



English Express

Spring 2021

Mary Seyler, Board Member and ESL Class Instructor



Our featured Literacy Volunteers' Board member is Mary Seyer. Mary is active in our fundraising events and is Board liaison to the North Port Area Chamber of Commerce. She was born in Hoboken, New Jersey, and was raised in North Bergen. Her mother, also named Mary, came to the United States from the German-speaking part of Switzerland. Mary's mother arrived in New York shortly after the Titanic sank and recalled that it was a quiet, somber journey. People were afraid. Because she arrived in the USA as a child, she had no accent as an adult. She learned English playing with the local children.

Mary's dad, Clifford, was American-born Irish/Dutch from New York City. He was a conductor on the New York State railroad system.

Growing up in North Bergen, a New York suburb, Mary did not encounter many non-English speaking people. For those of us raised in the suburbs or rural America, we had few opportunities to hear foreign language or to witness the difficulties new-

comers have overcoming language misunderstandings. That is why we hear the insensitive phrase "she should speak English" so often. The best response to that is, "you should join Literacy Volunteers and teach English." So many in this country have no idea what a hurdle it is to learn a new language as an adult.

Mary went to a Catholic school and was a good student. Her favorite subject was math. When she finished college, she went on to teach math in a high school. In 1968, Mary went to Europe for the first time to visit distant relatives of her mother. She also traveled to Italy and got a taste of being in a county whose language you don't understand.

After retiring from teaching, Mary and her husband Ed, a retired financial advisor, moved to Florida to be near the children and grandchildren. While this had been a blessing for both of them, Mary was looking for some new friends and challenges. She found both at the North Port library where she met Karen, Literacy Coordinator. Karen immediately saw the great possibilities for Mary. She was a teacher who was looking for a challenge.

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President's Corner

To all the dedicated tutors who stayed with us this last year, you deserve a huge "Thank You." You kept Literacy Volunteers relevant and important. You were open to new ideas and new technology and met the challenges of virtual teaching. You were able to keep your students engaged and learning. It has been a monumental task.

I also want to thank our donors and supporters who continued their help when our fundraising came to a halt. Thank you for keeping us going.

To those students who stayed with their tutors and made progress during this past year, you make us proud.

The Board of Directors worked hard to make sure that Literacy Volunteers had every possible means to aid tutors and students. New ways to raise funds for supplies and expenses was always a priority. They are a wonderful team dedicated to Literacy Volunteers. I thank you for your support.

The staff of Literacy Volunteers has been outstanding. Peter, Karen, and Kim kept everything running perfectly. The introduction of Tutor Chats was a big help in keeping tutors connected. The staff worked together to come up with new ideas to help both the students and tutors.

All in all, it has been a rewarding year. I feel honored to have been the president of such an important organization serving our communities. Blessings to all.



Penny Corell, President

Volunteers, students, and donors are invited join us on Zoom.

- What: Volunteer Appreciation Day Virtual Coffee/Tea Break**
When: Wednesday, May 19, 2021
What time: 2:00 - 3:00 PM
Where: On the Zoom online chat application using your laptop computer, iPad or other tablet, or your smart cellphone

Please sign up before Monday, May 10, by emailing one of the Literacy Volunteers staff:
Peter at venice.literacy@gmail.com
Karen at north.port.literacy@gmail.com

The staff has videos of tutors and students that we'll be watching, and you'll meet the Board officers for July 2021 through June 2022. There will be a drawing for prizes.

Literacy Changes Lives

Our motto is “Literacy Changes Lives.” We have included examples of that motto shared by both tutors and students.

Carolyn Conte Remembers

I had the pleasure of tutoring two seminarians from Poland. Prior to being ordained they must be fluent in English. Before entering the seminary, Tomasz was a nurse in Warsaw and Krakow. Wojciech taught music and religion in Brusy, Poland.

While both were serious about learning English, Wojciech was extremely determined. He and I spent six days a week, four-hour sessions, for a year.

