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# BOULDERREADS

is the community learning program of the  
Boulder Public Library.

## OUR SERVICES INCLUDE

- One-on-one adult literacy tutoring
- Reading Buddies for children
- English conversation groups
- High school completion

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# INTRODUCTION

As I take a moment to write this year's introduction for the 2023 edition of Discoveries, I first must thank our incredible writers and their tutors. The stories and essays you will find here are unique, reflecting the broad diversity of life experiences represented in the BoulderReads community. It is truly an honor to share these with our readers. You will see commonalities in these pages – nature, family, home, even learning.

This year's theme of "What Brings You Joy?" derives from the 2023 One Book One Boulder campaign provided by the Boulder Public Library with the Boulder Library Foundation's support. We thank everyone who has donated to the Boulder Library Foundation to provide unceasing support and advocacy for BoulderReads. This generosity has allowed us to provide adult & family literacy & language tutoring to Boulder for thirty-seven years. We are grateful to our Conversations in English facilitators, our volunteer tutors, our participants, and all our community partners.

Here in BoulderReads, we have much to be joyful about. We are truly entering a new era, one that returns us to full staffing and the promise of more resources and growth. In June, we welcomed our new literacy manager, Juan Jimenez. Juan comes to us from the I Have a Dream Foundation of Boulder. He is also a college educator with two decades of teaching experience. In August, we welcomed our new Reading Buddies coordinator, Carylla "Carey" Franklin. Carey comes to us from Education for Wholeness Consulting and Teaching for Transformation. Carey has many years of experience as an educator, particularly with kids and as a consultant. In 2024, we will move our headquarters to the new North Boulder Branch library. Our signature Reading Buddies program has been re-established, we are exploring new partnerships with community partners, and as the pandemic eases, we have been uplifted by the gift of seeing tutors and learners in-person again.

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As I considered my own sources of joy, I realized there is another element that is inseparable from joy, and that is hope. Hope and joy are bound in a circle; I am not sure that you can have one without the other, or which one comes first. Reading the stories in the Discoveries magazine this year brings me both.

**Karen Bowen**

BoulderReads Program Coordinator

**BoulderReads Tutors:**

Dave Abbott • Jeffrey Adler • Lindsey Anderson • Carmen Ardalan • Glynn Bass • Marilyn Baldor • Libby Berry • Shannon Chang • Caroline Fuller • Deborah Blake • Lloyd Botway • Jackie Colt • Betty Dilley • Nancy Erickson • Anitta Frant • Stanley Gold • Kathy Golds • Katy Hess • Marcia Kahn • Midge Korczak • Robyn Larson • Dan Macy • Carolyn Marino • Teresa Mason • Vera Moffitt • Jen Moore • Frank Morse • Linda Murphy • Jane Rich • Laura Roettiger • Clare Schoolmaster • Jackie Seltzer • Jeff Skovron • Shelley Sullivan • Deb Usrey • Anne Walker • Lynn Weatherwax • James Woodall • Lon West • Suzane Williamson • Jennifer Yu

**Conversations in English Facilitators:**

Dylan Blaskey • Tina Bonifacio • Nan Burroughs • Alyssa Finer • Kirsten Hoaby • Erika O’Conor • Connie O’Dell • Bobby Rothschild • Catherine Schieve • Suan Schnell



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## WHAT BRINGS US JOY BY AMANDA BAMMANN

Jackie Seltzer, Tutor

Helping others read.  
Knowledge sharing questions.  
Inspiration growth.



# THE PERFECT HIDING PLACE

## BY BLANCA ALICIA UREÑA

Linda Murphy, Tutor

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A few years ago my brother, who lives in Mexico, sent me an email fable on happiness.

This fable speaks of 3 demons who met one day to do mischief.

The first demon said, “We are going to take something from humans, but what do we take from them?” After much thought, the first demon said, “We are going to take away happiness, but the problem will be where to hide it so that they cannot find it. One place to hide it is on top of the highest mountain in the world.” To which the second demon immediately said, “No, remember that humans have strength; sometime someone could go up and find happiness. If one finds it, then everyone will know where it is.”

Then the second demon proposed, “Then let’s hide happiness at the bottom of the sea.” The first demon answered, “No, remember that they are curious. Someone could build a device to go down and then find it.”

“I know,” said the first demon, “Let’s hide happiness on a planet far from Earth.” And the second demon said, “No, remember that they have intelligence, and one day someone will build a ship in which he can travel to other planets. Then he will discover happiness, and everyone will have it.”

