ALLI Bay Area 2008 Class

Front row: Maria Villaurrutia; Santa Dandan; Kathleen Smith; Suzie Keels
Middle row: Debbie Hodge; Thelma Gonzalez; Klara Polin; Lupe Perez; Kiwha Seo
Back row: Donald Johnson; Daciano Silva; Olegario Neves; Ramon Barboza
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As most of you should know by now, Anne Turner, longtime director of the Santa Cruz Libraries and gifted former editor of the *Clarion*, has retired, leaving very big shoes to fill on many fronts. Because I feel passionate that the California Library Association (CLA) should retain its paper-based magazine, I’ve agreed to step-in as temporary editor until someone more permanent can fill that position. I’ve had tremendous help, this time around, from Alan Archer, coordinator of the Read Up Building Reading & Writing Skills program at the Madelyn Helling Library and chair of CLA’s Literacy Services Section, as well as from my coworker Jacquie Brinkley, library programs consultant at the California State Library. They have both assembled a stellar group of articles celebrating the 25th anniversary of library literacy services in California.

I was a seasoned reference librarian when the state library first started talking about literacy services in the early 1980s. I remember very vividly how reluctant some people were to initiate this new service. Some staff felt they had enough to do just serving the folks who came into the library; others insisted that libraries were for the people who already knew how to read. But eventually librarians began to see the logic of helping nonreaders become literate, so that today literacy services are as mainstream as any other service the library offers. I can guarantee that if you still have doubt about the appropriateness of this type of program, your mind will change quickly once you’ve read one or two of the articles contained in this issue of *Clarion*. In fact, I’m so impressed by these stories that I’ve decided to look into literacy tutoring myself after I’ve retired (many years from now!).

Happy reading!

Cindy Mediavilla
Guest *Clarion* Editor
Welcome to the spring issue of CLARION everyone! Dedicating this issue to literacy is so appropriate because just as the spring season is a time of rebirth and renewal, library literacy services allow those involved to experience a type of rebirth and improvement in their lives. And certainly at the heart of any library, no matter which type, is the improvement of our users’ literacy in many areas:

- Basic literacy
- Early literacy
- Computer literacy
- Information literacy
- Consumer literacy
- Family literacy

I hope you find the articles here inspiring and perhaps, throughout this issue, identify people with whom you might partner or share information. As we all deal with our budgets this year, let’s remember that literacy programs should be considered basic core services and not partially or underfunded “extra” programs. Some of us, I know, need to fight for that core funding and are particularly grateful to the state library’s literacy grant programs that allow us to provide these essential services.

To all who work with literacy in all its forms, thank you for your enthusiasm and commitment. Thank you for being the champions of providing people with the opportunity to be not only literate, but smarter and better informed in their lives. In these times of economic upheaval and information overload it is more important than ever for libraries to let their constituents, their politicians, and their stakeholders know how our literacy efforts impact the lives of those we serve. Don’t be shy; market the fabulous results of your programs.

Speaking of being better informed, the CLA Transition Tool Kit has been distributed to chairs of current sections, round tables and committees. It is also available on the CLA website. I hope everyone has an opportunity to take a look at this document so we are all better informed about the transition to our new governance structure.

Barbara L. Roberts
2009 California Library Association President
Congratulations to the California Library Literacy Services (CLLS) on 25 years of providing outstanding service to adults who struggle with reading skills in California’s public libraries! It is with great pleasure that I am able to share my perspective on CLLS’s history and commemorate the CLLS silver anniversary.

I had the pleasure of working in California for nearly thirty years and witnessed firsthand the value that literacy programs bring to the library and the communities they serve. Literacy services attract a new and diverse clientele to the library, while enhancing library visibility and community goodwill. They also help libraries fulfill their mission by providing information and resource-sharing, as well as opportunities for life-long learning.

During my tenure as library director of several California libraries, and most recently as State Librarian of California, thousands of adult new readers and their families transformed their lives because of the commitment and hard work of hundreds of library staff and dedicated volunteers. What began in 1984 with a small but dedicated group of visionaries at the state capitol, the state library and fourteen public libraries—plus one year of federal Library Services and Construction Act funding—has evolved into an expansive network of libraries that provide multiple literacy programs for adults, children and families. CLLS libraries now span the state in more than half of California’s public library jurisdictions. This extension of services has allowed residents in even the most isolated communities to: access free help with their reading and writing; learn how to use computers for job training and communication with family and friends, voter education, and improving financial literacy skills; and gain the confidence to help their children with homework assignments, communicate more effectively with their children’s teachers, and even volunteer in the classroom.

In addition to the primary services of one-on-one or small group literacy tutoring, many programs have been created within CLLS to provide on-going reinforcement. Book groups are active in many CLLS libraries, giving new readers an opportunity to read, share, evaluate, and analyze an author’s words—all skills efficient readers take for granted. In a trusted and safe environment, these adult learners relish the chance to express their ideas, so often colored with their very gripping stories of growing-up as poor readers and feeling isolated from their peers, their families, and their communities.

The Adult Learner Leadership Institute (ALLI), now in its seventh year, began with the inspiration of an adult learner who felt it was important to share his success with other learners and the community at large. Under his guidance, learners and volunteers created a leadership seminar to teach others the skills needed to speak to groups and individuals on the value of library literacy services. Over 125
adult learners statewide are now alumni of the ALLI program. Many are actively engaged in supporting new learners or speaking publicly on behalf of their library literacy program.

As a network of providers, CLLS has increased the level of integration and strength of literacy services within public libraries. Once thought to be the sole responsibility of schools, libraries have become valuable partners in providing basic literacy skills instruction in a more personal, and less classroom-like, environment. By design, the one-on-one tutoring approach is the key to success for many of the adult learners in library literacy programs. We know that the library is uniquely suited for literacy services as it provides a comfortable, supportive, and enriching atmosphere for learners and their families.

