

## STORIES, etc.

### I Did Not Forget



by Winifred Doerue

When I was little and went to school in the Ivory Coast, Africa, I loved the American flag. I wore the “stars and stripes” as a headband on my head.

Everyone used to call to me, “Hey, American girl”. I didn’t even know what it meant, but I liked it. I loved the name “American”.

The teacher who worked in my classroom told me to take off the headband. I said, “No! I am not taking it off”. He said, “Well, OK.....then get out of my class”. I got out.

When the principal saw me, he called to me and asked me why I was outside. I explained everything and he said, “You do not have to take it off. Go back to class.”

When I went back to class, the teacher was not happy about that. The principal told him that this may be her dream. She may not understand now, but one day, she may go to America.

Today, I am here in America. My son, Miracle, took my picture next to the American flag when I became a citizen. He put it on Facebook.

The principal is here, too. He is in Chicago. He saw my picture on Facebook and he called me. He said, “You see, you are an American now.”

(Winifred Doerue recently cast her first vote as an American citizen.)

### Bike Schmike

by Neva Cordova

My childhood was good and I wouldn't change it for anything in this world. I got my first bike when I was six and in the first grade. My mom bought it for me and it was waiting for me when I got home from school, covered in wrapping paper. I can't remember what color the wrapping paper was and it was my little sister's idea to wrap, according to my mother. I was very surprised that the gift came from my little sister and my mother.

I unwrapped it fast, took it outside and started to learn how to ride. I learned quickly. I felt so loved and happy, I rode it forever in our yard.

The best part of my bike was that it was pink and red, Strawberry Shortcake to be exact. I cherished it so. It had a banana seat and long handlebars with red, pink and white tassels at the end. It should have been with me all my school years, but it happened-- it all came crashing down. My big brother came to live with us.

I left my bike out in the front of the driveway. My brother came home early from his job and I hadn't put my bike inside the fence yet. Consequentially, he ran it over. I came running out when I heard the crash. My brother was standing with it - all stupid - saying, "Sorry, hija, I'll buy you a new one." He never did. I cried for days.

As years passed, I got other bikes, but they weren't the same. They were slow and hard to pedal. One of them, the chain would fall off all the time. I wished my Strawberry Shortcake bike was still around. It makes me sad to think about my loss to this day.



**Literacy Ventures needs your best stuff!**

Find out how to submit *your* best stuff at  
<http://www.lovetoread.org/lvt-community/students/literacy-ventures>.



# LITERACY VENTURES IN TUCSON

~ A magazine by and about LVT Students ~

## TIPS, NOTES and IDEAS....

Yikes! Need help with **MATH**? Try these websites:

- <http://illuminations.nctm.org/>
- <http://www.khanacademy.org/>

You can also use Google to find Khan Academy videos and other math help.

## GOOD NEWS!

The work of author Charles Barlow, Jr. was featured recently at a meeting of the Quincie Douglas Library's poetry group. Charles and many of his LVT friends participated in a dramatic reading of Charles's story about a spooky old house, enhanced by a miniature replica made by Uwe Keilitz.

In addition to the monthly poetry reading group, the Quincy Douglas Library (at 36<sup>th</sup> and Kino) hosts a monthly movie discussion group. Check them out at <http://www.library.pima.gov/locations/quinciedouglas/>.



### My Red Shoes by Maritza Encinas

When I was 11 years old, I had a pair of gorgeous red shoes! My grandma bought them for me on my birthday. The shoes were bright red with small, white flowers on the sides. When she gave me those shoes I felt very happy because she knew how much I wanted them.

My grandma was always very happy, smiling at all times, caring for everybody and she was always thinking on a positive note. But she was very sick at that time. My grandma had womb cancer, yet none of us knew she had that terrible sickness.

She was a hero for us, especially me. I loved my grandma and those red shoes. I wanted to wear them all the time, for parties, for school, for dinner, for every occasion. They were a gift from my grandma who I loved with all my heart.

She passed away 12 years ago, but I still have those red shoes. Now they are old and small. They are a memory of my grandma who I will remember every day by looking at them. I love my red shoes!

## HOW DREAMS CAN COME TRUE!

by Charles Barlow Jr.

### *My Background*

My life began in New Jersey in 1958. My mom gave life to me one month early. Then all my sickly ways started and never got better. At five the doctors told my family, "You need to go to Tucson, AZ because it is drier there. If you stay your son will die before he is six."

My family did move to Tucson, AZ in the year 1963. I was in Tucson Hospital for 8 years. In 1972 I was going to high school to learn. They did not take the time to teach me. I graduated in 1976 not knowing how to read.

