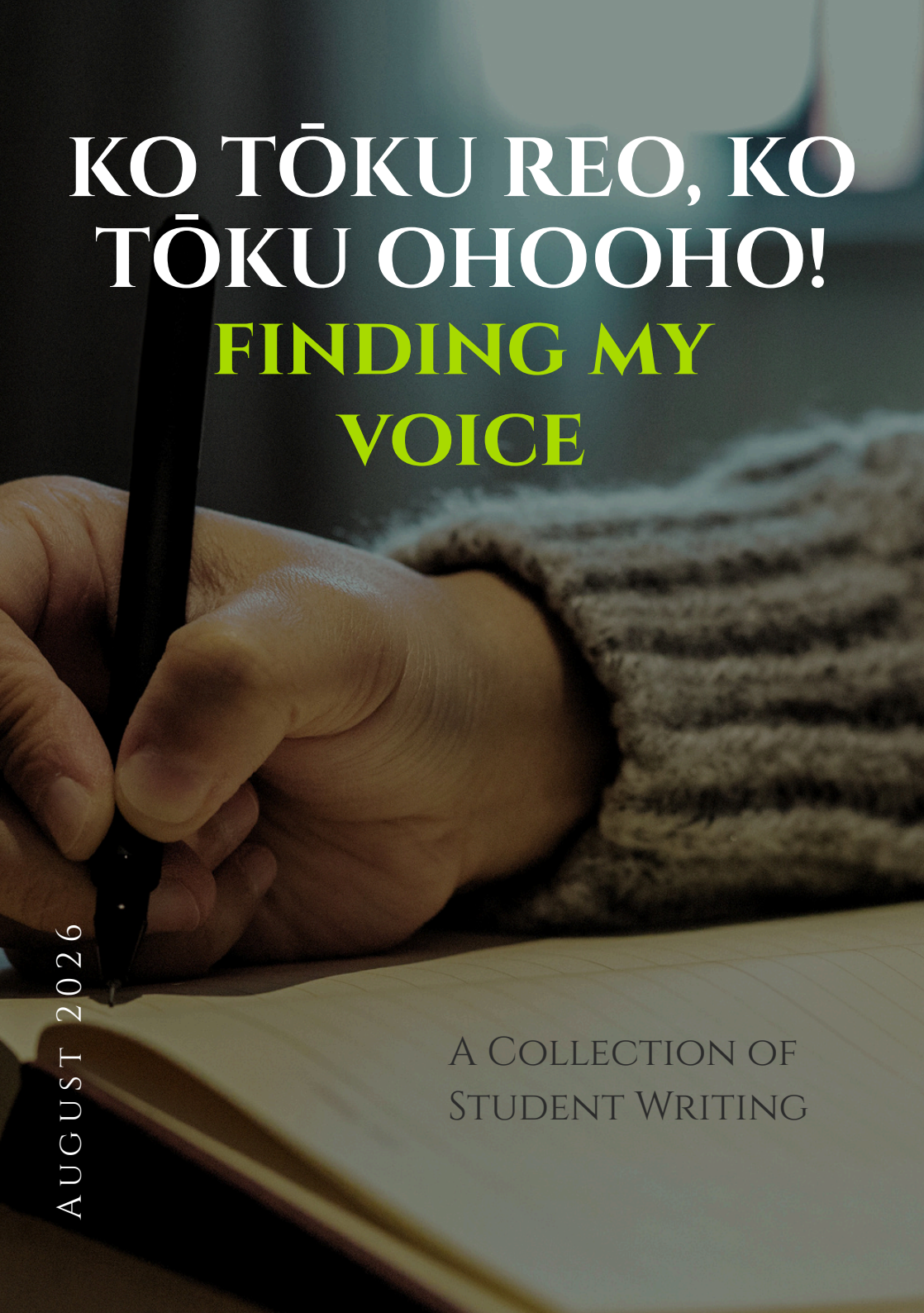


A close-up photograph of a hand holding a black pen, writing on a lined notebook. The hand is wearing a brown, textured sweater. The background is blurred, showing a sailboat on water. The text is overlaid on the image.

KO TŌKU REO, KO
TŌKU OHOOHO!

**FINDING MY
VOICE**

AUGUST 2026

A COLLECTION OF
STUDENT WRITING

AN OPEN LETTER

To Our Students, Coaches, Sponsors and Volunteers

This publication is a celebration of our RYALT students' inspiring and insightful writing. We are so proud to share this with you all and wish to thank you for all of your efforts.

