

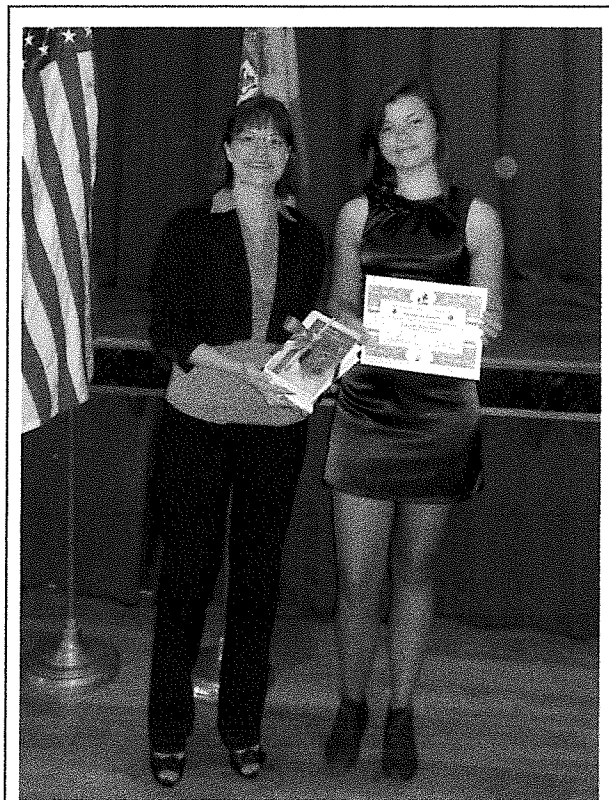
Tomales High language program propels student success

The Citizen this week caught up with Tomales High School alumna Laurel Ann Riley who in 2013 received an award for participating in a Spanish literary contest, *Escribo en Español*, organized by the California Department of Education and the Education Office of the Spanish Embassy in the U.S.

Over 500 Californians entered the contest that year. Laurel Ann participated in the non-Spanish speaker's high school category. She received a meritorious 7th Place, which included a \$4,000 scholarship to further her Spanish learning by spending a month in an immersion course in Spain. Laurel Ann's prize-winning essay is printed below in both Spanish and English.

Now in her second semester at UC Berkeley, Laurel Ann is majoring in Sociology and Environmental Policy. She credits the THS Spanish program, led by teacher Nuria Pont, for propelling her academically and personally. "The Spanish program not only equipped me with the Spanish speaking skills to be able to easily enter into a higher level college Spanish course, but Ms. Pont inspired me to get involved with investing myself into my Spanish-speaking development," she said.

"Ms. Pont made it possible for me to study abroad in a summer language immersion program in Spain," Laurel Ann said. "Through the contest, I was fortunate enough to be go



THS grad Laurel Ann Riley and school language teacher Nuria Pont at a 2013 award ceremony in San Francisco honoring finalists of the "Escribo en Español" literary contest.

abroad the following summer through a similar program. The Spanish program at THS was the program that stood out to me and pushed me to my limits."

THS also had two finalists in 2011, Eduardo Romo in the Spanish Speakers category and

Samonti Smith who subsequently attended U.C. Berkeley. "These students and others to come are an example of how you can achieve great things if you are willing to challenge yourself," said THS language teacher Nuria Serra.

Shifting demographics compelled new curriculum

*By Nuria Pont, Spanish teacher,
Tomaes High School*

Laurel Ann Riley entered the THS Spanish program as a Spanish 1 student and she became what I call the quintessential example of the motivated student who can achieve a proficient level with the perseverance of sticking to taking the full four-year itinerary we offer at THS.

It's a demanding program for English speakers because we have to prepare them to merge with the Spanish speakers program after level 3, and that's why this year we've started offering and developing a Spanish honors program, a more advanced itinerary for those motivated English speakers to follow, and that helps bump their GPA when they are Juniors after taking Spanish 3 Honors. At THS we are extremely committed to differentiate and meet the needs of our small, but very diverse population.