Library literacy staff have worked to increase their professional visibility through expanded participation in the California Library Association (CLA). A designated Literacy strand of workshops is now built into the annual CLA conference, with audience attendees often representing any number of library service areas. Literacy coordinators or staff are represented on a majority of CLA governance committees and have been critical in keeping communication about literacy services on the forefront of CLA’s legislative and advocacy agendas. They have also done a great job of engaging not only staff, but also volunteers and adult learners in library advocacy. Literacy staff are proud to have gained this level of participation in library leadership and are grateful for the support and respect they have found within the professional library environment.

CLLS programs continue to improve the lives of thousands of adults, children, and families each year. Our libraries and communities have been transformed as well. But unacceptable levels of low-literacy still persist. Though the mission of CLLS is “to enable Californians of all ages to reach their literacy goals and use library services effectively,” much work remains to be done toward achieving this end. I am confident that, with the combined strength of the CLLS network and the commitment of so many dedicated individuals, more adults will attain and even surpass their literacy goals.

So how are these programs making a difference? Let me share a CLLS success story.

Michael struggled with reading throughout elementary school. By the time he moved to junior high, he was so far behind his classmates that all of his energy went into hiding his inability to read. He graduated from high school, but read at a second-grade level. Michael hoped to join the Navy like his father, but was unable to pass the entrance exams. The best job he could find was cooking at Burger...
King. He worked his way up to shift supervisor, got married and had children. When his children were little his wife would read to them and occasionally the children would ask him to read, too. He would always select books with lots of pictures and make up the story. As his children got older it became harder and harder to hide his reading problems. It was at this point he heard an ad on the radio about a local library literacy program. After a year of agonizing, Michael finally made the phone call. He was matched with a tutor and was soon reading to his children. He's in community college now and his future looks bright.

Michael’s story is not uncommon. Millions of Californians’ daily lives are affected because they lack basic literacy skills.

On this 25th anniversary, I would like to recognize the library directors, staff, volunteers, and AmeriCorps members whose passion and commitment for adult literacy services have helped to change so many lives over the years.

Susan Hildreth is the former State Librarian of California. In February 2009 she became Director of the Seattle Public Library.

2009 Library Legislative Day
April 15, 2009

Sacramento Convention Center

It’s time for you to register for Library Legislative Day! Library staff and library supporters are needed to tell our story—how our libraries have improved the lives of Californians and why continued legislative support is imperative during these tough economic times.

To register, visit our website at www.cla-net.org or call us at 916-447-8541 for a registration form. Advance registration ends April 10. You may also register on site on April 15 at the Sacramento Convention Center.
You may think a book club consists of a group of intelligent, intellectually curious adults discussing characterization, plot, motivation, and context. Project Read, San Francisco Public Library’s adult-literacy program, thinks so, too. Participating in a book club is exactly what the Wednesday Night Readers (WNR) do eleven times a year, even though some members of the group read at an elementary-school level. Our discussions produce a rich amalgam of poignancy, reflection, comradeship, and just plain fun.

The books we read are written for adults, with an occasional young-adult offering. (See sidebar for a sampling of the books read to date.) Book selection is the responsibility of the Project Read staff, but recommendations are also encouraged from among the WNR. Books must be shorter than 300 pages and available on unabridged tape or CD. Learners have the option of listening to the recorded version either exclusively or in addition to reading the book. On most evenings we have between 10 and 20 members participating in the discussion. We meet on the last Wednesday of every month except December. Longer books (e.g., *Seabiscuit*) are selected for reading during the holiday hiatus.

The group is made up of both learners and tutors, all of whom become members simply by their attendance. Monthly discussions are facilitated by me and one other Project Read tutor. On book discussion evenings, we distribute the following month’s book.
and recording, along with a discussion guide and full-color bookmark bearing the book’s cover. All materials are free to participants. It is typical, but not required, for learner/tutor pairs to attend the discussions together.

At the start of each session, the readers vote on how well they liked the book: thumbs up, thumbs down, or thumbs sideways for a mixed review. The floor is then opened to the learners to begin deliberating. The varied backgrounds of the members produce a richer, more textured discussion than might be found with a more homogeneous group—college graduates, for example.

Some learners read their first “real” book in WNR; others have their first-time experience of reading a book purely for pleasure; still others move from listening only, to listening and reading, to reading only. Each step is acknowledged by the group with the heartfelt enthusiasm befitting a life-changing milestone.

Learners who wish to read aloud to the group are given the opportunity to do so in a safe and supportive environment. No one is required to contribute to the discussion, but everyone has that opportunity. As is true with all groups, some members are more talkative and demonstrative than others. It is the facilitators’ delicate job to see that everyone has a chance to contribute without stepping on the toes of the more talkative members.

When I began co-facilitating eight years ago, I was concerned that my lofty pronouncements would be taken as law. “I don’t think anyone will disagree that ______ is the main character of this book,” I stated during the discussion of Ann Patchett’s *Bel Canto*. I was met with a barrage of dissent, followed by an intriguing debate of what constitutes a main character. As it turned out, three or four of the book’s characters had strong proponents for main-character status. That experience, and many similar subsequent ones, disabused me of the notion that my role was somehow godlike.

Although finishing the book is not a requirement for attending the discussion, many participants often regret not doing so and, therefore, voluntarily commit to reading the remainder of the book after the session. In those instances, the power of discussion is almost palpable, producing deeper understanding and appreciation of literature.

Members come and go, but a core group of about 15 readers can be counted on to attend most of the sessions. While strong bonds grow among these regulars, cliquishness does not prevail. First-timers are welcomed. In many ways, joining WNR is like coming home to an ideal family.