As you read through the writing that has been shared here, please take time to reflect on the progress and dedication that has gone into producing this beautiful book.

The planning, the writing, the editing and the publishing are valuable skills that continue to improve throughout our lifelong literacy journey.

To our students who agreed to write so that we could publish this book: a huge thank you!

Your work will be read with pleasure by people all around New Zealand and our supporters and sponsors will enjoy reading your pieces and seeing the literacy skills you have acquired through your perseverance and hard work.

Coaches will be able to share your writing with new students to provide them with interesting reading material and help encourage them to follow in your footsteps to improve their literacy skills.

We thank all the volunteers who helped compile this book, particularly our editor and designer, Amanda Livingston, for the many hours she has dedicated to our students' writing books over the years.

And we are hugely grateful to the Adult Community Education Aotearoa (ACE) for the Festival of Learning Funding which made the printing and postage of the book possible.

NEVER STOP LEARNING, BECAUSE LIFE NEVER STOPS TEACHING.



Rural Youth &
Adult Literacy Trust

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PAINT IN RAIN

by Jimmy

In silence and comfort I sat
as my work was well washed away.
I gazed up at the grey clouds
thanking them for the shade
they provided me earlier
but felt ungrateful for their rain.

My eyes focused on the droplets on the window,
but the droplet I chose lost the race to the bottom.

The fresh paint was now nothing
washed away by rain
the paint on my jacket was the only evidence to show
my time was spent painting.

In solitude under a roof I sat, knowing I would redo it tomorrow
tomorrow, the day I had set aside for my own tasks
due homework
I said little to my parents about the rain
my cat could write books full of my comments
but at the moment she was absent, no comfort.

Added to the sound of rain on the roof,
I heard the jingle of a bell
but it was not her, it was a different cat
though he might not like it, he did not run from the rain
why could the paint not be like him?
but if it were my jacket would be ruined.

Tomorrow is another day it is just busier.



CHILDHOOD

by Regie

When I was young, I always helped my mother and father, and every weekend I went to the river with my friends.

It was summer when I went to the river and I accidentally fell into the river and my mother had to bring me to the hospital.

When I was in the hospital I saw my classmate there and my family and I visited to the market.

I found my cap under the bed.

Every year we danced all night at the party. My mother sang beautiful songs to me.



THE HILLS ARE ALIVE TO THE SOUND OF CICADAS

by Guy Baker

I skip and hop on my merry way "it feels so good to be alive!"
The hills stand before me, mighty and majestic, they call out to me: "Come closer Guy, we have something to tell you."

As I get closer, I can hear a sound, what can it be?
I am in two minds: "Should I stay or should I run away?"
The sound speaks to me: "Guy, we have been waiting an eternity for you to arrive."

I cannot see anyone. Where is the sound coming from?
Suddenly they rise up from the grass, millions of them.
Cicadas everywhere! I am at peace!
Whenever I am around wildlife and open spaces, I feel a sense of calm come over me.





SPRING FESTIVAL

by Ning Chen

My home town is Henan of China. Spring Festival traditions in Henan are very traditional and full of the culture of central China. The New Year celebrations start on "Little New Year," which is on the 23rd day of the last lunar month. Families clean their homes, worship the Kitchen God, make traditional foods like date buns and fried snacks, and buy things for the New Year. Everywhere feels busy, happy, and festive. On New Year's evening, families put up red Spring Festival couplets and pictures of door gods on their doors. Some families also remember and honour their ancestors. In the evening, everyone gathers together for a big family dinner. Dumplings and fish are important foods because they represent good luck and having enough every year. At night, families stay awake to welcome the new year, and older

family members give lucky money to children and younger people to wish them safety and happiness. On the first day of the new year, younger people greet older family members and give New Year wishes. There are also special customs, such as not sweeping the floor or using knives, because people believe this helps keep good luck in the house. On the second day of the new year, people visit relatives and friends. Married daughters usually return to their parents homes to spend time with their families. During the Spring Festival, there are many exciting performances, such as dragon dances, lion dances, and drum shows. On the sixteenth day of the lunar new year, people often go for a walk outside to wish for good health and good luck in the coming year.

HOME IS WHERE THE HONEY IS

by Guy Baker

Honey, honey, everywhere.
Everywhere bumblebees look, there is honey.
Oh, what a joy it is to pollinate our plant friends!