My challenges were learning how to drive, ordering food at a restaurant, going to the store to buy groceries, and how would I ever get a job? One of the things I was always good at was adapting and finding a way. I passed my written driver's test by guessing and thanks to Nintendo, passed the driving test. Most menus had pictures that I could point to. I would buy fresh food and milk to avoid reading labels. My dad filled out a job application for me and I got the job (and I stayed with it for 21 years).

After losing my parents, I was depressed and suicidal. It was my next door neighbors, who became my new parents, that gave me a reason to live.

### *The Turning Point*

My new mom took me to Literacy Connects and she said, "You can learn. I believe in you. This place will help you. They will never give up on you and they will take the time to help you learn. Your new family will help you too."

What keeps me motivated? To see my soul coming to life on paper. To look back and see all that I have accomplished. To feel good about myself knowing I can learn. My family gives me hope and love.

The first time I read aloud was at Literacy Connects! No one here ever gave up on me. "Thank you all so, so, so much!!!" They all have answered my prayers. I feel God gave his angels here at Literacy connects because they feed the mind, they comfort the heart, and help the souls to fly high in all they learn!!!

For 51 years I was unteachable!!! All who see this will know they were wrong!

LITERACY **VENTURES** IN TUCSON  
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**The Smoky Shadow Returns**  
by Charles Barlow

Twenty-one years later, my room filled up with smoke and hot sticky air. I woke up to see the smoky shadow. He said, "You are the only one who can see me. I need your help. Will you help me?"

I said, "How can I help you?"

He came to the table and put his hand on it. After he removed it, a ring appeared. He said, "The ring was for my girlfriend Roseann. I was going to ask her to marry me. But I died, so she never got this ring. She never knew the love of my heart for her."

"May I use your body to use your computer to find Roseanne's family, so I can give them the ring and end my journey?"

I said, "Yes!" He started using the computer. Eight hours later, he found the address. They live in Alabama. The smoky shadow came out of me, and said, "I need you to take me to Alabama."

I said, "I will." We got to Alabama and found the address. But the house was no longer, just ashes He went to the center of the ashes, sat down, and cried.

A white form appeared behind him. "It's about time you came for me, Ray!"

Then Ray got up and turned around to see Roseanne where the doorway used to be, with her arms open, waiting for him. He went over to her. They hugged and then, as they kissed, the ring vanished from my hand, and then appeared on her finger and he turned white as well!

Roseanne said, "Thank you for taking time to bring Ray to me."

Then they faded away.



**My Regrets**  
by Martha Tobler

It was a Thursday when I came home from work. I was surprised to see my husband waiting at the door for me. I could tell that something was wrong by the expression on his face. He asked me to sit down.

"Your brother called," he said. "Your mother passed away this morning."

In that moment I felt suffocated. I couldn't breathe. I was unable to speak but I wanted to scream from the pain, pain that I had never felt before, the emptiness in my heart to know that my mother was gone. Then I felt my husband's arms holding me, making me feel loved, safe and protected.

For the next hour we packed our clothes, getting ready to leave for Mexico for the funeral. I knew that everybody was waiting for me to get there soon. On the way there, so many things came to my mind.

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The last time she called I was too busy to answer the telephone. Around Christmas, when she asked me to visit, I was working and I couldn't leave. That was the last time I talked to her.

I regret those decisions. I'm sorry I didn't take that time for her. "If only," I kept repeating to myself, "If only."

After fifteen hours of driving I finally could see the road leading to the church where the funeral was. When I walked in to the church I could see my brothers standing next to the coffin. When they turned around and I saw their faces I couldn't control my tears. They walked up to welcome me and we all hugged in the middle of the church. We cried like lonely children realizing their loss.

Then I saw my father sitting by the coffin with his hands touching the cream colored casket. When he saw me he started crying uncontrollably. I went in to hug him and we cried together. He said to me, looking at my mother's body, "That was her favorite dress." She had on the pink dress she wore when my daughter got married.

"Dad, I'm sorry." I was sobbing so hard.

My mother looked like she was sleeping so peacefully. After the funeral we all walked back to my parents' home. When the door opened I was expecting Mom to be standing next to the table with food ready for me. That was her way to welcome me when she knew I was coming to visit and always with a big smile, happy to see me.

Now there was only sadness, tears and memories. That house felt dark with her absence. I came back home feeling my loss and my guilt.

