



LIFE'S EXPERIENCES



Reflections from the
Writers of
Centro Romero

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CENTRO ROMERO



Literacy Works

Life's Experiences is a result of Literacy Works' Writers' Circle, a ten-week writing workshop created by Literacy Works in partnership with Centro Romero in Chicago's Edgewater neighborhood.



A few words from our partner,
Centro Romero

CENTRO ROMERO

Centro Romero has been a space of learning, empowerment, and literacy for over 30 years. Our organizational goal is to bridge a disenfranchised community of immigrants and refugees into mainstream American society while holding steadfast to the rich, cultural roots of their heritage. Identity—who we are and where we are from—is food for our students' souls. Literacy Works' Writers' Circle has helped our students capture the stories of their lives—and of their identity—and put it down on paper.

Our namesake, Oscar Arnulfo Romero, used the moral authority of his position as Archbishop of El Salvador and broadcast his sermons over the archdiocesan radio station. He quickly amassed a growing following as people began to gather around radios to hear his message of justice and humanity. He was not afraid to denounce the violence of El Salvador's civil war and the accepted patterns of abuse and injustice that it fed on. Romero was committed to speaking for those who could not speak for themselves and soon became known as the “Voice of the Voiceless.” At Centro Romero, each and every day, we empower our students to know that they are not voiceless. We help them to find effective ways to use their voices.

Mil gracias to Literacy Works and Lindsay Crammond for the opportunity for our learners to be published in this book so that others may hear their voices. We hope you'll enjoy the read!

Centro Romero
www.centroromero.org

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Introduction by Literacy Works

Life's Experiences is a collection of writings by seven participants of Centro Romero's English as a Second Language and Citizenship programs in Chicago's Edgewater neighborhood. For many, this Writers' Circle was their first opportunity to put their life experiences down on paper. Each day of writing was a challenge, but the writers worked tirelessly to perfect their writings and discover their voices.

Theirs are the stories of mothers and fathers, wives and husbands, sisters and brothers, children and grandchildren. They are the stories of newly arrived immigrants, volunteers in faraway lands, and families reunited after years apart. Each story is a reflection on a particular life experience. Through that reflection, we witness these writers discover their passions and their purpose.

At every meeting, I was energized and inspired by the group. These writers were reflective, caring, kind, and supportive of me and of one another. I am grateful for our mornings spent together writing, listening and laughing.

Thank you to Bernadine, José, Liza, Lupita, Maria Eva, Raquel, and Silvia for allowing me to write with you and to learn from you.

Lindsay Crammond, Program Director, Literacy Works

My Married Life

Liza

When I was a teenager in Nepal, I dreamed about my future husband. I thought that a husband should be caring, loving, and independent. Boys started to propose to me, but I couldn't choose one because I was an obedient daughter. In our culture, girls didn't choose their own boyfriend. If it happened, people started talking about the characterless girl. They would also blame her parents and say that the family didn't teach their children anything. So, I thought that I would marry whatever boy my parents chose.

When I finished my graduation at the age of 23, my parents started to search for a suitable groom for me. Two or three months later, they found a man to marry me. His name was Sunny, and his family was from my own city. We had the same religion and culture; we were both Hindu and Newari. He was 29 years old. When he came to meet us, I thought he was a cute guy. We met him through one of my cousin's uncles. He said that Sunny's family was nice and high society. He also said that if I married Sunny, I would be the happiest person in the world. We trusted him. So, I got married at the age of 24, one year after he proposed.



Before I married, I was very excited because he was good looking and his family members were nice and kind. We got married in a beautiful Newari ceremony. I wore a red sari and golden jewelry. I felt so happy. But after we got married, I came to know that Sunny had no job and his family was lying to my family and me. From the very beginning, they said that Sunny had a business and he earned good money. But, that was not true.

As soon as I got married, I had to face many difficulties. Sunny was a drunk. He started to drink alcohol at 9:00 in the morning. Then at 1:00, he would go to the neighbor's house. There was an old woman who lived there alone. Most of my neighbors said that they had a physical relationship. Almost every night, Sunny went out to the casino. There he drank too much alcohol and came back home at 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning with trembling legs. His mouth smelled very badly. I felt so bad and depressed. But I controlled myself, and I tried to give him some suggestions. I told him, "Don't drink too much. Concentrate on your work. Look for a job." He refused to take suggestions from me, and he shouted at me very loudly and scolded me with bad words. Sometimes, he didn't come home for two or three days without any message. I cried a lot then. I was only married for two months, and my marriage was not good.