Our Queen awaits our return.
We must protect her at all costs!
Other insects see us and wonder what we are up to.

We build our nests wherever it is a good spot.
Danger is all around us, but we are always on our guard!
Life goes on, and so do bumblebees.



MY LIFE IN UKRAINE

(and why I came to New Zealand)

by Jenya

I was born in Ukraine in the city called Dnipro, population of 1 million. I lived in a one bedroom apartment on the 9th floor with my mother and my sister.

My mum was a single parent with two kids. She worked as a kindergarten teacher only a few minutes away from our apartments.

During communism, all the kindergartens, school and universities were government owned.

If you worked in that type of job you used to get paid summer holiday leave in the government owned resort for two weeks every year. But during the whole summer school holidays, we had pioneers camps where all the working parents' children would go, while their parents were working. I never liked it. It was just like another relaxed school environment.

Life in general was ok. We all were dressed in the same clothes, our homes all looked the same inside and out. We were living from one wage to the other. Quite often paying off big purchases like a couch or a bed, as mum's wages were very little.

We never had a washing machine or a vacuum cleaner, everything we did by hand on the weekend.

Mum's parents were from big families, so we had lots of cousins. My sister and I grew up in a loving environment. Our grandparents were not rich but they spent hours and hours with us, playing card, dominoes and board games or just simply take us out on walk or swims along Dnipro river, as they lived right next to it.

When USSR broke apart, times got tough. My mum lost her job and all of a sudden we were living tough. Some days we had very little food at all.

We ate everything from cow's head to the udder, as these were the only cuts mum would afford.

Thanks to my mum's grandma, who worked as a chef at the restaurant, and was able to take, now and again, uneaten food from the functions. That's what kept us alive.

Later, mum managed to find a job walking long distances selling Herbalife and Avon, during -35°C, with holes in her shoes. That's why one day she decided to go to the dating agency and try to find a man overseas, to seek a better life.





I managed to find rest home and kumara jobs in Dargaville.

Later, I met my partner who was a sheep and beef farmer and I got a job down the road from him on the dairy farm. I milked cows and reared the calves.

After 5 years living with my partner Ian, we decided to have kids. We have two beautiful daughters now age 16 and 19.

It was not easy leaving everything behind in Ukraine, my family, my friends and my life. But at that point, this had to be done for us to stay alive and what a journey it has been.

I would not have it any other way.

CHINESE TEA

by Kangli



Chinese tea is more than just a drink, It's a part of daily life and culture. People have been drinking tea for thousands of year, and it remains a popular beverage today.

There are many types of Chinese tea. Such as green tea, black tea, oolong tea, white tea, yellow tea, and dark tea (like pu-erh).

Each type tastes different. For example, green tea is fresh and light, oolong tea is often more rich, etc.

People enjoy tea not only for its taste but also its health benefits. Many Chinese people drink tea throughout the day, at home or at work.

Drinking tea is also a social activity, when guests visit our home, it's common to offer them a cup of tea.

There's a special way of preparing tea called the "Gongfu tea ceremony" which focuses on the skill of making a nice cup and enjoying the moment.

Do you have a favourite type of tea?

SAUDI ARABIA

by Regie

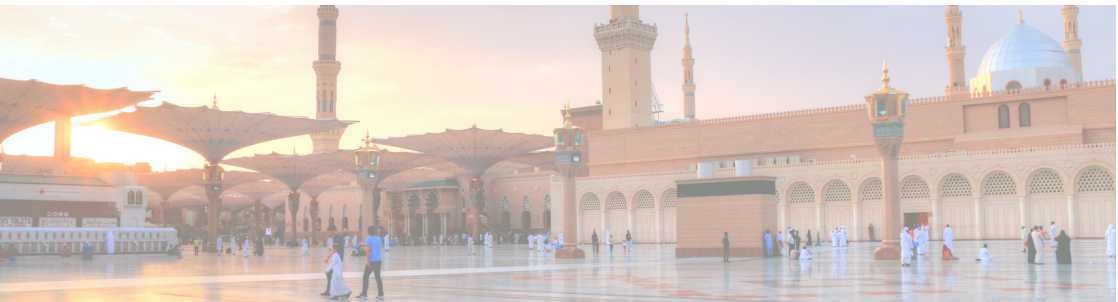
In 2007 to 2011 I worked in Saudi Arabia. I worked there four years and worked there on a dairy farm. Now I work in New Zealand.