The third of them was a demon who had remained silent, listening attentively to each of the others’ proposals. He analyzed each one of them and then said, “I think I know where to put it so they never really find it.”

The two turned around in astonishment and asked at the same time, “Where?” The demon replied, “We will hide happiness within the humans. They will be so busy looking for it outside of themselves that they will never find it.”

# THE PERFECT HIDING PLACE CONT. BY BLANCA ALICIA UREÑA

Linda Murphy, Tutor

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Everyone agreed and since then it has been like this:

HUMANS SPEND THEIR LIFE LOOKING FOR HAPPINESS WITHOUT KNOWING THAT THEY BRING IT WITHIN THEMSELVES!!!

This fable is very true! A few years ago my daughters and I lived through a very painful and difficult experience. I spent a lot of time praying and trying to forget the past and forgive all the damage that some people did to us. After searching many resources I came across a mantra; it was a mantra from the Hindu religion and the Sanskrit language. The mantra is to “let go” and I began to investigate, “let go” what?

I found that it said to let go of hate, resentment, the past, bad thoughts, and everything negative. The mantra had to be listened to for at least 21 days without interruption for it to have an effect on the person who listened to it, and I began to listen to it. Little by little I became better, emotionally and mentally. Later I found other mantras that I liked, and I continued listening to them with great discipline and without interruption.



# WHAT BRINGS ME JOY? BY CARMEN BIRMINGHAM

Lynn Weatherwax, Tutor

The 2007 Oxford Thesaurus defines **joy** as:

- a feeling of great pleasure and happiness
- the emotion evoked by well-being, success, or good fortune or by the prospect of possessing what one desires
- a source or cause of delight



For me waking up and seeing the sunrise, taking a sip of coffee first thing in the morning, going for a walk, dancing while I cook, throwing a ball with my dog, taking my parrot out of his cage and putting him/her on my shoulder, and having a chat with my birds, all bring me joy.

Lately reading has brought not only knowledge, but a sense of living the experience of the people that are involved on the paper. Sometimes wearing someone's shoes can bring you a different perspective. And in some cases, I am not willing to wear them, and I am ok with that. We must walk our talk.

Here is how to put joy back in your life as long as you are willing to put in some effort. Do small things, for example. Look at the sunny side of things and people that surround you. Daily routines or rituals become habits that will help you achieve well-being, experience positive emotions, and do more of what you love without failing your duties.

I put everything on paper or on a white board. So, make a list of what brings you joy. Perhaps it will keep you grateful for people and things you accomplish.

# WHAT BRINGS ME JOY? BY CARMEN BIRMINGHAM

Lynn Weatherwax, Tutor

For example:

- Go on a memory lane with music you enjoyed in your childhood.
  - Give your time or money to an organization that is close to your heart.
  - Do a small gesture to strangers. A random gesture of kindness can make a big difference in someone's life.
  - Create someone's art: A colorful environment can help you bring the best of you and music will improve your mood.
  - Keep healthy: Move and watch what you eat.
  - Bring nature to your home, plants, outdoor fountain, koi pond, indoor garden, etc.
  - Enjoy the good and the bad. Celebrate your successes and failures. They will bring you experiences and lessons.
  - Keep positive and grateful.
- Spend your time in what is important to you.
  - Take on a challenge. Take all the steps to achieve your project and master your goal.
  - Get inspired by the Zen of meditation or yoga.
  - Laughter is therapy.
  - Travel to experience new and different cultures.

Life can be messy and chaotic, and the smallest things can bring you the gift of being present. These Kodak moments will keep you relaxed and happy and will be kept in your memories. But watch out for nostalgia, because that will keep you trapped in the past. Keep your mind focused in the present, where joy lives.

**“Some things are within our power, while others are not. Within our power are opinion, motivation, desire, aversion, and, in a word, whatever is of our own doing.” – Epictetus**

