



# “Life Got Wider”



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# “Life Got Wider”

## *Meanings Associated With the Computer Use of Older Adults*

**S**an Francisco-based nonprofit Community Technology Network works to close the digital divide by helping people of all ages build their computer skills. Photovoice is an academic action-research project that explores the social and economic concerns of communities that may affect health and wellness.

Nine older adults participated in the Photovoice study to explore meanings associated with using computers. Participants, including immigrants and low income seniors, were asked to take photos to describe how using computers have affected their lives, their occupations, and the things they do every day.

The photos and their accompanying stories of digital inclusion form this powerful new exhibit that invites viewers to share the experience of older adults and understand how computer use has positively affected seniors' everyday lives.

PHOTOGRAPHER

# Anna

*Senior and a Young Tutor*



I'm a very elderly person, but in the waning years of my life, I decided (so as to not appear like a 'cave man') to acquaint myself with computers. And my tutor Katyusha helped me in this regard. Thanks to her I bought a tablet a bout two years ago. I felt very satisfied because I was able to acquaint myself with current events all around the world and with those topics that interested me. Prior to that, I wasn't able to fully enjoy TV and radio because I am hard of hearing, so I would learn about the news long after it took place. I live alone in my apartment, but after acquiring the iPad, I was presented an opportunity to communicate with people through Hangout, email, and Skype. I could also find Russian-Language YouTube videos and newspapers.

## *My Love, My Best Friend, My Doctor, My Medicine*

So, I use my bike to get to classes at the computer lab, which is about a mile from my house, to be on time. I get really excited about the class. Computers opened a new life. Because of computers I get connected with people who mean something to me and they get connected with me. My nephew lives in Sydney, Australia. I sent him an email, and he sent me an email back. I use the computer for the latest news. As I mentioned previously, I don't have another form of communication. I read various Russian newspapers with different objective points of view. I read and watch only what I want, not what TV tries to make me watch. And I also try to obtain information about health and law issues. I dream of learning how to shop online! My bicycle is my first best friend and the computer is my second.







# Beverly

*View of San Francisco from North Beach*



“That’s a morning view from my roof. I took a view looking at the city. When I want to move or travel, I look at cities. It gives a person a good idea of where they’re going. It’s great studying the city, and the population, and the skyline, and the weather. I look on Google at cities. The one city I really like is Newport, Rhode Island. You can pick out any location, or pick out a church, and get a closer picture of it with Google to find out what it is.”

## *Coit Tower, San Francisco*

I live near here; I've been here 40 years. It's a landmark in San Francisco that you can find on Google, but tourists have a hard time finding it! It's part of the history of San Francisco. It's popular because you can see both bridges. I planted wild poppies here; they're blooming. The gardener said the two legged animals do far more damage than the four-legged visitors.





PHOTOGRAPHER

# David

*Very Proud of Myself*



“When I came here I didn’t know anyone. Everybody was running all over the city with smart phones, and I asked, “What are they doing?!” You know, they’re not saying ‘hello’ to anybody around them. So, I started teaching myself how to use computers to meet people. I started helping the elderly (they’re afraid of computers; they think they’re going to hurt the computer). It raised my self-esteem. And now I’m part of the “in crowd” with my smart phone. I hear everybody talking about what they’re going to do career-wise. I don’t know what to do career-wise myself. But I like to learn. I can learn all that I want to on the Internet. And of course I learned how to do pottery like this on YouTube. I take singing classes on the computer too.”

## *Chef's Ahoy*

These are eggplants. You can go on YouTube to watch cooking classes, and it's free and a great learning experience.

You can become your own professional chef at home. I've been watching the classes on YouTube, and I've been getting all the equipment for my kitchen. I've got everything. Cooking helps you be aware of your health, and you can save a lot of money by cooking at home. You can impress your friends, too, because the food will look yummy. That's what computers can do.



PHOTOGRAPHER

# Lyudmila

*Today's Days and Times: Computer Class*



“People come for the computer class and wait for the tutor here. People, even at this age, are willing to learn computers: even my 92-year-old mother, who is in this photo. The computer is a whole new world and whole new country; there’s so much information all over the world. For example, people can buy event tickets and they can learn about laws and regulations. Now I’m retired, so I have more time to learn.”



## *Elders Go Into the Future*

**T**he class is ready to learn technology and computer skills. This computer is in a senior center. This picture shows the computer and how it is helping people go into the future. It's very influencing. It's a connection to people with whom I'd like to speak. There is no other way to connect with them, so I do it through my tablet and email.