After four months I go to the doctor to have a check-up and I saw my boss waving at me. I looked out the window and saw his son outside. He ran to come with me.

After my check-up I drove home and ate my lunch with my friends. Then I bought drinks for them.

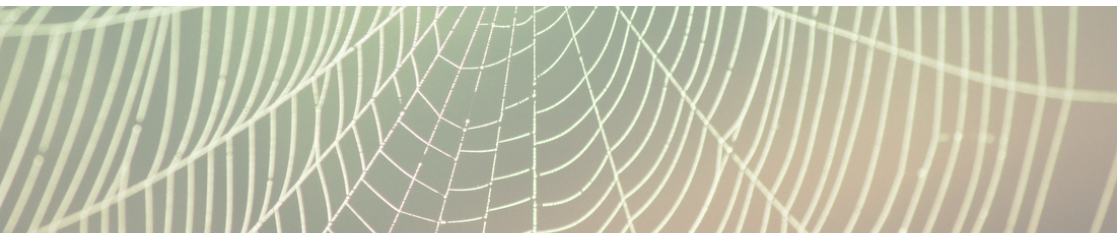
I looked to play basketball with my friends and I learned some tricks to play.

I talked about travelling abroad to earn some money so I can buy a new house.



OH, WHAT A TWISTED WEB WE WEAVE!

by Guy Baker



Spiders, spiders, we are on the march.

See us here, see us there.

Our webs await a delicious feast.

We have eyes on the back of our head.

No one can see us come: Cry out! For it is already too late.

Run there, run here, can you outrun my multilegged entity?

I can see you, but can you see me?

You come close, come closer still!

The dark is my friend.

I am in the grass, waiting for you to arrive.

The wind carries the scent of your being close to me.

I can wait all day. Can you?

CHRISTMAS

by Regie



Last Christmas my family and friends had a Christmas party in December.

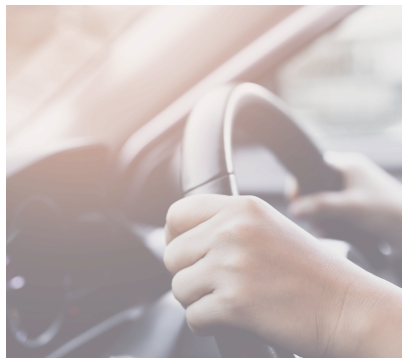
My friends and I had a barbeque. The smell through the air as we grilled, laughter as we drank our festive drinks, and dance was alive with everyone moving to the music.

The last of the evening was the raffle draw. As the tension built, my name was announced as the winner of the first prize. I won a ceiling fan that night.

It was a night filled with joy, the celebration, and unforgettable memories.

HOW I LEARNT TO DRIVE AND GET MY LICENSE

by Greg S



It started when I was about 8 years old, my dad would get me to drive the tractor. I would stand on the gear box and steer around the paddock, while he fed out the hay. He said stay away from the fence! You hit it, you fix it. So I stayed well a way from it. I enjoyed driving the tractor. It was a fun thing to do.

As I got older he let me do more tractor work. When I about 14 I would practise backing the car up and down the drive way.

It was an old Holden station wagon, one day my mum saw me and came out and told me off. So that was the end of that lesson. I think she told dad so he started to teach me how to drive. I would go to work with him and he would let me drive his work ute. It was a Hg Holden column change.

As I got better he would let me drive more, I started to read the Road Code. It was hard for me to read because I am dyslexic. I tried to get some one to help me but they said I will work it out. So I just kept trying to read it. I worked it out eventually.

My uncle took me for some driving lessons in Mum and Dad's Mark 3 Cortina, It was a 4 speed on the floor.

One day while he was giving me a lesson I was coming up to some traffic lights, and I forgot to push the clutch in and stalled the car. He laughed at me. He said what did you forget to do, I said push the clutch in.

I got better at driving. The more I drove the better I got, so I made an appointment to sit my licence.

The first part was the written and oral. But when I went to sit my test all the seats were being used. So the officer taking the test said, I could do the oral part first and then the written. I got all 5 oral questions right, but the written part was harder to do as I had to read the question. I got 23 out of 25 right. Next I had to make an appointment for the practical part.



I was in Papakura, in dad's car, it was a Mark 3 Cortina. It was a sunny day and the traffic officer was cool. We drove through the streets of Papakura and the officer asked me to perform a hill start, a 3 point turn, and a parallel park.