# MY HAPPY LIFE BY DAVID ALLSHOUSE

Lindsey Anderson, Tutor

The most recent thing that brings me joy is my new nephew, Micah. He was born on June 24, 2023. I am excited to be a Great Uncle. Family makes me very happy. The other thing that brings me the most joy is friends. Having friends, making new ones, and doing things with all of them. I have met a lot of my friends through the Best Buddies program. One person who makes me happy is Liz from Best Buddies; she is very sweet and lovable to all of us. She invited me out to dinner to meet her younger sisters, who were in town for the weekend. She also introduced me to her parents— her mom was so nice – that made me very happy to meet them. Liz also invited me to her graduation and I sat with her parents. I was also sad because she was leaving Boulder – I did not want her to leave. I got her a teddy bear with a CU outfit on. She has invited me to her apartment to meet her roommate that made me feel cared for. Everything she did for me made me feel good. When my girlfriend Teri died in the King Soopers shooting, Liz stepped in and helped me feel better, like a good friend should. She was talking to me and gave me a sweet hug; she said “it’s OK. I’m here if you need me.” She asked Best Buddies to represent the program at Teri’s funeral. There were 10 people there from the program. Their support made me very happy. When they asked us to stand up, we all did. One of the buddies got in touch with Anthony Shriver, the founder of Best Buddies International, and wrote a nice letter about Teri – it made me feel supported and good inside. Another day, Liz asked me about BoulderReads and asked me what my teacher’s name was. I told her about the program and she was happy for me. Today we still keep in touch. Sometimes she asks me how class is going. I talk to Lindsey about Liz a lot.

# MY HAPPY LIFE CONT. BY DAVID ALLSHOUSE

Lindsey Anderson, Tutor

Lindsey is my teacher and another good friend. She likes to listen to me talk about my good friends. It makes me feel good when she shares what is going on in her life. One thing I appreciated was when my mom died, Lindsey was there for me and told me some good thoughts to think about. When Teri died, she and her mom came to Imagine's Remembrance Ceremony for Teri. At Christmas, Lindsey's girlfriend, Meghan asked her who she was making her famous coffee cake for and Lindsey said, "It's for David!"

Another time, Lindsey gave me the sweetest present ever – a Mork & Mindy T-shirt. That made me feel good inside because we worked together and did a lot of research for our Mork & Mindy story that was in Discoveries. We want to take a picture together in front of the house on Pine Street that was part of the Mork and Mindy introduction.

Another thing that Lindsey and I have done together and makes me feel excited and joyful is when we celebrate our birthdays together and go on reading field trips. We have gone to Alfalfa's and The Creek Festival to read signs and look at things. One thing that made me happy was we were thinking of a Halloween costume for Lindsey. I came up with an idea of a zombie biker chick. Lindsey says it turned out to be one of her favorite costumes she has ever done. I was proud because it was my idea.

One day, Lindsey had a big surprise for me. She introduced me to her girlfriend, Meghan and Meghan and I have become friendly. Sometimes Meghan asks Lindsey how our weekly Scrabble game went. It means a lot to me that someone else is interested in what we are doing. I am always happy when Lindsey and I play Scrabble. We laugh a lot when we are playing and it's a lot of fun. It also helps

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me learn how to spell better, make words out of different letters, and learn new words. Scrabble is a very exciting game to play with your friends. One day, Karen told us about a Scrabble board she had at home and brought it in for us to try. We have been using it ever since and we love it!

Lindsey and I have been working together for almost 15 years. I have been learning more than I ever have ever before. I write sentences using spelling words to understand what some words mean. My stories are longer and have more detail. I am learning different kinds of word endings I have never learned before – I am really good at T-I-O-N and I-E-S. I am proud of how much I have learned since Lindsey joined the program, and grateful to have her as a teacher and a friend. Being in BoulderReads is fun for both of us and makes us both happy. Karen says we are a great team, and we think so too!





## A HAPPY GIRL BY DJENEBA SAKO

Katy Hess, Tutor

Hi, my name is Djeneba Sako. I am from Mali, West Africa. I have been in the U.S. for 23 years. I am a happy person.

My family is still in Mali. We are far away but we are close. We talk on the phone all the time. I have a big family, and I talk with somebody every day. They tell me stories about my sister that make me laugh a lot. Everything my sister does is funny. She thinks I have a lot of money here. She says, "Send me money. I need to eat your money. I am your big momma now." When she says that, I laugh. I love my family and miss my family. They make me happy.

My job makes me happy, too. I teach and perform Malian dance. I travel to different cities in the U.S. I love to see new places. I meet nice people everywhere. When I dance, I forget everything.

I love my job, my family, and the U.S.





# MY COMFORT ZONE BY FRANKLIN ESCOBAR

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Marcia Kahn, Tutor

Growing up in a small town, in my home country El Salvador, made me love and appreciate nature. My father does agriculture in the mountains near our home. We walked about an hour to get to the farm. Sometimes my mother or one of my sisters would bring us lunch and we all ate together. It was amazing having the experience of homemade food in the woods, taking a break from work and enjoying the views of nature with the company of my family.

