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Opportunity to Read

LITERACY CENTER NEWSLETTER

Winter 2022 Issue

MESSAGE FROM ESPERANZA



2020 a year to remember, a year full of challenges, full of learning experiences, full of fear and the perfect time to share the definition of emotional freedom. During these difficult times, Covid-19 the pandemic has affected millions of people around the globe. It is the perfect time to spend quality time with your loves, the perfect time to reflect about what we humans are doing to take care of ourselves.

What is the definition of emotional freedom? It is a healthy mental stage when people are able to recognize, respect, understand and express themselves. The brain can be trained to generate positive and creative thoughts when people learn to use the "I" statements to express emotions because it means people are in control of their own emotions and feelings.

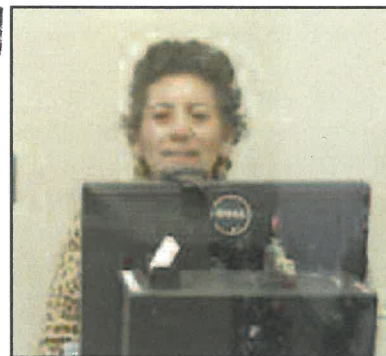
When people have emotional freedom, they have the initiative to set up goals and dreams about what they want in their lives. To express or not to express emotions could be a cultural thing. In some cultures, people are not allowed to show emotions. People grow up hiding their feelings, and it is not a healthy decision. To express emotions and feelings is not to impose anything; it is just an emotion, feeling, and excitement about what people want in life. People just need to be listening, be accountable, and be respected. For some people, it might be hard to control their emotions, but by practicing and training the brain to generate positive thoughts, people can live a healthy life.

Standing up for yourself is an excellent example of having emotional freedom. When people have emotional liberation, they feel important, competent, and self-confident. Sigmund Freud said, "One day, in retrospect, the years of struggle will strike you as the most beautiful." This quote says a lot about happiness, respect, acceptance, and understanding about emotional freedom. Sometimes, people do not realize they have choices and free will.

Now that we are in difficult times it would be great to adopt a habit to practice happiness and serenity, so it is the perfect time to talk openly about feelings and emotions to our children. Children who grow up in a healthy environment who express what they want without being oppressed, they would learn how to respond to difficult situations instead of overreacting. To have emotional freedom is a privilege, a privilege that has to be practiced and transmitted to children, so they can have a healthy mind now that the world is having a pandemic. By having emotional freedom, people choose how they feel, love themselves, and have a good relationship with themselves with all their strengths and weaknesses.

Having emotional freedom is not taking anything personally, as Don Miguel Ruiz mentions in his book *The Four Agreements*. For instance, he says, "Nothing other people do is because of you. It is because of themselves. All people live in their dream, in their mind; they are in a completely different world from the one we live in." When people have emotional freedom, they understand and comprehend other people. Emotional freedom is just emotional intelligence that contributes to personal growth and well-being.

When is the best time, date, and place to conquer emotional freedom? The time is now, and the place is where you are right now, so eliminate negative emotions make personal transformations right now. Stop being a prisoner of emotions, and live a life free of substances that alter the mind. Take the time to enjoy what you have right now. 2020 the year of the pandemic the year of transformation.



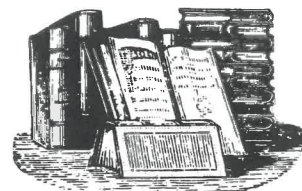
Esperanza Gutierrez, Literacy Assistant
and Newsletter Editor

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

CLASSES AND SMALL GROUPS

All the Classes are conducted via zoom

- **Basic Grammar Class**
 - Tuesday and Thursday 9:00 -11:00 am
- **Reading Class**
 - Monday and Wednesday 9:00 -11:00 am
- **Computers, iPods, and iPhones**
 - As requested
- **Focus Group**
 - Tuesday 6:00 -8:00 pm
- **Tutor Check-In**
 - To be announced



RESOURCES

OTR hours Monday through Thursday - 8am-6pm

COVID UPDATE – Due to the Delta variant we are asking tutors and learners who want to come in to the Literacy Center to make an appointment. Social distancing allows us to have up to 3 pairs at a time. Write your appointment times in the planner by the Sign in Sheet.

Tutor Check-In – OTR has had several tutor meetings via Zoom. Tutors and staff have shared valuable resources (on-line and other,) received peer support regarding tutor topics and other topics related to on-going changes that COVID brings to daily schedules. **We will be offering tutor meetings again in January, 2022. We are considering 2 meetings per month. Please let us know if you have a day or time preference. Once we receive your feedback, we will schedule our meetings.**

Resources

America Learns – Reflection log – captures roles and goals, acknowledges learners goals and incremental progress. It is important that you complete your reflection log. This data is critical in reporting to the California State Library to receive continued funding which provides free services to our learners and tutors. If you have questions or would like assistance completing this report, we can help you navigate the process of capturing roles and goals. Please contact staff.

Tutor Training videos are now available through America Learns. Training modules provide OTR orientation, as well as modules that cover phonemic awareness, learning styles, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension and roles and goals. We have a small pilot group that are viewing them to work out any kinks we may have. If you are interested in viewing them, please contact staff.

<https://americalearns.net/index.cfm?event=user.login>

Northstar – Northstar Digital Literacy defines the basic skills needed to use a computer and the internet in daily life, employment, and higher education. If you are interested in using this program to build your computer skills, please contact Esperanza.

