



Literacy Lights the Way

*International Literacy Day
September 5, 2025*

**project
adult
literacy**

*A program of the
Newport Beach Public Library*

**A program of the Newport Beach Public Library,
Project Adult Literacy provides free literacy
instruction to adults who live or work in the
Newport Beach area.**

Our team of dedicated volunteers helps people improve their literacy skills, which in turn could mean everything from getting a better job, to reading the prescription without fear of taking the wrong dose, getting a high school diploma, getting into college, helping a child with homework, and not hiding in shame when asked to read something.

Project Adult Literacy is firm in the belief that literacy changes lives.

*To become a volunteer or to refer a learner to the program, visit our
website at www.projectadulthoodliteracy.org.*



In Our Own Words

Stories from Project Adult Literacy Learners

From the Library Director

UNESCO officially established International Literacy Day in 1966 with the first celebration held on September 8, 1967. Since then, literacy is celebrated every year to highlight its essential role in empowering individuals, strengthening families, and enriching societies, while also honoring those who are actively improving their own skills or supporting others on their journey toward literacy. The ability to read and write serves as a basis for people to gain more knowledge, skills, values, and viewpoints. Literacy nurtures critical thinking, creativity, and empathy. With these abilities comes greater personal independence and higher self-esteem, leading to contributing more fully within society.

The Newport Beach Public Library's Project Adult Literacy Program serves to foster an environment that develops the literacy skills of adults to empower them to achieve greater success in their lives — at home, at work, and in the community. The essays in this compilation are a testimony to the commitment and effort our learners and tutors devoted to the importance of literacy. They offer a glimpse into the many successes that have directly resulted from the program.

Melissa Hartson
Library Services Director



From the Literacy Coordinator

The importance of literacy cannot be overstated. When an individual improves their literacy skills, whether in reading, writing or comprehension, it often leads to a significant boost in their self-confidence and self-efficacy. Literacy unlocks a vast world of information and provides people with the tools to navigate their community more effectively. In addition, literacy enhances an individual's ability to express their thoughts, feelings and ideas effectively, leading to more meaningful relationships as well as both academic and professional successes. As the adult learners in our program are gaining literacy skills, they are learning to self-express, reflect, and use their voice to pursue their goals and participate in their communities. We hope you enjoy their stories!

Christina Smith
Literacy Coordinator



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Decisions, Decisions

NAOYA SETA

It's common for anyone from abroad to find cultural differences when they visit or even move to another country. What did you find very different from your expectations based on the long experience in your home country? In the US, I've found so many things that are different or even difficult compared to ones in my home country, Japan. I'm not referring to anything serious such as politics, laws, rights, but I'm talking about things around our daily lives.

Among other things, let's pick the ones about fast food purchases. In a burger shop, there are selections of combos that are supposed to make it easier to order. They are already packaged with a specific hamburger, fries and a drink. I could expect even back in my country that I need to choose the sizes and drink I want - that's it! However, it wouldn't end there. They'd ask me extra, which are things like if I wanted to exclude tomatoes, lettuce or onions. Even after I said yes to onions, they'd ask if I liked them raw or roasted.

It gets a little worse in a coffee shop. Of course I choose a type of coffee - regular, latte, espresso, cappuccino, etc. As you know, there are many more choices nowadays, but that's fine, I can simply pick a regular coffee, so there is no question. Then they'd ask if I wanted milk and sugar, well okay, that's still a legitimate question, and I say yes. Then a nightmare starts there, they'd ask what kind of sugar, sweetener, and milk I want, each of which has at least three options. As an English learner, I wouldn't understand what they are asking about first of all, and then the list of selections they say. I already answered earlier that I needed sugar and milk, that's it, nothing more should be asked! After I managed to select "brown" sugar - not the white or chemical one and 2% milk - not oat milk, whole or half & half, they'd finally ask something extremely strange, flavors! I ended up choosing Hazelnut from a couple of options, which I don't even remember.

Lastly, the worst-case scenario is when ordering a sandwich. As you can already imagine, there are selections of bread (white, wheat, rolls, sourdough, etc.), if I like mayo and/or mustard, again exclusions of vegetables, choice of cheese (American, Cheddar, Swiss, etc.), heating up or not, cutting it in half or not, for here or to go, cash or card, and finally, if I have a QR code for membership points. It never ends. See how many decisions I need to make to get a "quick" sandwich. It's not fast food anymore!

Decisions, Decisions

NAOYA SETA

I believe these situations above may be especially challenging for English learners, and for those who are familiar, it must be nothing and trivial. However, aside from the language barrier, it was a lot easier to order fast food in Japan, most things, even sandwiches, are pre-packaged and there are almost no selections that you choose from, and shops would not accept special orders or exceptions. I know few selections in principle bear downsides for people who have likes and dislikes. In the US, a country of freedom, people should be able to choose exactly the way they want, which I totally understand. However, I sincerely hope English learners won't go hungry before they finally get their food.

My Best Friend

JOY DONG

Even after 33 years of marriage, I can say that my husband is still my best friend. He hasn't just had a positive impact on me; he's made a difference in the lives of many people around us. He's hardworking, always positive, and one of the kindest people I've ever known. No matter what happens, he always faces life with positive energy and a determination that never fades.

We used to work together at the same international trading company in China for twenty years. He was the CEO and made all important decisions and handled critical projects. Our company was authorized to sell high-quality medical equipment that was imported from Europe and America. Under his leadership, everything ran smoothly. He was careful, focused, and deeply committed to his work.

I've always admired how hard he works. We lived in Wuhan for more than forty years. When the city suddenly went into lockdown on January 23, 2020, hospitals were desperate for medical supplies. My husband did everything he could to get them what hospitals needed – ventilators, protective gear, medical masks, etc. He tried all the ways he could think of to support others, and he worked tirelessly with his team to save people's lives. During the pandemic, his phone never stopped ringing. He was solving problems as quickly as possible, even though he had a bad sore throat and could barely speak.

Throughout his career, my husband has faced many challenges. But he never gave up. He always pushed forward, doing everything he could to make the company more competitive. He told me that persistence is the key to achieving our dreams. I remember a time when some misunderstanding nearly silenced his voice at the company, he chose to remain optimistic. Even when a government investigation took away his freedom for a few months, he never lost

hope. He trusted the government and believed the truth would come one day and he would be free. He was correct. From him, I learned that persistence, patience and optimism matter more than anything.



My Best Friend

JOY DONG

In addition, my husband is a man of extraordinary generosity and compassion. He always reminds me: “Helping others is the best way to help yourself.” These are not just words — it is how he lives. I will never forget years ago, after heavy rain flooded our low-lying neighborhoods, many families lost everything. Some children could not afford the tuition of school for the upcoming year. Without hesitation, my husband provided funds to help the children to continue studying. He also cared for the elderly people in the neighborhood. If there were some elderly people who lived in poverty due to various reasons, my husband voluntarily paid their living costs each month. Year after year, I watched the list of people he helped grow longer. I never complained; I was so proud of him.

Through relentless hard work and dedication, my husband transformed not only his own destiny but also the lives of others. And his quiet kindness continues to inspire everyone around him. To the world, he may seem like an ordinary man. But to me, he is the wisest person, and I am so glad to call him my best friend.

My Grandpa

SARAH CARLSON

It sounds kind of crazy but my Grandparents raised me. My mom was having trouble with my dad. My mom and my brother and I moved in with them when I was 6 months old.

My Grandpa had high blood pressure and he would hold me to help his emotions.

Grandpa was a teacher. He taught me to fix my mom's sewing machine. On my 6th birthday, my Grandpa gave me an embroidery kit. He drew the flowers and he gave me some thread.

Grandpa's doctor wanted him to walk around the neighborhood before dinner. I would come home after school and we would walk.

My Grandpa and my brother made these patio chairs and we would sit outside and see all the shapes in the clouds. My favorite shape was a square. His favorite was a star. We both like diamonds. At night we would look at the shiny stars.

That is my favorite memory of my Grandpa. I love you, Grandpa.



