didn’t my tia (aunt) like it?”

My dad said “Don’t worry, my angel, I liked it.” That’s all I cared about—my father’s acceptance. That night I felt asleep dreaming with angels.

As a naïve child I never comprehended the actions of my family. I wasn’t aware of the gender role thrust on me. Now I question whether a gender role is an act of separation, some kind of oppression, or a form of discrimination. A simple object like a ball for Christmas given to a girl was a mistake of names committed by my family. The ball was meant for my cousin Antonio. You can question how a ball is harmful to a young girl or whether a sport is just for males because as a naïve girl, I precisely did that—question.

I didn’t begin to understand until I was fourteen. That was when I started noticing that my parent’s actions had a meaning behind them. I played with a ball and became passionate for soccer while my female cousins played with dolls and became infatuated with boys. The problem arose when I didn’t follow the girl, then woman, roles every one else in my extended family did. None of the other girls had gone to college. In fact, none had even graduated from high school.

I have become involved in clubs, I make good grades, I play a sport I love, and I have everything except a proud family. Ironically, education allowed me to visualize myself in my family’s situation, but they want me to have nothing to do with education. Before, I attributed their action to their lack of knowledge. Now, though, I have learned the meaning of their traditions, and I have begun to value them. I will continue to value family, holiday traditions, and togetherness. I plan to keep those traditions through coming generations, but I will also start a new one—education.

*12th Grade, Dorsey High School*

# I AM FROM

*by Norika McAdams*

I am from the wild waters that expand  
in the day and night.  
I am from hell, not even a day too late—  
Then eventually, back to storms and days of icicles pasted to my face.  
I am from a go-getter, a bird that sings.  
I am from a place,  
Kind of hard to explain.  
How the sun falls all over me  
Rumbling through my soft skin like an earthquake that always wins.  
It's even harder to explain,  
How thick the blood in me flows through my too-tough veins with fiery passion,  
Even as my skin is scorched by the fires from the gates of hell  
I daily pass by.  
I am from when I search my conscience within,  
I see my face in its bright mirror,  
A child shouting out with sane pride.  
I am from the edges of nature's bed bathed by angry oceans that push ashore  
sand finer than it flows.  
I am from the inviting perfume from blooms of fragrance.  
I am from the twinkle in my mama's eyes, that's what daddy would say,  
His brown eyes laughing,  
His hands like small bear paws slapping whoever was near.  
I am from a place where there were more trees than people.  
I am from the hills that rang with mama's gospel songs,  
High-pitched prayers to the king of all nations  
And the sky above for safety,  
For favor,  
For forgiveness of all sins.  
I am from a place inside myself where  
the paint does not match,  
and the walls are filled with words.  
I am from a pillow full of water that never dries,  
But knowing that I have hearts reaching to me,  
Which is all that matters now.  
Where I'm from is a place  
where my tree of hearts has branched.  
I'm from no man is an island to no man stands alone.  
I'm from the day of the blazing sun and the gleam  
from my mother's eyes.

*12th Grade, Foshay Learning Center*

# PERCEPTIONS OF OURSELVES

*by Hannah Troughton*

So often I catch glimpses of a girl, needing, wanting something so far away, so opposite of what has surrounded her for her whole life. She is caught in this vacuum of space, a span of time where escape is so close but not exactly tangible, her perception of the world in ways limited and naïve. However, she is thrown into an environment, being misconceived, judged, perceived as an image of inexperience, symbolic of the lack of opportunity and diversity offered, the spitting image of what it may seem to live in rural America. She takes a look at this image, contemplates how much of this really represents herself, and begins to piece together how she really defines the person that she is each day.

I often wonder what it is that causes me to form opinions about myself, what it is that influences my own perception of who I am? Do I wake up each day, look in the mirror and judge solely on character? On achievement? On self-worth? Self-esteem? Or are there always constant voices and influences shouting to me about who I am, what I will be, where I am going in life? Do these judgments actually have an effect on how I view myself and if so, is this perception an accurate assumption of who I am as a person? So often it is hard to look outside of who I am, this image that everyone else can see, my own vision distorted, by the simple fact that seeing what is there, the truth is harder than I realize. Living the same life in rural America day after day, interacting with the same familiar faces, the world change is seldom present on a daily basis, I somehow cannot take on the simple task of actually realizing who I am. In many ways, I leave it up to the rest of the world to define me. Each rural community will be pre-judged, seen as the typical portrayal of what small towns have to offer, but what lies beyond that is what I must define for myself.

We all have perceptions and judgments that are present throughout our lives. We see people in the light that we make for them—group, stereotype, label, and limit simply through critique, criticism, speculation, and observation. We categorize, summarize, and define the lives of individuals by where they lay their head at night, by where they wake in the morning, by where they lead their lives day by day, insensitive to the emotions and meaning that actually lie behind each person, each place.

If growing up in a confined place our whole lives defined who we are as people, labeled each person, wouldn't we all be the same? If growing up in rural America meant making a name, a definition for the people we would become, the stereotype of daily rural life on a farm, Sundays spent in church, or family gatherings every week, it wouldn't do justice to anyone as an individual. This generalization is a picture lacking the details and the colors in a world that would be boring without them, and the pieces to a puzzle that would be incomplete if lost. We have portions of the places we have lived, but these portions are just that, pieces of a person that do not summarize their existence or define them in their entirety, but are glimpses into a world, into an individual who is full of so much more than the surroundings that have sheltered them throughout their lives.

The preconceived notion is that people who dwell in these rural communities, who make a choice to live in a place where diversity may never become a characteristic, choose rural America because it works for their lives, for who they are. The fact that husbands and wives are content with raising a family in a quiet, quaint neighborhood, going to work at a low-key job, coming home to a place of comfort and security is only one example of what lies inside the city limits of a small town. That is not the only description, the only image, of being a part of rural America.

It is not always simple to break away from the image others make for us, but growing up in a rural area can provide so much more than we realize. Growing up as an adolescent in rural America, I have seen what is offered around me not as a lack of experience, knowledge, or opportunity, but as a chance to make what I see for my future mean so much more, become so much more valuable. I have limits now, but I know that just because

**PERCEPTIONS OF OURSELVES** by *Hannah Troughton*

I grew up in a rural part of the world, and was not provided with certain aspects of city life, does not mean the small town opportunities have not equipped me with lessons and knowledge that I will use to appreciate and move onto bigger and better things in life.

The truth is we all have desires, wants, and needs that long to be fulfilled. I have desires to see, experience, and live in the world around me. However defining who I am, through where I live is only a small part of the picture. I may wake up in a town of 7,000 people, but my sights are always set on blending into the cities filled with life, population, diversity, opportunity, perhaps to escape the perceptions of this small town girl. Perhaps I am set on such goals to escape my own image of what it meant for me to grow up in “limited, lifeless” America, with little interest in local high school pride or occasional parties with people who may never have begun to realize what life was beyond high school, beyond home.

It is rather limiting to imply that where we lay our head at night is somehow a complete reflection of who we are. We are shaped and molded by our surroundings, but somehow the perception of others puts me in a category—the stereotype of a small town girl, with no dreams, only family and faith. But the truth, the unseen reality is that a girl sits and waits, wonders and anticipates how she will be affected when she wanders out into the world, past the city limits of this small rural town, leaving every ounce of judgment behind—an open book to an open world.

*12th Grade, Corning Union High School*

# I AM A CALIFORNIAN

*by Alexander Lancaster*

Born in Long Beach,  
Seventeen Septembers past  
Living in a state of diversity.  
The son of two cultures,  
Racially mixed,  
A product of two continents,  
I am a Californian.

From the fruited plains of the Midwest,  
The sugar fields of Cuba,  
The Black Forest of Germany,  
Two migrating families,  
Seeking new life, a new start,  
They join up here and I am made,  
I am a Californian.

People stereotype me as Hispanic,  
Others think I am white,  
I change the bubbles on standardized tests,  
Ethnicity and race are two different things,  
My identity will always remain the same,  
For I always remember,  
I am a Californian.

My roots are deep in the soil,  
The ground that I walk on,  
The air that I breathe,  
Does not know me as white,  
Does not call me Hispanic,  
Nor am I Cuban to nature,  
I am a Californian.

Like an onion I am layered,  
With culture and race,  
A layer of island,  
A Grimm's fairy tale,  
A farm at the core,  
An attitude that tells others,  
I am a Californian.

Part of a lineage that goes back generations,  
Heritage is important to my identity,  
I am a mix of two worlds,  
A clashing of cultures,  
A body of traits,  
An individual who knows,  
I am a Californian.

*12th Grade, Woodrow Wilson High School*

# I AM WOMAN

by Irene Cerda

I am a woman...  
*The cry of my people calls me.*  
I drift in a sea of storms.  
*The sweat of my people beckons me.*  
I am mixed in an array of confusing standards,  
*The dreams of my people blind me.*  
I am unwilling to blend in with a strange civilization.  
*The strength of my people drives me.*  
I am a woman...  
I am judged for no apparent reason,  
*The history of my people saddens me.*  
I am concealed by humanity,  
*The suppression of my people angers me.*  
I am ruined by humanities immorality.  
*The diminishing of my people pains me.*  
I am a woman...  
My blood, my people,  
*Their despair impairs me.*  
They are spellbound in a mist of poverty.  
*The cry of my people calls me.*  
But, they have conquered.  
*The sweat of my people calls me.*  
Preserving the fundamental ways of life,  
*The dreams of my people blind me.*  
And Now! I am a woman...  
*The strength of my people drives me.*  
I am torn between,  
*The history of my people saddens me.*  
The paradox of,  
*The suppression of my people angers me.*  
My hopes and my reality,  
*The diminishing of my people pains me.*  
I am a woman...  
Love is all,  
*Their despair impairs me.*  
Or  
Living no man's land,  
*The cry of my people calls me.*  
My destination remains unknown,  
*The respect I have for my people gives me an identity.*  
I am a woman...  
I hear your cries,  
I feel your pain,  
I seek your dreams.

12th Grade, Woodrow Wilson High



# WHO I AM

by Crystal Franco

Sí por favor.

No Thank You.

Gracias.

You're welcome.

From the sunlit streets on a stunning day in California,

To the striking oceans on a lively night in México,

All bringing out a different part of who I am;

But, who am I?