On Sunday mornings my dad would wake us up early, so we could go get firewood for the week's cooking. After brunch he would take us to church and then he would pick my cousins up and we would walk by the creek and jump in the water. It was a really fun time that I will always keep in my heart.

I moved to Houston at the age of 16. It was a drastic change for me. Everything was so different. The land was flat and there were huge buildings around. I missed the mountains back home.

I spent about 2-½ years in Houston and then moved to Colorado. When I moved here it was winter and everything looked so sad and depressing outside. A couple of days later there was a blizzard which was new to me. It was all white and beautiful. In the summer my uncle William who I was living with in Erie took his family and I to Seven Falls and the Cheyenne Zoo in Colorado Springs. We also stopped at one of my favorite parks, Garden of the Gods. All the places were magical, and I was loving Colorado so much.

# MY COMFORT ZONE CONT.

## BY FRANKLIN ESCOBAR

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A year later I moved to Boulder where I started a new job. I fell in love with Boulder and the nature around. One day one of my co-workers invited me to join him on a 5k race that he was attending. I wasn't sure if it was a good idea to go because I thought running was boring, but I ended up going and I loved it. Afterwards, he invited me to my first hike which I would never forget. It was a Saturday morning and we went to the Sanitas trail. It was beautiful and there were a lot of people hiking. That is one of my favorite places to go hiking.

I asked my friend Erick what motivated him to go hiking and running and he told me that running helps him with depression and makes him feel better.

I started to go on walks and hikes by myself around Boulder and I started to like it more and more and to feel better. I found out what my friend had told me was true.

I hiked my first 14er in August of 2019 and it was amazing. One of my friends had told me about the 14ers and I was curious about it, so I asked him about what exactly a 14er was. He told me that they were mountains with a height of 14,000 feet and up.

I thought it was a good idea to hike one of those mountains, so I googled the 14ers nearby. I found one that caught my mind called Longs Peak which is in Rocky Mountains National Park. A couple days later I was hiking Longs Peak. I woke up early in the morning, made myself a coffee and went on my way to do the hike. I started around 5:30 am and got to the top around 10ish. That was a long time going up. The views are gorgeous and I saw a lot of people on the trail.

I was tired but also satisfied. I spent a couple minutes on the top and took a lot of pictures before making my way down to my car. I was trying to run the areas I knew I could run and walking in areas with a lot of rocks. When I got to my car, the first thing I did was text my friends and they were surprised I did that hike alone.



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Marcia Kahn, Tutor

In 2020 I injured myself playing soccer and I had to get surgery which stopped me from running and doing hikes for over a year. I went back to Longs Peaks last summer with my sister, brother, and some friends. It was beautiful.

I've been reading about National Parks in a book that my tutor Marcia loaned me and I'm very excited to go to a lot of them. One of my favorites is the Grand Canyon in Arizona. I have heard a lot of people saying how beautiful it is. So, I hope I can make the time and finally take a trip to Arizona.

I love nature because it gives me joy and makes me feel alive physically and mentally. I believe I am in the best time of my life to accomplish so many goals I have, and I know that with passion and hard work, I'll make all my dreams come to life.



# MY GRANDPARENTS' "CASTLE"

## BY GENEVIÈVE BATTAREL

Conversations in English Participant

When I was a child, I loved to go to my grandparents' house where I met my many cousins. My grandparents lived in a large stone house in a small village in the North of France.

They had nine children, so they needed a big house. The inhabitants of the village called this house "the castle" and their inhabitants, my grandparents, "the landlords."

When they died, the "castle" was sold. But the memories linked to this "castle" and also to my grandparents are still engraved in my memory.

One day not long ago I had the opportunity to visit the village in the North of France. And I immediately went to see again the "castle" of my childhood which does not belong to my family since a very long time.

I was surprised to find "my" castle much smaller than I remembered. I had seen it with my 10-year-old eyes and I saw it again with my adult eyes.

All my memories came back. What a positive emotion! The castle of my childhood had become a simple big house, but for me, it remains a "castle," that of my grandparents.

I suddenly felt a deep joy. I saw my grandfather in my head and thought of his story. He was married to my grandmother when the 1914–1918 war began. All the men of his village had to go to the war. They wanted to serve their country. My grandfather also wanted to go, but he was already the father of four children (including my mother, five other children were born later). He couldn't go to the war.



With great nostalgia, I thought of my grandfather, who could have died in the war like so many men from his village. When I fall asleep in the evening, I started to count the number of my grandfather's descendants.

132 direct descendants, 118 of whom are still alive...Incredible! And my greatest joy is the last of them: my great-grandson, who has just been born.

