



Yolo Reads



Volunteer Adult Literacy Tutoring—A Program of the Yolo County Library

Winter 2011

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Message from Heather Bratt, Yolo Reads Coordinator

For the 6 month period from July through December of 2010, 54 volunteer tutors provided 49 adult learners with 775 hours of instruction. In total, 64 volunteers provided more than 1,200 hours of service. During the same period, seven volunteers provided more than 140 hours of tutoring to youth at the Juvenile Detention Facility in Woodland.

In addition to tutoring, volunteers have provided office assistance, assembled this wonderful newsletter, posted Yolo Reads flyers, spoken to businesses in their community about Yolo Reads, and raised money for purchasing books.

Thank you to our dedicated Yolo Reads volunteers! Without you, this program would not be possible.

Are you interested in volunteering for Yolo Reads? Yolo Reads is looking for new volunteers to provide tutoring to adults in the community and to incarcerated youth. Do you have other ideas for contributing to literacy? We welcome your ideas!

Thank You, Ellen Pettit!

By Stephanie, Yolo Reads Volunteer

Through September to November, Winters Friends of the Library member Ellen Pettit showed her photojournalism at Steady Eddy's coffee house. The exhibit, entitled "Dia de los Muertos," was a collection of photographs and brief paragraphs describing her subjects. Ellen uses her photojournalism to showcase people and places of different cultures to allow others to appreciate and connect with those cultures. Ellen's show was very successful, and a tremendous support for Yolo Reads. She not only displayed brochures and information on
see THANK YOU, page 3

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Yolo Reads, a program of the Yolo County Library, provides free tutoring to adults who want to improve their reading, writing, spelling and grammar skills.

Writer to Writer

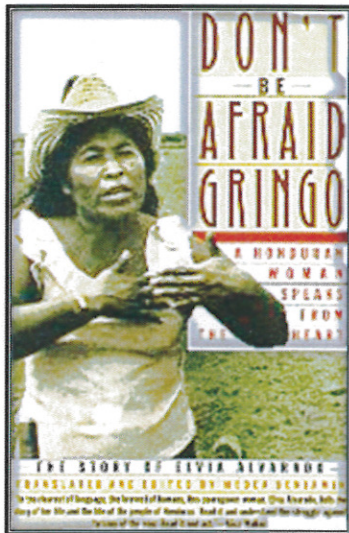
By Rachel, Yolo Reads Volunteer

The Writer to Writer Challenge will be upon us soon and Yolo Reads is hoping our Learners will be eager to participate again this year. Writer to Writer is an annual challenge in which adult literacy learners read a book of their choice and then write a letter to the book's author. Past Yolo Reads participants have been finalists in the statewide competition and received replies from the authors. Whether you are ready to participate in Writer to Writer (and we hope you are!) or just looking for a good book to read, the California Library Literacy Services website (http://www.library.literacy.org/learners/great_books/) has suggestions for you. Listed below are book reviews by adult literacy learners. These books are available at the Yolo County Library.

Don't Be Afraid Gringo: A Honduran Woman Speaks from the Heart: the Story of Elvia

Alvarado

*Translated and Edited
by Medea Benjamin
Difficulty Level: 3-4*



This book is about Elvia Alvarado, a poor woman in Honduras. She had a hard childhood. Her brothers worked in the field. She worked in the house. The school that she went to only went to second grade. She repeated second grade 5 times until she was 12 because she really wanted to learn. By the time she was 15 she had a baby. She had six children when she was a teenager. She met Alberto and she lived with him for 15 years, but he drank just like her father. Then she got involved in Church, and it opened her eyes to let her know she had a right to speak up for herself. She started to get more and more involved in helping all poor people fight for their rights. Elvia talks about the struggle of all the campesinos, the poor people who work the land in Honduras. Elvia explains Honduran customs and compares the three social classes in a easy to understand manner. We recommend this book for reading and writing classes because it is a story

about a brave woman who changed her life and worked to help others fight for their rights. It is interesting and this happens today, not just in Honduras, kids having kids and poor people struggling to survive. So we would also recommend this book for teenagers.

The Pact: Three Young Men Make a Promise and Fulfill a Dream

*by Drs. Sampson Davis, George Jenkins, and
Rameck Hunt*

Difficulty Level: 4

This book is about three young men who grew up as children in the projects. They lived where there was drugs and violence. One of them grew up in a one parent home. Another had a teacher who told him he could be somebody. The third one had a dental appointment. After the visit he was interested in dentistry. So all three made a pact to be somebody. Now they are doctors. We recommend this book for reading and writing classes because it's a true story. It tells you how you can be successful in a bad situation.



THANK YOU, *cont. from p1*

Yolo Reads, but also generously donated some of the proceeds from her show to the program, which raised \$320!