An identity only known to myself: I am a daughter, una sobrina, a sister, y una prima.

Family and amigos refuse to believe that.

Arms are pulled both ways, mind thinking left and right, language still a bit confused,  
the stomach still puts up a fight.

A native to American land, but a background that holds like a solid vine.

Too dark for one place, and too light for the other.

My life always changes when I cross that line.

Taquitos, piñatas, tequila, and la fiesta will always let me be part of one life,

But my accent, my clothing, and my knowledge of the country will always be pointed  
Out.

Pizza and beer, fireworks, football games, and cheerleading will surely get me in the  
Loop, but my culture, style of music, and loyalty to my heritage will always be mocked.  
I cannot wear a rebozo, sing mariachi, or even say, "Hola" without a single judgment and  
hearing the word, "Jag,"

I cannot wear "Tommy" shirts, or even say, "Hello" because I'll surely be labeled a  
"Gringa" and that will make me feel bad.

But who am I?

And who are they to judge me?

Which offense should I take more seriously?

Am I that crazy "California babe" looking for a party with all her wild friends?

Or the boisterous "Chicana girl" hitting the clubs in the early hours of the morning?

What if I am both of them, neither more nor less?

What if they have me all confused and don't know me when they put me to the test?

They think they know me.

Put me on the spot and make me choose right now.

My answer stays and my mind is set.

I am that Gringa and proud to be a Jag.

This is me and no one can change that.

I will not choose to tell untruths. I am who I am and that's plain proof.

I am mixed now and that's OK.

Life is much better when I have two worlds where I can stay.

Yet, I am not alone.

I am neither this nor that, but hold a bit of both.

When people ask me, "Who are you?"

I simply say, "Hello, Amigo." And that explains it all.

# THE STRUGGLES BETWEEN TWO CULTURES

*by Pa Houa Lee*

As a young Hmong female, I have realized that there are many things to be proud of in the Hmong culture like work ethic and commitment. However, Hmong people face many issues because we came to live in an unfamiliar country and brought with us our different values, beliefs, and practices. We are a minority in this world because we have no country of origin, history of a written language or school system, and not enough role models or leaders to guide our people. Many Hmong elders are concerned with how to maintain the Hmong culture. Meanwhile, many Hmong youths are torn between two cultures, struggling to find our identity. Many who are torn between the Hmong and American cultures are heading toward the wrong direction and facing hardships, trying to decide what cultural practices to hold onto or let go. Altogether, we need to reassess which Hmong values, beliefs, and practices are important to hold on to and let go of the practices that will hold us back from achieving in the United States. In addition, we also need to learn what American values, beliefs, and practices we should adopt so Hmong youths are not torn between two cultures.

Some values, beliefs, and practices in American culture are important to the adjustments the Hmong will have to make in America. Yet, many Hmong, especially the elders, are not confident enough to live a new lifestyle because of the fear of losing the Hmong identity. The elders want to hold onto our traditional ways of life, which include marriage at a young age and entering into the workforce right after high school instead of getting a higher education. I understand that some Hmong elders do not want to let go of the traditional beliefs set forth by our ancestors centuries ago, but they need to learn about the importance of education. The youth get married early, devalue education as a key to mobility, and lack the knowledge of education because of the elders' misunderstandings. The majority of the Hmong elders try very hard to emphasize the importance of our culture to our youth, but some of our cultural ways of living are not going to be much help to the Hmong youth in the United States.

Some of today's Hmong youth have different perspectives from their elders, but many are very confused and torn between both cultures. Many Hmong youths try to distance themselves from the culture because they consider themselves to be "Americanized". Meanwhile, other Hmong youths are encouraged to continue the traditional practices. Yet even today, many Hmong females still believe in early marriages because of the fear that no one will marry them as they get older. People who still believe in young marriages think that a marriage in America will be the same as the marriages in Thailand or Laos, where a married couple live day-to-day by working in the rice fields. But in the United States, most of the young married couples experience many hardships after marriage because they drop out of school and have more responsibilities like raising their children. Some of the jobs high school dropouts get, cannot even pay for the wants and needs of their children. Without an education, it is very hard to obtain a good paying job because today's workforce is very competitive. Many Hmong elders who encourage their children to enter the workforce believe that working at a fast food restaurant is a good start. They are unaware of its closeness to the poverty line and that the income is barely enough to support one person through a day. Although some parents are encouraging their children to obtain a higher education, other parents are still holding onto the classic beliefs and emphasizing early marriages or entering the workforce. Therefore, Hmong youths struggle with what choice to make. This can lead to devaluing or valuing one culture over another.

In order to influence Hmong elders that the American culture is a source of mobility, we need to emphasize higher education and encourage Hmong youth to consider the opportunities education can offer. Yet, there is a need for strong, charismatic role models who can show us how to balance the two cultures. Role models who have succeeded by holding onto some Hmong practices and adopting some of American practices, need to help Hmong parents and elders filter out the unnecessary Hmong practices in the United States. One good leader is Minnesota State Senator, Mee Moua. She is one of the very few who has learned how to balance both cultures.

Meanwhile, Senator Moua is an important political figure who still holds onto her role of a Hmong housewife and daughter. Senator Moua attained a Judicial Degree and later married, in her late twenties, a very successful Hmong man. By being able to balance the two different practices, she succeeds in both cultures. Another significant role model is UC Davis medical student, Sia Vang. Sia was married at a young age because she was pregnant. Yet, her belief in education, as a key to mobility, encouraged her to focus on her studies. Although she had to raise her son, she managed to go to college and is doing very well in the UC Davis Medical School.

We have a few leaders, but we need more leaders to influence our mind and thought toward the direction where we can access a better life. As I look up to the few role models we have, I understand that I also need to work hard to become a good role model for my own people to follow. I do everything that I can to help out my elders, siblings, and peers understand how some American culture values, beliefs, and practices can benefit them. I have held leadership positions in many clubs and stay away from drugs or gang-related activities. I also help tutor or mentor many of those who need help to succeed academically and personally. I am continuing on with my education. I plan to attend college and come back to my community to help emphasize the importance of adopting higher education and any additional American cultural practices that can help the Hmong people achieve mobility. Once we learn to balance both cultures, we will broaden our views about education and knowledge of both cultures.

Many Hmong people think that keeping the traditional ways of living and beliefs such as early marriage or entering the workforce right after high school is a positive thing for our people, but they are wrong. In a more civilized, industrialized, modern country, such Hmong practices will not work. Some Hmong people have not yet learned to adopt the American cultural practices that can help them succeed, and Hmong youths will continue to struggle to balance and understand both cultures; meanwhile others will either distance or reinforce the traditional Hmong practices. The only way that will help bring positive changes in the Hmong community is to learn what to adopt from both cultures that will help us be successful and bring mobility.

*12th Grade, Grant Union High School*



## **CHAPTER THREE**

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# **GRAPPLING WITH THE REALITIES & CHALLENGES OF LIFE IN CALIFORNIA**

# RE-EDUCATING OURSELVES

by Syreeta Singleton

It was a day like every other day at my high school in Los Angeles. There were fights, students out of class, girls gossiping about each other and wanting to fight, smoking, gambling, gangbanging, and every other thing done at school besides learning about how our ancestors worked and died for us. It was a day like any other day. But on that day, my eyes were truly opened. All day I observed. I watched everything and thought to myself, “How sad.” All of the time that was wasted on doing nothing. My friend David and I began to talk about gangs and what was going on in our neighborhood. He felt gangs were in a way positive and that they were justified.

David: Gangs are like families. There’s nothing wrong with gangs. There’s nothing else to do anyway. We have to stick together in the hood.

Me: There’s nothing wrong? There is something wrong if young black men are dying from being gang-affiliated.

David: That’s just what happens, you know, and if someone’s busting me, I’m going to bust back.

Me: But if that’s how it is, then why even be involved and take risks with your life and those around you? Especially with so many innocent people dying from gang violence. We can do so much better for ourselves than this. What about making something out of yourself?

David: Well, if that’s who your friends are and what they do, or your family does, you naturally just fall into it.

Me: But you have to make the choice to do differently with your life.

David: But you have to show your loyalty to the hood, and if I die, then that’s just how it happens. I’d die for my hood.

Me: So you’re willing to die for your hood? Is your hood going to die for you? Or take your spot in jail? What’s the whole point of banging? You’re not going to get anywhere. The Bloods will never take out all of the Crips or 18s. The Crips will never take out all the Bloods or the Eight Trays. We need to act like brothers and sisters and stop killing each other.

David: You have a point, but not everyone is going to listen to that. You can’t reach everyone. People are going to do what they want.

I thought to myself, he may be right, but who knows what can be done if enough people try or even care. Others may look at us and say we’re ghetto, misbehaved, ignorant, or stupid. I would just say we’re misled. We need faith in ourselves.

I am an African American female, and I’ve always been and always will be. But I didn’t really become who I am until November 2003, when I read a book by Sister Souljah. It shaped me as a person and is very much a part of who I am today. I had never really appreciated who I was and embraced it. I’ve never been so proud of who I am and what I come from.

Sister Souljah’s book spoke of how far black people have come, even from Africa. It spoke of how broken our homes are and the vicious cycle that has been created. It spoke of how we’ve had to struggle in America and how even the people in Africa struggle. We have had it hard as a people. Now it has affected us mentally. Sister

writes about why black girls and boys are the way they are, why they've given up on themselves and lost all hope of a bright future. Everything she said is true, and it all made sense; all of this has been carried since slavery. The book spoke of the mental bondage that we've put on ourselves. It made me want to help my people understand the ways of society and overcome our obstacles.

After reading her book, I looked at my people differently, and I decided that as a writer, I'd continue to write what I always intended to write, but I'd also write for my people. I'd help out in inner city schools, helping young kids find their way. Helping them to see that they can be whatever they want to be in life. I found a new way of thinking; I began to look at things with a new kind of depth. I didn't want to be anything but who I was. I was not ashamed of our kinky and thick hair, our many shades of chocolate and brown, or our wide noses. I wasn't ashamed, but I was proud. I loved our differences, every single one of them, from our full lips to our different body types.