My mother-in-law also scolded me very badly. She blamed me for Sunny. She said I had no idea how to take care of him, that I knew nothing, and that I was a bad wife. After hearing these words from her and facing the bad attitude from Sunny, I couldn't sleep most nights. I felt very scared and insecure.

I told all of these things to my parents, and it hurt them very much. They gave me suggestions and told me I should get a job to establish myself. So, I looked for a job, and finally found one as an accountant. Although it was a small salary, I felt so happy to be an independent person. I gave Sunny some pocket money so he would realize how much I loved him. I hoped he would become a better person. In the beginning he was happy again, but later he started to steal money from my purse.

As the time passed, his family decided to open a restaurant for him to run and manage. They wanted to give Sunny the opportunity to be a good son and husband. They opened this restaurant on a popular street. It was very beautiful. It had a big garden with a swimming pool and a bowling alley. The cooks made delicious food. We were all so happy because we thought that Sunny would change. But, he never changed. He would call many girls on the phone. He gossiped with them for long hours. I was very upset and angry about this. Those girls were characterless, and they ate food at his restaurant for free. He started neglecting his restaurant, and slowly it began to fail. His attitude was the same. It never changed. I would give him more and more good suggestions, but they didn't matter.

One day, he told me he would change if he had a more beautiful lady in his life as his wife. After hearing this, I was totally depressed. I discussed it with my parents, and they told me that I had to make a decision about my marriage. I decided to leave Sunny and his family. His parents apologized to me and asked me to return back home. But I didn't trust them. I felt calm and peaceful about my decision to leave. After a year, we got divorced. I was 30 years old.

When I got divorced, many friends started to gossip about my life. Others stopped talking to me. I was very upset, and I felt lonely. My parents decided that I should get married again, but I refused. I started thinking about my siblings' married life. I thought that although my married life was the worst, my siblings' married life could be better.

Time was passing. It was almost five years later. One day, I had a very beautiful dream about Lord Krishna with his girlfriend Radha. He was playing his flute. It was a very beautiful dream. I was surprised because I had never had such a dream in my life. I thought it was a good sign.

A week later, a man named Raja emailed me about his life and said he wanted to meet me. I was so surprised. Raja wrote that he was divorced and a father of one son. He gave me his cell phone number. Later, I learned that one of my college friends gave him my email address. She and Raja were friends. She told him about my life, and he wanted to get to know me more. When I told my mom about this, she suggested I call him. So, I called him. His voice was very nice. He spoke English, and I liked his way of talking. He said he wanted to meet me.

I met him in a restaurant. When I saw him for the first time, his face was sad, and he looked so worried. He smoked too many cigarettes. He didn't dress well. I asked him about all these things. He told me that he had opened a restaurant in Africa and lost all of his money. He was worried about that and that he had no job now. I liked his honesty and innocence.

Later that evening, he called me and told me that he liked my politeness. He also said that he wanted to marry me. I knew that I wanted to marry him, too. I wanted to change him.

After getting permission from our parents, we got married in a temple six months later. I moved into his apartment. It was not so good. The furniture, carpets, and curtains were all old, but I wasn't upset. I thought that I could change it one day. However, he had no job. He had one son. He was nine years old, and his name is Sam. He lived at an international school, and we visited him on weekends. I cared for him and loved him very much. He obeyed me.

Three months later, Raja got a job at an NGO. We were so happy. We bought a small car, and sometimes Raja, Sam, and I went on long trips. We enjoyed this very much. We also designed and furnished our apartment very nicely. It looked like a small hotel.

Time passed very quickly. Almost two years later, Sam's mom decided that he would study in the United States. It was good for Sam. So, Raja went with him and also decided to study more. But I refused his decision. I thought that he was not the age to study. We discussed it, but he made his own decision and started to study at the master's level in a university in the United States. When he left, I felt very lonely and sad, like a homeless person. After three years, Raja suggested that I apply for a visa because he had completed his studies and he had a nice job. So, I applied for the visa, and I got it. Now, I am here in Chicago with my family. I don't feel homeless now.