# PRACTICING BEING A SOURCE OF JOY

## BY HAMID SAMARI

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I close my eyes and let my mind take me back to my childhood era and later. What do I remember about things that brought me joy? Many things brought me joy in my life, such as when my father bought me a new bicycle, when he registered me in a horse-riding club, and I rode a horse for the first time in my life. Gradually something else could bring me joy, such as graduating from high school or university and getting a job. No doubt, falling in love with my wife brought me incredible joy. After that, having a son brought extraordinary happiness to our life. I cannot forget how much coming to the US and becoming American Citizen brought joy to my family and me. Frankly, buying a house in the US was a miracle for us and made us happy, but getting rid of its mortgage would bring me one of my greatest joys.

Since we, as human beings, belong to one species, mostly the same things bring us happiness or sadness. We love to be successful and see that our children are on the right track to success. Having a good and stable job makes us happy. We love to hang out with our friends and talk about pleasant things. We are afraid of being fired from our jobs, being sick, and being alone.

I am still trying to figure out when I experienced another type of joy, which does not come to us unless we are the source of joy for others. The reaction of those who get your help is unique and unimaginable. That would be an absolute joy that can last forever. You feel it with your body and soul. It is like a dream of a summer day in the middle of a cold winter or a dream of chilly and cold weather in the middle of the desert. Sometimes it is not huge, but it tingles your soul. You do not need to do extraordinary work for someone or pay much money to get this joy. You need to open your heart and treat others like yourself. Frankly, it isn't easy, and I cannot do it often, but I am trying to. I believe my wife is acting better than me in this way and gets absolute joy more than me. Respecting people, treating them politely, and helping people in need as much as possible, which are human principles, bring us absolute joy.

At this time, I want to share one of my experiences about getting absolute joy during one of my business trips to Armenia in 2019. The project was located in Armenia near the Azerbaijan border, and I went there as a geologist for a geotechnical investigation. I had a translator, a young and domestic Armenian senior geologist, who helped me to communicate



with people at the Mine site and domestic people within and around the Mine property. During my job, I needed to check all geological field evidence within and beyond the site to get more detailed

information about a few geologic structures. Thus, we went outside the Mine site and, during our fieldwork, passed through a few farms and in front of a few rural homes. One day an old house caught my attention. I asked my accompanying person about that house. He asked me, “Would you like to go in?” and I said, “Is it possible?”

He knew the owners of the house well. In a minute, we were inside the house and were welcomed by an old couple. They greeted us well and brought us edible things they had in their home. I started talking to them through my translator, and immediately I found out how kind they were. During our stay there, I thought about what I could do in return for their excellent behavior. Suddenly I remembered I had a new scarf in my backpack, which my wife gave to me to protect my neck and face from the sun. I opened my backpack, brought it out, and put it around the lady’s neck. At that time, I saw sparks of deep joy in her eyes. I could not forget those brilliant eyes for a few months. That reaction brought me unbelievable joy, which has lasted so far and probably forever.

At that time, I looked at her husband and told myself, hey, do something for him. I took my gloves and gave them to him and told him you need them more than me. My action also made him happy. I asked them to have a photo with them, one of the best photos I have ever brought from fieldwork.

I could not sleep that night because of the great joy I got from those small smiles on their faces, those shining eyes, and the behavior of those two angels. In fact, they made me happy and brought me real joy. Their faces have been printed in my mind forever.

In fact, we need real joy to have a better community, city, country, and world. Experiencing real joy means we have a little share of making people around us happy; thus, let’s have it as much as possible.

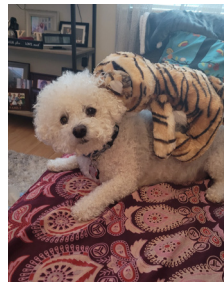
# WHAT BRINGS ME JOY BY KIM TORRONE

Jennifer Yu, Tutor

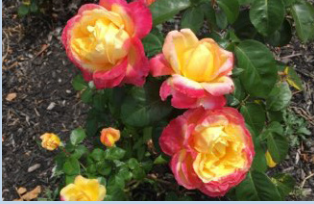
I was happily married to my husband when I was very young. At eighteen, I had my first daughter, and three years later, I had my second daughter. I brought up my kids by myself because my husband was in the army and often not home. When my kids got a little older, I found work at the MGM Grand in Reno, Nevada where my husband was teaching ROTC. I always worked. I did not speak English – not much – but people always helped me. I worked until I retired.