When I started working as the Spanish teacher at Tomaes High School the demographics in the district were significantly shifting and the Spanish speakers population was approaching 50 percent. It was clear we had to meet their learning language needs. Developing a four-year Spanish speakers program became the goal.

It's been a tremendous amount of work to develop meaningful curriculum for those four years of study of their heritage language, but a very rewarding experience since we have already collected the positive results.

We had the first group of THS Spanish speakers graduate after finishing the four-year program who are entering college with a superior knowledge of academic Spanish. Prior to that, they'd be mixed in Spanish classes with English speakers, and their learning needs were clearly not met.

– *Composición*

La voz de la lucha por la igualdad

Por Laurel Ann Riley

Una líder es alguien que no cede a sus temores, que no ignora sus dudas y que hace que su pasión se imponga ante la injusticia, ya que comprende que los cambios no ocurren sin que alguien los promueva, sin que se abran nuevos horizontes y sin descansar hasta que los objetivos de esa lucha se hayan conseguido. Una de estas líderes es Rigoberta Menchú, una mujer que ha tenido que enfrentarse a muchos obstáculos en su vida, pero que los ha superado y se ha servido de ellos para inspirar y ayudar a que otros también tengan la fuerza necesaria para llevar a cabo su lucha. Rigoberta pidió igualdad entre los que tienen mucho y los que tienen poco, entre los fuertes y los débiles y ha sido la voz que ha liderado la lucha de la gente indígena contra el racismo y la discriminación. Así que para mí, el poder pasar un día con ella sería un sueño hecho realidad. Durante ese día podría haber algo de intercambio de culturas,

aunque más que mostrarle aspectos de la mía, mi mayor deseo sería poder estar inmersa y así conocer la suya. Me encantaría viajar a Guatemala y sobretodo poder sentir la cultura maya que todavía está muy presente en los corazones de los guatemaltecos.

Como un día acostumbra a empezar, nuestro día empezaría con el desayuno; sería un desayuno chapín, como se denomina el desayuno típico guatemalteco y a través del paladar, ya estaría disfrutando de un aspecto de su cultura, el gastronómico. Lo prepararíamos juntas y mientras los frijoles se estarían cociendo, oiríamos el sonido de cómo se fríen los huevos y los plátanos. Entonces me ofrecería para ayudar a poner el queso y la fruta fresca en la mesa, además del aromático café recién hecho que tampoco podría faltar. Me encantaría experimentar ese desayuno colorido y que me lo enseñara alguien que conociera de primera mano la tradición culinaria.

Durante nuestra primera oportunidad de conversar, le pediría que me hablara de su vida, de sus orígenes, de cómo logró transformar su sufrimiento en lucha, ya que en su libro autobiográfico describe lo duro que fue crecer en una familia pobre e indígena en medio de las montañas de Guatemala. También explica cómo su padre ya fue un representante de los derechos humanos, que luchó para obtener un mejor trato para los indígenas oprimidos y por lo tanto me sentiría muy emocionada de poder escuchar todos esos relatos contados por la propia Rigoberta. Y, el tiempo, simplemente pasaría volando.

Después de la oportunidad de conversar bastante, le pediría que me llevara a la Iglesia del Apóstol Santo Tomás en Chichicastenango, en la zona de Quiché, su

www.westmarincitizen.com
tierra natal. Al dirigirme a su interior, podría sentir las piedras desiguales debajo de mis pies al subir la escalinata y me empezaría a sentir rodeada por la gente del lugar. La experiencia de estar allí sería muy valiosa ya que sé que la religión es un parte muy importante de sus vidas. Además, el poder contemplar la arquitectura única del interior me haría sentir una energía y concentración únicas. Imagino que podría empezar a sentir la pasión y el sentimiento de aquella gente. Un sentimiento del que no dudo surgió mucha de la fuerza que los indígenas tuvieron para luchar contra la opresión. Ese sería el tipo de fuerza que me gustaría poder trasladar a mi propia vida, ya que precisamente, Rigoberta es uno de mis personajes favoritos porque mostró que las soluciones no se encuentran respondiendo con violencia ante el maltrato, ni siendo cobarde y agachando la cabeza para asimilarse al más fuerte. Sino que radican en el respeto entre culturas y el ánimo de entendimiento.

