

2004

3rd Grade Gompers Elementary School
Ms. Andrade

GRANDMA MARTHA DOMINGUEZ (1936)

My Grandmother was born and raised in Torreon, Mexico. She lived there until she was eighteen years old. Then she came to Texas to work and find a better place to live. That is where she married my Grandpa Abel and raised her older children.

My Grandpa and Grandma worked hard and very long hours on a farm. They decided to move to New Mexico to work on a bigger farm. After working so hard, my Grandma talked my Grandpa into moving to Southern California. They wanted a better life for their family.

In 1965, my Grandma was nervous to move her whole family to Los Angeles with only eighty-five dollars. My Grandma found a good paying job, but she made sure she always had time for her children. She always told them that a good education was the key to a good future. She also told them if they worked hard they would be able to help others.

In 1976, my Grandma and her family moved to Long Beach to be closer to their work. By now my Grandma had five children. My Grandma believed the best schools are in Long Beach. I guess she is right because I sure am smart. Three of her children graduated from Jordan High and one from Poly High. Three attended Long Beach City College. One went to UC Riverside and another to Cal State Long Beach.

Long Beach has brought a lot of happy memories but also sad ones. Her oldest daughter was in the Marines. She died while serving in 1977. In 1993, my Uncle Abel was working as a Long Beach Police Officer. Uncle Abel was shot in the head by a gang member. My Grandma prayed he would not die, and he didn't. My uncle is now a sergeant and still serving the community. My Grandma is so proud of him.

I learned so much about Grandma Martha when I interviewed her. She loves family gatherings and feeding us. She encourages us to study hard and serve our community. She says the only way to change unjust situations is with education. I guess that is why her kids are in medicine, justice, and education. My Grandma Martha is one of the people who came to California for a better life and found it. No wonder she doesn't want to move away from Long Beach.

(This third grade sample has been slightly edited. The story treats Long Beach as a community with good job and education opportunities. It is an example of migration from rural to urban life as well as migration from Mexico to Texas to New Mexico to California. It reveals urban expansion in Southern California history. The essay is an excellent example of a biographical narrative and language fluency.)

Dottie Frazier (1921)

From the first moment I met Dottie Frazier she had so many things to show and tell me. She has shark jaws, crustaceans she stuffed herself, a divers' helmet, scuba diving pictures and awards; things from the Queen Mary, and a fifty foot wall outside covered with things from boats and the sea. There were steering wheels, anchors, spears, floats, lots of shells, buoys, signs, fishing lures, portholes, and lots of memories. I don't think anyone loves the ocean as much as Dottie. (Except maybe for me)

Dottie was born in Long Beach on July 16, 1921 as Dorothy Reider. She lived in a tent city that her father built on the beach before the breakwater was built when there were giant waves.

When Dottie was three years old she swam across Alamitos Bay by herself while her father crossed the bridge above. She did her first skin dive when she was six years old. She was on her father's boat in Catalina. He accidentally dropped a coffee pot over the side of the boat. Dottie's father asked her to go get the coffee pot. He handed her a small anchor to hold on to and she jumped into the water and brought it up.

Dottie attended Lowell, Rogers, and Wilson. She left Wilson and went to Poly because there were more science classes. She took every "ology" she could find. She even milked rattlesnakes! Every morning before high school at 5:00 a.m. she would take her gopher snake around her neck and body surf and swim three blocks.

Dottie had some interesting pets. She had fifty-four snakes in cages all around her bedroom. She also had a lot of rats.

Her chores were cleaning the bottom of the boat, wiping the hulls down, and cooking. She had her own rowboat and knew how to sail. Later on she even had a dog that surfed with her on her surfboard.

Right after the 1933 earthquake, the army set up kitchens but there was no water or gas, so she and her father went to live on their boat.

After she graduated high school she applied to the County of L.A. to become a dive instructor. She got a letter of denial and was told that women don't teach scuba diving. Dottie had won almost every scuba diving and surfing contest she has ever entered and so had her dive buddy, Big Jim Christianson. He was a very famous scuba diver. When Dottie told him she couldn't to the class he said he would take her with him. When she arrived at the class, Big Jim convinced them to let her stay.

When she graduated from her class she was the first woman scuba diver instructor in the world! When she went to teach her first class, she was very excited, but when she got there they were surprised and said we don't want to be taught by a woman. She convinced them to let her try, she proved herself, really worked them hard, and they all loved her.

Later on, she even taught dive classes to doctors. She learned a lot about medicine from them. They learned a lot from each other. She also designed and made wetsuits for forty-eight different dive shops and did underwater fashion shows. Dottie went on to be one of the only woman commercial divers. She had to wear a dry suit, a metal helmet and weighted boots. The equipment was so heavy that they had to lower her in the water on a platform. The boots were so heavy that she could walk on the bottom of the ocean.

Dottie applied to the Coast Guard but was turned down because she was a woman, even though she was qualified. Dottie went on to work at Douglas Aircraft as a “Rosie the Riveter” building planes during World War II. In the years that followed, she got married, worked on fishing and dive boats, gave lectures and raised four boys. She was also president of the Herbalogical Society and later was inducted into Woman Divers Hall of Fame!

In 1971, while she was surfing in San Blas, Mexico, she met an Australian musician named Cyril May. They are married and live in Long Beach. Over the years, they have had boa constrictors, iguanas, lizards and various other reptiles as pets. They sing, give lectures and take trips to Baja every year in their motor home, towing a boat and motorcycles. They still snorkel, fish, ride motorcycles and explore.

At 84, Dottie still loves the water as much as she always has and has helped everyone enjoy it too!