Unexpected Lesson

ANONYMOUS

I'm Y Choi, I came from Korea 11 years ago. I have three kids. Unfortunately, my English is still poor. Because of that, my personality became introverted after immigrating to the USA. I don't have any confidence at all except in driving. I have to go everywhere my kids need to go. Fortunately, I was thinking I am cool because I can bring them without being afraid. To tell you the truth, this might be a case of "ignorance is bliss".

My son J flies Gliders. Almost every Sunday, he has practice with the team on the field at Perris. One Sunday, one of his team members asked me to bring her there. She is R, who is my daughter's friend. My daughter said that she told her "your mother is cool because she drives everywhere. My mother cannot." I felt so good that I was proud. I was thinking that I want to show off my cool driving skills.

Before that practice day, it rained. That day, it was foggy. The navigation took me on a different route than I usually take. When I got on the route, I suddenly felt scared. The ground was muddy. I asked J, "J, it's a different road, I think I went the wrong way. But navigation just guides me this way. Can you ask the coach?" He said "It's okay, you can keep going." "But I think we may get stuck in the mud, but okay I will try." Oh oops. My car got stuck in the mud. I tried to push the accelerator, but my car got stuck more and more.

J called to ask for help from his team. One of his team parents and one of his coaches came to where we got stuck. When I looked around, I could see just two miles away there was his team. Everyone else took the safe way to access the practice area except me. For some reason, the navigation sent me in a



weird way. I couldn't recognize the safe way because it was too foggy. The coach and the parents took the kids to practice and I called AAA. I stayed alone there for 30 minutes to wait for AAA. Suddenly one truck was coming towards me.

Unexpected Lesson

ANONYMOUS

I was thinking 'who is he? Why does he come here? There is nothing here. Is the truck useful in the mud?' He stopped and asked me "did you get stuck? I can help you." Wow, I thought that he looks like a Good Samaritan in the Bible. He looked like a hero. Then his truck got stuck in the mud.

One parent and one coach came again. The coach said " if my wife is alone like this, I can't let her stay alone." Two of them, the truck driver and I, started digging the ground to take out my car and the truck. Finally AAA came to take out my car. When the AAA truck was coming almost to my car, it got stuck in the mud too. He called his AAA friend. Two more AAA trucks arrived there to help him. The three AAA trucks got stuck and got unstuck several times. They didn't help us at all. They just helped themselves and they left. The good Samaritan truck driver's whole family came there to help him. His father, wife, younger brother, and mother brought some food for him and shovels. We got stuck there for more than 4 hours.

Then a huge truck came to the road 0.5 miles away with another truck. Thankfully someone had called them but I didn't know who did. The huge truck driver said that he could pull the cars from the road by attaching a rope to the other truck which then can attach another rope to the stuck cars. The price was \$900, but it didn't matter at all. I wanted to get out of this situation. I wanted to go home. I asked him if he could help the good Samaritan truck too. He said that the truck was here because of you, he would help them with the same price. Of course, I was so grateful. Finally my car got out of the mud after struggling for 5 hours.



From this accident, first of all I recognized there are many good people in the world. The truck driver was such a good person. He didn't know me at all, but he didn't hesitate to take risks and give his time to help me with his family. I was grateful to the team parents too.

Unexpected Lesson

ANONYMOUS

Before this day, I couldn't get to know them because of my poor English, so I always stayed alone. I thought that they didn't like me, that I was annoying. But it was my mistake. Second, I was ashamed of myself for trying to show off. I need a humble mind especially while driving a car. Safety is the important thing.

Family

NICK HUBBARD

My family has changed a lot in the last couple years. I was with my wife, Tammy, for about three years. This year she left me. I was shocked because I didn't know she wasn't happy. She didn't tell me she was leaving, her house-parent told me. I was upset for months. My whole family was upset because of the way she broke up with me. My family has been helping me out a lot. My friends helped me and told me to be single for a while. They wanted me to feel better.

One of my friends is Sarah. I've known her for a while. She is helping me with reading. She helps me with flashcards. She doesn't judge me. We like lots of things alike. We both like Anime, the Detroit Tigers and Lions. I like her personality. She is smart and she makes me laugh. We like doing things together. We like shopping and going to dinner. When I am upset, she helps me to feel better. We started dating last Halloween. She wants to meet my family.

My family is growing a lot. Bill got married to Yesenia last spring. Now I have a stepmom. I like having a stepmom because I lost my mom four years ago. It's nice having her in the house. My favorite meal she makes is Mole. It is tasty and messy. She has taken over the house and taking over the kitchen. I am okay with that. My family is getting bigger this year. This Christmas is going to be even better. We will go to church and spend time with family. I believe next year will be even better.



Like in a Dream

MAHO GOTO

I came back.
At first, everything looked right.
The streets, the trains, the shops
All still there, just as I remembered.

But something was different.
People spoke in many languages.
The signs had extra letters,
New ones next to the old.
It made me feel uneasy.

Like in a dream.

I wondered,
Did I really come back?

So, I left the city.
Narrow roads, a farm stand,
Local announcements still on the speakers.

The smell of soil,
The sound of people speaking,
I knew that.
And for the first time,
I felt settled.

The past is still here,
Not everywhere,
But in some places.
That is enough for me
To return.

My Regrets

SUSAN MANZOOR

I have many regrets about my past. Sometimes I wish when I was twenty, I had the wisdom and experience that I have now.

If I wrote about my regrets, probably it would take pages and pages. So, I will mention some of them only in short sentences:

I regret my choice of marriage. I regret hurting my family with this choice. I regret my years wasted. I regret the things that I may have said that hurt somebody else. I regret the years of depression, years that I was not able to give my daughter a joyful childhood as my time was consumed in figuring out what to do with my son. I regret pursuing approval, starving for it. I regret searching for recognition, and please others.

Someone said, "Our regrets show us who we are." I believe this is true. God has given me a tender, caring and kind heart. I am a survivor, courageous and brave. Someone who pushes forward. Someone who never gives up. Someone who is always kind in a mean world.

It is said "Never regret anything you have done with a sincere affection; nothing is lost that is born of the heart". This quotation is very comforting to me.

There is nothing, absolutely nothing that we can do to change the past. The things that we said or did are as fixed and as unchangeable as Mount Everest. This truth sometimes hits me hard. But at the same time, I realize that all my mistakes and shortcomings brought me to who I am today. And I am a strong, resilient and a brave woman.

Recently I've realized that all the struggles and the hardships that I had endured was because of love and going through emotions. I do not want to condemn myself anymore.

I married my husband with love, sacrificing everything for him. I also had my children with love. My heart was so large that I needed to give love to someone who needed it and was capable of receiving it.

My Regrets

SUSAN MANZOOR

Every hour taking care of my children, breast feeding them, giving them a bath, long nights without sleep, preparing food, cleaning my home, and doing every chore was from my heart and it was because of love. And I was carrying a capricious, self-centered and narcissistic man. I encouraged him, defended him, trusted him with love.

Time is our life. And life passes very fast. I no longer want to waste it looking behind me and having regrets. We are a mist that appears for a short time and then vanishes.

Life is so fragile, so brief, so unpredictable. One moment we are here and the next we are gone. And I don't want to waste this precious passing breath on things that don't matter.

I believe it is time for me to forget and to forgive even myself and push forward.

Every day, every breath is a gift from God, and I've decided to enjoy it and be thankful.

A Mindful Morning Growing My Happiness

SELENA KIM

At 4 am, I woke up. Again? Oh no...it is too early to get up. As always, I try to linger in bed checking today's weather forecast, ups and downs of my stock market, and catch up with missing online conversations with my five best friends in South Korea. Still I am half sleepy, ok let's turn on Youtube music and put my phone somewhere near my head and try to grab a few more hours of sleep. Soon, I feel like falling asleep. Then, I turn off everything in my room, lights, music, but an air purifier. My warm enough room immediately turns as silent and dark as the night sky. My consciousness is once again reduced to restful sleep.

At 7:40 am, great, after some more sleep, I feel much better. Now, it is a good time to say goodbye to my husband and greet my brand new morning. "Alexia, play classical music by Chopin" After drinking a cup of warm water, I am looking for my rabbit daughter, repeating her name with the most friendly soft voice. "Sunny, are you gonna have your favorite snack?" Anxiously, she waits for her snack in front of her red bowl. "How smart, how cute you are, good girl." She displays extra happiness to me at every moment she clearly understands me. After filling her yellow bowl with some fresh water, I put it back next to her red one. I begin to wish both my rabbit daughter in my living room and my human daughter in Boston their best days, with my full heart.