Ellen does photojournalism as a passion and hobby and has had her work displayed in 5 shows. Her day job is as a psychologist with a practice in Davis. Having no formal training in photography, Ellen began refining her art during a trip to Bali, when a friend loaned her a camera to capture the beauty of the island. Since then, she has used her pictures as an opportunity to share the people, artifacts, and places she encounters on her travels. Ellen's recent art show aptly reflected not only her interest in traveling and meeting new people, but also her connection to adult literacy and the challenges of learning new languages. Ellen studied Spanish briefly while in Guanajuato, Mexico during Dia de los Muertos and continues to practice her Spanish skills with a group of friends, so she understands the challenges many of our second-

language learners face. Ellen's mother also struggled with literacy after emigrating from Ireland with only a third grade education.



We sincerely thank Ellen for her dedication to Yolo Reads and the extremely generous donation of her talents in outreach and financial support of the program! Please stay tuned to find out when Ellen's next art show will take place.

Q & A: Yolo County Juvenile Detention Facility Volunteers

By Adrienne, Yolo Reads Volunteer

Are you a mentor or a tutor? Or both?

Ethan: Depends on the evening. Our role seems to be constantly evolving over time but in each session as well, depending on the needs of the youth that we're working with. Initially we were working as tutors with students who were studying for the GED, and that initially consumed all of our resources, but over time as we began working with younger youth and youth interested in things other than GED, we've helped students work on their writing and vocab, do reading groups and small discussion groups, math, finance, as well as education counseling: once you take the GED and get your GED, what do you do with it? More recently, we've begun working with the national Mexican curriculum standards provided to

us by the Mexican Consulate, working with the English learners, trying to get them up to speed on the core curriculum. We're doing all sorts of stuff and we'll do more as the wants and needs change over time.

Diane: I would say the message we have gotten from the leadership is that we're really there to help them with skills, not personal issues or as life mentors. For instance, I had a student I worked with a few times. He was really bright and we talked about goals. He was working on his GED prep, said he was interested in being an airplane mechanic. Between our sessions, I did some research [on the] qualifications needed to be that, got some stuff on the computer for him to review on his own time. So in some ways there's

some mentorship going on there, but it's really focused on skill-building. We don't ask them about their personal lives or why they're there. It's to improve their skills.

You've been with the program since its inception. What makes you stay, and what is the most gratifying part?

Ethan: There's been a lot of turnover amongst the volunteers, and I totally understand why. I think the vision I had coming into the program was we'd pair up with one youth and work with that youth for 6 months, and it'd be a sort of linear process and developing a relationship, but that's not the environment. There are a lot of students who are there for a short amount of time, and it's hard to plan or expect. And there's the challenge of not knowing who's going to participate in the program on any week. They have to earn the right to participate: if they did something to get in trouble, they won't be there. I've stuck with it because I was lucky enough to work with one student every week, for about 8 weeks, and really see a lot of tangible progress with him, which was

great, and it's been an opportunity for me to get to practice my Spanish, which I don't get to do on a regular basis, and get to teach, which I don't get to do in my current job as much as I like.

Diane: Heather asked for a 6 month commitment, because they train you, and I'm one of those people who, if I commit to something--unless I get run over by a truck--I stick with it. You learn as much from the kids as they learn from you. Every time I come home feeling like I made an impact on a kid. Last week, it was terrible! I had to send my kid out! But I stick with it because there's more positive than

negative, and it's a small commitment every week, and hopefully you touch someone's life. Some of these kids have never had this experience of just sitting down with someone and having them paid attention to, and a lot of them are very smart and have been paying attention and have a lot of potential. I think everyone deserves a chance to learn, no matter what the circumstances.

Any surprises? Student reactions you weren't expecting, challenges or joys you hadn't anticipated?

Ethan: I think the challenge is having so much inconsistency, and only being able to plan for the unexpected, in terms of who you're working with, what you're working on, the state of mind they're going to be in, their attention span. There have been many times when there are a lot of tensions in the classroom, because there are three members of one gang on one side of the room and two members on another, and they have to bring in extra staff members to create a boundary zone, and keep them focused on the task at hand. The rewards are in seeing the very tangible

progress these students make over time, and knowing some of these guys are getting their GEDs and getting opportunities they wouldn't otherwise have.

Diane: I think surprises are how sweet many--most--of the kids are: respectful; polite; how motivated they are to increase their skills. It's a more positive experience than what you would imagine. I tell my friends and they think, "How can you do that, it'd be so negative," but it's really not. A lot of times you're sitting in the room, tutors working with different kids, and you can just see the difference: that you're breaking through.



JDF Volunteers Diane and Ethan