

# IN MY WORLD

VOICES FROM OAKLAND YOUTH



LIGHTHOUSE COMMUNITY CHARTER SCHOOL

OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

November 2009

A service-learning project with the National Council of La Raza (NCLR)  
and What Kids Can Do, Inc. (WKCD)

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# Jorge Prieto

## Who I Am

I am from my Mom Lola and her warm hugs  
and my dad Jorge and his big smiles

from Mama Ramona and her cool hands  
and Papa Pedro's warm hand shakes

I am from my little brother and his big eyes.  
I am from the first time we went to Mexico

from the full week in Blythe in 2009.  
I am from the Christmas of 2008.

I am from cherry red roses, nectarines, and tomatoes,  
in my backyard, from the messy bed and dark red room.

I am from my Vida Verde wood chip name tag  
and black and white size 8.5 vans.

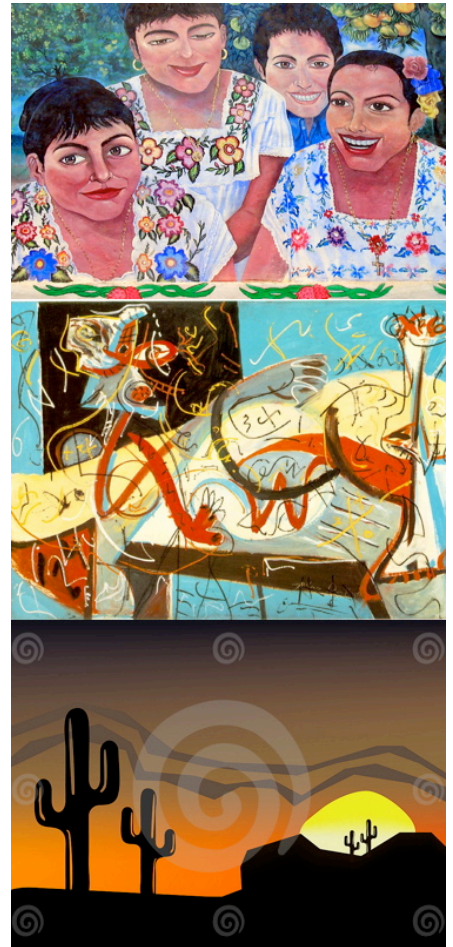
I am from Mallard Ducks, from the San Lorenzo duck pond  
and from Peanut barking every night.

I am from quiet nights with sprinklers on low.  
I am from my Mom's delicious cinnamon apple cake,

from my Dad's succulent *carne asada* tacos.  
I am from tamales de *queso y rajas*, and

*Munuelos con azucar y pilonsillo*.  
I am from building and unbuilding electronics,

from playing soccer on chilly afternoons  
I am from playing video games every weekend.



I am from like father, like son from, "If you work hard, you can go anywhere."  
I am from *mas vale tarde que nunca*,

better late than never.  
I am from Nochistlan, Zacatecas

from the hot deserts near Blythe  
I am from the quiet streets of San Lorenzo, CA.

## My Oakland

Oakland would be beautiful if there weren't gangs. Because there are gangs, you can't wear red or blue or black. Not many people want to come here. If you go down the street, it's like that quote from *The House on Mango Street*:

"Those who don't know any better come into our neighborhood scared. They think we're dangerous. They think we will attack them with shiny knives.... But watch us drive into a neighborhood of another color and our knees go shakity-shake, and our car windows get rolled up tight, and our eyes look straight."

That's how Sandra Cisneros says it.

If you wanted to live in peace, you'd have to be rich and live in the mountains. It seems like nothing bad or dangerous happens up there.

On the other hand, Oakland is beautiful for how it progresses and is becoming better in some ways. Downtown Oakland is becoming more beautiful. There's a new cathedral made out of glass. There's Lake Merritt and tall buildings. The Bay Bridge is being made new.