<https://digitalliteracy.org>

Change Agent - Change Agent is an on line publication featuring authentic writing by adult learners that anchors classroom ready teaching materials. This is an engaging, empowering, and ready-to-use magazine and website. Student generated, multi-level relevant content. Designed to teach basic skills & transform and inspired adult learners. Issue 52 (March 2021) focuses on Mental Health: Learning, Coping, and Healing (excellent ideas for COVID reflections & more).

<https://changeagent.nelrc.org/>

- **The New Resume Project** – developed by student leaders at Berkeley Reads. This project helps learners find a job that fits, and gets them started examining their skills and strengths from their life experience to document their qualifications so they can begin their job applications. Even if your learner is not looking for a job now, it is a good time to expand life skills experience, acknowledge their strengths, and build confidence so they have a jump start for when they are ready to create a resume and practice interview skills. Check out this awesome project.
- <https://libraryliteracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/The-New-Resume-Project-Workbook-v3.1-1.pdf>

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

OTR Advisory Board

- Thank you to Opportunity to Read (OTR) Advisory Board! OTR appreciates all the support and guidance that you provide for us! You have done an excellent job hanging in there during the pandemic and now with the transitions since Toni's departure. We recognize your dedication and commitment to keeping our learning community successful. Thank you Charles Perkins, Barbara Corrigan, Kathy Church, Rick Del Bonta and Maria Ponciano.

- **Paula Norton** – Thank you for editing OTR's newsletter and other documents. Your willingness to help with various projects in addition to tutoring two learners is much appreciated. You are awesome!

Welcome to our new citizens:

- Adriana Rita became a citizen August 28, 2021
- Sonia Montoya became a citizen October 23, 2020



SHARING WHAT IS TRULY HUMAN:**Learning from the pandemic of 2020-21***By Janet Shirley**Tutor, Janet Shirley*

A few years ago, before it all happened, I was on a retreat with a couple dozen people. We had come together to study the works and writings of a prominent social justice leader and spiritual guide from the Andes, named Silo.

In one of the exercises we did on that retreat, we picked a partner in the group and—gazing at each other's eyes—said: "I feel the

human in you, I feel the human in me, and it is the same." The partner would also repeat these words and we would stand there in a short silence—trying to feel the humanity in the other. It was powerful.

Little did any of us know what was coming in 2020. Everyone experienced shock. Everything closed down. People were afraid. It was at that time that I came to learn about the crisis occurring in Pajaro Valley and in our fields. Covid had taken a hidden toll on our most vulnerable community members: the field farmworkers who bring food to our table every day and the undocumented workers who still had to continue working. Shortly after watching a Frontline TV special on this crisis, I had the luck of finding a place to help. Under the guidance of 3 exceptional women: Sheila, Esperanza and Toni—I volunteered for their Opportunity to Read program.

Zoom has been a blessing in this difficult time and I have totally embraced it as the only possible way to tutor for the time being. I was blessed to be assigned my student, Veronica, who is intelligent, kind, thoughtful and very eager to learn English. I feel that teaching and learning is a 2-way street. We both learn from each other, and I am thankful that OTR has provided a window into another wonderful human being, with their cares, challenges, fears, humor, kindness and insights. Through this weekly and powerful connection, I feel connected to countless others who are also trying to cope-- searching for the light and meaning in their lives that can triumph over our immediate concerns and challenges. We all need each other because the human in me and the human in you is exactly the same. In the measure that we can truly feel that, we will be opening up a new chapter in human history.

*Barbara Corrigan Family**Barbara Corrigan*

The Things I Missed the Most:

Lunch out with friends

Monthly 'in person' book club

Seeing people's smiles

Water Aerobics

Bridge groups

The Things I Liked the Most:

The quiet

Time to read

Weekly dinners with my 'Pod',
daughter and family

Barb

NEW TUTOR AT OTR*By Paula Norton*

A strategy I employed to help myself stay positive last year, was to find things that got better or were helped by Covid. One of the big ones for me was to start tutoring for OTR.

I am a retired reading teacher, and have been working parttime for San Benito County Probation Department, tutoring at risk youth.

In March of last year, San Benito County Probation discontinued my contract due to Covid. I consider myself very fortunate in that my husband and I live on 3 acres and have horses, so staying home was not a particular hardship. However, after the first of the year, my husband went back to work, and I found myself needing to get my brain back into tutoring mode: problem solving, critical thinking, enjoying students.

I was grateful for the opportunity to be assigned a learner and work with them on Zoom. I found tutoring that way a bit clumsy, but OTR has been helpful with suggested strategies and encouragement. Now we seem partially able to meet with students, and I feel almost normal again.

If not for Covid, I probably would not have looked into OTR, and I'm very glad I did.

FINDING A PLACE TO GET TESTED

By Lane Wallece

Finding a place to get tested for COVID should be easy. It isn't.

My friend Susan and I attended a memorial service in North Carolina and learned four days later that the minister had just tested positive for COVID. We tried to find a COVID test that could be done a day or two and wouldn't break the bank. We couldn't.

The fully-vaccinated minister, with whom we shook hands, had no symptoms on the day of the service, but tested positive three days later. When we were told, we started looking for a test.

We checked local pharmacies for the do-it-yourself tests that cost \$20, but every place we checked was out of them. There was a private clinic in Santa Cruz that wanted \$280 for a rapid-results test, a price that made us cough and gag.

We then tried the nearby Sutter walk-in clinic but were told we couldn't get the test until seven days after exposure and would need a doctor's approval. (Every other source said three to five days.) I emailed my doctor and got a boilerplate response saying I could get a video visit. But even that would have taken another day or two, and we would still need his approval for a test. We learned that even though asymptomatic people can spread the disease, Sutter was not giving COVID tests to asymptomatic people anyway.