I passed my test and got my licence which was good because I was working on a farm and had to drive tractors on the road. Now I could legally drive tractors on the road.

FIELD (VELD) FIRES

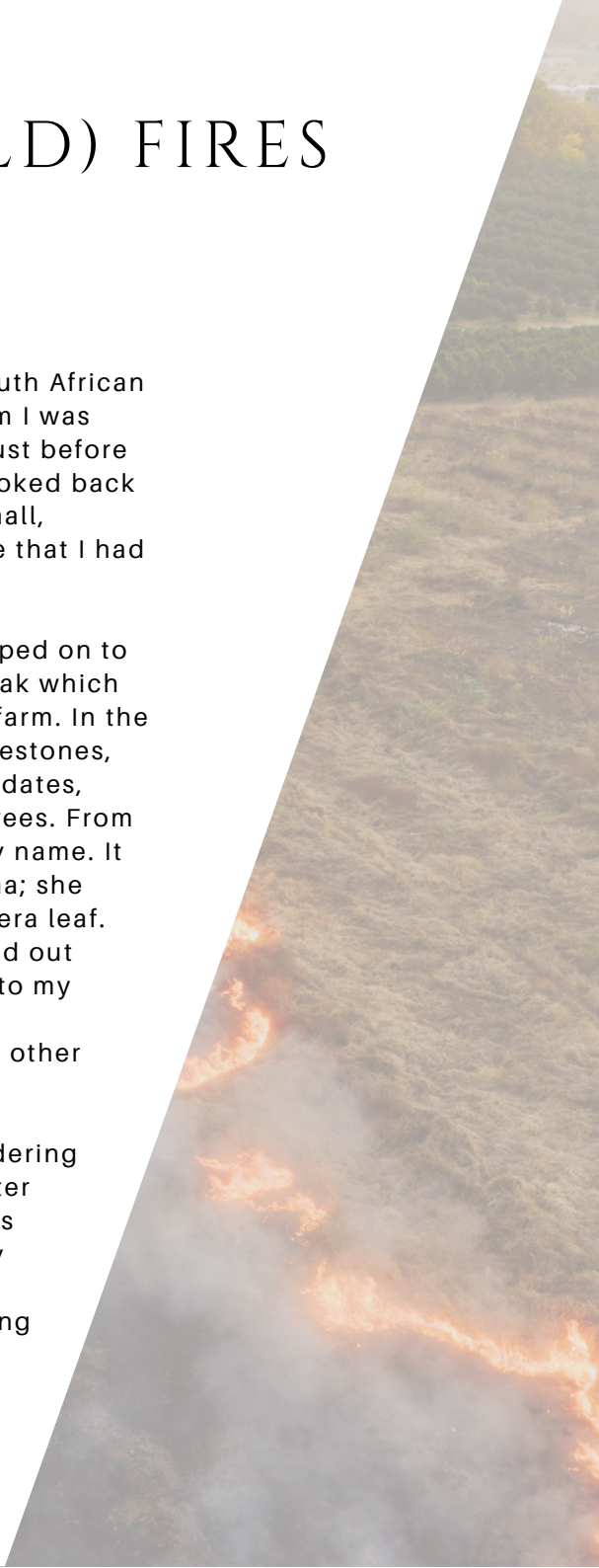
in South Africa

by Jimmy Junior Johnson

Around midday in the hot South African sun on my grandparents' farm I was heading to the lower gate. Just before reaching my destination, I looked back at the stone animal pen, a small, square, high-walled structure that I had always wanted to climb.

After opening the gate I stepped on to the burnt grass of the firebreak which marked the perimeter of the farm. In the centre were two granite gravestones, engraved with names but no dates, shadowed by buffalo thorn trees. From afar, I heard someone call my name. It was an invitation from Mamma; she wanted me to taste an aloe vera leaf. Since I trusted her, I squeezed out some juice and dripped it onto my tongue, only to face the disappointment of no flavour other than bitterness.

We spent the afternoon wandering the farm together. A while after walking through the dry grass and stumbling over the rocky terrain, we found ourselves shaded by a slim tree, standing beside a mound of boulders.



I continued onward as if there was a pot of gold on the other side. To my left my younger brother was scaling the massive boulders while my Mamma was watching us.