One series we’ve enjoyed reading is Alexander McCall Smith’s delightful *The No. 1 Ladies’ Detective Agency*. In these books, we’ve learned that the favorite beverage of Botswanans is bush tea, a drink that relaxes, revives and brings folks together the way leaf tea does the British. After trying it at one of our sessions, the WNR decided that perhaps bush tea is an acquired taste. Coincidentally, one of our members was born and raised in the same region of Africa, so when a custom described in the series seems strange, we often turn to her for verification. Thus far, everything in the books has been deemed authentic.

How many other book clubs have built-in resources like that?

Our most unusual evening involved a group of actors from the local Screen Actors Guild, who performed scenes from Arthur Miller’s play *Death of a Salesman*. Some of the learners had never seen a play, and the atmosphere was electric. Following the performance, the actors joined us in discussing...
the work—a truly magical moment. I was pleased to see the learners participating avidly in the discussion, proof that the skills and behaviors we foster here are transferable to unfamiliar situations.

I’m often asked how people who can’t read can participate in a book club. The answer is that our learners—and not just those in WNR—can read and just want to improve their reading skills. Some want to be able to read to their children, others want to read a religious text, still others want to land a job or advance to a better one. They are an amazingly resourceful group of individuals who, with a truncated set of literacy skills, have learned to navigate the reading world with consummate dexterity. Many hold jobs whose requirements are beyond the level of their reading skill—they devise intricate workarounds to make their reading challenges invisible in the workplace. Most mortals would be exhausted by the time and energy these subterfuges take, yet these amazing people thrive and rise. It’s no wonder, then, that they elevate and enliven the WNR discussions with a depth of experience, insight and innate savvy.

Lively and richly textured discussions are the norm in WNR. The learners, unencumbered of having been taught in college how to talk about a book, bring vigor and unfettered enthusiasm to the discussions, and flavor them with their life experiences, which tend to be fraught with difficulties we tutors can only imagine. The tutors, in turn, enrich the discussion with their breadth of knowledge and experience without becoming pedantic. Simply put, all of us learn from and teach one another. The result is a rich, thick soup that delights the senses and warms the spirit.

San Francisco Public Library’s Project Read offered the first Wednesday Night Readers book club in January 2001. Since that time, it has proven to be the most popular ongoing workshop ever offered for adult learners and their tutors. For the past eight years, John Gildersleeve, Erin McAleece, Renee Feldman, and Mary Hilton have all served as book club facilitators, providing a safe, welcoming, and supportive environment that fosters free expression and respect for others. The author of this article, John Gildersleeve, has been a volunteer with Project Read for over 15 years, serving as a tutor and mentor tutor. Co-facilitators Mary Hilton and Renee Feldman assisted with the preparation of this article.

– Randall Weaver, Literacy Program Manager, San Francisco Public Library

### A Sampling of Books Read

Isabel Allende: *Portrait in Sepia*  
John Howard Griffin: *Black Like Me*  
Sue Monk Kidd: *The Secret Life of Bees*  
Lorraine Hansberry: *A Raisin in the Sun*  
Harper Lee: *To Kill a Mockingbird*  
Jack London: *The Call of the Wild*  
Mildred Taylor: *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*  
Maya Angelou: *And Still I Rise*  
Frank McCourt: *Angela’s Ashes*  
Ray Bradbury: *Fahrenheit 451*
ARE YOU LOOKING FOR IDEAS FOR SUMMER READING 2009?

The California Library Association’s California Summer Reading Program is celebrating music and the arts!

Please visit our website for:
creative and expressive ideas for children’s, teen, and adult programs
resources from Poets & Writers and the California Arts Council
150 “Best Ideas” for summer reading from California librarians
tips on finding and working with community partners
training workshop videos and downloadable flyers
conversations with California’s summer reading community on our discussion board!

www.cla-net.org/summer-reading

The California Summer Reading Program is a project of the California Library Association, supported by the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act, administered in California by the State Librarian.

Collaborative Summer Library Program is the sponsoring organization for the 2009 Summer Library Program.
I went into AmeriCorps hoping to make a difference. I want to save the world, and the only way to do that is by giving people the power to read and understand. I love seeing the satisfaction on students’ faces when they understand or when they have moved up a level.

– Julia Washington, AmeriCorps member, Stanislaus County Library

Approximately 3.4 million adults in California do not have the literacy skills needed to read a book to a child, fill-out a job application, or read the directions on a medicine label. California Library Literacy Services (CLLS), a program of the California State Library, provides instruction for adults with low-literacy skills. Over 100 libraries in California have adult literacy programs that match volunteer tutors with adult learners.

For most library literacy programs, the need for volunteers far outweighs the supply. To help alleviate the demand, various library sites have incorporated AmeriCorps members to help tutor these adults. Since 2004, AmeriCorps members have served in CLLS programs throughout California. While their primary goal is to tutor adults, AmeriCorps members also work with the community to promote literacy and libraries.
The AmeriCorps Story

Often called the “domestic Peace Corps,” AmeriCorps and its members are part of a larger group of people who serve in communities for not much pay. Full-time CLLS AmeriCorps members must serve 1700 hours, January-December. Part-timers serve 900 hours for the year. Their monthly stipend? For full-time members (serving an average 35 hours a week), their pre-tax allowance is $950. For part-time members (serving an average 25 hours a week), it’s $490.

Who are these individuals who have set aside one year to serve? They are a diverse group of people: all ages, from as young as 17 to a seasoned 82, all backgrounds—some who were born in the same city where they serve, others from as far away as India, and all levels of experience, from first-time workers to retirees. Some members are serving in the same library they used as a child. Others have relocated from as far away as Ontario, Canada. Retired library administrators, former library board members, and current tutors have offered their skills and expertise to participate in this unique program.