Para terminar de pasar el resto del día, le pediría que visitáramos el lugar donde creció. Así que iríamos y exploraríamos juntas su aldea de nacimiento, Laj Chimel, por la que pasearíamos tranquilamente. Veríamos el mercado, donde la gente autóctona estaría vendiendo infinidad de flores bellas, frutas multicolores y ropa tradicional. Podría ver todos esos colores con mis propios ojos, podría tocar las texturas y sentiría en mi corazón la riqueza de su cultura, lo que haría que estuviera en una nube de felicidad.

Mientras tanto, querría seguir escuchando más relatos de su pasado y le pediría que me contara sobre los tiempos tan duros por los que pasó de joven, ya que cuando solo tenía trece años de edad tuvo que trabajar de mucama, o sea de sirvienta para una familia

www.westmarincitizen.com

adinerada española, con quienes se sintió muy maltratada por el simple hecho de ser indígena. En esa época, el gobierno guatemalteco había sometido a los indígenas a violentas torturas y con tantas injusticias y sufrimiento, quería que me explicara de dónde cree que fue capaz de sacar la fuerza necesaria para convertirse en una líder y organizar a los 22 grupos indígenas de su nación que se unirían para luchar por los derechos que les habían sido arrebatados. El haber sido una líder de esa increíble lucha por recuperar la dignidad de un pueblo y los derechos humanos de su gente le valieron a Rigoberta la obtención del Premio Nobel de la Paz en 1992, así que también le preguntaría por cómo se sintió al alcanzar ese reconocimiento tan prestigioso a nivel mundial.

Cuando llegara la hora de despedirnos tendría la esperanza de haberme podido contagiar de su fuerza y sabiduría, ya que el impacto de su testimonio directo me habría dado la fuerza e inspiración necesarias para poder aspirar a ser tan luchadora como ella algún día. Me habría transmitido su sueño de respeto intercultural y habría aprendido más sobre la democracia y la lucha por la igualdad entre pueblos. Habría comprendido lo que el derecho a la autodeterminación significa, ya que según Rigoberta una democracia debe de permitir que haya negociación y participación de la ciudadanía para decidir su futuro. Pero lo más importante, habría entendido mejor que para alcanzar cualquiera de estos objetivos, todos los sectores sociales deben de estar dispuestos a participar de ese proceso con respeto y una buena comunicación para avanzar en la dirección adecuada. Todo eso y más me acompañaría para siempre como parte de las enseñanzas que me inspirarían para ser parte de la futura generación que sin duda va a tener

que involucrase en muchas luchas para mejorar el sinfín de problemas que acechan a nuestro mundo actual.

– *Essay*

The voice of the struggle for equality

By Laurel Ann Riley

A leader is someone who doesn't give in to her fears, who doesn't ignore her doubts and who makes her passion impose itself over injustice, since she understands that changes don't take place unless someone promotes them, without opening new horizons and without resting until the goals of that struggle have been achieved. One of these leaders is Rigoberta Menchú, a woman who has had to confront many obstacles in her life, but who has overcome and made use of them to inspire and help others, so that they also have the strength necessary to carry on their fight. Rigoberta asked for equality between those who have much and those who have little, between the strong and the weak, and has been the voice leading the struggle of indigenous people against racism and discrimination. So, for me, to spend a day with her would be a dream come true. During that day there could be something of an interchange of cultures, although rather than telling her about mine, my greatest desire would be to be able to immerse myself in, and thus get to know, her culture. I would love to travel to Guatemala and, above all, be able to feel the Mayan culture which is still very present in the hearts of the Guatemalans.

