



# READ

200 N. Greensboro Street  
 Suite C-2  
 Carrboro, NC 27510  
[www.orangeliteracy.org](http://www.orangeliteracy.org)  
 WINTER 2011

## The Orange County Literacy Council

- *We envision a community where literacy is available to all.*
- *Our mission is to help adults reach their education, employment and life goals. We do this by providing free, flexible instruction in reading, writing and basic math, English and computer literacy skills and GED preparation.*

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## From Our Students ...

Each year we invite students in our Adult Literacy program to speak at our Winter Celebration. They talk about what brought them to the Literacy Council, what they have learned and their dreams for the future. They talk of lost opportunities and impossible hurdles. They also talk about improved skills, newly discovered confidence and the willingness — no, the desire — to help others. And each year, without fail, they inspire us. We celebrate our students, and the tutors, volunteers, donors and staff who support them, with the writings from this year's program.

### Casio Noell

Confucius once said, "he who says he can and he who says he can't are both usually right." At one point in my life I was one of those who said "I can't" but now that I see life in a pristine way. I say "I can." Around the age of 18 I made the decision to drop out of high school.

But after a few harrowing events taking place in my life I recognized I was headed nowhere fast. So I made it my prerogative to turn my life around for the better. By me realizing I needed to make a change, I began the journey to getting my General Equivalency Diploma (GED). This led me to walk into the OCLC doors about a year ago.

After entering the program I was set up with a tutor that helped me pass the reading, math, science and social studies test. I studied hard and passed every test I've taken, and I'm proud to say that I'm one test away from obtaining my GED. I feel a sense of achievement after

*continued on page 4...*

### Aung Pwe

OCLC is really helpful for people who cannot speak English and who don't have a chance to go to school. For me it's really helpful because my first day in the USA I could speak only "yes" or "no". The first time I started to learn English as a second language was at DTCCMC, Durham Technical Community College at a Methodist church.

*continued on page 4...*

### Rosa King

Good evening everyone. I hope everyone is doing well tonight. My name is Rosa King. I've been a student in the OCLC for one year. Tonight I would like to share with you my story of how I got involved with the OCLC. When I was younger I was not interested in school. I chose friends and partying over school. That disappointed my mother very much. Soon my adult life

*continued on page 5...*



Additional student writings and event photos on pages 4 & 5

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## Vimala's Donates to OCLC in Unique Way

**"Welcome, beloved community!"** These are the words which greet restaurant-goers at *Vimala's Curryblossom Café*. They reflect the spirit and values of this local Indian restaurant and its founder Vimala Rajendran. From the beginning Vimala wanted the restaurant to function as a community meeting space. By donating space to one of our morning ESOL classes, she discovered the perfect opportunity to open her doors to the community in a new way.

Since last year the restaurant has opened early for tutor Lori Carswell and a small group of ESOL students to meet in the dining area. The group practices English while staff members busy themselves preparing for the restaurant's lunch crowd.

Donating tutoring space is a creative way to contribute to OCLC programs. Morning space is in high demand for our

ESOL students, who often work night shifts before going to class afterwards. In the afternoons, when space is more readily available, many of these students need time to sleep or watch over children returning home from school.

Vimala recognizes the struggles of non-native English speakers in our community and

understands the difficulties they often have filling out forms, navigating the community, and engaging in basic personal communication. "I believe that social and civic engagement is vital to human life," says Vimala. "Literacy plays a key part in making that happen."

- Claire Davis



Vimala Rajendran of Vimala's Curryblossom Café

## A Conversation with Creative Writing Tutor Jocelyn Dawson

**How long have you been a volunteer with the Creative Writing Program?** I've volunteered since 2005.

**What led you to be involved in the Creative Writing Program, specifically at the men's shelter?** A friend who knew former Creative Writing Program organizer Willis Brooks introduced me to the program. Willis's enthusiasm for working with the men and women at the shelters and the thoughtful group discussions he led during times we volunteered together have been an inspiration. I started off volunteering at the women's shelter but now prefer the men's shelter, as the higher residency numbers seem to

result in larger and livelier groups.