We went home for dinner, and a while after I found myself with nothing to do. My quiet evening was interrupted by the sound of my grandparents and Mamma on the phone. Then I heard distant shouting! I hastily grabbed my fraying old shoes, forced them on, and raced outside before anyone could stop me. Being careful not to step on my own laces, I reached a barbed fence almost twice my height at the corner of the garden. Within seconds of arriving, my eyes were lit by the distinct flicker of a fire. I had known it was a fire because of the oppressive smell of smoke, but the overwhelming scale lit a flame of fear in me. Roughly the length of two rugby fields was between me and this malevolent dragon.

On the wind's command, it lunged itself through the grass, as Smaug would charge at a frail hobbit.

Hungering for a better view, I desperately climbed the tightly strung fence, where I could peer through a head sized gap. Awestruck, I stood open-mouthed, staring at this panorama of fire in the darkness. The flickering flames filled my empty mind.

Before the birds woke the next morning, we were already putting on our shoes to take the livestock to graze in the fields.



On my way to the bottom gate, I was tailed by a friendly canine escort, named Trouble. After taking my assigned sheep to a fenced-off area, I found myself on the other side of the barbed fence I climbed the night before. Suddenly, I wanted to see the destruction done by the dragon. Hastily, I made my way to my family near the gate.

Crossing the bisecting road with my grandmother and Mamma, we followed the road west to Koppie Alleen, an abnormal rock extrusion which appears out of place from the rest of the terrain. We were led by two, brave and furious chihuahuas, and close by our side were old Trouble and young Sky. Soon we arrived at the site of the fire. We were met with charred grassland, dead trees and an acrid smell. After a short ravine exploration, we reached a flat, open area. Here the inflamed dragon had rampaged with fury, leaving everything and anything in ruin. Only a few scattered tree skeletons remained. From where I stood, I could do a thorough recon by simply swivelling my head.

On our trip back, everyone seemed tired, and to be honest, I felt the same. The sun slowly baked my shoulders while my legs became tender. On top of this, there was nothing new to see, just rocks, burnt grass, more rocks and a blue sky. Moments before I gave up, I saw something familiar, it was the trees which surrounded the gravestones and just behind it was the animal pen; this gave me the hope I needed to push forward.

A close-up, top-down view of a hand holding a white ceramic cup filled with a light brown coffee. The background is softly blurred, showing another cup and a spoon.

HAND CRAFTED COFFEE

by May (Mei) Wang

Last year, my friend asked me “would you want to join a coffee class online?” The speaker was a Taiwanese who is living in Australia. The courses were only two months. At that time, I was not a coffee person. However, I was happy to enrol in the class because I like to learn new things and practice those in my daily life.

Over this time, when I reflected on the class. I appreciated what had been done by the teacher.

He taught us many professional ways to make coffee and how to develop our senses and sensations without judgment on the quality of the coffee.

The most important part of the course was the sensation of taste. The teacher spent lots of time to explain how important it was. I had never recognized our sense of taste.

The teacher showed us how to improve our sensory taste skills.

Our sense of taste is playing an important role to help us distinguish each type of ingredient, its natural feature, such as bitter, sweet, and spicy.

Looking back myself, I have eaten food in a rush not really enjoying meals.

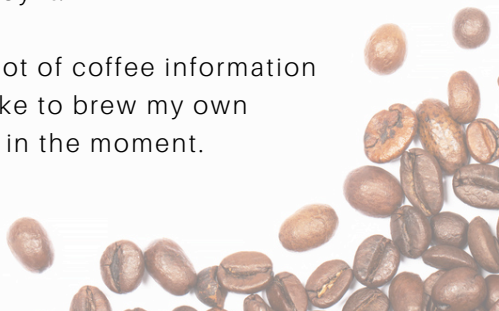
During the course, I learned how to recognize different food tastes and experiences different sense feelings, rather than just finish the meal. Especially the teacher wanted us to notice how we felt about sweet food and how much percentage of sweet we have experienced.

It is worth mentioning how to grow coffee beans, and how to pick them up. The original coffee beans are produced from Ethiopia. Over time, countries like Brazil, Colombia, Indonesia, and Vietnam are most the famous places to grow and produce it. I have learnt different types of coffee beans have a specific character. Depending on how it is roasted, like light, middle or dark roasted, might affect the taste. In addition, some of these have a strong fruity smell and flower flavour or citric acid taste. The different conditions of the environment surrounding the coffee trees, also affects the taste.