It caused me to think of so many things. It made me see a lot clearer. Naturally I felt the need to write about it. I wrote about my country, the country my ancestors are from. I wrote about the world around me—my city and my community. There are so many of us who are confused about life. I decided I want to end the cycle. I want to help free my people from the many stereotypes and labels that have been slapped on us. I want to help people understand the power they possessed, and what we could do if we all came together instead of being against each other. I want people to see the boundaries they've been putting around themselves.

I began to value my education more, so I could succeed and be another example of what we can accomplish, even in inner cities. All we need is willingness and support. We need someone to believe in us, and we need positive examples. We need people to keep telling us it can be done.

*9th Grade, Dorsey High School*

# **A ROMANTIC STORY IN THE CITY OF L.A.**

*by Francisco Torres*

I am the star she never  
met.  
She is a rose from  
Eden.  
My life is a desert  
where it never rains.  
She is the moon,  
I am the sun,  
and by sunset and dawn  
we will never meet.  
A romantic story  
that could never be.  
A rose and  
a poet who will never reach.  
A romantic story  
in the city of eternity.

*9th Grade, Dorsey High School*

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## **CALIFORNIA'S LOST QUEEN**

*by Sandy S. Gomez*

That's a night walker  
On Blvd St.,  
Providing services for those in need.  
No pay, no game,  
That's how it works on these streets.  
Life isn't cheap,  
Girl's gotta make a living and money she needs,  
It's a sacrifice she makes to stay alive,  
No longer knowing if she'll be buried 6 feet deep or laid  
down on her daddy's street.  
It's the high life or no life.  
That was his guarantee,  
Now 5 years later, daddy's night walker  
Is no longer standing on her feet,  
She's too weak to even eat.  
Who knows if she'll continue to be the Blvd St. Queen or  
make it past her teens.

*10th Grade, Polytechnic High School*



# ANGEL'S PROMISE

by Karla Torres

Life is hard living in L.A. with a brother that gangbangs. It began when I was about four years old. My brother Angel was 15. Angel had started banging in eighth grade, but I was too small to understand. I don't really know how and why he started banging. All I know is that he had lots of problems. Angel had just gotten to Los Angeles from Guatemala. I guess he was stressed out, had problems adjusting, and didn't know anybody at school. Problems started in school and out of school.

The worst fight my brother was involved in occurred five years ago when I was nine. I was a third grader going to Virginia Road Elementary School. It was a cool, but sunny day, and I was just getting home from school. I walked into the kitchen and saw my mom cooking something to eat. She didn't look happy. It seemed like she had been crying, and I wondered what was wrong.

As usual, I asked for my brother Angel. Mom didn't answer. I walked over to my brother's room. His door was closed—it was never closed. I knocked and called out his name, "Angel." He didn't answer, so I walked into his room.

I remember his image like it happened yesterday. Angel was literally bandaged from head to toe. I mean he had broken arms and broken legs. I looked at him and gasped. I was scared, and I tried not to show it, but tears began to run down my cheeks. Angel heard my voice and knew it was me. He forced himself to talk. "Get out of here, Michi," he said gently, calling me by my nickname.

I left, running to my mom and asked her "¿Qué tiene Angel?" What's wrong with Angel?

I could see that she wanted to cry, but she was trying not to show it. She managed to say in a normal voice "Veté a tu cuarto." Go to your room. Not understanding why, I simply obeyed.

Angel's recovery took time. Days, weeks, and months passed and I still didn't know what had happened. Someone later told me that five boys had beat my brother while his friends, who had locked themselves safely in the car, watched. My brother recovered slowly, and I had to help take care of him, be there when he needed me. My brother Franky also helped. Angel felt bad, useless. He couldn't walk or move, and he had to try hard just to open his mouth to eat or drink. It was one of the worst episodes of my life.

It broke my heart when my brother apologized to my parents. With tears in his eyes, forcing himself to talk he said, "Perdonáis." Forgive me, I won't do it again. "Se los juro." I promise. Scared to walk into the room they were in, I just stood in the doorway, hiding, so they would not see me and the tears running down my cheeks.

*9th Grade, Dorsey High School*

# MUD BOGGING

by Ruben Bogarin

## THE SET UP

“If you need anything, I will be in Chico at your aunt’s house,” said my mom.

“Cesar said that he would come by later and we would go to Orland, OK?” I said.

“That’s fine. Just be careful with whatever you guys do.”

“I know, Mom. I will probably get back around 8 or 9 o’clock.”

“All right. Bye, son.”

“Adios, mom.”

## ON THE WAY

It was a cold day in the middle of September, a day after it had just rained. I was sitting on my couch watching TV, when I heard the phone ring. It was my brother in law. He would pick my cousin and me up to go mud bogging in Orland. So I called my cousin and told him that we would be there in about an hour. We left Corning heading south on I-5. I was starting to get very sleepy as I looked at nothing for 14 miles. The road between Corning and Orland is so dry, lonely, and long. There is absolutely nothing to see but a bunch of boring hills. The excitement ran through my whole body and mind as we got to Orland. Cesar lived about 7 miles out of town and had about 15 acres of grass and mud. Along the fence line, there were trees and a lot of bushes. So I had to be careful when I would be riding near the fence. We would go and just ride around in a 1985 Chevy S-10. We all took turns driving that little truck around. It was a small blue and black pick-up with no windshield. That truck had been through a lot. The front of the truck was black and the back was blue. It had dents everywhere, but it would still run. So when you are riding in a car with no windshield, your face might get a little muddy. Basically, we were riding in an unsafe vehicle. But even under the worst circumstances, Cesar would always want to go mud bogging. I fell in love with it also. Getting tossed around and hitting your head on the roof of the truck was part of all the excitement in mud bogging. In mud bogging, you forget all about your worries that you have, so I named it *akunammatada*. The mud hitting your face and the laughs of Cesar were what I enjoyed the most. Cesar loved mud bogging.

## MUD BOGGING’S TEN COMMANDMENTS

- 1) Must be in Orland, CA.
- 2) Must have love for mud bogging as much as Cesar does.
- 3) Must not whine or yell.
- 4) Eyes open at all times.
- 5) Three to-a-seat.
- 6) Mud must be fresh.
- 7) If truck flips, roll it back and keep going.
- 8) Must have old clothes.
- 9) Body may ache, so rest after.
- 10) Can’t be smelly, so shower before.

## ON ITS SIDE

Cesar is driving while Ruben is in the middle, and Eric is next to the door.

**Ruben-** Cesar, Eric, is that a big puddle of mud that we are about to hit?

They all look at each other and are in shock while truck loses control

**Cesar-** Hold on guys!

The three of them evacuate the car and start to laugh.

**Eric-** (laughing) Is everyone ok?

**Ruben-** I’m alright what about you Cesar?

**Cesar-** I am ok too. Let’s flip it back on all fours. (Cesar looking at truck) I love this truck.

## **PRICELESS**

Truck- \$800

Gas- \$25

Exhaust- \$45

Tires- \$100

Flipping a truck over while mud bogging- Priceless

## **CAR ACCIDENT LEAVES TWO DEAD**

On Thursday the 24th of July 2003, a horrible tragedy left two dead. Cesar Rico, 22, and Ezequiel Rico, 23, were on their way back home from a hard day at work. They worked for Jason Abel Construction Company. It was Ezequiel's 2nd week in this job and Cesar's 2nd day. The two cousins were heading west-bound on highway 70 going from Grass Valley to Corning. This poorly constructed highway is the road to many deadly accidents. They were in a blue 87 Nissan Pick-up. As they were passing up another car, they moved back into the lane and were clipped from behind. They spun out while going into oncoming traffic. There was an Explorer coming in the other lane, which met the truck in a head on collision. The 34-year-old driver had two kids in the back seat, but luckily nothing happened to the kids. The driver suffered minor injuries and a broken leg. After authorities arrived at the scene, they loaded the two injured cousins into a helicopter. They were transferred to Enloe Medical Center in Chico, CA. Cesar was announced dead about 20 minutes after the accident. Ezequiel was announced dead an hour after arriving at Enloe Medical Center. Ezequiel leaves a 1-year-old girl and a wife. Cesar leaves a wife whom he loved dearly. They have been married for four months.

## **IN LOVE**

My sister Ariana has always been a hard worker. I have always looked up to her, and I have never doubted her. I strongly accepted her new husband on April 5, 2003. Ariana always came to visit us after she married Cesar. She lived in an apartment by Corning Union High School, and she would always invite me to go and eat for dinner. When I would walk in the apartment, I could smell her delicious food all the way to the door. I would hear Cesar tell her lovely things like "How is my babe? I love you Ari," and I would feel so happy for Ariana. Cesar loved Ariana. We would always watch movies on weekends. I remember smelling that popcorn so perfect. I always looked at Cesar like the brother that I never had. He was, without a doubt, the best guy that Ariana had ever dated. He always treated her right and never disrespected her.

## **HARD NEWS**

One day after Ariana had visited my family and me after work, she came to us saying how proud she was about Cesar. Cesar had been hired to a better job. It was his second day at work and Ariana came to visit us. She told us about how they treated Cesar better and how much Cesar loved his new job. We were all in the living room waiting for my mom to finish cooking. It smelled a little different than what she normally cooks, but she said that it was a surprise. Ariana received a call on her cell phone and so she went into my room. About 10 seconds later, I heard the loudest and saddest scream that Ariana had ever made. I ran into the room and she ran into my arms, crying and trying to talk. I felt as if someone had stabbed me in the back. Then I calmed her down and she explained what had happened. Cesar had been in a car accident and he was seriously hurt. So my dad grabbed his keys, and we left for Chico. When we arrived at the hospital, it was too late. Cesar had died.

## **CESAR RICO**

R.I.P

1982-2003

# IT CAN HAPPEN TO ANYONE

by Carlotta Cochran

What a world we live in, filled with diseases, war, and pollution. I have never experienced war first-hand, but the diseases I have. When my sister Teresa was born, she was born with a common disease called cancer. The experiences in someone's life make them who they are. When my sister got cancer, I know it changed me and the way I live life today. This is my story.