At the beginning, my English was not good. But when I joined Centro Romero, my teachers helped me to improve my English. So now I am able to write my story. I am also volunteering at the Iskon Temple. It is the temple of Radha Krishna, who I mentioned in my dreams. Raja has a good job. He became a responsible person, and he supports me and our son. He taught me a lot. At the beginning, I knew nothing about the US. He is also a loving and helpful person. He loves and helps his family and friends very much.

I feel very happy and lucky that I got four things at once: my family, the best teachers and friends at Centro Romero, Iskon Temple, and the ability to share the story of my married life. I want to tell other women that sorrow and happiness go hand in hand. We shouldn't give up. Whatever difficulties come over our life, we should stay strong. We should always think positive. Because of positive thinking, we can be healthier and happier.

One day, when we settle down in the US, we are going to have another baby. I want to make the baby a good and religious person. We will give it love, support, and a good education. This will make our family complete and happy.

My Story

Maria Eva



I came from Mexico. I am married and have eight children, five daughters and three sons. My family is big and happy. It is beautiful.

We lived in California for six years. In 2011, we came to Chicago. Chicago is beautiful. My other family members moved from Mexico to Chicago.

My job was difficult. I worked in Mexico. Then, I moved to California for a job. It was hard to find a job.

In Chicago, I started my U.S. education at Centro Romero. It gave me important opportunities. I met the good teachers and beautiful people from Centro Romero. Now, I go to school and get homework, like my husband and my children did. I will go to my family reunion next year.

My Life in Chicago

Raquel

I came to Chicago in 1975 from El Salvador. My brother brought me here when I was 19 years old, and the rest of my family was already here. I thought Chicago was a beautiful city, but I needed to learn how to live here. I didn't know, speak, or understand English.



When I first came, the weather was too cold, but I was happy. I was here with all of my family. I needed to look for a job because we needed money to pay the rent, gas, food, and for a lot of things.

One week after I arrived, I started to look for a job. I listened to the radio, and I heard an advertisement. A person who spoke Spanish needed someone to work in her store. I went to see her, and we talked about the job. She told me, "I need you to help me in the store and keep my house clean." She lived at the back of her store. I accepted the job.

The store was a *botanica*. She sold herbs, candles, and amulets for good luck. Inside the store it looked like a church. There were a lot of religious images, like the Virgin of Guadalupe and many saints. The owner was a psychic and a fortune teller. Many people from different countries came to her. They wanted to know their future, so she read their cards.

I did not believe in this, but I liked working there because I met people from different countries and my boss was a very good person. I worked with her for approximately five years. I learned some English, and my life got better and better.

After that, I started working in a factory as an assembler and packer.

Today, I think it was a good idea that I came here to live. Now I have a better life thanks to God and to my brother.

My Profession and My Calling

Bernadine

Years ago in my country, I used to be a secretary. I worked for the government in the financial department for eight years. One day, one of my managers came to my office. There were three secretaries in that office. While he was talking with us, he asked to read our palms. He was a fortune teller. He first read the hands of my two colleagues, and he told them that they were going to be rich, prosperous women. Then, it was my turn. He looked at my hand, and he said, “Oh! Your place is not here. It is in the church. You must work in the church. There is your blessing.”

I was not happy because I was expecting to hear that I was going to be a rich woman and a successful secretary. I asked him, “Sir, what am I going to do in the church? What kind of job?” He said to me, “I don’t know exactly. But when I read your palm that is what I saw.” “Okay. I will see,” I said. I kept his word in my heart, and I never forgot.

It was God who spoke to me through that man. I am living that prophecy today. I was trying to direct my own life then, without knowing that God had a glorious plan for me.

Later, when I came to Chicago, I had an opportunity to take fashion design classes. I attended and graduated from fashion design school in 2009. Now, I can help a woman by giving her color and style advice. I like fashion so much, and it is a part of me. I love to make people beautiful. This is a gift from God.



Around that time, my husband and I worshipped at Golmi Church. One day, the senior pastor told my husband and me that we had to take training classes. The Lord spoke to him about us. He said that God was going to use us for his work. The training took a year and a half. We were seven people who took the classes together, and we were all ordained at the same time in 2010.