Now I am very happy to have two beautiful grand-daughters and a dog named Tiger. He is the love of my life. Now I have more time to join BoulderReads because I want to learn more English and to understand better. Thanks to Ms. Karen for finding Jennifer to help me.







## WHAT BRINGS ME JOY BY LARYSA CHERVONNAYA

Conversations in English Participant

What brings me joy? First of all, I want to define what is joy? This is a small drop in the ocean of happiness, health, success, in the ocean of my whole Life... I wake up, look at the rising sun and rejoice at the beginning of a new day. I thank God for such a gift. I go to work, study or just like that and send vibes of happiness to all passersby... It's so cool and familiar in my favorite city. And this joy immediately returns to me with greater force... I enjoy working in my garden. When I water roses and other plants, I physically feel how they absorb moisture, how they become stronger and healthier and then give me all the charms of the flowering... My humble motto is: if I did not make one person happy, I lived a life in vain... I'm glad when my day is full and I feel pleasantly tired from everything that has been done. I'm glad to walk 10 miles and see, and discover, and marvel at new horizons... And just like that, another day has gone by. And again, joy and gratitude to God for the lived moments. I always have Tomorrow and Life gives me one more opportunity to enjoy Life!

## SMALL JOYS BY MASAKO AIZAWA

Every year before the new year, I always love to hear my husband say, “Hey, Mas. Do you want to go to Marshalls?” Because I know that I can find almost any item. I want to get a new planner.

There is no guarantee to find planners to your taste in design, color, or decent condition at the store. Still, it is perfect to peruse there because I can remake an original planner to use various materials I have in my home: recycled paper, cute stickers, Japanese Washi paper, and pens and colored pencils. When I return home, I am ready for my joyful project to start.

First, I use some art material to fix torn areas. Second, I decorate the cover with paper and stickers to make it to my taste for the new planner. Third, I write the new title on the top page, my new phrase of the year. For example, this year I wrote, “Happiness consists of contentment.” Fourth, I fill out monthly schedules. Fifth, I fill out weekly schedules. Sixth, I set weekly to-dos and habit trackers.

I use three fun stationaries to fill out the monthly and weekly pages. One is a special pen. It is erasable and so handy for rewriting schedules (It is Pilot and made in Japan). I can focus on the correct schedules and keep my pages clean all the time. After I write the events, I put small cute stickers or art on recycled paper, such as wrapping paper from tea bags, chocolates, or bar soaps, on the front of each event. It is the most exciting moment because the cute items are from many places in the country. One of my Mexican friends and I exchange tiny cute stuff once in a while when we travel and get them. This event is also enjoyable to think of her and my travel memories. After that, I use colored pencils to emphasize the events: red for tutoring sessions, yellow for study, and green for socializing. I can easily recognize how my day goes. Last, I double-check my schedule on the iPhone calendar I share with my husband.

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## Conversations in English Participant



One day, during the CIE class (Conversations in English provided by Boulder Public Library), the facilitator asked us to check-in. One of our classmates, Marilu, talked about her Monday. She mentioned that Monday is the most exciting day because she looks forward to new events and weekly goals, and it is like making a New Year's resolution again. I felt the same way about writing a planner. It is my joy and happiness.

When I open a new page, I am ready to create a new weekly schedule with fun art items. These items simply make me happy and more excited to see my schedule.

# NOWRUZ: A CELEBRATION OF THE NEW YEAR IN IRAN BY MINA AHANIN

One of the special days in Iran is the first day of Spring. It is a holiday called Nowruz. Nowruz means “new day” in Farsi. Nowruz is a long holiday that lasts for about one week and celebrates the Persian New Year. The holiday symbolizes renewal and wishes for good health. People wear new clothes and have big parties with family and friends.

Nowruz has three special parts:

Charshanbe Suri  
Haji Firooz  
Sizdah be dar

On the Wednesday before Nowruz begins, is the day called Charshanbe Suri. It means “Wednesday gathering.” During this day of celebration there is a ritual with a small fire pit area. People take turns jumping over the fire. People sing songs to celebrate.

When you see Haji Firooz that means Nowruz is starting. The children love this! Haji Firooz brings joy to everyone! He says, “Nowruz is coming! Happy Nowruz to everyone!” One of the traditions of Nowruz is the arrival of Haji Firooz in the streets.

This happens between Charshanbe Suri and Sizdah be dar. Haji Firooz is a character who dresses in red. His face and hands are black from chimney soot. He wears a red hat just the same as Santa Claus. He dances and sings with his tambourine. He yells, “Hi to my Master! My Lord, raise your head,” bringing joy to everyone. Everyone gives a gift of coins to Haji Firooz for his festive dancing and singing.