Tomasz and Wojciech were assigned elsewhere after one year. Tomasz went to a parish in Mississippi, and Wojciech went to Ukraine.

May 2020, Wojciech was ordained. Due to COVID, I could not travel to Poland so he sent me photos of his ordination, his family, and of him serving his first Mass as a priest. I often receive cards, letters, and photos consisting of special blessings and words of appreciation for my being his teacher.

I truly believe we can change the world one person at a time, which is why I became a literacy volunteer. Nothing is more memorable than the look in the eyes of my students when they succeed. You know for as long as they live, they will remember you.



Wojciech with “Miss Carolyn”



Tomasz

Upcoming Virtual Tutor Training

June 2 - 23, 2021

Our virtual tutor training consists of watching four 20-minute videos and reading assigned chapters in the *LitStart: Strategies for Adult Literacy and ESL Tutors* manual that will be provided to volunteers. After volunteers watch each video and read LitStart, they will meet with tutor trainer, Denise Gastineau, on Zoom to discuss the material and ask questions. The Zoom discussions are scheduled for 3:00 - 4:00 PM on June 2, June 9, June 16, and June 23.

Contact Peter or Karen to register. Volunteers will also watch an Orientation on Literacy Volunteers before the tutor training.

Joe Pokorney's Method

When I initially volunteered to tutor, I was a bit apprehensive as I have never taught ESL but did have some experience teaching adults to use computers. When I saw a list of a few potential students, I was thrilled to see a woman at an intermediate level who was from Prague. Since my father's family three generations back emigrated from near Prague to southwestern Wisconsin, and I had visited Prague, this seemed like a great potential match.



So in 2015, I met with Barbara and learned that she, her teenage daughter, and husband were living in Venice on an extended visitor visa. While her English was okay, she was extremely intimidated by her family's English capabilities. Her daughter is extremely smart and speaks excellent English. Barb's husband speaks English with very little accent, but Czech was the language in their home. Barb was not learning English at home.

She enrolled in an English class in Sarasota, but found that since the class tended to work at the level of the slowest or lowest level individual, it did not meet her needs.

Barb came to Literacy Volunteers and was screened for language level. A few weeks later, we met for the first time. What I found was a lovely young woman with basic English skills trapped in a sort of communications limbo. Barb was so intimidated about her English skills that she would barely make a phone call for fear of being embarrassed.

So, we began our weekly routine of meeting to work on her English. As we began to work together, we focused on pronunciation and meanings of a variety of words and phrases. Using various online materials, we progressed through most of the intermediate English skills. I discovered that Barb loved politics and was also working as a spinning instructor at the YMCA. As she related her spinning class experiences, I would correct her English storytelling skills. Each week Barb reads an article from the New York Times. As I listen, I correct pronunciation and ask questions to determine comprehension. This works very well for Barb.

REMINDER! *Special Tutor Chat on Wed. May 5 at 1:00 PM on Zoom*

Presenter: Daniella Rundek, Literacy Specialist, Sarasota County Libraries

Daniella will be talking about literacy materials that the library has for beginning adult (and ESL) readers, grab-and-go literacy bags, internet "hotspots" that can be borrowed from the library (two weeks at a time), and Brainfuse, a new online tutoring platform. It will be an informative Tutor Chat! Email Karen, north.port.literacy@gmail.com, or Peter, venice.literacy@gmail.com, to register.

Barbara's Story

It was a very long journey for my husband Paul to fulfill his dream about becoming a part of the great American Nation. To be exact, this journey has lasted over 23 years and hasn't finished yet.

Five years ago, shortly after obtaining our Green Cards, we moved from Prague, the Czech Republic, to Venice, FL. We fell in love with this area years ago when we spent our vacation here. Soon, we agreed on buying a small house in South Venice. Back then our plan was to keep coming to Venice as often as we could and to enjoy our holidays here. This little house has become our home. It wasn't an easy step, as you can imagine, leaving our families behind, but we did it.