I grew up in a family of all boys and played boy games. Then when my mom had twins and I found out that I was going to finally have a sister, I was so excited—mostly because I would finally have someone to play with, the games that girls play, you know, house and Barbies. When she was born, I wanted her to be my age right then, right now, so we could share secrets and carry on big kid conversations. It was a little disappointing because I didn't think about her only being a baby; I was a little upset. Soon after my anger turned to sadness and sorrow. My mom called sometime in the night worried about a lump on Teresa's side. We had it checked on and no one could tell us what it was. One doctor even said it was a sewage build up and that was really gross to consider. Then we found out it was really a tumor. I was horrified. I remained in denial for quite some time. "What did she do to anyone to deserve this? She is only two. God please help her." These were some of the millions of thoughts that passed through my mind every minute of every day.

A couple of days after we found out what the lump really was, my sister entered into surgery. She had to go all the way to Sacramento, so I couldn't go because I had school. I was worried all that day. I would pray all day that she would make it through the surgery alive. When I could finally see her, I was so happy that I ran to give her a hug, until my mom yelled for me to be careful for her chest. The doctor had placed tubes in her chest. I was so scared, it looked unsafe to have white plastic tubes coming out of a hole in her chest. She also had stitches all the way across her stomach. My sister is really loving, caring, sensitive, but also really dramatic. When she needed to have meds injected into her tubes and the caps replaced, all of which my mom did, my sister would not let my mom do it unless I was there holding her hand. She was so cute. Sometimes my mom would have to wait until I got home from school, so my sister would not cry and squirm. All of these things made me wonder why this all happened—Why did she have cancer? Would she die? Is the cancer all gone? Did I hurt her?

Soon after surgery my sister started treatment; it was hard on me. I was really scared that I might lose Teresa. To lose my sister would have torn me apart inside. During this point in her recovery, my denial slowly deteriorated and reality slowly set in. In chemotherapy a patient loses their hair. So before my sister lost all of her cute strawberry blonde curls, I would spend hours after school just playing with it and making her laugh.

Teresa had regular check-ups in Sacramento. I was never able to go because of school and it makes me sad to say that I was not there 100% for her, only when I could be. I finally had the opportunity to go to her last surgery when she got her tubes removed. I remember my sister and I begging my grandma to let me miss school. She eventually agreed, and I got to go when her time finally came for her to go into her last operation. I was relieved; yet at the same time, the fear from the first surgery returned. But not until the doctors injected Teresa with the sleepy medications, and I watched her playing with her toys and then suddenly drop as if shot by a silenced gun, life without my sister flashed before my eyes.

When the final operation was over and we were allowed to take Teresa home, all she wanted to do was eat, eat, eat. I remember she had a PB & J sandwich, Cheetos, Skittles, and milk. The road to recovery for my sister and I was uninterrupted by any other life-threatening barriers. Teresa received money for being a cancer patient and only having one kidney. She was also a member of a kids' cancer association and on Christmas, we would all get presents from them. At a Christmas party thrown by the cancer association, we went to Chuckee Cheese's (my sister's favorite place) where Teresa and I spent the whole together playing games and making memories.

This life-changing event has made me who I am today. All of the tear-jerking memories and harsh realities have taught me so many valuable lessons. I learned to never depend on someone else because you never know; they might not be there the next time you need them. I also learned to never forget you love someone—be affectionate, caring, and a good role model for everyone. I am a better person because of my sister. She taught me that not everyone is a bad person and not everyone deserves to be treated badly. I am always nice to someone who is nice to me, I go that extra step to be a good friend, and I am also careful before judging someone. I don't know what their life is like or what they've been through. Who knows; they might be in remission or have a sister who is.

*10th Grade, Corning Union High School*

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## **GO AWAY DADDY**

*by Holly Garcia*

When I was four, you walked out the door.  
I didn't know you'd be gone forever.  
You called on birthdays, but I wanted more.  
I wanted to be together.

I used to wait for your calls.  
I wanted to hear my father's voice.  
The call never came on my eleventh birthday.  
You made a very bad choice.

Do phones only work on my birthdays in Mexico?  
Or could you possibly call another time?  
God forbid you call your daughter.  
Or maybe I'm not worth a dime.

I don't want to be an obligation.  
I don't look forward to your calls.  
In fact, I dread them.  
I'd rather talk to the walls.

You're a stranger to me.  
You're not my Dad.  
You don't deserve the title.  
You're nothing but a cad.

What's going to happen now?  
Soon I'll be eighteen.  
I'll go to college, and I'll live my life.  
You'll still be living a dream.

I love my mother.  
Without her, I'd die.  
She loves me.  
She doesn't have to lie.

Don't call me anymore.  
I won't pick up the phone.  
Go away Daddy.  
Leave me alone.

*12th Grade, North Monterey County High School*

# **MY PLACE**

*by Anonymous*

She had a family but didn't know why.

They would always mistreat and abuse her.

She would watch helplessly in a corner while her mother was being battered by the fist of her father.

Her father would pound his fist into her face again and again until blood was visible.

She went to save her mother but her father would turn against her and without even realizing what he was

doing, he had struck her with his fist and she spun around and hit her face on a glass table.

Tears blinded her vision and warm, wet blood was trickling down the side of her face.

A series of pains shot through the back of her neck.

She would crawl back to her corner because that was where she felt the safest.

She'd curl up into a ball until exhaustion would cradle her body and she would be rocked to sleep.

One day all that changed, because there was someone that did care.

A teacher cared.

That one teacher had noticed the pain in her eyes when she had smiled, and she had seen the bruises marked

upon her delicate skin.

Because of that teacher, that girl was finally set free from the torture of the place that she called home.

*8th Grade, Norman Glick Middle School*

# **STRUGGLES AND TRIUMPHS**

*by Marquisha Henderson a.k.a. Tru Dark*

Two words, block corners, money exchanges  
Crack pipes, nasty ladies  
Stop hoe'in, cause it will never be hoes up, pimps down.  
Too grown, too fast, screamin' babies,  
In the trash, or welfare, make it last,  
Two months, no cash.

Chorus

Being black and female,  
Surviving life in this destructive and material world,  
Stay strong, live long.  
Bad schools, no books  
Lost hopes, different strokes,  
For our "ghetto" female folks,  
Better education will be our salvation.

They—

Used it, worked hard, ran hard  
My mom, my aunt, different goals,  
Both achieved, regardless the obstacles.

Chorus

Being black and female,  
Surviving life in this destructive and material world,  
Stay strong, live long.  
Lighter note, hot fashions,  
Tight clothes, bangin' music,  
Combine this with what exists  
A feeling you feel  
Deep in yo' soul.  
My girls, my crew,  
All this ain't new,  
Stereotypes, chick fights,  
Hopefully all this turns out right.

Chorus

Being black and female,  
Surviving life in this destructive and material world,  
Stay strong, live long.

*11th Grade, Foshay Learning Center*

# MY NEIGHBORHOOD

by Kathy Tanson

On any day of the week, I get home from school, and I do my homework. I get my homework done and I go outside and hang out with my friends at the apartments where I live. When I had first moved into the apartments, my friends had to go inside when it became dark. I never knew why until the other night.

My family and I were moving into a bigger apartment and it was dark. No big deal, right? Wrong. My mom's boyfriend had walked outside to start the car, and he came straight back in. He had told my brother and I to stay inside for a couple minutes. He wanted us to stay inside because there were people dealing drugs right in front of our house. I didn't like the fact that was going on, but it was.

My friends have to go inside because the apartments are half full of druggies and/or drug dealers, and the trailer park nearby doesn't help any either. The trailer park is full of druggies and/or drug dealers. During the day, when I'm outside hanging out with friends and the druggies and/or drug dealers come outside, they look like they just woke up, have not changed they're clothes for a couple days, and they're spacing out.

Late at night, I came home from hanging out friends. I saw drug dealers dealing drugs around the apartments, cops coming in and out of the apartment and the trailer park, cats running wild like dogs were chasing them, and cars pulling in and out all night.

I lay in my bed, and all I wanted to hear was silence, so I could get a good night sleep. But instead I hear couples fighting all night, arguing about drugs and money, right in front of their children.

I hate living in these apartments, but it's all my mom can afford for her, my brother, and me. As long as my mom and my brother are with me, I'll be fine. I have to be tough for my family, don't I?

My mom wants to call the cops, but she won't because if the drug dealers find out who called, they won't go after her—they'll go after her children. About 21 years ago, I had an aunt murdered over drugs. The two that had murdered her had came after my mom, asking her where my aunt had put the drugs. She didn't know what my aunt had done with them, so they threatened to kill my mom. The two that murdered my aunt were busted. Now they're in prison. One died in prison, deserves him right—and the other one is getting out in about 2 to 5 years. I don't think he should be getting out but he is; he shouldn't be getting out because he might end up doing it again.

If you think dealing drugs can make you a lot of money, I mean yes it can, but it doesn't mean it does. If you want some reality in life, go to a graveyard where people are buried for dealing drugs or doing them. That's what my mom says to me to remind me not to do anything to deal with drugs.

Why do people deal drugs or do them? What's the point of doing them? There's no point in it, is there? I don't know what drugs do to you, but all I know is that they can get you killed. Do people do them, just so they can die faster than anyone else? I guess they just are lucky that they're still alive.

Why don't cops do something about it? I ask myself that question everyday of the year. I would really like to know why they don't do something about it. The cops know that drugs are, right around the apartments and they still won't do anything about it. I know that they know that drugs are done there at the apartments because all you have to do is walk outside or get out of your car, and you can smell it really bad.

Somebody needs to stop those who do drugs or deal them before their children get a hold of them and take them to school or something. The children will probably start doing them too because their parents really don't care about their children anymore. I guess I'm lucky to have a mom that cares what I'm doing and who I'm with.

*10th Grade, Corning Union High School*



# I SING, THE PERFECT WORLD

*by Mary Lao*

I sing America  
The place where dreams are made into reality  
The life that everyone wants to live  
The language that we learned how to speak  
The time teenagers realized the future to adulthood  
The risk immigrants took to care for their families  
America, the Perfect World

I sing America again  
Where happiness is promised  
Where land is granted  
Where new things are experienced  
How other countries wish they were us  
How we are the best in the world  
America, the greatest of All

Then sing to me  
The greed over money  
The spoiling of the children  
The education no one cares about  
The dramas full of hatred  
The disrespect for the elders  
America, the Illusion

America continues singing  
The dishonesty between friends  
The secrets that are kept from us  
The miseries we have to go through  
The darkness that may never be revealed  
The pain we all have inside of us  
America, the Imagination

This time I listen to my own voice  
The perfect place I thought I once wanted  
Can not be fulfilled here  
Not anywhere

*11th Grade, Grant Union High School*

# I WANT BOTH CULTURES

by Ana Rosa Flores

## THE “GOOD” NEWS

Dear Diary:

My mom just gave me the good (bad in my feelings) news—we’re moving to the United States, California to be specific. My parents say I will have a better future there, that I will be able to learn English and have a career. I don’t want to move, but I guess I don’t really have an option. I can’t even imagine what my life would be like. Well, diary, my point is that my whole future depends on it. My parents want the best for me, and I don’t want to disappoint them. This whole thing is just a great sacrifice, not only for me but also for my parents. Hopefully, God shows me the right way out of this.