**What is the greatest challenge you've encountered there?** I had never worked with the homeless before and wasn't sure what to expect when I started volunteering. But the entire experience, over seven years, has been extremely positive—the only real challenge has been making sure that everyone gets a chance to share their writing in groups where there's a lot of conversation.

**What is the greatest reward to working there?** The greatest reward has been the interesting discussions and new perspectives that the creative

writing participants have opened up. Some incredibly talented natural writers have come through the shelter since I've been there. I've particularly enjoyed prompts where we chose five random words and the works produced were really imaginative, as well as prompts that tackled big subjects like racism and hope.

**What is next for you now that you're leaving us? What exciting things are you looking forward to in Raleigh?** My next volunteer activity will be getting involved in the 2012 election campaign. I'll miss my work with the OCLC but am glad that there are energetic new volunteers to carry the work forward.

-Diana Hoffer

## Family Literacy—Teaching Parents and Their Young Children

For years we offered workshops to help parents throughout the county teach their young children (under 5 years) literacy and pre-literacy skills. These one-to-two hour sessions focused on how to read books to children, the importance of talking to children, and how to engage children in fun, educational activities. Although the workshops have been very popular, we knew that in order to truly effect change, we needed a much more comprehensive, robust program—one that would provide a level of education and support far beyond the scope of a one-to-two hour workshop. Thanks to a Smart Start grant through the Orange County Partnership for Young Children and a partnership with El Centro Hispano in Carrboro, we've finally been able to see that dream come true.

In mid-September 10 mothers and their 12 children enrolled in our first 12-week Family Literacy class. The program is intense. Both parents and children participate in structured activities for five hours each week. Parents spend three hours a week in English class, one hour a week in a parenting support group and one hour a week in Parent and Child Together

(PACT) time where they learn and practice techniques for teaching their children literacy and pre-literacy skills. While their parents are in class, the children are engaged in age-appropriate educational activities led by trained staff from El Centro Hispano.

The pilot session has just wrapped up, and the teachers have been excited to see their students' confidence and literacy skills improve over the 12-week period. One of our instructors, Virginia Meldahl, credits the students for the success she sees in them. "I think the motivation and enthusiasm of our students has been a significant factor in their success," she said. "These moms have been eager to learn and apply literacy strategies with their children." Our other instructor, Alice Drozdiak, who teaches the beginning level students, notes the camaraderie that has developed among the students as being an important factor in their success. Alice has seen the students speaking to each other in English outside of class, as well as helping each other in class when one student struggles with a difficult concept.



Children Choose New Books to Take Home

The children have also improved over the course of the class. At first we struggled with separation issues as the children were uncertain of their new environment. After a few weeks they adapted to their wonderful teachers and classmates and began learning and playing together very well. More importantly, they began to identify colors and shapes, count in English, adapt to a schedule, follow directions and get along with their peers—all skills that will help prepare them for kindergarten.

The next round of Family Literacy classes will start in February with 10 new students and at least 10 new children. We're looking forward to providing these new students with another great experience in Family Literacy! For pictures from the program, check our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/orangeliteracy](http://www.facebook.com/orangeliteracy). For videos, try our YouTube channel at [www.youtube.com/user/orangeliteracy](http://www.youtube.com/user/orangeliteracy).

- Joy Turner

## Carolina Apartments Keeps ESOL Classes Close to Home

Imagine entering a new country with nothing but the clothes on your back. Literally. Everything about your new home is foreign—climate, food, transportation—and especially the language. How would you handle such a dramatic transition? One of Orange County Literacy Council's long-running ESOL classes tackles this very issue.

In 2007, we began working with refugee placement organizations to provide English-language classes. We quickly realized that many of the newest

arrivals to the area needed and wanted to learn English, but were so overwhelmed by the new country they were unable to venture outside their apartment complexes. To address that problem, we partnered with the Carolina Apartments in Carrboro, where many of the new refugees lived, to provide on-site English classes.

By holding classes in the apartment complex's activity room, we were able to provide English language instruction in a familiar, safe

environment. Students learned the basics – what U.S. currency looks like, which bus routes they needed, how to provide contact information on a job application and how to pay bills. "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes" became their anthem, with three generations of Burmese and Karen students bending and stretching as they sang along. By beginning to learn basic language and skills in this safe environment, students gained the confidence to expand their

comfort zone further and further into the community.