So, fashion designer is my profession, but pastor is my calling. I feel more like a pastor than a fashion designer now. I believe that my calling is more important than my profession. My passion for fashion design is gone.

In my profession, I make women beautiful, help them with their style according to their shape and size, and teach them how to dress for different occasions. I like to see women feel beautiful because we, women, are the beauty of society. I don't know where humanity would be without women.

However, today I have another desire, a great and glorious one. I desire to beautify the souls of people. Real beauty comes from our inside. I am still advising women on their physical appearance, but I always let them know that their souls are more important than their bodies. The body is temporary. Dresses, makeup, jewelry- all of those things are physical. These worldly things are going to end one day. My mind is on eternal things now.

Today, I design people's lives with the light of the word of God. My focus is not on physical beauty now; my focus is on the soul's beauty. I want to bring the soul to his creator through preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. For the captives to be free. The Lord has put his spirit in me because he appointed me to tell the Good News to the poor and to announce the time of grace (Luke 4:18 to 4:19). Our souls are the ones that are going to live in eternity. Let's prepare our soul, and beautify it with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Finally, today I am doing what God chose me to do. I know my mission now. It is a beautiful and glorious mission. I am a peaceful and joyful woman today. *Our lifetime is like nothing to God. Everyone's life is only a breath. People are like shadows moving about. Our work is for nothing. We collect things, but we don't know who will get them. I came to the fact that God is more concerned with the soul, the salvation for the soul (Psalm 39).*

My calling is more important than all other things in my life.

Wonderful Grandmother

Bernadine

My Grandma Odette was a beautiful woman. She was hardworking, wise, lovely, humble, and calm. She was a counselor and a great cook. She liked to share what she had, and she raised many children of her relatives. She had a great heart. She was godly.

Grandma Odette was my mother's mother. She is the one who raised me. At two years old, she took me in. My mother was living in another city with a new life. I called Grandma Odette mama instead of grandma, because she was a mother to me.

Grandma Odette had ten children, six girls and four boys. My mother is the one who gave her her first grandchild. That child was me. Before she died, she had fifty-one grandchildren.

I don't know how to explain the love that my grandma had for me. Her love was so strong. She loved all of her grandchildren, but she had a particular love for me. I was her best friend. She didn't hide her secrets from me. She trusted me, and I trusted her too. I was closer to her than her own children. People called me her secretary. I was her confidant.

When I was in elementary school with my cousins, my grandma used to give us all some money to buy lunch at the school cafeteria. She always gave me a little extra money and told me, "Don't tell your cousins! This is our secret," and I said, "Okay, mama." I was her favorite.

Grandma Odette gave me a lot of advice, and she raised me with good morals. When I was a teenager, I liked to look at myself in the mirror for a long time and comb my hair and say, "Oh! Look at me! I am beautiful!" People often told me that I was a beautiful girl, and I was happy. One day, my grandma was behind me, and I didn't see her. I was doing my show in the mirror. She came to me, took my hand, and said, "My baby. Let's go to my bedroom." Together, we went and sat on her bed. She began to counsel me. She said, "My baby, I know you are beautiful, but don't rely on your beauty. Rely on your education. Do well in school, and get degrees that are going to help you become someone in society." She told me, "Your education is your first husband. It is going to make you independent so that you can be helpful for your future husband and children."

The year that I began high school was the first time I left my Grandma Odette. My high school was in another city far from ours. It was a sad moment for her and me. The day before I left, my grandma and I were in her bedroom. She hugged me, and I began to cry. I said, “Mama, I’m going to miss you a lot.” She said, “Don’t worry. I will visit you whenever I can. My baby, this is an opportunity for you to learn how to live by yourself and to learn from other people. You must practice my advice. My hope is for you to succeed in school and become a great woman.”

I became what my grandmother wanted me to be. I finished high school, and I graduated from a secretarial school. God heard the prayers of my grandmother, and I began to work in the Cabinet of the Financial Minister as a secretary. One year later, my Grandma Odette died. It was terrible for me, but I thanked God because I was prepared for it when I left her for another city. That helped me a lot. I also thanked God for keeping my grandma alive until I grew up, finished school, got a nice job, and was able to take care of and support myself. It was by the grace of God.