## SAYING GOOD BYE

The last day I was in my hometown—Chiltepec, Mexico—it was the saddest day of my life. I felt that the words from every member of my family were tearing me apart. “Take care. Don’t forget us. Come back to visit. Don’t leave us,” were some of the phrases I will never forget. On the other hand, there were my friends. We’d been friends since I can remember. How could I go without my friends? They were the most special things I had since I was a little girl. I had to face it; I was leaving no matter what.

## FAVOR?

If they only knew that they didn’t do me a favor  
That I needed that dream  
The one you never wake up from  
Where hurt is NOT there  
Where sadness doesn’t exist.  
If they only knew that I wanted to stay there,  
Relaxed, without tears or worries  
And everything was in vain  
Some people say it’s just an experience  
Others choices of God  
But have they asked me  
If I wanted to stay there?  
If I felt happy to be able to forget?  
Who asked me if I wanted to go back?  
Who thought of my own tranquility?  
And retaking my own way, the steps are heavy  
The path has thorns, I know  
And my soul cries in silence  
The love that goes, is another chapter of life  
No one could understand, is just that  
Those who say they love me  
Easily can change  
They break my heart more than any fatal accident could  
Blames and reproaches, when I can’t take any more  
Today I close a curtain again  
The drama has to end  
Alone I cry, for the memories  
So the ignorant can’t enjoy my tears  
And once more like a clown  
A smile I have to draw.

## GOING BACK TO MY COUNTRY

September 22, 2003

**Dear Sister,**

Hope that when you read this letter you're O.K. Our parents and I are fine. I'm so excited. After three years, I'm finally going to see you again in December. I'm looking forward to this trip, but anyways tell me how your life is going. Mine is as always. I've been here three years, and this is still a strange place. You can't imagine how pretty it is. It should remind me of Mexico. I never thought that this was going to be that hard, even though I have lots of friends, a nice house, and I know English almost eighty percent. I love to look at the olive trees and all the Mexicans working, so they could feed their families. I love to go to the big stores and buy stuff for you. I don't even have the words to explain it to you. California is just beautiful. I am sorry to say it this way, but I'M NOT HAPPY AT ALL, and that's the way I feel. You are the only one who I really trusted and told the truth. I try to seem happy so my dad will feel proud of me, but it is really hard. Well, got to go. SEE YOU SOON.

LOVE YA MUCHO'S, YOUR LIL. SIS

Ana Rosa Flores

## I Lost What I Love the Most

October 3, 2004

One afternoon, just like any other one, I received the news—one of my brothers had a car accident, and he passed away. I didn't understand why. Why had God taken him away from me?

**Dear Brother,**

How are you? I know you're fine because you are with Him. You know? Today I felt the desire to write you a letter.

Tell You: How much I love you and miss you.

Tell You: How happy I was when I found out that I had a wonderful brother just like you.

Tell You: How much I loved to spend my life with you.

Tell You: How I admired you because even though you had lots of problems you would always find the right way out of them.

Tell You: How proud I was to have YOU as my brother.

Tell You: That the brother I always dreamed of was you.

Tell You: Thank you for loving me as much as I love you.

Tell You: How much I miss looking at your angelic face.

Because you know this was what you were to me:

In this letter, I want you to know you will **always** be in my heart and in my thoughts. You know, today I felt the desire to write to you and tell you how much I love and miss you.

## EPILOGUE

After living five years in the United States, I still ask myself, was it worth it having a better future, leaving my family behind without knowing that I could lose a part of me? I don't think I'll be able to answer that question, but I hope that wherever my brother is he can feel proud of me. Having to remember these things makes me more than just sad.

*11th Grade, Corning Union High School*

# AMERICA IT IS...

*by Michael Lee*

Make your claim, and it's yours  
A dream, a fantasy, a land of the free  
Don't worry; there's never a fee  
Make your riches and take your leave  
We have rights that no one can relieve

Given the chance to succeed  
Given the chance to proceed  
Given the chance to be who you wanna be  
And see what you wanna see  
This is America..  
The closest thing you think you could get to a Utopia

Find your land and give it a name  
And for the non-whites, just do the same  
Lynch those who disagree  
But please, make it seem like it was done sincerely  
All you had to do was work your land and pay your tax  
It's not like they told you to work a farm and didn't even bother to lend you an ax

There's love for everyone, but us  
C'mon everyone excluding Rosa Parks, jump on the bus  
But how about them Chinese folks? They need a place to live  
No problem, just tell them when and where to build the bridge  
And the Mexicans? They need a job too  
Don't worry, all they're gonna do is come rob you

From past to present, there have always been the wrongs and rights  
Is this what our forefathers had in their sights?  
A land of fame and fortune

Where the biggest real issues are gay marriages and abortions  
An economy where there seems to be not that much poverty  
One would go as far as to say that America is a global robbery

Taking what's needed for us to survive, even when it might not be ours  
This land is so great; our own presidential candidate was accused of being a coward  
From top to bottom, we might not be the best  
But we do what we have to do to stay atop of the rest

America it is..  
Make it your own while you can, because soon, it will become his

*11th Grade, Grant Union High School*

# **MY PEOPLE**

*by Sarai Rodriguez*

I was brought here really young  
And have been here for quite long,  
As I got older year after year  
I realize why my parents brought me here,  
They wanted a better life and future for me,  
But the American dream isn't what it seems to be,  
There are many things I wish that you could see,  
There are lots of problems my people face,  
They get judged just because of their race  
And many can't do much to their disgrace,  
Of stealing they're accused,  
With all the work in the fields, they're abused,  
Work is what they come to do,  
Hard work,  
Which no one else would do,  
With these I don't mean my people are only simple workers,  
Some become successful; some are teachers and doctors,  
I'm proud of my people and for them I'm taking a stand,  
I don't know if you remember, but California used to be our land,  
It's sad how our own Governor is forgetting what he was,  
And he is attempting to pass laws,  
Laws against my people trying to make them leave,  
But this kind of prejudice they are not going to receive,  
"They should go back to their country"  
Is what some of them say,  
But I wonder what would happen if we really went away?  
Who would do all the hard work we have to do everyday?  
There are many other things I wish that I could say..  
I don't think the way you treat us is being very fair,  
My people suffer all the time but you don't really care,  
When you go into our countries to vacation or to stay,  
I wonder if you'd like it if we treated you the same way,  
All I really want is for people to understand,  
That life isn't easy for my people in this land.

*9th Grade, Grant Union High School*



**CHAPTER FOUR**

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**DREAMING OF A BETTER  
LIFE IN CALIFORNIA**

# **CRUZANDO LA FRONTERA**

*by Luis Navarette*

My grandfathers, Ignacio and Alberto, were both 20 years old when they were contracted by a ranch owner in Fresno, California. It was the bracero program that brought them to the United States in 1961. They crossed la frontera from Mexico to California without a problem because the American government needed more field workers, and they were welcomed. My grandfathers went directly to Fresno looking for the address that they were given. It was very hard for them to find the ranch without being able to communicate in English. They worked picking tomatoes, strawberries, and oranges, as well as other vegetables from around the San Joaquin Valley going from ranch to ranch. By the end of six months, both looked forward to seeing their families again but planned to keep working to earn the money needed in the travel from Fresno back to Michoacan. My Apa Alberto went back sooner than my Apa Ignacio who stayed working. Apa Ignacio was struck in the head one night on his way home from the store. He made his way back to the ranch and packed up his things to head home. After that experience, he never came back to California again. Apa Alberto, on the other hand, came back to California regularly in the following years staying for six months, at a time and then going back to Mexico to reunite with his family. One day he told me that he always remembered when he returned from those days of hard work, the great smiles of his family welcoming him home from el norte.

My father, Enrique, followed in the footsteps of my Apas Alberto and Ignacio, but he had to face the border police when he crossed la frontera with his friends. The bracero program had ended, and crossing the border without proper documents was illegal. Before immigrating to the U.S., my father was in high school, ninth grade, trying to get an education. He worked after school taking the family cows to eat in the rural part of his town. Each morning after putting up the milk for sale, he walked to school about three kilometers away from the little town where they lived. His lunch was a sandwich full of beans, which his parents could hardly afford. He told me that those who had money bought hamburgers made of ham and vegetables with a juice on the side. The scene was sorrowful. My grandparents told me that they had to let the kids eat first and then they did if anything was left over. My father began to feel the need to abandon school and go to the U.S. to find work.

Around the 1980's my father began work to support his family since he was the eldest of three brothers and five sisters. The pressure on him was greater with every sickness and accident the family had. One time when he came home from school, my grandmother Josefina had an accident trying to step up on an old ladder. My father was the only one who could make decisions since my Apa Alberto was in el norte. He took her to the hospital in the nearest city. It was unclear at the time how they were going to pay the hospital, but in the same week Apa Alberto sent some money for the medical payment. After examining the conditions that his family lived in and not having opportunity to get an education without money, my father and my grandparents concluded that he needed to migrate to the U.S.