Since that first year, the class has continued to grow. Under current tutor, Jane Underhill, we teach roughly 19 students twice a week. We are grateful for the generosity of Carolina Apartments for allowing us to use the facility to accommodate these students.

- Kelly Sanders

## Student Writings continued...

### Chris Reed

My name is Chris Reed. I work at UNC at Chapel Hill. I've been working at UNC in the HVAC shop for ten years.

I was a carpenter before I started working for UNC. I had four different contractors and I had at least two to five houses in the parade of homes every year. When I started building houses I didn't know that much about building big country-style homes. After working for about a year I learned a lot from other builders. At that time I realized I was a fast learner. I learned so much in a year that I could build about anything. I worked in construction for about ten years. Not everything was going the way I wanted it to; I injured my back and was forced to find other work. I applied at UNC for work that wasn't backbreaking and got the job.

I was hired to work with the electricians. In one year they had layoffs. I was one of the few that got to keep their jobs. I was transferred to the HVAC shop across campus. Now I had to learn something new

and prove to myself and others that I could do this job. It didn't take me long to learn how to fix heat and air problems in all the dorms on campus.

I talked to my boss about getting a promotion to HVAC Maintenance Worker (instead of a helper). He said, "Fill out the application," and I did. When he looked at the education part of my application, he said I didn't have enough education for the job. I didn't have a diploma or GED.

My boss said if I got my GED we could talk more about the job. Then he asked why I didn't finish school. I told him I really liked school. I didn't make the best grades in school, but I did good enough to pass every year. Passing wasn't the problem. My mother got hurt and wasn't able to work anymore. My mother told me I had to quit school and find a job. I said I didn't want to. She said if you don't, we would lose everything. We had no money for lights, food, car payment, gas, or house payments. I never got to say bye to my teachers and classmates. I would never

get to go to my first prom. I had more important things to take care of.

Now I'm working on something really important for me – getting my GED. You can only go so far without a GED. That's why I'm working hard to prove that I can overcome this problem. I started two years ago in the OCLC GED Class at UNC. The hardest thing was walking in the door not knowing what to expect.

I walked into the classroom and saw there were students young, my age, and older. It wasn't a class of all young people. For some, that's intimidating because the young people will finish class really fast. When you are one of the older ones you find out you have a lot to learn – more than you did when you were in school. A lot has changed.

I've learned that in GED class people are on different levels. For me and most of the older students, that's good because you are not trying to keep up with a group of students on one subject and hoping you don't fall behind.

It took me some time to get in the swing of things. I had a lot of help from teachers and tutors – they really helped me learn fast. It's an environment where people care about you and want you to succeed. The teachers and tutors make you feel good about what you are doing – they don't make you feel bad about not finishing school. I've been going to class for about two years. Some people say that's a long time, but you've got to understand I only go to class for two hours a day, two days a week. I think I've done a lot in a short amount of time. There are five subjects on the GED, and I've passed all of them but one. I'm working on my final subject – math.

I would like to thank my teachers and my tutors for helping me get this far. I'm glad I started this GED Class at UNC. The hardest thing to do is to walk in that door. Once you do that you are on your way to getting your GED. Just stick with it. There will be days that are harder than others, but there will be a day when you will say "I did it!"

### ...Aung Pwe continued

It was really going well when I worked a part-time job, but after I worked full-time I couldn't go there anymore because I worked during the day. So I could go only to the evening class. They had evening classes too. Anyway, I still could not go because there was no parking. I did not go to school for a while.

About three or four months later I heard about this OCLC School, and I decided to go the first week, and the second week I felt tired. I didn't want to go anymore. Finish

work. Go to school. Hmmm..... So tired!! But I needed more speaking practice and more experience. Now in our class Miss Debbie teaches us grammar. I think grammar is important. When you speak and read it is ok because you can use body language and eye contact to communicate. People understand you better than when you write. If your grammar is not right a person who reads your writing won't understand you.

Thank you, thank you so much for having this school.