If I had a choice in Oakland, the police wouldn't kill people, and if they did they wouldn't lie about it. They would have better training. Oscar Grant is a black person, a father, who was killed by police when he was with his friends on the BART. That happens a lot with people of color and Mexicans. Police brutality happens very often and needs to stop because it's not right, and it's hurtful. I've never seen it with my own eyes, and I don't want to. I wish Oakland would become a better place.

At least Lighthouse Community Charter School is trying to make a change. If I had the power, I would make Oakland a better place by cleaning the streets and not making 'side-shows' legal. Sideshowes are people in cars who do donuts and burn rubber and crash. If I had the power I would try to make gangs not exist and give dropouts better options and give everyone a second chance.

I would like to see people in Oakland getting a better education. There wouldn't be homelessness but successful businesses, and there wouldn't be police brutality. Gangs would not affect Oakland any more, and we would try to stop drug sales. All Oakland should take on the Lighthouse School goal: "To give every child a bright future."



# Kelsy Nava-Lopez

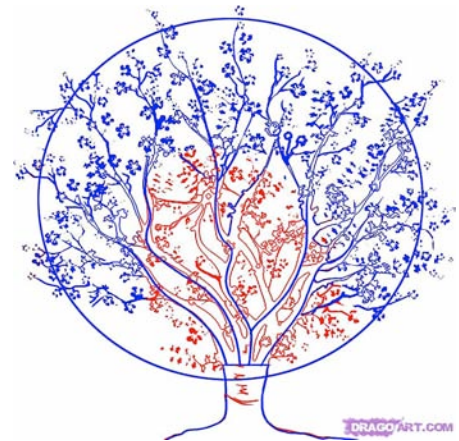
## Where I'm From

I am from Los Angeles  
From my room  
I am from sitting underneath a tree

I am from Mexico  
From my grandpa  
I am from my grandma

I am from my neighborhood being quiet  
From feeling safe  
I am from feeling peaceful

I am from 7-11  
From trees filled with birds  
I am from a park with a playground



I am from peach trees  
From a picnic table  
I am from a bird feeder where my cat waits for birds

I am from sunflowers  
from my Dad always fixing something  
I am from my dog play-fighting with my cat

I am from chicken *mole*  
From Mom's lasagna  
I am from carne *asada* tacos

I am from baby tigger  
From baby bugs bunny  
I am from a pink baby blanket

## Peer Pressure

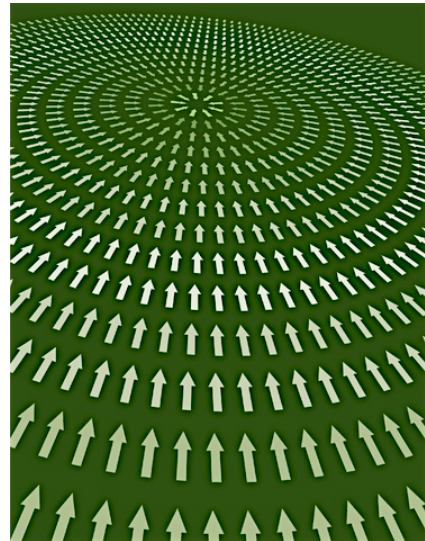
Peer pressure is when your choices are based on your schoolmates and friends' opinions.

It's like an eel that hides and when you go by it grabs you until you can't think. That's when you make decisions you don't like.

But too late, you're caught up in it's grip until you make the right decision.

When you stand up for yourself, it's losing its grip.

So don't pass by it, or else it will eat you up!



## I Wish

I wish parents wouldn't argue so much.  
I wish the wars would stop.  
I wish everyone would be friends.  
I wish everyone would stop polluting the environment.  
I wish everyone would respect black cats.

## My Home

My family has lived in Oakland for seven years. During those years, we lived in a bad neighborhood where you heard gunshots at night. It was scary. I also lived in an apartment, so I couldn't bring friends over. It was too small to play in.

But now, I live in San Leandro. My uncle lived there and was renting a house. We visited him, and when we saw a house, we decided to rent it. My neighborhood is really quiet. Nothing bad really happens. I live in a house, where there's a big backyard and a garden. In my garden we are growing melons, tomatoes, and sunflowers.