We then found that we could get drive-through testing that day at a pharmacy 45 miles away. That would mean driving over the mountains and up the Peninsula, so we looked for something closer.

The first available appointment was in three days at a pharmacy six miles away. Results would come back four days after that. Useless.

The standard quarantine for COVID exposure is 10 to 14 days, so we decided to self-quarantine until the tenth day after exposure, which is when those useless test results would have arrived. The tenth day rolled around and we were still feeling fine, so we declared a limp victory over red tape.

So, if you want a COVID test right now, ask me --- in 10 days.

STEPPING INTO UNCERTAINTY

By Laura C.

I had been volunteering for several years at a public library when the Covid pandemic started, and I had to stop when the lockdown began. I missed being in the community of books, plus I had long considered working specifically in a literacy program. That was why I looked into Opportunity to Read. But I knew that during a pandemic there would be limited physical contact and that technical tools (computer, internet) were going to be important. My tech skills are low level, and I really didn't know how to help anyone with reading; I had no formal or professional training in literacy instruction. But I put those concerns aside. I had willingness. The OTR staff took me where I was - uncertain skills but willing to learn. At minimum, I knew I could talk on the phone with someone - maybe read a book together? I was already doing that with my sister during the pandemic - we would call each other, have our cup of coffee and gab for hours. I had that skill! A great feature of the program is that the staff reassured me over and over that we were all learning together. What help did you need? Basics on computer use? Someone would get assistance for you on that. And you may have something to offer someone else. My offerings were showing up, flexibility, and follow-through. Staff, learners, tutors - we were all working together to support each other during this time of the unknown. The OTR staff set me up with several online tutorials. A Zoom training for example. We used Zoom to learn about Zoom, and everyone in the meeting was very supportive. One student said, "I know a lot about it, please email me, call me anytime, I'm happy to help." That guy touched me with his kindness. I was connected with a learner (via Zoom) shortly after signing up, and I was a little nervous. The OTR program helps people with all kinds of skills development, for example spoken language as well as reading and writing. I speak a little Spanish, and I used to be shy or embarrassed to use it. This makes me more understanding about shyness or reluctance of English learners in speaking English. It can feel scary. But I thought if I'm willing to try, to risk being wrong with my Spanish, then maybe that would put the learner at ease, they would feel okay with the risk too. Every now and then I will use Spanish with a learner to expedite an understanding, a rapid translation. I'm able to laugh at myself when I get it wrong, and laughter helps lighten things up. I'm meeting nowadays in the OTR office with a learner, and we laugh a lot while we're talking and reading together. I'm not sure yet if I'm actually teaching anyone anything. I'm designated as a tutor in the program, but actually I feel like I'm still a learner too. We're all connecting somehow through learning to speak, read, and write a language together. Sometimes I'm afraid I'll get kicked out of the office for laughing too loudly - for having fun doing what is actually serious work. I didn't expect to enjoy it all so much. The learner and I are educating ourselves together. In uncertain times, we've found this wonderful connection.

VALUE YOUR FAMILY

By Mirella Contreras



Left to Right: Learner, Mirella Contreras and Tutor, Laura C.

My name is Mirella Contreras. My experience from Covid-19 was that my husband was the first to test positive in the whole family, so my three children and I went to test, but the strange thing is that we came out negative. We had to quarantine for 15 days. We all stayed in the house because we had nowhere to go, but we always kept our masks on, disinfecting everything, especially for the kids.

The government closed all the schools, so my children had to do their classes by computer. My children were desperate

because they could not go to school and all the parks were closed. My family left us food outside the door because if they came in contact with us, they could get infected with Covid. We were terrified because many people were dying. I learned that you have to value your family and tell them how much you love them because if something happens, it may be too late.

THE FOCUS GROUP



“What you focus on expands” is the motto of the Focus Group. The pandemic sure has given us a lot to think about! It’s up to us as individuals to make the

most of our time. The Focus Group consists of dedicated learners who want to continue to develop their literacy skills through topics of interest. Together we strengthen literacy skills through reading, book discussions, developing effective communication skills and exploring personal values that ensure happiness and success. We have been meeting via Zoom and developing technology skills. Recently we have been reading various articles people have written about COVID, health & wellness. Most recently we have been reading a book by Maria Shriver called I’ve Been Thinking... The reflections spark meaningful conversations and provide strategies for wellness and creating a successful and meaningful life.

Thank you to those who have been consistently attending the group and participating in writing your reflections about COVID. The class meets Tuesday evenings from 6-8:00pm. I want to thank Frances McGrath (tutor), Felipa Ochoa, Adela Cisneros and Yadira Jaime for your consistent participation. You bring so much to the class and we learn so much from each other. I look forward to seeing learners from the past and invite newcomers to join this group! If you are interested in joining the group, contact Sheila.

FAMILY LITERACY SERVICES

The Family Literacy Services program has survived during these difficult times thanks to all the learners who we participating by joining the virtual video in zoom. There were between eight to ten families participating in the virtual videos. The first virtual video was Wednesday, February 2021. Learners as well as their children were so happy to see each other. Opportunity to Read offered a curbside pick-up, so learners could take their materials home and be ready for the virtual video. On October 4th, 2021 OTR offered its first in person Family Literacy Services, the theme was The Importance of Reading event in which only five out of 12 families came in person. We had hand sanitizer on every table, and all the participants had a face mask to protect themselves. Children were so content to see their friends again as well as their parents. Some families could not come in person because they were afraid to get covid. December 8th 2021 OTR offered another Family Literacy Services event, and the theme was Questions and Answers. Eight families participated, they did a Scavenger Hunt, and a tour in the Library. Learners were delighted to walk around the library again. Here are some pictures during the virtual videos and in person. Enjoy the pictures!