## Emotions

by Angela Leyvas

I had all my emotions  
bottled up inside until I  
couldn't hold them in anymore.  
I was like a volcano, ready to explode.  
I remember being brokenhearted.  
It was the most terrible feeling  
I had ever felt.  
My heart was beating so fast,  
it felt like it was coming out of my chest.  
I could feel my veins swelling up.  
My heart was splitting in two.  
I tried to hold back my tears  
from rolling down my face but,  
it was unavoidable.  
I felt them, one by one, as they fell.  
I lost myself for one moment.





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## My Favorite Vacation

by John Spencer

My favorite vacation was in Rhode Island. When we finally made it to Rhode Island we had to pay to stay at the campsite for two weeks. The workers told us where the campsite was so we could set up the three tents and unroll our sleeping bags. We set up a food tent with a picnic table and put the camping stove on the table. Then we put the food in the tent and the chairs around the campfire.

We drove down the boat ramp to set the boat in the water and drove the car back up the ramp and parked it in its original place. Then we put the two oars and the life jackets in the boat and set the motor in the back. We put the fishing poles and the rest of the fishing gear next to a tree to be ready. We went on the boat to go fishing for bass, trout, rainbow trout, calico bass and catfish. Then we went back to the campsite to clean all the fish, wash them and put them in the freezer bags.

Sometimes we would go to the beach to watch some boats come into the port and we would go swimming and out to eat at the seafood restaurant there. We would go into the stores to look for some different kinds of knick-knacks and then go back to the campsite so we could relax around the campfire and talk.

On the first Wednesday morning, my father-in-law took me on the ocean fishing. I had never been on the ocean. As we went out on the boat, one of my buddies called out, "Hey John! How are you doing?"

"I'm just fine," I said.

And when we went out a little farther, my friend called out, "Hey John! How are you doing?"

"I'm just fine." Then we went out farther, and that's when I got sick.

I was lying on the bow of the boat. My friend told me to stand up and look over to the horizon. "If you look at the waves, you will get sick again. Do you know about the one that got away? It was so big, I had to let it go." We chuckled.

And suddenly, two weeks later, we headed back home because our vacation was over. As soon as we got home we had to unpack the van and put everything away for the next time we go on a vacation. We had the best time! It was my first time camping and my first time ocean fishing. I'll always remember it.



*The following essays were inspired by an exercise on "close observation." Instructor Judy Davis hung up five photographs of different rooms in an abandoned home. She asked the students to base their writing on what they observed within the photographs and on the emotions and ideas that were evoked by the images. Judy believes that everyone should write from his or her own life because we all experience the world a little differently and nobody else can write your stories. She said, "It was interesting to see that idea play out - each story comes from a slightly different angle even though they all viewed the same images."*

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## The Broken House by Susan Earnest

When I went to Myrtle Beach in South Carolina, I saw an old run-down house that was condemned. The reason why the house was unsafe was because it had many broken windows and a broken front door that looked like someone had kicked it in. When I went into the structure, there was broken glass, and cracks in the walls and ceiling.

The kitchen looked okay, except the door on the stove was hanging down and that would be a hazard to children. The bathroom had broken tiles, which were also a safety hazard. There was a pair of dingy jeans on the floor by the sink and the medicine cabinet was falling off its hinges and looked like it could fall and shatter. The back yard had big old palm trees that needed to be removed, the grass needed to be mowed, and some landscaping needed to be done to both the front and back yards.

If I were the owner of this house I would tear it down and rebuild it. I would then sell it to a family who could afford to take care of it and treat it like a home and not a construction zone.



## Home by Neva Cordova

One morning my boyfriend and I were driving back from our trip to Salt Lake City, Utah, when we saw an old house just off the road. This building fascinated me and we stopped. The path we walked on up to the empty place was covered with beautiful colors of green, blue and brown glass, broken in pieces. It made me feel uneasy to continue when suddenly we noticed a doorway that had no door. Our curiosity took over, but didn't curiosity kill the cat? My boyfriend and I took a look at each other and stepped into the doorway. It led us into an old bathroom.

In the shadows of the bathroom, we noticed a dark figure. We couldn't tell if it was an animal, ready to attack in the dark. It was lying on the bottom of the dingy tile floor. Embraced in one another's arms, we trudged together in baby steps closer to the figure. In relief, we sighed and giggled a little when we realized it was an old pair of jeans that looked as stiff as the floor it was lying on. Not even wind could move those jeans. I wondered how long they had been there. (Or, if they were once owned by Kenny Loggins - if this was ever one of the places he stayed at while he was in his old western movie.)

The minerals and mold formed underneath the sink made it seem like it had running water. The tiles on the floor and shower seemed discolored from age. Or maybe there had been a horrific accident that turned the tiles from pink to a urine-looking color (in a Norman Bates horror movie way).