Now I have a dog that I have always wished for. She's a miniature Pinscher. Her name is Trixie. My cat has more room to play, too. When I am a grown up, I am going to be a veterinarian, because I love, love, love animals and I want to help them.

# Devonte Morris

## I Am

I am a boy who loves to have good grades,  
loves basketball, and loves art.  
I am a kid who loves help and gives help.

I am a kid who thinks of things  
differently from others.  
I am a kid.

I am from Peach Cobbler  
From creamy Banana Pudding  
I am from Creamy Ambrosia



I am from Home Town Buffet  
From Olive Garden  
I am from McDonalds

I am from Bushrod  
From North Oakland  
I am from my backyard

I am from Spiderman curtains  
to Spiderman covers  
I am from Spiderman 3 posters



I am from Sharon Morris and Ray Morris  
I am from Sixtieth Street.  
I am from Visions Christian Center.

I am from the Lighthouse Los Lobos.

## **My Thoughts on Oakland!!!**

Not good, not bad...maybe. Oakland has gangs that so-called “claim colors” and try to hurt you if you’re in the wrong part with those colors. You can’t wear red or blue or the colors you like without being hurt. You can’t even walk a block without seeing a dime bag on the ground, empty or not. You can’t walk the whole way down Telegraph without seeing a homeless person asking for money.

But Thank God that Oakland has good things...rarely. I wish that Oakland will be a better place for everyone and you can just walk outside, happy, and not worry about anything happening to you. I wish everyone would have the right to wear any color they want, if people of Oakland like it or not, without getting hurt. Oakland is Oakland. Not good, not bad...maybe.

The good things about Oakland are that people are still happy, even though their surroundings are not so positive. They try to make a way for other kids to be happy. The good thing about Oakland is that we at least have programs that attempt to help others to stop the madness we have here. Some of the programs are Boys and Girls Clubs, basketball, soccer and baseball teams, other sports teams, and programs at Recreation Centers, afterschool programs that help you out, a program where kids with divorced parents can go for help, a program for juvenile kids to have fun, and Youth Radio with a lot of inspiring songs and stories about kids’ lives and what they learn.

Well, we will have to face it until we all at least try to change. Oakland is Oakland. Not good, not bad...maybe.

## I Dream...

I wish I can be a basketball player,  
I wish to have a family of my own,  
I wish my parents could live forever,  
I wish Oakland would be a better place,  
I wish I could live forever.

I don't dream of dying.  
I don't dream of Oakland being a better place yet.  
I don't dream of gang violence.  
I don't dream of drugs.  
And, I don't dream of failing.

In my dreams, I dream of being an artist.  
I like to draw cartoon characters.  
I use pencils, and I'm a Sharpie fan.  
I wish to have a beautiful family,  
with a wife, a boy and a girl, and a dog.  
I want a nice house, a mansion,  
a Lamborghini.  
I would attempt to always be me  
and not someone else.  
That's what I dream!





# Ebony Jones

## Where I'm From

I am from Mac and Cheese and Fried Chicken  
I am from pictures of Mom and Dad and souvenirs,  
from awards of achievement.

I am from refrigerator magnets.  
I am from toys, grass, and concrete,  
from gates to security codes.

I am from benches and apartments.  
I am from concrete and homes,  
from stairs and basketball.

I am from BBQ grills to laughing.  
I am from mom, dad, sister, and cousin,  
from family reunions in Texas.

I am from roller derbies with family.  
I am from the girl who cried wolf.  
From waking up at 5:30 a.m. for school.

I am the girl who gets in trouble by her parents.  
I am from mac and cheese and fried chicken,  
from rice and gravy.

I am from homemade potato salad.  
I am from Applebees to Great America,  
from Ryans to China King.

I am from Hometown Buffet.  
I am from celebrating birthdays to holidays,  
from parties to baby showers.

I am from Sunday brunch.



## Oakland

Oakland would be brighter if there weren't so many people sleeping in the dark.