Time slowed down, I became more present
I spent time with my 7 month old grandson
I recovered from COVID with no side effects
I've stayed healthy
My family is healthy

I was very surprised
About the confusion about COVID safety guidelines
And lack of proper guidance
I was surprised when all the schools closed down
There were no children on the playgrounds
I was shocked when the devastating fires came
the sky looked sick
orange / brown smoke looked
like the end of the world

Ways I worked with others to succeed during the pandemic
 I learned how to use ZOOM
 Yes! So grateful for ZOOM
 I found zoom classes to do yoga and exercise
 Zoom classes that offered self-care and wellness techniques
 I learned to work with others through technology such as
 Zoom

I reached out to coworkers, friends and family
I received support and guidance from others
I offered support and guidance to others
I took care of my grandson so my daughter can work

I found strength
In my faith in God
Helping neighbors and those in need
Exercise classes with my friends on Zoom
More time with my family
Supporting family through anxiety and fear
I found strength by connecting with OTR's Focus Group on
Zoom

Reading together
Talking together
Encouraging each other
Reminding each other that
This too shall pass
Together we've grown stronger and wiser
Together we can navigate life's constant changes
Together we rise!

The reading and grammar classes have been very successful during the pandemic. Learners had to learn how to use the devices in order to take the classes via zoom. These two classes are very popular and there are between eight to twelve learners. In the reading class we read a variety of short stories about important people who have made history in the United States and around the world, the solar system, weather and regions of the earth. First, we discuss the vocabulary, then the reading and at the end we talk about the questions that are listed in the reading. Also, we study basic grammar, tenses, verbs, adjectives, and prepositions. Learners are so happy to have the opportunity to take the zoom classes because they can be in touch with their classmates and old friends. Learners say, “if it weren’t for zoom, we would have been isolated.”



OPPORTUNITY TO READ HOLIDAY DROP IN

On Friday, December 10, 2021, Opportunity to Read (OTR) hosted a Drop by Holiday event. We had 33 people come by and greet us with the holiday spirit. Tutors and Learners received 2022 calendars and a cooler lunch box, children received stockings with a holiday picture frame craft, candy, jump rope, Frisbee, and were able to choose books that were available. Although OTR was unable to host our usual holiday event with food & refreshments, the library hosted a Homemade Holiday event, it was a night of crafts, music and a selfie station. It was a perfect community event. The hustle and bustle of little ones making Christmas ornaments, enjoying various crafts, games and having their photos taken captured the holiday spirit. Thank you to everyone who made this a special event.

Enjoy the photos!



APPRECIATE WHAT WE HAVE

By Karla Olvera



Learner, Karla Olvera and family

When we learned in March 2020 that there was a disease called Coronavirus, we began a quarantine shelter in place on March 15th, 2020. We all had many changes, my son stopped going to school face-to-face, had to wear masks, and could not go anywhere. Schools, parks and churches were closed, changes we never expected to have in our lives. At first, we were a little scared because everything passed so fast, watching the news scared us even more. Since I did not understand what was happening, I did not know how to explain to my children that the Covid-19 had already spread all around the world.

My son started taking virtual classes as well as me thanks to technology. I couldn't take in person classes for a couple of years because I have my daughter (Lupita) and I take care of her. Thanks to the pandemic and Mrs. Esperanza who motivated me I was able to continue studying virtually. This experience has been very good for me and my family. Opportunity to Read offered the Family Literacy Services virtually and my children had books, and activities to do during the pandemic. We have learned to appreciate and value what we have. Thanks to the program Opportunity to Read, the teacher Esperanza, the classmates, without all of you this pandemic would have been more difficult.

I LEARNED TO APPRECIATE

By Sandra Fernandez



Learner, Sandra Fernandez at her daughter's baptism

It never crossed my mind that I would experience a pandemic like Covid-19. At first, I thought that this pandemic was in the past. I lived without concern, but now I think I was very wrong. When Covid-19 started, I was petrified, stressed out, and worried about myself and my loved ones. I thought it was a nightmare and wanted to wake up from this bad dream. Time has passed, and we are still fighting this virus and following the rules recommended by the experts.

We **LEARNED** to use masks, keep our distance in public places, and wash our hands frequently, and the vaccine has helped us feel a little relief.

I started to think that there are also good things after all the bad times we have been through. When the businesses closed, I **LEARNED** to cut my husband's and son's hair. The schools closed, and I **LEARNED** to get on the internet because I had to help my children, and they helped me too. Opportunity to Read also started offering online classes through zoom, and I benefited from it. I took the online classes from home which I had abandoned because I could not attend in person.

I also **LEARNED** to do my shopping online and after all and most importantly it taught me to appreciate my family to have quality time with them, teach my children that in difficult times there is always something good to **LEARN**. This is what COVID-19 has **TAUGHT ME!**

REMEMBER FOREVER

By Ana M. Ceja



Ana Ceja's grandchildren

My name is Ana M. Ceja, and I am 63 years old; I am originally from Michoacán, Mexico. I have been in this country for 25 years, and I haven't lived through a pandemic

in my entire life. I was infected with covid-19, I had all the symptoms, fever, body pain, blood clots in my legs; the worst was my legs had no blood circulation.

My worst fear was going to the hospital because people said you die in there. Many people were sick; some had shortness of breath and needed to be tubed. The doctors were working long shifts, nights, and seven days a week. Doctors were seeing only covid infected patients. Here in Watsonville, many people were infected, and the number of infected cases increased day by day.

All people had to be inside their houses to stop the spread of the virus. Whenever we needed to go to the store, we had to wear masks to protect ourselves and others. We had to use hand sanitizer all the time.