Aung Pwe talks of evening ESOL classes

### ...Casio Noell continued

studying for and passing these tests. I know that I can set my mind to a goal and accomplish it, which inspires me to go forward. After I get my GED I wish to pursue a communications degree to further spread my message that even though we all come from different backgrounds, races and ethnicities, with perseverance we can all accomplish our dreams. And I am glad to have OCLC as a beginning foundation to fulfill my dreams.

## GED Student Faydene Alston—Setting a Good Example

After almost six years of hard work, Faydene Alston—known to friends as Faye—is very close to earning her GED. For the past two years, she has been a student in the OCLC's GED class at UNC. The class, she says, has helped her "tremendously" with her math.

Faye grew up in an unstable home and never felt pressure to succeed academically. She always loved English classes, but struggled with math to the point that she was no longer motivated to stay in school. She left when she was 16. She returned briefly, only to drop out

again – this time for good – when she was 17.

Faye decided to get her GED after she adopted her daughter Precious because she wanted to be a better role model. Precious, now eight years old, also struggles with math. But Precious sees how hard her mother is working and knows that giving up is not an option. Faye says of Precious, "She keeps me motivated. She's a joy." Now that Faye is able to help Precious with math homework, she knows that her hard work is paying off. "[Precious] gets frustrated about math, too," said Faye. "I want to be able

to help her with *any* part of math, not just the simple things."

When she started studying for her GED, Faye decided to work on the subjects that came most easily to her in high school. She started with the reading and writing tests and quickly got them out of the way. Then she decided to tackle math, a subject she knew would be difficult. After more than three years of work, she realized she needed a break. She switched to social studies and science and passed both tests. Math is now the last subject she needs to pass.

Many members of Faye's family

have had to leave school early. Her father left the third grade to support his family. When Faye started taking GED classes, she brought him with her as long as she could. His progress filled her with pride and reinforced her belief that everyone deserves an education. Faye's advice to those who are thinking about furthering their education: "Go for it, regardless of how old you are. Everyone can be educated."

- Diana Hofler

## Student Writings continued...

...*Rosa King continued*

took over and I lost sight of ever finishing my education. I still felt however, that I owed it to my mother and more importantly myself to go back and try to get my GED. Then one day while at work I saw a commercial for the OCLC. I decided that day to take the opportunity. It was the best decision I have made in a long time. Over the past year I have made progress in several areas including math which was my weakest subject. This has given me hope of getting my GED and given me confidence in myself. It has not been easy though. It has been challenging to find time for studying and classes while working two jobs and dealing with other responsibilities. If anyone here is facing these same difficulties then my message to them is stick with it no matter how long it takes. I hope that my story may inspire anyone who is thinking of giving up. Please don't. If I can do it, it can be done. Thank you for listening. Have a good night.



Rosa King



Casio Noell



Donna Chiamonte picks up her award for improved reading comprehension.



Our thanks for their help with the banquet (and throughout the year):

The Daniel Boone Convention Center

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Our dedicated volunteers, tutors, and students

## 5th Annual Writers for Readers Book and Author Event—February 19th & 20th, 2012

Join us February 19th and 20th as we welcome authors **Robert Goolrick, Marisa de los Santos, Nathasha Trethewey** and **Kevin Wilson** to the 5th Annual Writers for Readers Book and Author Luncheon.

Sunday evening, February 19<sup>th</sup> enjoy a unique opportunity to meet and chat with our guest authors. We will be holding our **Meet the Authors Gala Reception** at the UNC President's House from 5PM - 7PM, with Honorary Hosts **UNC President Thomas Ross** and **Mrs. Susan Ross**. Tickets for the reception are \$125/person.

On Monday, February 20<sup>th</sup> from 11 AM - 1 PM we hold our

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**5<sup>th</sup> Annual Book and Author Luncheon** at the beautiful

Carolina Inn. Each of our acclaimed authors will offer

their frank and fresh ways of looking at how literacy shapes the community. You will hear unforgettable testimonials from an OCLC student and tutor about the difficulty and joy of learning to read as an adult. Author **Daniel Wallace** will be our emcee. Books will be available for purchase from **McIntyre's Fine Books**. Tickets for the luncheon are \$65/person.