Oakland would be beautiful if it weren't a dumpster.

Oakland would be good  
if we tried to open our eyes for once.

Oakland would be kind if everyone wasn't so blind toward people in disguise.

Oakland would be equal if we would look deeper in between the lines.

Oakland would be full  
if we weren't so hungry.

Oakland would be a better community  
if we weren't being so shhhh'ed.

Oakland would be wonderful  
if we weren't so gullible.

Oakland would be PERFECT  
if there weren't so many bodies playing hide-and-seek.

Oakland would be humble  
if there weren't so many wannabe's.

Oakland is Oakland,  
whether you want to hear it or not.

It will never be perfect.



## I Am

I am a girl who is kind and who knows how to stand up for herself. I'm nice, smart, and I know how to interact with people. I'm not shy and I love to have fun. I know how to talk to anyone, even if I don't know them, and even if I don't like a person, I'll still treat them nicely. My family likes to go out to restaurants and have a good time. We like to joke around and laugh.

I love going to amusement parks because I get to ride roller coasters. I like where I live, but we are supposed to be moving because our neighbors are always arguing. People come over for parties and go in front of the gate and try to sell weed. One time we were coming home and someone tried to commit suicide so the streets were blocked off, and another time a house caught fire, and another time my friend got attacked by a German Shepherd. There are car accidents and people like to speed around at nighttime.

I will be moving to apartments in Hayward. I heard that it's quiet there, and nothing bad happens. I would like to have a washing machine and dryer in the apartment so we don't have to go downstairs, and bigger rooms. I'd love to have a backyard, with grass and a garden.

When I grow up, I want to be a firefighter. I'm not scared of fire and I like their big, red trucks. I'm inspired about it. I want to save people's lives and be a hero.



# Yamile Duran

## My Life

I am from jealousy, to sadness and loneliness  
From short skirts to shorts and tight jeans  
I am from skate boarding and ice skating  
I am from *posole*, *mole*, and Snicker's bars  
From watermelon, mango, and strawberries  
I am from strawberry cake, cupcakes, and cookies  
I am from crawling, walking, to running  
From baby letters to normal letters to graffiti letters  
I am from baby toys, to dirty diapers and *chupones*  
I am from Nikes, flat shoes, and Vans  
From Nikes of purple, white, and black  
I am from white, black, and purple loop earrings  
I am from skinny jeans, to normal jeans and color jeans  
From lip gloss to eye liner and eye shadow  
I am from scary movies to suspense movies  
I am from hip-hop, *Reggaeton*, and *duraguenze*  
From computers, Ipods, and radios  
I am from black, brown, and blue eyeliner  
From holding hands to a hug and a kiss  
I am from love, and scared  
that it might just be a dream!



## In My World

Like my mother, I like to dance and move every time I'm in a party. I can't help dancing. We both like to party. We are both party animals. Whenever we're at a party, my dad or my uncles take her out to dance. When I go to a party, my cousin or my cousin's cousins take me out to dance. Everyone is impressed with how I'm dancing, and they start clapping! Then I get shy and sit down.

Like my father, I like to get things, but I have to earn them first. Also, I need to work for them to get them.

I'm a girl who still dreams of the perfect guy, even though I've been through a lot with guys. I started dating guys when I was ten. I've felt before getting my heart broken and it's sad.

When I get outside my house, I'm happy because my house is really boring.  
My street is sometimes silent, and sometimes loud with music and kids playing outside.  
When I cross some streets, there's gang bangers and drug dealers.

Every time they are outside their house and a car goes by, drug dealers go up to the car.  
Gang bangers hang out in little groups wearing the same colors, and sometimes they carry guns.

Most of the time I go out with my sister, and if they bother us we just keep walking, ignore them, and turn the corner.

But then after that's over I get to a safe place where there are gang bangers but nowhere you can see them in the light. They are like vampires who only come out in the dark, drug dealers hiding from the police.

I like that I get invited to a lot of parties on my street, and my cousin lives close, so I go visit her when I get bored.

