

## Nano's Purpose

### One Teen Finds Himself and his Future through Mariposa Arts

Gang members often approached Nano as he walked home from his Pajaro Valley high school. Nano was tempted to join. Like most teens, he needed to feel like he belonged. He wanted to feel special. Music gave him that special feeling. He'd dance to it in his room. It carried him like a feather in the wind. He would have loved to dance like this at his school.

But there were no dance classes. He had no place for the energy he felt welling up inside. School stressed him out. His grades suffered. He got into trouble—

a lot. The gang life seemed like it might be the only place he could find that release, that sense of purpose he was looking for.

Luckily, he met Luis and Monique—two dance instructors with Mariposa Arts. This after school program gives teens like Nano a chance to plug in to something they can call their own. These high school kids also get to share their passion. They teach dance, drama, music or painting to their younger peers in middle and elementary school. They also get paid for their efforts, which makes them more marketable toward a future career. Professional teaching artists help guide them, as mentors and role models.

Luis was one such mentor. Like Nano, he also grew up in a rough neighborhood. He related to Nano's need to find

something real inside himself. Both of Nano's teachers encouraged him to try new things. They coached him beyond his fear of being seen.

"The first time he got up to the mic he looked out at the audience and froze," recalls his mother Marcelina. "Then suddenly I saw how he let go."

And Nano did more than just let go—he found himself in performance. "To me it represents freedom," he says, "like I'm flying, like I can do anything."

Nano became less agitated and his confidence shone bright. Dancing in his room at night helped him stay focused. Now he could do his school work. His grades improved. His mother took notice. She could see something new blooming in her son.

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## Portrait of a Thriving Artist

### Open Studios Helps Transform a Passion into a Living

Renee Sayer Wence almost abandoned her artistic dreams.

A self-described introvert, Renee struggled to connect with other artists and find her artistic niche. In the 70's and 80's she worked as an illustrator locally and abroad. She also fell in love with ceramics. After the Loma Prieta earthquake, earning a living as an artist was hard.

Then, she met Hal Hyde, a founding Arts Council Santa Cruz County board member. He connected her with Pajaro Valley Arts and encouraged her to

apply to Open Studios. Over the years, Renee has built on her craft, her network, and her passion for sharing with artists and the community. This fall, Renee celebrates her 30th Open Studios Art Tour.

"Open Studios has given me the opportunity to grow as an artist," says Renee. "It encourages artists to do something with their talent and connect with the community." Through Open Studios Renee has a community of artists who support and cheer her on. She can showcase her work, make a living doing what she loves, and meet people like you.

For Renee, the Open Studios experience goes beyond three weekends each October. It helps her to attract commissions and exhibit in prestigious galleries year-round.



Reflecting on her experience, Renee said, "I would love to have someone as an apprentice. I want to help someone start the way I did."

Your support of Arts Council Santa Cruz County helps make artists like Renee's dreams come true.

# Making Santa Cruz a Place Worth Living

## Why Judy and Geoff Alexander are Arts Council Donors

Judy and Geoff Alexander believe art brings people together. It builds bridges. It creates community. That's why they've invested in the Arts Council for more than 20 years.

"It would be a much bleaker experience living in Santa Cruz if it were not for all of the art activity," explains Judy.



The Alexanders appreciate how the Open Studios Art Tour connects them to the creativity of the artists who inspire them. Inside their home, there's hardly a space that isn't graced by a piece of sculpture or pottery, a painting, or art furniture that they've acquired through one of their tours—nearly one a year for the past twenty-five years.

When they first moved here almost three decades ago, they had expected Santa Cruz to have a vibrant art scene. But, as Geoff recalls, "Open Studios

### *Nano's Purpose continued*

"Art was not important to me until I saw Nano doing it," Nano's mother Marcelina readily admits. "Now I know it's an expression of what kids see and feel. Parents can see what their children are truly capable of, if there are more opportunities for art."

Thanks to you, Nano found his "purpose." Now he wants to share it with others, too. After he graduates, Nano wants to teach art to Oaxacan street children. He wants to help

exceeded our expectations. I believe it to be the best-organized Open Studios event that I've ever heard of. It not only has incredible access to art, but it also connects us to artists in their own space."

The Alexanders also support the Arts Council for its arts education programs.

"We all learn things in different ways," says Geoff. Teaching that focuses just on textbooks and tests only captures part of who we are as humans. Music and art and dance and crafts are very important in rounding out a complete adult human being. Getting an awareness of that while students are still young is incredibly valuable."

Geoff notes that public schools, especially in poorer districts, often can't provide access to the arts. The Arts Council has become "one of the key bridges between the arts and students who wouldn't otherwise have that kind of experience."

The Alexanders also give to the Arts Council because the programs benefit not just students and artists, but our entire community through events like the Ebb & Flow River Arts Festival.

Judy says of the festival. "It was not just like going to see a painting show. There were a lot of people impressed by it who would not ordinarily be part of the arts community."

The Alexanders are fully engaged in the work of the Arts Council—as donors and participants. They get to meet artists where they work through Open Studios. They give kids hands-on learning through arts education. They nurture others while enjoying artistic beauty in their home and community. It's a give-and-take that fills their life with meaning.

If you'd like to join Judy and Jeff in helping Santa Cruz thrive as an artistically vibrant community, please consider making a contribution today.

them find themselves the way Luis and Monique supported him. He believes that art can save a life. "I want to teach art classes and show them a different path."

Your support of the Arts Council is helping Nano pay it forward. Many other students also need to feel that spark. Once they do, they might also spread the magic!

Open doors for more kids in our community, invest in arts education today.

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## Thank You!

You make everything we do possible. Thank you so very much for making a difference. We'd love to share some of the success you helped create. That's why we publish this newsletter. We'd also love to hear your thoughts.

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