I know that not only her yellow bowl, but also my coffee machine, my tea machine, and my stomach are also waiting for their daily amount of water. I pour fresh water into each of the three and sit down at the dining table with a cup of hot espresso and a bowl of fresh salad. Through the window, a big tall tree is luring me with its auspicious extravagant new clothings. I make eyes at it. Before long, I notice that all the dead leaves fell down during last winter, now lovely Avocado-like greenish baby leaves are catching my eye. It is so charming. With every single new baby leaf, the richer the tree gets, day by day, the happier I feel. My emotions are moisturized and nourished enough to bloom a flower of perfect contentment. I do love my peaceful and cherish able morning routine, which is filled with such small things.

A Mindful Morning Growing My Happiness

SELENA KIM

With a bowl of Rainbow Salad, my body is gradually but fully gratified. Roughly chopped romaine lettuce, vitamins, swiss chard, carrots, sweet beans, avocado, and some sliced crispy honey apple creates a very addictive harmony for my healthy breakfast. The harmony of those flavors linger like an orchestra in my mouth. This slow and mindful breakfast adds immeasurable value to my serenity.

OMG, already 10 am? Is it high time to say “hello” to my plant babies on my balcony and in the front yard? Five times, yes at least five times, I repeatedly shuttle a big pitcher of water from my kitchen sink to the balcony in order to let them take a morning shower. With no hesitation, I trim or cut off every sick leaf. I am humming heading for the front yard. With a water spray, it is a piece of cake to water camellia and rose trees there, only my industriousness is essential. What a nice light workout to brush away all the fallen leaves. My humming doesn’t stop until all the maintenance process is wound up there.

I sweat a little, isn’t it my turn to take a shower? I feel so good to have another caring time of moisturizing my nails, feet, and skin with some gentle self-massages and special creams. I feel as if I am also well treated as much as all my animal and plant babies.

I do love my typical morning of having both mindfulness and maintenance. It is an essential and magical key, with which I can unlock a door for my rejoicing day time activities. I would invite no change to my serene morning as long as the day.

At 11 am, I am fully ready to hit the road with my ultimate mental and physical restoration.

My Story

HOURA PARTOVI

I wanted to share a childhood memory that has stayed with me for many years, shaped by a cultural belief from that time.

Back then, it was commonly believed that laughing too much was not a good thing- that after too much laughter, something bad would happen. One summer, while traveling with my family, we went to a comedy play one night. I laughed a lot during the show and had a wonderful time. But when we returned home, we received the heartbreaking news that my grandmother had passed away.

Since then, I've always carried a sense of guilt. Feeling that my excessive laughter somehow caused her death. Even though I now understand this was just an unfortunate coincidence, the memory and that childhood belief have never completely left me.

My Trip Stories

EMMA ZHOU

When I was a young girl, I wanted to go somewhere in the world that I read about in books. Like most people, I also enjoy traveling. Every year, I spent weeks traveling to some famous places with my family. Now I'd like to share my trip stories with you.

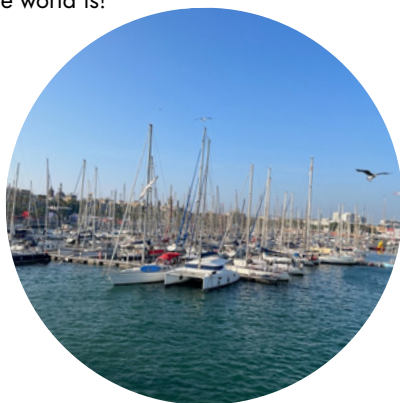
Ten years ago, I visited a church by myself in Toronto. The building has a long history; it was shut down soon and was maintained. On the way back to the hotel, unfortunately, I got lost at a big shopping mall, where there are the nearest entrances that lead to the underground station. It was dark outside, so



I preferred to take a shortcut. I was anxious and afraid. I asked someone for help, but they did not understand my poor English. Suddenly, a local man came to me and asked if I needed help. I said yes. Then he led me turn two corners to my right line to the hotel, then he ran away, he needed to immediately ride another line to the airport. On the way to my line, he told me that I looked like a Chinese woman, and he had worked in Sichuan Province in China a few years ago.

Chinese people were kind to him. Today, I always remember that tall, handsome man's smiling face and the light of the underground that evening. That trip made me feel how beautiful the world is!

I like Spain very much. In the past few years, my husband and I have gone to Barcelona annually. It is a beautiful city with a pleasant Mediterranean climate. It's seafood rice, tacos, coffee, and fruit wine are all very attractive. In Barcelona, there are also many world heritage sites. We often walked along streets and alleys, watching old buildings and cathedrals. Sometimes we also entered churches to listen and others to pray.



One day, when we were walking in a quiet, narrow alley as before, a young guy stopped us. He said he was from Italy in the Spanish language. I expressed that I didn't understand at all, then he spoke again in English. He said he only had Italian money, no European bills, he asked us to exchange money with him. I was confused by his words because there was a bank nearby. Barcelona is a famous traveling city, changing local money is very convenient. I told him we didn't have money, and we didn't speak much English. At that moment, two strong men came to us, and they asked for our ID and passports. I asked if they were policemen because they didn't wear uniforms. They said yes. One of them took his ID and showed us quickly, then he put it back in his pocket. They carefully checked each of our IDs and wallets, and smelled every bill of the man, then he returned our passports and wallet. and smiling said several Spanish phrases. Although we didn't know a Spanish word. He gestured that we may leave. I saw them three left together. What happened? I called my friend in Barcelona immediately. She said there were many plainclothes policemen on the street protecting tourists. According to her guess maybe the young man was a criminal they were tracking. The police stopped the possibility of a street robbery.

It's a travel experience unlike anything in the past. We appreciate that they protect the whole city's security. How great it would be if I understood a bit of Spanish. Nowadays, I live in a city where a large number of people speak both English and Spanish. Life is truly amazing.

Traveling is always exciting, interesting; on the other hand, it can change our thoughts, open up our minds. Books give you knowledge, travel gives you perspective.



My First Volunteer Opportunity

SHOKO USHIKU

How does the new challenge make us change? Challenges sometimes come with failures and setbacks. However, if we try to challenge ourselves we gain new skills, knowledge, and expand our perspectives. The new challenge especially gives us value. I also grew up through my new challenges. Since I moved here, I haven't had confidence because my English level is lower. I was scared to talk with native speakers. After working with a tutor, I thought I would try volunteering. Volunteering at the Epilepsy Walk Orange County Carnival was my first time helping at a public event, and through this experience, I learned the power of community, empathy, and I stepped out of my comfort zone.

First, I learned the power of community. On that day, there was a lot of volunteer staff for the Epilepsy Walk. The concept of the event was kind of Star Wars, so they gave the volunteer staff a concept T-shirt. I thought the atmosphere was very warm because we had the same purpose and the same feelings. I was happy because I felt the power of community.

Second, I learned to empathize with others even though we had different backgrounds and mother languages. I volunteered at the Duck Hunt booth with other volunteers and helped children play the game. I felt heart-warming because every family helped with children with Epilepsy and the children always smiled. I heard another volunteer's story. She had a friend who had a daughter and lost a daughter due to Epilepsy. I felt heartbroken. I can't put myself in their situations, but I can empathize with their feelings. I also learned it's important to take action by thinking about their feelings and thoughts.

Last, I learned to step out of my comfort zone. At first, I didn't have the confidence to communicate with other volunteers and families of Epilepsy. I worried that I had made a mistake and my words wouldn't be understood. However, every smile gave me the confidence and the power to speak. Of course, my words were simple and easy, but I thought everyone understood my words.

My First Volunteer Opportunity

SHOKO USHIKU

After I volunteered, I was satisfied and confident I did the volunteer work. I learned that even a small action, but I could step out of my comfort zone and change my mind.

As a result, volunteering at the Epilepsy Walk Orange County Carnival was a truly eye-opening experience. At first, I was very nervous, but this new challenge gave me the confidence and some values, the power of community, empathy, and stepping out of my comfort zone. Now I believe that if I take action, I can get more value than I thought.