During Nowruz, the eldest of the relatives hosts a big gathering of the extended family at their home or in a large area at a hotel. The holiday begins with the youngest in the family greeting and visiting with each of the elders in the family and the elder friends. The elders give gifts to all the children. The youngest give flowers to the elders.

The table is a very important part of the Nowruz celebration. It is a special table that is set up in the formal living room. It is not part of the dining table. This special table must have several specific and symbolic items displayed.

It must have seven items that start with the sound “s.” These items are:

- Sonbol, or hyacinth in English
- Somagh, a spice used to make kebabs
- Sakeh, a coin—gold is best
- Sabzy, a container that has seeds that are sprouting
- Sarkeh, or vinegar in English
- Sir, or garlic in English
- Sib, or apple in English

This table must also display eggs, a candle, a mirror, and a live fish.

Thirteen days after the start of Nowruz, is a day called Sizdah be dar. It means, “In 13 days, go out of the house.” On Sizdah be dar, people bring the Sabzy to the park or to the water, like a creek or river. They take a handful of the sprouted grass and throw it out into the grassy area or into the water. The single women wrap a piece of grass or a flower stem around a patch of grass in a park or garden. This is an old and symbolic tradition that is done in hopes of marrying in the new year.

I always look forward to celebrating Nowruz with my family.



# MY NEW JOB BY NISA FERNANDO

Nancy Erickson, Tutor

I started my new job in February 2023. The name of the company where I work is Bloomin'. It is a company that makes seeds cards and other paper products. It is located near the intersection of 30th and Valmont.

Bloomin' is very close to my home, and I can walk to my work. I work Monday through Thursday from 9:00 am–12:30 pm. My job is to put together seeded card packages. I make about 500-2500 packages every day. We get orders from different companies like schools, banks, universities, farms, Amazon, and individuals.

These cards and papers contain plantable seeds of flowers and vegetables. Our company makes greeting cards with seeded papers.

There are about 40 employees; some of us are cutting and bagging seeded paper. Different groups are designing and printing the cards. Others are packaging and preparing the mail packages. During the busy season November–February, they needed extra help. I went to work on

Fridays, until 2 pm. Some people work until 3:30 pm. Others work on Saturday.

I like my job because the work is easy and comfortable working with others. I enjoy meeting new people, and I feel satisfied with how much work I can complete in one day, and of course I like getting paid for work. The company celebrates their employees by giving a party once a year on Earth Day.

I'm happy to work at Bloomin'.



# WHAT BRINGS ME JOY? IMPROVING PEOPLE'S HOMES AND LIVES BY ORADAN BARLOW

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Laura Roettiger, Tutor



I am super grateful and blessed to be part of an industry that brings joy to so many people's lives, the home remodeling profession, where I get to improve people's homes and improve their lives. The first thing I do is protect the rest of their living space, being respectful of the people who are living there. Clients regularly comment to me how clean I kept their home. They are super impressed with me. It brings me joy to see the hard work that I do pay off.

Where you start and end your day matters. In the bathroom and kitchen, it is quite important for you to love the space. Because if you don't love it, that sets a tone for the whole day. Also, at the end of the day, you'll have better sleep. Working on these areas impacts the day-to-day life of the people who live there. When I install tile in a kitchen it is a permanent change and a drastic improvement to the room you spend the most time in.

As you can tell, improving people's homes improves their lives. So what brings me joy is seeing the faces and hearing the comments after we get done, and knowing the impact it makes on the people's lives that live in the homes that I work on. Knowing how grateful they are for the new shower or a nice kitchen. I care deeply about what I do and it brings me joy. What brings you joy? How does the space you're living in impact that?



# MY EXPERIENCE BECOMING A UNITED STATES CITIZEN BY PATTY MOLINA

Jane Rich, Tutor

My lawyer called me in January 2021 to let me know that it was time to start the process of naturalization. I asked her how much it would cost and, when she told me, I told her that I needed to save money for the application fee. I saved the money and called her back in April 2021, in the middle of COVID.

I filled out my application in June 2021. My lawyer told me she didn't know how long the process would take but probably between six and 12 months. I started to study for the test and put aside one hour every day, five days a week.

In December 2021, my divorce lawyer called me to ask if I was ready to start my divorce proceedings. I said yes because I thought that I still had six months left before the citizenship office would be calling me. I had my first divorce court session in January 2022. I couldn't focus on my studying because it was a difficult time.