Upon completion of their service, members receive an education award ($4,725 for full-time service, $2,362.50 for part-time) that they can then apply to future educational expenses or existing student loans. The education award and the experiences gained from their year of service often lead members to a second year of service.

Connecting AmeriCorps to the Library

The California Library Literacy Services AmeriCorps Initiative began in 2003 as a partnership among the National City Public Library, California State Library, Wal-Mart, and LiteracyWorks, a non-profit literacy organization. Carla Lehn, library programs consultant at the California State Library, had heard that “there were never enough hands to get things done” in libraries. A former VISTA volunteer herself, she knew that involving a national service program, like AmeriCorps, would be a good way to get the help needed for library literacy programs. By the start of 2004, forty-two AmeriCorps members were working in seventeen library literacy sites throughout California. The results of their efforts were immediate and long-lasting. Since 2004, nearly 300 individuals have served as members at a total thirty-one sites. Duties include tutoring adults, promoting libraries and literacy programs, and recruiting library volunteers. (See sidebar for more details.)

Drawing Community Support

In addition to tutoring, members also help coordinate community events that promote libraries and literacy. Fund-raising activities, such as Scrabble-thons and Trivia Bees, not only raise literacy awareness, they also recruit potential volunteer tutors. Members have also developed their own community events, like the Walk-A-Mile for Literacy experience, created by AmeriCorps members in Hemet in 2006. Using the adage “walk a mile in someone else’s shoes,” participants walk one mile, stopping at various stations (e.g., grocery store, health clinic, and bank) to see what it’s like to be a non-reader in everyday situations. This event has been adopted by other literacy programs, notably in Alameda and Nevada counties.

The Future of the CLLS AmeriCorps Initiative

The CLLS AmeriCorps Initiative is currently in its final year of a three-year grant cycle. A grant proposal for further federal funding was submitted in early January, but results will not be known for a few months. In the meantime members will continue to tutor adults, gather community support for libraries and literacy, and “Get Things Done.”

So far my experience in AmeriCorps has made me a better person, community member, friend, tutor and mother. I like that.
– Charlie Wick, Del Norte County Public Library

Susan Empizo is Program Director of the CLLS AmeriCorps Initiative.

CLLS AmeriCorps by the numbers
(2004-2008)

Total number of AmeriCorps members: 297
Adult literacy adults served: 22,230
Volunteers recruited and managed: 21,433
Hours of volunteer service: 464,521
Literacy events developed and implemented: 352
Literacy event attendees: 178,935
One of my first experiences at Project Literacy—and one of the most poignant so far—was the first learner assessment I witnessed. A new learner came into our office to meet with my co-worker, Bobby. My role was to observe and learn how to perform an assessment.

The learner (I’ll call him Brian) entered the office with a hesitant smile and clasped hands, clearly very nervous. We offered him our smiles and invited him to sit down in order to begin. As Bobby began, I sensed Brian’s unease with my presence, so I gave them some space and sat in front of the computer, far enough away for Brian to relax but close enough to listen. Brian stumbled over words and laughed, first nervously and then almost desperately, as he explained that he had dyslexia and added that there was probably nothing anyone could do to help. The tone of his voice nearly broke my heart—such shame and embarrassment. He felt hopeless even in coming here, sure that he was beyond help.

After Brian left, I discussed with Bobby how the assessment had gone and the questions I had regarding the different components. Bobby showed me Brian’s paperwork as an example, and that’s when I saw the paragraph he had written, a sample of his writing. Upon reading his words, I began to cry. Brian wrote about the constant terror he felt at the workplace, the embarrassment, the low self-esteem he suffered, and the fear of being discovered. He wrote about his shame about not being able to help his mother, who was ill, because he could not even help himself. From Brian’s writing and his demeanor, I could see how little he thought of himself. I could see his deep shame about who he was and his doubt about what he was capable of.

I recalled the woman I had met at the training in San Diego, also a learner, who shared with us her struggles with severe dyslexia. What had stood out to me most about her was the pure excitement she had to learn and the nearly tangible glow that surrounded her—she was proud of herself and exuded confidence. In this moment, I understood the power of literacy, and the impact this program has in people’s lives.

Since his assessment, Brian has been working with a tutor and is making huge strides. I am sincerely grateful, not only to Project Literacy and AmeriCorps for this incredible opportunity to work for such a cause, but also to Brian, who is far braver than I have yet been, and who taught me that literacy is a privilege and a gift that I had taken for granted.

Rachell Shaffer, AmeriCorps member, San Leandro Public Library

continued on page 16
Adult Learners Leading the Way

By Shanti Bhaskaran and Rosie Manela
As libraries across the state face steep budget cuts, we need to find better ways to advocate for continued funding and literacy services. You cannot find a more effective advocate than a patron who can testify, “This library changed my life.”

A couple of years ago, a group of adult learners from library literacy programs across the Bay Area got together on a Saturday morning to write a letter to state legislators. Although these learners found writing an ordeal, they felt it was critical to have their voices heard on an issue that mattered to them deeply. Their letter found its way into the California Library Association’s (CLA) Legislative Day packets that year.

“Before we found help at our library’s adult literacy program, we struggled to communicate and had difficulty . . . helping our children or grandchildren in school, completing a job application, getting a driver’s license, and completing a voter registration form,” the learners wrote. “Thanks to the adult and family literacy programs in our libraries, we are now able to read and write better, have more confidence, and are able to achieve our goals, such as writing letters, volunteering in our children’s schools and in our communities.”

The authors of this letter were graduates of the 2007 Adult Learner Leadership Institute, a statewide training program for adult learners to gain self-esteem and learn public-speaking, advocacy and networking skills. Acquiring the ability and confidence to advocate and effectively express themselves is a literacy goal common to many adult learners.