Grandma Odette taught me many beautiful things. Most importantly, she taught me how to cook. I am a great cook today. My husband, my children, and my friends like my food. I love people, and I like to share what I have with them. I learned many other good things from my grandma that have helped me so much in my lifetime.

By the way, I am glad to have this opportunity to write about my grandmother because it also gives me the chance to write about the grandmothers of the USA. The way I see them treat their grandchildren here always makes me remember my childhood with Grandma Odette. They love their grandchildren so much.

Grandmothers in the USA make being a grandmother a wonderful thing in the society. Being a grandmother is like a movement here. That is one of the things I love about the United States. In my country, a grandmother is a great blessing from God. There, grandmothers love their grandchildren too. But in the United States, you can see it and feel it everywhere: on the train, in the streets, on TV, and in hospitals, buses, parks, churches, and newspapers. We even have a First Grandmother in the White House! Grandmothers everywhere, please allow me to deliver to you this oral certificate, “Good job! Congratulations!”

I am also a grandmother now. God blessed me with a son and made me a grandmother with three grandchildren. This story is a memorial for me. It allows me to review and remember all the details of my childhood experience. I want to thank Centro Romero and the leader of our Writers’ Circle, Lindsay, for giving me this opportunity to satisfy my desire to write about grandmothers.

I am a grandmother’s product. That is what I call myself. This story is the root of my life.

Volunteering in Chile

Silvia

I have been a civil engineer since 1985. For my work, I moved frequently. I like to help other people, and I was a volunteer twice. The first time, I worked as a volunteer for two years in Ecuador, my country. I worked with people who needed medical specialists in the Ecuadorian Amazon. In this region, they didn't have any specialists.

The second time I volunteered was in Chile after the earthquake in 2010. When the earthquake happened, my son and I were in the Galapagos Islands for vacation. On TV we saw the news all day. I was overwhelmed by the devastation. In my head, I didn't have the idea of volunteering in Chile. Instead, I was thinking of volunteering in Haiti. The earthquake in Haiti was in January 2010, maybe 20 days before the earthquake in Chile. I lived alone, and I thought I could live in any place. After the earthquake, I knew the country needed doctors, psychologists, and engineers. I'm an engineer. I could help.

I intended to travel and work in Haiti. It was a poor country, and I wanted to help. But it was impossible. I couldn't find an institution to work for. I called the Chilean consulate, and they immediately said, "Thanks! Welcome." They gave me all the necessary information and the name of the place where I would work. In two weeks, I prepared for my travels to Chile, sold a few things, and gave some away. I kept only a few items and books. My family helped me and supported me, and were respectful of my decisions. They said that I was their inspiration and pride.

Before I left for Chile, I communicated my decision by email to my three children. I traveled four thousand miles by bus in five days. It was exceptional. I saw beautiful landscapes, and my travel experience was very rich. It was awesome travel, but I was very tired. I was going to another country where I didn't know the country, the people, the food, or anything. I knew nothing.

When I first arrived in Chile in September 2010, I was in shock. I don't have words to describe the situation. The people and the landscape were devastated. All of the people had a father, a mother, a son, a daughter, a niece, a cousin, or a friend lost by the earthquake or the tsunami. Small cities on the beach were collapsed, and people lived with their families and others in camps. The tsunami had brought large ships to the parks, roads, and houses. There were so many boats. I was aware in this moment that all people should be helping.

On September 18th, Chile celebrates Independence Day. At this time, I found an apartment for rent. I didn't know this city, but I found a place to live, so I was very happy. A few days later, someone robbed my apartment. They stole only my clothes because my big suitcase was at a friend's house. I also had money stored in a book on my night table. I was lucky because they didn't take the book with my money. I think they didn't have any cultural interest!

I worked for 18 months in Concepción, Chile. The 8th region was the epicenter of the earthquake and was devastated. I moved three or four times a week to other cities when buildings crashed down. My work was to help with the reconstruction of these buildings. I looked at the damaged homes and decided what was needed. After that, I prepared a report and a budget. I found workers and began reconstruction. Many houses were very difficult because they were very old and were completely damaged. They needed new walls, ceilings, floors, baths, paint, and everything. In other cases, families didn't have houses because the earthquake was worse there. They needed new houses. For them, I went to measure the land and decided the size of the house that would fit in that area. Then, I would install the house that was manufactured in a factory.