Music That Brings Back Memories: "Another Day of Sun"

MERCEDES ADRIÁN SANZ

So many songs and so much music bring me happy and poignant memories that it is difficult to pick out only one. But I will go with the soundtrack of a movie, especially the song "Another Day of Sun".

It was back in 2017 when the film "La La Land" was released. After watching the movie, I decided to buy the CD.

I have always enjoyed surprising my kids, even nowadays. At that time, only Patricia and I were in Madrid. My husband and our two other children were living in the USA. In March 2017, I planned a trip to ski with my daughter. The first few days would be by ourselves, and then my sister, niece, and brother-in-law would join us for three more days.

My daughter had no idea what I had in mind. As I wanted to surprise her, I first spoke with her teacher and explained my intentions to him. I would tell Patricia I would pick her up from school to go to the dentist, which wasn't true at all.

The day came, and at 4pm, one hour before her classes ended, I picked her up. As we were driving, she realized our path wasn't the right direction to go to the doctor's practice. She looked at me, a little bit confused. I looked back at her playfully, and her face lit up with the most beautiful smile and eyes as big as saucers. Then I told her half my plans " We are heading to a Ski Resort."



When I drove my kids to school or on a road trip on vacation, we always played music, and we used to sing together. At other times, when I drove my kids to school or on a road trip on vacation, we always played music, and we used to sing together. At other times, we simply enjoyed listening to it. Those were always remarkable moments that still last in my mind, and when I think of them, I feel nostalgic and transported back through time and space.

Music That Brings Back Memories: "Another Day of Sun"

MERCEDES ADRIÁN SANZ

We had a long trip ahead of us, almost eight hours. We only enjoyed three hours of sunlight and highways, then darkness loomed over us, and highways became sinuous and narrow roads. As we drove along, we passed numerous small and picturesque villages with beautiful mountain houses. These are typical houses in the mountainous regions of Spain, known for their use of brick and stone in their walls, making them sturdy and complemented by sleek slate roofs. They also boasted beautiful wooden balconies full of flowers. Every village we came across along the way was beautifully lit.

Our car had a panoramic glass roof that allowed us to enjoy the view of the sky sprinkled with twinkling stars and a full moon. It was like driving through an enchanted world in a fairy tale.

The last few kilometers were tricky ones. It was almost midnight. I was tired, and we were going up a narrow and steep switchback road. Finally, we arrived at our destination safe and sound.



The music was our best ally during the road trip. We played the CD over and over again. Most of the songs were cheerful and helped me stay awake and focused on the road. I remember singing along with my daughter and moving my upper body as if I were about to jump onto the stage in the movie. We still talk occasionally about that trip and how memorable it was. And every time I listen to any song from the soundtrack of La La Land, unforgettable memories of that journey come back to me.

My Grove of Birch Trees

ZHUO LUAN

I have three oil paintings of birch trees hanging in my living room. They may look simple at first glance, but I know they hold childhood memories.

I was born in a prominent city — Yichun, in northeastern China. Yichun is known as the “Forest capital of China.” I remember at the end of my town there are endless birch trees. The sap from birch trees was part of my whole childhood. When I caught a cold, my mom would always give me this sap to drink. She told me that was the most appropriate medicine for a cold. When I was little, there was always an old man playing the harmonica under the birch trees in the evening.



The golden light of sunset shone through the gaps in the trees, gently on his tanned shoulders, which made him look so admirable. Back in those days, life was a little bit hard, and few people had the opportunity to learn an instrument. Countless evenings at dusk, my friends and I always found ourselves in the birch forest by habit, waiting to hear the old man’s sophisticated melodies.

Time flies, and now I am over forty. The memories from my childhood often come back to me. I no longer have the chance to go back to the birch forest. Whenever I see my three paintings on the wall, I know they are not just dull pictures of birch trees. They are a joyful reminder of my childhood.

One Day Trip to Tijuana: A Walk Across the Border

OMI CHOI

After receiving the Global Entry Card, my husband and I decided to go on a special trip with our boys. A short trip abroad that we can take without a plane. A one day trip to Tijuana.

We live in Irvine, Tijuana is not far from our house, and we can go there by car. We were excited about traveling abroad in just one day.

My family loves Mexican food, but we had never been to Mexico before, so I thought it would be a nice trip.

Crossing from the U.S. to Mexico was easier than I thought. We parked in a parking lot near the border and walked to the border office. After answering a few simple questions, we passed through a large wire fence and iron gate, and we were in Mexico.

It was amazing to have entered a different country after walking only a few steps. The mood was different. The streets were lined with street vendors selling souvenirs, and we heard Spanish instead of English. And most signs were written in Spanish.

At first, we went to Caesars Hotel, famous for inventing the Caesar salad. In fact, I thought that Caesar salad was made by an American, but I learned that it was first created in Tijuana. The salad was made immediately in front of us at the hotel restaurant. It was really fresh and delicious. Usually my boys don't like salads, but they said that it was the first time they really enjoyed such a delicious salad. The romaine lettuce mixed with a rich and refreshing dressing was even more delicious than expected, but unfortunately the portion was smaller than expected. It was a shame.



One Day Trip to Tijuana: A Walk Across the Border

OMI CHOI

After that, we walked around downtown and looked around the street. While we were looking around the market and shops on the street, we smelled the delicious tacos. We took a seat in a small Mexican restaurant and ordered several tacos and menudo. They were the most delicious tacos we've ever had. The menudo was also the best. The taste of the original food in Mexico was another level.

But traveling isn't always easy. I tried to take an Uber to the border beach, but the address was in Spanish instead of English, so I made a mistake and gave the wrong address to the Uber driver. We drove for about 30 minutes and arrived at a city outside of Tijuana, which was completely different from our intended destination. I was scared by the unfamiliar scenery, but eventually, a kind Uber driver took us to the beach near the border. Finally I could see the famous wire border line right next to the sea. It was a strange feeling that one side of the wire fence is Mexico and the other side is the U.S. After walking along the beach and buying some churros and snacks at a street store, I tried to call an Uber to go back to the border, but the internet didn't work well. I had a hard time, but a kind Mexican street seller helped me and finally, I was able to call an Uber.

There was a really long line of people waiting at the entrance in front of the border office. However, we were able to quickly re-enter the U.S. without waiting in a long line using the Global Entry Card. It was really convenient, and I definitely felt the value of the card.

Our entire experience actually made for more enjoyable memories. The Mexican food was even better than expected, and the experience of walking across the border was really new and fun. We laughed, wandered, ate, and enjoyed. This short one day border trip will be remembered for a long time by our family.



The Power of a Thank You

SUNGHYUN HONG

Have you said “thank you” to yourself recently?

In everyday life, we often say “thank you” to others even for something small like a cup of coffee. But when it comes to us, we rarely do. Sometimes, it’s important to give yourself a pat on the back. That made me wonder: Why hadn’t I done that for myself before?

Looking back, I realized I didn’t fully understand what true gratitude meant. To me, “thank you” was just a routine response—something people said out of politeness, not deep appreciation. So, when someone thanked me, I didn’t feel moved. And when they didn’t, I assumed they were rude or didn’t notice my effort.

But a meaningful shift happened when I joined the Newport Beach Library as a literacy student. My English isn’t perfect, but I met friends from around the world, along with kind teachers, tutors, and staff who looked beyond my grammar and listened to what I truly meant. Their kindness never felt small. I expressed my thanks, and they thanked me in return even just for showing up, trying, or being open minded.

I experienced a space where gratitude flowed naturally in both directions. Through that, I finally began to understand what genuine gratitude feels like.

Gratitude is ultimately a form of true respect. Whether it’s toward our selves or others, expressing it helps build trust and deeper understanding. It also creates a positive cycle of kindness and mutual growth—both individually and together.

Since then, I’ve started to appreciate even the smallest things. I’ve grown in how I respect myself, and I’ve become more thoughtful toward others. By sharing gratitude, I’ve helped create a more positive environment around me.

So today, I want to say this again—to myself, and to everyone reading: Thank you for living your own beautiful life. And a special thank you to Newport Beach Library. You have brought such a meaningful change to mine.