The lovely rusted pipes carried our trail into a ramshackle kitchen where we could hear an unsettling moan from the wind. The crumbling walls were falling away and I could picture the rats and dust mites being the only things holding up the structure.

The building is now only memories of someone's home or first place. To them it was snug and now it's uninhabitable, someone's dream far-gone - a condemned building in very bad condition, that is going to be destroyed.

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## The Old House That Was by Charles Barlow

I was built on an old gravesite. All the other graves are still in my back yard. I feel a flaming sun each day; I smell dead flesh all around me. When the wind picks up, I feel the bare earth move and hear the calling of the dead, "We want a new place to live!!"

I'm tortured by black mold that is swimming all over my inside floors. I hurt because green mold is dancing in and out of my walls. My roof has black mold that has moved into the fiberglass. It showers all who enter me. I feel the mold. It is sticky and slimy and smells like rotting eggs.

Thieves ripped out my guts leaving holes inside my walls where my wires and pipes used to be. In my living room, bats are hanging inside the roof. During the daytime the bats are sleeping and I hear them breathing in unison. The bats give the floor free food. At night they go out to eat.

In my bathroom sewer bugs live and their eggs are waiting to hatch. At night I feel the sewer bugs moving into the living room for the free food. I hear them eat.

On my kitchen floor an army of rats has moved in to stay. I feel their movements as they play their games - hide and seek or tag, you are it. The best game is new life. At night they sleep.

Snakes have moved in behind my stove. They know they will never starve. In the daytime they hunt for food and I feel them as they move on my floor. I know when they get their food; I hear the last squeal that they make. At night they sleep. I hear them breathe. Sometimes I hear their tails rattle.

My cabinets all have warped wood and fat termites. I hear them eat; it feels like a wood chipper.

In my small bedroom are the ghostly remains of a kid's toys and clothing. I hear a child crying.



## Decrepit House by Patty Yau

On a winter's Sunday morning my family went hiking on a trail near Phoenix. As we walked back in the late afternoon we passed a small, dilapidated house. We were curious and approached the vacant house.

The house's roof was about to collapse. There weren't any trees or flowers around it. We stared through the windows. It was simple inside. The living room's old doors hung off the hinges and the windows were very run down.

In the kitchen some cabinets were missing. An old oven was out of shape and was missing a burner and the broiler. The whole house looked terrible, but the bathroom was the worst room.

The wall paint was flaking, and mold and dust were all over the floor. The pipes and sink were rusty. We saw an old pair of jeans under the sink. There were many cockroaches and rat droppings on the floor.

I imagined that a poor couple had lived there and died, one at a time. No one had lived there for a long time. I had a kind of sad feeling. We hope that one day when we walk there again there will be a beautiful park with gardens of trees, flowers and fountains. This house should become a children's playground.

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## **The Kitchen in the Old House** by Angela Leyvas

I wonder if someone who liked to cook, like I do, once used this old kitchen? I see an old shabby stove with a door hanging by two hinges and missing knobs. It leaves me wondering how many meals were made in here?

I use my stove at least three times a day. The kitchen is my favorite place in the whole house because my family and friends enjoy gathering in it. We have special dinners on holidays, birthdays and anniversaries. How many times were they all gathering in that old kitchen?

On Sundays my family and I like to have a big breakfast with butter pancakes, bacon, eggs, oatmeal, juice and coffee.

In that old house, did they enjoy the kitchen? I know we do. And why have they abandoned it? Will it ever be used again? As long as I live, I will use my kitchen to the end.



## **I Bought My Home and I Need To Fix It Up** by John Spencer

I'm going to replace the solid oak walls in the kitchen and the rest of the house. I'll restore the cabinets and countertops and put in a new stainless steel sink. In the bathroom, I'll replace the sink and the towel racks. I'll lay new carpeting in the living room and bedroom and up the staircase. I'm going to fix the siding, put insulation in the walls, and install "Newpro" windows throughout the house. The roof needs to be rebuilt too.

And then I can live in here.



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***Congratulations to each of the contributors to this,  
the eighth issue of Literacy VENTURES of Tucson.***

Our goals are, as these authors have written:

- *to make our miracles happen, and*
- *to honor the gifts of our early years,*
- *to treasure our great gifts (and red shoes!)*
- *to work to make our dreams come true,*
- *to remember love never dies,*
- *to live without regrets,*
- *to find ourselves even amid ashes and tears,*
- *to keep our eyes on the horizon of new experiences,*
- *and to know that we have our own wonderful stories to tell.*