During this time, I always communicated with my family by phone or email. They knew exactly where I was, but my children still worried about me. They decided that my oldest son would travel to Chile to see me. Twenty days later, my oldest son arrived in Chile from France. It was very emotional.



He wanted to know what was happening with his mom. Where did she live? Where did she work? He had many questions, and he needed to see everything. He saw the place where I worked, my apartment, and my coworkers. My son and I enjoyed ten days together, and he was happy to go back to France because he knew his mom was okay. When he went back to his country, he spoke with his siblings about me.

My work in Chile was an enriching experience. It helped me to become a better person and taught me to be supportive and help when needed. I also met my best friends in Chile. For the Chilean people, it was unbelievable to them that I traveled to their country without family or friends and worked for them very hard every day without a salary. In my new job, I worked very happily for many hours, maybe sixty or seventy per week. On the weekend, I was exhausted but happy. I had empathy for the Chilean people, and sometimes I helped rebuild their houses with my own money. After eighteen months of work in the Home of Christ, I became Chilean. This experience is so important to me because I learned so much.

My Work When I Came to Chicago

Lupita



I came to the United States in 1995 with my daughter to live in Chicago. She was 12 years old, and my two other children stayed at home in Peru. My husband also came with me. It was very bad economically in Peru, and my husband was not working. I talked to my sister, and she said to me, “Come here to Chicago. You are hardworking. You have my home and my help.” We thought about our decision a lot, but we finally decided to come.

On my second day in Chicago, a Sunday, I went to a flea market. I got there at 6:00 in the morning, and I paid \$20 for a table for the day. I had the table and a red tablecloth, and I sold artisans’ items from Peru. I sold jewelry, bags, and other beautiful things. The first day, I sold \$50. I was happy. Other days, I made more. Sometimes, I even made \$600.

One day at the flea market, I told my friend, “Please, watch my bag of merchandise. I have to go to the bathroom.” I went away, and when I came back I asked about my bag. She told me she didn’t know where it was. I was crying because it was all gone. I was too sad to go home. She helped me look for my merchandise, but I noticed some items from Peru on her table. Her merchandise was only from Mexico. She stole my bag!

Soon after that, my husband and I found jobs as messengers for banks. We drove around and picked up checks and deposits from banks all over Chicago. Then we dropped off the checks and deposits at the central bank. We went to Carol Stream, Aurora, Joliet, Deerfield, and all over Chicago. We worked a lot then. My husband worked seven days a week from 6:00am to 8:00pm. On Sunday, he worked a half day. I worked 6:00am to 7:00pm Monday to Saturday as a messenger, and I had my table on Sunday at the flea market. My husband and I fought with traffic, time, sun, sometimes 20 inches of snow, and many accidents. This was very hard. Sometimes on Sundays, I was so tired that I put sunglasses on so I could close my eyes. When it was early, there were no people to see me sleeping. But, I had to do this to survive.

My mother always told me to work independently. She said to never depend on another person. After five years in Chicago, I opened a little store. It is mine. I sell jewelry for men and women, rosaries, stainless steel merchandise, and other things. Now, I am happy with my business. Sometimes it is good, and sometimes it is bad. It depends on the season and the month. I am thankful for my business. It helps me pay my bills.

I love Chicago because it is a big city. It has many opportunities. Now, I have lived here for 20 years. So, I lost my bag at the flea market, but now I have the blessing of God.

Uniting my Family

José

For many years, it was difficult for me to live in Chicago. I came here to work and to support my family in Mexico. My first time in Chicago was in 1987. I met my wife here, and my first son Erik was born here. I lived here close to eight years, but my wife went back to and stayed in Mexico.

We had two more children, and I came back to Chicago. It was very hard for us because my wife and three children stayed in Mexico. When I came here, I was working very, very hard in two jobs to make money as fast as I could so I could go back to see my children. Every year, I came to Chicago, worked hard, and went back.

It was not easy to go back to Mexico all the time. When I went back, I stayed two or three months and enjoyed my family. When my time with them finished, I came back to Chicago. When I would tell my wife it was time to go back to Chicago, she was very sad and worried about me. My children always cried, too. But I needed to support my family.