Coffee is planted near high mountain. The picker faces a challenge with uneven hill was steep roadways. If machinery couldn't reach a place, where the coffee beans are, they are picked by hand. General speaking, I appreciate every procedure and process to make coffee. The classic saying, every coffee bean fully lived.

I bought a coffee maker set, including gooseneck kettle, filter, scale, and hand grinding machine. Each type of coffee bean has its own recipe, it is not the same way to brew them all. What's more, coffee beans like humans have their personality, not good or bad, no judgment just taste and enjoy it.

In conclusion, I have been learning a lot of coffee information and improved coffee making skills. I like to brew my own coffee to share with friends and enjoy in the moment.



MY NAME IS ROBERT

by Robert Manuel



One thing people should know about me is that I am a loving and caring person. I am on time most times. A hard worker. I like to be open minded, friendly, and honest with people.

Something I enjoy doing is reading the Bible. I like to sing songs. I am very active in the Church. I like to meet new people. They help me to achieve my goals, and help me run my business and do things in the Church.

I enjoy getting help from people in the Church who have more experience.

I remember when I was growing up that I could only learn hands-on and visualising things. That's the only way I could pick up on things. I didn't have much help when it came to reading. When I started College I was in the special needs class.

I didn't know how to write a sentence, and learning English words was hard for me. Even 5 letter words were difficult for me. I feel that if I got help when I was young, I would be better now.

Something I find difficult is reading big words from newspapers and magazines.

Sometimes reading people's names is hard for me. Reading signs on the road like street names I don't know is difficult. Learning is still hard for me as I get older. Sometimes I have to stop and go back a sentence and often go backwards and forwards to figure out words.

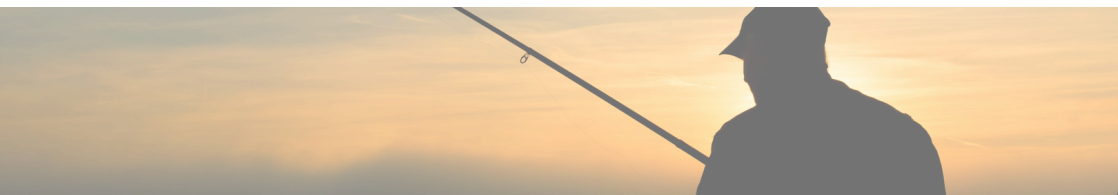
I started learning to read and write when I was in my 30s because I needed to learn how to read to be able to get through life and keep up with everyone else. Before RYALT I was with Literacy Aotearoa. It helped me with things like going for my car licence, learning the road code, and answering the questions.

I started with RYALT around 2-3 years ago. I noticed I was improving when I was able to get my car licence.



I also completed a scuba diving course and did really well. At church I notice little scriptures are easier. I make sure I prepare a few days before the service and read a short verse at the pulpit. Preparing helps me in that way.

Learning in RYALT has been exciting for me. It has helped me keep learning new words and making time to read anything I find in books or on my phone.



Being able to work online is better because one-on-one is easier than in a group. Reading stories during my lessons in RYALT has shown me I love reading. I enjoy stories about things I do in life, like fishing, hunting, and driving a truck.

I often have to pick myself up and keep pushing myself daily to not give up. I worry what people think of me, and it's easy to have negative thoughts in my head. I block it out, look above them, and keep talking.

What has helped me keep going has been friends around me, family, and people in my church who encourage me and have seen me grow and develop.

One person that stands out is my wife because she's always with me, and we help one another out when it comes to reading things out of the Bible. I feel proud when I accomplish something. I feel pleased with myself. I can go back over and refresh myself with what I have done.

I would tell other learners to keep pushing yourself and never give up. There will be hard times where you feel like it's not worth it, but we have to keep persevering. It has made my life easier to be able to read a little better. I feel like I'm getting better and better with more practice. More practice and going over things two or three times makes it clearer for me.

CAT

by Suzy Gibbs

Cat jumped
looked around
paws firmly
on the ground
Looking listening
to the sound
of birds
and beetles
all around
Amongst the garden
they are found.



HI, MY NAME IS GREG

by Greg S

Discovering I was dyslexic in my twenties was a turning point in my life. For years, I struggled with reading and writing, never quite understanding why these tasks felt so difficult.

When I finally received the diagnosis, everything clicked. It gave me clarity and made sense of my past experiences, allowing me to be kinder to myself and to seek the right support.