My father and his friends formed a little group for the purpose of not being lost in the unknown land that was awaiting them in el norte. They figured a way to get the transportation money by selling the goods they had. Composed of five, they traveled by bus from Michoacan to la frontera. Before arriving in the U.S., immigrants were not sure where they were but stayed in an old hotel in Nogales, a city on the border of between both countries. The next morning they had to start the journey again and try to cross la frontera. That same morning they asked others what was the best way to "jump the border" as they called it. Someone told them about a tunnel that was dangerous but easy to cross. It was called "tunnel of the death" because there are people inside who wanted to kill them or rob them of their money. By a sense of fate, they decided to cross the border through the "tunnel of death" and paid someone, a coyote, who guided them. It cost them 500 pesos or 50 dollars a piece. My father said the tunnel was black, and the sound of the cars passing on top of them made a thunderous noise. They ran all the way through the tunnel and finally they reached the exit and touched, for the first time, American soil. They were so relieved and were in a hurry to reach their transportation. From there,



they went to the bus station looking for someone that spoke Spanish. Finding someone, they asked him if there was any transportation available to Merced, California where some family relatives were living. They found a bus that was departing that same day and were on their way for nine more hours before arriving in Merced. My father lived there for seven months and worked picking tomatoes. He saved money and sent it back to his father, brothers and sisters.

And yes, 20 years later the story was again repeating itself. The difference was my father came and went and had to support his family from the seasonal work he had in the United States. I was eleven years old and in the sixth grade in my middle school in Michoacan, Mexico. As I started examining the world around me, hopes and dreams formed in my mind. I dreamt of becoming a teacher or those political employees or a police officer.

It was the 10th of May in 2000 when my parents took my little sister Maria to the U.S. Yesica, my older sister, and I stayed behind with our grandparents. After a month Apa Enrique and Ama Elizabeth called to let us know that we were going to be getting on an airplane that would take us to la frontera. Transportation by air was not very common because it was about \$2000 pesos, \$200 dollars in U.S. money. My Apa Ignacio took us to the airport, and as we arrived and saw those giant machines, I could not believe that my eyes were seeing an airplane. As we were departing from the airport, a sensational feeling came over me from just thinking about seeing my parents again, but on the other hand, it was hard for me to leave my friends, my town, and my grandparents. After traveling for about half an hour, some nice-looking girl brought food to my sister and me. But first she brought with her a wet towel for the intention of cleaning our hands. I did not know any of those new customs, so I just stared at her without knowing what to do with the wet towel. This was the first of many new experiences awaiting me. As the airplane was arriving at the airport, it started to shake roughly. I was feeling nervous by remembering those airplane crashes showed on the television, but we landed in Tijuana, Mexico without crashing. It was a great pleasure to fly from Michoacan in just a few hours rather than driving the eighteen hours by car. It was all something new to me. My father had been working in the fields in Arizona picking tomatoes with my mother. From there, he came to pick us up at the airport, and then we went to a hotel. There, in Tijuana, I did not know what was happening around me; the city, the streets crowded with cars, the giant buildings, and too many people.

The next morning it was time to cross the border, and we had to memorize the name and the city from the birth certificate my father bought for our crossing. My name was Juan and my sister's was Maria on our new birth certificate. We crossed la frontera almost asleep with our eyes just closed, nervous and scared of what might happen if an officer asks us some questions. We did not have any problem, thanks to God, passing the examination stations and came to live in Merced, California. It was the experience that shows me we had to have a lot of determination to get the American Dream.

As we came to Merced, the houses, the people, the language, and everything was different. I was going to enroll in school, but it was summer vacation. So, my father instead took me to the fields of Planada, California to pick tomatoes during the hot summer. It was hard for me to pick up those heavy buckets and carry them to the trailer. The trailer was far from where we were picking tomatoes and by the time I reached the trailer, my hands and arms were so tired I could not continue. In the apartment we had rented, we had to sleep with our jackets as our bed and our table was the floor. My father only had a little money left after paying for the plane tickets and the coyote who helped us get across la frontera.

It was a different climate at Cruickshank Middle School where I enrolled in as a seventh grader, from the one in Michoacan. I did not like anything that was happening around me since everything was so new and different. On one occasion when I did not know which bus to take, I was feeling powerless when I could not

communicate with the students or teachers. This feeling of powerlessness was the mountain I had to cross in the two years before I went on to high school. I was able to cross that mountain, and when I started high school, my English vocabulary was developing, but I was still in the non-English learner classes. The next summer I went to summer Migrant Workers Education for summer school where I took my first regular English class. In the next two years, I joined one of the advanced placement classes in U.S. History. The American Dream had changed the life my parents had before and had allowed them opportunity of giving their kids a better future. I, as many others like my father or my mother, have the dream of serving my community. Now, I have the opportunity to represent my family by fulfilling the American Dream for my parents.

It is the so called American Dream that brings many Mexicans to the United States looking for a better and stable life. Yes, the need is brought about by the prolonged hunger and poor conditions in Mexico in which the poor can not support their families only from agriculture. Many of them come to give their kids a better future and life. Also, others seek it as a way of making it through la frontera between Mexico and the United States by passing illegally. There is a lot of suffering when crossing the border, some walking three days without a drop of water under the hot sun. Many reach it, others not, because of the dangerous conditions in the desert of la frontera. Families join their fathers to emigrate and settle as a family, which has to adapt to a different world they have never seen or heard about to begin a new life in a new country. The American Dream is just a phrase that many fathers have given to their families; a better life without hunger and suffering.

The American Dream has now come into my two hands, leaving those tired hands of my parents, free from working in the fields for the good of their family. Yes, I wish someday I can do something for my country, but without the opportunity of having money, there is no other solution to the problem. With the help of God and my family, the dreams of my past history can be reached, representing all of those who immigrate and dream of a better life by having a good education. My dream is to be a priest or doctor and help the poor and the needy. Also, my dreams are to form an association that helps the newcomers giving them a place to stay and advising them about this new world. It is not just my dream, but the dream of many who wish to someday live their lives toward a good future.

*11th Grade, Golden Valley High School*

# AMERICA SINGS

*by Dionne Harris*

America sings haste and hate  
Happiness that covers  
Vulgarity and pain  
Abuse and use of girls like me  
Yet America sings of the free

So much opportunity and so much chance  
America sing, America dance  
America sings only for beauty  
Beautiful faces  
Beautiful bodies  
But it does not sing for  
Beauty like me

America sings of hard workers rejoice  
America sings and drowns out a voice  
And act like it cares  
When it really don't

America sings for STDs and AIDS  
Cheering on sex, even for the under age  
Yet there's no place like America it seems  
America is the only place where you can dream

America sings for actresses and actors  
People who act like they are factors  
And act like they're running a country  
But all I ever notice is the running of their mouths

America sings for low self-esteem  
America is cruel, cool, nice, yet mean  
The kid with all of the latest things  
Popularity the "American Dream"

America the great  
And great by all means  
Grand in fact  
But what about me

Because I'm American too  
And I too sing.

*11th Grade, Grant Union High School*

# MY MOTIVATION

*by Chong Her*

My family was one of the many refugees who immigrated to the United States, searching for a better life. Since I was only three years old when we arrived to this country, I do not remember much except for one important fact that I only have one parent, my mom.

I am the oldest child of five kids, with a single mother. Since there is only one parent in the family, I often find myself acting as the other parent. Now that I am older, I am responsible for many chores at home. I am in charge of the mail and interpret for my mom when we go for a doctor's visit or teacher's conference. Outside of school, I work part time to help support my family. I come home late at night and later have to stay up finishing the homework that is due. In many situations, I find myself acting as my siblings' American parent because I understand what my siblings are going through. I give them advice about problems my mom does not understand, and I tutor them with their homework. Most importantly, I try to be a good role model for my younger siblings.

In addition to the current responsibilities of a parent, there were also expectations that I needed to fulfill for myself. At an early age, I had to learn the English language in addition to keeping my native Hmong language. As I began school, I realized this task was difficult. I was not reading at my grade level and could not even write complete sentences in English. There were no older siblings to turn to when I had difficulty with homework, and since my mom did not know English, I struggled through school myself. Realizing my limitations, I gave up on school from time to time. Every night, my mom lectured me on how I was not trying hard enough. Sometimes I got mad at her for lecturing me because she did not understand that I was already struggling. No matter how consistently my mom reminded me, I was confused and did not get her message of the importance of education.

With these personal experiences, I now realize that my mom is my motivation to become a better person. Even when I gave up, she never gave up on me or my siblings. She has many hopes in all of us, especially in me being the oldest child, to succeed in all that we do. As a single parent, she did everything she could to support her kids to ensure a better future for us. Now that I see the obstacles my mom has overcome, I want to pursue a higher education to make sure my mom's dream comes true. I know college will not be easy for a first generation student like me, but I will just have to work twice as hard to be on the same level as other students whose parents have already gone through college. If I give up now, my siblings will also follow my footsteps, and I will never be able to open the door of opportunities for them. College will allow me to contribute what I learn to my family. I want to be able to support my mom because without her hard work and encouragement in the past, I would not be who I am today. My community is also important to me, so I hope to give back what I learn from college. In the future, I want my kids to be able to depend on me as a parent, so they will not have to carry on their shoulders my current responsibilities.

*12th Grade, Grant Union High School*

# **CALIFORNIA: MY NEW HOME**

*by Ko Ko*

When I come to think about living in California, I always feel extremely happy. California used to be my dream when I was young. One of my favorite places in this world is California.

I am neither Californian nor an American. I am just a refugee who has been here for a few months. As you know about refugees' lives, we lost our home country. Now California has become where I call my "home" in the United States. I like California very much.

By the way, California would be the best place to live for a refugee because of these kind-hearted societies, institutes, authorities and organizations. When I arrived here, I had nothing to worry about. I got a lot of help from the International Institute and some other organizations. The Institute has found an apartment for my family and me. Institute assistance ranges from teaching English to finding jobs; arranging for schools and driving permits; connecting with social agencies and health providers. We get help with welfare, health care, state benefits, etc. I am here to thank them beyond the word.

Californians are very friendly, hospitable and open, although they might have bad behavior sometimes. However, they have big hearts and beautiful minds. Californians are always welcoming. Sometimes living in California makes me feel like walking in the air. The place where I came from and here are very different. I am experiencing different climates, cultures, customs, and traditions. I am getting used to speaking a new language, eating new foods, seeing people of all nationalities in one country, seeing and wearing different clothes and different educational systems. Another story!

I do not know about you, but an answer for a better life for me is living in a different country and living in California.