Finding My Voice in a New Country

LIVIA

Life doesn't always go as planned. We can't choose what happens to us, but we can choose how to respond. I never thought I would live in another country. But when my son decided to study in the United States, I came with him to support him.

In China, life was comfortable. I had family and friends nearby, good food, fun gatherings, concerts, and help whenever I needed it. But after arriving in a new country, I felt like a baby learning to walk. Every step was difficult.

The biggest problem was language. I had studied English in school for many years. I memorized words, learned grammar, and got good grades. But after not using it for a long time, I found that I could not understand or speak well. At the airport, I suddenly felt deaf and mute. I could not read signs, order food, or talk to people. I became a stranger in this world. Even driving around and seeing American flags and unfamiliar people made me feel like I was watching a movie—not living real life.



At first, I had help from family and friends. I could stay behind them and ask for support. But as time passed, I knew I couldn't keep asking for help. Even my son, who always helped me, would sometimes say, "Mom, I have a test tomorrow. Please handle it yourself." So I had to face things on my own. I started using translation apps and ChatGPT. They helped a lot, but sometimes the translations didn't make sense. I knew I had to really start learning English again.

Then one day, I found the Project Adult Literacy program at the Newport Beach Public Library. It was close to my home and easy to get to, so I signed up. With Christina's kind help, I started attending classes. I met two wonderful teachers, Marcia and Helene, who are patient and caring. I also met classmates from many countries who are working hard just like me. Soon, I will also have a tutor to help me one-on-one. This gives me hope and confidence that my English will improve.

Finding My Voice in a New Country

LIVIA

Learning English is not just about speaking a new language. It also helps me make new friends, understand other cultures, and see the world in a new way. In class, some people share music from their home countries, others talk about their travels or traditions. It's exciting to learn so many new things.

Learning a new language is like opening a window to a bigger world. It helps me understand others—and myself—better. In the past, I was always told to make the “right” choices and try to be a “better” person. But now, I believe that sometimes we should just do what we enjoy. Maybe we don't need to be better. We just need to be more true to ourselves.

I'm thankful for this journey and for all the people I've met along the way.

When the Aroma Talks with Heart

EVGENIIA BOBROVSKAIA

I'm Evgeniia and I'm a facial massage specialist. Frequently women come to me for a face massage not only for skincare. They come to me to exhale, to turn off their internal controller and just to be themselves. My client Emma is an example.

She was a mother of 3 and looked very tired. Probably she worked a lot and didn't have time for rest. As usual before a face massage I combine a custom blend of essential oils for each client. Emma chose aromas to match her vibes. It was a composition from 3 essential oils, that would help her to rest, to relax and reduce her stress.

When we started the massage with this blend, suddenly I saw tears in Emma's eyes. It turned out the Aroma which Emma chose plunged her deep into her childhood.

In her mind Emma was seeing images when she was a little girl wearing her favorite dress with stripes and a bow. Emma's mom gave her this dress. She saw that little girl hug her mom. Unfortunately, Emma's mom died a long time ago.



But that moment she realized it's really important to find a time for herself definitely and don't postpone selfcare. The time moves very fast. Emma seemed she was in her childhood recently. And now she is a mom herself and postpones self-care like her mom. She kept putting it off for later - enjoying quiet time, self care, silence.

This story touched me very deeply. It reminded me how powerfully essential oils can influence not only our bodies our souls as well. The aroma can be a bridge between past and present, between something long forgotten and what is still possible. It was the story not a massage, a story about becoming oneself.

From the Four Age to Forty

TUGBA TASKIN

From my four-year-old little girl Tugba, love for my 40th birthday...

I was four years old when my parents got divorced and I hid in the closet so that my father would not separate me from my mother. That day, I wasn't the only one hiding in the closet. I also hid my fears, my tears, and my dreams in that closet.

Life is like the distance between two points. You neither remember the day you were born nor do you know the day you will die. The time will pass so quickly. And as it does, the girl grows up, gets married and has a new beginning in life. I took out the dusty dreams I had hidden as a child from that closet, I wiped them off with hope and smiled at them.



My husband and I went on our honeymoon to the Maldives, which was our first dream. Then my son Ibrahim, who is a piece of my heart, was born. When he was only three years old, he asked me, "Mom, can you tell me about my childhood?"

Our days were passing like a compressed parenting program after the 9am-6pm work shift. A few hours of outings and activities on the weekend and a new week would continue with the same routine.

Something awoke inside me with Ibrahim's very innocent wish. I said to myself, 'When did you grow up, Tugba? When did all this time pass and now you have a child?

What if his childhood passes by so quickly? Eight years have passed since I asked myself these questions. Without understanding how it passed just like that.

From the Four Age to Forty

TUGBA TASKIN

I grew up without a single memory of my family, without a single photograph of us. And that day, my son and I had a dream which excited us. We were going to collect memories. We were going to live and write our own story. We bought a caravan and our dreams began. We traveled many roads, we saw many beautiful landscapes. Our curiosity and excitement grew as we traveled. I had published a book from the poems I had started writing in elementary school, like a legacy I gave to my childhood.

And now, as a gift to my children's childhood, I have written these journeys from my eldest son's perspective. I wrote this book to inspire you to collect memories and to hope that every child can have a wonderful childhood.

May this book be a light for you. With love.



A City for All - The Role and Calling of Urban Planners

EUNJEONG HONG

What do urban planners do? To understand this, let's first look at what it means to plan a city.

A city is not merely about infrastructure. It is a living space that holds the stories and struggles of its people. In other words, a city is a container for human life. Therefore, it should be designed to support the well-being of all residents. This is what urban planning ultimately seeks to ensure: the support of safe and healthy lives in every aspect. So, it addresses the physical, economic, social, and environmental dimensions of city life.

First of all, physical space is a fundamental element in urban planning. Much of a person's daily life is shaped by the way urban space is set. If a town has decent houses but lacks a grocery store or community park, residents must travel to another town for their needs. If there are not enough spaces for offices or schools in a city, people must commute to other places for work every day. If a city does not have a public transportation system, people can't go anywhere without their cars, so every household has no choice but to buy a car. Therefore, a key concern in urban planning is how to allocate these residential, commercial, and business areas, along with cultural and open spaces and transportation systems in the city.

To determine what gets allocated, urban planners try to find out how much infrastructure is needed in the city. They predict the appropriate scale of infrastructure based on sufficient data related to population changes and projected future needs. This data is collected with consideration of the city's economic, social, and environmental factors.

Regarding the economic aspect, a city must achieve "economic efficiency". This means using resources in a way that minimizes costs while maximizing the provision of services. In particular, when the population reaches a certain level and the shared infrastructure is well-established, the efficiency is enhanced by decreasing the average cost for providing services per resident. Therefore, a city needs to secure enough population to support efficiency, and such growth of population is only possible when sufficient jobs are available.

For example, in small cities in South Korea, young people are moving away, and only aging people are left. So, these cities are pushed toward demographic extinction. This is due to the lack of adequate job opportunities. There is no choice for young people except to relocate to other cities for their livelihoods.

A City for All - The Role and Calling of Urban Planners

EUNJEONG HONG

Therefore, a city should aim to attract businesses and commercial facilities that can generate employment. To make a city attractive to investors, it must ensure there is adequate infrastructure and offer incentives such as tax benefits. In this way, urban planners must make comprehensive decisions for economic efficiency based on various data, including population trends, construction costs, and management expenses.

Meanwhile, “social equity” must also be taken into account. If a city is planned only considering economic efficiency, it will be made for only those who are economically active. However, a city is a place where various people coexist. There are not only healthy individuals, but also groups who are more vulnerable to risk, including children, the elderly, the disabled, and the poor. For instance, during the 2024 North American heat waves, over 1000 people died from heat stroke, many of whom were elderly or vulnerable in housing. When large-scale risks are encountered, they can lead to the destruction of socially vulnerable populations and the whole city’s resilience.

Therefore, urban planning must consider socially vulnerable people. For example, there can be public rental housing above the minimum housing standards. There can be heat/cold shelters for energy-poor households. There can also be childcare and welfare facilities for those in need of care. And we can think about accessible pedestrian paths and building amenities for all. Planners must estimate how many such facilities are needed and determine how they will be distributed to which areas.