Now, in my sixties, I've come a long way. I'm finally able to enjoy reading books—especially adult literature—something I never thought I'd do comfortably.

Recently, I completed a car project I had worked on for years, a milestone that filled me with confidence and pride. Meeting these challenges has transformed how I see myself, and I feel a deep sense of achievement and self-acceptance for all I've overcome.

FARM

by Regie

Wake up 6:00am in the morning, change my clothes, then start my bike.

Going to the farm, then start to feed the cow heifers and old cows. Then draft three new mums and push to get them going to the cow shed and milk them.

Feed the calves. Set up some rail to the next paddocks. Clean the calf shed and feeder buckets, clean the bikes, grease the tractor and wagon, put some aluminium for dusting.





LEGO TECNIC

by Andrew

Hello and my name is Andrew.

I do enjoy building Technic and my biggest set that I have built is the Technic Volvo dump truck.

Another big Technic set that I have got is the Bulldozer and they have both been rebuilt because parts had been put in the wrong way.

I have other Technic sets like a car transporter and a tow truck and motorbikes and a plane and it has a loader. And all up I do have 47.



THANK YOU SPEECH

by J

Kia ora Whānau

I want to thank everyone for the support I have received in the last several years. Special thanks to Jason because we have worked together a long time and he has offered me a lot of support, also Brian who has shared his knowledge with me.

There have been a lot of staff changes since I began. Only Jason, Brian, Martin, Ian & I are left from the beginning and now we have a new building and a large workshop.

There are a few other people I want to mention, John and Jim. Jim helped me with my issues like a father. Neil gave me an All Blacks t-shirt from the social club when I got my residency. Shaun and Debra both helped me as well. Steve took me to the strippers for the first time too!

I appreciate my employer, if they hadn't employed me I would not be living in NZ with my family.

Love you all, thank you

...and thanks for the lunch today.



LEARNING TO READ

by Bruce Woodmass

This is my story. My name is Bruce and I am sixty-six years old. I live in Morrinsville. I have got two sons and a daughter who are doing really well. Now that I am retired there is no excuse.

I have kept a secret all my life from others. I left school without learning how to read or write. So finally I have made my mind up to learn. So I got in touch with RYALT and they arranged a coach for me. Hannah got in touch with me over the phone. She lives in Gore and I live in Morrinsville. So we had a conversation about it.

We came up with a plan, now we are eight weeks in. Now I am finding out it is so hard - I'm frustrated even writing this. I have got a dictionary which helps me a bit. But it is hard if you cannot sound the words out very well.

That is me at the moment. The hardest thing for me is the unknown. I want it so much. However it's early days.

Hannah is pushing me along. She is a rock of strength helping me. I don't want to let her down. My goal is to learn, future unknown.





MY HOME TOWN

by Ning Chen

My home town is Henan, a province in the middle of China. It is one of the oldest places in China and is called the birthplace of Chinese civilization.

Many ancient capitals, like Luoyang and Kaifeng, the famous Shaolin Temple, and the Longmen Grottoes, all of which reflect the depth of Chinese culture.

The Yellow River is often called the "Mother River of China."

Henan also has delicious food. People love noodles, steamed buns, and a special noodle soup called Hui Mian.

The people in Henan are friendly, and I proud to come from such a place with both history and good food.



READING LESSONS

by Glenn Candy

I'm Glenn. I have reading lessons twice a week. I started it in February 2026. I was scared at first, but after 4 weeks I started to enjoy it, and I want others to do the same. You will see improvement in writing and spelling and understand words.

I'm pleased how far I have come in a short time. If I can put it out there for others to ask for help you will love it. Homework is a good choice to get better. I love to do spelling. I put my spelling in the areas I'm in the most, on a white board and paper to look at until I get it.

I still struggle with full stops and commas. My reading teacher is very good and he understands They are very good and helpful. The teacher works around my work. Thank you. I'm next going to try to get my truck licence H1.

Any questions ring the reading trust.

LET US HELP YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW

The Rural Youth and Adult Literacy Trust is a non-profit organisation that assists adults and teenagers living in rural areas (or who are otherwise isolated) with literacy and numeracy.

Tuition is free and our tutors can coach you over the phone, online, or sometimes in person.

There is nowhere in New Zealand that is too far away for us to help you.

Get in touch with us for a friendly and confidential chat.



Rural Youth &
Adult Literacy Trust

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August 2026

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