The Institute was founded in 2001 in memory of Henry Huffman, an extraordinary learner leader who inspired others to advocate actively for the cause of adult literacy. Seven people completed the program that first year. Even more participated the following year when the Institute opened its doors to learners from other library literacy programs. Inspired by the experience, the graduates wrote a letter to the California state librarian urging that this become a statewide program. Their request was accepted and, in 2003, the Adult Learner Leadership Institute (ALLI) became a statewide training program funded by the California State Library through a Library Services and Technology Act grant.

Today, the training is spread over six sessions, with classes meeting one Saturday a month. Available at four sites in California—Santa Clara, Solano County, Rancho Cucamonga, and Carlsbad—ALLI is led, presented and facilitated by adult learners. Over 150 learners have graduated from the program in the past eight years.

ALLI empowers adult learners to recognize their own strengths and view themselves as productive members of the community. The Institute enables participants to come full circle by allowing adult learners to give back to the libraries and literacy programs that have helped them reach their goals. As Institute graduate Adeline Rivas says, “I’ve gone on radio. I’ve talked to groups. I talk to a lot of students that are coming into the literacy program. I speak with passion because I know how it is to be here in this world and not have this one thing I want so badly. I’m going to keep helping, and if I can help one person to overcome that barrier, then I know I have done something in my life.”

Another graduate admitted she was scared when she first started the Institute. “I didn’t know what to expect,” she says. “I’m glad I attended the classes. I can speak up at church now without feeling fearful. My confidence is higher. I share with the children in my community about literacy.”

Likewise, Ruben Dozal, Jr., an alum of the first Institute, writes in a poem, “I learned in the confusing translation of my mind how to present a speech, although I shake all the way down to my toes!” Now Ruben speaks frequently to community groups about how joining the literacy program transformed his life.

ALLI participants share their stories with groups of new learners, volunteers, donors, and elected officials. They also help staff tables at community events to spread awareness of the importance of adult literacy. In 2008, they participated on a panel discussion about learner leadership at the CLA conference in San Jose. Some of them have even gone on to advocate for adult literacy at the national level and are on the boards of ProLiteracy America and VALUE (Voice of Adults United for Education).

As one of the learners summed up, “Everybody has the ability to be a leader, so I am planning to take these ideas back to my library, and to encourage my fellow students that we can do more than what we thought. Not only can we change our lives but we can make a better community.”

Shanti Bhaskaran is Literacy Program Supervisor of Santa Clara City Library’s “Read Santa Clara” program. Rosie Manela is Literacy Supervisor of Rancho Cucamonga Public Library’s Adult Literacy Program.
They’re twin sisters and for the past six months they have come faithfully twice a week to the literacy center at Salinas’s John Steinbeck Library. There they meet with their tutor, a retired school teacher. They bring their small children along—one baby is asleep in the car seat at her mother’s feet, another plays with books and lounges in a bean bag chair, while several of their older kids play in the children’s area. Between them they have nine children, ages 0 to ten. Both sisters dropped out of school when they were thirteen and neither learned to read. After failing classes and falling too far behind, they did what many of us would do in their circumstances: they quit and gave up hope.

Today, working with their tutor, the twins are mastering the alphabet and learning to read by sounding out letters, vowels, and blends. Using second-grade materials and the simple Cinderella storybooks they purchased at the Dollar Store, they are becoming readers. They laugh as they sound out words, and discover new ones that sometimes make little sense. For the first time in a long time, they are building their confidence. “They’re learning so fast,” says their tutor, who delights in their progress as much as they do. “But they still have a long way to go,” she cautions.

The Business of Building Hope in Salinas

By Mary Ellison and Elizabeth Martinez
We know that learning to read is a slow process. It does not happen overnight. We look at the work we’re doing in our literacy center as building Hope: hope that something lost can be found again, hope that something never acquired can be attained and even mastered, and hope that a library card can represent an admission ticket to a world of learning.

Literacy is a community issue in Salinas and the entire Monterey County, where only 58% of the people 25 years or older have a high school diploma (compared to 84% nationally). It impacts everyone. Our goal at the Salinas Public Library is to make literacy a part of everything we do. From bookmobiles that stop at Mi Pueblo supermarkets and low-income housing projects, to digital arts labs and weekly story times, all of our programs are targeted at improving literacy.

We are fortunate to have a mayor, Dennis Donohue, who is committed to literacy and makes the connection between a thriving city and the literacy of its residents. Last year, the city council adopted four goals, one being a “Culture of Literacy.” When the mayor asked us to issue library cards to all third-grade students in the city, we did one better. We made it our goal to issue library cards to every K-12 student in Salinas public schools. By June 2009, more than 31,000 students will have library cards.

To achieve this goal, we learned quickly to think creatively and change some of our processes. For example, one superintendent asked if we could use the school’s address for all the students in her district, thus eliminating the need for an application form. She agreed to be responsible for any lost books and overdue fees. We then designed a card specifically for her district, using its logo and colors. Library cards were delivered to every classroom in each school. As a result of our card drive, we now have more children in our libraries, more books circulating, and more people attending our programs. What could be more simple?

Salinas is a very young community. The median age is 26, with 32% of the population under 18 years old. Just as the twins gave up hope in middle school, we know there are many more youth in school today who will eventually dropout because they can’t read well enough to succeed. These are the same kids who are more likely to get involved in gang-related activities and won’t be able to find jobs. To attract them to the library, we worked with San Jose State professor Anthony Bernier to create a space for young adults, called the “U Name It Lounge,” that features a plasma screen TV and Xbox. Youth come in to socialize and play games, but they also read and check-out books.

Knowing that access to technology and computers is an issue for many in Salinas, and that there is a huge interest in learning digital arts and technology skills, we also opened a digital arts lab at the John Steinbeck Library, equipped with Mac computers and software for filmmaking (Final Cut Pro), music composition (Garage Band), photography, and graphic design. Students and adults are using the lab to make movies, create music, and mix photographs. Classes are offered several times a week, and mentors are available from local nearby colleges.