Lastly, “environmental sustainability” must be ensured. Environmental sustainability refers to development and lifestyles that preserve the environment for future generations by maintaining ecological balance, avoiding resource depletion, and minimizing pollution.

Cities consume a huge amount of energy and resources. On the other hand, they generate an equal amount of waste. Such energy consumption and waste emissions are closely tied to the city’s spatial structure. For instance, high-density cities like New York emit lower per-household carbon emissions than the U.S. average, while sprawling low-density cities like San Diego or Los Angeles have higher energy use due to their greater automobile dependency. In addition, cities with separated residential, work, commercial, and educational areas force people to travel long distances by car, increasing fossil fuel consumption. In contrast, well-designed mixed-use developments reduce energy use by enabling various activities within shorter distances.

A City for All - The Role and Calling of Urban Planners

EUNJEONG HONG

Furthermore, urban planning elements such as solar panel placement, ventilation, shading, and green spaces directly contribute to reducing fossil energy consumption. The efficiency of a city's waste management system - including separate general disposal, recycling, and food disposal - also significantly affects overall waste output.

Therefore, planners must devise ways to incorporate energy-efficient structures, eco-friendly energy sources, and efficient waste disposal systems. As we have seen so far, this process of planning a city requires consideration of complex and diverse factors. To achieve this, economists, sociologists, environmentalists, and government officials must come together to discuss and reach a consensus. In this process, we also need the residents' opinions, which are revealed through surveys, interviews, and meetings. Meanwhile, for the physical realization of the plan, the planners need to collaborate with urban designers, architects, transportation designers, construction companies, and governments. Urban planners are the experts who coordinate not only professional opinions in each field but also citizens' opinions. They derive the best plan within the city's capacity and lead the process of realizing and operating urban development.

However, the whole process is not easy at all. It can be difficult to reach a consensus among many stakeholders who have different positions. No matter how good the plan is, some of the factors may have to be abandoned because the city may lack financial resources. Or it may become physically impossible to carry out a plan.

But this is exactly the role of urban planners: to mediate different opinions, to set priorities among many needs, and to ensure essential needs are met. So, they need a macro-microscopic perspective, analytical thinking, and a wide range of knowledge in various fields to solve complex problems and find answers that work for everyone. But above all, they need a respectful attitude to listen to people's thoughts and to harmonize their opinions smoothly.

Do you want to become an urban planner? Then, start to prepare step by step from now on. Observe your surroundings and care about people's lives with your curiosity. Ask yourself what changes are needed for your city. Different bases of knowledge from your school—like math, science, social studies, history, environmental studies, and design—will be powerful tools for you to build better cities in the future.

But most importantly, you need a heart that truly wants to improve people's lives. Urban planning is not just a technical job; it's a warm and thoughtful responsibility toward people and communities.

To make your city and the city for future generations safer and more sustainable, take your step as an urban planner today.

WRITER TO WRITER 2025 SUBMISSIONS

Writer to Writer is an annual regional writing challenge available to all literacy learners. Those who participate read a book in English and write a letter to the author explaining how the book affected them. This is a great opportunity for learners to solidify their reading and writing efforts. Please enjoy this year's *Letters to Authors*.

Letter to Dr. Kelly Turner

MAHO GOTO

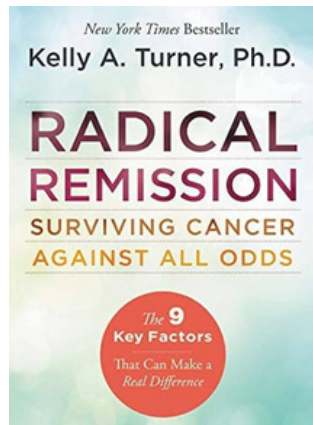
*Winner of the Intermediate Category:
2nd Place - Maho Goto, Newport Beach Public Library*

Dear Dr. Kelly Turner,

I read "Radical Remission" while experiencing a pain running from my chest to my back, fearing it might be a sign of recurrence. I was fortunate that my stage zero breast cancer required only a mastectomy, without radiation or chemotherapy. But since my diagnosis three years ago, my life has completely changed. As anyone who has faced cancer knows, no matter the stage or location, it has the power to transform a person's life.

When I read about the 31 year old mother with stage 3 breast cancer in your book-the one who said, "I'll do anything. I don't want my child growing up without a mother."-Her words deeply resonated with me. Since my diagnosis, I have felt the same way for my 9- year-old daughter. At the same time, I have become stricter with her, this way she will be prepare for life. Even though I finished treatment and am in remission, the fear never fully disappears. I constantly worry about recurrence or a new cancer forming. I know that if I continue living as I did before my diagnosis, I may face cancer again. Your book helped me realize that I must truly change my way of life.

Radical Remission is packed with interesting dietary methods, fasting and supplements. I often paused reading to search more information on the Internet. I had learned so much and created a personal to-do list when I completed the book. I now feel motivated and excited to put it into action.



Letter to Dr. Kelly Turner

MAHO GOTO

*Winner of the Intermediate Category:
2nd Place - Maho Goto, Newport Beach Public Library*

Your book also made me recognize the changes I had already made. In my 20s and 30s, I was constantly stressed, overworked, and sleep-deprived. Now, in my 40s, I have naturally adopted healthier habits-playing tennis with friends, minimizing sugar, switching to soy milk, and prioritizing sleep. But some habits had faded. I once took supplements after treatment but stopped over time. Your book reminded me why they are important, and now I feel motivated to take them again.

One common thread among those who experienced radical remission was their unwavering commitment to the path they believed in. I felt that this is the most important element in maintaining a healthy state and how difficult. That's why having a strong reason to live is essential. For me, it is to support my daughter's growth and also in future see my grandchildren grow up. Each morning, when I see my daughter's face, I am reminded of this.

I sincerely thank you for your work. As a doctor trained in Western medicine, your willingness to explore cases beyond conventional science is invaluable. Your research gives hope to so many, and I deeply appreciate your dedication.

Sincerely,
Maho Goto

Letter to J.K. Rowling

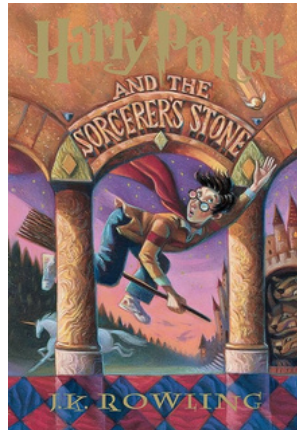
NAOYA SETA

*Winner of the Advanced Category:
3rd Place - Naoya Seta, Newport Beach Public Library*

Dear Mrs. J.K. Rowling,

I am writing to express how I was impacted by your book, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone. While I really like watching fantasy movies, it was the first time for me to read a book I many years, and I found it so exciting. I really appreciate that your book provided me with the opportunity to look back on my own life to see how I have lived and how I should live going forward.

When I was reading the book, I was always thinking what if I was in the shoes of the characters. Even if we wouldn't have exactly the same situation (We live in the muggle world!), it always made me think about what I would have done in a challenging situation in real life. Through the journey of the three characters, Harry, Ron and Hermione, I was reminded it would take strong curiosity to see and find things going on around us and behind the scenes as the first step. This ties to our awareness to know where we're in the first place to make a



difference as the next step. Then it would require all the courage, knowledge, skills, and more importantly, teamwork to overcome most of the challenges that we face in real life.

Ever since I moved to the US, I found myself having been less curious about people and things around me, losing courage, and trying to avoid communicating with people. One simple example is that I tend to order lunch online and just go pick it up without talking to anyone. I should instead order in person with the cashier at the shops to interact more with people to practice my English. Another example is I keep hesitating to apply for new job opportunities, expecting that the next step would be an interview in English that I'm afraid of.

Letter to J.K. Rowling

NAOYA SETA

*Winner of the Advanced Category:
3rd Place - Naoya Seta, Newport Beach Public Library*

Your book made me realize that I was putting myself in my comfort zone, which really wouldn't make any difference at all. Your book also made me start bringing back the courage to get out of the zone, and push myself to proceed to take action. As I'm writing this, I realized meeting and interacting with my English tutor, Soo, and having started reading your book has already turned out to be a good start for this purpose, and I see I'm going in the right direction now. My journey has just started.