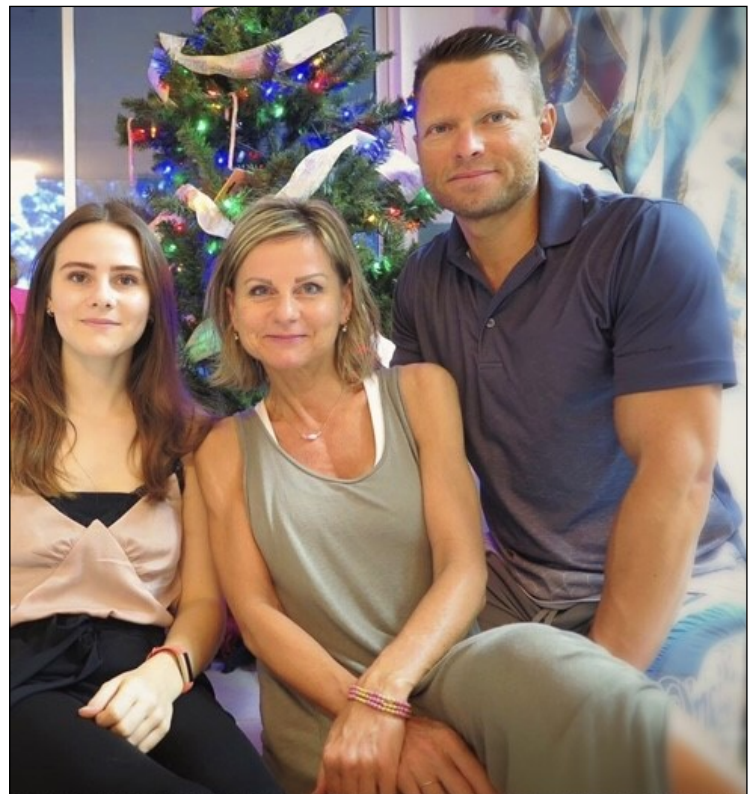
When you move to the USA legally, you have to pay a lot of money. You have to find a job ASAP and start basically from zero. It was necessary for my husband to travel abroad when he got hired as a security officer by one of the companies operating in Iraq. As a military veteran, he later worked in Pakistan, Libya, and other countries.

Katerina, our daughter, started studying at Venice High School. She was then 16 years old. She spoke English and Spanish. I could only speak Czech, German and Russian. It was very stressful, and it was hard.

My husband was gone working, Kate was busy with school. And I felt lost, without friends, not knowing anybody. People were very friendly, but I was uncertain and shy. I got scared to get into any conversation – even a small talk, which you, Americans, like so much. I didn't know what to say, how to respond without feeling embarrassed. I started visiting the Suncoast College in Sarasota to study English with a group of other foreigners from all over the world. It was nice, but I soon realized I wanted more. Somebody told me about the Venice Library and the amazing volunteers who were working there as tutors.

My very first contact in person was Joe Giorgianni. We met for a little conversation and he asked me some grammar questions to get an idea what level my English classes could possibly start at. But most importantly, Joe gave me the most amazing feeling – his support, strength and a big encouragement. He gave me what I missed the most when being alone in the foreign country – that decision “I can do it”.

A few days later I got a phone call from Joe Pokorney who became my tutor. We scheduled our first class at the Library. We worked on reading, grammar, and conversation. Step by step, he and I became friends. As soon as I was able to express myself a bit better, I started sharing my life story with Joe. I shared my concerns, my feelings, my fears. I shared my little victories, my husband's successes at work, and my daughter's successes at school.



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Remote Tutoring by Remote Tutors



One of our newest tutors, who resides in New Hampshire, learned about our organization and the need for more tutors willing to tutor remotely. Barbara agreed to be one of our first out-of-state remote tutors. Some tutors who have volunteered for years tutoring in the traditional manner were able to switch to remote tutoring using a number of different apps. We are so thankful to all of them. Many tutors are waiting until they can meet face-to-face with their student before restarting tutoring sessions. Thus, we needed more volunteers, and to find them we needed to “think outside the box.” Why not invite people to join us who don’t live in Sarasota County?