When I get to school I daydream what I would do the whole time, and how my day will be after I walk the streets.

## Pedro Villaiba

### I Am From

I am from Mexico,  
San Antonio, Ixtlahuacan,  
and also from a good cursive hand.

I am Mexican-raised,  
I have light brown skin,  
and love to go camping at night in the woods.

I am from video games,  
like Xbox 360 "Left 4 Dead Live 1 and 2,"  
and also from Mi Pueblo meat and fruit stores.

I am from a respected family,  
so I should be respectful  
to get respect back.



I am from soccer balls  
and soccer games and my favorite team,  
Club America.

I am from hot food  
like *posole* and chicken,  
meat, *tamales*, also waffles in the morning.

I am from Mexico  
but born and raised in California  
since little.

I am a fan of good clothes  
like my favorites are Gucci, Ecko,  
Rockwear, and much more.

I am from hair grease and mousse  
that make my hair smell good  
and look shiny.

I am from a busy street  
with a lot of people, a lot of homeless  
asking for money,

and I'm broke, but I have  
a heart, a good sense of humor.  
I don't fight physically,  
but I fight with words, not  
bad words, but words that I can say at school,  
words that can make a change.

## **My Neighborhood**

While I'm walking through my neighborhood,  
I see stuff a child shouldn't see.  
Sometimes I see older people doing drugs,  
injecting themselves.  
Sometimes they ask me,  
"Hey young one, you wanna hit this?"

I just start walking faster, because I don't.



I believe me and my fellow other kids shouldn't be seeing this kind of stuff.

If people want to do drugs, they should do it at home and not around people's houses—really, they shouldn't do it at all.

Also, one time a crazy guy who maybe did drugs just parked in front of our parking lot and started self-pleasuring himself. I didn't see it, but my little brothers did and now sometimes they just got that in their heads. They ask me, "What does that mean?" Even though I do know, I just say, "That guy was crazy, and he didn't know what he was doing." Sometimes I say he was gay, just so they will get that out of their minds. I don't like it when my baby brother asks me about that guy. Luckily, he went to jail, but he never showed up so I feel better.

To make me feel safe, people should use their minds wisely. I don't even act like that, so why should they?

I'm not saying I want for people to die, just people to be cool and mind their own business. Just be cool, that's all, no killing.

I just want them to keep the block safe and for people who come in to make them feel safe.



# Kellen Lee

## I Am Kellen

I am from a big family,  
from a noisy household.

I am from hard-working parents, Catherine  
and Robert, who are always there for me,

and my brothers and sisters,  
Marcus, Lee-Lee, Perry, and Cadan.

I am from Dewey Street,  
from a quiet and peaceful neighborhood.

I am from a kind, loving street  
during the day, but scary at night when it's dark.

I am from Lighthouse Community Charter School,  
from people who want to learn.

I am from teachers who care about their students,  
who do one-on-one training if you need help.

I am from the *sakura* trees,  
from beautiful pink leaves falling in the fall.

I am from the rain of flowers  
when the wind blows.



## Like My Parents

Like my father, I am bossy and get mad quickly. I am also sometimes calm and gentle like him. I am also somewhat strong like him. I am very proud of him.

Like my mother, I get sleepy after about eight or nine o'clock. Lots of people say I look like her. Also like my mother, I am very good at math.



Like my uncle, I live on the dangerous side of life and I am always ready for a new adventure.

Like my Oakland, I try to stay happy during hard times.

## My Oakland

Oakland has many different stories and parts to it. In West Oakland, the people sell many, many drugs. There are also lots of gangs in Oakland. The positive side is that there are many outdoor pools. On my walks to school, I see what look like friendly people walking the streets. And I see lots of landscapes with trees to make them beautiful. The Lake is magnificent. Even though some parts of Oakland are negative, the positive side of Oakland may one day overcome the dark side. Like a collage, the drug addicts, dealers, and gangs may become part of the healthy community of the city, and in the end, everyone may smile at each other.