As a day usually begins, our day would begin with breakfast; it would be a "chapin" breakfast, as a typical Guatemalan breakfast is

called and, by means of the palate, I would already be enjoying an aspect of her culture, the gastronomy. We would prepare it together and, while the beans were cooking, would listen to the sound of how to fry eggs and bananas. I would then offer to help placing the cheese and fresh fruit on the table, together with the fragrant coffee which couldn't be lacking either. I would love to experience that colorful breakfast taught to me by someone familiar with the culinary tradition at first hand.

During our first opportunity to converse, I would ask her to tell me about her life, her origins, of how she managed to transform her suffering into fighting, since her autobiography describes how hard it was to grow up in a poor and indigenous family in the mountains of Guatemala. She would also explain how her father was already a representative for human rights, that he fought to obtain better treatment for the oppressed Indians, and I would therefore feel very moved at being able to hear all these tales told by Rigoberta herself. And the Time would simply fly past.

After having had a sufficient opportunity to talk, I would ask her to take me to the Church of the Apostle Santo Tomás in Chichicastenango, in the zone of Quiché, her native land. On venturing inside, I would feel the uneven stones under my feet on climbing the steps, and begin to feel surrounded by the local people. The experience of being there would be very valuable, since I know that religion is a very important part of their lives. Moreover, on being able to contemplate the unique architecture of the interior, I would experience a unique energy and concentration. I imagine I would be able to start feeling the passion and the sentiment of those people. A

www.westmarincitizen.com

sentiment much of which, I don't doubt, came from the Indian's strength in fighting against oppression. This would be the type of strength I would like to transfer to my own life, since Rogoberta is, precisely, one of my favorite people, showing that solutions are not found by responding to mistreatment with violence, nor by being cowardly and dropping one's head in submission to the stronger, but lie in a respect between cultures and a desire to understand.

To finish passing the rest of the day, I would ask her to take us to visit the place where she grew up. So we would go and explore together the village where she was born, Laj Chimel, and stroll through this together peacefully. We would see the market, where the people of the place would be selling an infinity of beautiful flowers, multicolored fruit and traditional clothing. I could see all those colors with my own eyes, I would touch the textures and feel the richness of their culture in my heart, which would place me on a cloud of happiness.

Meanwhile, I would want to continue listening to more stories of her past and would ask her to tell me of the very harsh times she went through as a young girl, since when she was only thirteen years of age she had to work as a "mucama". that is a servant, for a Spanish family, with whom she felt very ill-treated solely because she was an Indian. At that time the Guatemalan government had subjected the Indians to violent tortures and, with so much injustice and suffering, I would want her to tell me from where she thought she had been able to find the necessary strength to become a leader and organize the 22 indigenous groups of her nation to unite, and fight for the rights that had been ripped from them. The fact of having been a leader in this incredible struggle

to recover the dignity of a nation and the human rights of her people earned for Rigoberta the award of the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1992, so I would also ask her how she felt on achieving this highly-prestigious recognition at worldwide level.

When the time came to say goodbye I would hope to have been able to receive a little of her strength and wisdom, as the impact of her direct testimony would have given me the necessary strength and inspiration to be able to aspire, some day, to fight as hard as she has done. She would have transmitted to me her dream of intercultural respect, and I would have learned more of democracy and the struggle for equality among peoples. I would

www.westmarincitizen.com
have learned what the right to self-determination signifies since, according to Rigoberta, a democracy should permit negotiation and participation by the citizens to decide their future. But, more important, I would have better understood that, in order to achieve any of these goals, all the sectors of Society must be willing to take part in this process with respect and good communication in order to make progress in the right direction. All this and more would remain with me always, as part of the teachings which would inspire me to be part of a future generation which will, without doubt, have to become involved in many struggles in order to improve the infinite problems afflicting our present world.

West Marin Citizen, September 18, 2014