PHOTOGRAPHER

# Mikial

*City Hall, San Francisco*



“The computer helps me find out any information. I found my brother in Moscow, and I talk to him—finding out information and learning how he is doing. Through Skype, I found my brother. We weren’t in touch for four years.”



## *View of the library*

I like this library. It's where there are computers, and it's characteristic of San Francisco. People learn the computer here. It's the best library in San Francisco. Most of the time I come here to learn the computer; if I learn more, it makes me feel better. I'm glad I can learn more about the computer so that I am in the information technology world and can be in touch with that.



PHOTOGRAPHER

# Nikolay

## *Cat Having Pleasant Dreams*



I have two very interesting things in my life now: my wife and my cat. I have nobody else. That's why I really like these two beings! Working with the computer—sometimes with my wife or by myself—I find different recipes, like for making cakes. Sometimes I look for information about my cat, like how to take care of some things, or what kind of pills and vitamins I can give it.

## *My Sunny*

“My wife Natasha calls the Ferry Building “the Kremlin.” All buildings like this she calls the Kremlin! We go swimming at a pool in the Embarcadero. And after swimming, we go back to the street car and walk through this area. This is where my wife wanted me to take a picture of her. She spends time talking with her friends in the Ukraine via Skype, and she also likes to watch foolish Turkish movies on the computer. I like to do crossword puzzles on the computer. When I don’t know a word, the computer helps me. The computer is so smart. I also listen to music, like Chanson, and of course I talk to my friends from Australia and my many friends in the Ukraine via Skype. The computer is such a clever invention!”





PHOTOGRAPHER

# Rem

*America and Germany*



“The computer enables you to see people who live far from you. Not only can you speak with them but you can also see them. It’s very, very important, because my relatives are so far away; they are all around the world, beyond the physical boundaries of the U.S. The computer is a way to communicate, connect; it’s a way to create a mood. We can speak with each other and tell each other funny stories. In this picture, my wife is talking with her cousin in Germany. I can connect with classmates from first grade from all over the world: New York, Canada, Australia, Brazil, Ukraine, Boston, Chicago. We help each other, support each other. We know what’s going on in each other’s family: who died, who’s ill. One of my friends in Israel lost his wife and then got married again. I can speak with my friend and see his new wife and know that everything is okay with his family.”

## *The Dog is Man's Best Friend*

“My grandson said to his mom, my daughter, that she can have another baby only if they buy him a dog. And they bought this dog from New York, it cost about \$900. And after his parents bought the dog, one year later, my granddaughter was born. My granddaughter loves to talk on the phone, and she asks for the phone from her mother and tries to play games.”