At the same time, the staff and Denise Gastineau, one of our tutor trainers, were in the process of producing tutor training videos for new volunteers who were anxious to get started.

Barbara approached the challenge with great energy and enthusiasm. She enjoyed the online tutor training consisting of online videos and question and answer sessions on Zoom. She now knows all the staff. Recently, Barbara conducted her introductory session with an older Spanish-speaking woman in North Port. Barbara has grasped the Zoom distance learning concept and has no problem using it. She has a tutor buddy to answer questions and feels comfortable asking our staff members for help. In turn, we have promised Barbara all the support and training materials she needs.

NEW! *Student Chats on Zoom*

Literacy Volunteers is now offering a free conversation class for all levels of adult learners. The Student Chat group meets twice a week on Mondays at 12:00 Noon and again on Thursday evenings at 6:00 PM on Zoom. The lesson is the same for both classes, which gives students two chances each week to practice their English listening and speaking skills.

A topic is selected each week and a video or article is assigned. Learners receive an email with a link to the video or website. Students are learning how to activate a “link” and how to open an email attachment in addition to the assigned class material.

Sample topics from Student Chats are describing foods we like and foods we dislike, different ways various foods are prepared, and how to order in an American restaurant. Learners and tutors shared some of their favorite recipes, and we discussed ingredients and how to make these wonderful dishes!

If tutors or students are interested in joining the Student Chat, please email to request the Zoom link. We’re in need of tutor volunteers to assist, and we welcome new students any time!

venice.literacy@gmail.com

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start.now.north.port@gmail.com

Register for Tutor Chat scheduled for May 26 at 1 PM on Zoom

Introduction to Zoom Scheduling and Screen Sharing

To tutor a student via Zoom or to converse with ESL students during Student Chats, you'll need to learn the skills that will be demonstrated during this one hour meeting.

Email Peter or Karen to register.
venice.literacy@gmail.com
north.port.literacy@gmail.com



Continued from Page 1 - Mary's Story

Karen explained Literacy Volunteers' program and the needs of the students. The local students are mostly Ukrainian, Russian, Polish and Latin American. Mary took the tutor training course. Soon after, she was leading a class at the North Port library with an international mix.

Mary has been teaching the weekly class for 8 years. The classes were held at the North Port library. There were usually 5-15 students each week. When COVID closed the libraries, Mary needed to learn to host Zoom classes. Luckily, Kim Pike, Start Now Project Manager, was able to help her accomplish that. Mary's Zoom class is growing as former students learn to connect online and new students join. COVID-19 has radically changed so many lives. Now, children are learning from home and using the adults' computers and phones for remote learning. Some of our adult students have lost jobs or had to change work hours, others found jobs and are too busy to join the classes.

Continued from Page 5 - Barbara's Story

Joe, my tutor, saw me crying when feeling homesick, he made me laugh at his stories, he always knew how to encourage me when I needed it. He laughed at me when I got perplexed by some crazy English grammar rules. Joe has been here for me from the very beginning. I don't know about the other tutors, but I can assure you that if they are all like "my" Joe, this project has saved many people who might feel lost and lonely because of poor language skills. When they can find a person who really cares and wants to help them to move forward, it is just a blessing.

With time, my English got better, and I can understand, and I can speak. But there is still so much to improve. The more I can understand the English language, the more questions I have for Joe, about the culture, politics, and history. I have so much to learn from his wisdom. He is willing to answer all my questions. He asks me questions as well. We don't always need to agree on everything, but we can share our points of views. I appreciate it very much.

Your support, Joe, is of great value. I'm so grateful for you. You gave me a gift and I will carry it with me forever.

**Literacy Volunteers
of South Sarasota County**
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Literacy Changes Lives



FIRST CLASS

Literacy Volunteers of South Sarasota County

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