Last November we held “Dinner in the Stacks” with poet Jimmy Santiago Baca to raise funds for new youth literacy programs. We hope to engage parents in their children’s reading progress as well as helping students directly. The library, of course, is a nonjudgmental and non-graded environment where students feel comfortable asking for help.

Because many adult learners can’t get to our libraries, we decided to offer a “Families Learning Together” adult literacy program at several low-income housing projects and at a local family resource center. We provide the instruction and childcare at the housing projects. The local family resource center provides the facility and childcare when we visit there. Not surprisingly, we have long waiting lists for these classes. Our bookmobile also visits homebound mothers and young children who have never been to a library. Soon, we hope to provide a Babymobile that will carry board books and other infant materials to childcare centers, pediatric clinics, and preschools throughout the area.

The Salinas Public Library is looking forward to celebrating its centennial this year. Thanks to a generous grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, we’ll be collaborating with the National Steinbeck Center to explore the past, present and future of Salinas through book groups, workshops, conferences, video and oral histories, art projects, and original theater performances. All these programs will provide hundreds of opportunities for children, students and families to engage in community-building, reading and choosing knowledge over ignorance.

Mary Ellison is Literacy Program Manager for the Salinas Public Library. Elizabeth Martinez is the Library Director.
Most of us take the gift of reading and writing for granted. The 19,000 adult learners in the 103 California library literacy programs are not among them, however. Many of them had never read a book before they joined the literacy program. Many more had never put their thoughts and ideas in writing.

Writer to Writer is an annual writing challenge where adult learners in library literacy programs statewide are invited to write a letter to their favorite authors describing how reading their work changed their lives. Some of the winning letters are then sent to the authors, if still living. Begun in 2001, the Challenge is sponsored jointly by the California State Library and the California Center for the Book. It is modeled after a national reading-and-writing program for youth, called Letters about Literature, hosted by the national Center for the Book.

In 2008, 162 learners from 47 library literacy programs submitted entries to the Writer to Writer Challenge. To encourage as many adult learners as possible to participate, entries are divided into four categories: emerging, beginning, intermediate and advanced writers. Even learners who lack the literacy skills to read a book are urged to participate by listening to books on tape. If the learners have little or no writing skills, volunteer tutors use a technique called “the language experience” to transcribe the learners’ words onto paper and use this to teach spelling, grammar and vocabulary. Entries are judged by library directors and literacy specialists who pick the finalists in each category. Last year’s winners, who were selected by groups of adult learners across the state, received their awards on November 15, 2008, at a moving ceremony cosponsored by the California Library Association’s Literacy Section, the California State Library and the regional literacy networks.

The winner in the “emerging writer” category is Ferial Hanna, an Iraqi immigrant and cancer survivor who believes in “freedom and education for everybody.” Jeri Chase Ferris’s biography Remember the Ladies: A Story about Abigail Adams inspired her to hold onto her dreams and “not give up.” “I will be a strong woman, I will educate myself and I will write my stories,” Ms. Hanna tells the author. “My stories will make me alive to my kids and my grandchildren and they will be proud of me.”

Responding to Ms. Hanna, Jeri Chase Ferris writes: “Abigail Adams would be proud to know you, Ferial, and she would be proud to know her story has helped you. You have persevered in new and frightening circumstances; you have not let even cancer stop

By Shanti Bhaskaran
you. You say you ‘will be a strong woman.’ I say you are a strong woman, and just as Abigail helped shape the new United States of America with her ideas and actions, so you too will help shape your new country—our country—America.”

Former drug addict Juan Alberto Santoyo confesses to author Nicholas Sparks how *The Notebook* took him back to “a happier time” and made him realize “all the great things that I was missing out on in life.” Now four years sober, Santoyo expresses hope that someday he’ll be able to “flip through the pages of my own notebook, and read back to our family the story of our life.”

In his letter to Mr. Santoyo, Nicholas Sparks says, “Thanks for taking a chance on the novel, *The Notebook*, and I’m glad your life is becoming all you wish it to be.”

The Writer to Writer winners can be viewed reading their letters on the California Library Literacy Services Web site at www.libraryliteracy.org.

Shanti Bhaskaran is Literacy Program Supervisor of Read Santa Clara, Santa Clara City Library.

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**Winning letters from two Writer to Writer Challenge categories**

**Emerging Writer:**

Dear Ms. Chase Ferris,

After I read your book, *Remember the Ladies - A Story about Abigail Adams* it made me open my eyes and mind to the world. When I read about Abigail Adams it was like looking in the mirror. I saw myself there. She was strong and brave and made hard decisions by herself. I had to make very hard decisions by myself to leave my country, Iraq, with my children. It is very hard to come to a different country when you don’t know the language. I started from zero here. As a 23-year-old with two children, I had to get a job, learn to drive a car, learn a different language, and rent an apartment. It was difficult.

Abigail Adams stuck to her beliefs. Like her, I believe whatever you want to do you can do. She never gave up and I am not going to give up. When I had cancer I was very down and thought about death but I did not give up. Cancer pushed me to work hard, to carry on learning more and more.

Like Abigail Adams, I believe in freedom and education for everybody. It is lovely to raise children and educate them. They are the future of the world. I think education is like an ocean, there’s always more of it. Education is very important. Education gives you self esteem. When I first came to my Vision Literacy class, I was very nervous, so nervous I couldn’t hold the pencil properly. Even though I still feel nervous, I don’t give up.

Women like Abigail Adams help me to hold on to my dreams and not give up. I will be a strong woman, I will educate myself and I will write my stories. My stories will make me alive to my kids and my grandchildren and they will be proud of me.