*11th Grade, Grant Union High School*

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## **I SING AMERICA**

*by Caroline Thao*

Today, I sing America with different colors  
I sing America with different people  
    From the rich to the poor  
    The Blacks to the Whites  
    The Asians to the Mexicans  
I sing America, education is free  
Oh, America the land of dreams, the aide of the others  
America has it all, everyone wants to live in America  
    Today, I sing America as the home of many  
    I sing America as a better country than any other  
    I sing America as my dad sung America  
Who fled the mountains and traveled the lands to be here  
    In the land of equality and opportunity  
    I sing America of democracy, where one can vote  
Today, I sing America the land of differences and change.

*11th Grade, Grant Union High School*

# LIFE AT MY HOUSE

by Tom Holloway

Can you imagine growing up in a family full of abuse and drunkenness? A family of four: a drunken father who doesn't care about you and is always drunk whether it is at work, at home, or in public; a mother who drinks a little, but loves her children dearly; and a twin sister who is your best friend. Imagine asking dad for permission to go over to your grandma's and him saying no and you getting beaten with a belt. And while this happening, you're asking yourself why? Why is this happening? What did you do to deserve this? You get hit so much that by the last hit, it hurts so much you can't do anything, not even cry. This happened to me for eight long miserable years.

I can remember when I was five years old seeing my dad drinking a beer at about 3 in the morning before he went to work and putting about five or six in with his lunch my mom had made the night before. It was even worse when he got home that afternoon about 3 or 4. I can remember every day when I got home from school and asking, "Is Dad home?" And when he was, I'd see him sitting at the kitchen table with a beer. He would probably have about fifteen beers a day.

I remember my dad showing up at Little League baseball games drunk and if that wasn't bad enough, he would go to the truck or car and drink even more. And then he would get loud, and he would stagger around, and I was embarrassed. I think I was only 6 years old, and I didn't want anyone to know he was my dad. One thing I would never forget about that man is how destructive he would get when he got drunk. One night my cousin was over. My sister and I had finished our dinner, and we were watching T.V. I heard a noise. When I got out there, my dad had thrown a dinner plate across the kitchen and then threw one at my mom. When he saw me standing there, he threw one at me. Luckily the plate didn't hit me. I am not sure why this happened, but I think someone did something to make him mad. When he got done with his rampage, he passed out, about an hour later after having a few more beers. After he passed out, my mom took my sister, my cousin and myself over to our grandma's, and she went home. On the way to my grandma's I asked myself, "What just happened? Doesn't he love me anymore?"

At that moment, I didn't think so. It was like a knife in my heart. It is every little boy's dream to grow up and be just like his dad. At that time, it was my dream, but I thought, "My dad is a drunk. He is a very abusive man." I also thought, "I don't want to be like that and I don't want anyone to go through what he did because of stupidity."

When I was eight, my mom decided to divorce my dad. She did this because she was tired of all the drunkenness, the verbal and physical abuse, and she thought it would be better for my sister and me. During the divorce, we stayed at my grandma's while my dad stayed at the farm.

One of the days at court, my dad decided that he wanted the farm or \$32,000. I think that it was a tough decision for my mom because that was a lot of money and the farm was how we get our extra money to get things like supplies and vacations. I thought my dad's request was really outrageous because he was never there to help or he was too drunk to help. I say this because I've been bucking all the hay since I was either 5 or 6. To pay off my dad, we had to get a loan from the dairy where we get our calves. It took about 3 years to pay the loan off.

My dad and my mom had to go to court to get divorced, and my sister and I were afraid that the judge would make us live with our dad and we couldn't see our mom. But that was just being paranoid. The last day of court after all the paperwork had been completed and everything was done, I gave my dad a hug, and I haven't seen him since.

I have lost a lot of respect for him because I feel that he ripped off my whole family with all the money

he took and all the things he had taken with him when he left, like tools, milking equipment and supplies for the house. You would think that with all the money he took he could have set up a trust fund or some sort of an account for me and my sister to go to college with, but that didn't happen. What he did do is go out and buy a brand new 4-wheel drive truck and an SUV.

What makes me even madder is that he hardly pays any child support, but he comes over on our birthday and at Christmas and puts a card in the mailbox and goes through our mail. You don't know what this feels like until you have to go through it personally and have gone through it yourself.

You're probably saying to yourself, "What kind of father figure did this boy have after his parents' divorce?" I kind of adopted my older brother as the father figure in my life. Jim is my best friend. He has gotten me involved in all kinds of sports—hunting, fishing and quading, which I really enjoy. He helps me with a number of different things such as welding and small engine repair.

Jim and I go to Coos Bay, Oregon twice a year to ride our quads in the sand dunes. The last time we went we had to take my sister, which was okay, but I really like the one on one with my older brother. We can talk, we like the same movies, and we really like the same music.

I am really lucky for I have a grandma who will give me the world, and she keeps me supplied in fun stuff.

I have an uncle and an aunt who will pretty much give me and my sister anything we need, and I am certain they are going to be helping us out with our college education.

I have also developed a friendship with Mr. Kee, my Ag teacher. I think he's really cool and I can just go hang out in his room and it's great. I really have an interest in ag mechanics and welding; maybe this will be my profession.

Through all my life I think I have been closest to my sister and mom. We realize how good we have it now, and I think we are better for it in some ways. I have my dog Ranger, who is a Walmart special. I got him for free. He doesn't judge me or harp at me, he just wants to be my friend.

You might say I've had a bad childhood, maybe, but I have really learned as a person. I think that with what my family and I have gone through, we are very close. Sure my sister and I still fight with each other just like any other brother and sister, and we still get in trouble for not cleaning our rooms, and we are still raising calves for the dairy.

But when I come home from school, I don't have to worry if someone is going to be drunk, I don't live with physical or verbal abuse, and I don't have to worry about my mom when I'm at school or when he's going to hit again or if he's going to hurt my mom or sister again.

I know that if I were to get married and have kids, I couldn't do what my dad did to us. I just couldn't live that way again.

I don't think I'll drink but who knows. I do want to race my QUAD and go to college. I guess you can say I'm just like every other 15 year old.

# AWAY FROM HOME

by Alejandra Salazar

Not all of life have I lived in California. Before I came to the U.S., I used to live in Mexico. There I went to kindergarten and all the way to third grade. I loved school, it was my favorite place to be.

When I was in school, I was always the little one. My classmates in higher grades would always hug and carry me around like if I was a little doll. In school every Monday we had to go and salute the flag, we had to line up from smallest to biggest I was always up in front. In Mexico they didn't give so many awards. They only gave from first place to third place for each grade. In those days I was really smart. Those three years that I attended school I got third place in first grade, second grade, and since I didn't get to complete third grade, they gave me one ahead of time.

In Mexico we had everything we needed; food, clothing, a roof over our heads. Work over there is not the same as here; here what you earn from work in one day helps you a lot. In Mexico it is not like that; my mom had two jobs and the money she got out of it barely helped her to buy one pound of meat and tortillas. That's where a day's work went. My dad's money helped to pay the bills and that was mostly it. Mexico is a beautiful place, but it is a hard struggle. Nothing there works like it does here. You can have it all, but nothing comes free you have to break your back for it.

When my parents decided to come to the United States, I was in second grade I didn't understand why they had to leave. I didn't think money was a big issue, since all I did was stick my hand out and wait till I got the money. One night they said they were going to get some milk. I knew they had left because they didn't come back. We had to stay with our grandmother; she was always there helping us whenever we needed help. My grandmother was always good to us; when my parents would send money, she would always give us some to go and buy something at school. One day my little brother got sick. When my mom found out my dad was at work, she just left without telling him. The next day she was already in Mexico. She lasted almost a year there. My mom later had decided that she was going to bring us with her. We didn't have enough money for all of us to come with her, so she just brought the four smallest with her; my three brothers and me. My older brother and sister had stayed with my grandma.

Since we didn't have papers, we had to come illegally. Once we were at the border of the United States and Mexico, we had to come with a "coyote", which is a person who is going to lead across the border. It was really scary being around hotels in that area. You always hear people drinking and acting like animals. My two brothers were already across; they were staying at some relative's house. When it was time to go, we had to walk for about an hour. It was still dark outside, and I was getting sleepy, but since I was so little they would just carry me. I was up in front; my mom had to come in the back because one of the other guys had to help her with my little brother. Once we had gone over, we had to go to some house. Then they told me that my mom had gotten lost but that one of the persons who was a helper was with her. I didn't know what was I supposed to do; I was too little to understand. I could hear people saying "so little and lost her parents already," but my mom appeared that afternoon, so I was very happy to see her again.

When we went to my aunt's house, we met with my brothers. There we took a bus to California. Once we got to Corning, we met our uncles and aunts. We were not going to stay here. My parents had planned to move to Washington. When we got to Washington, we were staying at one of my moms' friends' house.

The day came when we had to go to school. We didn't want to go since we didn't understand English. It was very hard to adapt to that new change especially since the school we started to go to didn't have anyone who spoke Spanish, not even the students. That was very hard for us. Then they gave us a new class; in that class is where we were taught English.

My parents had problems with the people we were living with, so we decided to move from their house into a new apartment. In my mom's work, they told her that she could apply for papers. One day we went down



to where they had told my mom to apply and we all got ID cards from the state of Washington.

When my uncle went to Mexico, he brought my older brother with him. We decided to move here because my brother had found a good job, and he didn't want to leave. The day we left Washington it was really sad. We liked it there so much we didn't want to leave. I cried because it was so hard because we had already made friends, and I didn't want to start over again.

We were living at my uncle's house when we got here. It was pretty nice there. Once they moved, my dad agreed to take over the house and continue paying the rent. Since both of my parents had jobs, it was really easy to maintain the house. My mom signed us up to school and once again I didn't want to go to school. I thought it was going to be scary. I wasn't so scared because I knew how to speak English, so it wasn't that bad. Once in school, I met new friends, and it turned out to be pretty nice.

Finally when my sister came, we were all together. We decided to move from there into another place. My parents have cars, money and much more stuff than what we had in Mexico.

Life in Mexico is not what it seems to be. Yes there are pretty beaches, good food. But without money, none of that is possible. Once you have seen and been there, you see that what's behind all that is not pretty at all. There's just struggle and hard work to get what you want, and sometimes not even with all that, do you get what you really need. In those days I didn't understand what all of that meant, but remembering how much my parents had to work to give us a better life, really makes me think that there are a lot of other things out there besides what money buys. Some people are born lucky and some people are not. Even if I'm not rich, I know that I'm one of the lucky ones. It all depends on how you want your life to be.