## I Wish

I wish to become a Coast Guard worker, strong and tough.  
I wish to sail the seas to where people need help,  
in natural disasters.  
I wish to become a doctor, to help find a cure for diseases  
that hurt people's minds and souls.  
I wish to become the President to help fix the economy  
and solve people's problems fairly.  
I wish to become a peacemaker so the world will stay  
in a state of peace instead of war.  
I wish to become a runner, a track star, to be the world's  
fastest person, but for now, I am who I am,  
and that's Kellen: awesomeness.



Jackson Pollock (1912-56) - Oasitol, 1942-44

# ABOUT THIS PROJECT

In 2008, the Education component of the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) launched a multi-year service-learning initiative in three Affiliate charter middle schools: Lighthouse Community Charter School in Oakland, California; Camino Nuevo Charter Academy in Los Angeles, California; and East Austin College Prep Academy in Austin, Texas.

Five principles guide the initiative:

- Reflecting and honoring the values of Latino communities and the traditions in those communities through culturally competent service-learning programs
- Approaching the service element of service-learning through direct ties in the community
- Reinforcing high standards and rigorous learning
- Engaging youth in the service-learning planning process to emphasize their voice
- Addressing community issues through participation in the solution to challenging issues that many Latino students commonly face

Drawing upon the evidence-based success of middle school service-learning programs nationwide, these schools are developing their own programs and becoming models for the broader NCLR School Network. During the pilot phase, NCLR has helped teachers develop a culture of service-learning, cultivate a cadre of youth advocates, and create a space for the Latino voice. It is also strengthening students' skills in leadership and critical thinking and students' understanding of issues affecting their community.

In the fall of 2009, NCLR partnered with What Kids Can Do, Inc. (WKCD) to design and implement a Youth Voice Institute at each school. These workshops gave student leaders the opportunity to use language arts, literacy, and writing activities to imagine a better world. As they found their voices, ideas for projects and concepts of the service-learning process came to life.

The students participating in this program are leaders at their school. In turn, they will serve as youth trainers, teaching other students and instructors how to use language arts and literacy to imagine a healthy community.

We are grateful to the participating schools for the unending support they gave and continue to give their students. These students love their communities and have given voice to their image of the future.

*Sarah DeCamps, NCLR Service-Learning Project Coordinator*  
*Abe Louise Young, WKCD Writing Facilitator*  
*Barbara Cervone, WKCD President*



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## Lighthouse Community Charter School (7<sup>th</sup> grade)

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## DESIGN AND LAYOUT

Barbara Cervone, WKCD

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## **Lighthouse Community Charter School**

Since its opening in 2002, Lighthouse has developed an innovative program based on five priorities, for students in grades K-12: high expectations, a rigorous curriculum, serving the whole child, family involvement, and teachers as learners. The K- 8 program received a ten out of ten in its similar school ranking from the state of California, and the 9 -12 program received an eight out of ten. The latter is ranked among the top three public high schools in Oakland overall, regardless of income level or students served. All students in the first graduating class were accepted to four-year colleges or universities; 92 percent are first in the family to go to college.

### **Contact:**

**Lighthouse Community Charter School**  
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**Oakland, CA 94612**  
**Phone: 510.271.8801 | [www.lighthousecharter.org](http://www.lighthousecharter.org)**

## **National Council of La Raza (NCLR)**

The National Council of La Raza (NCLR)—the largest national Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States—works to improve opportunities for Hispanic Americans. Through its network of nearly 300 affiliated community-based organizations, NCLR reaches millions of Hispanics each year in 41 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. In the summer of 2009, with support from State Farm Insurance, NCLR launched a service-learning project for middle schools in its School Network.

### **Contact:**

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## **What Kids Can Do, Inc. (WKCD)**

What Kids Can Do, Inc. (WKCD) started in 2001 to make public the voices and views of adolescents. On its website, WKCD documents young people’s lives, learning, and partnerships with adults both in and outside school. WKCD also collaborates with students and educators around the world on books, photography projects, curricula, and research to expand current views on what constitutes challenging learning and achievement.

### **Contact:**

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