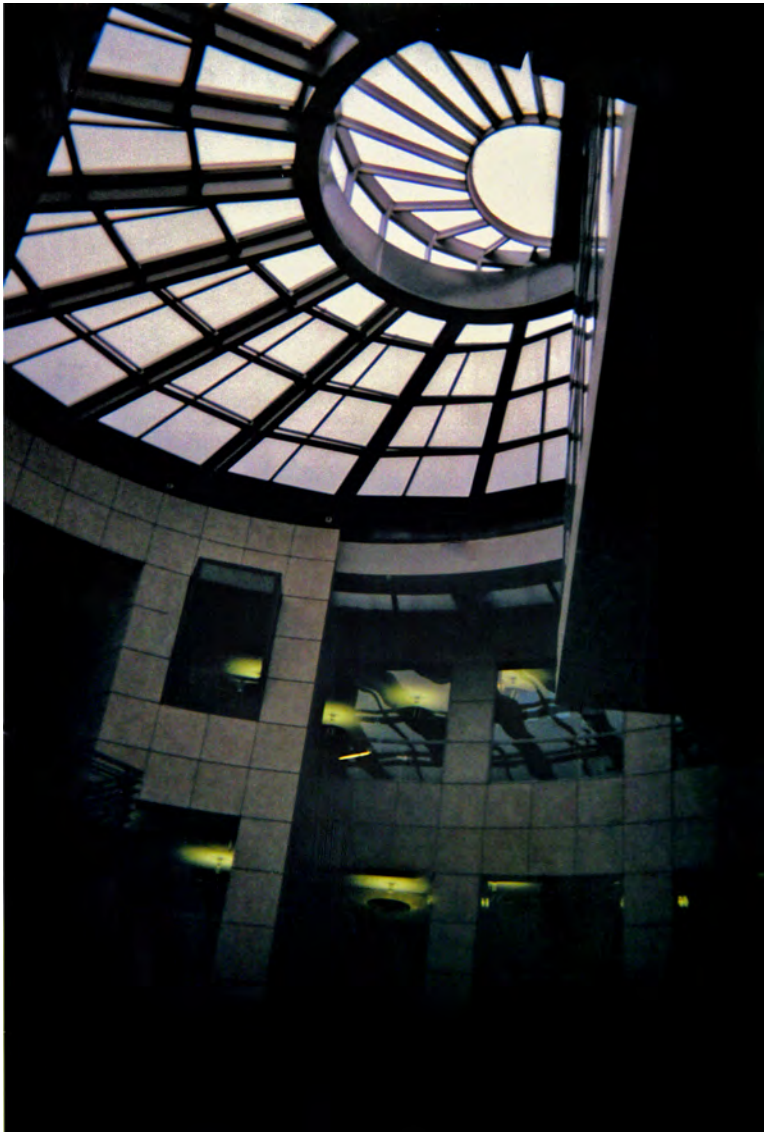




PHOTOGRAPHER

# Valery

*The Dome of  
The Main Library In San Francisco*



“This is the top of the library. I visit the library every day and use the computer everyday too. The library is the most effective place. It is a very important part of my life. It is very difficult to have contact with the Russian consulate to get help with problems with documents and to prepare all the papers; it was very useful for me to do it online. I write articles that go around the world, including to readers in Japan and Israel and Russians in America. My article is called ‘Israel Is In My Heart’”

## *San Francisco The Way To City Hall*

It is most expressive for me to use the computer to show the differences in architecture. I have so many contacts in different countries, and I like to see new places. I want to display architecture and the places I have visited and send it to people in other countries via email. In the Tenderloin, close to my home, here is the way to City Hall.



PHOTOGRAPHER

# William

*San Francisco Education Admin Building*



When I moved to the Bay Area, this was the place I went first to get a teaching position. It was a period of reflecting on my teaching philosophy and strategies that lent themselves to teaching in California, especially in San Francisco, which was new to me. This place prompted me to discover very quickly that my lesson planning did not cater to my new students! I had made an assumption that these students were going to learn a certain way, which turned out to be an awakening for me. By using the computer to educate myself about new classroom strategies and techniques, I was fortunate as a teacher. And I'm fortunate now to work with senior citizens at Senior Centers. Fortunately, I have always had students who were self-motivated.



I realized that I could teach anybody, whether they were motivated or not, through being willing to learn how to become a more effective teacher for that population. Since accessing tips about teaching and learning from the internet, I was confident about what I was doing as a teacher. My confidence has been steadfast, even today in working with seniors. With seniors, and kids too, there is that fear factor. It is so intimidating to them, so my sharing with them that I was once like they were (and the fact I'm a senior as well), means they no longer have negative views of themselves. They appreciate my sticking with them. Taking all those teaching and learning courses at San Francisco State really prepared me, and taught me how to rely on the computer as a tool of support. I am now a life-long learner; my learning has not stopped. I don't remember having that self-reflection on the East Coast!

## *A Public Place of Instant Information*



I spent a lot of time in this building [San Francisco Public Library] before I became a tutor with Community Technology network. This is where I do all my “Project Read” tutoring. This is the place I would always come to use the computer for an hour, before I had one in my home. The computers were there for me to access the internet. I wrote many resumes in this library. The more I became confident and computer literate, the more I started having my “Project Read” learners use various programs that focus on pronunciation. I found out that when I teach seniors how to use the computer, it’s beyond rewarding because I am learning something. I make sure my lesson is engaging for the learner so that they will more likely and up teaching me something I didn’t know before.



**I**t happens all the time. A lot of learners think they can't teach you anything, but they do. I used to feel like I wasn't ready to equip anyone with computer skills, but sometimes it doesn't matter if you don't know something. There have been times when I'm not sure about something and I'll say, "Let's look it up together!" We'll both get a tutorial as we go through it, and we'll both walk out of there knowing something new. This has been an experience that I'm having repeatedly, and I love that. Now I don't shy away from the "I'm not so sure about that." I'm a learner too, and I don't know if it's possible not to be one. I guess it is, but I don't know how a teacher could not be a learner. I want to get across the idea that my learning computer skills started in this library building, and it's ongoing. That whole duality between teacher and learner, it goes back and forth; I'm never constant in one of those roles—it's very flexible and fluid



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