There were essential workers like farmworkers who needed to be working during the pandemic, and they worked all the time to bring food to our tables. We are in November 2021, hoping covid is over next year, and the entire world is back to normal again. I hope all the businesses are back and the economy gets better. We will remember these difficult times forever.

OUR LIVES HAVE CHANGED

By *Adriana Rita*



Learner, *Adriana Rita*

2020 was the beginning of a pandemic and the change of my life as I knew it. Maybe my life only a little, not as drastically as other people. At first, I lived with fear of getting infected and worrying if the food in the stores would be scarce. I tried

to take care of myself as much as I could for my family and I never thought that one of my parents would get sick from this virus and live in such a serious situation. I could have lost my mother, there were very difficult moments. When my mother recovered, my daughter got sick and so did I. The situation was difficult because instead of celebrating Christmas with my family I had to stay in the hospital taking care of my mother.

Thank God we were able to overcome that virus, unfortunately not all of us were able to do that. I lost my two uncles during this pandemic. In 2021 they found a vaccine and I did not hesitate to get vaccinated because I did not want to feel the symptoms of this virus again. This year I was able to work with a bit of restrictions, we had to wear masks and wash our hands more often. At first it was difficult to adapt to all this but it was necessary if we wanted all this to end soon. Thank God this year I can celebrate with my family. But the great lesson that the pandemic gave is that life is very short and if we do not enjoy it maybe tomorrow will be too late. We need to continue taking care of ourselves and others.

WITH FAITH, I FIND STRENGTH

By *Adela Cisneros*



Learner, *Adela Cisneros*

During the pandemic I was an essential worker. I worked providing food for the community during the school closures.

Many people stopped working. Everything closed down. Some days were cold and rainy. Some days were filled with smoke and heat from the fires. It was hard to work because we had to be outside in the elements. I couldn't visit family, go to shows or attend church. We could only communicate by phone calls and video calls.

We were only able to go out for necessities but this allowed me to spend more time with my

family. I learned about technology and attended the Focus Group via Zoom. I spent time in the garden

and I learned to appreciate life more. I enjoyed being in nature and taking time to be present and reflect on what I value in life. Unfortunately, I got COVID, thank God I'm healthy. I do not have secondary effects and my family is healthy too! With faith, I find strength.



LESSON ON HUMILITY AND UNITY

By *Sonia Amelia Skeel*

The coronavirus (COVID19) has marked a new stage worldwide. Most may remember it as something super negative. Personally, although I do not see it as positive, I consider

that it has given us a great lesson in humility.

In truth, people of all ages and of different ethnicities have died, some, who although they took care of themselves, were affected by others who did not.

Likewise, there were people who did not believe in it and will pay for their doubt with their lives, with the loss of someone close, or with suffering the consequences in their own health. In addition to having physical, physiological, psychological or emotional damage by feeling guilty for their irresponsibility.

Personally, I have lost friends and others are recovering. My first trip to Europe was frustrated by this situation, but that is the least important and there will be another occasion to travel.

The world economy has been affected. There are job losses. Hospitals in chaos. Gyms, restaurants, museums, entertainment centers, schools churches closed to prevent this virus from spreading further.

Positive things have also emerged among many, for example, the value of compassion and empathy has sprung up, putting selfishness aside, since many people have joined to help the neediest. I have even seen that they give food also for pets, they donate masks.

Some owners have reduced or forgiven the rent to their tenants. There is less environmental pollution because there is less traffic. Now we realize that we are not so superior and that a being as small as this virus has given us this great lesson in humility and respect for nature. In order to survive on this planet, we need to take care of ourselves, take care of others.

That is unity and the unity makes us strong.



Left to Right: Immigration Agent, Learner, Sonia Montoya

THE LESSON

By Teresa Sonia Montoya

Since the Pandemic began, it has been a bit difficult in some aspects of my personal and family life. At first it was not difficult for me since I am used to being at home. I dedicate myself to the home and family. Before the pandemic started my daily routine was to take care of my little girl at home, and do chores around the house. Everything got complicated when the weekends that we would have gone out to walk to the park to eat, were closed.

Thank God my house is big and has a large space for my daughter, the youngest, she did not miss outings. I used the time to study to become an American citizen. As time went by, everything got complicated because my daughter who was in college, as well as my son & youngest daughter took online classes from home. It was a bit complicated not being able to do the things at home that I normally did. I did not want to interrupt my children's classes. My youngest daughter took zoom classes like the other children and although the teacher put in a lot of effort it was also complicated for her.

The children did not miss their classes but I saw the disinterest in my daughter who was not motivated. I, as a mother, motivated her. With just six years she did not understand 100% the seriousness of the situation, she never insisted on going out because she understood that it was not the time to go out. The country and the whole world became sad, knowing that people were dying, that we could not hold meetings, or visit anyone. We only walked down the street with all the precautions when there were no people, my daughter on her skates. I had my appointment for citizenship in April 2020 and it was canceled due to the pandemic and I thought, when am I going to have another appointment again? I called the U.S Citizenship and Immigration Services many times to get another appointment.

I did not know when they would give me another appointment, although he spoke to inform me. I did not want to panic with so much information and misinformation, however in August I did have the interview for citizenship. I thought that the pandemic was already

under control and thank GOD I was able to become a citizen. I did not have a ceremony like people regularly have it, people from different countries. I had to take the oath alone in the parking lot, with the immigration agent, my husband and my daughter.