All proceeds from these events support our efforts to help adults improve their reading, writing, basic math or English language skills or prepare for the GED. Tickets are on sale now at [ocltickets2012.eventbee.com](http://ocltickets2012.eventbee.com).

Tickets on sale now at — [ocltickets2012.eventbee.com](http://ocltickets2012.eventbee.com)

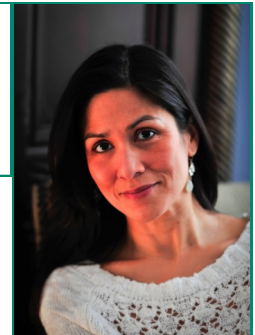


**Robert Goolrick**

Author of the critically acclaimed *The End of the World as We Know It* and wildly popular *A Reliable Wife*, Robert Goolrick's newest book, *Heading Out to Wonderful*, is scheduled for release in early summer 2012.

**Marisa de los Santos**

Marisa de los Santos is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Love Walked In*, *Belong to Me*, and *Falling Together*. She has also published a poetry collection called *From the Bones Out*.

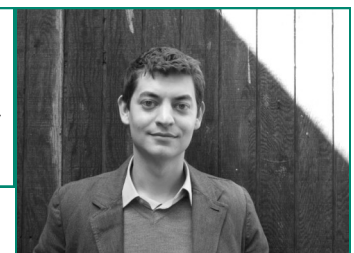


**Natasha Trethewey**

An acclaimed poet, Nathasha Trethewey is the author of the 2007 Pulitzer Prize winning *Native Guard*, as well as two other books of poetry—*Domestic Work* and *Bellocq's Ophelia*. She is also the author of *Beyond Katrina: A Meditation on the Mississippi Gulf Coast*.

**Kevin Wilson**

Kevin Wilson's collection, *Tunneling to the Center of the Earth*, received an Alex Award from the American Library Association and the Shirley Jackson Award. His 2011 novel *The Family Fang* is one of the most discussed books of the year.



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## ESOL Classes Win Video Award

Two of our ESOL classes were winners in a recent video contest celebrating Orange County Preparedness Month. The contest, hosted by the Orange County Health Department and Orange County Emergency Services, was designed to draw attention to the importance of emergency preparedness.

Hurricane Irene and its effects on North Carolina proved to be the perfect focus for Jerry Zeller's Intermediate ESOL class. Students discussed how Irene affected them and what they did to prepare for the storm. This brought them to the theme of their project – how to prepare a disaster kit. In their first-place video, students Jeff Tshi, Hsa Moo, and Hay Mu,

along with OCLC Program Coordinator Claire Davis, put together a disaster kit of their own, following guidelines from FEMA and the Orange County Health Department. The class also researched what to do once a disaster occurs. They learned about possible shelters in the area and why shelters might be necessary. They talked about the best ways to mobilize their families to get them to safety. Further they discussed how each family's situation is different, making it necessary for each student to adapt a plan for themselves and their family.

Debbie Granger's ESOL Intermediate class focused on types of natural disasters that might occur in Orange County.

Several of the students from Burma grew up learning about the dangers from tsunamis. They found information about tsunamis on FEMA's website and learned that some of the problems resulting from them are similar to problems with hurricanes: tsunamis cause sudden, violent flooding from tidal waves, while we are often in danger of flash floods in Orange County. The class also researched possible manufactured disasters, such as a nuclear emergency with the Shearon Harris power plant in Wake County. They also learned about the dangers found in the home and how to prevent electrical fires and other household disasters. In their

second place video, students Yu Yu Aye, Nan Khan, Rafael Munoz, Leticia Patino, Law Doh We, Paw Ku, and Aung Pwe described the kinds of disasters that could occur in Orange County.

Both classes were awarded prizes valued at \$175, which included a stocked disaster kit, emergency radio, glow-in-the-dark flashlight and supplies backpack. The first place video can be found on our YouTube page at <http://www.youtube.com/user/orangeliteracy> and on the Orange County Department of Health's website at <http://www.co.orange.nc.us/health/Preparedness.asp>.

-Diana Hofler

## The 5th Annual Writers for Readers Event—February 19th and 20th, 2012

*Tickets available online at [ocltickets2012.eventbee.com](http://ocltickets2012.eventbee.com)*

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