Once again, I'd like to thank you for providing the opportunity, through the adventure of the three, to reflect back on myself to be able to see where I am and to remember the essential factors, curiosity and courage to make a difference in my life. I'm really excited to read your next book of Harry Potter.

Yours Sincerely,
Naoya Seta

Letter to B.J. Novak

JANE LI

Dear Mr. B.J. Novak,

How are you? My name is Jane Li. My family lives in Irvine, Orange County, California. I'm an English learner. These days me and my son keep reading your book "The Book With No Pictures". I think that the book is very interesting. When my seven year old son showed it to me, I was attracted by the title of the book. You know, books for beginners usually have lots of pictures. Your writing is expressive and emotional. It brought lots of fun to me and my son.

Thank you so much!

Best wishes

Jane Li



Letter to Kaia Alderson

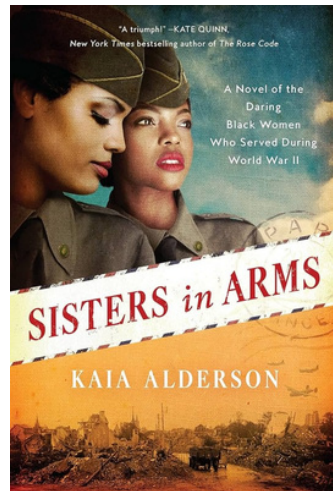
MERCEDES ADRIÁN SANZ

Dear Ms. Alderson,

I hope this letter finds you well. I recently had the opportunity to watch the movie "The Six Triple Eight." It touched my heart so profoundly that I became curious about the story of these women. Therefore, I began looking for books on this topic and came across yours, "Sisters in Arms."

I was utterly absorbed in it from the first page. It made such an impact on me that I wanted to write to you and express my deepest gratitude for your incredible work. It is not only a story but an emotional journey through history and the life of the fantastic, bold group of women who became members of the only all-Black battalion of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) during World War II. They had to fight fearlessly against countless obstacles in a bid to be allowed to serve their country. From the very beginning, they were undermined and set to fail by their families, the Army, and Society, but they dealt bravely with every setback they encountered so they could prove themselves worthy.

I love how you depict the sisterhood between these women, their resilience, and how they had to face discrimination, not only because of their gender but also because of the color of their skin. Their friendship, the way they had each other's back, their survival, their perseverance, and their shared determination are inspiring. It makes me reflect on how we, as a society, are changing and following the wrong path. A path where a significant number of people are isolated, have no one to lean on and are becoming selfish. We are losing the feeling of camaraderie. A path where some people don't want to fight for whatever is worthy in life; they instead choose the easy way to navigate through their life, and eventually, they feel that inner void that can't be filled.



Letter to Kaia Alderson

MERCEDES ADRIÁN SANZ

I was particularly mesmerized by these women's work organizing and delivering the mail to American soldiers deployed in Europe. Something as simple as a letter from home, a reminder that they were loved and missed, could mean the difference between despair and hope for a soldier. And they did whatever it took to match every letter with every soldier on the battlefield. Most of the letters had just a name, lacking last names on the envelope, and some had smudges that made it difficult to know to who it was addressed.

These courageous women and the work they were committed to, make me think about the significance of the heroes behind the scenes in war, those who are unrecognized but whose work is crucial for so many soldiers on the frontline. Reading your book, I felt transported in time and space. You elicited from me the desire to be there with these fantastic women, navigating challenging situations and celebrating their accomplishments.

Thank you for writing this novel and bringing these women's stories to life. Their legacy has a voice through your work and will inspire many young women who go through hardships in life. It will encourage them to work hard, be determined to achieve their goal in life no matter how challenging their circumstances are, and eventually succeed. I am genuinely grateful to have had the profound pleasure of reading your book, and I will always carry the lessons of Sisters in Arms with me.

With gratitude and admiration,
Mercedes Adrián

Letter to John Boyne

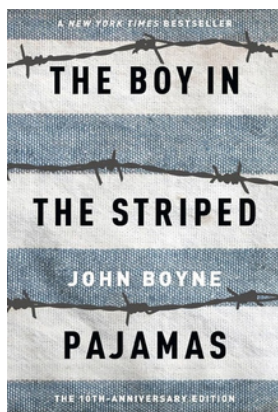
OMI CHOI

Dear Mr. Boyne,

Hello, how are you? This is Omi Choi, I am an English learner, and I read your book, "The Boy in the Striped Pajamas" for the purpose of studying English, with my tutor's recommendation.

I am very happy that I could read your book in English, and I was deeply impressed by this book. So, I am writing this letter to express my sincere appreciation for your incredible storytelling.

Of all the things I enjoyed about reading this book, the best thing was the story telling through Bruno's perspective. I was impressed by the way you tell the story. I think Bruno's innocent and naive thinking made this novel more attractive.



This story is based on painful and sad historical facts, but rather than directly describing the cruel and violent scenes, it is made for the reader to imagine through Bruno's perspective. I liked that. Sometimes, I think that guessing is more influential than direct description.

The two innocent children in the novel, Bruno and Shmuel, meet through a fence. They couldn't play physically, but they became best friends through emotional connection. I felt both sad and warm when I read this.

In the end, when Bruno helped Shmuel find his father, dressed in the same clothes (the striped pajamas) as Shmuel and went inside the fence, and was eventually taken to the gas chamber, my emotions were very complicated. Most of my emotions were sad, but what remained in my mind was that anyone, whether Jewish or German, could eventually become a victim of discrimination and violence. I think the boy in the striped pajamas is not a fixed person, anyone can become the boy in the striped pajamas.

Letter to John Boyne

OMI CHOI

I was even more impressed when I heard from my tutor that you wrote this story entirely through research and imagination.

You were able to lead the reader to understand the content through imagination and speculation. I want to find and read other books you have written in addition to this one. Thank you for writing such a wonderful book.

All the best,
Omi Choi

Letter to James Bowen

SARAH CARLSON

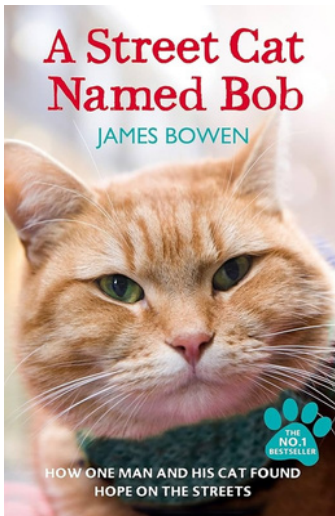
Dear James Bowen,

This book was affecting me because when I was homeless. When I read chapter 1, fellow travelers it just kept going with my life. The book helped me what it means to see. The title is *Street Cat Bob*. This cat was attaching to the author. My cat, I've been giving her love and I usually like to play with her.

People are attention to Bob. James is playing guitar and people give money. That helps James. My cat helps me. Like she reminds me to brush my teeth. She Blinks her eyes. She reminds me when I got to bed. After breakfast.

I saw "the light at the end of a very dark tunnel" when I decided to go back to my workers. When you saw the light you wanted to become clean.

I loved this book.



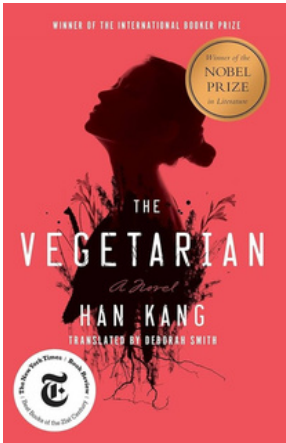
Letter to Han Kang

SELENA KIM

Dear Han Kang,

My hat's off to you and your book, *The Vegetarian*. I couldn't stop applauding in astonishment at your honorable achievement of winning the great Nobel Prize in Literature, 2024. When this incredible news reached the members of my book club, their mixed feelings toward the main character, Young-hye, and her unusual transformation were frequently discussed. This, in turn, raised my curiosity about her to its peak.

Young-hye's sudden decision to become a vegetarian doesn't seem to be merely based on food preference. To me, it appears to reflect her instinctive reaction to her father's animalistic nature, shaped by deeply traumatic memories. It may have been her only way to protect herself emotionally from his habitual domestic violence.



