

Memoir focus of reading project

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Body

Francisco Jimenez's worst fear came true as the eighth-grader was about to recite the beginning of the Declaration of Independence.

"All men are created equal . . . endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights . . . life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

At 14, the undocumented immigrant -- in the United States for 10 years with his farmworker family -- was snatched from his California classroom by the Immigration and Naturalization Service and deported to Mexico.

So begins "Breaking Through," a **memoir** by Jimenez, which thousands of Santa Clara Valley residents of all ages are **reading** as part of the **project** Silicon Valley **Reads**: One Book, One Community, which began this month.

"How we break through the obstacles in our lives is something we can share to develop a stronger sense of community," said Jimenez, now 59 and professor of modern languages and literatures and director of ethnic studies at Santa Clara University.

"People from all backgrounds -- Japanese, Portuguese, Vietnamese -- are saying they feel I'm writing about them."

In February, the public is invited to gather with the author to share their reactions at various venues. If you haven't picked up a copy of the slim volume, it's not too late to join this page-turning adventure.

"The **reading** period does not end in January; it goes through February," said James Alexander, eBooks director at Adobe Systems, a **project** co-sponsor.

Jimenez is excited about meeting readers during February's events. More than 4,000 people voted for his book last fall, selecting it over three other choices including Amy Tan's "The Bonesetter's Daughter."

Published by Houghton Mifflin in 2001, the **memoir** has sold nearly 30,000 copies -- with 8,000 copies purchased since October.

While the **memoir** is still available at bookstores, Adobe is offering it for free as a downloaded eBook off the Internet in both English and Spanish during the two-month **project**. The group's Web site, www.siliconvalleyreads.org, includes a study guide for families and a list of retailers for books in English and Spanish. To download the eBook version in English or in Spanish, go to www.siliconvalleyreads.org/bookdownload.asp or click on the image of the book on the Web site's home page.

"This is the first community **reading** program where it is possible for virtually universal access to the book," said Alexander, also vice president of the San Jose Public Library Foundation.

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In addition, Borders at Santana Row is offering a 20 percent discount on all of Jimenez's books in February, as well as providing space for book clubs to talk about the memoir, said Denise Christensen, a store representative. The memoir follows another book, "The Circuit: Stories from the Life of a Migrant Child."

Community is about "feeling at home with each other," said Jimenez, a husband and father of three, who earned his doctorate and master's degrees from Columbia University. "When we come together as a community to tell our stories, we break through barriers that separate us from one another. We come face-to-face and see ourselves in the other and take refuge and comfort in our shared humanity."

"When the economy is bad, we tend to be less compassionate toward others -- especially immigrants." But at February's events, he said, "we'll learn from each other."

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