I really believe that this pandemic has affected everyone in one way or another. Thanks to GOD my husband and my son did not lose their jobs, but we were afraid that they would be infected from their co-workers. It was also very difficult to stand in so many lines to go buy just the basic things. The pandemic stole part of our lives and left us a great lesson. Not everything is money, sometimes we did not make family time because we had not been used to spending 8 hours together as a family. We had lost how to spend quality time with the family, now we have it back, thank GOD.

Now I have the opportunity to be at home, and I listen to family, friends who do not like to be at home or with their children and this is very sad. This pandemic has left us a great lesson in life, the only thing that cannot be bought is HEALTH, the rest are only material things. We must not lose family values or exchange them for work or money. This pandemic is showing us that we are all the same with or without money, all races are equal, no one is better than anyone and we are all vulnerable and deadly.

WE MISS THE IN-PERSON CLASSES

By Margarita and Ismael Magaña



Learner, Margarita Magaña and husband Ismael Magaña

I am Margarita Magaña. I am a student at Opportunity to Read the Literacy Center of the Watsonville Public Library. Unfortunately, we had to stop going to the in-person classes and started taking the zoom classes. I want to share the sad story that my family and I had

due to the covid-19 pandemic, we lost one of my sisters and her daughter. There are no words to express such great pain even though life has to continue we just need to be very responsible and take all the precautions to protect ourselves and others. I hope we can start the classes soon again and take advantage of all the opportunities OTR offers us. My husband and I hope to see and get together with all my classmates soon. My husband and I thank teacher Esperanza for her patience and dedication, and I want to invite everyone to come to the program to take advantage of all of the classes and one-on-one tutoring services OTR offers. Thanks to everyone who makes this possible for us to get better in our studies.

WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN*By Maria Salcedo**Learner, Maria Salcedo (Lucero)*

Hi my name is Maria Salcedo (Lucero) My experience with the Pandemic was very difficult. I worked as a seamstress and I lost my job for a long time. Everyone was scared and didn't know what to do. When I watched TV to see what was going to happen there was a huge confusion. I had to see how to start going ahead with my job, so I started making masks at home for three months. And little by little we started to get out of this mess. I want to thank God for all the people who helped me financially, and morally. This program especially Opportunity to Read for all the support they offered me. Thank you, Toni, Esperanza and Sheila.

MAKING THE MOST OF THE PANDEMIC*By Lourdes Tapia**Learner, Lourdes Tapia*

I have been experiencing different routines during the pandemic. I'm still working but I have changed my schedule so I can take care of my grandchildren while my children work from home. I am not as distracted with TV or social events. I am more organized, I only go to the grocery store once a week or every other week. I do not go shopping like I used to. I have been more focused on things that have value to me. My husband, my children, grandchildren, my family who live close by, connecting with my family in Mexico, Texas, Oregon and checking in on friends to make sure they are ok. I focus on staying healthy and staying as positive as possible. I am more present in the here and now. I enjoy Mother Nature, all the plants, animals, flowers, fresh air, sunshine, stars and moon. So many blessings available to me that I do not have to buy, I just pause to enjoy. I have been expressing my creativity with cooking, writing, learning new things, inventing games for my grandkids and baking with them. I have been enjoying coloring books, taking care of my plants and decorating my patio, making facemasks for my husband and cooking different foods for my clients that I do not usually make for them. Sometimes I sit outside my house and listen to the birds sing, watch the sun rise in the morning and the sunset in the evening. I like walking around the fields and smelling the fresh strawberries. It is such a treat to pick them and enjoy their flavor. Sometimes I drive my car by the beach, with the windows down and breathe in the fresh smell of the ocean. Sometimes I imagine that the world stopped and slowed down so that I can enjoy the quiet time, spend more time with myself and nourish my inner soul.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED DURING THE PANDEMIC*By Felipa Ochoa**Learner, Felipa Ochoa*

It was the end of 2019, when I first heard the news about a virus called COVID-19 that killed a lot of people in China. It was very contagious and there were no vaccines to prevent or cure the dangerous disease. I couldn't understand or believe the enormous danger this virus caused humanity. I didn't think it would get to the USA so fast and had no idea how everybody's lives would change. At first, I had a lot of questions. I learned new ways to care for myself and my family. I learned ways to prevent becoming contagious by wearing a mask, using hand sanitizer and social distancing to prevent getting COVID-19. So many more changes came when lockdown happened. It was a very sad time for me and my family. Everything was so confusing; my husband did not have work and there was no school for my son to attend. I couldn't visit my parents, brothers and sisters. No more birthday parties, no barbecues with friends and family. Everybody was quiet, there were no noisy cars passing by my house for a long time.

The sky looked grey, dark with smoke and the sun was red because of all the fires in the area. I was worried, many sad thoughts came to mind but my faith gave me strength to stay healthy. I asked God to keep my family healthy. Thank God nobody in my home got infected by COVID-19.

Two years of the pandemic has taught me many things and I have improved my life. For example: using the internet to buy online instead of going to the stores, the Focus Group Zoom meetings helped me learn English from my house without driving a long way to Watsonville to OTR to take English classes.

I feel safer because I know how to live my life to prevent COVID-19. My family and I have taken the two COVID-19 vaccines. I'm very happy because things are becoming more normal. I feel comfortable going to visit my parents. We can be together and have parties or go to a park to barbecue. We can have fun times together. Everybody feels more confident. The pandemic taught me to love life, love my family, be more empathetic with people in need and be more conscious about my health. Thank God for my life and for humanity.

COVID-19

By Yadira Leon



Learner, Yadira Leon

Never in my life have I fallen victim to something as unknown, painful, and devastating for humanity as the COVID-19 Pandemic. I didn't believe it at first, but as time passed, I realized that something was seriously wrong, and for the first time, I saw how many people were fighting for their lives while others died in this horrible battle.