As a child, she was beaten as if she were no different from the family dog—one that was brutally abused and eventually killed by him when she was just nine. She might never have forgotten the honor of witnessing such cruelty, only to see her family later consume the dog's meat. This traumatic experience haunted her throughout her life, ultimately leading her to take her own life in pursuit of complete escape—perhaps wishing to be reborn as a tree.

Young-hye's desperate story made me realize how deeply external trauma can shape one's everyday life, often without conscious awareness—especially when no one is there to truly understand.

Like Young-hye, I also suffered from nightmares after a car accident many years ago. In my dreams, cars from every lane would rush toward mine, leaving me in panic behind the wheel. Without my neighbor JJ's unwavering emotional support, I don't think I would have ever been able to drive again.

Letter to Han Kang

SELENA KIM

Whenever I called JJ, she never hesitated to come to my side and reassure me. "Selena, it will be fine. I'm right here. Anyone can have a car accident-it wasn't your fault." Almost every day, she listened to my fears and gave me rides whenever the trauma prevented me from driving myself. Through her genuine concern, I was able-little by little-to climb out of the dark hole of my memories and regain my mental and emotional strength.

"What if your husband had embraced you instead of ignoring your painful nightmares? What if your parents had listened to you instead of forcing you to eat meat again?" I often wonder these things as I gaze out the window at the tall tree in my yard- as if Young-hye were truly reborn as the tree she longed to be.

Han Kang, if only I could have been by Young-hye's side-just to listen to her, the way JJ did for me. "It will be fine. I'm right here." Perhaps that's all the Young-hyes of the world are waiting for. True empathy might just be strong enough to dull the pain of trauma in our daily lives.

With my deepest respect,
Selena Kim

Letter to L. Frank Baum

SHIHO KOBAYASHI

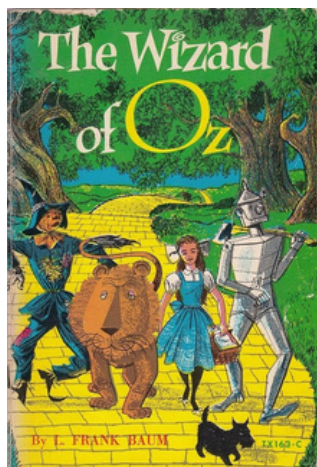
Dear Lyman F. Baum,

Hello, I'm writing to you because I'm so glad to have read this book. The reason I read this book is my chorus group is going to sing a song from "Wicked" at our next concert. I was curious about the story of the original Wicked, The Wizard of Oz, and after reading it, I enjoyed singing Wicked song even more.

In the book, Dorothy suddenly goes to the Emerald city, but she achieved her goal to return home. I came to the U.S. 3 years ago for my husband job, and it was suddenly too. At that time, I had no friends and couldn't speak English. I couldn't communicate with people, and that was the hardest part for me. Finally I'm going back to Japan soon. I thought I accomplished nothing here, but after reading this book, I realized that was not true. Now I can say what I want to do and what I think in simple English. Even if I couldn't tell someone the first time, I didn't give up and tried again. Because I studied English, "I have been changed for good", like the words in Wicked.

Dorothy taught the important thing is to believe in myself, and when I follow my way with courage and confidence, I can change the future. Dorothy's journey ended, but my journey in English will continue. I appreciate that this book made me realize what is important.

Sincerely,
Shiho Kobayashi



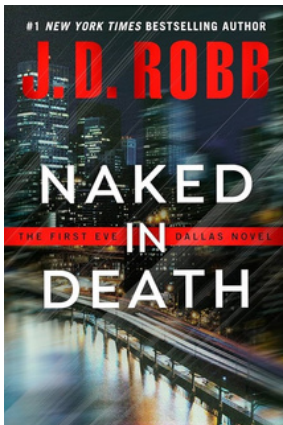
Letter to J.D. Robb

ANONYMOUS

Dear Ms. Robb,

I'm Ms. Choi. I have lived in Irvine, California for 11 years. I am a single mom and I have three kids. I came from South Korea. I just finished 'Naked in Death'. It was an amazing mystery and romance story. I know you have a lot of other books in the "In Death" series. I'm just a beginner reader of your series.

I like the main character, Eve Dallas. I think she is such a strong, charming, and wise woman. After reading this book, I'm thinking that I want to be a police officer if I can be born again. She is very inspirational to me. I want to be a strong woman. I want to ask you if your personality is like Eve, or if you want to be a woman like her. She grew up when her father abused her, but she overcame her life from that bad situation, and she found her true love.



I have to take care of my kids alone. I have to do everything in my house and car repairs. What I think the hardest thing to do is to get along with the parents of my kids' friends because I am not fluent in English. I want to be able to get along with them but I feel lonely and stupid. I need to have a strong mind and body to take care of my kids and me. Sometimes I dream that I am a police officer and fluent in English.

I think Roarke is a very magnificent character. He is so perfect. He is rich, handsome, sexy, charming, and has a good personality.

When I was a high school student, I dreamed of meeting a man like Roarke. He appeared whenever Eve needed him. In reality, I couldn't find that kind of man.

Roarke was an immigrant when he was young and he had a poor childhood. My kids are almost the same as him, because they don't have a father here but at least they have a mother who cares for them.

Letter to J.D. Robb

ANONYMOUS

As an immigrant, it is difficult for me to raise my children here alone. Roarke became successful on his own as an immigrant. He must have endured and overcame many adversities. I hope my kids grow up like him, it looks so difficult because they don't even follow my orders.

Is "In Death" series 61 books now? I read that you wrote over 225 novels. Wow, it's amazing. How can you write so many books? You usually write 5 books per year. Do you have a lot of stories in your brain? Do you always think about your books? Suddenly I wonder if you have free time, and what you do in your free time. You might be a genius. I hope you don't stop writing. Your novels give me hope that I can overcome my life. I was so happy reading your book.

Sincerely,
Your fan.

Letter to Dan Gutman

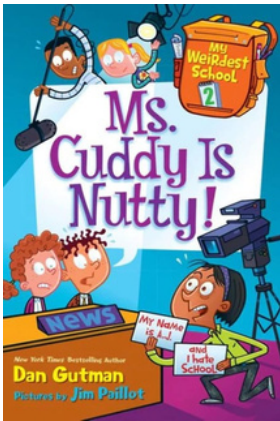
ANONYMOUS

Dear Mr. Dan Gutman,

I'm Tiffany from Vietnam. Our family moved to the U.S. two years ago.

A little about myself- I grew up in a traditional Vietnamese family and went to Germany for my university studies. I came from a family where education and academic achievements are important. I always dedicated my time to studying hard and achieving good results.

When I lived in Germany, I saw the differences in education and human development between Asia and Europe. With certain accomplishments in my career and a belief in the importance of education for my children, I decided to bring them to the U.S. to expose them to global values.



One question in my mind was, How does early childhood education in the U.S. differ from other parts of the world? This question led me on a journey with my children: reading books, traveling, and participating in activities with them.

Then I found myself in the book 'Ms. Cuddy Is Nutty', as I had entered a world of childhood with wonder and creativity. I was influenced by the humanistic values and the way children are educated that the author conveyed. The book answered my question and changed my perspective on how to educate my children.

Our 'Ms. Cuddy Is Nutty!' is the second book in the 'My Weirdest School' series. The story is about A.J., a clever and mischievous student at Ella Mentry Elementary School. With a humorous narrative, it describes A.J.'s vivid imagination as he reacts to daily challenges at school. The creativity of the teachers inspires their students to explore knowledge with excitement that makes me envision how children grow up with their imaginative minds. The way children are educated helps them build their confidence and develop their social skills to understand the natural social flow.

Letter to Dan Gutman

ANONYMOUS

With its humorous stories about problem-solving skills and perseverance, this book should be highly recommended for elementary school children.

I'm determined to read the entire series; now everyone in my family is enjoying this book. Thank you Mr. Gutman, and I hope you will continue to write more interesting books for children like this.

Education is a long journey, and childhood should be nurtured with creativity and compassion rather than just academic achievements.

Best regards,
Tiffany

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