*9th Grade, Corning Union High School*

# THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AN EDUCATION

*by Paying Lee*

I grew up living in low-income areas my whole life. As a young child, I did not do well in school because I did not motivate myself to do so. I did not have the knowledge concerning the opportunities I would have if I had a good education. I had a hard time concentrating on my studies because I only cared about having fun and playing with my friends. I did not know much about education because of the lack of resources I had.

Unlike many other parents, my parents do not have an education or know much English and were unable to help me in terms of my schoolwork. My parents, on the other hand, still knew the value of an education. Although my parents could not help me much with my schoolwork, they always tried to motivate me to do well in school because they did not have the chance to have an education. They grew up in mountainous areas of Laos and did not have the opportunity to go to school because they did not have the money or the transportation to attend. That is the reason why they want me to have an education because they do not want me to work as hard as they have worked. My parents knew that if I saw what success was, then I would want it.

When I was in sixth grade, my father bought a small landscaping business, and he used to take me along with my mother and my brothers to go help him work. He wanted to show me how hard he had to work because he did not have the education to get a good job. My experiences going to work with my father helped me realize that I needed to do something significant with my life. Seeing all of the beautiful houses my father worked at gave me the motivation to become something more. I wanted that life: to have a nice house, a nice car, and a great career. More importantly, I have come to realize that I do not want to spend the rest of my life working at a job I do not like. I want to be able to choose my own career rather than being held back with an unwanted job.

Surrounded by poverty all of my life, I was too young then to understand the significance of an education. Now that I am older, I have become more aware of the fact that having an education can take me on the right path to become someone worthy. Realizing the significance of education, I have motivated myself to get more involved in my schoolwork. My experiences working with my parents and seeing others succeed has driven me to become a more open-minded person about education. I do not want to let myself get away from higher education because I would be missing out on something great. I have seen education take many others beyond their dreams, and I know it can take me beyond mine. I know it will help me find a great career for myself in the future. Not only do I want a great career, I want to be able to expand my knowledge. I want to go far in life knowing that I have done something significant.

*12th Grade, Grant Union High School*

# **EIGHT HAIKUS**

*by Karen Aguilar*

## **I. Unclean Hands**

His hands are dirty,  
Working late into the night,  
Toiling until four.

## **II. Hands With a Message**

Hard labor women  
Compelling with a message  
For all to know.

## **III. Man Under the Rain**

He battles to live,  
Selling flowers is his task,  
In the rain he stays.

## **IV. Bakery**

Bakery is full,  
Packed people-waiting in line  
Workers keep dashing.

## **V. Taco Bell**

She stands alone,  
Proud of the job she does,  
Active day and night.

## **VI. Tire Shop**

Open anytime,  
Shining or not they still work  
Day and night casing.

## **VII Fruits**

They're taken from roots  
Around the road they might come,  
Leaving their hometowns.

## **VIII. Future Life**

To study is our labor  
A dream of education,  
We are the future.

*9th Grade, Foshay Learning Center*

# A PLACE CALLED HOME

by Karen Xiong

My parents have been living in the U.S. for over twenty-five years and have never found another place so perfect as California. They have lived in Minnesota but are not comfortable with its cold climate. They believe that California makes the best home for them and for their family. With me being born in California and having the experience as a Californian, I know that anywhere I go, I will have a good time. I've gone to places like Pismo Beach and had the best time ever. I swam in the waves and tried racing them.

There are many beautiful places to see in California. I have gone to such places that take my breath away and are so beautiful, I can hardly resist—places that make me feel good because for the moment that I am there, whatever is on my mind turns into joy and happiness. Gorgeous places such as Yosemite National Park are places where I just want to sit and enjoy the moment. I have gone there once and was very amazed by its beauty. The Central Valley is where my family and I live and fit in best because it has everything we want. We love its temperate climate. We enjoy the warmth of the sun in the summer, and the coolness in the winter. My family and I are able to travel anywhere without worrying about the weather. During the summer, we spend a lot of our time out at parks and lakes barbequing. Spending time with the family is most fun and exciting. It holds many memories of good times, maybe even some bad times.

I have a really big family that includes nine children, my mother, and father. Every moment is special to us because we don't know when one of us will be leaving. A family is the most precious gift ever because you know that you can always count on them to share a laugh or a smile. They can also depend on me anytime for anything, a laugh and a smile, some love, whatever it is I'm willing to give. No matter how far the distance I have to travel, or no matter what I have to do, I will give them the world if I have to.

California is the state my family and I enjoy being a part of; all of my family and I have faith that California is the best way into the future. We are confident that the Golden Bear State can help us to build a better future as strong and mighty as the bear and help us be prepared for it. The future is the most important part of life to all. With the past behind us, unable to be changed, and the future unknown before us, all we expect is a more desirable life. The future is the key to a better life, and my family feels sure that the Golden State holds the key to that more favorable being. We see California (and us) as one huge shelter with many people sheltered underneath it. The people beneath the shelter are we, and our shelter is what governs us.

Without this state, I don't know where my family would be. This land is what is keeping my family and me alive. It has the best government that is fair and trustworthy. This nation gave my parents a better life than their's before. It is free and has helped them when they do not have any education to acquire a job. Here in the state, my parents have a good place to live and a suitable life. It has given them good ground to stand on. It is comfortable here because there are many social people who are very nice and kind. There are people with great manners who are well respected. Wherever I may go, maybe to the store or out walking, people with smiles and good words greet me. This state has a very satisfying education because students who attend are well taught. It is a great feeling to know that I'm being educated in California because it lends me a hand when I need it. For example California promotes college funds for students with a family of low income. I am really grateful for this because my family is a low-income family. I am even more determined to make myself someone successful because I know that I am being aided by my wonderful home state.

My parents have suffered too much in the country that they were from. They have been through much tragedy and suffering. My parents have a whole history behind them in Laos. Both of them were born and raised in Laos. They lived in bamboo and straw houses and slept on wooden boards with thin blankets. They did subsistence farming for a living. The only things that they ate were the things that they farmed and could afford. They would only eat meat if they could afford it or if they got a profit from their farming. As farmers, my parents cleared lands, grew tomatoes, cucumbers, potatoes, peppers, beans, corns, bananas, papayas, coconuts, mangos, etc. Money was scarce and was really hard to get. While life was difficult, they accepted it no matter what because it was all that they had. As for the rest of the children, we are doing our best to help my parents to live

an easier life. We want them to enjoy their life as much as they can. Back in Laos, my father was a military policeman and a soldier. He began working as a military policeman at the age of fourteen and as a soldier at the age of ten. As a military policeman, he investigated and imprisoned people, and verified the correct people who boarded planes. Then as a soldier, he followed orders, patrolled areas, cooked, cleaned, set up camps and dug trenches. He had to maintain many tasks.

As for my mother, she is what I call a Hmong Cinderella. When she was born, her mother died, so her father raised her by himself. When she was maybe five, her father remarried because he was a judge and was very busy all the time. He had no time to come and look after my mother. Although she had a stepmother, she was not loved. Her new stepmother treated her badly. My mother was beaten when she did something her stepmother didn't like. Also, with this stepmom around, my mom was barely home. My mother was sent to the farm to clear the field or grow crops. If she was not done, she was not allowed to come home. Little food was given for my mom to take to the farm, so she had to eat very little at a time so that she can save. Rice was the only food she had though. There was no meat given by the stepmom. This continued on until my mom grew older, and my father saw her at the Hmong New Year. When he did, he decided to marry her. But even when my mom was married, she had many responsibilities. Life was good until the Vietnam War, and that made them move out of their country. If there were no war, my parents would still be living in Laos and maybe I might have been born there too. Laos may have had hardships, but my parent's childhood memories reside there. Right now, California is the only home for them. If Laos were peaceful, my parents would definitely go back and live there. They are hoping that one day they will get the chance to go back and live there. As for now, California is all they've got.

I am looking for an education and raising high hopes that one day I can become very successful and help my family and give them the best they've ever seen. I know that my family deserves everything that is worth giving. Anything is possible for my family and I in California. As long as we all remain in this state, I know that all of us will be happy. I, as the youngest in the family am a freshmen and have many years to go before I can achieve anything, but I am only getting stronger along the way. The people I meet and the things I learn will help me with my road to success. With me being the youngest, I feel lucky that I can ask anyone for direction anytime I need it. Being the youngest child in my family, all I want for my family is to be happy and be loved. I only want the best for my family, and I know that California is the best for them. My family is happy being here, and I wish that they would remain like this forever. It has become a wonderful home for my family and me for many years, and we just adore it more and more. Each year becomes a finer year for us because as the years roll by, it takes the bad things and leaves us with a new start and a new beginning. Our new start begins and we are delighted that it is celebrated here in the Central Valley and the State of Poppies. Every year, we meet new people and get in touch with the old ones who live far from us. It doesn't matter how far we are from each other; distance may never part us because we know that we are close at heart. Whatever we do, we're always thinking about the others even when they're not there with us. Every little thing we do and every fun time we have, we share a little with them by having more fun. When looking at one person in my family, I see my whole family through that person. They're not invisible; they're believable and visible. I know that they deserve all of the chances in life and I'm going to do my best to make it happen. I want them to receive all the possible things in life, and I want their future to be a dream comes true.

I believe that my family is the perfect family for California, and that it is the perfect home for us. My family and I deserve to live here in the state because we keep the faith that California is our home. It has become the only home we all fit in and the only home that is keeping us alive and safe. It has given me life and my freedom to live my life.

*9th Grade, Golden Valley High School*

# **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

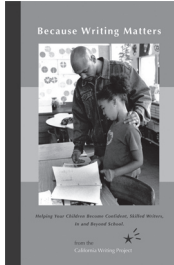
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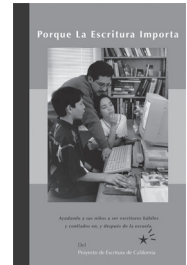
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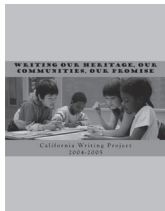


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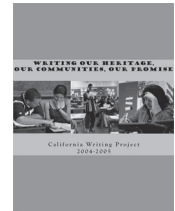
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