Sincerely,
Ferial Hanna
Vision Literacy (Santa Clara County Library)
Dear Mr. Nicholas Sparks,

It’s been four years now since I picked up your novel The Notebook but it has helped to change my life. To completely understand my story we have to travel back a few years to a time in my life that I would rather forget; you see, I was a drug addict for most of my adult life. Like a lot of people, my drug use started back in high school with beers and parties on the weekend. As the years rolled by, it progressed to a crystal meth addiction, which I had no control over.

In the spring of 2004, all that changed. One lucky day, there was a knock at the front door, and the police were there to rescue me from myself. While going through the process of being arrested, I realized I was heading down a path that would lead me to prison or worse death, and I know I needed to make some changes in my life.

In jail is where I realized how much I enjoyed reading books, and the jail library became my second home. On my first trip to the library I noticed this book sitting on the shelf, but for some unknown reason, I didn’t pick it up. After about a week, I returned to the library to get a new book and there, on the shelf, was the same book, daring me to come close. I noticed this book inch its way closer, and, after a while, this book The Notebook had me cornered. With no where to go, I finally gave in and picked it up. As I started to read, the book took me back to a happier time in my life, and the story reminded me of someone from a long time ago. The more I read, the more I realized all the great things that I was missing out on in life.

Today, I have the life that I’ve always dreamed of. I have over four years clean now, and I’ve been at my job for over a year. I have a savings and checking account, and I’m a productive member of society. That special someone form so long ago, I finally located her, and we’re getting to know each other again.

Like the novel, The Notebook, I see the wonderful life that awaits me. Someday, I hope to flip through the pages of my own notebook, and read back to our family the story of our life.

Thank you, Mr. Nicholas Sparks for all the great novels you have written. I never imagined your book, sitting on that shelf, would help to change my life around.

Sincerely,
Juan Alberto Santoyo
READ San Diego (San Diego Public Library)
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Over the past fourteen years, the Solano County Library’s literacy program has grown by adding new elements to help literacy learners reach their goals and develop skills they never envisioned. Cultivating leadership skills, for instance, is not necessarily the first thing that comes to mind as a building block for a literacy program. Yet Solano has seen learners grow and thrive by nurturing this particular skill set.

In 2004, we formed a Learner Council made-up of representatives from three of the metropolitan areas served by the library. The Council’s purpose is to (1) ensure communication among all three learner communities, (2) coordinate countywide literacy projects, and (3) provide a venue for learner leaders to develop their leadership skills. Policies and procedures were created to clarify expectations and two workshops—“How to Manage a Meeting” and “Taking Meeting Minutes”—are given to each incoming council. Annual council work plan objectives often include helping members develop presentation skills, which come into play at the library’s yearly literacy celebration. There, council members are frequently asked to address the audience, in what is usually their first public-speaking experience.

Literacy learners also are tapped to speak at other events, such as the Solano County Library Foundation’s annual authors luncheon, or to community groups, such as the Rotary and Soroptimist Club. Their stories are compelling and quite moving as they relay the obstacles they have had to overcome and how much the literacy program has helped them change their lives. Several learners have also discovered untapped leadership skills by attending the Adult Learner Leadership Institute (ALLi), described elsewhere in this publication (see pages 16-17). Four institute graduates from Solano County actually facilitated ALLi held in Sacramento in 2008.

Learners also find new ways to express themselves by writing for the literacy program’s newsletter, The Voice of Our Opinion. Best of all, they volunteer as learner advocates at “new student” meetings, showing new participants what can be achieved. Two students have even gone on to become tutors in the program.

One Student’s Story - Martha

When she first came to the adult literacy program, Martha was extremely shy. She sat at the far side of the table in a group of twelve students and barely said a word. At the end of her first meeting, she told her tutor in a timid voice that she didn’t think she could participate, that her skills weren’t good enough.

Martha’s tutor convinced her to stay and she became the only one of that group to complete the program. Her ultimate goals were to help her son with his homework, read household bills and understand them, learn to use the computer, and read with comprehension. She achieved all these goals and more. Today, Martha is a student leader and mentor to other learners. She sends emails, volunteers at her son’s school and is a great reader. But it is her leadership skills that impress and inspire others.

Elected to the Learner Council, Martha has blossomed into an excellent public speaker and now gives talks about the program at service clubs throughout the county. In 2008, she was one of the four learners who facilitated the
Leadership Institute in Sacramento. When other learners see her, they want to become leaders themselves.

The Literacy program is thriving and is an integral part of the Solano County Library. It has brought a whole new level and depth of purpose to the library as we reach out to some of our most vulnerable residents. The program has enriched and expanded the services we offer and is supported, from the top down, because we know firsthand that it has changed lives. Moreover, our program underscores what libraries are all about: literacy and learning.

Ann Cousineau is Director of the Solano County Library.

Martha’s story in her own words

“Before joining the literacy program I wanted to improve my speaking skills and confidence. I decided to join the Solano County Library Literacy Program because I felt I needed to learn new things: things like health, how to rent an apartment, programs to help my kids, become involved in the schools.

I was afraid to move ahead because of my lack of skills. I was afraid to make a mistake. I stopped being afraid because of the trust my tutor and the library staff gave me. My family also told me, ‘you can do it.’

My tutor made me feel confident. She didn’t just tell me what to say. She helped me imagine what to say with role plays. I learned speaking skills.

As a Learner Councilmember I learned how to socialize with the people around me. It was hard the first time. As the Learner Council representative, it was hard sometimes to be consistent and positive for a meeting.

That is the way you learn. . .to do it.

In my involvement with the 2008 Learner Leadership Institute, I am learning how to prepare the classes. The participants are counting on me.”

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What's the first book you remember reading cover-to-cover?