I was alone in Chicago. It was hard. I missed my children growing up, and they missed me. In Chicago, I worked at a restaurant. I lived with my sisters for six years, and then I lived alone.

The last time I came back to Chicago, my son Erik was twelve years old, my daughter Anahi was seven, and my daughter Yessenia was four. It was 2005. My wife and I decided that I wouldn't come back to Mexico anymore because I would wait for them to get their papers to come to Chicago. Erik was born in Chicago, but Anahi and Yessenia were born in Mexico.



When Erik was 17 years old, he decided he didn't want to study anymore. He wanted to get a job. My wife and I talked with him, and we asked him to study more and finish his career. I said to him, "Education is important for you. In the future, I don't want you to work so hard like me." I told him that I worked so much only because I wanted a good life for him and my family.

But still he didn't want to continue studying. He started going out with his friends and coming home very late. He didn't tell his mother when he left. So, my wife and I decided I would bring Erik to Chicago with me.

When Erik got here, I found a job for him. He started working in the same company where I worked. When Erik was 21 years old, he did his application for visas for his mother and his sisters. He sent the application to immigration, and we waited for the answer.

This difficult process took over two years. My wife came to the United States first in April 2014. I was so happy because I hoped to see all my family together. The next day, we came here to Centro Romero to fill out another application for our daughters and again sent the paper to immigration.

We had to wait another year and a few months, but it didn't matter. I was very, very happy when, finally, my daughters could come to Chicago. They are here living with me now. They have been here two years, and we are happy. My son and my daughters are grown-up now.

I waited close to ten years for my family to be together. Although I called my children and my wife every day, sometimes twice a day, it was a hard life. Now, my life is so much better.

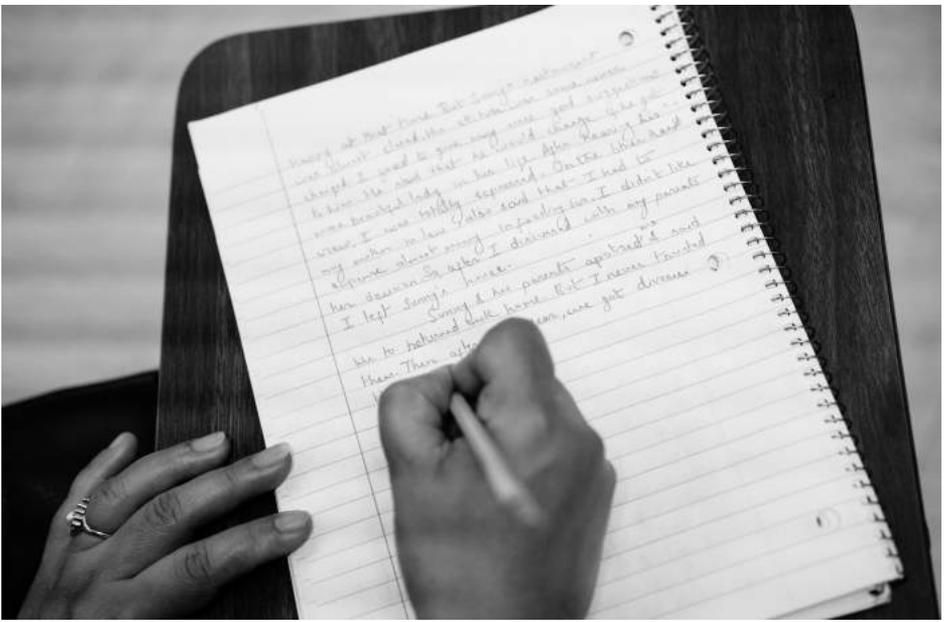


Literacy Works

Mission & Vision

Literacy Works' mission is to strengthen adult literacy, parent education, and workforce development programs by developing and providing innovative training and knowledge-sharing opportunities for professionals and volunteers.

Literacy Works' vision is that one day, all people will be able to realize their full potential through the ability to read, write, and interpret the world.



*"I feel like a better writer now.
I learned the story of my life."
-Liza*

To fulfill its mission, Literacy Works provides workshops, trainings and direct literacy services to over fifty adult literacy programs throughout Chicago.



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Life's Experiences is a result of the Writers' Circle, a ten-week writing workshop facilitated by Literacy Works in partnership with Centro Romero.



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