On February 15, 2022, I received a letter notifying me that my test was going to be on March 17—in just one month. I was so worried because I had stopped studying! I called my immigration lawyer after receiving my letter and told her that I wasn't ready for the test and asked if she could cancel the appointment. She told me that if I canceled the appointment, I might have to wait one more year before getting another appointment. So, I studied every day for one hour and I passed!

March 17, 2022, was a beautiful day for me because I became a US citizen and because it was my son's 18th birthday! It was a good year for me, too, because my divorce was finalized on May 4, 2022.

Life has challenges all the time but you need to believe in yourself that you can do it. There is never a perfect time. If you don't try, you'll never know if you can be successful.







# SHOPSKA SALAD BY SILVIA BERNIK

Conversations in English Participant

Summer days make it tempting to have a light and refreshing salad of fresh vegetables.

## INGREDIENTS

English cucumber	1 Tbsp oil
Tomatoes or cherry tomatoes	1 Tbsp White wine vinegar
Pepper (any color)	Feta cheese
Onion	

## INSTRUCTIONS

Peel the onion, clean the vegetables, you can also peel the cucumber (if you want).

Finely chop the onion. Cut the cucumber, tomatoes, pepper into small cubes about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch in size.

Mix briefly and arrange in a salad bowl.

Drizzle with good quality oil and vinegar.

You can add a little black pepper and parsley.

Top with crumbled Feta-style cheese.

Mix and the salad is ready. Bon appetit!

Store in the refrigerator. Enjoy the salad as a side dish to a main meal or as a light meal on its own.



# WHAT BRINGS ME JOY? BY SUSANA MORQUECHO

Clare Schoolmaster, Tutor

My family here and in Mexico, everyone. I had my dream with my first house in Mexico and now my house here. When I was little, I saw my parents have their own life, at home and at work and the kids. I think I will be like them. And I am, but here my husband and I work together. My business is here. I see my kids graduating, and it is the best thing. I love every time I go back to see my family knowing I have money to go, money from my own business.

About ten years ago, I went into a leadership program. I learned if I want something different, it was up to me to make it happen.

Now I enjoy being my own person as a woman, making time to learn with my tutor and taking personal time for my nails and my hair. My tutor says this is pampering my body and soul.

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## MY FIRST JOB BY TAYEBEH FIRUZKUHI

Lynn Weatherwax, Tutor

After I graduated in Agricultural Extension & Education from university in August 1976, I started to work in a project designed to help people in the southern area of Iran. The name of the project was the Social and Economic Complex of Tahlab. Tahlab was a flat desert located on the border of Pakistan. The people who lived there were native Baluch (Baluch are a western Iranian ethnic group native in the Baluchistan region of southeast Iran).

Every working day of the week a native Baluch man drove me to work for one hour on the gravel road in an old Land Rover. Additional to managing the experimental farm, I had to manage a project for the women. In that place the people stayed in black tents. They were too poor. They didn't have access to basic facilities like light, clean water, bathroom, and a lavatory. They took a bath in a pond a couple of times in a year.

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## MY FIRST JOB CONT. BY TAYEBEH FIRUZKUHI

In our project the men were learning how to prepare the ground for cultivating. Also, they worked on some structures that were supposed to be their homes in the future. The women just took care of children and their little households. They didn't have any opportunities to do anything else for their livelihood. In a storage building built by the project managing group, I taught them how to use the lavatory, and how they can bathe at home after their houses were ready. This task was seriocomic plus woeful. They were confused and scared. They tried to run away from that place laughing and wondering. After a couple months of hard work, they partly learned how to be clean and the meaning of cleanness.

Also, we made a contract with Iran Carpet Company for setting up some carpet looms in that storage shed, and prepared everything that was needed for carpet weaving. Then we hired two skilled weavers to teach them this skill. At the end of the first year, they wove several carpets for Iran Carpet Company and earned some money for themselves. When their houses were ready, they moved from their tents to the houses that had light, water pipes and bathrooms. The men were

working on the lands that were prepared for them to cultivate wheat and other vegetables that were experimental. Also, the women were becoming skilled carpet weavers and worked beside the men. It was a fascinating time of teamwork I learned at my first job.

Today, Tahlab is a rural district with five villages. More than two thousand people (about six hundred families) live there. Sometimes they come to visit us and express their gratitude to me and my husband (as the manager of the Tahlab project).

I feel real satisfaction when I think about all the things that happened along my life. My husband and I worked hard in a couple places after that, but I think our happiness, having a healthy and lively family, are the result of serving those people in that highly memorable time.



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