When I think about it, I feel so lucky because I am alive and ready to embrace each and every day that God has given me. I am also grateful because the people I care about are also enjoying the magic of a new day. However, I am not insensitive to the people who died as a result of this dreadful virus; I hope they are now closer to God, and I also hope their families find acceptance and eternal peace in their souls.

I thank God for giving me the opportunity to see my life from a different perspective, where anger, envy, depression, and loneliness are not permitted. I decided to follow my dreams, and from now on, I will not let people rush me with their timelines, I will decide what to do and how to do it in whatever way I consider to be fine, even knowing that I may be wrong, but if this is the case, I want to learn from my mistakes, not from the mistakes of others. I hope that from now on, I can see myself as a strong woman, willing to be brave and ready to overcome my fears; I want to be ready to achieve my goals; and I want to be ready to be myself....

MORE PATIENCE

By Rubi L. Garcia



Learner, Rubi Garcia and family

My name is Rubi Garcia. I have a big beautiful family. We are eight members, three

girls, three boys, my husband, and me. At the beginning of the pandemic I thought that it was not a bad thing and I took it as an opportunity to be closer to my children and to spend time with them. And as time went by we were enjoying being together, we had very beautiful moments. A few months passed and everything went away, but I, as mother, started to worry about how we were going to stay healthy. You had to stay at home and that was not possible because my husband and I had to go out to

work because we were essential workers. We worked in schools and we also had to bring home food and necessary things.

Our kids were fine they liked being at home. But as time went by being at home, taking classes from home, school began to get complicated. It was difficult to have classes, they couldn't concentrate, there was internet reception. It became more complicated because I started working at home on the computer, then we were many people studying and working at home and we still needed to work hard and get ahead.

It's been about a year since we had the hardest and saddest weeks because my husband and I got sick during the pandemic. We spent two weeks at home without being able to go out and not even being able to cook and eat ourselves. It was very hard. We felt very bad, but with the help and company of our children and some family members, we went ahead, and now we are better.

During the pandemic we learned many things, for example: to appreciate our health more, take better care of ourselves as a family, get to know my children more, and spend more time with them, have more patience. Professionally I learned a lot since I was not so familiar with technology. Here I will mention some things that I had to learn to continue working. I learned to teach children online, and communicate more with people through social networks. It was a challenge but I have achieved so many things that I could have ever imagined. To this point, I am only grateful for the life and health of all my children and my family. I am looking forward to better changes in the world, and for this pandemic to end soon. Personally, I think that the pandemic has left us many lessons, but it has also marked us with many losses as well as sadness in our families and in the world.

CHALLENGING TIMES

By Maribel Carrillo

I am Maribel. In February 2021, I started with symptoms of Covid-19, but I did not know it was Covid-19 until I got tested on February 15th. Later on, my children also got sick with covid. It was challenging to be sick and to take care of my children, who were ill too.

I heard that one of the symptoms was high temperature, but I never had a temperature, only a headache, and bone ache. I lost my sense of smell and could not smell food or anything. I did not work for one month and had vacations, but vacations were not agreeable.

Now I feel pain in my bones when the weather changes to cold, and my doctor says that it is because I had covid, apparently the pain remains for a long time. I already have had the two vaccinations, and I do not want covid to return.

IN TOUCH WITH MY BELOVED FAMILY*By Jose R. Gallardo*

The pandemic has affected us all; ever since we have been in a shelter-in mode, we have been somewhat different people. I personally had the virus though, thank God, the symptoms were rather minor. In fact, for some days I did not know I was infected. All I remember is that I had a slightly noticeable cough, it did not bother me because it was not bad; my family advised me to stay home for two weeks, which I did without much trouble.

One of the activities I participated in during the pandemic was to be in daily contact with my brothers; thanks to social media like Facebook and Whatsapp, I was able to stay in touch with my beloved family. With those activities, I was able to cope with the boredom of being isolated at home 24/7. I was daily participating in video chats with my brothers who live in different cities in my native country Mexico, Mexico City, Cuernavaca, Torreon and Guadalajara. I was also making phone calls to other relatives and when not directly in touch with family members, I would just watch TV.

The classes I have been taking keep helping me in different ways given that I am getting more confident about social media and some new technologies. For instance, I am able to film short videos using my tablet; I share these videos with my family and they make positive comments about them, which motivates me to continue learning new things and keep stimulating my brain.

Something I have learned is that a mask must be worn in public places, regardless of vaccine status. Wearing a mask should be a habit to follow just to be in the safe spot. I have been wearing one myself every time I go shopping.

A piece of advice I would give for generations to come is to accept the recommendations from the experts; we know it is not fun to stay isolated but those are the measures we must follow in order to avoid massive deaths.

DIFFICULT TIMES*By San Juana Reyes*

When the pandemic called Coronavirus Disease 19 which was discovered in 2019, began spreading in Wuhan City Hubei Province China, it caused a severe acute respiratory syndrome.

The U.S Government then under the Trump Administration was alert to prevent the spreading in this Nation. The first case in the U.S. was detected on January 20th, 2020, samples were taken to Washington State and the laboratory was confirmed on March 18th, 2020.

Unfortunately, many people all over the country ignore the consequences of the disease, also thousands refuse to be vaccinated. I emphasize my concern not only for my family and friends but for millions who have lost not only their income but loved ones; in our case, we lost a nephew and a friend in

Mazatlán, Mexico that we had known for thirty-five years, both due to Covid-19.

We all have been confined at home for months, we are no longer able to hug our siblings, children, grandchildren, and friends. We have always had to wear a mask or a face shield.