The Little Engine That Could by Watty Piper
Barbara Roberts, CLA president and director of the Palm Springs Public Library

One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish by Dr. Seuss
Laura Fisher, California Library Association

Madeleine by Ludwig Bemelmans
Rebecca Kozak, Alameda Free Library

Paddle-to-the-Sea by Holling C. Holling.
Fran Wielin, Palos Verdes Library District

Babar: King of the Elephants by Jean de Brunhoff
Karen Dyer, Dublin, CA

And To Think That I Saw It On Mulberry Street by Dr. Seuss
Lynne A. Price, Benicia Public Library

The Romance of the Three Kingdoms (the first book read in Chinese) and Gone with the Wind (the first book read in English)
Sally C. Tseng, CALA Honorary Executive Director

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz by Frank L. Baum
Mary Menzel, California Center for the Book

Freckle Juice by Judy Blume
Lalitha Nataraj, Chula Vista Public Library

Pet of the Met by Lydia & Don Freeman
Leslie Auerbach, Santa Cruz Public Libraries

Curious George by H. A. Rey
Steve Fjeldsted, South Pasadena Public Library

Thomas Edison: Young Inventor by Sue Guthridge
Karien Hudock, West Coast Proposal Operations Library, Northrop Grumman Corporation

The Hundred and One Dalmatians by Dodie Smith
Doug Coronado, Braille and Talking Book Library, California State Library

The Big Jump by Benjamin Elkin
Jill Patterson, La Habra Branch Library, OC Public Libraries

The Orange Fairy Book by Andrew Lang and H. J. Ford
Ida Z. da Roza, San Mateo County Library

Little Appaloosa by Berta & Elmer Hader
Lucinda de Lorimier, Madelyn Helling Library, Nevada County Library

The Little House in the Big Woods by Laura Ingalls Wilder
Andrea Woodruff, Lodi Public Library

Hardy Boys by Franklin Dixon
Wesley A. Doak, Christian Brothers High School

Gus was a Friendly Ghost by Jane Thayer
Julie Dahlen, Paso Robles City Library

The Hidden Staircase by Carolyn Keene
Maury McCord, Covina Public Library

Green Eggs and Ham by Dr. Seuss
Stefanie L. Gyles, Stockton-San Joaquin County Public Library

One of many books by Robert Louis Stevenson
Norman B. Hutcherson, Walter W. Stiern Library, California State University, Bakersfield

Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle by Betty MacDonald
Laura Mitchell, Escondido Public Library

The Outsiders by S. E. Hinton
Angela Bernal-Silva, South San Francisco Public Library

Alchemist by Paulo Coelho
Maria F. Kramer, Redwood City Public Library

Mickey Mouse comic book
Rosanna Brown, Lassen Community College Libraries

The King’s Stilts by Dr. Seuss
John Kallenberg, past CLA president (1987)

Johnny Crow’s Garden by Leslie Brooke
Nancy Quelland, City of Palmdale

Pippi Longstocking by Astrid Lindgren
Monique A. le Conge, immediate CLA past-president and director of Richmond Public Library

Fun With Dick and Jane
Cynthia Pirtle, Newport Beach Public Library

Ferdinand the Bull by Munro Leaf
Sandy Schuckett, California School Library Assn. liaison to CTA

Follow My Leader by James Garfield
Myrna Wathen, City of Roseville

Heidi by Johanna Spyri
Jayanti Addleman, Monterey County Free Libraries

Gabriel Churchkitten by Margot Austin
Ruth Hartman, Ventura County Library

Mr. Potter’s Penguins by Richard & Florence Atwater
Steve Chaput, City of Orange Public Library

My Father’s Dragon by Ruth Stiles Gannett
Celeste M Fong, Upland Public Library

Where the Red Fern Grows by Wilson Rawls
Sandra Tauler, Camarena Memorial Public Library

The Flying Eyes by J. Hunter Holly
Michael Toman, South Pasadena Public Library
Linda Perez is one of several Antoinette Mosley Adult Learner of the Year Award winners for 2009.

Linda sought out READ/San Diego in February 2007 because she knew she was not living the life she was meant to live. She initially enrolled in the program to earn her GED. After 18 months, she has completed six levels of phonics, advanced to the second level math series, and every day learns more about grammar, punctuation and writing essays. These are major steps toward attaining her GED. However, Linda has come to realize that she has more important aspirations. “What is most important is being what I was born to be, and that is a writer,” she now admits. She continues to delight in learning new vocabulary and word origins. In particular, Linda is discovering that words are more than just sounds—they are stories. With these words, she has made stories of her own, writing her first children’s book and currently working on her second. She loves what is happening to her because, as she says, “I’m doing what I was meant to do. I see my future as it was meant to be, and basically I can’t wait to get there.

Betsy Goodwin was one of the people named Rebecca E. Lytle Tutor of the Year in 2009.

Betsy had been interested in adult literacy for a long time. When she retired from 35 years of teaching grades K-3, she turned her sights on trying to teach adults. Two years ago, she heard about READ/San Diego on the radio and has been tutoring ever since. Betsy tutors two students one-on-one. She loves to read and enjoys imparting that love to her students. She greatly respects adults who decide to learn how to read later in life and is very proud of her students’ accomplishments. One student has passed three parts of the GED; the other is making amazing progress as well. Betsy feels she learns more from her students than they do from her and tries to recruit everyone she knows to tutor at READ/San Diego. “I tell them it’s extremely satisfying to see an adult learn how to read and fun to get to know them,” Betsy explains. “Reading positively affects their life and the lives of their families in so many ways. I tell my friends, ‘Tutoring is fun. You should do it, too!’”

Thanks to Valerie Hardie, Literacy Program Administrator of READ/San Diego-San Diego Public Library, for introducing us to Linda and Betsy.
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