For several months my only distraction has been the virtual grammar class that Esperanza Gutierrez and Riesa Bigelow offer through zoom. So, I would like to express to them my sincere appreciation and gratitude for their support, time, and kindness. GOD BLESS YOU!!.

MY EXPERIENCE WITH THE PANDEMIC*By Veronica Garcia*

Poverty has increased since the most vulnerable and those exposed to Covid-19 are getting SICK. Because of poverty, many people are forced to go to work, like essential workers. Others have become increasingly in debt due to not having a job. Some have had to search for aid in food, and housing. Others have had to subsist by living with other families.

With the passing of time, economies have been falling. There is an increase in imports such as gasoline and consequently everything else begins to rise. Other companies have been in total closure, due to the crisis that has been generated by this pandemic.

We also have to recognize the health sector more because they are the ones who fight every day to save the lives of many people. The saddest thing for me is to see a loved one die of this disease. In the beginning, when all this began, people died and they were not handed over to their families. At first, I was scared, we have been almost 2 years now with the pandemic and I still have the same fear of catching it. Although some members of my family were infected, there are still some who do not want to be vaccinated. So much information in the news confuses people.

Something crucial for the human being is to have a good diet, exercise, to live a more relaxed life. We also need to connect mind and body and to have high immune system, since it is important for this pandemic. Definitely our life took a 360 degree turn and it is something that we will never forget. We still do not know if we will be able to return to our life from before. It was very sad that we could not visit our family because we were terrified of getting infected. We gained weight and the doctor's appointments were by telephone only and everything has changed since the pandemic started. We became more cybernetic as the internet is the gateway to numerous essential services such cyber health platforms, digital money transfer and electronic payment systems. It is so important what we have experienced up to this moment.

MESSAGE FROM SHEILA



Pause and Renew

I remember receiving the email to stay home! Don't go to work, eliminate unnecessary shopping, COVID has reached our community. Do your part to stay healthy and eliminate the spread of the virus. Wash your hands, wear a mask, and observe social distancing. I felt shock, disbelief and fear that my community was at risk. It did not take long for the fear driven news to exhaust me and remind me how stress affects health. Fear is a virus!

I unplugged from the constant newsfeed and decided to make the most of my "time out." Staying home from work usually meant I was sick and didn't feel like doing anything. The idea of being at home to work on unattended projects, work in my garden, make delicious food from scratch, take time to read, journal, contact friends and family I was usually too busy to be in touch with was a bonus! I actually had time to pause and reevaluate my life, to become more creative and remember what brings me peace and joy.



*Sheila Mitchell,
Literacy Assistant*

I gained a new appreciation for the blessings in my life. I have a job, working with volunteers who help people learn literacy skills and reach their potential; we all connected with the public library which has provided creative services that allow our community to stay connected. I have a comfortable, safe home in a quiet neighborhood, with a garden I can tend to. I live in an agricultural community that grows organic produce which is made readily available through our local Farmers Markets. I have the ability to pause and to notice the beauty and healing elements of nature surrounding me. I have the ocean, mountains, forest, Elkhorn slough and so much open space to commune with. The pandemic offered a gift, to take advantage of the world halting for a brief moment in time so that we not only realize we need to take care of ourselves, we must notice that the environment needs us to participate in the healing of our planet.

It was important to face the challenges before me and recognize them as opportunities for change and personal growth. Learning more technology applications was a must so that I could continue to work from home. Finding ways to connect and communicate with tutors and learners was not easy. In the beginning phone calls were the best way to reach people. Eventually more people started to step out of their comfort zone and learn how to use Zoom and other applications so the learning journey could continue. Discovering topics of interest and issues of concern and having conversations that were relevant to these challenging times attracted more participants. We were able to support each other and be inspired by each other.

Everyone experiences the pandemic in their own way. I liked reading: "We are not in the same boat, some people are on yachts, some on rowboats, some on rafts and others are drowning." Not everyone had the luxury of time to rest. My husband was busier than ever with no pause to rest or relax. I watched fieldworkers in the extreme heat in smoke filled air from the disastrous fires that hit our area made me think of "essential workers" that did not have a pause. They are frontline workers that put food on our tables; nurses, doctors, caregivers working long hours to help others and risk their own health and that of their families and loved ones. I was fortunate to work from home until it was safe to return to the literacy center. I learned more technology that allowed me to connect with tutors, learners, friends and family via Zoom. I had access to many webinars that allowed me to connect with other literacy programs. We were able to support each other and we learned creative ways to keep our programs alive. Thinking outside of the box allowed us to get more people on board. We encouraged each other to take time to pause, re-evaluate their lives, their goals and what they desired to learn. We didn't give up, we helped hold each other up and we kept growing.

The world slowed down, fewer cars, less traffic, less fossil fuels, less air pollution. The pandemic provided us with an opportunity to halt "business and life as usual" and reflect on how we, as humans, affect our environment. Hopefully we will not go back to the bad normal, but we learn how our actions affect each other, the environment and the world at large. Start with self, be in community, find ways to connect with our local community and find resources that help those in need. Check on our neighbors, run errands for our elders, donate food, and smile at those you come in contact with. Even with the masks, the eyes can smile. We may have our own experiences but we all need clean air, water, food and shelter. Use time wisely, do our part, help others in need, be compassionate and lift each other, inspire each other. Always be mindful and do the best we can! A wise friend of mine who had a short time left to live, quoted Mahatma Gandhi, "Live as if you were to die tomorrow, learn as if you were to live forever."

Life is a gift, live it fully. May your New Year be healthy and filled with blessings!

~ Sheila Mitchell